

PIERANTONI, Claudio. *Una Veritas: The ‘Inclusive’ Definition of Truth as a Proof for the Existence of God.* Neunkirchen-Seelscheid: Editiones Scholasticae, 2018, 345p. ISBN: 978-38-683-8210-5.

This book is a rare gem: Claudio Pierantoni offers a clear reconstruction of the thought of three classical authors and displays deep philosophical acumen. The author intends to offer a “new” proof for the existence of God and argues for this demonstration by presenting Augustine’s, Anselm’s and Aquinas’ theories of truth. Pierantoni’s proof is “new” in the sense that it can be built out of a fresh look at the texts of Saint Augustine, Saint Anselm and Saint Thomas Aquinas. It is not “new” in the sense that it breaks with tradition. I shall first offer a sketch of Pierantoni’s proof, and I will later summarize his historical analysis.

The proof is discussed by Joseph Seifert in his *Preface* (p. 7-19; 13-18) and in the *Post Script* (p. 308-319), and is presented at length in the *Systematic Conclusions* of the book (p. 269-284). The three chapters of the monograph are respectively devoted to Augustine’s notion of truth (p. 51-102), to Anselm’s definition of truth and to his ontological proof presented against the backdrop of the theory of truth (p. 113-194) and to Aquinas’ reflections on truth and on the intellectual light (p. 215-267).

According to the author, whenever we grasp that something is true, we grasp a truth that is necessary and eternal. I may

know (at time t_p) that (i) “the cat is eating the mouse”. This utterance describes a contingent fact (a cat that is eating a mouse), but it will be forever true that, when I uttered (i), the cat was eating a mouse. (For the sake of argument, we suppose that my utterance was true. I distinguish between utterances and propositions, the first being the tokens of the latter. The proposition is the objective representation of the inherence of a predicate in a subject. The utterance is the truth-bearer according to Aristotle, see P. Crivelli. *Aristotle on Truth*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004; for a different reading of truth-bearers in Aristotle see D. Charles, M. Peramatzis. *Aristotle on Truth-Bearers*. *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, v. 50, 2016, p. 101-141). Hence, the proposition (i*) “the cat is eating the mouse at t_p ” is true at every instant of time. Contemporary philosophers of language tend to be satisfied with this conclusion. On the contrary, Pierantoni follows the lead of Saint Augustine and Saint Thomas Aquinas and asks what the truth of a proposition entails from an epistemological and an ontological viewpoint. He endorses Aquinas’ definition of truth, according to which truth is a correspondence between

a thing and an intellect (*veritas est adaequatio rei et intellectus*). From an ontological viewpoint, the *truth* is identical with the *true thing*, i.e. with the object that may be grasped by a possible mind. In the above example, the cat-that-is-eating-a-mouse-at- t_p is the *true thing* that can be grasped by a possible mind. The cat will perish and so will I who am thinking of the cat at t_p . Truth, however, cannot perish. Even the truth of a statement like “the cat is eating the mouse at t_p ” cannot change. Hence, the author argues, we should postulate the existence of an Eternal Intellect, i.e. God, and of Eternal Ideas, which are the *eternal true entities* that forever correspond to God’s Intellect in order to form eternally true statements. It goes without saying that Eternal Ideas are also identical with God’s Essence, because He is *altogether simple* (cf. *S. Th.*, I, q. 3, a. 7) – there is no composition of any sort in the *Ipsum Esse Subsistens*. If I understand correctly Pierantoni’s analysis of Augustine, the adjective “true” is predicated of utterances/mental states, propositions, extra-mental realities and Divine Ideas. There is, however, an order in this series of predications: utterances and mental states are true because *eternal propositions* are true. Similarly, on the ontological level, extra-mental realities are said to be true because Divine Ideas are true (an extra-mental reality is true inasmuch as it can correspond to a possible mind and inasmuch as it

actually corresponds to God’s Mind, i.e. to a Divine Idea; a Divine Idea is true inasmuch as it is the object of God’s Self-Knowledge). Eternal propositions and Divine Ideas seem to be coincidental: propositions represent the inherence of a property in a subject, whereas ideas are a single intentional content for a multiple reality. The distinction between eternal propositions and ideas seems to be the case *quoad nos*. In God’s Mind all contents are simple as long as their intentional Being is considered (because this Being is God’s Being). Hence, Pierantoni’s argument seems to rely on the analogy of truth, because the adjective “true” is only analogically predicated of changeable items (such as utterances, mental states or extra-mental realities) and unchangeable items (eternal propositions and divine ideas).

The author argues for this claim by focusing on the theories of truth of Saint Augustine, Saint Anselm and Saint Thomas Aquinas. The author dwells at length on Augustine’s *Soliloquia*, an early treatise composed in 387, in which one can find many Platonic themes, including the dialectic method: the treatise is in fact a dialogue between Augustine’s soul and Reason (*ratio*). The Augustinian theme of interiority is already present in the structure of the treatise: unlike the Socratic *logoi*, this is an *interior dialogue*. It is not clear to me whether Augustine wants to present his results as conclusive, but it is certain that the definitions proposed

in the *Soliloquia* are repeated in later treatises too (cf. p. 90-102). In this early text, he states that “*mihi videtur verum esse id quod est*” (*Solil.*, II, iv, 8, l. 15, quoted on p. 78, n. 122). If this is what is “true”, the definition of the “false” is rather complex, because one would be inclined to say that the false does not exist (cf. *Solil.*, II, viii, 15, l. 16: “*falsum non esse uspiam concludetur, quovis repugnante*”, quoted on p. 80, n. 128). This definition will be abandoned and Augustine will state that the false is what “tends to be and is not”, because it is an image of truth. What matters for us is that human beings are said to be capable of having false thoughts. Hence, they cannot be the intellect that is always capable of grasping what is true. This leads us to posit the existence of a transcendent Source of truth, i.e. God.

After the chapter on Augustine, Pierantoni writes an *Excursus* devoted to Heidegger’s criticism of the classical notion of truth (p. 103-111). In this dense *Excursus*, he shows that Heidegger’s definition of truth entails that human beings are *essentially* identical with truth, i.e. with existence. From a Thomist perspective, this is tantamount to proclaim that human beings are gods by nature. The statement eerily echoes Gen. 3:5 (“*et eritis sicut dii*”).

After the *Excursus*, Pierantoni focuses on Saint Anselm, with a list of his truth-bearers (p. 117):

- (1) the proposition
- (2) the opinion or thought

- (3) the will
- (4) the action
- (5) the physical senses
- (6) the essences of things
- (7) God (*Summa Veritas*)

As is clear from Anselm’s *De Veritate*, the “proposition” (*enuntiatio*) that can be true is an *utterance* (cf. especially p. 118). This list implicitly suggests that the notion of truth is analogous: as Pierantoni rightly notes, Anselm’s analysis entails that (1) our “signifying acts” are contingent, that (2) the conceptual content of our judgement is eternal *qua* objectively true and contingent *qua* psychological representation, and that (3) the universal truth of our judgements is grounded upon the necessity of God Supreme Truth (cf. p. 146-148). Pierantoni makes clear that his analysis intends to stress the analogous character of truth, because he shows that the two paths to show God’s existence in Anselm’s *Monologion*, namely the path from the “good” and the path from “greatness”, rest on analogy. After having exposed these two paths, Pierantoni notes that one could make an analogous argument by relying on the analogy of truth (cf. p. 156). He wants to save also the validity of the “*unum argumentum*” that Anselm proposes in his *Proslogion*. According to the author, “thought is ultimately rooted, by its very essence, in real being” (p. 171). It is true that the ontological argument presupposes that thinking is ultimately rooted in some real being. Following

Pierantoni's main idea, I would argue that this entails that truth exists, because there are at least some beings that are grasped by at least some intellects. But truth is eternal and necessary and this brings us to postulate an Eternal Mind. I think that this is the sense in which the "ontological argument" relies on premises on the nature of signification that Aquinas would also subscribe to. But despite this possible agreement on the presuppositions of the argument, the structure of the "*unum argumentum*" is open to criticism. Pierantoni, however, wants to save also the *littera* of Anselm's ontological argument and adds that "when 'something greater than which nothing can be thought' is thought, it must be always understood as *something real*" (p. 171). The author is aware that there are imaginary concepts that have no correspondence in reality, but he claims that these concepts are by definition related to other concepts of real beings, whereas the concept of the Supreme Being is by definition the concept of a *necessary Being*, so it cannot but have a corresponding Entity in the extra-mental reality. I think that this argument fails because both concepts (those of imaginary beings and those of necessary beings) *qua* concepts are not distinguishable. On the other hand, if one looks at their *intentional content*, one would be presenting a proof *ex natura rerum*, as Anselm does in the *Monologion* and Aquinas does in his five ways. When Pierantoni sums

up his interpretation of the ontological argument, he writes that "it is clear that this Supreme Essence, whose real and necessary existence we have been able to perceive from the notion of participation of contingent real beings in Being, can never be conceived of as *merely possible* because this would send us back to a higher Essence that thinks and causes it" (p. 172-173). Apart from some terminological quibbles (I would say that the Supreme Essence is *inferred*, not *perceived*, from the notion of participation in *being*, not *Being*), this argument looks like Aquinas' third way. If one were to reduce the "*unum argumentum*" to the third way, I would also find the "ontological argument" a conclusive one. I am not entirely sure that this interpretation is consistent with Anselm's own formulation, but Pierantoni might be developing his own philosophical ideas out of Anselm's *littera* in this very context.

The third chapter of the book, devoted to Aquinas' notion of truth, is equally thought-provoking. Pierantoni is right in focusing on *De veritate* I,1 to stress that one sense of truth – arguably, the core sense of truth – is the correspondence between created things and Divine Ideas. He goes on to underline that the principles of knowledge have the function of a light that enables us to recognize something as true. This light is the splendour of Divine Light in us. In his words, "St. Thomas retains here the fundamental

Platonic and Aristotelian theorem, already received by St. Augustine, according to which it is impossible to justify the *existence of universal and necessary principles* in us by the mere causation from contingent and particular beings” (p. 228). (Pierantoni collects Aquinas’ main texts on the innateness of the first principles in the *Appendix C*, p. 302-307. On the Thomistic doctrine of the first principles of the intellect see now: F. de Azevedo Ramos. *I primi principi dell’intelletto speculativo in S. Tommaso d’Aquino*. Dissertatio ad Lauream in Facultate Philosophiae apud Pontificiam Universitatem S. Thomae in Urbe, Romae, 2018). The *intellectus principiorum* is not innate, but is a congenital capacity to recognize the truth. Pierantoni interprets Saint Thomas Aquinas with the help of Blessed Antonio Rosmini’s philosophy and states that “the light of the intellect [...] in cooperation with external sensation, gives rise to the *ratio entis*, which is in turn at the root of all principles” (p. 228). In Pierantoni’s interpretation, illumination from God’s Light through the *intellectus principiorum* and abstraction are complementary activities (cf. p. 246-259).

In his *Systematic Conclusions*, Pierantoni offers a rigorous version of his proof for the existence of God and grounds it on an “inclusive definition” of truth: it “is being, eternal or finite, as object of the Eternal Intellect,

participated by the human intellect through the notion of universal, undetermined being, determinable through experience” (p. 278). There might be some dialectical reasons to rephrase this definition. Since we might agree that whatever God knows as true is true and whatever is true is true in virtue of truth, a definition of “truth” should make room for truths that are known by, or might be known to God alone. Pierantoni’s definition, however, does not capture the case of a truth that happens to be known by God but not by any other intellect.

As is clear, Pierantoni’s definition itself includes a reference to God. He has only to persuade us to accept the definition he proposes. He argues for his definition on the basis of historical and philosophical considerations.

I conclude with some methodological considerations. After having analysed the thought of Augustine, Anselm and Aquinas and having cursorily referenced the opinions of Bonaventure and Rosmini, it is clear that Pierantoni’s philosophical endeavour is rooted in tradition. In his opinion, “Aquinas’s contribution is based on his *humble openness to tradition*” and “one imitates him (...) who studies him not only in the light of previous tradition, but also in the successive”: “we believe that a truly fertile ‘Thomism’ should not focus exclusively on the writings of Aquinas, but should strive to read him from a wider perspective, one that

complements him by reading authors he himself considered the greatest masters, without forgetting those who, in later ages, are considered as his best disciples” (p. 25, n. 33). I am persuaded that these methodological remarks can lead us to a real Thomist Renaissance in Philosophy and in Theology.

The book stems out of a PhD dissertation defended at the Universidad

de los Andes of Santiago de Chile. The author displays a remarkable erudition, his prose is clear and his claims are well argued: the most demanding reader could hardly hope for more.

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