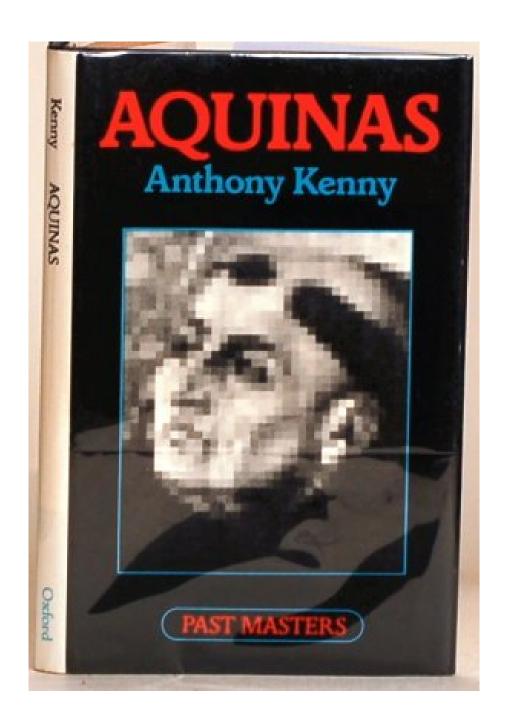


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It is hard to see how such a book could be done better ...Anthony Kenny ...manages to convey with great vividness the astonishing depth and intensity of Thomas's commitment to coherent rational understanding and the prodigious intellectual industry which he displayed in its pursuit.' John Dunn, London Review of Books St Thomas Aquinas's theological works, and especially his masterpiece the Summa Theologiae contain philosophical insights which entitle him to be considered as one of the world's greatest philosophers. Anthony Kenny's masterful introduction gives an account of St Thomas's life and works, sketching the major concepts of Aquinas's metaphysical system including his doctrine of Being, with the last chapter devoted to his philosophy of mind. This book is intended for students of theology and philosophy - particularly medieval or metaphysical. Students of the literature and history of the medieval period.

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Most helpful customer reviews

5 of 6 people found the following review helpful.

Very readable

By A Customer

Kenny's text on Aquinas is informative and to the point. If you want more than a shallow introduction to Aquinas' life and thought, this is an excellent place to begin. Like other contributions in the Past Masters series, the text offers a brief biography, articulates the main philosophical concerns, offers some criticism, then reflects on the consequences or influences of the subject under study.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

A book on Aquinas not worth reading.

By Andy K

Anthony Kenny's little book on Aquinas is three essays. Unfortunately, I hate this book, and accordingly gave it the lowest rating, because it is an opinion-piece which is inadequate to the subject and theme of the book. It thus fails as a book.

Of these essays, the first is biographical, the second is metaphysical, and the third is epistemic.

The biography is worthless, since a dozen more lively short descriptions of Thomas of Aquinas' life exist. I recommend Chesterton's book on Aquinas, which is about a hundred times better in about ten different ways.

But the marketing and packaging of this book (slim, low cost, and summarized) might lead readers to expect

a detached and academic overview of Aquinas and his work. And unfortunately, this book descends to pages of opinionation, baseless quibbles, hair-splitting, and useless fake controversy to justify its own existence and its author's philosophical power. This is clearly and simply an inadequate work, consequently.

Let's look at the chapter entitled "Being". I understand Kenny has worked up a book-length treatment of "Aquinas on Being". Let's hope it is not as woefully inadequate as this short essay appears to be.

First of all, Aquinas is not a hair-splitter or system builder, as Kenny misrepresents in his pages of careful distinctions. Rather, he is a scientist of what he considers the highest of sciences, theology. If Kenny cannot take Aquinas on the terms Aquinas needs to be taken on, then Kenny has no business writing a book that purports to be about Aquinas, because he has not made the effort to understand him.

Secondly, Kenny seeks to undermine Aquinas' use of the term "accident" by referring to the Eucharist as an accident without a substance behind it. He does this by saying Thomas meant the term "accident" to have two different meanings, which is clearly not the case. Self-evidently, Aquinas describes the Eucharist as the substance of Christ (the body and blood). The idea of Kenny doing a little few pages of critique to show off his philosophical ability against Aquinas is akin to watching a toddler play-box with a grown man. It diminishes Kenny and falls short of grasping Aquinas.

Third, Kenny again inadequately compares the notion of primal matter in Aquinas with the discovery of chemistry and quantum physics! He blithely overlooks the groundbreaking work of Maritain ("Degrees of Knowledge") and Gilson ("Methodical Realism") in distinguishing what the Thomistic method can and cannot do (Gilson), and extending it to cover other fields of knowledge (Maritain). Kenny seems to confuse the intelligible levels of comprehension and philosophical knowledge with the sensible levels of chemical and physical knowledge. Again, he has failed to grasp the subject of his book, and thus undermined both the book and himself.

Fourth, Kenny accuses Aquinas of platonism in his doctrine of angels, demonstrating that he simply has failed to understand the method on a level other the superficial.

Fifth, Kenny homes in on Aquinas' dispute about the dead body of Christ and the non-plurality of substantial forms, which was the basis of the controversy around Thomas' work at the time, and simplistically supposes that the term "form" has two meanings, just like "accident". It would seem that Kenny is bent on misreading Aquinas thoroughly at this stage, and our trust in his authority as a pedagogue is almost at zero. Aquinas meant one thing when he said "form", not two. The entire debate was won around the notion of the singularity of substantial forms. Kenny fails to be adequate to any of these aspects of the debate, but instead splits hairs.

Sixth, Kenny makes a mess of Aquinas' idea of essence, by overlooking the identification of the substantial form with the person. Much futile hair-splitting ensures, with predictable silliness.

Kenny concludes the chapter on "Aquinas' metaphysics" by saying that his metaphysics are "sophistry and illusion". This is a sad verdict on Kenny's lack of skilled reading, in-depth knowledge, and comprehension.

The chapter/essay on mind/epistemology concludes with a quote from an "admirer" of Aquinas, Herbert McCabe, and a "critic", Wittgenstein, who says that we admire Aquinas not for the answers he gives but for the questions he asks. This is quite clearly damning Aquinas with faint praise.

In conclusion, it is evident that Anthony Kenny is partisan against Thomas Aquinas, and ought not be writing

a basic introductory book on his teachings. Kenny is clearly a good "critical thinker", but just as evidently a bad "reasoner", because he cannot appreciate Thomas Aquinas on his own terms, because he blames Thomas for failing to grasp the modern extensions of Thomism without Kenny himself bothering to study the neo-Thomists, and because he hair-splits arrogantly instead of putting in the hard work of comprehending what Thomas of Aquinas is really saying. For these reasons, and more, this book should be resigned to the wastepaper basket.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful.

Great expositor of Aquinas

By GangstaLawya

Although G. K. Chesterton, Etienne Gilson and Frederick Copleston did marvelous introductions to the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas, Kenny's terse little tome merits attention. His analytic philosophical bent gives his exposition a fresh perspective on philosophical terms of art utitized by St. Thomas, and casts a light on troublesome areas. Moreover, I agree with Kenny that there has been an overemphasis on "Being" in St. Thomas studies, and a terrible negligence of "Mind" in St. Thomas studies. I would add that there was an empirical side in St. Thomas' apologetics that is also neglected by all the scholarship available.

The reader will not be disappointed. All the terms of art such as Substance and Accident are elucidated. For example, Kenny notes that Substance and Accident can be looked at as an attempt to classify predicates. In an age of deflationary logic, one might be persuaded to reconsider one's modern position after coming to an understanding of St. Thomas.

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