

# MA Thesis Final Evaluation



UNIVERZITA  
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Alena Bezoušková, *Naděje a činnost u Tomáše Akvinského*

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## General presentation of the work

The MA work by Miss Alena Bezoušková reflects her maturity and excellent qualities as a student. Her text, which is devoted to the theme of hope in Thomas Aquinas (a theme that, as she notices herself, has received thus far very poor attention by scholars), is structured and written in a magistral way. For it is systematic and accessible, first of all, even to those who are not familiar with medieval scholastic jargon. A proof of this was the in-class discussion with her colleagues during the Oborové kolokvium, where she presented a chapter of this work: everyone could follow her analysis and ask questions thanks to her great clarity and systematic approach.

Alena's work is divided in two main parts: there is first the analysis of hope as a passion, and then as a theological virtue. These two are preceded by a section on Aquinas' predecessors, notably Aristotle and St. Paul. The Greek philosopher and the early Christian saint play the role of two poles, around which Aquinas' own account of hope (considered as a passion and as a virtue) revolves; they are both present in the *Summa theologiae*, Aquinas' latest masterpiece on which Alena focuses.

Alena argues that, although Aquinas explicitly quotes Aristotle less often than St. Paul, the Aristotelian account of hope is the one upon which the philosopher actually modeled his own. Let us examine what this means. In Aristotle (notably in *Rhetoric* and *Nicomachean Ethics*), hope is defined as a human passion, which exhorts human beings to action. Such passion stimulates the realization of great works as well as the full development of the human person, as it happens in the case of the magnanimous person (cf. §2.8). St. Paul instead designs a concept of hope which is completely modeled upon his eschatological view: hope does not stimulate to action but only comforts human beings that are waiting for the second coming of the Messiah. So, the afterlife perspective is the horizon against which Paul gauges his concept of hope (cf. §1.2; 2.5). These two perspectives on hope are very different indeed. St. Paul does not draw a full-fledged account of human being, while Aristotle's treatment of hope belongs to the context of human passions and is

thus connected to a complex account of the human soul. Alena argues that both perspectives play a role in Aquinas' account of hope, but in a very different way. Like Aristotle, Aquinas fully links his reflection on hope (hope-passion) with a consideration on human being, starting from human psychology and human worldly context. As a passion, in fact, hope belongs to the sensitive part of the human soul. Another important aspect of Aquinas' account, which Alena emphasizes, is the relation between hope-passion and hope-virtue (§3.6). Although virtues belong to the intellectual part of the soul, most particularly, to the will, of which they are movements, Aquinas shows that also as a virtue, the main task of hope is that of sustaining and corroborating human action.

### **Remarks and Questions**

One of the most interesting aspects that Alena's thesis brings to light is that Aquinas gauges his concept of hope against the horizon of rationality (see §2.4, pp. 19-20): unless the one that hopes is not crazy or drunk, in fact, hope always targets something that is reachable and realizable through efforts and work; something which is possible to achieve. Differently than St. Paul, who speaks of the expectation of something which is not under human control, "Aquinas' hope" is understandable in human terms: as a passion, because it brings human beings to act, but also as a virtue, because it supports the entire process that brings human beings closer to God. Such closeness is naturally possible and therefore, achievable, as part of the human desire of happiness. This optimistic account seems to leave no room for irrationality: the human constitution is such that it can reach out to God by making use of its resources, from those belonging to the sensitive soul to those belonging to the intellective one. The discussion might revolve around some of these questions:

- In the wake of his master, Albert the Great, Aquinas develops an account of human being as "*solus intellectus*". But is it possible to imagine hope-virtue without hope-passion? In other words: Can we hope to be saved without knowing earthly hope?
- Why does Aquinas talk also about the hope of animals?
- What is the role of grace in Aquinas' view?
- Also, in such view, rationality (and hope) is inscribed within the horizon of Goodness, meant as a transcendent concept that permeates reality and structures it. Would there be any room for the hope of something known as bad to us (*malum sub rationem mali*), or does hope rhyme with "*bonum arctuum*" only?

### **Final Comments and Evaluation**

The thesis of Alena has many merits, among which I want to include the fine-grained analysis of Aquinas' texts. For all the reasons I have listed thus far, I propose *excellent (1)* as final grade.

January 23rd, Prague 2023

Anna Tropa

