

## WHO WAS CONDEMNED IN 1277?

THE Condemnations of 1277 have fascinated medievalists for a century and the fascination shows no sign of waning. Yet despite (or because) of this we really don't understand them very well. Controversy continues about why there was a condemnation at all, at whom the condemnations were aimed, why exactly those propositions were condemned, and what effect the condemnations had.

In his 1995 Aquinas Lecture Fr. John Wippel argued that the condemnations should be seen as evidence of a crisis within the Universities of Oxford and Paris (and, perhaps, within learned Christendom) over the relations of faith and reason — thus suggesting part of the reason why there was a condemnation at all.<sup>1</sup> In his paper here he argues that Aquinas was one of the targets of the Paris condemnation — thus suggesting part of the answer to the question at whom the condemnations were aimed. Moreover, following R. Wielockx, he suggests that certain issues do not appear in the Paris condemnations because they were the subject of distinct investigations of the views of Giles of Rome and of Aquinas which were being carried out at the same time — thus suggesting a partial answer to the question of why those propositions and not others were condemned. In the brief remarks which follow I would like to locate these issues within a broader context.

The leading idea I want to introduce is that the Oxford and Paris Condemnations should be understood as another round in a debate between philosophy and Christian theology which had begun in late antiquity, was carried on vigorously in the Islamic world and was being replayed with several new elements in Latin in the thirteenth century. In the picture I want to suggest, the Arts Masters at Paris usually identified with the condemnations — notably Siger of Brabant and Boethius of Dacia — can be seen as representing views originally advanced and defended by 'pagan' late antique commentators — notably Ammonius and Simplicius. Other figures of the period, Bonaventure, for example, can be seen as representing the point of view maintained in antiquity by John Philoponus and in Islam by al-Ghazali. In this debate Aquinas, with his strong interest in Aristotelian science and his conviction that the principles of such science could be reconciled with Christian theology, is an ambiguous figure who runs the danger of being opposed by both sides.

It is tempting for us to associate philosophy in late antiquity with what I shall call its Western wing — represented by the traditions of the 'libri Platonici,' which Augustine studied in the summer of 386 and which did so

much to move him toward Christianity, and by the approach to Plato (notably to the *Timaeus*) which we find in Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy* and in Calcidius. These traditions were distinct from Christianity and, occasionally argued directly against it, but shared with it much common ground.<sup>2</sup>

But the reconciliation between Late Platonism and Christianity which we find to some extent in Augustine and marvelously worked out in Boethius was not the only tradition within late antique philosophy. The great Aristotelian commentator, Simplicius, for example, represented a philosophical paganism which, as Richard Sorabji has emphasized, saw Christianity as both misguided and impious. Simplicius had studied with Ammonius in Alexandria and had apparently just recently moved to Athens when Justinian closed the philosophical schools and forbade the teaching of 'pagan' philosophy in Athens in 529 A.D. The careers of Simplicius and his colleagues in Athens are obscure after that momentous event. But what is clear is that they continued writing and that at least some of their writing was polemically directed against one of the most remarkable figures in late antique thought — Ammonius' 'other' student, the Christian philosopher John Philoponus.

One of the cornerstones of late Greek philosophical 'theology' was the doctrine of the necessary and eternal existence of a kosmos which was unchanging in its fundamental aspects. Philoponus challenged every aspect of this picture. In works directed against Proclus and against Aristotle he insisted on the philosophical respectability of the position that the world was created in time from nothing by the free act of a being subject to no necessity. He went further, arguing that the Aristotelian picture of an everlasting universe was incoherent and contradicted Aristotle's own views on the infinite.

Alexandria fell to Islam in 642 A.D. What the conquering Arabs found there by way of philosophical tradition is very unclear. It is not impossible that in some sense the Alexandrian philosophical tradition survived and indeed al-Farabi traces his own philosophical lineage back unbroken to the Alexandrines. What is clear is that in the two centuries after the conquest of Alexandria by Islam the polemic between Simplicius and Philoponus became entrenched in Islamic thought and reflected an ongoing struggle between Kalam, the Islamic science of philosophical theology, and Falsifah — the self-conscious development of late Greek philosophical thought within the Muslim world. The tradition of Falsifah was brought to a new pitch by Ibn Sina (Avicenna) who argued as Proclus and Simplicius had for an eternal and necessary creation. The tradition of Kalam found its own philosophical champion when al-Ghazali (Algazel), who had been trained in Falsifah, underwent a profound religious

<sup>1</sup>Wippel, John F., *Medieval Reactions to the Encounter Between Faith and Reason*, The Aquinas Lecture, 1995. Marquette University Press, Milwaukee, 1995.

<sup>2</sup>Probably the most direct attack on Christianity from within this framework was Porphyry's *Against the Christians*.

conversion which lead him to direct much of his work directly against what he saw as dangerous philosophy. His *Tahafut al-Falasifah* brings against Falsifah the same arguments that Philoponus had brought against Aristotle and Proclus, refurbishes them for use against the new philosophical developments and develops more explicitly than we have any reason to believe Philoponus did the picture of an intelligent God possessed of a Will which enables free choices. At the end of the twelfth century, Ibn Rushd, in any uncanny reprise of Simplicius, replies to Ghazali on behalf of a 'traditional' Aristotelianism.

As the works of Aristotle became available in thirteenth century Western Europe they became available with Ibn Rushd's (Averroes') commentaries and against a background of Avicennan ideas. Although al-Ghazali's *Tahafut* seems not to have been translated, many of his ideas were available in Averroes' reply to it and Ghazali's own presentation of the views he was attacking was translated as his *Metaphysica*. Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed* became available with its rather extensive presentation and development of the positions worked out in Kalam. By 1250 when Bonaventure wrote his *Commentary on the Sentences*, Philoponus ideas must have been in circulation since Bonaventure borrows arguments and examples wholesale. Thus by the middle of the thirteenth century both sides of the sixth century debate were well represented textually at the universities of Western Europe and, I suggest, over the next several decades we see the Arts Masters and Theologians at Paris and Oxford coming to grips with this debate.

Against this background the Condemnations of 1277 can be seen as a victory for the Philoponeans. As Roland Hissette and others have established, many of the condemned theses were to be found in the work of Arts Masters like Siger of Brabant and Boethius of Dacia, and no doubt the framers of the condemnations at Paris knew this full well. Perhaps they saw these figures and the movement they represented within the Arts Faculty as a political or institutional challenge as well. But it seems to me that Prof. Wippel has made out the case that a significant number of the condemned propositions were not only to be found in the work of Aquinas but that this could hardly have been unknown to the framers as well. Thus it is unlikely that the Condemnations simply represent an effort by the Theology Faculty to assert itself against a theologically encroaching Arts Faculty. Much more likely, it seems to me, is the philosophical hypothesis that the framers of the Condemnations saw the reintroduction of what we can see to be a development of the pagan late Greek Philosophical Commentary tradition into the central educational institutions of Christendom as a cause for worry and took steps to deal with it.

Against this background both Thomas Aquinas and Siger of Brabant appear

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as ambiguous figures. Like his mentor Albertos Magnus, Aquinas was eager to work out and present Aristotle's philosophy. He recognized clearly enough that Aristotle had taught doctrines incompatible with Christianity but he did not see these as fundamental to Aristotle's thought. He was convinced that the fundamental structure of Aristotle's philosophy was correct and, more immediately significant, he seems to have accepted a particular reading of Aristotle's view on the interrelationship of the sciences — a reading which had it that if a conclusion of one science differed from that of another then there must have been a mistake of some kind made.

The account has two sides — one metaphysical and the other epistemological. In metaphysics, Aquinas holds that there is a single reality various aspects of which are described by theology and by natural philosophy. On the epistemological side, Aquinas has a conception of revealed theology according to which revealed premises can be combined with premises obtained from the natural sciences to yield conclusions which are part of theology but are only derivable by us because of our natural philosophy. As Prof. Wippel has argued, it is this conception of theology which fuels Aquinas' firm opposition to the idea that natural philosophy might demonstrate conclusions which are contrary to the faith. Moreover, Wippel suggests, Aquinas not only thinks that there is no opposition between revealed theology and natural philosophy he also thinks that any putative opposition can be disarmed by natural reason. I put that last point rather vaguely because there are several forms that the view that any such opposition can be disarmed by natural reason might take. I shall return to this question in a moment.

We can contrast Aquinas' unificatory account with another which Prof. Wippel attributes at least to the pre-1270 Siger of Brabant. Let me call this the diversificatory position. This position too has a metaphysical and an epistemological side. As a thesis in metaphysics it would be the infamous double-truth theory. This too can be understood in several ways. The simplest would be that there simply are true contradictions consisting of pairs of contradictories one of which is really established in philosophy and the other of which is really established in theology. As Prof. Wippel points out, "it is generally agreed today that no members of the Arts Faculty of that time in fact defended a double-truth theory" so understood. A more nuanced position would be that truth itself is to be indexed to subject so that we cannot intelligibly speak simply of the way the world is but must speak of the way the world is relative to Physics or the way the world is relative to Theology. This view would be a kind of relativism but would not commit its defender to admitting true contradictions since there would be no science relative to which a contradiction would be true.

The epistemological side of the diversificatory thesis is more interesting. One form it might take is the direct epistemological counterpart of the relativism just mentioned. The idea would be that some proposition is to be regarded

as true in physics whose contradictory is to be regarded as true in theology. We index our beliefs to sciences. When doing physics we believe one thing, when doing theology another. If asked what we believe, we respond in a context and so will respond differently on different occasions. This is not a metaphysical position. We don't claim either that the world is contradictory or that the world is different from physical and theological viewpoints. It is rather a claim about what we should believe. When doing physics we should believe one thing, when doing theology another.

A second form of epistemological diversification would leave belief out altogether. The claim would be that the methods of physics mandate one conclusion and the methods of theology another. Nothing is yet said about what we should believe. Ordinarily if physics tells us something or if theology does we believe it, but it need not be so; and in the special case in which natural philosophy points one way and theology another we shouldn't believe naively. Perhaps in those cases we should be agnostic, perhaps theology trumps natural philosophy. Whatever the answer it requires new principles of belief formation beyond the naive one of believing whatever a science tells us.

Prof. Wippel and I agree that Aquinas thinks that there is a single way the world is and thinks that it can never be the case that the methods of one science, correctly applied, *demonstrate* a conclusion opposed to that *demonstrated* by the methods of another science correctly applied. We agree further that Aquinas thinks that whenever it seems as though the methods of two sciences, correctly applied, *demonstrate* opposed conclusions a mistake is being made which is discoverable in principle by humans. At the risk of some oversimplification let me suppose that demonstration is a matter of reasoning syllogistically from premises. One might think that any defect in syllogistic reasoning was a matter of form which could in principle be detected by humans. Thus if two sciences appeared to demonstrate opposite conclusions and there was no mistake in the syllogistic applied, then it must be that at least one premise is false. Now by definition the principles of a science are all true, so in the case just imagined one of the premises is not really a principle of a science. Aquinas is then committed to the view that we can always, at least in principle, tell the principles of a science from pseudo-principles.

Of course not all defects in syllogistic are formal defects. There is, for example, the fallacy of accident. So the project which Aquinas has announced, that of showing the mistake in every putative demonstration of opposed conclusions from the principles of different sciences, is more difficult than even this would suggest. In at least this part of methodology Aquinas is very much an optimist.

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In embracing the new Aristotelianism within this unificatory framework Aquinas has taken on an enormous project and one of which his confreres in theology might well be suspicious. Because Aquinas' 'mixed' arguments may draw premises from physics, logic, the theory of the soul etc., he has taken on commitments from natural philosophy as well as from theology. Thus his views are inevitably affected by what is happening with respect to the Arts Faculty. Moreover, while Aquinas' view of the powers of human reason may give him confidence that putative disagreements between natural philosophy and theology can always be resolved by us, this would be cold comfort to those theologians who did not share his optimism.

Siger of Brabant is working, I suggest within a different methodological framework. Siger is lecturing in the Arts Faculty and, although there is real difficulty in distinguishing discussion of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* (which was a text in the Arts Faculty) from theological discussion, there is no reason to think that Siger took himself to be doing theology or to embrace a view about the implications his discussions in natural philosophy might have for theology. Just as a Christian twentieth century physicist or psychologist does not typically keep a weather eye to the implications her physics or psychology might have for theology, there is no reason to think Siger did. He might have simply been working out the implications of the premises furnished him by the texts on which he was a professional commentator.

This perspective on Siger and his work has consequences for how we are to understand him and his role in the condemnations. For example Prof. Wippel takes it that Siger modified his position on several issues between 1269 and his death — perhaps under ecclesiastical pressure I do not want to deny that Siger modified his views. In my view the textual situation doesn't yet permit us to determine this. But I do want to deny that we know he did.<sup>3</sup> Let me consider just a couple of cases.

Prof. Wippel points out that Siger seems to have thought at the time of his *Questiones in metaphysicam* that the First Agent can produce many different effects through its Intellect. He points out that in the *De Necessitate et Contingentia Causarum* Siger claims that 'according to the mind of the philosophers' God can produce just one effect and that in his *Questiones Naturales* Siger announces that he cannot demonstrate either side of this question, while in his *Liber de Causis* he reserves creation to God. Fr. Wippel takes this situation as evidence that Siger changed his mind but I would like to suggest another reading. Siger thinks that the philosophers taught the view that the first cause

<sup>3</sup>Let me say at once that although he takes it that Siger's earlier works defended a number of heretical positions, Prof. Wippel does not claim, so far as I can tell, that Siger ever actually held the positions defended in these works and leaves open the possibility that he

was here marshaling what he took to be the best philosophical arguments for these positions.

<sup>4</sup>What follows is based on the work of Mr. William Baugh who prepared an M.A. thesis containing a translation of the *De Aeternitate Mundi* at Ohio State in 1990.

has only one effect. He himself thinks that if the First Cause were a pure Intellect (as the philosophers believed) then this would be true. But the Christian God has both Intellect and Free Will and such a God could create multiple effects — and indeed, if Christianity is true, is the only creator. But this is a matter of faith. We cannot prove that God has a Free Will and cannot prove that God does not.

Let me turn now to the Siger's *De Aeternitate Mundi*. This work is of special interest because there are two distinct manuscript traditions of it which differ hardly at all in the philosophical views presented but differ greatly in the way they present Siger's relation to these views. Which tradition one follows will be closely connected to whether one thinks that the arguments Siger presents are presented as his own or as the views of those on which he is lecturing.<sup>4</sup>

Eight manuscripts containing Siger's *De Aeternitate Mundi* have been discovered. Four of these contain the whole treatise. Scholars are agreed that these four manuscripts divide into two families. One family contains three complete manuscripts — designated A, C, and D. The other family contains one complete work, manuscript B, and four fragments, manuscripts E and V which only have chapter three, and manuscripts M and O which include chapters three and four.

Which manuscript to follow in compiling a critical edition of the *De Aeternitate Mundi* has been debated since the first manuscripts were discovered in the late 1800's. Mandonnet produced the first edition in 1899 based upon manuscript A, which had been discovered in 1878. While preparing that edition he discovered manuscript B, but concluded that the differences in B were the result of changes by a student. However, in his second edition of 1908 Mandonnet changed his mind. Because the differences between manuscripts A and B were so important, he decided that the changes in B were the result of Siger himself making corrections.

Later P. Barsotti discovered manuscripts C and D, and produced an edition based upon that family in 1933. He followed Mandonnet's original opinion that B was a copy whose changes in the text reflected the peculiarities of the copyist — not the original text. W.J. Dwyer produced another edition based upon B in 1937, in which he followed Mandonnet's revised opinion. Dwyer argues that, compared to manuscripts A, C, and D, B's changes have resulted in much greater clarity. It is his opinion that the portions left out concern phrases of transition and recall, the results of oral reporting, and idiosyncratic and indeterminate phrases. The fact that manuscript B was Godfrey of Fontaine's notebook also led him to choose to follow that manuscript. In the most recent

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edition, Bazan uses A as his base manuscript. Looking at the omissions in manuscripts A, C and D, he demonstrates that none could be the direct copy of another. By considering the mistakes common to A and D which are opposed to C, Bazan concludes that A and D were not copied from the same base manuscript as C. He proposes that C was directly copied from the reportatio, while A and D were produced by an intermediate scribe. However, the value of C is reduced because of the additions its scribe introduced. Thus, Bazan chooses A as his base manuscript.

Which family of manuscripts one follows in an edition is important because although there are no philosophical differences between B on the one hand and ACD on the other, there are important differences concerning Siger's relationship to the arguments presented. Manuscript B omits qualifying phrases in eleven places where they occur in ACD. These phrases attribute the arguments being presented as "according to the philosophers." Manuscript B agrees with ACD in keeping these qualifying phrases only in four places. The status of these phrases is important because their inclusion is strong evidence that Siger is not claiming these views as his own.

I have dwelt on this at some length to illustrate that the textual situation with respect to Siger's work is complex enough that we should be extremely cautious about attributing any particular relation to the text to him *in propria persona*. Indeed one very important determinant even of the edition of *De Aeternitate Mundi* has been the editors opinion of Siger's relation to his material. There are no independent witnesses here. Uncertainty with respect to Siger's relation to his work motivates caution with respect to any hypothesis about development in Siger's own views. We simply do not know what Siger saw himself as doing and so can hardly gauge what would have counted for him as a reason to modify what he had written. For example, if he saw himself as expounding natural philosophy and saw it as an autonomous science then the fact that its conclusions contradicted those of theology might count as compelling reason for him not to believe them but no reason at all to reject them as the conclusions of natural philosophy.

The unificatory methodology which Prof. Wippel and I agree in attributing to Aquinas and the more 'autonomist' or 'disorderly' methodology I have suggested might have been Siger's are two ends of a spectrum. We could reasonably expect many of the points between to have been represented at Paris and even among the theologians on Bishop Tempier's Commission. The methodological framework with which these thinkers approached the issues before them and the frameworks which they expected others — both students and Masters to bring to the material — could hardly help but shape their perception of what the movements within the Arts Faculty hinted at in the Prologue to Tempier's Proclamation really represented. Hisette, Wippel and others have done very valuable service in identifying Masters who might

plausibly be thought to have written down some of the Condemned propositions, but that leaves us a long way from a clear conception of whether those propositions would have been condemned even had those Masters not written them down and so a long way from identifying the targets of the Condemnations in any full-blooded sense.

I have suggested here that we see the Condemnations of 1277 as a 'Philoponean' victory in the ongoing struggle between the 'Simplician' and the 'Philoponean' sides of late Greek philosophy. But while it is, I think, relatively easy to identify the victors and the defeated at that level of abstraction, it is much more difficult to assess at whom in the immediate milieu the condemnations were aimed. We can say with confidence that they were not aimed at Philoponeans like Bonaventure. We can say that they were aimed at preventing the teaching of many propositions which Arts Masters like Siger of Brabant had taught as the best available natural philosophy. We can say that they were aimed at preventing the teaching of some propositions which 'Aristotelians' like Aquinas and his followers held to be true and which the members of the Commission knew they held to be true. We can say that they aimed at preventing the teaching of other propositions which someone might have thought either to be Aquinas' doctrine or to be easily confused with it. What we cannot yet say is at whom the Condemnations were aimed in the stronger sense of whose teaching about or writing about a given proposition *caused* its teaching to be prohibited. To answer that I suggest we need to understand much more fully the scientific methodology of the time.

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