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Roland J. Teske, *Studies in the Philosophy of William of Auvergne, Bishop of Paris (1228-1249)*. Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2006. 274 pp. Table, introduction, notes, bibliography, and indexes. \$30.00 U.S. (pb). ISBN 0-87462-674-9.

Review by Steven P. Marrone, Tufts University.

William of Auvergne, master of theology at the University of Paris and bishop of that city from 1228 until his death in 1249, was one of the most prominent Latin theologians of his day, recognized for his intellectual import throughout much of the rest of the thirteenth century. Yet the modern historiography of scholastic thought has paid him relatively little attention. The only book devoted to the entirety of his thinking, a three-volume study by Amato Masnovo, appeared well over half a century ago.<sup>[1]</sup> With the new work under review here, gathering together thirteen essays on aspects of William's philosophy originally published between 1990 and 2003, Roland Teske goes a long way towards redressing the balance. In the name of full disclosure, I should admit that as an author of two books in which William's speculative achievements play a major role, I cannot be considered an impartial witness to Teske's effort.<sup>[2]</sup> All the same, I believe that anyone who reads Teske's book will come away convinced that William deserves just the sort of probing and sustained examination Teske has given him. For the sake of our accurate appreciation of the historical trajectory of thirteenth-century scholasticism, I hope the book has many readers.

Among his arguments for putting the spotlight on William, Teske contends that the latter's writings, comprised in great measure of a series of seven lengthy treatises intended as the parts of a massive *Magisterium divinale ac sapientiale* (which Teske translates: *Teaching on God in the Mode of Wisdom*), constitute arguably the only "comprehensive structure" of philosophical and theological speculation from the first half of the thirteenth century that bears comparison to the great *summas* of that century's later decades, from the likes of Thomas Aquinas and Albert the Great. Moreover, claims Teske, William's work, along with that of Robert Grosseteste and Richard Rufus, stood at the vanguard of the first attempt in the Latin west to come to grips with the heritage of Greek and Islamic thought in all its radical difference and complexity. Following up on observations made by Masnovo but expanding them considerably, Teske presents convincing evidence that William actually anticipated at significant points what are often taken as innovations of the greats of the century's later years. Already present in William's work are the fundamentals of Aquinas's celebrated and vastly influential distinction between being and essence in everything but God. Likewise apparent in William, and quite possibly the inspiration for similar though not so fully developed ideas in his contemporary, Robert Grosseteste, is an understanding of the difference between eternity and time dependent on a clear grasp of the concept of infinity, something that scholars have typically attributed first in Latin scholasticism to the writings of Bonaventure. Teske even argues persuasively that William was earliest among the scholastics to deny for intellectual substances the principle of hylomorphism, insisting instead that they all, including human souls, were absolutely immaterial. Again, Aquinas is usually regarded as the first great proponent of that idea. If William's presentation of his position on these matters sometimes falls short of the lucidity and precision we expect of his late-century successors, perhaps that itself is a mark of his aggressive innovation. One can seriously ask whether Aquinas or Bonaventure would ever have achieved their discursive resoluteness and serenity had not William introduced such issues into the intellectual debate decades before.

It is in William's relation to, and dependence on, the eleventh-century Persian Avicenna (Ibn Sina), that Teske finds one of the most prominent markers of his intellectual achievement, indeed of his importance for subsequent scholastic thinking. As other scholars have pointed out, Avicenna's output offered for William the epitome of what he took to be Aristotelian thought, so that what he read in Avicenna he accepted as the authentic statement of Aristotle's own ideas. Where Teske goes beyond many twentieth-century readings of the significance of this hermeneutical reliance is in his claim that William accepted at least as much from Avicenna (and thus, to William's mind, Aristotle) as he rejected in him. Contrary to the too-often prevailing opinion of historians as diverse as Josef Kramp, Roland de Vaux, and even Etienne Gilson—all of whom in their different ways characterized William by his anti-Avicennianism—Teske emphasizes the continuities between Avicenna's and William's thought. He takes particular delight in calling attention to instances—and they are not infrequent—where William adopted as his own fundamental principles of Avicennian metaphysics or psychology. A whole essay in this collection is devoted to William's use of Avicenna's axiom, "from what is one, insofar as it is one, there cannot arise anything other than one." Despite the fact that in Avicenna's hands this rule is taken as necessitating the conclusion that from the first origin of all things there could arise immediately no more than a single creature, William insists on the principle's truth, employs it widely throughout his work, and finds his own way around the inconvenient restriction on the creativity of God.

At another equally freighted philosophical locus, William adopts for his analysis of "the divine" Avicenna's claim that God is most properly denominated as "necessary being in itself," thereby turning his back on the preceding Latin intellectual tradition of beginning with the divinity most properly as the biblical and Augustinian "I am" or "that which is." In fact, so great is William's debt to Avicenna, and so astute his perception of the meaning of Avicenna's ideas, that Teske dares to propose that William was largely responsible, as he puts it, for Avicenna's "entrance to the Latin West on a large scale" (p. 99).

To be sure, Teske fully admits that at crucial moments William took Avicenna to task, situating his own position expressly in opposition to that of his Persian forebearer. One of the most important of such instances, in Teske's eyes, came with William's arguments against the eternity of the world. As already hinted above, Teske holds William to be perhaps the first Latin scholastic to comprehend the fundamental incompatibility of Aristotle's—which for William, of course, meant Avicenna's—views on the eternity of the world and the Christian notion of creation. In countering Avicenna, William may even have inspired his contemporary, Grosseteste, in both thinkers' anticipation of the high-scholastic conceptualization of the difference between eternity and everlasting time. Another important point of divergence between William and Avicenna can be found in William's vehement rejection of the tenth and last of the celestial intelligences as creative source for all things generated in the terrestrial world and origin of both human souls and whatever knowledge they possess. William likewise refused to accept an Avicennian application of the idea of emanation, denying that anything other than divinity itself could emanate from God, first principle of the universe, via creation in contrast to emanation. He rejected as well what he took to be Avicenna's position on the unicity of the human soul, apparently not registering Avicenna's explicit affirmation of the separateness of souls even after death had divided them from their bodies. It is worth noting to this effect that although Teske is aware of René Gauthier's work on early Averroism in the Latin west, he might have sharpened his explanation of William's misunderstanding on this score by making use of Gauthier's demonstration that prior to the 1240s western thinkers all held the doctrine of the unicity of humanity's agent intellect to be distinctly Avicennian.[3] Maybe most consequential of all, William decisively distanced himself from the intellectualism—hence, too, determinism—of Avicenna's approach to ontology as well as metaphysics. A convinced voluntarist, William made an especially telling appeal to the concept of will in his account of how Avicenna's principle of "from one, nothing but one" did not inhibit the divine unity's ability to serve as immediate creator of a vast multiplicity.

A particularly intriguing and nicely framed essay is Teske's investigation of the "italici" referred to in

William's arguments against the eternity of the world. In contrast with previous attempts to identify these "Italians" mostly with great philosophers of antiquity, particularly Boethius--whom William does make reference to at least once as "ille philosophus italicus" ("that Italian philosopher")--Teske zeros in instead on Cicero, convincingly showing that on the critical issue of defining "eternity," William continually took as foil for his own views an "italicus" whose words can in every instance be found, with only slight variation, in Cicero's works. A note in this piece on the "italici" (p. 60), pointing to an occasion where William associated another group of "italici" with the logical distinction between *de re* and *de dicto* signification, leads quite naturally to the subsequent essay about William on *de re* and *de dicto* necessity. Here Teske correctly locates an important tradition of using the *de re-de dicto* distinction running from Abelard at least through Aquinas, but he ends up proposing that those employing the distinction whom William had in mind were "Platonizing members of the school of Chartres" (p. 79). As Neil Lewis and (subsequently) I have argued in separate articles, the *de re-de dicto* distinction William was in fact targeting, and which he largely adopted for his own analysis, was in effect the very one to be found in Abelard and Aquinas. William probably lifted it from the teachings of the "Parvipontani," students of the influential Parisian arts master Adam of Petit Pont.[4]

Running throughout the whole collection of essays at a meta-historical level is a recurrent and fascinating consideration of the question of why William the theologian turned almost exclusively in the treatises comprising his *Magisterium* to what he considered the methods of philosophical demonstration, drawn in his words from either metaphysics or a commonplace--perhaps specifically dialectical--philosophy (p. 84, esp. n. 13). It is especially interesting to note, Teske points out, that when William argues against a metaphysical dualism, which he attributes to "Manichaeans" but we can recognize as that of the more contemporary Cathars of southern France and northern Italy, he finds his reasons on Avicennian principles and conspicuously ignores the discursive strategies to be found in the works of Augustine, an author he knew extremely well. Teske's explanation is that William wanted to respond to the real-life heretics, who by his day had adopted a distinctively philosophical approach in their polemics with Christians, on their own terms, adding that he was perhaps also trying to compensate for a purported Cathar tendency to enlist Augustine in their own defense (p. 84, esp. n. 14, and p. 99). In any case, Teske detects in William's commitment to philosophical as opposed to theological or faith-based argumentation a tension with what he understands as William's ultimately religious goals in the *Magisterium*: leading the reader to a full understanding and proper worship of God. Indeed, the concluding essays to the volume testify to an intensifying assessment of the potency of that tension on Teske's part (compare pp. 187, 190, 193, and 246).

In the end, Teske brings us to an appreciation of William that links up, in my mind, with the presentation recent historians such as Alain de Libera have made of the fundamental philosophical pretensions of late thirteenth-century Averroism.[5] Teske quotes William as insisting that the human soul "is brought to its ultimate act by philosophizing" (p. 19)--more or less what de Libera identifies as the position of Albert and Averroes-influenced masters of arts such as Boethius of Dacia--and he likewise now asserts that by the time of his late treatise *De anima*, William had arrived at a progressive or "historical" conception of human nature, whereby the soul's capacity to act--especially to understand--changed according to its standing relative to divine grace (pp. 242-43). Teske would prefer to interpret the few faith-based or revelation-dependent arguments to be found in the *Magisterium* as doing no more than making plain how a recognition of the disparity between the full natural power of the soul and its limited accomplishments in the present state of sin can be taken to argue for the rationality of many of the commitments of Christian belief--for instance, the natural openness of the human mind to the fully intelligible realities of a higher spiritual world (pp. 253-55). To that extent, Teske's ambitiously philosophical William would still shrink from the position of de Libera's Averroists, willing to see philosophy as capable of yielding by itself the vision of God.

All the same, Teske allows that for William there were two "higher worlds" towards which the soul was naturally ordained. One was, as Teske puts it, the "world of natural intelligible things," presumably

regularly open to philosophizing in the world of sin, the other the “world of glory” (pp. 256-58). Did not William’s assumption that philosophizing—as exemplified, for instance, in the *Magisterium*—could bring the soul to its ultimate act imply that philosophy would also finally lead to knowledge of glorious things? If so, in none of his treatises did he ever explain how this might be true, or if it wasn’t, how grace fitted into the *Magisterium*’s plan for intellectual improvement. Perhaps, as Teske concludes, William simply managed at times to raise, without solving, profound problems that would continue “to baffle some of the greatest theologians,” including Thomas himself (p. 259). But just maybe it is worth looking even more deeply into the connections between the early thirteenth-century philosophical confidence of thinkers such as William and the more radical intellectual optimism we have learned to associate with a number of outspoken masters of theology as well as philosophy at century’s end. Could it be that William’s influence extended even more broadly than Teske has dared to suggest?

## NOTES

[1] Amato Masnovo, *Da Guglielmo d’Auvergne a s. Tommaso d’Aquino*, 2d ed., 3 vols. (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 1945-46).

[2] Steven P. Marrone, *William of Auvergne and Robert Grosseteste. New Ideas of Truth in the Early Thirteenth Century* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983); and *The Light of thy Countenance. Science and Knowledge of God in the Thirteenth Century*, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2001).

[3] See most importantly René A. Gauthier, “Notes sur les débuts (1225-1240) du premier ‘averroïsme,’” *Revue des Sciences Philosophiques et Théologiques* 66 (1982):322-73.

[4] Neil Lewis, “William of Auvergne’s Account of the Enuntiable: Its Relation to Nominalism and the Doctrine of the Eternal Truths,” *Vivarium* 33 (1995):113-36; and Steven P. Marrone, “William of Auvergne and Aristotle on Knowing,” in Matthias Lutz-Bachmann, Alexander Fidora, and Pia Antolic, eds., *Erkenntnis und Wissenschaft/Knowledge and Science* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2004), pp. 143-59.

[5] See, most conspicuously, Alain de Libera, *Métaphysique et noétique. Albert le Grand* (Paris: J. Vrin, 2005); and perhaps my review of the book in *Speculum* 82 (2007):722-25.

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