

## **The Name of the Rose:**

### **An Account on Medieval Catholic Church and its Connection with Aristotle**

"Because it was by the Philosopher. Every book by that man has destroyed a part of the learning that Christianity had accumulated over the centuries. The fathers had said everything that needed to be known about the power of the Word, but then Boethius had only to gloss the Philosopher and the divine mystery of the Word was transformed into a human parody of categories and syllogism."<sup>1</sup> This revelation made by Jorge of Burgos about the origin of his crimes summarizes, in my opinion, the position of Medieval Catholic Church towards the teachings of Aristotle and their influence in medieval thinkers both, outside and inside the church. It is towards the end of the book, when William of Baskerville discovers that the mysterious book is "Aristotle's Lost Book of Divine Comedy", that the reader is able to see *The Name of the Rose* as a precise description of the position acquired by church's leaders throughout the Middle Ages. Some of these leaders identified Aristotle's ideas as being the leading cause of heresies.

At the end of the seventh day, when William and Adso manage to find the way into the *finis Africae*, William and Jorge engage in an erudite conversation that leads to the destruction of the book. Umberto Eco, in his decision to make Jorge eat the book, thus making it disappear forever, draws an allusion to the Condemnations of 1277. In this episode of history, as well as in the last pages of the book, he (the Bishop of Paris, Stephen Tempier, in the former and Jorge of Burgos in the latter) is successful in placing Aristotelian propositions out-of-reach for everyone that might be seduced by these teachings. But why would the Church categorize Aristotle as the leading cause of heresies? What did his propositions imply? What were the philosophical

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<sup>1</sup> Eco, Umberto, *The Name of the Rose*, 1983, Harcourt, Inc., P. 473.

consequences in banning these 219 propositions? These are some of the inquiries that will continue to be treated throughout the paper.

Jorge's revulsion that laughter might "free the villein from the fear of the Devil"<sup>2</sup> represents in some way the medieval concern expressed by Bishop Tempier. The blind man of *The Name of the Rose*, as a member of the Church, has seen the impact Aristotle has had up to now in many individuals, including their own saints, "We knew everything about the divine names, and the Dominican buried by Abo--seduced by the Philosopher--renamed them, following the proud paths of natural reason."<sup>3</sup> He is afraid that the book on comedy might continue to be the basis for heresy and shape the breakdown of Christianity, as past theories by Aristotle have supposedly managed to do. The Condemnations of 1277 and Jorge in referring with disgust to "the Dominican buried by Abo" show the effect of Aristotle on Thomas Aquinas. Actually, many of the condemned propositions were taken from Aquinas' work, although he was never named.<sup>4</sup>

Now, in a broad scope many would acknowledge the presence of Aristotle's theory in medieval philosophy and his influence in some of its greater exponents. Personally, I am particularly interested in his influence in medieval theories of practical reason, his work as a shaper of the middle ages debate, Intellectualism versus Voluntarism, and the presence of these ideas in Eco's *Il Nome della Rosa*. Practical reason is the reasoning about an action which in consequence has an objective; this objective, in turn, is meant to carry some good with it. Medieval thinkers, in general, defend one of the following: either the predominance of the intellect in the reasoning process (intellectualism), or the predominance of the will (voluntarism);

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<sup>2</sup> Eco, Umberto, *The Name of the Rose*, 1983, Harcourt, Inc., P. 474.

<sup>3</sup> Eco, Umberto, *The Name of the Rose*, 1983, Harcourt, Inc., P. 473.

<sup>4</sup> Toner, Cristopher, "Medieval Theories of Practical Reason", *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, March 19, 2010, James Fieser (ed.), URL = < <http://www.iep.utm.edu/prac-med/#SH1c>>.

though both positions recognize the importance of both (intellect and will) in the process. Aristotle is, in fact, the precursor of Intellectualism (greater exponent: Aquinas) while Saint Augustine is the precursor of Voluntarism (greater exponents: Franciscans Duns Scotus and William of Ockham).

In order to show the trains of thoughts presented by these two positions, let's analyze one key event in the novel, the sexual act performed by Adso and the peasant girl. In engaging in sexual intercourse Adso must have carried a reasoning process involving both intellect and will. Aristotle would describe his final decision by a process of practical syllogism by which Adso would have reasoned the following when seeing the girl in the kitchen, "I should not please my carnal desires, pleasing my carnal desires requires me to make love to a girl, so I should not make love to a girl; I should not make love to a girl, there is a girl lying in front of me; I choose not to make love to the girl in front of me." Once the intellect has identified an end as having in it some good and identify the way for achieving this end, a desire for it puts the man into motion. It is clear, then, that Aristotle believes reason acts first, and desire follows. However, as any reader of the novel would recognize, this is not what happened. Why did Adso have sex with the girl if his reason told him not to? According to Aristotle, the reason never identifies a good end in a bad action; instead, there must be a discrepancy between reason and desire. Desires are in line with reason, whenever one manages to discipline the moral virtues, "Virtue makes the goal right, practical wisdom the things leading to it."<sup>5</sup> The power given to the intellect by the Greek philosopher paved the way for Thomas Aquinas' work as an intellectualist.

The morning of the fourth day, as the Benedictine novice meditates about his encounter with the girl, he recognizes the work of Aquinas regarding practical reason, "The angelic doctor

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<sup>5</sup> Walsh, James. *Aristotle's Conception of Moral Weakness*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1963.

says that the passions in themselves are not evil, but they must be governed by the will led by the rational soul."<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, he admits that, seized by love, his rational soul was not able to work in favor of his final end; Adso, following Aquinas, believes that one's final end is perfection with God in the afterlife, plausible by means of loving contemplation and obedient service throughout terrestrial existence. Although Thomas Aquinas would see Adso's reasoning process as a much more complex one (a twelve step interaction between intellect and will), his theory also blames Adso for not training "synderesis, prudence, and moral virtue which work together to ensure that the action meets all of the criteria of a good action."<sup>7</sup>

Studying the path of history and the opinion of many characters in *The Name of the Rose*, including Jorge, shows us that medieval catholic church was much more comfortable with the teachings of voluntarism expressed by Augustine and Scotus. Thinkers after the Condemnations of 1277, decided to protect divine and human freedom, assign dominance and independence to the human will. Duns Scotus and fictional character Jorge of Burgos believe the will is more perfect than the intellect. They believe that the corruption of the will, to hate God when knowing Him, is worse than the corruption of the intellect, not to know God. Jorge makes his point clear when he addresses that not having fear of God, not loving him properly, is far worse than the action committed by the Dolcinians who committed their heresies simply because they did not know God properly. In relation to Adso's incident with the girl, Scotus does not believe in the importance of reason in choosing good actions; instead, he believes that right reason must agree with will. One must know and draw upon the principle of natural law - a failure to do so would be denying and, therefore, contradicting natural laws. For example, Adso knows that God, the

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<sup>6</sup> Eco, Umberto, *The Name of the Rose*, 1983, Harcourt, Inc., P. 280.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, translated by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Allen, TX: Christian Classics, 1981).

representation of all goodness and perfection, is to be loved; loving him means being faithful to his vows. However, when having sex with the girl, he betrays his vows, and ergo, commits the contradiction of not loving the goodness of God. This draws upon him the greatest heresy according to voluntarist, not loving God properly-the corruption of the will.

Personally, I believe that Umberto Eco was successful in his main aim, not writing about the Middle Ages, but actually writing in the Middle Ages. *The Name of the Rose* has taught me the importance of the Catholic Church's position throughout this time period and its consequences in modern philosophy. It not only shaped many medieval philosophical debates such as Intellectualism versus Voluntarism, but also paved the way for modern positions such as Particularism and Internalism. The blaming of Aristotle's theory led to the Condemnations of 1277, to the crimes in the Franciscan abbey, to the development of Voluntarism, to the modern day theories of practical reason, and to the writing of this paper.

Benedictine

Grammar: 5/5

Composition: 5/5

Philosophical  
Analysis: 9/10

Literary  
Appreciation: 8/10

27  
30

A-

Excellent  
Work.