

ETIENNE GILSON

Thomism

The Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas

Translated by †Laurence K. Shook and Armand Maurer

Etienne Gilson published six editions of his book devoted to the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas. The appearance of these editions, the first in 1917 and the last in 1965, covers much of the scholarly life of their author. As he says in his Preface, the book was his lifelong companion. The editions represent a sustained effort to set forth his developing views on the philosophy of the man who, in Gilson's opinion, most profoundly sought out the heart of reality: being, understood as the act of existing (*esse*). Gilson presents his thoughts on this subject with new clarity and precision in his revised sixth and final edition, which is here put into English for the first time.

While probing into Thomas' philosophy, Gilson measures it against the views of his predecessors: notably Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, and the Pseudo-Dionysius among the Greeks, and Avicenna and Averroes in the Islamic world. Among the Latins, he pays particular attention to the views of Augustine, Boethius, Anselm, and in his own century to those of Alexander of Hales and Bonaventure. Gilson sees Aquinas as retrieving much of the long tradition of philosophy in which he was schooled, but surpassing it with his original insights and developments. Most important, in Gilson's opinion, is that Thomas goes beyond the essentialist ontology bequeathed to the Middle Ages by Augustine, among others, and reaches a "new ontology" which is truly existential.

With this leitmotif, in Part I Gilson explores Thomas' notions of the existence and nature of God and our access to them. Part II examines the emanation of the world from God and the hierarchy of creatures, culminating in the human person. Part III contains Gilson's fullest treatment of Thomas' moral doctrine, featuring the human act, its principles, and the personal, social, and religious life. While stressing the strictly rational character of Thomistic philosophy in the way it reaches its conclusions, this edition, like its predecessors, emphasizes its development within Thomas' theology and the guidance it receives from the Christian faith.

ETIENNE GILSON SERIES 24

Etienne Gilson

Thomism

The Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas

A translation of

LE THOMISME

Sixth and final edition

by

† Laurence K. Shook
and
Armand Maurer



PONTIFICAL INSTITUTE OF MEDIAEVAL STUDIES

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The translation is dedicated to

Donal P. Murnaghan

and to

Dorothy V. Maurer

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Translator's Introduction

This book is a translation of the sixth and final edition of Etienne Gilson's *Le Thomisme: Introduction à la philosophie de saint Thomas d'Aquin*.¹ The editions of this work have a long history. Gilson published the first edition in Strasbourg in 1919, the fruit of his first teaching of the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas at the University of Lille in 1913–1914.² The slim volume of 174 pages (which Gilson called “the first miserable edition”)³ bore the title: *Le Thomisme: Introduction au système de S. Thomas d'Aquin*. A slightly larger edition was published with the same title in Paris by Joseph Vrin in 1922. A more ample and revised edition was printed by the same publisher with the same title in Paris in 1927. In 1924, prior to its publication in French, Edward Bullough was authorized to translate this third version, giving it the simple title *The Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*. In 1929 Bullough put out a second and enlarged edition of his translation with the same title. In 1942 Gilson brought out a fourth augmented edition of his book with the new title (dropping the word “system”): *Le Thomisme: Introduction à la philosophie de saint Thomas d'Aquin*. The volume now contained 532 pages. This was followed by a fifth edition in 1944. This edition was put into English by Laurence K. Shook with the title: *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, to which was added a catalogue of the works of St. Thomas by Ignatius T. Eschmann. This translation was published in New York by Random House in 1956, with reprint editions by Octagon Books in 1983 and by the University of Notre Dame Press in 1994. The sixth edition, which is translated here for the first time, was published in Paris by Vrin in 1965. It marks the culmination of Gilson's long effort to present succinctly and comprehensively the philosophical thought of Thomas Aquinas.

On no other of his books did Gilson lavish such care and attention. This was his *chef d'oeuvre*, and it demanded a constant updating as he probed more deeply into the thought of his beloved philosopher. As new editions appeared, older interpretations were discarded, out-of-date controversies were suppressed, new insights were gained and incorporated into the ever-enlarged versions. The

¹For more details of these editions, along with translations and reviews, see Margaret McGrath, *Etienne Gilson. A Bibliography* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1982), pp. 26–27.

²Laurence K. Shook, *Etienne Gilson* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1984), pp. 60–62.

³Quoted by Romain Rolland, *Compagnons de route* (Geneva: Editio-Service, 1972), p. 284.

language of Thomas Aquinas in its French expression was refined and sometimes corrected. In the final edition the order of the chapters in the editions prior to the fifth was restored.

As Gilson says in his Preface to the sixth edition, he thought of his book as an historical introduction to Thomas' philosophy, which he wrote for his students and for himself as well. He found it a convenient place to document his developing understanding of the Angelic Doctor. He was under no illusion that it was the final word on the subject. He recognized that an historian could probably never fully fathom the mind of a great genius like Aquinas, and hence the need for modesty in setting forth his own interpretation of Aquinas and indulgence for those of others. In the same Preface he repeats his own controversial position that, while Thomas' philosophy is contained in his theology as its handmaiden and is therefore essentially theological, it is nevertheless a "strictly rational philosophy." The justification of this paradox appears in the pages that follow.

It will be noted that none of the titles Gilson gave to the six editions of his work contains the qualification of "Christian." They simply announce an introduction to Aquinas' philosophy (or system). The title *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas* appears only in Laurence Shook's translation of the fifth edition. If my memory is exact, this title was suggested to Gilson by his friend and colleague Anton Pegis. Gilson accepted it, for he was profoundly aware of the Christian influence on Thomas' philosophy and he thought it appropriate for English-speaking readers. But he avoided it in the title of the French editions of his work, perhaps because of the controversy over the notion of Christian philosophy that raged on the continent throughout the early twentieth century and beyond, and because of the misunderstanding of his views on the subject that the controversy occasioned. More decisively, he explains in the Introduction to the sixth edition that, since Thomas himself did not use the expression "Christian Philosophy," it is preferable not to bring it into a purely historical account of Thomism.⁴ Our own translation of the sixth edition avoids the term and is in this faithful to the title of the French original.

When the sixth edition of *Le Thomisme* was published in 1965, Fr. Shook realized that his work as translator was not complete. Here was a new version of *Le Thomisme* that in important respects modified and occasionally corrected the earlier version. English readers should not be satisfied with Gilson's views on Thomism contained in the fifth edition; they should have available the more recent expression of his views in the sixth. So Fr. Shook set about translating that edition with the secretarial assistance of Donal Murnaghan, for many years his personal physician and friend. Fr. Shook wrote out his translation longhand, using whenever appropriate his previous translation of the fifth edition, but improving and correcting it. He then passed on his handwritten pages to Dr. Murnaghan, who recorded them, first on typewriter and later on disk, and returned them for Fr. Shook to check.

⁴See Gilson's Introduction to the present work, p. 6.

This collaboration continued until they reached Chapter One of Part 3. Failing health then forced Fr. Shook to give up the project.

Before his death Fr. Shook assured Dr. Murnaghan that someone would continue their work and bring it to completion. Indeed, he knew that I would gladly step in and do this. I inherited all of Fr. Shook's work, and with the continued help of the good doctor finished the project. I was not content simply to translate the part of *Le Thomisme* Fr. Shook left untranslated. For the sake of consistency and uniformity of style, I began at the beginning and reviewed the translation of the whole book. Thus the translation is substantially the work of Fr. Shook, with myself acting as his editor and continuator.

What is new in the sixth edition of *Le Thomisme* that makes it worthy of translation? In his new preface written for this last edition, Gilson explains that, although substantially the same as the fifth, it adds to that edition his more recent reflections on the meaning of Aquinas' philosophy; for example, on the proofs of the existence of God, the meaning of *esse*, and the strict rationality of Thomistic philosophy and its relation to theology. These new insights are to be found chiefly in the first part of the book; for example, in the Introduction, which adds a new section on the philosopher and believer, and in the rearrangement of material on Thomas' meaning of *esse* and the divine being (*Haec sublimis veritas*), and on the Thomistic reform ("A New Theology," "A New Ontology"). Besides changes and restructuring in Part One of the new version, the reader will find throughout the book deletions of material in the former version and additions of words, sentences, and sometimes whole paragraphs, which add precision and clarity to Gilson's exposition of the philosophy of Aquinas. For example, he has largely rewritten the section on the meaning of the proofs of the existence of God (Part 1, ch. 2.6). He has retracted his former opinions that the proof by motion is a proof by the efficient cause of motion (p. 79, n. 80), and that the *De ente et essentia* contains a proof of God's existence (p. 83, n. 85). Thus, while remaining substantially the same as the fifth edition, the sixth offers the reader significant new clarifications of Gilson's views on the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas. In many ways it is his last word on the subject.

In the footnotes I have added a number of editions that have appeared since those Gilson cited—for example, the recent Leonine editions of St. Thomas and the CCL editions of St. Augustine. I have put these references in square brackets. I have also put in square brackets the paragraph numbers of the paragraphs in the manual Leonine edition of the *Summa contra Gentiles*, published in 1934, following the example of Anton Pegis and his colleagues, who translated the work under the title *On the Truth of the Catholic Faith*. Also bracketed are several comments and references I have taken the liberty to add in the notes. In rare cases when a completely new footnote has been added, I have used an asterisk in order to retain the footnote numbering of the original. In Part One, Chapter Three, however, the footnotes range consecutively from 1 to 157, in place of 1-99 and 1-58 of the original.

In Fr. Shook's translation of the fifth edition of *Le Thomisme* there are some additional notes and a significant change in Gilson's interpretation of Boethius' notion of being that do not appear in the French volume.⁵ I can only surmise that Gilson himself instructed Fr. Shook to make these additions. It should be noted that Gilson also gave Edward Bullough additions to be inserted in his translation of the third edition.⁶ Curiously, Gilson did not carry over to his sixth edition these changes he introduced into Fr. Shook's translation. I have taken account of them here in square brackets.

Gilson's personal copy of Fr. Shook's translation of the fifth edition is retained in Toronto in the Rare Book Room of the Library of the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies. Gilson carefully checked this English version and recorded numerous mistakes in translation and other faults in printing. Admitting that he himself may be wrong in his corrections, he begs forgiveness: "sit venia pro peccatis." Every care has been taken to eliminate mistranslations and misprints in this translation of the sixth edition. Like Gilson, however, I must ask the reader's pardon for any failures in this regard.

Some of the translations of quotations from Latin writers were made by Shook from Gilson's French translations, not from the Latin originals. Biblical quotations are from the *Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*, except when modified to fit the context.

It remains to thank my colleagues and friends who assisted in making and publishing this translation. First of all, I am grateful to Dr. Donal Murnaghan, who over the years collaborated with Fr. Shook and then with myself, by putting the translation on disks and printing them, all the while keeping his eye open for occasional misspellings and other happenstances. It is difficult to give adequate thanks to James K. Farge for his generous computer and editorial help. I am grateful to the editor, Jean Hoff, who meticulously prepared the manuscript for publication. I would also like to express my gratitude to Edouard Jeaneau, Jeanette Jardine, and Caroline Suma for their assistance.

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⁵For Gilson's interpretation of Boethius see pp. 91-93, and Appendix 1.

⁶Gilson, *The Philosophy of St. Thomas*, trans. E. Bullough (Cambridge: Heffer, 1929), p. xi.

Preface

The sixth edition of *Le Thomisme* incorporates into the substance of my fifth edition the results of my recent reflections on the meaning of the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas. In calling it "philosophy" I continue to insist on the essentially theological character of Thomas' teaching, but I maintain more than ever that his theology by its very nature includes not only in fact but necessarily a strictly rational philosophy. To deny this would be like denying that stones are real stones just because they are used to build a cathedral.

I no longer include here my prefaces to earlier editions of *Le Thomisme*. They are no longer pertinent. Nor do I include out-of-date controversies. The order now followed is that of the editions preceding the fifth. The reasons for this will become evident. Certain theses relating to the proofs for the existence of God have either been retracted or corrected. They will be indicated wherever they occur in the text, at least when they are important enough to deserve mention.

I would feel somewhat sad on taking leave of a book that has been my life-long companion if I did not know it would silently follow me to the end. What disturbs me more, is the thought of the ignorance and mistakes that can still distort the interpretation of a doctrine in the mind of an historian who devoted himself to it for sixty years. If young scholars suspected the uncertainties encumbering the history of philosophy, they would think twice before becoming involved in it. Grown old, the historian must at least have learned to be humble about his own opinions and to be considerate to those of others. There is a "law of closed consciousness." We shall perhaps never fully penetrate the mind of so great a genius as Thomas Aquinas.

This revision of an old book could hardly change its character or even its terminology. I should have liked to modify both profoundly but found such a task impossible. *Le Thomisme* grew out of my first course of lectures on the doctrine of Thomas Aquinas given during 1913-1914 at the University of Lille. It has always kept its character of an historical introduction, which at the time I myself needed as much as my students. The book remains a general treatment of that part of Thomas' teaching that he himself regarded as defensible by the light of natural reason. Although it leaves many important notions somewhat unclear, it is still an initiation for students into his doctrine.

I taught a little of Thomas at the Sorbonne, none at all at the Collège de France, but a very great deal, and over many years, at the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, founded by the priests of the Congregation of St. Basil, in Toronto, Canada. My students in Toronto were already well informed about the scholastic tradition and only needed an historical introduction to Thomism. I thought, however, that since for them Thomism was a living philosophy, at

least as much as an historical fact, I could help them by setting forth the main themes of a doctrine they themselves might one day have to teach. This called for a further effort: to teach the philosophical elements of Thomism. Since once again I followed the only order of exposition of doctrine warranted by Thomas himself, namely the theological order, I was at a loss to find a title for it. In Thomas' doctrine there is no such thing as natural theology properly so-called. Even when he is philosophizing he is theologizing. However, he is always quite aware of the field in which he is working, and when his conclusions do not depend on a premise held on faith, he feels justified in engaging in dialogue with philosophers and in speaking as they do. So I inevitably fell back on the well-known expression "Christian Philosophy" which some wrongly imagine I like, whereas all I like is the right to use it. Hence my *Elements of Christian Philosophy*.*

In my third attempt to explain Thomas' teaching I wanted to place before possible French readers the Thomistic notions that I thought especially valuable for their philosophical, theological, and even spiritual fecundity. I wanted to give only the nerves and muscles, for they are lost from view when they are covered with flesh. Hence the little volume entitled *Introduction à la philosophie chrétienne*.** The book was written in a completely free style, just as the thoughts came into my head. I would like to think that others besides myself will feel in it the tendency—should I say natural or supernatural?—for metaphysical speculation to be joined to spirituality.

You may think that it would have been simpler to bring the substance of these works together in one volume. I thought so myself; but experience has taught me that, for myself at any rate, such an undertaking is impossible. Whenever one tries to revise an old book he ends up with a new book, which follows its own order and adds to the complexity of the problem. My greatest regret is not succeeding in unifying the language. Were I writing the book today, I would not scruple to render *ens* by *étant* and *esse* by *être*.*** Thus I would be speaking more often of being (*être*) and less often of *existence*. Nevertheless, I hope the language in the book will be understandable, and that I may be forgiven for the strains I have had to put on language to show how it could be modernized.

Paris, 9 January 1964

*[Etienne Gilson, *Elements of Christian Philosophy* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1960; paperback reprints appeared in 1963 and 1978)].

**[*Introduction à la philosophie chrétienne* (Paris: Vrin, 1960); *Christian Philosophy: An Introduction*, trans. Armand Maurer (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1993).]

***[We have rendered the French *étant* as "a being" and *être* as "being." See Gilson's discussion of this question below, p. 154 and n. 40.—A.M.]

Abbreviations

SERIES

CCL	Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina (Turnhout: Brepols, 1953-)
CSEL	Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum (Vienna: F. Tempsky and various imprints, 1866-)
PL	Patrologiae cursus completus: Series Latina, ed. J.-P. Migne, 221 vols. (Paris: Migne, 1844-1864)

THOMAS AQUINAS

<i>Comp. theol.</i>	<i>Compendium theologiae</i>
<i>De pot.</i>	<i>Quaestiones disputatae De potentia</i>
<i>De ver.</i>	<i>Quaestiones disputatae De veritate</i>
<i>De spirit. creat.</i>	<i>Quaestio disputata De spiritualibus creaturis</i>
<i>In Boet. De Trin.</i>	<i>Expositio super librum Boetii De Trinitate</i>
<i>In De anima</i>	<i>Sententia libri De anima</i>
<i>In De causis</i>	<i>Expositio super librum De causis</i>
<i>In Eth. Nic.</i>	<i>Expositio in decem libros ethicorum ad Nicomachum</i>
<i>In Sent.</i>	<i>Scriptum super libros Sententiarum</i>
<i>In Phys.</i>	<i>Commentaria in octo libros Physicorum</i>
<i>In Metaph.</i>	<i>Commentaria in duodecim libros Metaphysicorum</i>
<i>Quodl.</i>	<i>Quaestiones de quodlibet</i>
<i>ST</i>	<i>Summa theologiae</i>
<i>SCG</i>	<i>Summa contra Gentiles</i>

ARISTOTLE

<i>Eth. Nic.</i>	<i>Ethica Nicomachum</i>
<i>Metaph.</i>	<i>Metaphysica</i>
<i>Phys.</i>	<i>Physica</i>

ETIENNE GILSON

<i>The Elements of Christian Philosophy</i> (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1960)
<i>The Spirit of Christian Philosophy</i> , trans. A.H.C. Downes (New York: Scribners, 1940)

Introduction

The Nature of Thomistic Philosophy

In three of its most important aspects the personality of Thomas Aquinas goes beyond the present work. The saint properly belongs to hagiography. The theologian would require a special study, conducted with an appropriate method, whose results would rightly occupy first place in a comprehensive study of Thomas. His mysticism and interior life are to a large extent beyond our reach. Only the philosophical reflection he places at the service of theology directly concerns us. Fortunately, there is an aspect of his career that is implicated almost equally in all the sides of his multiple personality and seems to be the most central point of view we could take of it. What is most apparent and constant in Thomas' personality, the image he most likely had of himself, is the teacher.¹ The saint was essentially a Doctor of the Church; the man was a teacher of theology and philosophy; the mystic never entirely separated his meditations from his teaching, which drew its inspiration from them. So we can hardly go astray if we look in this direction for one of the principal sources of the doctrine we are about to study.²

Section 1. The Doctrinal Framework

We can only choose between two kinds of life, the active and the contemplative. What confers special dignity on the functions of the teacher is that they imply both of these kinds of life, properly subordinated one to the other. The true function of the teacher is to teach. Now, teaching (*doctrina*) consists in communicating to others a truth previously meditated upon.³ It demands of necessity

¹Thomas himself said, in the words of St. Hilary, that he considered the chief duty of his life to speak about God: "Ut enim verbis Hilarii utar, 'ego hoc vel praecipuum vitae meae officium debere me Deo conscius sum, ut eum omnis sermo meus et sensus loquatur'" (*SCG* 1.2 [2]); see Hilary of Poitiers, *De Trinitate* 1.37 (PL 10:48 [CCL 62: 35.1-3]).

²On this point see Antoine Touron, *La vie de saint Thomas d'Aquin ... avec un exposé de sa doctrine et de ses ouvrages* (Paris, 1737), especially 4. 2-3, pp. 383-393: "Portrait d'un parfait Docteur selon saint Thomas." On the mystical aspect of his personality see L. Lavaud et al., *Saint Thomas d'Aquin, sa sainteté, sa doctrine spirituelle* (Ligugé: Ed. de La vie spirituelle, Saint-Maximin, 1926); Ferdinand Donatien Joret, *La contemplation mystique d'après S. Thomas d'Aquin*, ed. rev. et aug. (Paris: Desclée, 1927); M.-D. Chenu, *S. Thomas d'Aquin et la théologie* (Paris: Seuil, 1959), also indispensable for the interpretation of the Thomistic notion of sacred science. See Pierre Mandonnet and Jean Destrez, *Bibliographie thomiste* (Paris: Vrin, 1921), pp. 70-72 [Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Saint Thomas d'Aquin, maître spirituel: Initiation 2* (Paris: Cerf, 1996)].

³"Ergo quod aliquis veritatem meditatam in ulterius notitiam per doctrinam deducat, videatur ad vitam contemplativam pertinere" (*ST* 2-2.181.3, obj. 3). For what follows see *ibid.*, resp.

both the reflection of the contemplative in order to discover the truth and the activity of the professor in order to communicate the findings to listeners. But the most remarkable thing about this complex activity is that the higher presides precisely over the lower, that is, contemplation over action. The function of the teacher, as we have just defined it, is naturally directed toward a twofold object, interior and exterior, depending upon whether it is applied to the truth the teacher meditates upon and contemplates within himself or to the listeners whom he is teaching. Thus there are two sides to his life, the first of which is the better and which it is his task to regulate.

In the first place it seems clear that the activity of the teacher is not superimposed artificially upon his contemplative life. Rather, it finds its source in his contemplation, and is, so to speak, its outward extension. Teaching, as well as preaching, to which it is allied, is certainly a work belonging to the active life, but it derives in a way from the very fullness of contemplation.⁴ This is why it could not be considered as a true and complete interruption of contemplation. When a person turns from meditation on intelligible realities, which are the food of contemplation, in order to give himself to works good in themselves but purely exterior, he has to break completely with meditation. The distribution of alms and the entertainment of guests are excellent things, yet for all this they exclude meditation properly speaking. Teaching, on the contrary, is the outward expression of inward contemplation. If it is the case that a soul truly free from temporal interests preserves in each of its exterior acts something of the liberty that it has acquired, certainly there is no place where this liberty could be more integrally preserved than in the act of teaching.⁵ To combine in this way the active and the contemplative life is not a subtraction but an addition. It is evident that here is most integrally realized that balance between the two kinds of life, a balance that our present human condition demands that we seek.⁶ To teach the truth that meditation has revealed for us is to expand contemplation without losing any of it, but rather increasing its better part.

From this derive several consequences that are important for determining the exact role Thomas took upon himself by assuming the distinguished functions of a Christian teacher. These functions struck him as particularly suited

⁴"Sic ergo dicendum est, quod opus vitae activae est duplex: unum quidem, quod ex plenitudine contemplationis derivatur, sicut doctrina et praedicatio ... ; et hoc praefertur simplici contemplationi; sicut enim majus est illuminare quam lucere solum, ita majus est contemplata aliis tradere, quam solum contemplari" (ibid. 186.6, resp.).

⁵Ibid. 182.1, resp. and ad 3. See especially the conclusion of the article: "Et sic patet quod cum aliquis a contemplativa vita ad activam vocatur, non hoc fit per modum subtractionis sed per modum additionis."

⁶On the diversity of natural aptitudes for the active and contemplative lives see ibid. 182.4, ad 3.

to the religious state of the friar,⁷ and especially one belonging to an order like the Dominicans, who are both teachers and contemplatives. Thomas never grew weary of defending against the attacks of secular teachers the legitimacy of the ideal to which he had consecrated his life, namely, monastic poverty and the work of teaching. To those who would object to his right to live in absolute poverty, he cites the example of the ancient philosophers, who sometimes renounced riches in order to devote themselves more freely to the contemplation of truth. With much greater reason is this renunciation demanded of one who wishes to follow not only wisdom, but Christ, according to the beautiful words of Jerome to the monk Rusticus: "Naked to follow the naked Christ" (*Christum nudum nudus sequere*).⁸ To those who question the legitimacy of assuming the honor or accepting the title of master, Thomas replies sensibly that to be a master is not to assume an honor but a responsibility;⁹ and that the title of master is not something you give yourself but that you receive, and that it is next door to impossible to prevent people from giving it to you.¹⁰ In reply to those who maintain that the real friar is bound to perform manual labor and that its demands are hardly compatible with those of meditation and teaching, Thomas makes many distinctions in order to dispense with a manifestly secondary obligation like manual labor and replace it by the *oral labor* of teaching and preaching.¹¹ Indeed, in his eyes, nothing is more legitimate than a religious order of contemplative and teaching friars.

For a member of such an order, there is nothing more desirable than to aspire to the functions of the teacher and to spend his life in fulfilling them. True enough, the office of master is not without its dangers. A man might, for example, teach throughout his entire life out of vainglory, instead of aiming at the good of others. Such a life, consequently, would be unworthy of a religious.¹²

⁷Ibid. 188.6, resp. It is clear that religious orders that are both contemplative and teaching surpass in dignity those purely contemplative. In the ecclesiastical hierarchy they come immediately below bishops, because "fines primorum conjunguntur principis secundorum."

⁸Ibid. 186.3, ad 3.

⁹"Item, hoc est falsum, quod magisterium sit honor: est enim officium, cui debetur honor" (*Contra impugnantes Dei cultum et religionem* 2, ad 3 in contrarium [Leonine ed. 41A: 61.518-519]).

¹⁰Ibid. [59.354, 365]: "Item, cum nomina" and "Restat ergo dicendum."

¹¹*ST* 2-2.187.3, ad 3; *Quodl.* 7.17 and 18, resp. [ed. Spiazzi, pp. 153-159]; *Contra impugnantes Dei cultum et religionem* 2 [Leonine ed. 41A: 58.222-227]. Teaching is here taken to be an act of spiritual almsgiving and a work of mercy.

¹²Thomas was asked the curious question whether a master who had always taught out of vainglory can regain the right to his halo by doing penance. His reply was that penance restores the right to rewards that have been merited, but that one who teaches out of vainglory has never had the right to a halo and consequently no penance could enable him to regain it. See *Quodl.* 5.12.24, resp. [ed. Spiazzi, p. 117].

One who is conscious of doing his teaching as a work of mercy and as a true spiritual charity need experience no scruple in desiring to teach.

An objection constantly directed by secular teachers against the religious coming up for the title of master was the difficulty of reconciling the friar's humility with this pretension to authority.¹³ Thomas answers this objection in perfect agreement with the place the masters held in the University of Paris, and by carefully distinguishing between a candidate for a master's chair and a candidate for a bishopric. To seek an episcopal see is to look for a dignity not yet possessed, but to be named for a master's chair is not to receive a new dignity but only an opportunity to communicate one's knowledge to others. To confer a degree on someone is not at all to endow him with learning but merely giving him permission to teach it. A second difference between the two cases is that the learning required for holding a master's chair is a perfection of the individual who possesses it, while the pontifical power of a bishop increases his dignity in relation to other men. A third difference is that it is above all divine grace that renders a man worthy to receive episcopal honors, while it is learning that makes him worthy to teach.

Accordingly, the two cases are different. It is praiseworthy to desire one's own perfection and therefore also the knowledge and teaching for which it equips one; but it is wrong to desire an authority over others without knowing whether one has the grace necessary to wield it. Since the desire to teach, that is, to communicate to others the knowledge one possesses, is only the desire to perform an act of charity, there is nothing more praiseworthy than to wish to have authorization to do so, provided that one is genuinely capable of it. Now, no one can know with certainty whether or not he possesses grace, which God alone dispenses. But anyone can know with certainty whether or not he possesses sufficient knowledge to have the right to teach.¹⁴ It was with complete assurance of possessing the necessary knowledge, and out of love for the minds that he wished to enlighten, that Thomas dedicated his whole life to the work of teaching. *Contemplata aliis tradere*: to contemplate truth by his intellect and to communicate it out of love, such is the life of the teacher. Though still very imperfect, it is the least unfaithful human imitation of the very life of God.

We should note, however, the exact meaning of Thomas' words. Whenever he speaks of the teacher or master, we are inclined to think of the philosopher,

¹³Ibid. 3.4.9: "Utrum liceat quod aliquis pro se petat licentiam in theologia docendi" [ed. Spiazzi, pp. 46-47].

¹⁴"Nam scientia, per quam aliquis est idoneus ad docendum, potest aliquis scire per certitudinem se habere; caritatem autem per quam aliquis est idoneus ad officium pastorale, non potest aliquis per certitudinem scire se habere. ... Sed pericula magisterii cathedrae pastoralis devitat scientia cum caritate, quam homo nescit se per certitudinem habere; pericula autem magisterii cathedrae magistralis vitat homo per scientiam, quam potest homo scire se habere" (ibid., resp. and ad 3 [ed. Spiazzi, p. 47]).

while he thinks first of the theologian. The master par excellence can only teach wisdom par excellence, that is, the knowledge of divine things, which is essentially theology. This is also the only office of the master to which a religious can legitimately aspire. This is the office Thomas has in mind when he praises the life divided between teaching and the contemplation that inspires it. And it is for this office that he needs the many gifts the teacher must possess:¹⁵ a full knowledge of the divine things in which he must instruct others—it is faith that confers this; a power to persuade or to demonstrate in order to convince others of the truth—the gift of wisdom serves him here; an ability to develop his thought and to express it in a manner suitable for instructing others—here the gift of knowledge comes to his aid:¹⁶ wisdom and knowledge directed primarily toward knowing divine things and employed to teach them. Consequently, if we want to look for a teacher of philosophical truth in the complex personality of Thomas Aquinas, it is only within the theologian that we can hope to find him.

In fact, when we revert to the idea Thomas himself had of his own work, we find in the last analysis nothing but a philosopher in the service of a theologian. The statement is abstract and inadequate because it is too vague; very different doctrines could legitimately appeal to it. However, it is a statement that must be considered at the very outset in its stark simplicity, with all the consequences it implies for the thought of Thomas, if we are to avoid certain mistakes about the meaning of his doctrine.

Thomas considers that a religious may legitimately aspire to the title and functions of master, but since he could only teach divine things, it is only in relation to the science of divine things that secular sciences can legitimately interest him. This is demanded by the very essence of the contemplative life, the teaching of which is nothing but its immediate extension into the order of the active life. If contemplation is the highest form of human life, it must dwell on the object whose knowledge is the end of this life. This knowledge and contemplation will be perfect in the future life, and only then do they confer full beatitude upon us, whereas they are bound to be imperfect in this life, and only confer on us a beginning of beatitude. The fact remains that we should enjoy them, and that the study of philosophy is both legitimate in itself and useful in view of this supreme contemplation. Indeed, we shall have occasion to point out that in our present state all our knowledge is based on sensible things. It is therefore inevitable that the teacher of theology will have to begin with a scientific and philosophical knowledge of the universe in order to establish the science of its proper object, which is the word of God.¹⁷ But he will have to strive to

¹⁵ST 1-2.3.4, resp. See *Expositio in Matthaeum* 5 [Vivès ed. 19: 299-329].

¹⁶On this point see ST 2-2.177.1, resp.

¹⁷To determine the object of theology properly speaking does not directly fall within the scope of this work. For an introduction to the problems related to it see M.-D. Chenu: "La

acquire this knowledge only insofar as it can help him to understand the word of God.¹⁸ We can say, then, that the study of philosophy and the sciences is necessary for the Christian teacher, but that, although it is useful to him, this knowledge must not be its own end.

What, then, will this philosophy be? Thomas only employed it for the service it renders Christian wisdom. No doubt this is why he never thought of separating it from this wisdom and giving it a name. He probably did not foresee that the day would come when people would go through his works to extract the elements of a philosophy from his theology. He himself never attempted this synthesis. As a theologian, he had no obligation to do so. Since then, others have done it, and in order to describe what they were doing, they called the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas *Christian Philosophy*.¹⁹ Thomas did not use this term, and because it has raised endless controversies it is better not to bring it into a purely historical account of Thomism.²⁰ It is well, however,

théologie comme science au XIIIe siècle," in *Bibliothèque thomiste*, 3rd rev. & aug. ed. (Paris: Vrin, 1969); Jean-François Bonnefoy, *La nature de la théologie selon saint Thomas d'Aquin* (Paris: Vrin, 1939); M.R. Gagnebet, "La nature de la théologie spéculative," *Revue thomiste* 44 (1938): 1-39, 213-225, 645-674. See also the invaluable discussion of these works by [Yves] M.-J. Congar, *Bulletin thomiste* 5 (1938): 490-505; Gerald Francis Van Ackeren, *Sacra doctrina: the Subject of the First Question of the Summa theologica of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Rome: Catholic Book Agency, 1952); Etienne Gilson, *Elements of Christian Philosophy*, pp. 22-42.

¹⁸Located in its proper place in the life of the Christian teacher, the knowledge of nature appears as a contemplation of the divine effects which, in turn, is a preparation for the contemplation of divine truth. See *ST* 2-2.180.4, resp.

¹⁹The expression "Christian Philosophy" is used by Antoine Touron, who had a fine appreciation of Thomistic thought. See his *La vie de saint Thomas d'Aquin*, p. 450. It was a common expression in the first third of the nineteenth century, and it is included in the title normally given to the encyclical *Aeterni Patris* (4 Aug. 1879): *De philosophia christiana ad mentem sancti Thomae Aquinatis doctoris angelici in scholis catholicis instauranda*. The text is reprinted in *S. Thomae Aquinatis Summa theologica* (Rome: Forzani, 1894) 6: 425-443, [and translated in Gilson, *The Church Speaks to the Modern World* (New York: Doubleday Image Books, 1954), pp. 32-54].

²⁰The expression does not seem less legitimate now than during the period when I used it. But history can get along without it, provided that we keep intact the reality designated by this expression. I have explained what I mean by it in *Christianity and Philosophy*, trans. Ralph MacDonald (New York/London: Sheed and Ward, 1939). The basic idea in this book is that "Christian Philosophy" expresses a theological view of a reality observable in history (pp. 84-86). On the history of this controversy see the comprehensive work of Bernard Baudoux, "Questio de Philosophia Christiana," *Antonianum* 11 (1936): 486-552; the critical note of A.-R. Motte, "Le problème de la philosophie chrétienne," *Bulletin thomiste* 5 (1937): 230-255; and the remarks of Octavio Nicolas Derisi, *Concepto de la filosofía cristiana* (Buenos Aires, 1935). Many later publications have made no further progress, but the notion, ambiguous by nature, is not one on which agreement is easily reached.

to know why some historians have thought the term a valid description of Thomas' philosophy.

We can think of an exposition of Thomistic philosophy as a more or less complete inventory of all the philosophical notions in the works of Thomas. Since this would have to include his whole philosophical thought, it must contain all the material he gathered for his own personal work, including the ideas he simply borrowed from Aristotle, even if he made no changes in them. We can also conceive of a different account of Thomistic philosophy, as a synthesis of notions contained in Thomas' doctrine understood as truly his own, distinct from those that preceded it. The claim has often been made that there is no original and distinct Thomistic philosophy. We intend, however, to give an account of this philosophy, leaving to those who would like to undertake the task to show where that philosophy is to be found before Thomas. From this second point of view, not all the philosophical statements of Thomas are on the same level. We can and must at times include in the exposition of Thomas' doctrine what he simply borrowed. However, what he was able to do with what he borrowed is much more important. This explains the selection of Thomistic doctrines I have made for discussion here, and also the order I will follow in examining them.

If we limit ourselves to the parts of philosophy in which Thomas shows the most originality, we shall see that in general they lie on the border of the field of theology. "On the border" says too little; in fact they appear to dovetail right into theology. No one has ever undertaken to expound his philosophy without drawing heavily on his theological works, and it is often in these works that we will look for the definitive formula of Thomas' thought about the existence and attributes of God, creation, the nature of the human person, and the laws of the moral life. Thomas' commentaries on Aristotle are very precious documents and their loss would have been deplorable. Nevertheless, if they had all perished, the two *Summae* would still preserve all that is most personal and most profound in his philosophy. However, had his theological works been lost, would we have been as well informed about his philosophy by his commentaries on Aristotle? Thomas, the Christian teacher, searched everywhere for material to carry out his self-appointed task. He drew on Aristotle, but also on Dionysius, the *Liber de causis*, Augustine, Boethius, Avicenna, and Averroes; in short, on anyone he found useful for completing his work. We must never forget that his only reason for studying Aristotle was to be better prepared to carry out a work he intended to be primarily theological. Indeed, we can take it as a general rule that the elements of Thomistic philosophy that have been more profoundly elaborated are those concerning more directly Thomistic theology. Thomas' theology is that of a philosopher, but his philosophy that of a saint.

It can be seen at once why, from this second point of view, it becomes natural to set forth the philosophy of Thomas according to the order of his theology. If it is a question of what really interested him in philosophy and of

the points on which he personally committed himself, the only synthesis for which we are indebted to him is the theological synthesis of the two *Summae* and of the *Compendium theologiae*. For an historian faced with the fact of recounting a doctrine such as it really existed, there is nothing more dangerous than to invent a new one and lay it at Thomas' doorstep. However, this would not be what is most serious. To extract from the theological writing of Thomas the philosophical notions contained in them, and to reconstruct such data according to the order Thomas himself assigns to philosophy, would give the impression that he wanted to construct his philosophy for strictly philosophical purposes and not for those of a Christian teacher. Above all, it would run the infinitely graver risk of mistaking the true philosophical meaning of his philosophy.

Let us admit as a simple hypothesis that Thomas' philosophy was, if not inspired by, at least touched by his theology. In other words, let us suppose that Thomas found in his theological investigations an opportunity to take metaphysics beyond the point where his predecessors had left it. Could we then release Thomistic philosophy from its theological moorings without running the risk of not knowing its origin and end, of altering its nature, and even of no longer grasping its meaning? This danger has not always been avoided,²¹ though it is not unavoidable. If it were impossible to present Thomas' philosophy in the order of his theology without confusing it with Christian faith, it would be better to abandon this order. But it is not impossible. To begin with, Thomas himself did it,²² and we can try to do it again after him. Again, Thomas did it on good grounds, clearly aware of the definite situation of philosophy in the work of a Christian teacher. He has given a name to this situation that specifically expresses the state of philosophical knowledge incorporated into a theological synthesis. He called it the *revelabile*. This "revealable" is the proper object of this book. Our immediate task is to define the nature of the "revealable," at least if we are to understand the full meaning of the often used though rarely explained expression: the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas.

Some modern interpreters of Thomas believe that he wrote as a philosopher anxious above all to avoid compromising the purity of his philosophy by admitting into it the slightest mixture of theology. In fact, the Thomas of history was at least as concerned about doing just the contrary. His problem in the *Summa theologiae* was not how to introduce philosophy into theology without destroying

²¹See the enlightening article of M.-D. Chenu, "*Ratio superior et inferior*. Un cas de philosophie chrétienne," *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 29 (1940): 84–89.

²²Particularly in the *SCG*, whose books 1 to 3 (which take us as far as the principles of grace and predestination) lay claim to a purely philosophical and rational method "*secundum quod ad cognitionem divinorum naturalis ratio per creaturas pervenire potest*" (*SCG* 4.1 [10]) but follow a theological order: *SCG* 2.4 [5].

the essence of philosophy; it was rather how to do so without destroying the essence of theology. Not only the hostility of the "biblicists" of his time alerted him to the problem, but he himself was as much aware of its seriousness as they were. He was all the more conscious of it as he was going to use philosophy more extensively. However we might define theology, it must be understood as a teaching of revelation. Its matter is God's word; its foundation is faith in the truth of this word. Its "formal" unity, to use Thomas' expression, depends precisely on the fact that there is a revelation that faith receives as revelation. For those theologians who were not in the least concerned with philosophy, no problem arose. Persuaded that they should add nothing human to the bare deposit of revelation, they could pride themselves on completely respecting the unity of sacred science. They proceeded from faith to faith by faith. For Thomas the problem was rather different. It was a question of how to bring philosophy into sacred doctrine without either one of them losing its essence. In other words, how could a rational science be brought into the science of revelation without corrupting the purity of both revelation and reason?

This problem did not arise for the first time in the works of Thomas. Other theologians before him had channelled into sacred doctrine a considerable body of philosophical doctrines. Albert the Great, whose encyclopedic theology neglected no science as a stranger to his project, was one of them. What characterizes Thomas and gives him a special place in this general movement is precisely the intellectual effort he made to introduce this human learning into theology without destroying its unity. The moment we put the problem in this way, we can see in what direction we must look for the answer. For theology to remain formally one as a science, it must want philosophy, elevate it to itself and assimilate it, so that all the natural knowledge it contains is directed and subordinated to the theologian's own point of view, which is that of revelation. Thus brought into the theological order, human learning becomes part of sacred doctrine, which is founded on faith. This human learning, taken up by theology for its own ends, is what Thomas precisely called, at least once, the "revealable," a term for which many different interpretations have been suggested, perhaps as a result of a failure to grasp exactly the meaning of the problem it solved.²³

²³Taken in itself, this problem is simply that of Thomas' notion of theology. The term "theology," in the sense of the science of revelation, seems to go back to Abelard; see Jacques Rivière, "Theologia," *Revue des sciences religieuses* 16 (1936): 47-57. Thomas uses it from time to time, but he prefers *sacra doctrina*, which means "holy teaching." It happens that *sacra scriptura* (holy scripture) is taken as equivalent to *sacra doctrina*, because sacred teaching is given by God himself. On the distinction and definition of these terms see the remarks of [Yves] M.-J. Congar, *Bulletin thomiste* 5 (1938): 495-503. On the origin of the expression "natural theology" see Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 6.5, n. 1 (PL 41: 180-181 [CCL 48: 170-172]).

What makes it difficult to understand, is that we have developed a tendency to approach all problems of Thomistic philosophy from the most formal point of view possible. As the well-known adage puts it: "Thomas always speaks most formally" (*formalissime semper loquitur Divus Thomas*). At least, this is how we make him speak; but if he always speaks formally about the abstract, he himself always speaks concretely about the concrete.²⁴ Because we have forgotten this, we have lost a whole set of notions essential to the proper balance of Thomism. We have changed into a logic of essences a doctrine that its author had conceived as an explanation of facts. Let us try, then, to speak both languages as he himself does, and each one on the appropriate occasion.

The first notion to be defined is "the revealed." In order to grasp its nature we have to view it *formalissime*. According to Thomas, the revealed (*revelatum*) only includes that whose very essence it is to be revealed because we can only come to know it by revelation. In defining the *revelatum*, we do not undertake an empirical investigation of what in fact it has pleased God to reveal to us. What constitutes "the revealed" as such is not the fact that it has been revealed but rather that it has to be revealed in order for us to know it. Thus conceived, "the revealed" is all knowledge about God beyond the reach of human reason. God may in addition reveal knowledge accessible to reason, but because it is not inaccessible by the natural light of the mind it is not part of "the revealed." Actually, God has revealed such truths, but it is not of their essence to be knowable only by revelation.²⁵

As we have said, God may have seen fit to reveal some truths not essentially part of "the revealed." In order to define the category of truths brought within the range of our reason in this manner, we need a new notion, one completely concrete and flexible enough to embrace a large number of heterogeneous facts. Certainly this notion will also have its own unity. Were it not *one*, it would not exist. Lacking the strict unity of an essence, it will have the best

²⁴From the abstract point of view, concepts are mutually exclusive like the essences they represent. On the other hand, from the concrete point of view, widely different essences can enter into the composition of one and the same subject without destroying its unity. See the very important text of Thomas, *Expositio libri Boetii De ebdomadibus 2*, in *Opuscula omnia* (ed. Pierre Mandonnet 1: 173-174) [Leonine ed. 50: 271.114-272.146].

²⁵Let us remember that the question of how we are to distinguish scripture from theology taken as the science of faith belongs to the theologian's province. The question whether Thomas himself distinguished between the *revelatum*, as the proper object of divine faith, and the *revelabile* as the proper object of theology, belongs to the domain of the historian of theology. See François Bonnefoy, *La nature de la théologie selon saint Thomas d'Aquin*, pp. 19-20. The only question we deal with for the moment is whether Thomas' personal contribution to philosophy is or is not included in the order of what he himself calls the "revealable." I am trying to show that it is.

imitation of such a unity, namely, the unity of an order. Such is precisely the notion of the *revealable*, which we must now define.

We can only succeed in this enterprise by proceeding in the contrary manner, that is, empirically, beginning with the facts that the notion of "the revealable" must unify. These facts, which our new notion must tailor to measure, are all those that go to make up that very complex event we call revelation. We are here dealing with an event and consequently with a fact in the existential order, which has to do less with definition properly speaking than with the faculty of judging. It would be impossible to delimit a priori its boundaries with an abstract concept. However, we can progressively form a concept of it beginning with existential judgments about the factual data we hope to unify. Revelation, as we have said, has to do essentially with what has been revealed, but it includes many other things as well, and because it includes them, in some way they are part of it. Taken together they will form a class of facts coming under a single notion, whose unity will derive from their common relation to the divine act of revealing.

Revelation in itself is an act which, like every act, has a certain end in view. The purpose of revelation is to make our salvation possible. Our salvation consists in reaching our end, and we cannot reach it unless we know it. This end is God, who is infinitely beyond our natural knowledge. If we were to attain our salvation, God had to reveal to us knowledge beyond the limits of reason. The whole body of this knowledge is called sacred teaching, in the words of sacred history *sacra doctrina*, *sacra scientia*, or *theologia*. Our problem is to know what it contains.

As Thomas conceives it, revelation appears to be a kind of hierarchical operation, using the term "hierarchical" in Dionysius' sense. Supernatural truth reaches us like the water of a river that cascades over a series of waterfalls. From God who is its source, it flows first to the angels, who receive it according to the order of the angelic hierarchies; then it passes from the angels to men, reaching first the apostles and prophets, spreading out finally into the multitude of those who receive it by faith. Sacred science or theology, then, has for its basis faith in a revelation made by God to those whom we call the apostles and prophets. This revelation confers upon them a divine and therefore an unshakable authority; and theology rests entirely on our faith in their authority.

Consequently, theology depends first and foremost upon the body of writings inspired by God and that we call holy scripture (*sacra scriptura*). Moreover, it depends solely upon them, because it is the very science that they have given us.²⁶ But here, more than ever, we must remember to speak concretely of concrete matters.

²⁶The distinction between theology as the word of God and theology as the science of this faith would perhaps be less thorny if we approached the problem more concretely. It is curious,

Although theology has the same nature in all those who possess it, it does not have the same degree of perfection in everyone. So its content is not necessarily identical in everyone. Certainly, it contains first of all what has been revealed (*revelatum*) properly speaking, that is, what it has pleased God to reveal to us for our eternal salvation. It contains, over and above this, all our rational understanding of the revealed data. Clearly, revelation exists in us only to the extent that we can be said to know it. Now, we have said that it is an act that comes to us in hierarchical fashion, not only from the apostle or prophet to other men, but also from the Christian teacher to the simple faithful. By the science of the word of God that he constructs, the theologian simply explains, with the aid of natural reason, what has been revealed. This science, accordingly, is nothing else than holy scripture received into the human mind. Another way to put it is that it is only divine revelation diffusing itself, thanks to the light of a reason that examines the content of faith on the authority of faith and for the purposes of faith. We might ask why God did not also reveal this knowledge. It is because this knowledge is not necessary for salvation. In order to reach our goal, we must believe in the articles of faith which God has revealed to everyone, and the acceptance of which is sufficient for salvation. But because this knowledge is not necessary for salvation, it was not revealed. However, it is related to salvation as its end, because it only elucidates the saving word. This is why every legitimate study of holy scripture belongs by full right to sacred theology.

The problem would be relatively simple if a new factor did not arise to complicate it. This is the question of philosophy properly speaking. We all know that a large amount of philosophy is to be found in the *Summa theologiae*. So the question arises how it can be there without compromising the purity of its own essence or that of theology. Since we are concerned here with philosophy, I am speaking about truths accessible to the human mind, truths knowable by natural reason alone and without recourse to revelation. Since this kind of

moreover, that some theologians ask Thomas for its solution, for whom the problem hardly existed. What Thomas requires for man's justification is belief in all the articles of faith (*In Epistolam ad Romanos* 1.5 [*Super epistolas S. Pauli lecturae*, ed. Raffaelis Cai, Turin: Marietti, 1: 152]), but not belief in the theological science of these articles. As for this science itself, he thinks of it less as being added to scripture than as being contained in it. Even scripture is too wide a term, for Thomas finds it almost entirely in the Epistles of St. Paul and the Psalms of David: "[Q]uia in utraque scriptura fere tota theologiae continetur doctrina" (ibid. prolog. [ed. Cai, p. 2 b]). Sacred teaching, or theology, therefore, has no valid existence except as contained *in* sacred scripture. When it is conceived as having a unity in itself and cut off from its scriptural source, the problem of their relations become hopelessly entangled. "Scholastic" theology is a particular case of what is called biblical theology, for it is a question of Christian theology. A non-biblical theology would be no theology at all.

knowledge is not beyond the limits of natural reason, it cannot be considered as belonging to the order of "the revealed." If God has nevertheless revealed it, it is for an entirely different reason, because we need to know it for our salvation. Naturally knowable in theory, these truths are not always knowable in fact, yet they ought to be known by everyone if salvation is to be available for everyone. An example is the existence of God, which the metaphysician demonstrates, but whose demonstration—for reasons to be explained later—is not easily understood by everyone. Natural knowledge of this sort, included in the body of revelation, belongs to the domain of what Thomas calls the *revelabile*. The "revealable" in itself is philosophical but it is drawn, so to speak, into the orbit of theology because knowledge of it, like knowledge of the revealed, is necessary for salvation. Unlike the "revealed," the "revealable" does not belong to revelation rightfully and in virtue of its own essence. However, it is included in theology, which assumes it in view of its own end.

Thus the central notion that allows us at last to resolve our problem is the one emphasized at the very beginning of the *Summa theologiae*, namely, the notion of salvation. The notion of revelation is subordinate to it, because revelation is only the instrument—though admittedly a necessary instrument—of our salvation. The notion of revelation especially includes the saving knowledge that we absolutely could not otherwise obtain. However, generally speaking, it also denotes all knowledge than can be revealed as necessary or useful for the work of salvation. Discussions on this subject generally emphasize the distinction between theology and philosophy as though the main point was to keep them separate. Thomas himself underlines the concrete notion of revelation which, including as it does all truth leading to salvation, can be applied to natural as well as supernatural knowledge. Theology or sacred science, being simply the explanation of revelation, is always faithful to its essence when dealing with both, using the methods appropriate to each, provided the end pursued be that of revelation, that is to say, putting us in possession of all the knowledge leading to our salvation. This is the true unity of sacred science. Even when the theologian speaks of philosophy as a philosopher, he never ceases to work for the salvation of souls or to work as a theologian.

The formal unity of theology, thus understood, is the same as revelation itself, whose complexity it must consequently respect. The revealable, a concept that theologians seem to have considerably expanded since Thomas' time, played, at least for him, this clearly defined role: It enables us to understand how sacred science can absorb a dose of philosophy, however slight, without destroying its own essence and losing its unity. It is clear why Thomas is not disturbed by the fate of the philosophy a theologian might use. If this philosophy lost its own essence when integrated into theology, the unity of sacred science was not thereby compromised. On this subject no problem would arise. Now, it is just the problem of the unity of sacred science that Thomas wants to resolve when he asks how this science can keep its unity if it concerns objects as

different as God and creatures, more especially since creatures are already the objects of different philosophical sciences like physics and ethics. To this, Thomas replies that holy scripture speaks of all these things as gathered into one single science which scripture calls the “science of the saints.” What gives unity to this science is that it considers all of them from the same point of view or, as Thomas puts it, under the same “formal aspect.” How can objects as diverse as a stone, an animal, and a man be perceived by one and the same faculty of sight? Because sight only perceives in these varied objects what they have in common, namely, color. So too, theology only views the philosophical and natural sciences insofar as they can be seen from its own point of view, which is faith in the revelation leading to salvation. Everything that can contribute to beget this faith belongs to theology; but also, as Augustine had already remarked, everything that nourishes it, protects it, and strengthens it.²⁷ The formal unity of theology, then, consists in the fact that it envisages everything in its relation to revelation. The revealable about which Thomas is speaking here is nothing else than this. The revealable is all natural knowledge taken into sacred science in view of its own end.

Thomas’ commentators have been so eager to multiply formal distinctions that they have gradually altered the Thomist position on the subject. Before explaining how natural philosophy can enter into the science of theology without destroying it, Thomas’ concern was how to explain how revelation itself was able to remain one, although it spoke at one and the same time of God who transcends natural reason, and of men, animals, plants, objects of anthropology, and the moral, biological and physical sciences. Indeed, holy scripture itself is full of natural notions, if only what it contains of verifiable history and geography, all of which have to find a place there without destroying the unity of revelation. All these items belong to the revealable, that is, a mass of knowledge that, while not transcending reason, *did not have* to be revealed in order to be known, but which *could have been* revealed as useful for the work of human salvation. “Since, as has just been said, holy scripture considers certain objects as divinely revealed, all that is, generally speaking, revealable by God shares the formal object of this science. This is why all these matters come under sacred science as under a single science.”²⁸

If all that contributes to birthing, nourishing, defending and strengthening the faith that saves, enters into theology without destroying its unity, how can any knowledge be excluded from it a priori? It could and even should be excluded if the content of sacred science were defined by the concept of *revelatum*. It can no longer be if it is defined by the notion of *revelabile*,

²⁷See Augustine, *De Trinitate* 14.1.3 (PL 42: 1037 [CCL 50A: 423.52—424.61]), cited in *ST* 1.1.2, *sed contra*.

²⁸*ST* 1.1.3, *resp.*

because its "revealability" is only the permanent availability of all knowledge for the work of the theologian. Moreover, this knowledge, totally related to the knowledge of God, is no idle dream. It actually exists in God's knowledge of himself and in the knowledge the blessed have of him. It is this perfectly unified knowledge that our theology imitates in its own way by directing all natural knowledge to the supernatural knowledge we have of God by revelation. That philosophy may, when appropriate, fit into this synthesis, Thomas has not only proved but he has expressed it well: "Sacred science can, without ceasing to be a single science, consider from one point of view matters dealt with in the different philosophical sciences, insofar as they are revealable, so that sacred science may be as it were an imprint of divine science, which is the one simple law governing everything."²⁹

Related in this way to the knowledge God has of himself,³⁰ exalted as it were by being assumed into theology, philosophy eminently deserves the attention of the Christian teacher. This is the philosophy that we, in our turn, would like to make the object of our own study. We do not say that Thomas identified the two notions of the *revealable* and *philosophy*, nor do we claim that the philosophy of Thomas cannot legitimately be considered from another point of view.³¹ But we beg leave to consider it for once under the aspect Thomas himself tells us that he viewed it as it appears from the perspective of the Christian teacher. It may never happen again. If the philosophy of the "revealable" is indeed the one Thomas himself was mainly interested in, the one he renewed because he viewed it precisely in this light, and passed it on to us in the theological order followed in the two *Summae*, the historian at least must be excused for taking an interest in it as the personal thought of Thomas.³²

²⁹*Ibid.*, ad 2. On Cajetan's opposition to the Thomistic notion of *revelabile* see Gilson, "Note sur le *Revelabile* selon Cajétan," *Mediaeval Studies* 15 (1953): 119-206. Albert the Great (*ibid.*, p. 205) already disagreed with his illustrious student on this important point.

³⁰*ST* 1.1.2, resp.

³¹Thomas himself has described the order followed by the ancients in their philosophical studies: *In De causis* 1 [ed. Henri Dominique Saffrey, p. 2]. We also learn from this how very different he regarded the Christian's situation from that of pagans. According to Thomas, pagans did not begin metaphysics until late in life: "Unde scientiam de primis causis ultimo ordinabant, cujus considerationi ultimum tempus suae vitae deputarent." When he died, Thomas was only forty-nine years old. This would have been the right time for him to look for a proof of the existence of God.

³²I am urged to reconstruct Thomas' thought in its philosophical order which proceeds from things to God, rather than to follow the theological order which proceeds from God to things, but this fails to take into account the difficulties of such a task. There is a difficulty of principle here affecting the facts at every stage. The statements expressing a thought are bound up with the order they follow. To set forth Thomas' doctrine in an order contrary to his own, we would first have to continually break up his texts, but what is more serious, to upset his thought by forcing it to go up a stream that it itself claims to have come down. The

What, then, are we to understand to be the object of metaphysics, still called "first philosophy" or "wisdom?" The wise man is usually thought to be the one who knows how to put things in their right place and to govern them well. To put a thing in its right place and to govern it well is to make it serve its true end. Thus we see that in the hierarchy of the arts one art governs another and serves it as a matter of principle when its immediate end constitutes the last end of the subordinated art. Medicine, for example, is a principal and directive art in relation to pharmacy, because health, which is the immediate end of medicine, is at the same time the last end of all the remedies the pharmacist prepares. These principal and dominating arts are called architectonic, and those who practice them are called wise. But they only deserve the title of wise with regard to the things they know how to put in their place in view of their end. Concerned with particular ends, their wisdom is only a particular wisdom. If we assume, on the contrary, that a wise person does not propose to consider a particular end but the end of the universe, he will no longer be called wise in any given art, but wise absolutely speaking. He will be the wise man par excellence. Now, the object proper to wisdom or first philosophy is the end of the universe; and since the end of an object is identical with its principle or cause, we find Aristotle defining the object of first philosophy as the study of first causes.³³

We must now ask, what is the first cause or last end of the universe? The last end of anything is clearly what its primary author has in mind when he makes it, or what its first mover intends in moving it. Now, we shall see that the first author and the first mover of the universe is an intelligence. The end that it has in view in creating and moving the universe must therefore be the end or good of the intelligence, which is truth. Thus truth is the final end or purpose

result is to see his philosophy in a light in which he himself refused to see it, and to refuse to see it in the light in which he himself loved to view it—the light of faith that never ceased to illuminate his work. Writers do not always realize what they are getting into when they construct a philosophy *ad mentem sancti Thomae*. Thomas voiced for us the deep thought that motivated him by making his own the words of St. Hilary already cited above (p. 1, n. 1): "I am aware that I owe this to God as the chief duty in my life, that my every word and sense may speak of him" (SCG 1.2 [2]). Indeed, it is possible to construct a philosophy from elements borrowed from Thomism that does not constantly speak of God. It is possible, but one should be aware of what he is doing and carefully weigh its consequences. What such a person is doing is to present Thomas' philosophical thought in an order required by a doctrine in which everything would be "considered by natural reason without the light of faith"; see René Descartes, *Oeuvres*, vol. 9: *Les principes de la philosophie*, préface (éd. Charles Adam and Paul Tannery [Paris: Cerf, 1904] p. 4.19–21, p. 5.13–18). In brief, it is to present a *philosophia ad mentem sancti Thomae* as though it were a *philosophia ad mentem Cartesii*. As for the consequences, they fall into the domain of dogmatic philosophy, which is not my concern at the moment.

³³SCG 1.1; ST 1.1.6, resp.

of the whole universe; and since the object of first philosophy is the last end of the whole universe, it follows that its proper object is truth.³⁴ We must here avoid a possible confusion. Since the philosopher's task is to reach the last end, and consequently the first cause of the universe, the truth we speak about here cannot be just any truth, but only the truth that is the first source of all truth. Now, things are disposed in the order of truth just as they are in the order of being: *sic enim est dispositio rerum in veritate sicut in esse*, for being and truth are equivalent to each other. A truth that is the source of all truth can only be found in a being that is the first source of all being. Hence the truth that is the object of first philosophy would be the truth that the Word made flesh came to reveal to the world, as St. John says: "For this was I born, and for this I came into the world, to bear witness to the truth."³⁵ In a word, the real object of metaphysics is God.³⁶

This decision, which Thomas puts at the beginning of his *Summa contra Gentiles*, in no way contradicts the one that elsewhere leads him to define metaphysics as the science of being, considered simply as being, and of its first causes.³⁷ If the metaphysician's study deals immediately with being in general, this is not its real goal. Philosophical speculation moves beyond being in general toward the first cause of all being: "First philosophy is wholly directed to the knowledge of God as its last end, and so it is called the *divine science*."³⁸ This is why, when Aquinas speaks in his own name, he puts aside the consideration of being as such and defines metaphysics from the point of view of its supreme object—the first principle of being, which is God.

What means are at our disposal to attain this object? First, and obviously, we have natural reason. The problem is to know whether our reason is an adequate instrument to reach the objective of metaphysics, namely, the divine essence. Let us state at once that natural reason left to its own powers is adequate to attain certain truths concerning God and his nature. Philosophers can demonstrate that God exists, that he is one, etc. But it is also most apparent that there is a knowledge of the divine nature infinitely beyond the grasp of human understanding. It is important to establish this in order to silence those unbelievers who considered false all those propositions about God that our reason is unable to prove. Here the Christian sage is going to supplement the Greek wise man.

All the proofs we can bring to bear on this subject amount to showing the disproportion between our finite understanding and the infinite essence of God.

³⁴SCG 1.1.

³⁵Jn 18:37.

³⁶SCG 1.1 and 3.25 [9]. *In Sent.* 2, prol. [ed. Mandonnet-Moos 2: 1–3].

³⁷*In Metaph.* 4.1 [ed. Cathala-Spiazzi, p. 151, n. 533].

³⁸SCG 3.25 [9].

The one that introduces us most deeply perhaps into the thought of Thomas is based on the nature of human knowledge. Perfect knowledge, if we take Aristotle's word for it, consists in deducing the properties of an object, using the essence of the object as the principle of demonstration. The mode according to which the substance of each thing is known to us determines the mode of the knowledge we can have of it. Now, God is a purely spiritual substance. Our knowledge, on the contrary, is the acquired knowledge suited to a being composed of body and soul. Hence it must have its origin in the senses. Our knowledge of God, accordingly, begins with the sense data we can acquire of a purely intelligible being. Thus our understanding, using the testimony of the senses as a starting point, can infer that God exists. But clearly the simple inspection of sensible things, that are effects of God and consequently inferior to him, cannot lead to a knowledge of the divine essence.³⁹ There are, therefore, some truths about God accessible to reason, and there are others beyond it. Let us examine the special role of faith in both of these cases.

We should note at the start that, abstractly and absolutely speaking, where reason is able to understand, faith has no further role to play. In other words, we cannot both know and believe the same thing at the same time and under the same aspect (*impossible est quod de eodem sit fides et scientia*).⁴⁰ The proper object of faith, according to Augustine, is precisely what reason does not reach. From this it follows that any rational knowledge that can be resolved into first principles is removed by this very fact from the domain of faith. In fact, faith must often take the place of knowledge in our assertions. Not only may certain truths be believed by the ignorant and known by scholars,⁴¹ but it also happens that, because of the weakness of our understanding and the wanderings of our imagination, error creeps into our inquiry. Many a person misconceives conclusions of a proof, and so remains in doubt about truths that are in fact well demonstrated. For such a person the fact that reputedly wise persons disagree over the same questions is completely baffling. So it was good that providence should lay down as truths of faith a number of truths accessible to reason, so

³⁹SCG 1.3.

⁴⁰*De ver.* 14.9, resp., ad 6.

⁴¹What is more, since every human science receives its principles from a higher science, it accepts these principles on its "faith" in the higher science. Thus the physicist as such relies on the mathematician, or if one prefers, music relies on arithmetic. Theology itself believes in a higher science—that possessed by God and the saints. Consequently, it is subordinate to a knowledge that transcends all human knowledge, namely, the knowledge of God. In the order of natural knowledge each science is "subordinated" to the one from which it receives its principles, though these principles are rationally knowable by the higher science. Finally, among individuals, the science of one person often depends on an act of confidence in the science of another. We consider that he *knows* something we do not understand but that we *believe* to be true. See *ST* 1.1.2, resp.; *SCG* 1.3 [4].

that everyone might easily share in the knowledge of God without fear of doubt or error.⁴²

If we consider, on the other hand, truths beyond the grasp of our reason, we shall see no less clearly that it was only fitting that they should have been given to us as objects of faith. Our end is nothing else than God, an end obviously exceeding the limits of our reason. Still, we should have some knowledge of our end so that we can direct our intentions and actions toward it. Our salvation, therefore, would require that divine revelation should make us know a certain number of truths beyond the grasp of our reason.⁴³ In other words, since we need to know the infinite God, who is our end, and since this knowledge is beyond the limits of our reason, it can only be presented as an act of faith. And we should not regard faith as doing violence to our reason. On the contrary, faith in the incomprehensible perfects and completes rational knowledge. We do not really know God, for example, save when we believe him to be above anything we can think about him. Now, certainly, to ask us to accept incomprehensible truths about God is an excellent way of implanting in us a conviction of his incomprehensibility.⁴⁴ Besides, accepting on faith rids us of presumption, the mother of error. Some think they can measure God's nature by the standard of their own reason. To propose to them, in God's name, truths above their understanding, helps to give them a true estimate of their limitations. Thus the discipline of faith turns out to be of advantage to reason.

Is it possible, however, over and above this external and simple accord, to admit that an internal accord, one taken from the point of view of truth, can be established between reason and faith? In other words, can we affirm that there is agreement between truths beyond reason and those within the range of reason? The proper response to this question depends on the values we assign to the motives of credibility that faith calls upon. If we admit, as we really should, that the miracles, prophecies, and the marvellous effects of the Christian religion sufficiently prove the truth of revealed religion,⁴⁵ then we must also admit that there can be no contradiction between faith and reason. Only the false

⁴²SCG 1.4. Thomas' source here is Maimonides, as we learn from *De ver.* 14.10, resp. On this subject see the excellent study of Paul Synave, *La révélation des vérités divines naturelles d'après saint Thomas d'Aquin* (Paris: Vrin, 1930) 1: 327–370. Note particularly his conclusion (p. 348) that the same reasons lead the two theologians to two different opinions. Maimonides proves that we should not teach common folk metaphysical truths they cannot understand. Thomas argues differently, that common folk have a right to metaphysical truths necessary for salvation. Since they cannot understand them, they ought to be given to them by revelation. See Leo Strauss, *Philosophie und Gesetz: Beiträge zum Verständnis Maimunis und seiner Vorläufer* (Berlin: Schocken, 1935), pp. 87–122.

⁴³ST 1.1.1, resp.; *De virtutibus* 10, resp.

⁴⁴SCG 1.5.

⁴⁵Ibid. 1.6; *De ver.* 14.10, ad 11.

can contradict what is true. Between true faith and true knowledge there is by definition a natural agreement. We can demonstrate this agreement purely philosophically. When a teacher instructs his pupil, his own knowledge must include whatever he would introduce into the mind of his pupil. Now, our natural knowledge of principles comes from God, since he is the author of our nature. It follows that whatever is contrary to these principles is contrary to the divine wisdom and consequently could not be true. Between a reason coming from God and a revelation coming from the same God there must necessarily be agreement.⁴⁶ Let us say, then, that faith teaches truths that seem contrary to reason; let us not say that it teaches propositions contrary to reason. Simple folk think it is contrary to reason that the sun should be larger than the earth, but the proposition seems reasonable to the scientist.⁴⁷ We should also believe that the apparent inconsistencies between faith and reason are reconciled in the infinite wisdom of God.

But we do not have to be content with this general confidence in an agreement that we cannot directly perceive. Many observable facts cannot be satisfactorily interpreted unless we accept the existence of a common source for our two orders of knowledge. Faith is above reason, not as a mode of knowing, for on the contrary it is knowledge of an inferior kind because of its obscurity, but because it enables human thought to take possession of an object that it would be naturally incapable of grasping. So there can flow from faith a whole series of influences and actions whose consequences can be most important within reason itself, and without, for all that, ceasing to be a pure reason. Faith in revelation will not end up destroying the rationality of our knowledge, but rather allows it to develop more fully. Just as grace does not destroy nature but heals, enriches, and perfects it, so faith, through the influence it wields from above over reason as reason, makes possible the development of a more fruitful and truer rational activity.⁴⁸

The transcending influence of faith on reason is an essential fact that we must interpret properly lest we deprive Thomistic philosophy of its inherent character. Many criticisms of Thomistic philosophy are aimed precisely at the blending of faith and reason that it is thought to contain. It is just as wrong, however, to think that Thomas separates the two domains as it is to suppose that he confused them. Later on we shall have occasion to ask whether he did in fact confuse them. But for the present it is enough to see that he did not isolate them, but was able to keep them in touch with each other so that in the end he was not compelled to confuse them.⁴⁹

⁴⁶SCG 1.7.

⁴⁷*De ver.* 14.10, ad 7.

⁴⁸*Ibid.* 14.9, ad 8 and 10, ad 9.

⁴⁹On this general character of Thomistic thought see the fundamental book of Jacques

This shows the remarkable unity of the philosophical and theological work of Thomas. No one can pretend that a mind such as his was not fully aware of its objective. Even in his commentaries on Aristotle, he always knows where he is going, and there too he is on his way to the teaching of faith, if not when he is explaining, at least when he is completing and correcting. And nevertheless we can say that Thomas is fully and rightly conscious of never appealing to arguments that would not be strictly rational. For if faith enlivens his reason, this reason, supported and enriched by his faith, always carries out purely rational operations and draws conclusions based solely on the evidence of first principles common to all human minds. The fear shown by some followers of Thomas, lest they give the impression that his reason may be tainted by his faith, has nothing Thomistic about it. To deny that he knows and welcomes this salutary influence compels one to present as purely accidental the agreement that his reconstruction of philosophy and theology actually achieved. It shows a concern that Thomas himself would not have understood. He is too sure of his own mind to have felt such a fear. He acknowledges that his reason advances with the salutary help of faith, but he asserts that while traveling the road of revelation reason grasps and penetrates more deeply truths that it was in danger of misunderstanding. The traveler whom a guide takes to a mountain top beholds for himself the view disclosed before them, and his view is not less true because someone else has led him to it. It is impossible to read Thomas for long without becoming convinced that the immense system of the world his teaching reveals to us, took form in his mind along with his formation of the doctrine of the faith. When he tells others that faith is a salutary guide for reason, he still vividly recalls the benefit his own reason reaped from faith.

It is therefore not surprising that in the primary concerns of theology there is room for philosophical inquiry, even where it is a question of revealed truths beyond the reach of human reason. Undoubtedly, reason cannot pretend either to demonstrate or understand these truths. But encouraged by the higher certitude that they contain a hidden truth, it enables us to catch a glimpse of it through well-founded analogies. Sensible objects, the point of departure of all our knowledge, have retained traces of the divine nature that created them, because the effect always resembles its cause. Reason, therefore, can put us on our way to understanding the perfect truth that God will disclose to us in the future life.⁵⁰

This statement limits the role of reason in undertaking to clarify the truths of faith. Reason ought not to take on the task of demonstrating them. To try to demonstrate what is indemonstrable is to confirm the unbeliever in his unbelief.

Maritain, *Distinguish to Unite; or The Degrees of Knowledge*, trans. Gerald B. Phelan et al. (New York: Scribner's, 1959).

⁵⁰SCG 1.7; *De ver.* 14.9, ad 2.

So evident is the disproportion between the theses to be established and the false proofs offered for them that, far from serving faith by such arguments, faith is only held up to ridicule.⁵¹ But we can explain, interpret, and bring closer to us what we cannot prove. We can, as it were, lead our adversaries by the hand into the presence of these inaccessible truths. We can point out the probable reasons and the trustworthy authorities upon which they are based in this life.

We must go even further. Having benefited from the theses already established, we must state that there is room for rational argument even where it is a question of truths inaccessible to reason, and also for theological intervention in areas apparently reserved for pure reason. The latter has the task of demonstrating that the teaching of revelation is possible; that it contains nothing impossible or rationally absurd. Indeed, we have seen that revelation and reason cannot contradict each other. If, then, it is certain that reason cannot demonstrate revealed truth, it is equally certain that every demonstration claiming to be rational and pretending to establish the error of faith, itself depends on false reasoning. However subtle the arguments invoked, we must adhere firmly to the principle that, since truth cannot contradict itself, reason cannot be right if it is contrary to faith.⁵² We can always look for sophistry in a philosophical doctrine contradicting revelation. Revealed documents are not philosophical proofs that a doctrine is false, but they are for the believer the sign that the philosopher holding it is mistaken, and it is up to the philosopher alone to show that this is so.

With even greater reason, faith has need of philosophical speculation when it is a question of revealed truths that are also rationally demonstrable. If it has already been taught by faith, this body of true philosophy, which the human mind would rarely possess intact and complete if left to the resources of reason alone, is easily established, though by a purely rational method. Like a child who understands when the master teaches what it would not have been able to discover by itself, the human intellect easily grasps a doctrine whose truth is guaranteed by a more than human authority. This explains the extraordinary firmness it shows when faced with errors of every kind, which bad faith or ignorance can cause in its opponents. It can always refute these errors with conclusive proofs capable of reducing them to silence and to establish the truth.

Let us add, finally, that even the strictly scientific knowledge of the sensible world cannot be completely indifferent to theology. Not that there is no knowledge of creatures valuable in itself and independent of all theology. Science

⁵¹See the application of this principle in *ST* 1.46.2, resp.; *SCG* 1.8 and 2.38.

⁵²*SCG* 1.1, 1.2 and 1.9. All the help theology looks for in human knowledge is summed up in Thomas' statement: "The other sciences are called its servants" (*ST* 1.1.5, sed contra). Hence the well-known expression: *philosophia ancilla theologiae*, which seems to be modern, taken literally (it is not found literally in Thomas' works), but the idea is very old. For the history and meaning of the expression see Bernaud Baudoux, "Philosophia, ancilla theologiae," *Antonianum* 12 (1937): 293-326.

exists as such, and provided it remains within its natural boundaries, it develops without any intrusion of faith. But it is rather faith that cannot afford not to take science into consideration. From its very start it could not fail to show an interest in science; first, because the consideration of creatures is useful for instruction in the faith, and second, as we have just seen, because natural knowledge can at least refute errors concerning God.⁵³

Although the relations between theology and philosophy are so intimate, the fact remains that they occupy two formally distinct domains. First of all, though their domains have a certain area in common, they do not coincide. Theology is the science of truths necessary for salvation. Now, all truths are not necessary for this purpose; and therefore God did not need to reveal truths about creatures that we are able to learn by ourselves and are not necessary for salvation. There is room, then, outside theology for a science of natural things that considers them in and for themselves, and that is divided into different parts according to their kinds, while theology considers all of them from the perspective of salvation and in relation to God.⁵⁴ The philosopher studies fire as it is in itself; the theologian sees in fire an image of the divine power. There is room, then, for the philosopher's point of view along side that of the believer (*philosophus fidelis*), and there is no reason for reproaching theology for passing over in silence many of the properties of things; for example, the shape of the sky or the nature of its motion. These fall within the province of philosophy, which alone has the task of explaining them.

Even when the two disciplines cover the same ground, they keep their specific characters and thus are distinguished from each other. Indeed, they differ first and above all by their principles of demonstration, and this definitely prevents the two from being confused. The philosopher borrows his arguments from the essence of things, and consequently from their proper causes. This is what I am constantly doing in the course of this book. The theologian, on the contrary, argues from the first cause of all things, namely, God, and he appeals to three different kinds of argument, none of which the philosopher regards as satisfactory. Sometimes a theologian holds a truth on the principle of authority, because it has been handed on and revealed by God. Sometimes the glory of the infinite God demands that a certain thing be so. This is called the principle of perfection. Sometimes it is because the power of God is infinite.⁵⁵ This does not imply that theology should not be called a science. But philosophy exploits a domain that properly belongs to it because it uses essentially rational methods. Just as two sciences can establish one and the same fact starting from different

⁵³SCG 2.2, and especially ST 1.1.5, ad 2.

⁵⁴SCG 2.4.

⁵⁵"Fidelis autem ex causa prima, ut puta quia sic divinitus est traditum, vel quia hoc in gloriam Dei cedit, vel quia Dei potestas est infinita" (SCG 2.4 [4]).

principles and arrive at the same conclusions by their own methods, so the demonstrations of the philosopher, based on the principles of reason, differ *toto genere* from the demonstrations the theologian deduces from principles he holds on faith.

A second difference, closely allied to the first, is not in the principles of the demonstration but in the order it follows. In philosophy, which studies creatures in themselves, and in which we try to raise ourselves from creatures to God, the consideration of creatures comes first and the consideration of God last. On the contrary, in theology, which only studies creatures in relation to God, the consideration of God comes first, and then that of creatures. Thus theology follows an order which, taken in itself, is more perfect, since it reflects the knowledge of God, who, in knowing himself, knows everything else.⁵⁶

Such being the situation, the problem of the order to be followed in expounding Thomas' philosophy becomes all the more acute. As I have said, in none of his works is the body of his philosophical thought set forth for itself and according to the order of natural reason alone. There is a series of works in which Thomas used the philosophical method: the commentaries on Aristotle and a small number of *opuscula*. But each *opusculum* gives but a fragment of his thought; and the commentaries on Aristotle, added to an obscure text, only give us an imperfect idea of what might have been the nature of a *Summa* of Thomistic philosophy organized by Thomas himself with the lucid genius displayed in his *Summa theologiae*.⁵⁷ Then there is a second group of works, of which the *Summa theologiae* is the most perfect example, which contain his philosophy proved according to the *principles* of philosophical demonstration and presented in the *order* of theological demonstration. It remains, then, to reconstruct an ideal Thomistic philosophy by extracting what is best from these two groups of works, and by rearranging Thomas' demonstrations according to

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷To the contrary, see Joseph Le Rohellec, *Revue thomiste* 21 (1913): 449; Pierre Mandonnet, *Bulletin thomiste* 1 (1924): 135-136; Joseph de Tonquédec, *La critique de la connaissance* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1929), pp. x-xi. These last objections show clearly where the misunderstanding lies: "To be slavishly (*sic*) attached to this order (namely, that of the *Summae*) is certainly not to set forth *philosophy* as Thomas conceived it." Granted! But it is certainly to expound *his philosophy* in the only way he himself expounded it. As for saying that "the order philosophical developments follow in the *Summae* is external to them: *it does not belong to them*," this is to forget that the problem is they do not belong to it. Finally, de Tonquédec argues as though Aquinas' philosophy ought to have been presented in a kind of manual that a beginner could follow. This is no more necessary than in expounding the philosophy of Descartes, Spinoza, or Kant. To be sure, such an enterprise is legitimate, but an historical introduction to the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas is not a manual of philosophy; it is not even a manual of Thomistic philosophy. Hence it ought to be excusable to follow the very order that Thomas himself followed.

the demands of a new order. But who will dare to attempt such a synthesis? Who will guarantee that the philosophical order of the demonstrations thus adopted would be exactly the one that the genius of Thomas would have chosen and followed? Who, above all, will assure us that, in proceeding in this way, we will not leave out what Thomas himself perhaps valued more than all the rest: the tangible proofs of the benefit philosophy derives by uniting itself with theology under the title of the revealable, and finally the joy reason experiences when discoursing in the very order in which the Intelligences contemplate, thanks to the clues revelation offers to it. At any rate, historical prudence is no mean virtue in the practicing historian. But much more is at stake here. The real question is whether we can, without destroying it, uproot a philosophical idea from the milieu in that it was born and make it live outside its habitat. If the philosophy of Thomas was established as revealable, then it is only to respect its nature to expound it according to the theological order.

To do so does not at all imply that the truth of a philosophy, arranged according to this order, is subordinate to that of faith, which from its inception appeals to the authority of a divine revelation. Thomistic philosophy is a body of rigorously demonstrable truths and it is justifiable precisely as philosophy by reason alone. When Thomas speaks as a philosopher, it is only his demonstrations that are at issue. It matters little that the thesis he is supporting should come right where faith would have it, since he never calls upon faith, nor does he ask us to call upon faith in truths that he regards as rationally demonstrated. Between the claims of these two disciplines, even when they bear upon the same matter, there remains a strict formal distinction based on the heterogeneity of the principles of demonstration. There is a difference in kind between theology which finds its principles in the articles of faith, and philosophy which asks reason alone what it can tell us about God (*theologia quae ad sacram doctrinam pertinet, differt secundum genus ab illa theologia quae pars philosophiae ponitur*).⁵⁸ It can be shown that Thomas did not make this distinction in kind as a useless principle, to be forgotten once it has been formulated. A close examination of his teaching in its historical significance, and as compared with the Augustinian tradition most illustriously represented by Bonaventure, reveals what profound recastings, what incredibly bold transformations he was willing to carry out on his own responsibility in order to meet the demands of Aristotelian philosophy, whenever in his judgment they were justified by right reason.⁵⁹

Here precisely is the properly philosophical value of Thomism, and what makes its appearance a decisive moment in the history of human thought. Fully conscious of all the consequences of such an attitude, Thomas accepts both his

⁵⁸ST 1.1.1, ad 2.

⁵⁹This point is developed in my *Etudes de philosophie médiévale* (Strasbourg: Vrin, 1921), pp. 95-124.

faith and his reason, each with its own demands. He does not try to establish, at the cheapest possible cost, a superficial reconciliation, containing doctrines easiest to bring into accord with the traditional teaching of theology. He prefers that reason should develop its own content in perfect liberty, and that it should display, without diminution, the rigor of its demands. The philosophy he teaches is not philosophy because it is Christian; but he knows that the truer his philosophy will be the more Christian it will be, and the more Christian it will be the truer it will be. This is why he is equally open to Augustine and Aristotle. Rather than passively following the traditional path of Augustinism, he formulates a new theory of knowledge, changes the bases on which proofs of God's existence rest, submits the notion of creation to a new critique, and establishes or completely reorganizes the structure of traditional morality. Rather than passively following the philosophy of Aristotle, he everywhere breaks free from its limitations and transforms it by infusing into it a new meaning. The whole secret of Thomism lies in this immense effort to reconstruct philosophy on a plane where its agreement in fact with theology may appear to be the necessary consequence of the demands of reason itself, rather than the accidental result of some simple desire for conciliation.

Such seems to me to be the contacts and the distinction between faith and reason in the thought of Thomas Aquinas. They can neither contradict each other, nor ignore each other, nor be confused with each other. In vain will reason justify faith. Never will it transform faith into reason. The moment faith gives up authority for proof, it would cease to believe and begin to know. In vain would faith move reason from without or guide it from within. Reason will never cease to be itself, for the moment it would cease furnishing demonstrative proof for what she advanced, she would deny herself and immediately step aside to give way to faith. Thus it is the exclusiveness of their essences that enables each to help the other without contaminating themselves. But we are not living in a world of pure essences, and the complexity of a concrete science like theology can include both faith and reason, directing them to one and the same end. In becoming something revealable, philosophy does not give up in any way its essential rationality, but it raises the use of rationality to its own ultimate perfection.

We see how, considered in this light and as a discipline that grasps here below whatever natural reason can conceive about God, philosophical wisdom appears to Thomas as a divine science. Aristotle had already said this. Thomas repeats it, but with a new meaning. Raised by his efforts to the level of the revealable, it shares from now on the attributes of theological wisdom, which Thomas says is at once the most perfect, the most sublime, and the most useful knowledge we can acquire in this life. The most perfect, because to the extent that we are dedicated to the study of wisdom we participate in true beatitude even in this world. The most sublime, because the wise person takes on to a slight degree a resemblance to God, who has established all things in wisdom.

The most useful, because it brings us to the eternal kingdom. The most consoling too, because as scripture says (Wis 8:16), her companionship has no bitterness, life with her no pain, but only gladness and joy.⁶⁰

There are, no doubt, certain minds that are only, or especially, satisfied with logical certitude, and they will readily question the superiority of the study of metaphysics. They will prefer the sure deductions of physics or mathematics to investigations that do not declare themselves totally powerless even in the presence of the incomprehensible. But it is not only its certitude that ennobles a science, it is its object as well. To minds tormented by thirst for the divine, it is useless to offer the most certain knowledge of the laws of numbers or the structure of the universe. Straining for an object that eludes their grasp, they endeavor to lift a corner of the veil, only too happy to perceive, sometimes even under heavy shadows, glimmerings of the eternal light that one day is due to shine upon them. To such persons, the slightest knowledge touching the highest realities seems more desirable than the most absolute certitude touching lesser objects.⁶¹ We arrive here at the point of reconciliation between the utmost distrust of human reason, a mistrust that Thomas himself sometimes shows, and the lively taste he will always have for dialectical discussion and reasoning. It is when it is a question of attaining an object rendered inaccessible to us by its essence that our reason reveals herself powerless and deficient on every side. No one was more conscious of this shortcoming than Thomas. If, in spite of everything, he unweariedly applied this feeble instrument to the most exalted objects, it is because the most confused knowledge, even knowledge hardly deserving the name, is not to be scorned when it has for its object the infinite essence of God. Wretched conjectures, analogies not wholly inadequate, it is from these we draw our purest and most profound joys. Our sovereign happiness here below is to anticipate, in however confused a fashion, the face-to-face vision of Being.

Section 2. The Philosopher and the Believer

A philosophy begins with a philosopher and is identified with him, and this is no less true when the philosopher is first a theologian. No one truly understands Thomism who is not aware of the presence of Thomas himself in it, or rather brother Thomas, before he was raised to the altar; in short, the man with his temperament, character, feelings, tastes, even his passions. For he had at least one on the level of pure human nature, the passion to understand. We all know that man is a rational animal; but having said it, we no longer think or talk about it.

⁶⁰SCG 1.2.

⁶¹ST 1.1.5, ad 1; 1-2.66.5, ad 3; *In De causis*, prooem. [ed. Saffrey, p. 2]. See Aristotle, *De partibus animalium* 1.5, translated and commented on by André Bremond, *Le dilemme aristotélicien* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1933), pp. 14-15.

If wonder is the beginning of philosophy, we can say that for Thomas there was a first and fundamental wonder, the beginning of all to follow, of which it is literally true to say that it never left him. It was always amazing to him that there should be intelligent beings, or as he says "intellects." No one makes the slightest foray into Thomas' thought if he forgets that Thomas lived in perpetual astonishment at being gifted with intelligence and reason. He knows that philosophers themselves wondered about this, and he feels no surprise that they did. On the contrary, he finds it natural that Aristotle conceived of the agent intellect as something quasi-divine in nature, and that Alexander of Aphrodisias, Avicenna, and Averroes considered it, each in his own fashion, a separated substance in which human beings can indeed participate but not possess. He was even less surprised that Augustine made God the Sun of minds, or even that some Christian disciples of Aristotle, including William, Bishop of Paris, cleverly but without warrant, identified the agent intellect with God himself. Thomas thinks otherwise, but this is precisely the source of his astonishment: It is almost too beautiful to be true that the intellect should belong to the individual that possesses it and knows by means of it. There must be an underlying mystery here, and we shall see that indeed this apparently simple fact conceals the greatest of all enigmas, because for us the reason for our creation is the first of all mysteries, and the only key to it is our nature as an intellectual substance. Let us pick out from Thomas' writings a few indications of this high respect for intelligence. Perhaps the most obvious is the deep admiration, masked with affection, that he always felt toward the great philosophers—*ista praeclara ingenia*—and especially for Aristotle.

It is becoming more and more difficult to find a comparable feeling in those who are scientists rather than philosophers, and only see in Aristotle the representative of an out-of-date astronomy or physics. However, unless they think that they have created almost by themselves the whole of modern science, as Descartes did for mathematics, those who take Aristotle for a pedant should at least understand what noble witness his writings render to the marvellous power of the human intellect. Thomas first saw it at work and sung its praise in Aristotle's encyclopedia.

A second indication of the same respect for the eminent dignity of the intellect is that, among everything known to us through sense experience, contemplating the truth is an activity of which man alone is capable and which is proper to him. We read in *Contra Gentiles* 3.37 [2]: "Indeed, this is the only operation of man which is proper to him and in which he shares nothing in common with the other animals."

A third indication is that, in Thomas' view, participation in intellectual knowledge makes man a spiritual being comparable to the most eminent creatures God has formed. Humans are composed of soul and body, whereas angels are pure spirits and therefore more perfect than men. Although angels are nobler spirits, nevertheless we too are spirits, and so also is God. Intellectual

knowledge of the truth is therefore the only activity found in God, angels, and men. It is the only one, but they have it in common (*hoc tantum de operationibus humanis in Deo et in substantiis separatis est*).⁶²

It has often been repeated that it is dangerous to think of a human being as a sort of slightly lesser angel. It is a fact that we are intellectual substances while angels are pure intellects. Nevertheless, we should not forget that men, angels, and God constitute in the thought of Thomas a group distinct from all others, precisely because they and they alone are endowed with intellectual knowledge. Though Thomism interpreted the doctrine differently, it is faithful at this point to the Augustinian spirit; it admits no substance between God and us. There is nothing greater than the rational mind except God (*nihil subsistens est majus mente rationali nisi Deus*).⁶³ This makes the notion of man created in the image of God fully understandable.

The idea of image is at the center of Thomas' anthropology, including his epistemology, just as the notion of being is at the heart of his metaphysics. This is not an innovation on his part. Here as elsewhere he but renews a tradition, turning it into a fruitful heritage. Western theology passed on to him the teaching of Augustine⁶⁴ and Bernard of Clairvaux, and Eastern theology transmitted to him the teaching of Dionysius the Areopagite, Gregory of Nyssa and the great Cappadocians. What is new in the Thomistic theology of image, if I am not mistaken, is the technical interpretation of the notion, with the result of bringing much closer than ever before the essential relationship between man and God.

The expressions Thomas uses, and to which he returns insistently, is that in a sense man and God belong to the same *species*. In what sense can this be true? In order to define something we assign to it its genus and its specific difference. The latter is taken from the ultimate difference, that which specifies the object as belonging to the given species and to no other. In the case of man his ultimate difference is reason. From another perspective there is also a specific resemblance between an image and its model, but this is not true of every likeness. For example, like God we exist, and in this respect we resemble him, but we are no more an image of God because we exist than are other beings. What is more, we live, and in this respect, too, we resemble God. But even though this is a closer resemblance to God, it is equally common to all other living beings, and so it does not make us an image of God. To find this we must therefore press on to the ultimate difference that makes man a distinct species in the genus of animal. As we have seen, this is intelligence and the rational knowledge resulting from it. It is because we understand and God

⁶²These texts are in SCG 3.37.

⁶³ST 1.16.6, ad 1.

⁶⁴Augustine, *De diversis quaestionibus* 83, 51 [CCL 44A: 78-80], cited by Thomas, ST 1.93.2, resp.

understands that we are made in the image of God.⁶⁵ We say *in* the image, because the only true image of God is begotten, not created. This is the Word, who in itself is the perfect Image of the Father. We do no more than approach our divine model, who is also our cause and our end, because in our own way and to our own degree we are also intellectual substances. There is no sharing of being between God and ourselves, nor even a sharing of species (for God is not contained in a species), and yet it is in our species that we are the image of God. This is what Thomas means when he says that there is a *similitudo speciei* between man and God.⁶⁶

In this sense, the likeness of images does not express a unity of being but a unity of a way of being; in brief, a unity of quality.⁶⁷ These notions are so unusual that even Thomas' interpreters have often forgotten them. It must be granted that they are quite subtle. The most important of these notions is particularly so, for it requires us to conceive a relationship of man to God such that by the very species that is proper to him (rational animal), man is like God, who is not in any species. We shall have many occasions to see that this is always the case, because all relations are between things and God, not between God and things. This kind of relation can be thought but not represented. Nevertheless, it is essential to think it, because Thomas believes that this "specific resemblance" of man to God is the exact meaning of God's own words: "Let us make man in our image and likeness" (Gen 1:26). Every creature resembles its cause, but only man is made in the image of his cause; the intellect is the very image of God residing in him.

This opens up many truths for us. It is the source and justification of Thomas' entire epistemology and his intellectualism. He is often criticized for them as signs of paganism and naturalism and a lack of religious spirit. On the contrary, precisely because Thomas sees the intellect as the mark imprinted by God on his image that he places nothing superior to it: *Signatum est super nos lumen vultus tui Domine* (Psalm 4:6). For Thomas, these words express the exact

⁶⁵Ibid.

⁶⁶"In sola creatura rationali invenitur similitudo Dei per modum imaginis. ... Id autem in quo creatura rationalis excedit alias creaturas, est intellectus sive mens. ... Imago autem repraesentat secundum similitudinem speciei, ut supra (art. 2) dictum est. ... Nam quantum ad similitudinem divinae naturae pertinet, creaturae rationales videntur quodammodo ad repraesentationem speciei pertinere, inquantum imitantur Deum, non solum in hoc quod est et vivit, sed etiam in hoc quod intelligit, ut supra dictum est" (*ST* 1.93. 6, resp.); "... ad rationem imaginis pertinet aliqualis repraesentatio specei" (ibid. 7, resp.). "... imago importat similitudinem utcumque pertinentem ad speciei repraesentationem" (ibid. 8, resp.). Note the qualifying words: *quodammodo, aliqualis, utcumque*. It is only a question of "a unity of likeness in species."

⁶⁷"Unum enim in qualitate similitudinem causat" (*ST* 1. 93.9, resp.). See *In Metaph.* 5.17 [ed. Cathala-Spiazzi, p. 266, n. 1005].

meaning of the statement that man has been created in the image of God. In a remark made in passing and yet going to the heart of the matter, the Common Doctor goes so far as to say that the principles of our reason are innate by nature, for God is the author of our nature, from which Thomas draws the astonishing conclusion that "divine wisdom contains the same principles."⁶⁸ A remarkable conclusion indeed if we think about it, but do we ever do? Every true conclusion known to us is guaranteed as true by the remarkable fact that the principles from which our mind draws them, or which guarantee them, are already present in the mind of God. God's wisdom insures our own principles. "Therefore the divine wisdom also contains these principles" (*haec ergo principia etiam divina sapientia continet*). Thus the truth of science and philosophy is ultimately grounded in God.

This explains the surprising passage in Thomas' commentary on the Book of Job, where holy Job, exasperated by the evils besetting him, suddenly declares: "I want to dispute with God." Modern commentators are usually surprised at this statement. What audacity, they think, unless this was just a manner of speaking. But it is not. Thomas first expresses the common opinion, noting that Job's remark seemed out of order, as it would be if it were a matter of discussion between Job and God, whose perfection raises him so far beyond that of his creatures (*Videbatur autem disputatio hominis ad Deum esse indebita propter excellentiam qua Deus hominem excellit*). But Thomas the commentator quickly adds that "the inequality between the two speakers has no effect whatsoever on the truth of what they are saying. If what someone is saying is true, no one can gainsay him, whoever his opponent in the discussion may be." (*Cum aliquis veritatem loquitur, vinci non potest, cum quocumque disputet*).⁶⁹ Without pushing any of these statements beyond what their context authorizes, it is difficult to miss the aura of confidence and admiration they create around reason. Thomas almost worshipped reason. This statement is hardly extravagant, since each of the theses we have been looking at emphasizes the divine origin, the divine resemblance, the privileged role reason plays in creating a sort of affinity between men, angels, and God. If we are to delve deeply into the spirit of Thomism, we must first of all share the amazement Thomas always experienced in the presence of reason, whose truth is sure enough to assert itself before God himself, because the principles it invokes are the same in creature and creator. It is impossible to imagine a more striking expression of trust in the power of reason.

To be quite truthful, there is indeed in Thomas' thought a still more absolute confidence: the trust he places in the truth of faith. Faith, to be sure, lacks

⁶⁸SCG 1.7 [2].

⁶⁹*Expositio super Job* 13.2 [Leonine ed. 26: 67]. The passages of scripture particularly referred to are Job 13:3, 13-22.

the rational evidence necessary for the certitude of science and philosophy. The mind only gives its assent to the truths of faith because it is moved to do so by the will, which substitutes here for the missing evidence. Faith, as knowledge and in itself, is inferior to reason. The proof of this is that faith must yield one day before the sight of what it now affirms without seeing. No one thinks that the happiness of heaven consists in the kind of knowledge faith gives.⁷⁰ Nevertheless, whatever the reasons may be, faith participates finally in the unshakable certitude of the divine truth to which it adheres. If the believer knows why he believes, he knows that he is participating in the certitude of God's knowledge of himself. Whatever man's trust in the evidence of reason, his trust in the evidence of the divine knowledge can only be firmer still. No doubt he does not see it, but since he adheres to God's sight of it, his certitude is even firmer than that which he assigns to the first principles of reason (*Magis enim fidelis et firmitus assentit his quae sunt fidei quam etiam primis principiis rationis*).⁷¹

What is the object of faith's knowledge? Essentially it is the truth revealed by God to men in order to enable them to reach their final end, namely, beatitude (*Illud proprie et per se pertinet ad objectum fidei, per quod homo beatitudinem consequitur*).⁷² Beatitude is the beatific vision, that is to say, the eternal vision of God face to face. The disproportion between man and God is such that even the Greek philosophers could not conceive the possibility of this destiny for the human race. No doubt the very idea of it would have seemed unreasonable to them. Perhaps they longed for this beatitude in a confused and unconscious way, but they knew very well that it was inaccessible by the powers of human nature; and as they knew nothing about the notion of a supernatural Christian order, it would hardly have seemed wise to them to aspire to it. The purpose of revelation is to make this beatitude accessible to man by revealing to him the supernatural knowledge that natural reason by itself could not discover.

In what sense does revelation put us in possession of a *supernatural* knowledge? As has just been said, revelation is a holy and religious teaching: first, in the sense that it comes from God; second and as a consequence, that instead of consisting in certitudes known in the light of natural reason, which is that of our own mind, revelation communicates in human language something of the knowledge God has of himself. I do not myself see the truth of what I believe, but under the motion of my will, which takes the place of the missing evidence, my intellect gives its assent to the truth about God known from God himself, which he communicates to me by his Word obscurely, enigmatically, as a sort of reflection. It is because I know that the object of my assent is a divine view of truth, or better, divine truth itself, that the certitude of faith is much firmer

⁷⁰SCG 3.40.

⁷¹*In Sent.* 1, prol. 1.3, quaest. 3, sol. 3 [ed. Mandonnet-Moos 1: 1].

⁷²ST 2-2.2.4, ad 1.

in me than is that of the truth of science. I am even much more certain of the truth God knows than I can be of any human truth, even the evidence of principles.

This *holy* or *sacred* character of the knowledge of faith places it in an order other than that of philosophy. Philosophers also have a theology; they even call it the divine science because its object is God, but God as an answer to the questions reason asks itself about the world and as first cause known by the natural light of the understanding. The theology of the Christian theologian is entirely different. It differs from it not merely by a specific difference—as a species different from another species of theology within a common genus containing both—but by a generic difference. Now, we must remember that there is a great difference between two genera. What we predicate about two generically different objects is the object of a predication not at all univocal, not even analogous, but equivocal. This means that the God spoken of in the two theologies is specifically different. The theology of Aristotle can be called a divine science, and indeed it is. But it is such only by its object. It remains essentially a human knowledge about God, a *humana doctrina de Deo*, not a *sacra doctrina*, man's participation by faith in the knowledge God has of himself. Let us recall Thomas' words: ... *theologia quae ad sacram doctrinam pertinet, differt secundum genus ab illa theologia quae pars philosophiae ponitur.*⁷³

An immediate consequence of the same principle concerns the nature of philosophical theology. The simple knowledge man has of God does not raise him above himself. It is useless for salvation. This is true of all knowledge about God. Whatever may be its object, whether naturally accessible to natural reason (the "revealable") or transcending reason (the "revealed"), philosophical theology, which is the crown of metaphysics, is always essentially human both in its origin and content. This is why, from the point of view of salvation, we must believe all the truths about God, even those that reason is capable of knowing. No purely rational speculation can make us know them in the way they must be known so that their knowledge is a means of salvation.

This is the occasion of many misunderstandings. Thomas rightly teaches that it is impossible to know and to believe the same thing at the same time and under the same aspect. But the fact is that what we know and what we believe is never identical, and it is never known under the same aspect. Let us suppose that a philosopher has demonstrated the existence of a prime immovable mover. Knowing that such a being exists, the philosopher can no longer believe in its existence. But if God reveals his existence to us, he does not reveal the existence of a prime immovable mover. He himself instructs us about his own existence and permits us to participate by faith in his own knowledge of it. We see why Thomas speaks here of distinct *genera*; their difference is not one of degree but of order, and it is such that no one can pass from one to the other simply

⁷³Ibid. 1.2.1, ad 2.

by pushing one of them to its limit. There is no possible philosophical demonstration of the existence of Yahweh, nor of Jesus Christ, son of God and Savior. Scripture does not reveal the existence of a God, but rather that of the true God who makes himself personally known by man in order to establish with him and his people a contract in which he alone can take the initiative and fix the terms. The philosophical demonstration of the existence of God is only brought into theology insofar as it gives us some understanding of faith. Philosophical theology is joined to the other [kind of theology] as means to an end, but the understanding of faith remains intellectual; it never becomes *faith*. I know that God exists, but I believe in the existence of the One who tells me he exists, and I believe it on his word. Believing in the truths that philosophy can in a sense demonstrate is not believing by divine faith in the conclusions of philosophy. This would be both contradictory and impossible. Believing by faith is assenting to every truth about God, whether demonstrable or not, the knowledge of which is necessary for salvation; for example, that he is one and immaterial: *Necesse est credere Deum esse unum et incorporeum, quae naturali ratione a philosophia probantur*. Again, *Necessarium est homini accipere per modum fidei, non solum ea quae sunt supra rationem, sed etiam ea quae per rationem cognosci possunt*.⁷⁴

It is on this level of the human and concrete that we meet the problem of the relations between faith and reason, which some try without success to raise in terms of abstract essences, which are irreconcilable by definition. Revelation is not simply an unveiling of the truth that saves; it is an invitation to salvation. God does more than invite us to a blessed life in him by revealing the means to it on his authority and confirmed by his miracles. He presses us interiorly to accept his invitation: "The believer has sufficient motive for believing, for he is moved by the authority of divine teaching confirmed by miracles, and, what is more, by the inward instinct of the divine invitation" (*Ille qui credit habet sufficientem inductivum ad credendum, inducitur enim auctoritate divinae doctrinae miraculis confirmative, et, quod plus est, interiori instinctu Dei invitantis*).⁷⁵ The act of faith is our acceptance of this invitation.

This doctrine is based on St. Paul's teaching in Hebrews 11:6: "Without faith it is impossible to please God. For whoever would draw near God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him." (*Sine fide impossibile est placere Deo. Credere oportet accedentem ad Deum quia est, et quod inquiringibus se remunerator est*). We can only approach the God of salvation if we believe both that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. Thus faith in the God of salvation implies the desire to seek him and to find him. We are called by the desire and love of the good. As a result, the presence of faith in the intellect will necessarily modify its approaches, not in order to

⁷⁴Ibid. 2-2.2.4, sed contra and resp.

⁷⁵Ibid. 2.9, ad 3.

change their nature but to elevate them. "When a man's will disposes him to believe, he loves the truth he believes, wishes to understand it, reflects upon it (*et super ea excogitat*), and if he can find some reasons in its favor, he makes them his own."⁷⁶ We could not invoke more explicitly, on behalf of the theological knowledge of God, what so many modern philosophers accuse it of being: an exercise of reason controlled by the desire to justify a belief. Those who want to have the right to call themselves Thomists, while eliminating from their teaching this influence (exercised by the will in the understanding of faith) on the knowledge the mind gains from it, assume a title to which they have no claim. It is true that Thomas does not present himself as a philosopher, if to be one he must choose between this title and that of theologian. But this is not the question. The question is whether, in any case, the desire to understand what one believes about the word of God can obscure the natural light of reason? The contrary is the case. The spirit of authentic Thomism implies unlimited confidence in the beneficial effect faith exercises on natural reason. "Faith," says Thomas, "lies somewhere between the two thoughts, one inclining the will to believe and preceding faith, the other tending to the understanding of something it already believes, and the latter is simultaneous with the assent of faith."⁷⁷ There could be no authentic Thomism without the intimate symbiosis of the two modes of knowledge, at once distinct and united.

The distinction between the revealed and the revealable remains intact. In cases where the object of faith transcends the powers of natural reason a special illumination is needed on the part of God in order to obtain the mind's assent to the revealed truth. But it should not be forgotten that for all true knowledge (*in omni cognitione veritatis*) human thought requires divine cooperation. If it is a question of a truth naturally knowable, the mind does not need a new light but only to be moved and directed by God.⁷⁸ There is perhaps no other Thomistic thesis more completely lost sight of in the course of controversies (sterile to be sure) carried on in philosophy over the relationship between reason and faith. The fundamental distinction between the "revealed" and the knowable has led to the notion that natural knowledge is completely without the divine influence. But no natural activity is without it, because there is not one that does not have both its being and its efficacy from God. It is in the first place philosophically true to say that in him we have being, movement, and life. If God moves and directs his creatures, how could he not first direct them toward himself, the

⁷⁶*Ibid.* 2.10 resp.

⁷⁷*In Sent.* 3.23.2.2, sol. 1, ad 2 (ed. Mandonnet-Moos 3: 726).

⁷⁸"Sic igitur in omni cognitione veritatis indiget mens humana divina operatione, sed in naturaliter cognoscendis non indiget nova luce, sed solo motu et directione eius, in aliis autem etiam nova illustratione. Et quia de talibus Boethius hic loquitur, ideo dicit: '*quantum divina lux igniculum nostrae mentis illustrare dignata est*'" (*In Boeth. De Trin.* 1.1, resp. [ed. Bruno Decker, p. 61.20-24; Leonine ed. 50]).

end of all things? A mind quickened by love to search out the knowledge of God by studying the meaning of his word can surely count on his aid. The theologian who philosophizes is only using his own powers to know and to love for the purpose for which he has received them from God.

It's not hard to understand that such an exercise of natural reason, which is legitimate in itself, in no way lessens the merit of the faith of the one who practices it. The problem that hardly enters the mind of modern Thomists is nonetheless Thomas' main concern in these problems. Where we get upset over the injury faith can do to reason, Thomas has the opposite concern. If only the knowledge that comes by faith is meritorious, will I not lose its merit whenever natural knowledge replaces it?

Such would be the case were the rational certitude that I acquire not inspired by love of the highest good. The knowledge I seek by way of understanding my faith is assuredly no longer faith, but it is still quickened by the same love that is the root of my faith. At the very moment that I know that God exists, and know it with a certitude such that I could no longer even think he does not exist if I wanted to, my will goes on adhering by love to the God of revelation. Indeed, then less than ever can I want to think of him as not existing. Thus, when one wants to believe that which pertains to faith on divine authority alone, even when one finds that he can demonstrate a certain point, the existence of God for example, the merit of believing is neither suppressed nor diminished: ... *puta hoc quod est Deum esse, non propter hoc tollitur vel diminuitur meritum fidei*.⁷⁹ Knowledge desired by faith, fostered by the desire to know, and directed toward the beatific vision, is an almost complete description of theological knowledge. Everything here is religious: the origin, the means and the end; and yet reason is here more than ever herself. She could not renounce her essential needs without giving up the very end toward which she moves.

In this regard Thomism appears as a philosophy of the intellect, loved and served for its own sake. On this level Thomas puts nothing above philosophical wisdom, the love of truth sought and willed for itself as the sovereign good that it truly is, since God is truth. But at the same time this philosophical wisdom also appears as a sacred science founded on God's word and tending entirely toward the last end of man, of which it is a sort of pledge in this life. But there is more to be said. We still must understand that these two aspects of Thomism are really one. The theology of image can alone help us here. For if God has created man in his own image by endowing him with intellectual knowledge, it appears in some way natural that this knowledge, as such, already puts man on his way to his final end, and that all the supernatural means God offers him to reach this end converge to carry nature to the supreme point of perfection, which it confusedly desires but which its own powers do not enable it to attain.

⁷⁹ST 2-2.2.10, ad 1 and 2.

In every order, in all degrees, Thomism views nature as willed by God for its supernatural end. Here as elsewhere, the end is the cause of causes, and the world has but one end, namely, God. This unifying view of Thomism is perfectly correct. Contrary to what one might fear, it is this unifying perspective that gives us the best chance of appreciating the immense aptitude of the doctrine to confer order on the multiplicity of beings according to their proper essences, and at the same time to situate them in their proper place in the universal order. Occasions for calling upon this view will not be rare. Avoiding it would have to be deliberate.

PART I

God

The study of philosophy ends with metaphysics, and the peak of metaphysics is theology. The problem of the existence and nature of God is taken up only at the end of metaphysics. This is in accord with the nature of human knowledge, which begins with sensible things and progressively rises to knowledge of the abstract and intelligible. The procedure of sacred science is different. Founded on God's word, it necessarily begins with God himself and moves downward from him toward man, who is one of his effects.

Thomas engages in philosophical reflection in order to try to understand the object of Christian faith. As it advances, therefore, it must accompany the sacred science of which it is the handmaiden and adopt its order. Now, sacred science takes the existence of God as known. This truth is implied in each of God's utterances to man, and in this sense all scripture proclaims it. Faith in the truth of scripture implies the certainty of God's existence. This certainty, of course, is accessible to natural reason, but if the special use one makes of it consists in trying to grasp as much as possible what one believes, the proof of God's existence comes first. Indeed, not to be able to prove that God exists amounts to being ignorant of the very existence of the subject to which all our religious beliefs are related. In other words, no one can *know* anything about God if he does not even know that he exists. Thomas did not have to justify following an order that is the same as theology, for after all it was theology he was teaching. He knew very well that the existence of God is not an *article of faith*, but also that all the articles of faith presuppose his existence, because without it they would have no object. Finding rational justifications of the proposition "God exists" establishes a preliminary truth, if not to the truth of faith, at least to everything the intellect of the philosopher can think true apropos of the object of faith. In this sense, faith in the existence of the God of scripture virtually contains faith in everything we can and ought to believe about him. Reason's knowledge of the existence of God contains implicitly the knowledge of everything we can know of him. Thus philosophical reflection, in quest of an understanding of faith, must begin by establishing the existence of the object of faith.

Chapter One

The Problem of the Existence of God

Certain theologians consider the existence of God self-evident. They think its proof is superfluous, or even impossible, since the evidence for it is indemonstrable. We must begin, therefore, by examining their reasons which, had they been well-founded, would have authorized our speaking at once of God's existence as a certitude based on divine revelation and immediately evident to natural reason.

Section 1. The Alleged Evidence for the Existence of God

Among those who think the existence of God needs no proof, we must exclude the simple faithful. Accustomed from childhood to hearing God spoken about, and being in the habit of praying to him, they take their habit of believing in him as a rational certainty of his existence.¹ Thomas is not speaking to them, but rather to philosophers and theologians who think that God's existence is immediately evident.² Although he mentions a large number of them in his *Summa contra Gentiles*, they can all be satisfactorily dealt with in the three principal positions treated in the *Summa theologiae*.³ The arguments Thomas selected for discussion are not presented in systematic order. His summary of them, moreover, does not necessarily imply that their authors themselves expressly subscribed to the thesis he is going to criticize. In fact, all the theologians from whom these arguments are more or less directly borrowed have actually tried to prove the existence of God. This is clearly the case of John Damascene, for example, whose proofs have not been without influence in the history of the problem; and yet Thomas places him among those who think that the existence of God is not an object of proof. Here, as elsewhere, Thomas borrows from a number of authors' themes that enable him to throw certain important points into relief.

¹SCG 1.11 [1].

²For the history of the proofs of the existence of God before Thomas see Georg Grunwald, *Geschichte der Gottesbeweise im Mittelalter bis zum Ausgang der Hochscholastik* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1907); Clemens Baeumker, *Witelo, ein Philosoph und Naturforscher des XIII Jahrhunderts* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1908), pp. 286–338; Augustinus Daniels, *Quellenbeiträge und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der Gottesbeweise im dreizehnten Jahrhundert, mit besonderer Berücksichtigung des Argumentes im Proslgion des hl. Anselm* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1909); P. Henry, "Histoire des preuves de l'existence de Dieu au moyen âge, jusqu'à la fin de l'apogée de la scolastique," *Revue thomiste* 19 (1911): 1–24, 141–158; René Arnou, *De quinque viis sancti Thomae ad demonstrandam Dei existentiam apud antiquos Graecos et Arabes et Iudaeos praeformatis vel adumbratis* (Rome: Pontificia universitas Gregoriana, 1932 [repr. 1949]): a useful collection of texts.

³ST 1.2.1; SCG 1.10.

The first of the three arguments presented in the *Summa theologiae* is a simple one. In the beginning of his *De fide orthodoxa*, John Damascene says that “the knowledge that God exists is naturally innate in everyone.”⁴ In the same work he proved the existence of God by change and by finality; but this is unimportant here, for if it were true that everyone knew from birth that God exists, it would surely be impossible to prove it.

The second argument begins with the principle that every proposition is immediately evident that can be known to be true by understanding its terms. This is called a “self-evident proposition,” that is, one whose truth is obvious once the statement is understood; for example, the whole is greater than the part. The same holds for the proposition “God exists.” Indeed, the word “God” is defined as “that than which nothing greater can be conceived.” If someone understands what this statement says, he will form the proposition in his thought. At this moment God exists in his thought, at least in the sense that he is said to exist as an object of thought. Now, it is impossible that God exists only in this way. Indeed, what exists both in thought and reality is greater than what exists in thought alone. Hence, if the word “God” means “that than which nothing greater can be conceived,” then God exists both in thought and reality. The existence of God is therefore self-evident in virtue of the very definition of his name.⁵

The third argument Thomas includes in the *Summa theologiae* is even simpler and more direct. “It is self-evident that truth exists, because he who denies that truth exists concedes that it exists. Indeed, if truth does not exist, it is true that truth does not exist. But if anything is true, then truth must exist. Now, God is truth itself, according to John (14:6): ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life.’ It is therefore self-evident that God exists.”⁶

Of these three arguments for the evidence of the existence of God, the first is borrowed from an author who elsewhere proved God’s existence; the second is a summary of what Anselm considered to be its proof par excellence; the third comes from Augustine, who certainly never thought the existence of God too evident for demonstration. So these writers are certainly not responsible for the conclusion Thomas drew from the arguments he borrowed from them,⁷ but it does not follow that Thomas’ conclusion was therefore arbitrary. The notion

⁴John Damascene, *De fide orthodoxa* 1 and 3 (PG 94: 789c, 793c [ed. Buytaert, pp. 11–13, 15–19]).

⁵ST 1.2.1, obj. 2; SCG 1.10 [2].

⁶ST 1.2.1, obj. 3.

⁷This is all the more certain in that Thomas borrows from his own doctrine arguments from which one could infer, though wrongly, that the existence of God does not have to be demonstrated; for example, all humans naturally desire God (as he will prove in SCG 3.25), therefore they know naturally that God exists (SCG 1.10 [5]). Again, God is his essence; accordingly, in the proposition “God exists,” the predicate “exists” is included in the subject (ibid. 1.10 [4]). All these premises are true according to Thomas, but the conclusion that is drawn from them is false.

that God's existence is self-evident represents accurately the average opinion of a whole group of theologians with whose work he was familiar, and the arguments recorded by Thomas are the ones used by these theologians to justify this opinion.

The thirteenth-century work that best represents this opinion is undoubtedly that vast compilation known since the Middle Ages as the *Summa theologica* of Alexander of Hales. It includes the three arguments discussed by Thomas.⁸ They are also to be found in the commentary of Bonaventure on Peter Lombard.⁹ It is to works of this kind that we must look, rather than to the original sources of the theses, if we are to understand Thomas' attitude toward them. They represent the state of the question in his day. But this state had its distant causes in the philosophy of the past, and it is not useless to recall them, especially if we wish to make the thought of Thomas Aquinas understood.

Section 2. The Theologies of Essence

It is remarkable that to the question "What is being?" Plato always replies by describing a certain mode of being. For him, there is being only where intelligibility is possible.¹⁰ How could we say that a thing is without being able to say what it is? Now, for it to be something, it must remain that thing. To admit that a thing changes is to assert that it is no longer what it was and that it is about to become something that as yet it is not. How are we to know as being what is never ceasing to become something else? In the doctrine of Plato, then, the three notions of being, intelligibility and immutability are intimately linked together. That alone deserves to be called being which, because it always remains the same, is a possible object of knowledge. "What is it that always is and is never born, and what is always being born but never is?" asks Plato in the *Timaeus* (27d). This same principle enables us to understand Plato's reply to the question raised by the *Sophist*: What is being?¹¹ What remains constant throughout all the vagaries of his dialectic is that the expressions, εἶναι (being), εἶναι τι (to be something), and εἶναι τι τῶν ὄντων (to be one of the beings) are equivalent for Plato. This is why the term οὐσία (entity) is so difficult to translate in his writings. One rightly hesitates to render it by essence or by substance; neither of these two terms suggests its power and true import. Οὐσία is what

⁸Alexander of Hales, *Summa theologica* (Quaracchi: Collegium S. Bonaventurae, 1924) 1. Argument taken from John Damascene, *De fide orthodoxa*, 1.1.1, p. 43a; argument taken from Anselm, p. 42b; argument from truth, p. 41, 3.

⁹Bonaventure, *In Sent.* 1.8.1.1.2 (Quaracchi: Collegium S. Bonaventurae, 1934) 1: 153-155.

¹⁰For the history of the metaphysics of being see E. Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1952).

¹¹Plato, *Sophist*, 244a (ed. Auguste Diès, *Platon, Oeuvres complètes* 8, part 3 [Paris: Les Belles-Lettres, 1925], p. 348).

truly possesses being because it always remains what it is.¹² Here, as elsewhere, the Platonic τὸ ὄν is defined in opposition to τὸ γιγνώμενον: being is the contrary of becoming.¹³

In a doctrine in which being is reduced to the stability of essence, how are we to determine what is, in order to distinguish it from what is not? This, the *Sophist* finally replies, is the business of the dialectician.¹⁴ Armed with his method, his eye on the intelligible, he can say of each essence "what it is" and consequently "that it is," but also "what it is not" and consequently "that it is not." The empirical opposition between *existence* and *nothingness* tends here to be reduced to the dialectical distinction between *the same* and *the other*. Every time the dialectician defines an essence, he affirms simultaneously that it is what it is, and it is not other than what it is. From this point of view, which is that of essence, the notions of *being* and *non-being* lose all existential connotation. As Plato says in the *Sophist*: "When we affirm non-being, it seems that it is not at all to affirm something contrary to being but only some other thing."¹⁵

While in an existential ontology there is a strict opposition between existence and nothingness, in an ontology of essence, on the contrary, being and non-being are so far from being opposed that they call for each other and mutually imply each other. An essence can only be affirmed once as being, since it is only itself. For the once that it is, however, there is an indefinite number of times that it is not, since it is other than all other essences. If an essence is only once the same and being, against the innumerable times that it is other and non-being, being is so far from excluding non-being that it cannot be affirmed once without affirming it an infinite number of times. We can be sure that we are in the authentic Platonic tradition whenever the notions of existence and nothingness are reduced to the purely essential notions of the same and the other, *de eodem et diverso*.

This is precisely the notion of being that Augustine inherited from Plato. For him, as for Plato, the radical existential opposition between being and nothingness disappears before the distinction between what "truly is" and what "truly is not." Being acquires from then on the variable value that it always has in an ontology of essence. In the fullest sense it is defined as the absolutely immutable, self-identical and at rest, as differentiated from a non-being conceived of as changing, other, and pure motion. Between the purely immutable and pure duration are ranged all the beings of which it cannot be said that they absolutely are not, since they participate in some stable essence, but neither can it be said

¹²The provisional definition of being proposed further on in the *Sophist* (247d): "that which can act or be acted upon," only indicates how we can recognize the presence of something (τῷ).

¹³Ibid. (ed. Diès, p. 352, n. 1). See 251ab (p. 362).

¹⁴Ibid. 253e (p. 365).

¹⁵Ibid. 257b (p. 371).

of them that they "truly are," because they are born and perish. Now, to be born is to pass from non-being to being, as to perish is to pass from being to non-being, and everywhere there is non-being to that extent there is a lack of being.¹⁶ We are, therefore, clearly on the level of *vere esse*, where being is a variable value measured by the stability of essence. If God is to be located there as the principle of everything, it is because he exists in the supreme degree, since he is supremely immutable.¹⁷ Conversely, whatever is supremely immutable exists in the supreme degree, and this is God. Such is truth, which cannot change, since it is necessary and eternal. We advance in being at the same time as in immutability, and we attain simultaneously in God the supreme degree of both. God alone is supreme being because he is the stable totality of being; he cannot change either by losing anything or acquiring anything (*Illum [sentit homo] summe esse, quia nulla mutabilitate proficit seu deficit*).¹⁸

Thus conceived, God clearly occupies the summit of being, but he is there as supreme in the order of *οὐσία*. Before Augustine, both Cicero and Seneca had rendered this Greek term by its Latin equivalent, *essentia*.¹⁹ The debates that were to culminate in the definition of the dogma of the Trinity had also conferred a dignity upon it, as naming the one divine reality common to the three distinct persons. We can see, then, why Augustine preferred this term to any other to designate the divine being in its most profound reality. In a remarkable passage Augustine records his views on the subject in a few lines: "God, however, is unquestionably substance, or, if this name suits him better, essence. This is what the Greeks call *οὐσία*. Indeed, *essentia* takes its name from the word *esse*, as *sapientia* from *sapere* and *scientia* from *scire*. And who, indeed, *is*, more than he who said to his servant Moses: *I Am Who Am*, and later, "Say to the people of Israel: I Am sent me to you" (Exod 3:14)? Other things called essences or substances require accidents that cause a change in them, little or great; but in God no such accident is possible. This is why there is only one immutable substance or essence, which is God, to which supremely and most truly belongs being itself (*ipsum esse*), from which essence takes its name. For that which changes does not keep its very being, and that which is capable of changing, even if it does not change, is capable of not being what it was.

¹⁶"Res enim quaelibet, prorsus qualicumque excellentia, si mutabilis est, non vere est; non enim est ibi verum esse, ubi est et non esse." Augustine, *In Joannis Evangelium* 38.8, n. 10 (PL 35: 1680 [CCL 124: 343.19-22]).

¹⁷"Ecce quod est esse. Principium mutari non potest," *ibid.* n. 11 (PL 35: 1682 [CCL 124: 344.5-6]).

¹⁸Augustine, *Epistolae* 118, n. 15 (PL 33: 439).

¹⁹Seneca, *Ad Lucilium, Epistolae morales* 58, 6.7; trans. Richard Mott Gummere (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London: Heinemann, 1934) 1: 390, and Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 12.2 (PL 41: 350 [CCL 47: 357.15-16]).

It remains, then, that we can truthfully and honestly call something a being if it not only does not change but is even absolutely incapable of changing.”²⁰

This God of Augustine who is *essentia* was also Anselm’s. Toward the end of the *Proslogion*, Anselm, speaking of God, uses grammatical forms showing that the God he has in mind is the God of Exodus. But in the same passage, we also see how faithful he remains to the ontology of essence handed on by Plato to his successors: “Thus, O Lord, you alone are what you are, and you are *He Who Is*.” Anselm is clearly appealing here to the *Qui sum* of scripture. Now, he reserves for God the term “what he is,” and for exactly the same reason Augustine gave before him: “That in which there is some change is not entirely what it is.” It is proper to God, then, to be always the same, without any admixture of otherness, and consequently to be purely and simply: “But you are what you are, because everything you have ever been or that you are in any way whatsoever, you are it always in its entirety. And you are *He Who Is* purely and simply, because there is in you neither *have been* nor *ought to be*, but only *present being*, and because it is inconceivable that at any time you could not exist.”²¹ This is why, although he uses on occasion terms such as “substance” or “nature,”²² he prefers “essence” to designate God, understood as being itself, which is outside of and above all substance.²³ For *essentia* is to *esse* and to *ens* as *lux* is to *lucere* and to *lucens*. Essence, therefore, is for him *what is* or *what exists*, or *what subsists*, and it is as supreme essence that God is the supreme existent.²⁴

This passage from the *Monologion* shows how much closer Anselm was to the *Proslogion* than he thought. All his arguments for the existence of God share the fundamental notion of being-essence that produces them. For the good is proportional to being, or, to put it better (since it is the perfection of the essence that measures it), being is proportional to the good. Hence the so-called physical proofs of the *Monologion*. However, they are only so qualified by analogy with the proofs of Thomas. Foreign to the plane of actual existence, they are limited to showing that the essence of things more or less good or more or less great presupposes the essence of a supremely good, supremely great and supremely

²⁰Augustine, *De Trinitate* 5.2, n. 3 (PL 42: 912 [CCL 50: 207–208]). See: “Cum enim Deus summa essentia sit, hoc est summe sit, et ideo incommutabilis sit.” *De civitate Dei* 12.2 (PL 41: 350 [CCL 47: 357.2–3]).

²¹Anselm, *Proslogion* 22 (PL 158: 238 [ed. Schmitt 1: 116–117]). “Quidquid aliquo modo essentialiter est, hoc est totum quod ipsa (*scil.* summa essentia) est.” *Monologion* 17 (PL 158: 166c [ed. Schmitt 1: 31–32]).

²²For *substantia*, see *Monologion* 6 (PL 158: 152c); 15 (162b); 24 (178a). For *natura*, *ibid.* 4 (149bc); 5 (150b); 15 (162bc); 18 (167b).

²³*Ibid.* 26 (PL 158: 179c [ed. Schmitt 1: 44]).

²⁴*Ibid.* 6 (PL 158: 153a [ed. Schmitt 1: 20]).

being.²⁵ This same notion provides the major key to the treatise of Anselm "On Truth," which proves that whatever is true, in whatever sense, is true only in virtue of a unique and supreme Truth.²⁶

Finally, the same notion underlies the famous argument of the *Proslogion*. If God is essence, the whole problem amounts to knowing whether essence, which is defined as "that which is," can be conceived as not existing. The answer is obvious. That which is being by definition is "that than which nothing greater can be conceived. Anyone who grasps this, understands at the same time that it so exists that it cannot even be conceived as not existing. Therefore, anyone who understands that this is the way that God exists, cannot think that he does not exist."²⁷ The *est id quod* and the *sic esse* of the text of Anselm have a necessary function here, for it is the modality of the divine being that establishes the necessity of its existence in a doctrine where existence is a function of essence. Not for a moment do we leave the level of essentiality.

This tradition is kept alive between Anselm and Thomas thanks to several works, the most significant of which is the *De Trinitate* of Richard of St. Victor. This theologian asked the unusual question: what meaningful relation is there between the notions of essence and existence? In his discussion of the mystery of the Trinity, Richard remarked that when we wish to distinguish the Persons of the Trinity, we must consider each of them from two points of view: what being each is and where its being comes from. To say what each Person is (*quale quid sit*) is to examine it in its essence. To say where it gets the being that it is, is to examine it from the point of view of existence. Thus, in Richard's thought, existence is only essence in relation to its origin. Indeed, he actually asserts that the term "existence" connotes the two notions simultaneously. *Existere* is *sistere ex*, where *sistere* designates essence and the *ex* designates origin. As Alexander of Hales will later observe, *existere* is *ex alio sistere*, which amounts to saying that the noun "existence" signifies essence with reference to its source (*nomen existentiae significat essentiam cum ordine originis*).²⁸

The so-called *Summa* of Alexander of Hales agreed with Richard of St. Victor on this point, and so it inevitably reduced all problems of existence, including that of the existence of God, to problems of essence.²⁹ We find in it first

²⁵Ibid. 1-4 (PL 158: 144-150 [ed. Schmitt 1: 13-18]).

²⁶Anselm, *De veritate* 13 (PL 158: 484-486 [ed. Schmitt 1: 196-199]). "Est igitur veritas in omnium quae sunt essentia, quia hoc sunt quod in summa veritate sunt," *ibid.* 7 (475b) [1: 185].

²⁷Anselm, *Proslogion* 4 (PL 158: 229b [ed. Schmitt 1: 103-104]).

²⁸Richard of St. Victor, *De Trinitate* 4.11 and 12 (PL 196: 936-938). Alexander of Hales, *Summa theologica* 1, n. 349 (Quaracchi ed. 1: 517-518).

²⁹From here on we are usually dealing with texts borrowed from commentaries on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard. The *Sentences* 1.8 [Grottaferrata, Rome, 1971, 1: 95-103] contains a precious collection of texts from Augustine and Jerome in which the *Ego sum* of Exodus is

of all the identification of *essentia* with the *οὐσία* of the Greeks, justified by the text of the *De Trinitate* of Augustine, Book 5, ch. 2, already cited. Next comes the identification of *ens* (which is God) with *essentia*, for if we take it just by itself, abstracting from it any notion of dependence, composition or mutability, *essentia* is nothing else than the property of being, pure and simple. This term, then, becomes the proper name of the divine "essentiality," since "essence," thus understood, designates essentiality without the addition of anything.³⁰

This explains why what we call the proofs for the existence of God appears here under the general heading: "On the essentiality of the divine substance" (*de divinae substantiae essentialitate*). What is really at stake is to show that the property of being rightly belongs to the divine substance, that is, to prove that the divine substance, being what it is, must necessarily be (*quod necesse est divinam substantiam esse*). The real difficulty for the author of the Alexandrine *Summa* is not to prove that God exists, but rather to find a formulation of the problem such that one can at least believe that there is room for proving it. This is unquestionably why we find him using the term "substance," although he has said, following Augustine, that "essence" would be the correct term. But how can we be shown that the existence of that whose essence it is to be needs to be proved? The whole question is reduced to finding out whether there exists a substance from which being is inseparable. If it can be established that there is an essence that implies being, we shall have a proof of the existence of God.

In every doctrine of this kind, proofs amount naturally to an examination of essences. It is a question of determining whether or not an essence implies the necessity of existing. The so-called "physical" proofs will therefore keep the purely essential character they had in Anselm. Change is not presented as an existential fact but as the purely essential sign of an ontological deficiency. Anything that changes appears at once as non-necessary and consequently as non-being. That is why the two notions of the mutable and the creature are equivalent in the so-called *Summa* of Alexander. Thus it contains arguments like the following, which in an existential metaphysics would be a rank fallacy: It is obvious that the created universe, whether considered as finite or infinite, is entirely caused; now nothing is the proper cause of itself; therefore the universe has necessarily a cause that is not itself caused.³¹ In other words, if being is immutable, mutability attests to a degree of non-being characteristic of the state

interpreted in terms of *essentia* and essential immutability. This no doubt is the proximate source of Alexander, Bonaventure, and the disciples of Bonaventure on this important point.

³⁰"Si vero intelligatur cum praecisione vel privatione eius quod est 'ab alio' vel ens mutabile, efficitur (scil. nomen *essentia*) proprium nomen divinae essentialitatis: 'essentia' enim nominat essentialitatem nullo addito," Alexander of Hales, *Summa theologica* 1, n. 346 [Quaracchi ed. 1: 514].

³¹Ibid. 1, n. 25.2; 1: 41.

of creatures wherever they are found, and postulates the existence of the purely immutable being which we call God.

It is natural that, in the same chapter, the *Summa* of Alexander should borrow from Anselm, himself inspired by Augustine, a proof of the existence of God based on the existence of truth.³² These proofs reveal the same mentality. We cannot conceive of a time, Anselm said, when it was not true that something was going to be, nor of a time when it will cease to be true that something is going to be. It is therefore always true that there has been and that there will be something; therefore truth has neither beginning nor end. Consequently, Alexander adds in his turn, truth is eternal. We call it the divine essence (*et hanc dicimus divinam essentiam*). This time we can make no mistake about it: whoever succeeds in reaching the essence "God" reaches God.

Under these conditions, the simplest procedure was to follow Anselm's royal road to God, a road on which one has no sooner set out than he has arrived. The *Summa* of Alexander sets out along it with determination and even with evident satisfaction. Since essence here always precedes existence, existential being is always confused with the being of predication: "The best is the best, therefore the best is, because in the notion '*is the best*', the intellect includes being."³³ To show the divine *essentiality* is identical to showing that God exists; and to establish it, it is enough to show that the non-existence of God is unthinkable (*ad divinam essentialitatem declarandam, ostendendum est eam sic notam esse ut non possit cogitari non esse*).³⁴ We can certainly agree that Thomas was not misrepresenting the position of those whom he charged with having made a self-evident truth of the existence of God.

Even a quick examination of the texts of Bonaventure would lead just as forcefully to the same conclusion. I have observed elsewhere that Bonaventure's whole concern in this matter tended to make the existence of God appear evident rather than to demonstrate it.³⁵ Now we can see the profound reason for this. Since the divine *essentialitas* dominates the whole problem, it is less Bonaventure's concern to establish God's existence than to make clear his eminent intelligibility. Since God is being by definition, speaking of God is speaking of a being. Hence the typical statement: "If God is God, God exists; now

³²Ibid. 1. n. 25.3; 1: 41-42. See Anselm, *De veritate* 1 (PL 158: 468-469 [ed. Schmitt 1: 176-177]), and Augustine, *Soliloquia* 2.15, n. 28 (PL 32: 898). Alexander's editors rightly observe that here the *Summa* only cites Augustine *ad sensum*, and refer in addition to *Soliloquia* 2.2, n. 2 (PL 32: 886), and 2.17, n. 31 (PL 32: 900).

³³Alexander of Hales, *Summa theologica* 1, n. 25.4 [Quaracchi ed. 1: 42]. Note this example of the confusion often pointed out by Thomas between *est* as the copula of the judgment and *est* signifying existence.

³⁴Ibid. n. 26 [Quaracchi ed. 1: 42].

³⁵E. Gilson, *The Philosophy of Saint Bonaventure*, trans. Illyd Trethowan and Frank J. Sheed (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1940), pp. 117-138.

the antecedent (namely, "God is God") is so true that we cannot conceive his non-existence; it is therefore absolutely true that God exists."³⁶ This would be astonishing if we did not know the notion of being implied in these statements. For the existence of God to be similar to the being of the copula predicating God himself, Bonaventure must think of it as being the same as the relation of the divine essence to itself, that is, he reduces existential being to essential being. We thus come directly to some statements as close as possible to those Thomas will criticize:

The truth of the divine being is evident both in itself and when demonstrated. In itself, because principles are evident in themselves, since we know them as soon as we know their terms, and because the cause of the predicate is included in the subject. Such is the case here, because God, or the supreme truth, is the being than which none better can be conceived. Therefore it cannot not be nor be conceived as not being. Indeed, the predicate is included in the subject (*praedicatum enim clauditur in subjecto*). And this truth is not only evident in itself, but also by demonstration, for all truth and all nature prove conclusively that divine truth exists, since, if there is a being by participation and by another, it is because there is a being by essence and by itself.³⁷

In short, the existence of any truth whatsoever testifies that God exists, but this is only because the being here at stake is that of an essence, which is the being of truth.

Section 3. The Existence of God as a Problem

When Thomas substituted the point of view of existence for that of essence, he found that he had not only to look for new proofs for the existence of God, but that he had first of all to emphasize the fact that the existence of God requires a demonstration properly so-called. His doctrine, therefore, immediately stressed the existence of God as a specific problem, as opposed to the reduction of the problem to that of divine essence in the theologies of essence. Most significant in this regard is the attitude Thomas adopted in his *Commentary on the Sentences*. Like the others, he does not undertake to demonstrate the existence of God in this work, for the problem does not arise for the commentator on Peter Lombard. But at the very place where the *Summa* of Alexander and the *Commentary* of Bonaventure undertook to show that the existence of God is self-evident, Thomas devotes an article to prove that it is not.

³⁶Bonaventure, *De mysterio Trinitatis* 1.1.29 [Quaracchi ed. 5: 48].

³⁷Bonaventure, *In Sent.* 1.8.1.1.2 [Quaracchi ed. 1: 155]. The substitution of *melius* for *majus* is hardly a change. Anselm himself suggested it to Bonaventure: "Si enim aliqua mens posset cogitare aliquid *melius* te, ascenderet creatura super Creatorem." *Proslogion* 3 (PL 158: 228 [ed. Schmitt 1: 102-103]).

We have already identified the statements to which Thomas objects, but we must now define more precisely the meaning of his refutation of them. His basic objection amounts to the fact that all the arguments showing that God's existence is self-evident make the same mistake: they take for God himself what is only one of his effects. For example, if we admit with John Damascene that we have a natural knowledge of the existence of God, this knowledge will be at most an effect of God or his image stamped in our mind. But to infer from this that God exists demands a proof. If we say with the Augustinians that God can be immediately known by the intellect as light is immediately visible to the eye, or that God is more intimate to the soul than the soul itself, it must be replied that the only beings directly accessible to our knowledge are sensible things. A proof is therefore necessary in order that the mind ascend from the realities given to it in experience to the reality of God who is not so given. Anselm's argument contains the same error. If we begin with the principle that there is a being than which none greater can be conceived, it goes without saying that such a being exists, but his existence is only evident by virtue of this supposition. In other words, the argument amounts to saying that we cannot understand that God exists and conceive at the same time that he does not exist. But we can very well think that there does not exist a being than which none greater can be conceived. In brief, the idea of existence is never the equivalent of existence. Something existing is found or inferred, it is not deduced.³⁸

So far as we can judge from the text of Thomas Aquinas, his attitude may be first explained by his familiarity with a world inadequately understood by many theologians, namely, the world of the philosophers. Useful as the philosophy of Aristotle was to Christians, the universe it described was hardly a Christian universe. We have only to read the first book of the *Metaphysics* to meet Democritus and others, who seem to have dispensed with a first efficient cause and hence with God.³⁹ That there are such people may surprise pious souls, but they exist all the same and must be reckoned with. There would be no atheists if the existence of God were so evident that it required no proof. Besides, Aristotle himself has proved the existence of God in both his *Physics* and his *Metaphysics*. Since it has been proven, it is not self-evident. And it required proof, because where intuitive experience of God is wanting, his existence can only be affirmed after an induction based on his effects.

³⁸Thomas observes that any proposition known *per se* is known immediately through the senses. Thus when we see whole and part, we know at once, without looking further, that the whole is greater than the part. See *In Sent.* 1.3.1.2, sol. [ed. Mandonnet-Moos 1: 94]. It would be difficult to show more forcefully the empirical origin of all evidence, however abstract it may seem to be.

³⁹*Ibid.* and *In Metaph.* 1.7 [ed. Cathala-Spiazzi, p. 34, n. 112].

In outlining the method of such a proof in his *Commentary on the Sentences*, Thomas makes this interesting remark: "And such is Avicenna's proof in his *De Intelligentiis*, ch. 1."⁴⁰ Perhaps this is not simply a coincidence. It is not surprising that one of his most clearly existentialist predecessors should have called Thomas' attention to the existential aspect of the problem. But no one teaches us something we did not already vaguely know ourselves, and it might easily be shown that Avicenna was actually anticipating the essentialism of Duns Scotus rather than the existentialism of Thomas. However that may be, Thomas will never modify the position he adopted here in the *Commentary on the Sentences*. In his two *Summae*, he only returns in all essentials to his earlier criticisms of the alleged evidence for the existence of God.

To the notion, based on a text of John Damascene, that we have innate knowledge that God exists, Thomas is careful not to deny that there may be something innate about our knowledge of the existence of God. As usual, he does not completely reject a notion that he thinks susceptible of a reasonable interpretation. This principle governs the whole of his textual exegesis. He takes pains to interpret a text in the sense in which it is true. In the present case, he notes that what is innate in us is not the actual knowledge that God exists but the natural light of reason and its principles, through which we can ascend to God, the first cause, by way of his effects. How justified was this reservation we shall see when the time comes to study the origin of our knowledge. When it is said, furthermore, that we know God naturally since we tend toward him as our end, we shall also have to admit this up to a certain point and in a certain sense. For it is very true that we tend naturally toward God, since we tend toward our beatitude, which is God. But a distinction must be made. We tend toward happiness, and our happiness is God, but we can tend toward happiness without knowing that our happiness is God. In fact, some think the highest good is riches, others pleasure. Consequently, we tend naturally toward God and we know him in a confused way. To know that a man is approaching is not to know Peter, even though it is Peter who is approaching. Similarly, to know there is a sovereign good is not to know God, even though God is the sovereign good.⁴¹

This argument, which first appears as a purely epistemological discussion, rests ultimately on an observation of metaphysical significance. What dominates the problem is the fact that the being we know is not that of God. Because every object of experience needs God as its cause, we can begin with it to show that God exists. But because the existence given us is not that of God, we must prove it. This is why the argument from truth, whatever its form, cannot be taken as

⁴⁰*In Sent.* 1.3.1.2, sol. [ed. Mandonnet-Moos 1: 94]. The *De Intelligentiis* is an apocryphal work of Avicenna; see *De ver.* 10.12, resp.

⁴¹*ST* 1.2.1, ad 1; *SCG* 1.2, ad 4 [6]; *De ver.* 10.12, ad 1 and ad 5. The full discussion of this point will come later when dealing with the controversial subject of the natural desire to see God.

conclusive. We are told that truth exists, that God is truth, and that consequently he exists. Now, it is quite true that there is truth, just as there is being; but the fact that truths exist only implies the existence of the truths in question, just as the fact that certain beings exist of itself only implies their existence. If what we wish to attain is the existence that we think about, then to pass from truths empirically given to their first cause is to pass from one existence to another, and this can only be done by an act of faith or through a demonstration.⁴²

There still remains the argument of the *Prosligion*, which takes on different forms in Alexander of Hales and Bonaventure: it is unthinkable that God does not exist. For Thomas, the argument has two chief defects. The first is to suppose that everyone necessarily understands by the term "God" a being such that one cannot conceive a greater. Many of the ancients thought that the universe was God, and we can easily think of a being superior to the universe. Moreover, among all John Damascene's interpretations of this name, none is reducible to this definition. For many minds, the existence of God would not be evident a priori. The second defect in the argument is that, even if we grant that everyone understands by the word "God" a being than which none greater can be conceived, it does not follow that such a being really exists. The inference is in no way valid. From the fact that we understand this definition, it simply follows that God exists for our understanding, not that he exists in reality.⁴³ There is, therefore, no contradiction in holding at the same time that God cannot not be conceived as existing, and that nevertheless he does not exist. The case would be entirely different if it were conceded that there exists a being than which none greater can be conceived. Evidently, if such a being exists it is God. But since, by hypothesis, the opponent denies his existence, by this argument we cannot make him agree with us.

It is not this conclusion that separates Thomas and his opponents, for all agree with it, but the means of verifying it. They agree not only that God exists but that by full right he necessarily exists. But they differ on the problem of method, which is basically a problem of metaphysics. Proceeding from essence to existence, we shall have to look for the proof of God's existence in the notion of God. Proceeding from existence to essence, we shall have to use proofs for the existence of God in order to form a notion of his essence. Thomas takes the second point of view. After proving the existence of a first cause, he will show, through the proofs of its existence, that the first cause is the being than which none greater can be conceived, and that it cannot be conceived as non-existent. The existence of God, then, will be certain by demonstration and never by intuition.

For this knowledge, which is evident in itself, to be equally evident for us, we would have to see the divine essence, and this is not granted to us naturally.

⁴²ST 1.2.1, ad 3.

⁴³Ibid. ad 2; SCG 1.11 [3].

Thomas adds that it will be evident for us in heaven, where we shall behold God's essence. Then it will be self-evident to us that God exists, and we shall know much better than we do now that a thing cannot be and not be at the same time and under the same aspect. For the essence of nothing we know includes its existence. If it exists, it cannot not exist, but it is possible that it not exist. The impossibility of affirming the non-existence of an actually existing thing is therefore just as conditional as the very existence of the thing. On the other hand, those who see the divine essence see in it the existence of a being that, since it is the very act of being, cannot not exist.⁴⁴

This shows us how wide of the mark those are who claim that in this life we have an evident knowledge of the existence of God. They are perfect believers who take their faith for evidence. Their mistake does them personally no harm. But it is dangerous to lead unbelievers to think that such reasons for the existence of God are the only ones a philosopher can have. Given frivolous arguments, those who have neither faith in God nor proofs of his existence conclude that God does not exist. As for those who see the weakness of such arguments but believe in the existence of God, they simply come to the conclusion that, since this truth is neither evident nor demonstrable, it can only be accepted by an act of faith.

Moses Maimonides knew theologians of this kind.⁴⁵ The only philosophical justification of their attitude would be that our proofs had to be based on the essence of God. As we have just seen, this is neither necessary nor possible. To see the essence of God is to have an intuition of his existence, and this intuition removes all possibility of proof. Not to see the essence of God is to lack the proper concept necessary to be certain about his existence. So we have no other recourse in this life than to ascend to God by our intelligence, starting with the sensible knowledge of his effects. In doing this, we do no more than give full philosophical meaning to the words of the Apostle: "The invisible things of God are clearly seen from the things he has made" (Rom 1:20). All theologians and Christian philosophers who have spoken about the existence of God have quoted these words, but Thomas took them in all their living force. For him, they mean that we can begin with God's effects and come to know his existence, and that we can only know it by demonstrating it from his effects. We go from the existences we experience to the inferred existence of their cause. In thus revealing in its purity the profound meaning of the simple question: Does God exist? Thomas gave full meaning to the very problem he was about to solve. It was he who made it what we shall henceforth rightly call the problem of the *existence* of God.

⁴⁴*De ver.* 10.12, end of resp.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, at the beginning of the response. There is no indication that Thomas knew the supporters of this thesis. See Gilson, "Les seize premiers Theoremata et la pensée de Duns Scot," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen âge* 13-14 (1937-1938): 55, n. 1, 59, n. 1.

PART I. Chapter Two

The Proofs of the Existence of God

Five proofs of the existence of God appear in the *Summa theologiae* and four in the *Summa contra Gentiles*.¹ In the two Summas the proofs are substantially the same, but their manner of exposition is different. The proofs in the *Summa theologiae* are generally presented in a very succinct and simplified form (let us not forget that it was written for beginners) and, as the Prologue states, they approach the problem from the most metaphysical point of view. In the *Summa contra Gentiles*, on the contrary, the philosophical proofs are developed in great detail. We might add that they approach the problem from a more physical point of view, appealing more often to sensible experience. We shall deal successively with each proof as presented in the two accounts.

Section 1. The Proof from Motion

Although Thomas regarded all his five proofs of the existence of God as equally conclusive, their different bases are not equally easy to grasp. From this point of view the proof based on the consideration of movement is better than the other four.² That is why Thomas tries to elucidate it completely, demonstrating even its very minor propositions.

The proof appears originally in Aristotle.³ It remained unknown for as long as Aristotelian physics was itself unknown, that is, until about the end of the twelfth century. If we consider as characteristic of this proof the fact that its point of departure is the consideration of cosmic movement, and that it establishes the principle that nothing moves itself upon the concepts of potency and act,⁴ then we can say that it reappears for the first time in Adelhard of Bath.

¹For a useful book on this subject see Engelbert Krebs, *Scholastische Texte 1. Thomas von Aquin, Texte zum Gottesbeweis, ausgewählt und chronologisch geordnet* (Bonn: Marcus and Weber, 1912). The texts of the different Thomistic proofs are collected there in chronological order. On the general difficulties in interpretation of the doctrine see the first lesson, "Le labyrinthe des cinq voies" in E. Gilson, "Trois leçons sur le problème de l'existence de Dieu," *Divinitas* 5 (1961): 24–46; same author, "Prolégomènes à la Prima Via," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen âge* 30 (1963): 53–70.

²ST 1.2.3, resp.

³*Phys.* 8.5, 246a3–258b9; *Metaph.* 12.6, 1071b3–7, 1073a12. On this point see Eugen Rolfes, *Die Gottesbeweise bei Thomas von Aquin und Aristoteles*, 2nd ed. (Limburg: Steffen, 1926), and the texts of Aristotle collected and translated into Latin in René Arnou, *De quinque viis sancti Thomae ad demonstrandam Dei existentiam apud antiquos Graecos et Arabes et Judaeos praeformatis vel adumbratis* (Rome: Gregorianum, 1932), pp. 21–46.

⁴See Clemens Baeumker, *Witelo, ein Philosoph und Naturforscher des XIII Jahrhunderts* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1908), p. 322 ff.

It is found in its complete form in Albert the Great, who gives it as an addition to the proofs of Peter Lombard, and who borrowed it undoubtedly from Maimonides.⁵

The *Summa theologiae* presents the proof as follows. It is certain that there is motion in the world because our senses tell us so. Now, anything that moves is moved by something. Nothing, moreover, is moved unless it is in potency to that toward which it is moved. Conversely, nothing moves except to the extent that it is in act.* Now, to move something is to make it pass from potency to act, and a thing cannot be brought from potency to act except by a being in act. It is heat in act, for example fire, that makes wood, which was hot only potentially, actually hot, and in making it burn moves and alters it. But it is impossible for a thing to be in act and in potency at the same time and in the same respect. What is actually hot cannot be at the same time actually cold, but only cold in potency. It is therefore impossible that something be in the same way and in the same respect mover and moved; in short, that it move itself. From this we see that whatever is moved is moved by something else. If, however, that by which a thing is moved is itself moved, it is moved in its turn by some other mover, which mover is moved by another, and so on. This cannot go on to infinity, for then there would be no first mover and consequently no mover at all, because the second mover only moves because the first mover moves it, as a stick only moves because it is moved by a hand. To explain motion, therefore, it is necessary to go back to a first mover that nothing moves, that is, to God.⁶

We have already pointed out the very general character of the idea of motion.⁷ It is reduced to the notions of potency and act, transcendentals that divide all being. What provides the basis for the entire proof in the *Summa theologiae* is given as but one of the possible grounds of the proof in the *Summa contra Gentiles*,⁸ and this proof is presented there under two forms, direct and indirect. Aristotle's direct proof can be summarized as follows.⁹ Whatever is moved is moved by something else. Now, our senses tell us that there is motion, for example the movement of the sun. The sun, however, is moved because something moves it. Now, whatever moves the sun is either moved or not moved. If it is not moved, then we have our conclusion: We must grant that there is an unmoved mover, whom we call God. If it is moved, it is because another mover

⁵Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, 2.1 [trans. Shlomo Pines, pp. 235–246]; Louis-Germain Lévy, *Maimonide* (Paris: Alcan, 1911), pp. 126–127. The texts of Maimonides can be found conveniently in Arnou, *De quinque viis*, pp. 73–79.

*[For the notions of potency and act see below, pp. 207–208.]

⁶ST 1.2.3, resp.

⁷To move is simply to change, whatever kind of change it may be: "Quod autem se aliter habet nunc quam prius, movetur" (SCG 2.33 [4]).

⁸Simon Weber, *Der Gottesbeweis aus der Bewegung bei Thomas von Aquin auf seinem Wortlaut untersucht* (Freiburg-im-Breisgau: Herder, 1902).

⁹Aristotle, *Phys.* 7.1, 241b–243a 2; cited by Arnou, *De quinque viis*, pp. 21–25.

moves it. We must, then, either go on to infinity or else we must affirm that there is an unmoved mover. Now, we cannot go on to infinity, and so we must grant that there is a first unmoved mover.

In this proof two propositions must be established: that everything is moved by something else, and that we cannot go on to infinity in the series of movers and things moved.

Aristotle uses three arguments to prove the first proposition, which rests on three assumptions. First, for a thing to move itself, it must have in itself the principle of its movement, otherwise it would obviously be moved by something else. The second is that the thing should move immediately, that is, move itself by reason of its whole self and not by reason of one of its parts, as an animal is moved by the movement of its foot; in which case it cannot be said that the whole moves itself, but only that one part of the whole moves another part. The third is that the thing be divisible and possess parts, since according to Aristotle whatever moves is divisible. If this is granted, we can show that nothing moves itself. If we suppose that a thing moves itself, it is moved immediately, and therefore when one of its parts is at rest the whole is at rest.¹⁰ If, indeed, one part were at rest and another part in motion, it would no longer be the whole thing that would be moved immediately but only the part in movement, while the other part was at rest. Now, nothing whose rest depends upon the rest of another moves itself. Indeed, if the rest of one thing depends upon the rest of another, its movement too must depend upon the movement of another, and consequently it does not move itself. And since what is thought to be moving itself is not moving itself, it necessarily follows that whatever moves is moved by another.¹¹

Aristotle's second proof of this principle is an induction.¹² Whatever is moved by accident is not moved by itself, but its motion depends upon the motion of another. This is also evident in anything subjected to violent motion, and also in anything that is moved by nature and contains within itself the principle of its movement, like animals that are moved by their soul. Finally, it is clear in anything that is moved by nature without having in itself the principle of its motion, such as heavy or light bodies that are moved by their place of origin. Now, whatever is moved, is moved by itself or by accident. If it is moved by accident, it is not moved by itself. If it is moved by itself, it is moved either violently or by nature. If it is moved by nature, it is moved either by its own

¹⁰We accept the reading *sequitur* since *non sequitur* seems absolutely unacceptable. On this textual controversy see Georg Grunwald, *Geschichte der Gottesbeweise im Mittelalter bis zum Ausgang der Hochscholastik* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1907), p. 136 and notes, where all the necessary references are to be found. The Leonine edition of the *SCG* 1.13 [6] adopted this reading. See Leonine ed. 13: 31.

¹¹Aristotle, *Phys.* 7.1, 242a4–15.

¹²*Ibid.* 8.4, 255b29–256a.

nature, as in the case of an animal, or not by itself, like heavy or light bodies. Thus whatever is moved is moved by another.

Aristotle's third proof is as follows:¹³ Nothing is in potency and in act at the same time and in the same respect. But everything is in potency insofar as it is moved, because movement is the act of what is in potency inasmuch as it is in potency. Now, whatever moves is, insofar as it moves, in act, because nothing acts save according as it is in act. Therefore nothing is at the same time and in the same respect a mover in act and moved; consequently no thing moves itself.

It remains to prove the second proposition, namely, that it is impossible to go back to infinity in the series of movers and things moved. Here again we find Aristotle giving three arguments.

The first is as follows:¹⁴ If we go back to infinity in the series of movers and things moved, we must hold that there is an infinite number of bodies, for whatever is moved is divisible and consequently is a body. Now, every body that moves and is moved, is moved at the same time that it moves. Therefore the entire infinity of bodies that move because moved must move simultaneously when one of them moves. But since each one of them, taken by itself, is finite, it must move in a finite time, and therefore the infinity of bodies that must move at the same time it moves, must move in a finite time. Now, this is impossible. Therefore we cannot to go back to infinity in the series of movers and things moved.

Aristotle proves that it is impossible for an infinite number of bodies to move in finite time as follows: What moves and what is moved must exist together, as can be shown inductively by running through all the species of movement. But bodies can only exist together by continuity or by contiguity. Therefore, since all these movers and things moved are necessarily bodies, they must form a single mobile object whose parts would be continuous or contiguous.¹⁵ Thus, a single infinite body will have to be moved in a finite time, which Aristotle proved impossible.¹⁶

The second argument proving the impossibility of an infinite regression is this:¹⁷ When a series of movers and things moved are ordered, that is, when they form a series in which each one moves the next, it is inevitable that, if the first mover disappeared or ceased to move, none of the rest would any longer be either a mover or thing moved. It is the first mover, indeed, that confers the power of moving on all the others. Now, if we have an infinite series of movers and things moved, there will not be a first mover and all will be intermediate

¹³Ibid. 8.5, 257b7-12.

¹⁴Ibid. 7.2, 242b5-15.

¹⁵Ibid. 7.1, 242a16-31.

¹⁶Ibid. 6.7, 237b23-238a18.

¹⁷Ibid. 8.5, 256a4-256b3.

movers. Therefore, if the action of the first mover is wanting, nothing will be moved and there will be no movement in the world.

The third argument is the same as the preceding, except that the order of the terms is reversed. We begin with the higher term and reason as follows: The instrumental moving cause can only move if there exists some principal moving cause. But if we go back to infinity in the series of movers and things moved, all will be at the same time mover and moved. There will therefore only be instrumental causes, and since there will be no principal moving cause, there will be no movement in the world unless we see an axe or saw make something without the action of a carpenter.

Thus we have proved the two propositions found at the basis of Aristotle's first demonstration establishing the existence of a first immobile mover.

The same conclusion can also be established indirectly, that is, by establishing that the proposition "whatever moves is moved" is not a necessary proposition.¹⁸ If, indeed, whatever moves is moved, and if the proposition is true by accident, then it is not necessary. It is therefore possible that none of the things that move is moved. But the opponent himself has admitted that what is not moved does not move. If, therefore, it is possible that nothing is moved, it is possible that nothing moves and that, consequently, there may be no motion. Now, Aristotle holds that it is impossible that at any moment whatsoever there be no motion. Our point of departure is accordingly unacceptable, namely, that it is impossible that none of the things that move is not moved, and consequently that the proposition "whatever moves is moved by another" is true necessarily and not by accident.

The same conclusion can also be proved by an appeal to experience. If two properties are accidentally joined in a subject, and if we can find one of them without the other, it is probable that we can also find the second without the first. For example, if we find *white* and *musician* in Socrates and Plato, and if we can find *musician* without *white*, it is probable that in some other subject we could find *white* without *musician*. If, then, the properties "mover" and "movable" are accidentally united in some subject, and if we find somewhere the property of being moved without the property of mover, it is probable that we could find elsewhere a mover that is not moved.¹⁹ The conclusion here goes beyond what we set out to establish. In proving that the proposition "whatever moves is moved is not true by accident" we shall prove at the same time that if the relation of the mover to what is movable were accidental, we would at the same time prove the possibility (or better the probability) of a prime mover.

¹⁸Ibid. 8.5, 256b3-13.

¹⁹Maimonides already used this argument in his *Guide of the Perplexed* 2.1 [trans. Pines, pp. 245-246]. It had also been used by Albert the Great, *De causis et processu universitatis* 1, 7 [ed. Borgnet (Vivès ed., Paris, 1891) 10: 374b]. On the same point, with different examples see Baeumker, *Witelo*, p. 326.

The proposition “whatever moves is moved” is not therefore true by accident. Is it true essentially?²⁰ If it is true essentially, there still arises an impossibility. Whatever moves can either receive a movement of the same kind as it gives or a movement of a different kind. If it is a movement of the same kind, then it follows that whatever causes alteration will be altered, whatever heals will be healed, whatever instructs will be instructed, and this under the same aspect and in the same science. But this is impossible, for if he who instructs must first be in possession of the science, it is equally necessary that he who learns the science be not in possession of it. If, on the other hand, it is a question of a motion that is not of the same kind, so that what imparts an alteration receives a local motion, and whatever moves in place receives an increase, and so on, it will follow (since the genera and species of movement are finite in number), that it will be impossible to proceed to infinity. Thus there will be a first mover that is not moved by any other.

One might say, perhaps, that after having run through all the genera and species of movement, we must return to the first genus and close the circle. Thus, if what imparts local motion were altered, and if what causes alteration were increased, then what gives increase will in its turn be moved locally. But we would always come to the same conclusion. What moves according to a given species of movement would be moved according to the same species. The only difference is that it would be moved mediately rather than immediately. In both cases, the same impossibility compels us to posit a first mover that is moved by nothing outside itself.

But the second proof is not complete. From the fact that there exists a first mover that is not moved from outside, it does not follow that an absolutely immovable first mover exists. This is why Aristotle says that the formula “unmoved first mover” can be taken in two senses. First, it can mean an absolutely immovable first mover, and if we take it in this sense our conclusion stands. Second, it can mean that this first mover is not moved from outside but that it can move itself, and consequently it is not absolutely immovable. But is this first mover that moves itself moved in its entirety by its entire self? If so, we will once again encounter the preceding difficulties, namely, that the same being is instructing and instructed, in potency and act at the same time and in the same respect. But if we say, on the contrary, that only one part of the being is moving, while the other part is only moved, then our conclusion holds: There exists, at least, as a part, a mover that is nothing else but a mover, that is, one that moves without being moved.²¹

Here we reach the last stage of our long inquiry. The preceding argument proves that in the first mover, which nothing moves from outside, the mover-

²⁰Aristotle, *Phys.* 8.5, 256b28–257a28.

²¹Ibid. 8.5, 257a–258b9. See *SCG* 1.13 [21].

principle is itself immovable. So here once again it is only a question of the motive part, itself immovable, of a being that moves itself. Now, what moves itself is moved by the desire of obtaining the object toward which it moves. In this sense, the motive part of the being that moves itself is itself moved, if not from outside, at least from within, by the desire it has for the desirable object. To be desired, however, the desirable object itself has nothing more to do than to be what it is. If it moves insofar as desired, it remains totally immovable, like a beautiful object toward which he who sees it moves himself. Thus, beyond the mover that moves itself by desire, there is the object itself causing the desire. The object, then, is at the summit in the order of moving causes, "for whatever desires is, so to speak, a moved mover, whereas the desirable object is a mover that is not at all moved." Since this supreme desirable object is thus the first cause of all movement, we must place it at the origin of becoming: "Hence there must be a first separated mover that is absolutely immovable, and this is God."²²

Such are the essential elements of the proofs of the existence of a first mover given in the *Contra Gentiles*. In the mind of Thomas the notion of an immovable mover and the notion of God are one and the same. In the *Summa theologiae* he thinks that if we speak of the first mover that nothing moves, everyone will know that we are speaking about God.²³ However, Thomas does not ask us to accept this conclusion as clearly evident. We shall have its complete proof when we see all the divine attributes within the reach of human reason flow from the notion of a first immovable mover. Beginning from this single principle, the *Compendium theologiae* in particular demonstrates the simplicity, aseity, unity, and, in a word, all the attributes describing for us the essence of God.²⁴

No doubt it has been noticed that in the preceding proofs there is no allusion to a beginning of motion in time. The proof does not consist in showing that the present motion requires an efficient cause in the past, which would be God. In fact, the word "cause" has not even been mentioned in it; it speaks only of movers and things moved. It aims simply at proving that, in the actually given universe, the actually given motion would be unintelligible without a first mover, which in the present is the source of the movement for all things. In

²²SCG 1.13 [28]. See Aristotle, *Metaph.* 11.7, 1072a19–1072b13. Note Thomas' important remark: "Cum enim omne movens seipsum moveatur per appetitum . . ." Thomas follows Aristotle so faithfully that he ends the first way at the first immovable mover that moves as desired, hence also as the final cause, not as the efficient cause of motion.

²³ST 1.2.3, resp.

²⁴*Comp. theol.* 1.5–41 [Leonine ed. 42: 84–94]. In the SCG 1.13 [25] Thomas only posits the eternity of the first self-moving mover, and this from Aristotle's point of view (*secundum suam positionem*), but it goes without saying that the first immovable and separated mover is even more necessarily eternal.

other words, the impossibility of going back to infinity does not refer to an infinite regression in time, but in the present instant in which we are considering the world. We can put this in another way by saying that the structure of the proof would be the same if we admitted the false hypothesis of the eternity of motion. Thomas knows this and explicitly says so.²⁵

If, however, we accept the Christian belief that the world and motion had a beginning in time, we are in a much better position to prove the existence of God. For if the world and motion had a beginning, it is evident that we would have to posit a cause that has produced them. Whenever something new occurs, there must be a cause of the new event, for nothing can make itself pass from potency to act or from non-being to being. The easier a proof of this sort is, the harder it becomes if we presuppose the eternity of the world and motion; and yet we have seen Thomas prefer this sort of demonstration, though it is relatively difficult and obscure. This is because he thought that a proof of the existence of God based on the necessity of a creator who would make motion and all things appear in time would not be conclusive from the strictly philosophical point of view.²⁶ As we shall see, it could not be proved by reason alone that the world had a temporal beginning. On this subject Thomas was strictly opposed to the common opinion, and he carried his fidelity to Aristotelianism even to this point. To prove the existence of God on the supposition that the world is not eternal would be, in the last analysis, to make the existence of God a truth of faith, dependent upon our belief in the account in Genesis. It would cease to be a philosophical truth proven by demonstrative reasoning. On the contrary, by proving the existence of God on the hypothesis of an eternal motion, Thomas proves it a fortiori on the hypothesis of a universe and motion that had a beginning in time. Hence his proof is philosophically unassailable and consistent with his whole doctrine.

Finally, we must point out why a regression to infinity in the present instant in which we are considering the world would be an absurdity. It is because the serial movers about which we are reasoning here are arranged in a hierarchy. In the hypothesis on which the proof by the first mover rests, everything that is moved is moved by a mover that is superior to it, and consequently it causes both motion and the motive force of the inferior mover. The higher cause must therefore account not only for the movement of any individual whatsoever on the same level, for another individual on the same level would adequately explain it (a stone moves a stone), but it must account for the movement of the species. And if we take our stand within the species, it will not be difficult to find within it the sufficient reason of the individuals and their movements. But

²⁵SCG 1.13 [30].

²⁶Thomas is here only following the example of Maimonides. See Lévy, *Maimonide*, pp. 125–126.

we could not think that each mover, taken in itself, is the first source of its movement, and the same is true for all the individuals of the species under consideration, because for each of them the nature defining it is that of the species. Hence we must look for the sufficient reason of the efficacy of individuals outside and above the species.²⁷ Consequently, either we shall have to suppose that what receives its nature at the same time causes it and therefore that it causes itself, which is absurd, or we must assume that whatever acts in virtue of a nature that has been received is only an instrumental cause that must be led back through higher causes to a first cause: *oportet omnes causas inferiores agentes reduci in causas superiores sicut instrumentales in primarias*.²⁸ In this case, the ascending series of moving causes hierarchically arranged is not only finite but its members are not very numerous: *Videmus enim omnia quae moventur ab aliis moveri, inferiora quidem per superiora; sicut elementa per corpora coelestia, inferiora a superioribus aguntur*.²⁹ The proof of the existence of the prime mover is fully intelligible only on the assumption of a universe that is hierarchically structured.

This is the most famous and frequently cited of Thomas' five proofs of the existence of God. Moreover he preferred it to the others. But it is not easy to interpret. At first glance it only seems to repeat a text of Aristotle. In fact, it does not follow one text of Aristotle but makes a synthesis of passages from Books VII and VIII of the *Physics* and Book XI of the *Metaphysics*. Upon close examination it proves to be composed of two parts of unequal length. One, developed fully, is based on the *Physics*, the other, quite brief, on the *Metaphysics*. A comparison of the two parts reveals that they are very different. The one based on the *Physics* leads the reader toward a conclusion that is really in the realm of physics, or, to be more exact, of cosmology: the existence of a first mover that moves itself and in doing so causes motion in the entire universe. Since this first mover is not completely immovable and separated, it is not God. The problem of the existence of God is directly treated only in the second part of the proof, as a metaphysical problem the solution of which is provided by

²⁷SCG 3.65 [4].

²⁸SCG 2.21 [5]. We introduced the word "cause" here, following the example of Thomas himself, who used it when defining the notion of movers and moved arranged in order (*per ordinem*). See SCG 1.13 [14]. "Instrument" is the correct technical term to designate an intermediary mover which is both mover and moved: "Est enim ratio instrumenti quod sit movens motum" (ibid.). See also *In Phys.* 8.9 [ed. Angeli-Pirotta, p. 471, n. 2188], where this point is insisted upon: "Et hoc (*scil.* the possibility of regression to infinity) magis manifestum est in instrumentis quam in mobilibus ordinatis, licet habeat eandem veritatem; *quia non quilibet consideraret secundum movens esse instrumentum primi*." Thomas' profound remark (ST 1-2.1.4, ad 2) shows the logical basis of the doctrine.

²⁹*Comp. theol.* 1.3 [Leonine ed. 42: 84]. See Joseph Owens, "The Conclusion of the *prima via*," *The Modern Schoolman* 30 (1952/53): 33-53, 109-121, 203-215.

Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. Thomas accepts this solution and reproduces it with remarkable fidelity. The first physical mover moves itself because it desires God. As for God, he is completely immovable and separated since he moves only as an object of desire. How are we, in our turn, to interpret Thomas' proof from motion? Does it truly conclude, as Aristotle thought, that there is a first mover that moves only insofar as it is an object of desire? Or does it go beyond Aristotle to a first efficient cause of motion? Since the same problem arises in regard to Thomas' other proofs of the existence of God, we shall defer discussion until they too have been examined.

Section 2. The Proof from Efficient Cause

The second proof of the existence of God is taken from the notion of efficient cause, *ex ratione causae efficientis*.³⁰ Its origin is to be found in Aristotle,³¹ who says that a regression to infinity is impossible in any of the four kinds of causes: material, moving, final, or formal, and concludes that it is always necessary to go back to a first principle. Two comments are in order. First, Aristotle does not speak here of an *efficient* cause but of a *moving* cause, which is curious because the text is cited by Thomas to justify passing from motive force to efficient causality. Second, Aristotle does not immediately deduce the existence of God from it. Avicenna,³² on the contrary, after him Alan of Lille,³³ and finally Albert the Great³⁴ used Aristotle's argument for this purpose. Of the various forms these thinkers give to the proof, Avicenna's is especially interesting because it is very close to Thomas' proof. They are not so similar, however, as to rule out the possibility that Thomas came to the proof independently by direct and personal study of Aristotle's text.³⁵ Let us proceed now to explain it.

If we consider sensible things, which are the only possible point of departure for a proof of the existence of God, we observe in them an order of efficient causes. But we never find, nor can we find, a being that is its own efficient cause. Since a cause is necessarily prior to its effect, a being would have to be prior to itself in order to be its own efficient cause, which is impossible. On the other hand, it is impossible to go back to infinity in a series of ordered efficient

³⁰On this proof see A. Albrecht, "Das Ursachengesetz und die erste Ursache bei Thomas von Aquin," *Philosophisches Jahrbuch* 33, 2 H (1920): 173–182.

³¹*Metaph.* 2.2, 994a1. See Thomas, *In Metaph.* 2.2 [ed. Cathala-Spiazzi, p. 85, nn. 299–300]. For the history of this proof see Baeumker, *Witelo*, pp. 326–335. See the important note of S. Van den Bergh, *Die Epitome der Metaphysik des Averroes* (Leiden: Brill, 1924), pp. 150–152.

³²See the texts in Baeumker, *Witelo*, pp. 328–330.

³³Alan of Lille, *Ars fidei*, prol. (PL 210: 598–600).

³⁴Albert, *De causis et processu universitatis* 1.1.7 [Vivès ed. 10: 374–376].

³⁵See Grunwald, *Geschichte der Gottesbeweise*, p. 151.

causes. Now, we have noted that there is an order of moving causes, that is, causes so arranged that the first is the cause of the second and the second is the cause of the last. The same is also true of efficient causes, whether it is a question of a single intermediate cause binding the first to the last or of several intermediate causes. In both cases, and whatever the number of intermediate causes, it is the first cause that is the cause of the last effect, so that if the first cause is removed, the effect is removed, and if there is no first member in the series of efficient causes, there will be neither intermediate members nor a last one. Now, if there were an infinite series of causes arranged in this way, there would be neither intermediate efficient causes nor last effect. But in the world around us we observe that there are such causes and such effects. It is therefore necessary to posit a first efficient cause, which everyone calls God.³⁶ The text of the proof in the *Contra Gentiles* is almost identical with that of the *Summa theologiae*. Since the only differences are in the manner of expression, it is useless to dwell on them.

We should note the close relation between Thomas' second proof of the existence of God and the first. In both cases the need of a first cause is based on the impossibility of going back to infinity in an ordered series of causes and effects. Nowhere more than here is one more strongly tempted to accept the recent suggestion that there are not five proofs of God's existence but only one divided into five parts.³⁷ If by this is meant that the five proofs of Thomas are dependent upon one another (and some have gone so far as to regard the proof by a first mover as a mere preparation for the proof) the conclusion is unacceptable.³⁸ Each proof is sufficient in itself. This is eminently true of the proof by the first mover (*prima et manifestior via*). But it is correct to say that the structure of the five proofs of Thomas is identical, even that they form one whole and complete one another. Any one of them is enough to establish the existence of God, but each begins with a different order of effects and consequently brings out a different aspect of the divine causality. While the first brings us to God as the cause of cosmic motion and of all motion dependent on it, the second leads us to him as the cause of the very existence of things. In a doctrine of knowledge that, in regard to the divine essence, subordinates the

³⁶ST 1.2.3, resp.

³⁷A. Audin, "A proposito della dimostrazione tomistica dell'esistenza di Dio," *Rivista di filosofia neo-scolastica* 4 (1912): 758-769. See the criticism of this article by H. Kirfel, "Gottesbeweis oder Gottesbeweise beim hl. Th. von Aquin?," *Jahrbuch für Philosophie und spekulative Theologie [Divus Thomas (Berlin)]* (1913): 451-460.

³⁸It has even been emphasized, and rightly so, that there is an empirical element (in the sense of not being metaphysically necessary) in the choice and order of the proofs proposed by Thomas; see A.R. Motte, "A propos des cinq voies," *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 27 (1938): 577-582.

determination of *what it is* (*quid est*) to that of *whether it is* (*an est*), the multiplicity of converging proofs cannot be considered a matter of indifference.

Finally, it should be pointed out that if the proof by efficient cause, like that by the first mover, rests on the impossibility of carrying the series of causes to infinity, it is because in this case, too, causes arranged essentially are arranged hierarchically as principal and instrumental causes. An infinite series of causes within the same species is not only possible but even necessary in the Aristotelian hypothesis of the eternity of the world. A man can beget a man who, in his turn begets another, and so on to infinity. A series like this has no internal causal order, because it is as a man and not as a son of his father that a man begets another. But do we want to find out the cause of his own specific form as such, the cause in virtue of which he is a man and able to beget another? It is clearly no longer in his own kind but in a being of a higher order that we shall discover it. And just as this superior being explains at once the existence and the causality of the beings subordinated to it, so it holds in its turn its causality from a still higher being. Hence the necessity of a first member of the series. This first member virtually contains the causality of the entire series and of each of its members.³⁹ In the doctrine of Thomas there is not just one efficacy, but there is only one source of the efficacy of the entire world. "Nothing gives being save inasmuch as it participates in the divine power" (*Nulla res dat esse nisi in quantum est in ea participatio divinae virtutis*). This is also why, in the order of efficient causes as in that of moving causes, we must come to a stop at a supreme degree.

Thomas indicates the historical source of this second proof in the *Contra Gentiles*, which explicitly refers to Book II of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. He even presents it as a proof by Aristotle himself in order to show "that it is impossible to proceed to infinity in efficient causes, but that we must come to one single first cause, whom we call God." However, if we examine the passage Thomas seems to have had in mind (*Metaph.* 2.2, 994a 1–19), we are struck by the fact that here there is no direct question of an efficient cause. Aristotle is showing that it is impossible to go back to infinity in any of the four kinds of causes: material, moving, final and formal, but there is no mention of the efficient cause properly speaking. The problem that came up before when treating of the moving cause reappears here with an even greater urgency. Is Thomas simply following Aristotle, or is he putting to his own use the letter of the arguments to which he would give a new meaning?

³⁹ST 1.46.2, ad 7, and 1.104.1. "Quod est secundum aliquam naturam causatum, non potest esse simpliciter illius naturae causa, esset enim sui ipsius causa: potest autem esse causa illius naturae in hoc; sicut Plato est causa humanae naturae in Socrate, non autem simpliciter, eo quod ipse est causatus in humana natura" (*SCG* 2.21 [28]).

Section 3. *The Proof from Necessity*

The point of departure for the third proof is the distinction between what is possible and what is necessary.⁴⁰ Two premises can be regarded as the foundations of the proof. The first is that what is possible is contingent, that is, it can either be or not be, and thus it is opposed to what is necessary. The second is that what is possible does not have its existence from itself or from its essence but from an efficient cause that gives it existence. With these propositions and the principle already proven, that it is impossible to go back to infinity in a series of efficient causes, we have everything we need to establish our proof. But we should begin by explaining how it appears in history.

Insofar as the third proof considers what is possible as having no existence of itself, it takes for granted a certain distinction between essence and existence in created things. This distinction, which the Arabian philosophers, and chiefly Alfarabi, brought to light, became the hidden source of the Thomistic proofs of the existence of God. It had provided Avicenna with the basis of a distinctive proof in which we see at work the two premises we just mentioned.⁴¹ A slightly modified form of the proof appears in Maimonides, who no doubt took it from Avicenna.⁴² Finally, we find it in the *Summa theologiae*, where, as Baeumker pointed out, it follows step by step the proof of the Jewish theologian.⁴³

⁴⁰On this proof see Paul Gény, "A propos des preuves thomistes de l'existence de Dieu," *Revue de philosophie* 31 (1924): 575-601; A.-D. Sertillanges, "A propos des preuves de Dieu. La troisième voie thomiste," *Revue de philosophie* 32 (1925): 319-330; same author, "Le P. Descoqs et la 'tertia via'," *Revue thomiste* 9 (1926): 490-502; (see P. Descoqs, *Archives de philosophie* 4 [1926]: 490-503); Lucien Chambat, "La 'tertia via' dans saint Thomas et Aristotle," *Revue thomiste* 10 (1927): 334-338, and the remarks of Charles-Vincent Héris in *Bulletin thomiste* 5 (1928): 317-320; Maurice Bouyges, "Exégèse de la Tertia Via de saint Thomas," *Revue de philosophie* 32 (1932): 115-146; Henri Holstein, "L'origine aristotélicienne de la tertia via de saint Thomas," *Revue philosophique de Louvain* 48 (1950): 354-370. See H.-D. Simonin, *Bulletin thomiste* 8 (1951): 237-241; U. degl' Innocenti, "La validità della III via," *Doctor Communis* 1 (1954): 42-70.

⁴¹The elements of this proof appear to come from Aristotle, *Metaph.* 9.8, 1050b 2-20. For Avicenna's demonstration see Nematallah Carame, *Avicennae Metaphysices Compendium* (Rome: Institut Pontifical d'Études Orientales, 1926), pp. 91-111; Joseph T. Muckle, *Algazel's Metaphysics* (Toronto: St. Michael's College, 1933), pp. 46-51. On these doctrines see Bernard Carra de Vaux, *Avicenne* (Paris: Alcan, 1900), p. 266 ff., and Djémil Saliba, *Étude sur la métaphysique d'Avicenne* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1926), pp. 96-113. The essential texts can be found in René Arnou, *De quinque viis*, pp. 59-68. For Gény's criticism of this proof in his article cited above, n.40, see Gilson, "Trois leçons sur le problème de l'existence de Dieu," pp. 33-34.

⁴²See the text of Maimonides in Arnou, *De quinque viis*, pp. 79-82.

⁴³See Baeumker, *Witelo*, p. 338.

Maimonides begins with the fact that there are beings,⁴⁴ and in this connection there can be three cases: (1) no being is born or perishes; (2) all beings are born and perish; (3) there are beings that are born and perish, and some that are not born and do not perish. The first case is not worth discussing; experience shows us that there are beings that are born and perish. Neither does the second case stand scrutiny. If all beings could be born and perish, it would follow that at a given moment all beings would necessarily have perished. For indeed, as far as the individual is concerned, an individual that is possible may or may not be realized, but with respect to the species it must inevitably be realized;⁴⁵ otherwise the word "possibility" is meaningless. Therefore, if it were truly possible for all beings, considered as forming one single species, to go out of existence, they would have already done so. But if they had gone out of existence, they would never have been able of themselves to come back into existence, and consequently today nothing would exist. We see that something does exist. So we must admit that only the third hypothesis is true. Certain beings are born and perish, but there is one with no possibility of perishing and that possesses necessary existence, namely, the first being, which is God.

This proof does not appear in the *Summa contra Gentiles*, but it is found almost word for word as the third way to prove the existence of God in the *Summa theologiae*. There are, says Thomas, things that are born and die, and consequently that can either be or not be. But it is impossible that everything of this kind should always exist, because when the non-being of a thing is possible, there finally comes a moment when it does not exist. If, therefore, the non-being of everything were possible, there would have come a moment when nothing would have existed. But if it were true that such a moment had come, then nothing would now exist, because what does not exist cannot begin to be without the intervention of something that does exist. Consequently, if at this moment no being existed, it was absolutely impossible for anything to begin to be, and nothing would any longer exist, which is clearly false. We cannot say, then, that all beings are possible beings, and we must acknowledge the existence of a necessary being. Finally, this necessary being can have its necessity from itself or from another. We cannot go back to infinity in the series of beings that have their necessity from another, no more than in the series of efficient causes, as already shown. So we must inevitably posit a being that is necessary of itself,

⁴⁴See Arnou, *De quinque viis*, or Maimonides, *Guide* 2.1 [trans. Pines, p. 247]; Louis-Germain Lévy, *Maimonide*, pp. 127-128; E.S. Koplowitz, "Die Abhängigkeit Thomas von Aquin von R. Mose Ben Maimon," private publication, Mir (prov. Stolpce, Poland, 1935), pp. 36-40.

⁴⁵An "Aristotelian conception" according to Baeumker, *Witelo*, p. 128, n. 2. See the explanation given by Maimonides himself when consulted about this passage by the translator Ibn Tibbon (Lévy, *Maimonide*, p. 128, n. 1): "If we say that writing is possible for the human species (he said), it is necessary that at a given moment there be men who write. To maintain that no man ever wrote nor will write would be to say that writing is impossible for the human species."

and that does not have the cause of its necessity from another, but on the contrary causes the necessity of other things. This is the being everyone calls God.⁴⁶

Thomas' third proof of the existence of God is related to the first in that it also assumes, and even more obviously, the eternity of the world. If the Jewish philosopher and the Christian philosopher both admit that in the event that the non-being of all things might have been possible, a moment would necessarily have come when nothing would have existed, it is because they are reasoning with the hypothesis that time is of infinite duration, and if time is infinite a possible being worthy of the name cannot fail to be realized. No doubt—and we have already noted this insofar as Thomas is concerned—they do not really accept the eternity of the world. But as Maimonides says, they wish “to confirm the existence of God, in which we believe, by a method of demonstration that is incontestable, so as not to rest this true and important doctrine upon a basis that anyone can shake and that someone else can even consider as worthless.”⁴⁷ Maimonides and Thomas are here in complete agreement.

It is easy to see the advantage of this third demonstration: God, already known as the moving and efficient cause of all things, is henceforth known as a necessary being. This is a conclusion we shall have to recall more than once. Here again the problem arises of the extent to which Thomas is merely following the writers whose arguments he borrows. The question can hardly be avoided, above all with regard to Avicenna and Aristotle himself, whose principles underlie the proof. The notion of “necessary being” implies the notion of being, and its necessity will be determined by the sort of being you are talking about. To be more precise, since as we have seen, this proof presupposes a certain distinction of essence and existence, it is probable that what was new in Thomas' conception of existence has given an equally new meaning even to those elements of his proof that he most obviously borrowed.

Section 4. The Proof from the Degrees of Being

The fourth proof of the existence of God is based on an examination of the degrees of being. Of all the Thomistic proofs none has given rise to so many different interpretations.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ST 1.2.3, resp.

⁴⁷Maimonides, *Guide* 1.71 [trans. Pines, p. 182].

⁴⁸On this proof see the studies of Robert Joly, *La preuve de l'existence de Dieu par les degrés de l'être: "Quarta via" de la Somme théologique. Sources et exposés* (Ghent, 1920); L. Chambat, “La ‘quarta via’ de Saint Thomas,” *Revue thomiste* 33 (1928): 412–422; Charles Lemaître, “La preuve de l'existence de Dieu par les degrés des êtres,” *Nouvelle revue théologique* (1927): 331–339, 436–468, and Charles-Vincent Hérís' remarks in *Bulletin thomiste* 5 (1928): 320–324; P. Muniz, “La quarta via di Santo Tomàs para demostrar la existencia de Dios,” *Revista de philosophia* 3 (1944): 385–433, 4 (1945): 49–101; V. de Couesnongle,

First, we shall examine Thomas' two accounts of it, then we shall point out the difficulties in these texts and suggest how they can be solved. In the *Contra Gentiles* Thomas says that another proof can be formulated by extracting it from the teaching of Aristotle in Book II of his *Metaphysics*.

Aristotle teaches⁴⁹ that things having the supreme degree of truth have also the supreme degree of being. In another place, moreover, he shows⁵⁰ that there is a supreme degree of truth. Wherever we have two falsehoods, one is always more false than the other, and hence one of them is always truer than the other. But to be more or less true is determined by approximation to what is absolutely and supremely true. Hence we can conclude that there exists something that is being in the supreme degree, and this is what we call God.⁵¹

In the *Summa theologiae* Thomas says that he is going to take his proof from the degrees that can be found in things. We observe that they are more or less good, more or less noble, more or less true, and so on for all perfections of the same kind. But different things are only said to be more or less according as they approach in varying degrees what this thing is in its highest degree. For example, what more closely approaches supreme heat is hotter. Thus there exists something that is true, good and noble in their highest degree, and that consequently is the highest degree of being. For, according to Aristotle,⁵² what possesses the highest degree of truth also possesses the highest degree of being. Moreover, what is said to constitute the highest degree in a genus is the cause and measure of whatever belongs to that genus. Fire, for example, which is the highest degree of heat, is the cause and measure of all heat. There must accordingly exist something that is the cause of being, goodness, and the perfections of every sort found in all things, and this we call God.⁵³

We have said that the interpretation of this proof has given rise to many controversies. This is because, unlike the others, it appears to be a conceptual and, in a way, an ontological proof. Many philosophers can be cited as having

"Mesure et causalité dans la quarta via," *Revue thomiste* 58 (1958): 55-75; E. Gilson, "Trois leçons sur le problème de l'existence de Dieu," pp. 35-38.

⁴⁹Aristotle, *Metaph.* 2.1, 993b19-31.

⁵⁰*Ibid.* 4.4, 1008b32-1009a5. Thomas could have known the fragment of *De philosophia* preserved by Simplicius in his commentary on the *De coelo*, which contains exactly the same proof that he himself reconstructed with the help of the *Metaphysics* (frag. 1476b22-24): "Generally, whenever we find the better, we find also the best. Therefore, since among beings one is better than another, there must be a best, and this would be the divine being." Simplicius adds that Aristotle borrowed this proof from Plato. This shows that what the first Aristotelianism had retained from Platonism allowed Thomas to feel himself to be in agreement with both of these philosophies on this fundamental issue.

⁵¹SCG 1.13.

⁵²Aristotle, *Metaph.* 4.4, 1008b32-1009a5.

⁵³ST 1.2.3, resp.

misgivings about it. Staub,⁵⁴ for one, thinks it is a probable argument. Grunwald⁵⁵ claims that the proof proceeds from an abstract concept to the affirmation of being. What is more, Thomas' realization of this inconsistency led him to modify his proof in the *Summa theologiae*. By constantly appealing to sense experience in this second version, using fire and heat as an example, he was trying, we are told, to put his proof on a more empirical footing. And this modification, which was intended to bring the proof down from the heights of idealism to the bases of Thomistic realism, would be perceptible by simply comparing the two texts. On the other hand, there are many historians who admire the proof unreservedly. More Thomistic in this regard than Thomas himself, they prefer it to the other proofs.⁵⁶ These varying appreciations are interesting because they conceal differences of interpretation.

No problem can arise over the factual statement that there are degrees of being and of truth in things. Nor is there any difficulty about the conclusion Thomas draws from it: that there is a supreme degree of truth. Some have wondered whether the conclusion should be understood in a relative or in an absolute sense. Kirfel⁵⁷ understands it in a relative sense, that is, as the highest degree actually found in each genus. Rolfes,⁵⁸ for his part, understands it as the highest possible degree, in other words, in the absolute sense. Peguès writes similarly: "It is a question first and immediately of the being that surpasses all others in perfection, but, by that very fact, we reach the most perfect being that can be conceived."⁵⁹

The interpretation that takes "the supreme degree of being" (*maxime ens*) in the relative sense is easily explained. Its purpose is to eliminate the least trace of what is taken to be ontologism from the Thomistic proof. Thomas says there are degrees in error and truth, therefore there is a supreme truth and consequently a supreme being who is God. But is this not to pass, with Anselm, from thought to being, from the order of knowledge to the order of reality? Now, nothing is less Thomistic than this attitude. And it is to avoid this difficulty that some attribute to Thomas an induction that raises us from the relative-

⁵⁴Kurt Hans Staub, *Die Gottesbeweise in der katholischen deutschen Literatur von 1850-1900* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1910), p. 77.

⁵⁵Grunwald, *Geschichte der Gottesbeweise*, p. 155.

⁵⁶Thomas Pègues, *Commentaire français littéral de la Somme théologique* (Toulouse: Privat, 1907) 1: 105.

⁵⁷See H. Kirfel, "Der Gottesbeweis aus den Seinstufen," *Jahrbuch für Philosophie und spekulative Theologie* 26 (1912): 454-487.

⁵⁸Eugen Rolfes, *Der Gottesbeweis bei Thomas von Aquin und Aristoteles erklärt und verteidigt* (Cologne, 1898), pp. 207, 222. See his reply to Kirfel's article in *Philosophisches Jahrbuch* 26 (1913): 146-159.

⁵⁹Pègues, *Commentaire* 1: 106.

ly highest degree that we observe in every order of reality to the absolutely highest degree of being, that is, to the highest being we can conceive.

If this is so, we can understand the importance of the addition found in the proof in the *Summa theologiae*. The *Contra Gentiles* concludes the proof with the affirmation of the existence of a *maxime ens*, which is at once identified with God. The *Summa theologiae* demonstrates further that what is supremely being (*maxime ens*) is also the universal cause of being and consequently can be nothing but God. Why this addition to the proof? If we take the expression "supremely being" in the relative sense, it is easy to understand it. In this case it is not immediately evident that this supreme degree of being is God. It can be a very high degree that is still finite and within our grasp. But by assimilating it to the universal and supreme cause, we establish, on the contrary, that this supreme being is God. If, on the other hand, we take the expression in the absolute sense, it is clear that this supreme being is God, and it is hard to see why Thomas uselessly lengthened his proof, above all in a work like the *Summa theologiae* where he wishes to be clear and brief.⁶⁰

These arguments are ingenious but they only serve to create difficulties where there ought not to be any. The first difficulty is: that if supreme being must be taken in a purely relative sense, the argument of the *Contra Gentiles* is but a crude paralogism. Thomas reasons as follows: that which is the supreme truth is also the supreme being; now there is a supreme truth; therefore there is a supreme being, who is God. If supreme truth and supreme being have a relative sense in the premises, how can supreme being be given an absolute sense in the conclusion? Yet the proof requires this because it immediately concludes to God.⁶¹

If we are referred to the supposedly more complete proof of the *Summa theologiae*, we find that the literal text gives no support to such an interpretation. Thomas' example of the more or less hot should cause no illusions. It is simply a comparison, a *manuductio*, to help us understand the principal thesis. Certainly the "supremely hot" is only a relative supreme degree. Strictly speaking, the status of the "supremely true" and the "supremely noble" could be questioned. But the discussion seems difficult when it is a question of the "supreme being." It is possible to conceive of a relatively supreme degree in any order of perfection except in that of being. From the moment Thomas affirms a truth par excellence that is also being par excellence, then either his terminology has no conceivable meaning or he is affirming, purely and simply, the supreme degree of being, which is God. As to the appeal to the relation of causality that terminates the proof of the *Summa theologiae*, it is not at all intended to establish the existence of the supreme being. This conclusion has

⁶⁰Kirfel, *Jahrbuch für Philologie und spekulative Theologie* 26 (1912): 469.

⁶¹Rolfes, *Philosophisches Jahrbuch* 26 (1913): 147-148.

already been reached. It is intended simply to show that, in this first being, whom we place above all beings, there is the cause of all perfections of secondary things. This consideration adds nothing to the proof itself, but adds precision to its conclusion.

The fact remains that Thomas would have reached his conclusion that God exists directly from the consideration of the degrees of being. Can arguing in this way be interpreted as a concession to Platonism? The very sources of the proof would invite us to think so. At the very origin of the proof we find, besides Aristotle,⁶² the famous passage of the *City of God* in which Augustine praises the Platonic philosophers for having seen that in all changeable things the form by which a being, of whatever nature, is what it is, can only come to it from the one who Is, truly and unchangeably.⁶³ But it is perhaps a little too hasty to infer an ontological character from the Platonic inspiration of the proof, or to say with Grunwald that it is a waste of time and labor to reduce this idealist argument to the properly Thomistic point of view of moderate realism.⁶⁴

Thomas' criticism of the a priori proofs of the existence of God would lead to the conclusion that it is impossible to make a consideration of the divine essence the point of departure for these proofs, and that consequently we have to begin with sensible things. By "sensible things," however, we do not mean only material things. Thomas has the undeniable right to take the expression in its fullness and with all the conditions that it requires in line with his own teaching. Now, we shall see later on that a sensible thing is constituted by the union of an intelligible form and matter, and if the mind cannot directly grasp a purely intelligible idea, it can nevertheless abstract from sensible things the intelligible form involved in them. Looked at in this way, the beautiful, the noble, the good, and the true (for there are degrees of truth in things) are realities that we can grasp. The fact that their divine exemplars escape us does not mean that their finite participations must also elude us. If this is so, nothing

⁶²See above, nn. 49 and 50. The main text, *De pot.* 3.5, resp., expressly attributes this conception to Aristotle and even makes it the specifically Aristotelian reason for creation: "Secunda ratio est quia, cum aliquid invenitur a pluribus diversimode participatum oportet quod ab eo in quo perfectissime invenitur, attribuitur omnibus illis in quibus imperfectius invenitur. ... Et haec est probatio Philosophi in 2 *Metaph.* [1, 993b19-31]." Nevertheless, Thomas was clearly aware that he was here as close to Plato as his own doctrine and Aristotle's permitted him. See the following note.

⁶³"Cum igitur in eorum conspectu, et corpus et animus magis minusque speciosa essent, si autem omni specie carere possent, omnino nulla essent: viderunt esse aliquid ubi prima esset incommutabilis et ideo nec comparabilis; atque ibi esse rerum principum rectissime crediderunt, quod factum non esset et ex quo facta cuncta essent," Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 8.6 (PL 41: 231-232 [CCL 47: 223.43-224.48]). See Plato, *Symposium* 210e-211d [ed. W.R.M. Lambe, Loeb ed. 5 (London/New York: Putnam's, 1925), pp. 204-206].

⁶⁴Grunwald, *Geschichte der Gottesbeweise*, p. 157.

prevents our taking them as points of departure for a new proof. Motion, efficient causality, and the being of things are not the only realities that demand explanation. Whatever is good, noble, true in the universe also requires a first cause. In searching for the origin of the degrees of perfection in sensible things, we in no way go beyond the limits we previously set for ourselves.

No doubt this inquiry would be fruitless if we do not introduce the Platonic and Augustinian idea of participation, but we shall see that, taken in a new sense, exemplarism is one of the essential elements of Thomism. Thomas never varied on this point: Lower degrees of perfection and being presuppose an essence in which perfections and being meet in their highest degree. He also maintains without discussion that to possess perfection incompletely and to possess it from a cause are synonymous; and since a cause can only give us what it has, anything that does not possess a perfection of itself, and only possesses it incompletely, must hold it from something possessing it of itself and in the highest degree.⁶⁵ However, it does not follow, as has been charged, that Thomas' proof is reduced to a purely abstract and conceptual deduction. All the proofs equally presuppose the intervention of rational principles transcending sense knowledge, and that the sensible world itself furnishes these principles with an existential base on which to rest in order to raise us to God. Now, this is precisely the case, since the very intelligibility of things comes from the fact that they resemble God. "Nothing is knowable except through likeness of the first truth" (*nihil est cognoscibile nisi per similitudinem primae veritatis*).⁶⁶ This is why the conception of a universe, arranged in a hierarchy according to the degrees of being and perfection, is involved right from the beginning of the

⁶⁵SCG 1.28 [8]; 2.15 [3]. "Quidam autem venerunt in cognitionem Dei ex dignitate ipsius Dei; et isti fuerunt Platonici. Consideraverunt enim, quod omne illud quod est secundum participationem, reducitur ad aliquid quod sit illud per suam essentiam, sicut ad primum et ad summum; sicut omnia ignita per participationem reducuntur ad ignem, qui est per essentiam suam talis. Cum ergo omnia quae sunt, participant esse, et sunt per participationem entia, necesse est esse aliquid in cacumine omnium rerum, quod sit ipsum esse per suam essentiam, id est quod sua essentia sit suum esse; et hoc est Deus, qui est sufficientissima et dignissima et perfectissima causa totius esse, a quo omnia quae sunt, participant esse" (*Commentarium super Joannem*, prolog. [Vivès ed. 19: 670]).

⁶⁶*De ver.* 22.2, ad 1. This allows Thomas to give some recognition to the Augustinian proof from the notion of truth. See *Comm. super Joannem*, prolog.: "Quidam autem venerunt in cognitionem Dei ex incomprehensibilitate veritatis. ..." But Augustine considers this to be the clearest proof of all because it argues solely from the intrinsic characteristics of truth. Thomas can only argue from sensible truth empirically given, because of the care he takes to begin from existences. Hence he necessarily considers truth less clear to the senses than movement. This accounts for the less prominent role of this proof as he transposes it. For arguments for and against this form of proof see Manuel Cuervo, "El argumento de 'las verdades eternas' según s. Tomás," *Ciencia tomista* 37 (1928): 18-34; Charles-Vincent Héris, "La preuve de l'existence de Dieu par les vérités éternelles," *Revue thomiste* 10 (1926): 330-341.

proof of the existence of God by the prime mover or by the efficient cause. Consequently, if this new proof should be considered as essentially Platonic, sound logic would demand we concede that the earlier demonstrations are also Platonic. And they are indeed, to the extent that, through Augustine and Dionysius, Thomas borrowed Plato's conception of a participation of things in God by way of resemblance. This invited Thomas to think of the universe as arranged in a hierarchy according to the various possible degrees of finite participation in the causality of the first cause, in the actuality of the unmoved mover, in the goodness of pure goodness, in the nobility of the purely noble, and in the truth of pure truth. But this is not so in the doctrine of Thomas Aquinas, who, as we shall see, began by changing the Platonic notion of participation into an existential notion of causality.

Section 5. The Proof from Final Causality

The fifth and last proof is based on the consideration of the government of things. There is no point in looking for its philosophical origin, since the idea of a God who directs the universe was a common notion in Christian theology, and there were many texts of scripture on which it could be based. Thomas himself appeals to John Damascene,⁶⁷ who appears to have furnished him with the model of his argument. It runs as follows in the *Contra Gentiles*: It is impossible that contrary and dissimilar things should be in agreement and harmony within the same order, either always or frequently, unless there exists a being governing them and causing them, collectively and individually, to tend toward a specific end. Now, we observe that in the world things of different natures are in harmony within one and the same order, not merely from time to time and by chance, but always or for the most part. There must, then, exist a being by whose providence the world is governed, and this being we call God.⁶⁸ The *Summa theologiae* argues in exactly the same way, but specifying that the providence that orders the world, by which all things are disposed toward their end, is an intelligence. One could come to the same conclusion in different ways, especially reasoning by analogy from human acts.⁶⁹

Although more familiar to theologians and more popular than the preceding proofs, this last one and the conclusion it establishes are, in Thomas' opinion, no less valuable than the others. If in a way it remains separate from the others, it is because the final cause itself is very different from the other causes, but it is only distinguished from them by the eminent place it occupies in the order of

⁶⁷*De fide orthodoxa* 1.3 (PG 94: 795 [Latin ed. Buytaert, pp. 16–17]).

⁶⁸SCG 1.13 [35], 2.16 [10]; *In Phys.* 2,4 Thomas regards this as the commonsensical proof par excellence, a kind of "popular" proof (SCG 3.38 [1]).

⁶⁹ST 1.2.3, resp; *De ver.* 5.1, resp.

causality. It is true that this proof can be understood at various depths.⁷⁰ Most obviously, it ends with a supreme workman or demiurge, more or less resembling the Author of Nature so dear to eighteenth-century France. More deeply, it sees the final cause as the reason for which the efficient cause acts; in short, as the cause of causes. It not only reveals (but not first of all) there is an order in nature, but also, above all, there is a nature at all. In brief, beyond the intelligible ways of existing, the final cause tells us the reason for which things exist. It is exactly this reason that the proof by final causality seeks, and it reaches it when it concludes that God exists.

Like the preceding proofs, the proof by finality is existential and has the same structure. To admit that sensible things are put in order by chance is to admit that there is room in the universe for an effect without a cause, namely, their very order. For if the form of each body adequately explains its particular activity, it does not at all explain why different bodies and their different activities are ordered in a harmonious whole.⁷¹ In the proof by finality, therefore, as in all the preceding proofs, there is a sensible datum whose sufficient reason we seek and which we find in God alone. The intelligibility of things is explained, like the things themselves, by their distant imitation of the intelligible idea of the provident God who rules them.

The various "ways" Thomas follows to arrive at the existence of God are clearly distinct from one another if we consider their sensible starting points, and they are obviously connected if we consider their structure and relations.⁷² In the first place, each proof is based on the empirical observation of a fact, because no existence could be inferred except by starting from some other existence. In this regard all the thomistic proofs differ from the Augustinian proofs by truth, or the Anselmian proof by the idea of God. There is motion, there are reciprocal actions, beings that are born and die, things more or less perfect, and there is order in things. It is because all this exists that we can confirm that its cause exists. The presence, then, of a sensible existential base is a first characteristic common to the five proofs for the existence of God.

A second characteristic is that all the proofs presume that the causes and effects appearing in them are arranged hierarchically. This aspect of Thomas' thought is very apparent in the fourth way, but is no less observable even in the first. It is this hierarchical subordination of effects and causes, essentially ordered into principal and instrumental causes, which makes it impossible to

⁷⁰Thomas himself used this proof, giving it its simplest form in his *Expositio super Symbolo Apostolorum* (ed. Mandonnet, *Opuscula omnia* 4: 351–352). The authenticity of this *opusculum* is generally admitted.

⁷¹*De ver.* 5.2, resp.

⁷²On this point see Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *Dieu, son existence et sa nature*, 3rd ed. (Paris: Beauchesne, 1920), Appendix 1, pp. 760–773; Rolfes, "Die Gottesbeweise bei Thomas von Aquin," *Philosophisches Jahrbuch* 37, 4 H (1924): 329–338.

regress to infinity in the series of causes and permits us to affirm the existence of God. Let us note, nevertheless, to avoid all equivocation, that the hierarchy of causes to which Thomas assigns a first member is much less necessary as a ladder ascending toward God than as something enabling us to consider the whole series of intermediate causes as one sole second cause, of which God is the first cause. To be sure, Thomas' imagination takes pleasure in ascending these degrees; but as far as concerns his metaphysical reason, they are but one degree, since the efficacy of each intermediate cause presupposes that the complete series of its conditions is actually realized. Thus we come back to our first general characteristic of the proofs: We have to start from an existence, for it is enough to give the complete sufficient reason of any single *existence*, empirically given, to prove the *existence* of God. It would appear that nothing could be simpler than this formula, but it is not as easy to understand as many imagine. The quickest way to grasp its most hidden meaning is perhaps the one that at first blush appears to be the longest. Unless we situate them historically, we are hardly likely to discern the true meaning of the Thomistic proofs for the existence of God.

Section 6. The Meaning and Significance of the Five Ways

All theologians faithful to Vatican I hold that the existence of God is demonstrable by natural reason. This is what Thomas already expressly taught, although he added that very few can understand the proof. Anyone who recalls Thomas' position on this point today is suspected of fideism or semi-fideism. What is the use of demonstrating this truth if most are unable to understand its philosophical proofs? Moreover, we have just seen the disagreement, even among Thomists, on the meaning and value of Thomas' proofs of the existence of God. Furthermore, we have only lightly sketched them, and have said nothing about the non-Thomist Catholic theologians who reject Thomas' way of presenting the problem and look in different directions for the principles of its solution. If the proofs are easy to understand, why such disagreement about them?⁷³

The historian has no other business than to understand these proofs as best he can, exactly as Thomas understood them. Understanding their original meaning is both difficult and risky, which is one more reason not to dictate to anyone. It is simply a matter of explaining to everyone the type of proofs to which

⁷³For the details of these controversies see my "Trois leçons sur le problème de l'existence de Dieu," pp. 23-87, particularly the first lecture: "Le labyrinthe des cinq voies." This phrase is taken from the title of A. Boehm's article: "Autour du mystère des *Quinque Viae* de Saint Thomas d'Aquin," *Revue des sciences religieuses* 24 (1950): 217-234, especially 233-234. It seems paradoxical that the proofs Thomas wanted to be simple and even elementary, in short, introductions for beginners in theology, have become a "mystery" for our time. It is fitting, then, to examine again the state of the question. See William Bryar, *St. Thomas and the Existence of God: Three Interpretations* (Chicago: Regnery, 1951).

we should appeal to remain faithful to the mind of Thomas Aquinas. People often think that the historian's attitude is a hindrance to the philosopher. But if the philosopher claims to be a "Thomist," we have the right to be certain that he knows the doctrine to which he appeals. The most imperious philosophers are not always the best informed.

The essential point, if I am not mistaken, is to remember that the two *Summae* and the *Compendium* are theological⁷⁴ works, and that the explanations of the proofs for the existence of God we take from them are the work of a theologian pursuing a theological end. The all-too-real disagreements about the meaning of the proofs arise first of all from the fact that they have been treated as philosophical proofs. If they are called theological, it is objected that then they are not rational, as if the whole theology of Thomas were not one long effort to arrive at a rational understanding of the faith. From that point on, there will be no mutual understanding on any point; trying to continue the conversation seems useless.

We must not, however, lose courage, nor cease repeating the truth. On the point in question Thomas asks: Can we prove that God exists? Yes, he replies, we can. The proof is that it has already been done. His first intention is not to propose a truth of his own making. He simply wants to place before theologians, be it one or four or five, one of the principal ways philosophers have proceeded to prove this truth.⁷⁵ Each of the five ways represents a possible rational approach to the problem of the existence of God.

In presenting the five ways Thomas has two main preoccupations. First, he wants the proofs to be rationally conclusive, whatever the doctrine inspiring it may be. Second, he wants to connect the proof insofar as possible to a metaphysical theme of an Aristotelian origin, because he himself prefers to follow the philosophy of Aristotle. Because he hopes to achieve a certain unity of spirit among the proofs, he tries to tie them as far as possible to Aristotle's metaphysics. It is here that the historian of thought runs into the most serious difficulties of interpretation; his historical scruples run the risk of concealing from himself the meaning of the doctrine he wants to explain. He only cites Aquinas at the end, but he is tempted to think that Thomas himself proceeds in the same way, which raises many problems for him as an historian. For Thomas

⁷⁴The very title of the *Summa theologiae* bears witness to the fact as far as this work is concerned. As for the *Contra Gentiles*, its full title used to be: *De veritate catholicae fidei contra gentiles*: "... propositum nostrae intentionis est, veritatem quam fides catholica profitetur, pro nostro modulo manifestare, errores eliminando contrarios" (ibid. 1.2 [2]). Impossible to put it more clearly, briefly, or exactly. Nothing can contradict so firm and clear a statement. The title of the *Compendium theologiae* is clear enough to make further discussion about its object unnecessary.

⁷⁵"Procedamus ad ponendum rationes, quibus tam philosophi quam doctores catholici Deum esse probaverunt" (*SCG* 1.13 [1]).

also writes as a philosopher; every philosophical theme he reflects upon has the meaning he himself gives it, whatever may be source from which he borrows it. The historian therefore has to be historian enough to realize that St. Thomas is not always proceeding as an historian. It is certainly useful, when one can do so, to distinguish the different currents of thought feeding each Thomistic proof of the existence of God, but it is not in tracing these currents toward their sources that we shall see the exact meaning of each proof. On the contrary, whenever historical erudition follows its own bent it becomes a source of confusion. Proofs that Thomas hoped would be simple and straightforward then become inextricable historical labyrinths.⁷⁶ The meaning of the proofs can only be found in Thomas' own explanation of it.

This is not the most serious difficulty. The Thomistic doctrine has been criticized as philosophically incoherent. Setting out from the different philosophies from which St. Thomas had borrowed the materials for his work—Aristotle, Avicenna, Averroes and many others—Thomism has been seen as a clever mosaic made up of heterogeneous items skillfully designed to produce a rational duplicate of Christian revelation.

The replies to this criticism are not convincing, because they propose the notion of what the doctrine of Aquinas ought to be if it is to satisfy the condition of a true philosophy. Now, although it contains much philosophy, it itself is not a philosophy. Everything philosophical in Thomism is truly philosophical, but it is integrated into a theological synthesis whose own end dominates the elements it contains within itself. Whether these elements lose or gain in rationality is a question to be discussed in itself, and we can expect that there will be disagreement over the conclusions, as there is every time a question admits of two possible answers. In any case, it is not an historical question since it involves a value judgment. It is not even a purely philosophical question. The only person qualified to answer it is one who, like Thomas himself, is competent in both philosophy and theology. As an historian, we have a limited task; all we can do is try to explain the meaning of the question posed by a theology like that of Thomas Aquinas.

This question is tied to the possibility of a theological view of philosophy. The word "theological," let us recall, does not necessarily mean irrational. We can only say what it does mean by examining the doctrine to which it is applied.

Essentially, the five ways are metaphysical, since they lead us to the affirmation of the existence of the divine being, which transcends the nature it causes.

⁷⁶The concise bibliographical notes accompanying the explanation of the third and fourth ways in the preceding pages give a faint idea of the amount of historical erudition necessary for approaching these difficult if brief accounts. For the philosophical meaning of the proofs and their present value see my "L'existence de Dieu est-elle encore démontrable?" in Gilson, "Trois leçons sur le problème de l'existence de Dieu," pp. 48-67.

Furthermore, each of these proofs is distinguished from the others because it begins with a different sensible experience, such as movement, efficient causality, the contingency of the relative in relation to the absolute, or the end as cause of the means. Each of these ways is presented as distinct from the others, as indeed it is. Each leads to the affirmation of the existence of the kind of being which, if it exists, is undeniably the being we all call God. Let us note, however, that if the prime mover, the first cause, the first necessary being, and so on, is God, we could not simply say that God is the prime mover, the first cause, or the first necessary being. If there were no movement, no caused being, no participating being, God would nonetheless be God. Every proof of the existence of God based on a datum of sense experience presupposes the existence of a freely created world. Each and every one of these aspects of sensible being requires its first cause, and hence the ways leading to God are different. Yet, we can already suspect that this is one and the same cause, and this Thomas will establish in his own good time. But his interpreters are in a hurry. So we find them sometimes skipping stages of the metaphysical inquiry and trying to combine the five ways into one, or to show that they are all really one and the same.⁷⁷

The attempt is legitimate, and any expert dialectician can succeed in it. He can even do so in several different ways, but he cannot be certain that Aquinas would like the way he does it. In the first place, Aquinas himself did not unite the five ways, and so he did not think it necessary.⁷⁸ Then, since the *Compendium theologiae* is based entirely on the single proof of the existence of a prime mover, one way could suffice. So it is unnecessary dialectically to construct one whole proof composed of five parts. Finally, the wording of the five ways shows Aquinas' desire to present them as distinct and each adequate in itself.

This is especially the case with the first two ways. Forty years ago, Paul Gény raised a pertinent question, which no one, as far as I know, really answered. If the motive cause of which the first way speaks is not the efficient cause of movement, how can the existence of the cause be concluded from the existence of its effect? But if it is its efficient cause, how is the first way

⁷⁷The model of these syntheses is that of the admirable commentator on the *Summa theologiae*, Domingo Báñez, *Scholastica commentaria in primam partem Sum. Theol.* 2.3 (Madrid: Editorial F.E.D.A., 1934) 1: 241-242. The passage is to be found in "Trois leçons," p. 43, n. 14: "Ordo verum harum rationum talis est..." A. Boehm proposes another method of reduction in his "Autour du mystère des cinq voies," pp. 233-234. No doubt, looked at from above and from the completely developed idea of God toward which they are moving, the five ways do form a single whole. However, on the level of the proof itself, each is self-sufficient. All we can ask of it is that it prove correctly the existence of a being which everyone will agree to call God.

⁷⁸For this sensible statement see Paul Gény, "A propos des preuves thomistes de l'existence de Dieu," p. 577.

distinguished from the second, when Thomas expressly says: *secunda via est ex ratione causae efficientis?*⁷⁹

These remarks suffice to show that, in the thought of Thomas Aquinas, the first way is based on motive force taken in itself, in abstraction from efficient causality. Someone will object that this is impossible, since in Aquinas' own mind the motive cause is the efficient cause of movement. We agree with this in general, but it is precisely why the text just cited has to be taken literally. Already in the *Contra Gentiles*, having spelled out at length the proof for the existence of an immovable first mover, Aquinas adds "Aristotle proceeds in a different way" (*SCG* 1.13). If the second way is different, then the first way does not prove the existence of God by way of the efficient cause, even if it were the cause of motion. An observation confirms this interpretation of the text. In none of the three expositions of the first way, namely, in the *Summa theologiae*, *Contra Gentiles*, and *Compendium theologiae*, does the word "cause" appear.⁸⁰ The more certain one is that, for Aquinas, the *causa movens* is also the *causa agens* and *causa efficiens*, the more certain he becomes that the two ways have not been expounded separately by mistake. Each of them stands alone and ought to be interpreted apart from the others as valid in itself.

Aquinas, moreover, had a good reason for presenting the first proof apart from the others. It is a fact that there had been philosophers who accepted the first proof while at the same time rejecting the second. Averroes was one of them,⁸¹ and in that regard he showed himself faithful to authentic Aristotelianism. Aristotle did not speak of the prime mover as an efficient cause of motion; and consequently it is possible to prove the existence of a prime mover without bringing in an efficient cause. Why should not those who are of this mind have the right to the proof that strikes them as satisfying and which indeed is so? Everything it affirms is true. God is truly the immovable prime mover; he

⁷⁹The text leaves no room for ambiguity. The proof from efficient causality is presented as a way *different* from that which begins with movement. In the *Summa theologiae* they are two distinct ways; in the *SCG* the way of efficient causality is presented as an *alia via*.

⁸⁰Thus I retract completely my interpretation in the fifth edition of *Le Thomisme*, which presents the proof by movement as a proof by the efficient cause of movement. This error demonstrates to what point historical prejudice can blind the good-willed expounder of a text, and how difficult it is today to recover Thomas' authentic mind. I have been able to teach, comment on, and interpret the *prima via* for fifty years without observing, nor being told by anyone, that the word "cause" is absent from it. This absence, which occurs three times, can only be deliberate and must have a meaning.

⁸¹See my *Elements of Christian Philosophy*, p. 68. It could be shown that this interpretation of Aristotle was already made by Averroes. Thomas cites it several times to show that, even if we eliminate the notion of a Primary Being as efficient cause, God is still no less the cause of the very substance of beings. Indeed, the final cause is the origin of all desires, which are themselves causes of the movements which bring about the generation of beings.

moves all beings as an object of desire, that is, as the final cause. Now, the final cause is the cause of causes. It is the cause of movements such as generation and corruption, which amounts to saying that, as the ultimate end, it is the cause of all beings in the universe. It is the cause of their very substance, because the love their causes have for the prime mover makes them carry out the productive actions of beings. So the moving thing does not have to be an efficient cause for the validity of the *prima via*.⁸² Aquinas specifies that the second way is based on efficient causality, because in fact the only notion the first way brings into play is the relation of the moving thing to the thing moved.

The proof by the prime mover is important because it shows in a special and very definite way what Thomas takes to be a proof for the existence of God. Is it valid? Yes, it is. Is it the best of all the proofs? It is the clearest because its point of departure—the perception of movement—is clearest of all. Is it the most profound and most complete as to the notion of God it reaches? All the proofs have equal value, provided they are regarded as answers to the question: Does it exist (*an sit*)? Each of the five ways truly ends up with the existence of a being such that the name “God” cannot be denied to it, whatever else the name ought to signify. The five ways are, accordingly, at one and the same time both independent and complementary. We are only speaking here of the meaning they have at the precise point in the *Summa* where they were formulated for the first time. However, free from the wording of the question he raises here, Aquinas will often speak as a philosopher who knows that God is not only the prime mover as final cause, but also as efficient cause of the movement that itself causes beings. For the moment, he is only taking into account the prime mover as the origin of movement, whatever order of causality one may wish to consider.

A philosopher who would be nothing but a philosopher could not be satisfied to leave this problem unsettled. He would quickly say which order of

⁸²René Mugnier, *La théorie du premier moteur et l'évolution de la pensée aristotélicienne* (Paris: Vrin, 1939), pp. 111–122. For a different though not contrary interpretation see Régis Jolivet, *Essai sur les rapports entre la pensée grecque et la pensée chrétienne* (Paris: Vrin, 1931), pp. 34–39. Thomas' position is clear: “From this first principle, which is a mover by virtue of being an end, depend the heavens, both regarding the perpetuity of their substance and their movement. Consequently, nature in its entirety depends on this principle, since all natural beings depend on the heavens and their movement” *In Metaph.* 12.7 [ed. Cathala-Spiazzi, p. 592, n. 2534]. Thomas explicitly likens the moving cause to the efficient cause: “It has been similarly demonstrated by an argument of the same Aristotle that there exists a first immovable mover, which we call God. Now, in every order of movements, the first mover is the cause of all movements produced in those orders. Since, therefore, the movements of the heaven cause many things to exist, and since God is the first mover with reference to these movements, God must be the cause of the existence of many things” (*SCG* 2.6 [3]). [The note has been shortened and corrected.— A.M.]

causality he has in mind. He would specify the proof he thought most favorable to the further development of his thought. Rather than presenting four or five equally valuable proofs, he would put forward the one most in conformity with the principles of his own philosophy and set about showing how that proof can be drawn from them. Thomas has a very definite purpose in mind; he wants to gain some understanding of faith. He certainly does not wish to create single-handed a philosophy destined to be the basis of a theology that would be his own, and would nevertheless become everyone's theology. The *Summae* he is writing are general accounts of the theology of the Church, as progressively founded, developed and enlarged by the Fathers, by ecclesiastical writers and, more recently, by the masters of theology teaching in the universities of the West. Not a *summa* of *his* theology but of theology itself, they retain what is essential, set it in order like a science, and defining its meaning with all desirable precision. The best tool for success in such an enterprise is the philosophy of Aristotle, especially its logic, without in any way adapting Christian theology to this instrument. On the contrary, it is philosophy that will have to adapt itself to the needs of sacred science. Thus, the theologian will remain free to gather all the true or useful doctrinal elements furnished by the theological tradition, only asking the Aristotelian method to provide them with a true and suitable philosophical framework in which to receive them. Since each of these elements has its own language, the theologian who undertakes to summarize tradition, feels obliged, even while respecting what is due to the intellectual method he has chosen, to make it flexible in order to allow himself to be open to everything true and good in the theologies of the past. This leads to a series of exchanges, in the course of which the Neoplatonism of an Augustine, of a Dionysius, of a Gregory of Nyssa is assured by the new theology that its essential truth would be safeguarded in it, in spite of differences of language. At the same time, the new theology is invited to be open enough so that all the old ways to God remain accessible alongside the new one. Thomas' constant practice was not to allow any truth to be established at the expense of an older truth, but rather to make the new truth broad enough to welcome all truths.

For this twofold movement to be possible without the whole enterprise being reduced to the level of a convenient eclecticism, it is first and foremost necessary that the theologian not commit the error of making a philosophical synthesis out of philosophies. His real task is to elaborate a theological synthesis from them. Only on these terms is the whole enterprise possible. The theologian must have a somewhat detached attitude toward philosophical wisdom. He has to introduce and keep a certain distance between sacred science and the various available philosophies. We should not think that the theologian welcomes philosophers as equals. His duty lies elsewhere: "Taking every thought captive in obedience to Christ" (*In captivitatem redigentes omnem intellectum in obsequium Christi*) (2 Cor 10:5). We shall never meditate sufficiently on the well-known passage in the *Summa theologiae* (1.1.3, ad 2m), where

Aquinas compares the position of *sacra doctrina* (the one simple imprint of the knowledge of God himself with regard to philosophical disciplines) to that of the *sensus communis* (the one simple interior sense with regard to the objects of the five senses). The common sense neither sees nor understands nor touches; it has no organs with which to do so. But all the messages of the exterior senses come to it as to a common center of information. It compares them, it judges them, and in the last analysis it knows more about each of them than an external sense itself knows about them. Similarly, sacred doctrine is not physics, nor anthropology, nor metaphysics, not even moral science. But it can know about all these kinds of knowledge in a single higher light that is truly of another order. Its very function is to unite this multiplicity in its own unity.⁸³

All the same, the multiple elements must lend themselves to this, and in fact they do so. The theology of the proofs of the existence of God simply unites a number of related metaphysical arguments. They all have to do with some aspect or property of being. And since the transcendental properties of being are both conceivable in themselves and inseparable from it, the theologian simply brings about a synthesis of being with itself, by trying to connect up with the first being by way of the good, the one, the necessary and causality. From the summit it occupies, theology can see each of these efforts as it is in itself, each with its own limitations, and yet each oriented to the same object as the others. Each proof tends of itself to remain self-sufficient, sometimes to the exclusion of the others. The sacred science teaches them that they are not exclusive but complementary.⁸⁴ The more one studies them in history or philosophy, the more the five ways will tend to be lost in what has been called their "labyrinth." If they are restored to the theological milieu in which they were born, their meaning and also their purpose will be clear.

We come now to what is most difficult to say. Perhaps the word "impossible" would be more apposite than "difficult." By an astonishing change of

⁸³Regarding the comparison of theology with the common sense, see my *Elements of Christian Philosophy*, pp. 32–33, 86–89. See another use of the same comparison in *SCG* 2.100 [3]. [See also Gilson, *Christian Philosophy: An Introduction*, trans. A. Maurer (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1993), pp. 47, 110.]

⁸⁴From Thomas' point of view, both as a philosopher and a theologian, the particular teachings of Plato and Aristotle would appear to be included under a primary notion of being (philosophy) or of God (theology), which subsumes both as particular cases. The Platonic philosophy of the One or the Good, and the Aristotelian philosophy of being or *ens*, are equally included in the Thomistic metaphysics of *Esse* (philosophy) and in the sacred theology of *Qui est* (sacred science). Alfarabi and Avicenna already tended to consider Platonism and Aristotelianism as a single philosophy. In fact, these philosophies are one or several according to the plane on which questions are raised. Thomas knows very well how to distinguish their ontologies, noetics, and their moral teachings; but he never fails to write, "Plato, Aristotle and their followers" when the occasion calls for it, as in *De pot.* 3.6.

perspective, the observer who adopts the detached attitude befitting the theologian, far from losing sight of philosophy, has the impression of seeing it come to life and deepen before his very eyes. None of the five ways makes use of the properly metaphysical notion of being as Aquinas himself—going beyond Aristotle—conceived it. Nowhere in all his work has he proved the existence of God, the pure act of being, starting from the properties of beings.⁸⁵ However, even while laboriously collecting the proofs for the existence of God bequeathed by his predecessors, he cannot not have had in mind the new notion of *esse* that is going to enable him to transcend, even in the purely philosophical order, the perspective of his most illustrious predecessors. Theological reflection opens out with philosophical elucidations, as though natural reason were becoming conscious of resources she knew nothing about until she became involved more completely in the theologian's sacred science. This fact is so surprising that even among Aquinas' most famous disciples many have lacked the courage to follow him. Descending from theology to bare philosophy, they have watched *sacra doctrina* break up and metaphysics itself crumble in their hands. But to follow this route would be to follow the history of Thomism, which is not necessarily the doctrine of Thomas Aquinas.

⁸⁵I retract what I wrote in my fifth edition of *Le Thomisme* about a so-called proof of the existence of God based on the dependence of beings (*entia*) upon a first *Esse*, who is God. In the first place, Thomas never used the composition of *essentia* and *esse* in finite being to prove the existence of God. Moreover, the composition of *essentia* and *esse* is not a sensible datum even in the wide meaning of the term. We are aware of movement, contingency, grades of being, and so forth, but we are so little aware of the distinction between *esse* and *essentia* that many refuse to admit there is one. The required sensible evidence would be lacking at the very beginning of such a proof. The *De ente et essentia* does not contain a proof of the existence of God. It does, however, contain a profound meditation on the notion of God, beginning with the certainty of his existence and his perfect unity. I no longer accept what I wrote in the fifth edition, p. 119: "the Thomistic proofs of the existence of God are developed immediately on the existential level." [Trans. L.K. Shook, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, p. 81]. This is not true, if what it means (as I understood it at the time) is that these proofs presuppose the Thomistic notion of *esse*. On the contrary, the five ways are valid independently of this notion. We shall see how we acquire it beginning with these ways. Once we are in possession of the notion, it goes without saying that the notion of God as the pure act of being reflects back on everything that has been said about him, including the proofs for his existence. But the proofs come before it; they do not imply it. No one could hold the contrary without attributing this notion to Aristotle, which no one thinks of doing. *Nota bene*: The notion that a being is contingent in relation to its cause does not imply that the essence of this being is distinct from its *esse*.

[Gilson's denial that the *De ente et essentia* contains a proof of God's existence should be taken in the sense of a *demonstrative* proof. This leaves room for a dialectical proof, as suggested in his *Christian Philosophy: An Introduction*, pp. 57-58.—A.M.]

PART I. Chapter Three

The Divine Being

When we know that a thing exists, we still have to ask in what way it exists in order to know what it is. Can we know what God is? We shall see that, properly speaking, we cannot. Nevertheless, we can raise questions about his nature, starting from what the proofs of his existence teach us about him.

The first notion we have to form about him is his simplicity. Each of the ways leading to his existence arrives at a first being, the origin of a series of other beings of which he himself is not a member. The prime mover, the source of all movement, is itself immovable; the first efficient cause that causes everything is itself uncaused, even to the point that it does not cause itself; and so on for the other proofs. This seems to have been a dominant fact in Thomas' thought: to be first in any order it must be simple. Indeed, every composite depends on the unity of its parts, all of which have to be present for it to be. The absence of a single part is enough to make it impossible. A first term, therefore, outside the series, is necessarily simple—something we know by a simple inspection of the five ways. This being, called God, whom we know exists, we also know to be self-sufficient in all respects, as being first in all orders.

Even before approaching *ex professo* the problem of God's knowability, Thomas observes that the notion of simplicity is negative. We cannot form any concrete notion of an absolutely simple object of thought. The only thing we can do in this case is to think of an object composed of parts, then to deny of God any composition whatsoever. This negative way of thinking about God will appear increasingly more and more characteristic of our knowledge of him. God is simple; now what is simple escapes us; accordingly the divine nature escapes our grasp. Human knowledge of such a God, therefore, can only be a negative theology. To know what the divine being is, is to acknowledge that we do not know it.

Section 1. Haec Sublimis Veritas

It seems hard to believe that Christian theology had to discover the existential nature of the Christian God. Was it not enough to open the Bible in order to find it there? When Moses wished to know the name of God in order to reveal it to the Jewish people, he spoke directly to God himself and said to him: "If I go to the children of Israel, and say to them: The God of your fathers has sent me to you, and they ask me what is his name, what shall I say to them?" And God said to Moses: "*I Am Who Am*," and he added: "Say this to the children of Israel: *He Who Is has sent me to you.*" (Ex 3:13-14). Since God gave him-

self the name *I Am* or *Qui est*, as properly belonging to him,¹ how could Christians have ever not known that their God was the supremely existing being?

I am not saying that they never knew this. Indeed, they all believed it, many tried to understand it, and some before Thomas have interpreted it profoundly, even on the level of ontology. The identification of God and being is certainly the common possession of Christian philosophy as Christian.² But the agreement of Christian thinkers on this subject does not preclude that as philosophers they do not see eye to eye on the interpretation of the notion of being. Holy scripture contains no treatise on metaphysics. The first Christian thinkers, in order to think philosophically about the content of their faith, had at their disposal only the methods elaborated by the Greeks for altogether different ends. The history of Christian philosophy is in large measure that of a religion becoming progressively conscious of philosophical notions which, as a religion, it can do without, but that it recognized more and more clearly as defining the philosophy of those faithful who wish to have one. A simple examination of the two very different notions of being that we have seen contrasted in the problem of God's existence, could make us surmise that Christian thinkers reflected at length on the meaning of the basic text of Exodus, and that progress was made in its metaphysical interpretation. History enables us to observe it so to speak *in vivo*, by comparing the essentialist interpretation of the text of Exodus, at which Augustine finally stopped, with the existential interpretation of the same text developed by Thomas Aquinas.

Augustine was so sure that the God of Exodus was Plato's being that he wondered how to explain the coincidence without admitting that Plato had somehow or other known Exodus. "But what makes me almost subscribe to the idea that Plato was not completely ignorant of the Old Testament, is that when an angel conveys the words of God to the holy man Moses, who asks the name of the one who is ordering him to proceed to the liberation of the Hebrew people, the reply is this: '*I Am Who Am; and you are to say to the children of Israel: He Who Is has sent me to you.*' As if, in comparison with him who truly is because he is unchangeable, what has been made changeable did not exist. Plato

¹On the meaning of the expressions of Exodus see E. Gilson, *The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy*, trans. A.H.C. Downes (New York: Scribners, 1940), p. 433, n. 9; also the interesting remarks of Albert Vincent, *La religion des judéo-araméens d'Éléphantine* (Paris: Geuthner, 1937), pp. 47-48. Against the traditional interpretation of these expressions see the objections of André-Marie Dubarle, "La signification du nom de Jahweh," *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 34 (1951): 3-21. Dubarle adopts a different interpretation: "I am who I am, and I will not speak my name." Thomas, we shall see, adopts the first interpretation without discussion.

²For the agreement of Christian thinkers on this point see *The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy*, p. 433.

was strongly convinced of this and he took great care to stress the point."³ Clearly, the being of Exodus is here conceived as the unchangeable entity of Plato. Reading these lines, we are bound to suspect that the agreement at which Augustine marvels conceals a little confusion.

There can be no doubt that such was indeed the Augustinian notion of God and being. "He is the first and supreme being who is entirely unchangeable, and who could say as forcefully as possible: '*I Am Who Am; and you will tell them, He Who Is has sent me to you.*'"⁴ But Augustine, with a deep sense of the difficulty of the problem, perhaps never expressed his final thought on the subject better than in a homily on the Gospel of St. John. The text must be quoted in its entirety, so fully do we sense in it both the depth of Augustine's Christian mentality and the Platonic limits of his ontology.

Nevertheless, (Augustine writes), pay good attention to the words spoken here by Our Lord Jesus Christ: "If you do not believe that I Am, you will die in your sins" (Jn 8:24). What is this "If you do not believe that I Am"? I am what? There is nothing added, and because there is nothing added his word embarrasses us. They waited for him to say what he was, yet he did not say it. What did they think he was going to say? Perhaps, if you do not believe that I am the Christ, if you do not believe that I am the Son of God, if you do not believe that I am the Word of the Father, if you do not believe that I am the author of the world, if you do not believe that I am the former and reformer of man, his creator and recreator, he who made him and remade him, if you do not believe that I am that, you will die in your sins. This *I Am* which he says he is, is embarrassing. For God also had said to Moses *I Am Who Am*. Who can rightly say what is this *I Am*? By his angel, God sent his servant Moses to deliver his people from Egypt (you have read what I am saying here, and you knew it, but I am recalling it to you); God was sending him trembling, reluctant but obedient. In order to find some excuse Moses said to God, who he knew was speaking to him through an angel: if the people ask me, who then is the God who sent you? What shall I reply? And the Lord said to him: *I Am Who Am*; then he repeated: *He Who Is has sent me to you*. Here again, he did not say: *I am* God; or *I am* the maker of the world; or *I am* the creator of all things; or again *I am* the propagator of this very people whom he must free; but he only said this: *I Am Who Am*; then, *you will say to the children of Israel, He Who Is*. He did not add: *He Who Is* your God; *He Who Is* the God of your fathers; but only said this: *He Who Is sent me to you*. Perhaps it was too difficult for Moses, even as it is difficult for us too—and even more difficult for us—to understand these words: *I Am Who Am* and *He Who Is has sent me to you*. Moreover, even if Moses understood them, how could those to whom God was sending him have understood them? God has then postponed what man could not understand and added what he could understand. This he added, indeed, when

³Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 8.11 (PL 41: 236 [CCL 47.1: 228]).

⁴Augustine, *De doctrina christiana* 1.32, n. 35 (PL 34: 32 [CCL 32: 26]).

he said: *I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob* (Ex 3:15). This you can understand, but what mind can comprehend *I Am*?

Let us pause here for a moment to mark in passing this first meeting, in God's own words, between the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and the God of the philosophers and scholars. Augustine knows very well that they are the same. No more than the people of Israel, can he hesitate over the identity of the living God of scripture. But it is the *Qui est* that intrigues him, for God no more wanted to explain it to Moses than to Augustine or to us, as if, having revealed to men the truth of faith that saves, he had reserved the understanding of it to the patient efforts of metaphysicians. However, faithful to the teaching of the "interior master,"⁵ Augustine is going to pray here to God himself to enlighten him on the meaning of his words:

I am going to speak now to Our Lord Jesus Christ. I am going to speak to him and he will hear me. For I believe he is present; I do not doubt it in the least, since he himself said: Behold, *I am with you even to the consummation of the world* (Mt 28:20). O Lord, our God, what have you said: *If you do not believe that I am?* Indeed, of all you have made, what is there that is not? The heavens, are they not? The earth, is it not? And the things that are on the earth and in the heavens, are they not? And the very man to whom you are speaking, is he not? If all these things you have made are, what then is being itself (*ipsum esse*), which you reserved for yourself as something proper to you, and which you have not given to others, in order to be the only one to exist? Must we then understand *I Am Who Am*, as if the rest were not? And how are we to understand the *If you do not believe that I am?* Those who understood it, then, were they not? Even if they were sinners they were men. What are we to do? Let being itself (*ipsum esse*) say what it is; let it speak to the heart; let it say it within; let it speak within; let the interior man understand it; let the mind understand that to be truly is to be always in the same way.⁶

Nothing could be clearer than this statement: *vere esse est enim semper eodem modo esse*. To identify in this way the true being (*vere esse*) that God is with "immutable being" is to assimilate the *Sum* of Exodus to the *οὐσία* of Platonism. Here we again come face to face with the same difficulty we had when it was a question of translating this term in the dialogues of Plato. The Latin equivalent of *οὐσία* is *essentia*, and it seems, indeed, that Augustine identified in his mind the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob with that alone which, being immutable, can be called *essentia* in the fullness of the term. How would it be otherwise, since to be is "to be immutable"? Hence this formal statement of *De*

⁵Etienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of Saint Augustine*, trans. Lawrence E.M. Lynch (New York: Random House, 1960), pp. 66-76.

⁶Augustine, *In Joannis Evangelium* 38.8, nn. 8-10 (PL 35: 1678-1679 [CCL 36: 341-342]). Shook translation.

Trinitate: “Perhaps it ought to be said that God alone is *essentia*. For he alone truly is because he is immutable, and this is what he told his servant Moses when he said *I Am Who Am, and you will tell them that it is He Who Is who has sent me to you* (Ex 3:14).⁷ Hence the divine name par excellence—*Sum*—would be best translated into philosophical language by the abstract term *essence*, which itself denotes the immutability of *that which is*.

We see here the source of that doctrine of divine *essentialitas* which was later through St. Anselm to influence so profoundly the theology of Richard of Saint Victor, Alexander of Hales and Bonaventure. To pass from this philosophical interpretation of the text of Exodus to the interpretation of it that Thomas was going to propose, the gap must be bridged between the being of essence and being of existence. We have now seen how, by their empiricism, St. Thomas’ proofs of the existence of God have bridged it. All that is left is to know the proper nature of the God whose existence they have demonstrated, that is, to know him as the supremely existing being. To distinguish, as Thomas himself does, between these various moments in our metaphysical study of God, is simply to yield to the demands of order. We cannot say all these things at the same time, but we must think them in this way. In fact, we cannot think them otherwise, for to prove that God holds first place in all the orders of existence is to prove at the same time that he is by definition *Esse* itself.

There is nothing clearer or more convincing in this regard than the order followed by the *Summa theologiae*. Knowing that a thing is, we have only to ask in what way it is, in order to know what it is. As a matter of fact—and we shall have to explain why—we do not know what God is, but only what he is not. The only conceivable manner of circumscribing his nature is therefore to remove successively from our notion of him all the modes of existing that cannot be his. Now, it is remarkable that the first of the ways of being that St. Thomas eliminates as incompatible with the notion of God is composition. What can we find at the end of this operation but the being free from all that is not being? To come to this conclusion will be nothing else than to present a notion already entirely included in the proofs of the existence of God.

As we follow Aquinas’ analysis, it is well to pay at least as much attention to the reasons why all compositions are eliminated one after the other as to the nature itself of the compositions thus eliminated. Let us begin with the crudest of all, that of conceiving God as a body. In order to eliminate it from the notion

⁷Augustine, *De Trinitate* 7.5, n. 10 (PL 42: 942 [CCL 50: 261]). Other texts may be found in Michael Schmaus, *Die psychologische Trinitätslehre des hl. Augustinus* (Münster-im-Westphalen: Aschendorff, 1927), p. 84, n. 1. For Thomas the unchanging presence of the divine essence is no longer the first and direct meaning of the *Qui est* of Exodus. Since it has to do with time, and since time is “consignified” by the verb, this meaning is only a “consignification” of the *Qui est*. Its signification is given to us as *ipsum esse* (ST 1.13.11, resp.).

of God, it is enough to review one by one the principal proofs of his existence. God is the first immovable mover; now no body moves unless it is moved; God is therefore not a body. God is the first being and hence supremely being in act; now every body is continuous and as such infinitely divisible; every body is therefore potentially divisible; this is not being that is pure act; hence it is not God. We have also proved the existence of God as the most noble of beings; now the soul is more noble than the body; it is therefore impossible that God is a body.⁸ Clearly, the principle commanding these various arguments is one and the same. In each case, it is a question of showing that whatever is incompatible with the pure actuality of being is incompatible with the notion of God.⁹

According to this principle, we must deny that God is composed of matter and form, for matter is in potency, and since God is pure act, without any mixture of potency, it is impossible that he is composed of matter and form.¹⁰ This second conclusion immediately entails a third. In its reality¹¹ essence is only substance insofar as it is intelligible through a concept and capable of definition. Thus understood, essence expresses primarily the form or nature of substance. Consequently, it includes—to the exclusion of everything else—whatever enters into the definition of the species. For example, the essence of man is humanity, which notion includes everything by which man is man: a rational animal composed of a soul and a body. It will be noted, however, that an essence embraces only that part of the substance that all the substances of the same species have in common, and not what each substance possesses as an individual. It is of the essence of humanity that every man should have a body. But the notion of humanity does not include that of the particular body, members, flesh and bones belonging to the substance of an individual man. All these individual determinations belong to the notion of man, since no man can exist without them. Thus, man (*homo*) will be said to designate the complete substance, taken with all the specific and individual determinations that render it capable of existing, whereas humanity (*humanitas*) designates the essence or formal part of the substance man, in brief the element that defines man in general. From this analysis, it follows that in all substances composed of matter and form, substance and essence do not exactly coincide. Since there is more in the substance man than in the essence humanity, man and humanity are not wholly identical. Now, we have said that God is not composed of matter and form. Therefore in him there cannot be any distinction between essence on the one hand and substance and nature on the other. We can say that man is man in virtue of his humanity, but not that God is God in virtue of his deity. God

⁸ST 1.3.1, resp.

⁹SCG 1.18 [4].

¹⁰ST 1.3.2, resp. From an even more general point of view see SCG 1.18 [2]

¹¹Concerning the divine being see below, pp. 93–94.

(*Deus*) and deity (*deitas*), and anything else that can be predicated of God, are all one and the same.¹²

This last rule enables us to recognize at once the opponents whom Thomas has in mind in this discussion, and at the same time to understand the exact meaning of his position. At the stage of the analysis he has just reached, Aquinas has not yet arrived at the order of existence, the ultimate goal toward which he is tending. Thus far he is only envisioning a notion of God that would not go beyond substantial being, so to speak. What he is asking is simply whether on this level, which is not yet that of being, it is possible to distinguish what God is, that is to say, his substance, from that by which he is God, that is to say, his essence. In this case, that by which God is God would be called his deity, and the problem would come down to asking if God is distinct from his deity or identical with it.¹³

This line of argument is not a consequence of Augustine's Platonism but that of Boethius. It is a rather curious fact that Plato's thought so profoundly influenced the thought of the Middle Ages, although it knew almost nothing of his works. His thought reached the Middle Ages through several doctrines which he had directly or indirectly influenced. We have already met the Platonism of Augustine and its followers; elsewhere we shall be meeting the Platonism of Dionysius the Areopagite and its devotees. But we must also take into account the Platonism of Alfarabi, Avicenna and their disciples. The Platonism of Boethius, which falls under examination here, is by no means the least important.

Thus at the origin of medieval philosophy there was not just one Platonism but several, and it is important to know how to distinguish them. But it is also important to remember that by their relationship to a common source these various Platonisms have constantly tended to reinforce one another, to unite, and sometimes even to become confused. The Platonic current is like a river flowing from Augustine, enlarged by the tributary from Boethius in the sixth century, from Dionysius through Scotus Eriugena in the ninth century, by the tributary Avicenna and the Latin translations in the twelfth century. Other less important tributaries like Hermes Trismegistus, Macrobius and Apuleius, for example, could be cited, and we should not forget the translation of the *Timaeus* by Chalcidius with its commentary, the only fragment of Plato himself that was, if not known, at least used during the high Middle Ages. Thus Aquinas was presented with many related forms of Platonism, with which he had sometimes to come to terms, sometimes openly to combat, but which he always tried to restrain.

In the present case, the root common to the Platonism of Boethius and Augustine is the ontology that reduces existence to being and conceives of being as *essentia*. But this principle is developed differently by Boethius than by Au-

¹²ST 1.3.3, resp.; SCG 1.21.

¹³ST 1.3.3, obj. 2.

gustine. Boethius seems to have begun with the well-known remark made by Aristotle as it were in passing, but which was to give rise to so many commentaries: "What man is, is different from the fact that he exists" (*Posterior Analytics* 2.7, 92b10-11). Apropos of a question in logic, this touched upon the frequently discussed problem of the relation between essence and existence. Aristotle himself never raised the problem, for the simple reason that, as his faithful commentator Averroes very well saw, he never made the distinction between what substances are and the fact that they are. Aristotle is not saying in his remark that the essence of a substance is distinct from its existence, but simply that one could not conclude from the mere definition of the essence of a substance that it exists.

[When in his turn Boethius took up the problem, he raised it to the level of metaphysics.¹⁴ The obscurity of his pithy formulas must have had no small role in drawing the attention of his commentators to them.¹⁵ Boethius distinguishes between being and that which is: *diversum est esse et id quod est*.¹⁶ But his distinction between *esse* and *id quod est* does not mean a distinction between essence and existence.¹⁷ Rather, it means the distinction between the thing itself that is (*id quod est*) and the form (*esse*) whereby it is what it is. For this reason the form (*esse*) of a substance is also called its *quo est*: that by which the

¹⁴[This paragraph and the following one do not translate literally either the 5th edition (1944) or the 6th edition (1965) of *Le Thomisme* but are taken from Shook's altered rendition of them in his translation of the 5th edition, published in 1956 as *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, pp. 90-91. As rendered by Shook, these paragraphs introduce an important change in the meaning of *esse* for Boethius. In the French editions Gilson takes the Boethian *esse* to mean existence; in Shook's rendition of the text, however, it means form. This agrees with Gilson's account of the Boethian *esse* as form in his *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (New York: Random House, 1955), pp. 104-105. It is hardly credible that Shook would have altered these two paragraphs on his own initiative. We conclude that Gilson instructed him to do so, just as he instructed him to make other changes in the text. (I have touched on Gilson's practice in this regard in my Introduction.) We must likewise conclude that Gilson by inadvertence failed to incorporate this important change in his 6th edition of *Le Thomisme*, which in these paragraphs repeats word-for-word the text of the 5th edition. The translation of the original French text is given in Appendix 1. — A.M.]

¹⁵For this doctrine see Aimé Forest, "Le réalisme de Gilbert de la Porrée dans le commentaire du *De Hebdomadibus*," *Revue néo-scholastique de philosophie* 36 (1934): 101-110; Marie-Humbert Vicaire, "Les Porrétains et l'avicennisme avant 1215," *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 26 (1937): 449-482, and especially the excellent pp. 460-462.

¹⁶Boethius, *Quomodo substantiae in eo quod sint, bonae sint*, usually cited under the title *De hebdomadibus* (PL 64: 1311b). Cf. "Omni composito aliud est esse, aliud quod ipsum est" (ibid. c). On the Platonist sources of Boethius see two works often overlooked by most historians of mediaeval philosophy: Joseph Bidez, "Boèce et Porphyre," *Revue belge de philosophie et d'histoire* 2 (1923): 189-201, and Pierre Courcelle "Boèce et l'École d'Alexandrie," *Mélanges d'archéologie et d'histoire de l'École française de Rome* 52 (1935): 185-223.

¹⁷Vicaire, "Les Porrétains et l'avicennisme avant 1215," p. 461.

substance is. A form of this sort is simple by definition: *ipsum esse nihil aliud praeter se habet admixtum*.¹⁸ The *quod est*, on the contrary, only exists insofar as it is informed by the form that gives it being: *quod est, accepta essendi forma, est atque consistit*.¹⁹

To comment on Boethius through Gilbert of Poitiers is certainly explaining the obscure by the more obscure. However his modern commentators interpret Gilbert himself, they agree that in his texts "we should not translate *essentia* by essence. In its true meaning, this term evokes a distinction within being itself (essence and existence) that did not as yet exist in Latin thought. *Esse*, too, is taken as a form. *Esse* and *essentia* are in this sense equivalent. God's *essentia* is the *esse* of all being and at the same time form par excellence."²⁰ Since it is here a question of a basic metaphysical, or at least an epistemological position,²¹ it was to dominate even the problem raised by the notion of God. Indeed, Gilbert thought of God, the form of all being, as himself defined by a form determining our notion of him as God. The mind would then conceive the *quod est* which is God, as determined in being by the form *divinitas*. We cannot think that Gilbert conceived God to be composed of two really distinct elements, God (*Deus*) and divinity (*divinitas*), but he seems at least to have admitted that, as far as we are concerned, God can only be conceived as a *quod est* informed by a *quo est*, which is his divinity.²² The doctrine has been highly influential. Accepted or amended by some, condemned by others, it has left its traces even on those who most emphatically rejected it. This is hardly surprising, because philosophers frequently reject consequences whose principles they nevertheless accept. In order to eliminate Gilbert's doctrine, it was necessary to go beyond the realism of *essentia* to reach that of *esse*. In brief, it was necessary to bring about the philosophical reform that we associate with the name of Thomas Aquinas.

Put in terms of Thomistic philosophy, the distinction between *Deus* and *divinitas* was equivalent to conceiving the divine being as a kind of substance determined to be such by an essence, namely, the essence of divinity. Perhaps this conclusion is almost inevitable as long as one tries to circumscribe the divine being by the conceptual definition of an essence. Even if it is affirmed,

¹⁸Boethius, *Quomodo substantiae*, 1311c.

¹⁹Ibid. 1331b.

²⁰Vicaire, "Les Porrétains et l'avicennisme avant 1215," p. 461. See Gilbert of Poitiers, *In librum Boetii De Trinitate*, 1.2 (PL 64: 1268d, 1269a). [See *The Commentaries on Boethius by Gilbert of Poitiers*, ed. Nikolaus M. Häring (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1966), 45, p. 87.]

²¹For this problem see the article by André Hayen, "Le Concile de Reims et l'erreur théologique de Gilbert de la Porrée," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen âge*, 11-12 (1935-1936): 29-102. Note the "Conclusion": 85-90.

²²Since we cannot discuss this thorny problem here, we are abbreviating Hayen's careful conclusions. See Hayen, "Le Concile de Reims," pp. 56-60, particularly 58, nn. 4-5.

as Gilbert did, that God is his divinity, whoever seeks to define such an essence can only do so by conceiving God as being God by the very *divinitas* that he is. This introduces into God, at least in thought, a distinction between the determined and the determining, between potency and act, which is incompatible with the pure activity of the divine being.²³ In order to overcome this difficulty, we must, with Aquinas, go beyond the identification of God's substance with his essence and affirm the identity of his essence with his act of being. What distinguishes Aquinas' position from that of the followers of Gilbert of Poitiers is not that it gives witness to a more lively sense of the divine simplicity. All Christian theologians know that God is absolutely simple, and they say so, but not in the same way. The lesson Thomas Aquinas gives us here is that we cannot say this properly if we remain on the level of substance and essence, which are objects of quidditative concepts. The divine simplicity is perfect because it is the simplicity of pure act. We cannot define it; we can only affirm it by an act of judgment.]

In order to understand Aquinas on this decisive point, we must first recall the privileged role he assigns to *esse* in the structure of reality. For him everything has its own act of being; everything is in virtue of what is proper to it: *unumquodque est per suum esse*. Since it is here a question of a principle, we can be certain that its range extends even to God. It would be better to say that it is the very existence of God that is at the basis of this principle. After all, God is the necessary being, as shown by the third proof of his existence. God, then, is an act of being such that his existence is necessary. This is what is meant by being necessary *per se*. To posit God in this way is to affirm a being that needs no cause of its existence. Such would not be the case were his essence distinguished in any way from his existence. If the essence of God determined in any way his act of being, the latter would no longer be necessary. Accordingly, God is the being that he is and no other. This is the meaning of the statement: *Deus est suum esse*.²⁴ Like everything that is, God is by his own act of existing, but in this unique case we must say that *what* the being is, is nothing else than that by which it exists, namely, the pure act of existing.

Thomas Aquinas himself says that this thesis can be shown in many ways (*multipliciter ostendi potest*). God is the first cause; hence he has no cause. Now, God would have a cause if his essence were distinct from his being, because then to be what he is would not suffice for him to exist. Accordingly, it is impossible for the essence of God to be something other than his act of existing. We can begin, too, if it seems preferable, from the fact that God is act, free from all potentiality. Then the question is: What is most actual in every given reality? The answer must be: the act of existing, because to be (*esse*) is

²³SCG 1.21 [6].

²⁴"Unumquodque est per suum esse. Quod igitur non est suum esse, non est per se necesse esse. Deus autem est per se necesse esse. Ergo Deus est suum esse" (SCG 1.22 [5]).

the actuality of every form or nature (*quia esse est actualitas omnis formae vel naturae*). To be actually good, is to be a good existing being. Like humanity, goodness has no actual reality other than in an actually existing man. Let us suppose, then, that the essence of God were distinct from his existence. The divine act of being would then be the act of the divine essence, and this latter would consequently stand in relation to God's *esse* as potency to act. Now, God is pure act; therefore his essence must be his act of existing.

We can proceed even more directly, beginning with God as being. To say the essence of God is not his *esse*, would be to say that *what* God is has *esse* but is not itself *esse*. However, that which has the act of existing but is not the act of existing exists only by participation. Since, as we have said, God is his essence or his very nature,²⁵ he does not exist by participation. This is what we mean when we call him the first being. Thus God is his essence and his essence is the act itself of existing; he is accordingly not only his essence but his act of existing.²⁶

Such is the God whom the five proofs of Thomas Aquinas seek and finally reach by five different ways. Undoubtedly it was a question here of a properly philosophical conclusion. Placed in history, this conclusion appears to be the result of an effort extending over several centuries to reach the very root of being, which was henceforth to be identified with the act of existing. Going beyond the Platonic ontology of essence and the Aristotelian ontology of substance, Thomas Aquinas at the same time went beyond both the first substance of Aristotle and the God as *essentia* of Augustine and his disciples. At least to our knowledge, Aquinas never said that God has no essence.²⁷ If we think of his many opportunities to say this, we will certainly agree that he had good reason for avoiding the expression. The simplest reason is probably that, since we only know beings whose essence is not their act of existing, it is impossible for us to conceive of a being without essence. In the case of God, we conceive less an

²⁵See above, pp. 89–90.

²⁶“Est igitur Deus suum esse, et non solum sua essentia” (*ST* 1.3.4, resp.). We can come to the same conclusion starting from creatures. They *have* the act of existing, but *are* not it. The cause of their *esse* can only be *Esse*. Therefore the act of existing is God's very essence (*De pot.* 7.2, resp.).

²⁷According to Sertillanges, “St. Thomas formally concedes in the *De ente et essentia* that God has no essence” (*Le christianisme et les philosophies* [Paris: Aubier, 1939] 1: 268). But actually Thomas only says: “Inveniuntur aliqui philosophi dicentes quod Deus non habet quidditatem vel essentiam, quia essentia sua non est aliud quam esse suum” [*De ente et essentia* 5; Leonine ed. 43: 378.5–7]. Texts of Avicenna are cited in the edition of M.D. Roland-Gosselin, *Le De ente et essentia de S. Thomas D'Aquin* (Paris: Vrin, 1948), p. 37, n. 1. Thomas explains here in what sense this expression would be true, but he himself does not seem to have used it. But in Avicenna we read: “Primus igitur non habet quidditatem” (*Liber de prima philosophia* 8.4 [ed. S. van Riet, 2: 402.11]).

act of existing without essence than an essence which, by passing as it were to its limit, would come to be one with its act of existing.²⁸ Moreover, such is the case of all God's attributes in the doctrine of Thomas Aquinas. Just as we do not say that God has no wisdom, but rather that wisdom is his being, we do not say that God has no essence but that his essence is his being.²⁹ To grasp in one glance the extent of Aquinas' reform on the plane of natural theology, we have only to measure the distance separating Augustine's God as *essentia* from the God of Thomas Aquinas, whose *essentia* is, as it were, absorbed by *Esse*.

The pure being that Aquinas the philosopher encountered at the end of metaphysics, Aquinas the theologian also met in scripture, no longer as the conclusion of a rational argument, but as a revelation from God himself to the human race to be accepted by faith. For there is no doubt that Aquinas thought that God had revealed to men that his essence is to exist. He is not lavish with epithets. No philosopher was less prone than he to yield to the temptation to wax eloquent. On this occasion, however, seeing these two beams of light so converging that they fused into each other, he was unable to withhold a word of admiration for the brilliant truth blazing forth from their point of fusion. He saluted this truth with words exalting it above all others: "The essence of God is therefore his act of existing. This sublime truth (*hanc autem sublimem veritatem*) God taught Moses when he asked the Lord: 'If the children of Israel ask me what your name is, what shall I tell them?' (Ex 3:13). And the Lord replied: '*I Am Who Am*. You are to say to the children of Israel: *He Who Is* has sent me to you.' Thus he showed that his proper name is *He Who Is*. Now, every name is intended to signify the nature or essence of something. So the divine existence itself (*ipsum divinum esse*) is the essence or nature of God."³⁰ Note well that for Thomas Aquinas this revelation of the identity of essence and existence in God was equivalent to a revelation of the distinction between essence and existence in creatures. *He Who Is* signifies him whose essence is to exist; *He Who Is* is the proper name of God; consequently, the essence of anything

²⁸From the point of view of Christian doctrine, there exists a still simpler reason: the notion of *essentia* is necessary to define the mystery of the Holy Trinity: *et in personis proprietates et in essentia unitas*. It is to be noted, moreover, that it is the *esse* that absorbs the essence, not the reverse: "In Deo autem ipsum esse suum est sua quidditas: et ideo nomen quod sumitur ab esse, proprie nominat ipsum, et est proprium nomen ejus: sicut proprium nomen hominis quod sumitur a quidditate sua," *Sent.* 1.8.1.1, sol. [ed. Mandonnet-Moos 1: 195]. Thus God is more properly called *Qui est* than *essentia*.

²⁹"Quandoque enim significat [*scil.* ens et esse] essentiam rei, sive actum essendi; quandoque vero significat veritatem propositionis Primo enim modo est idem *esse* Dei quod est substantia et sicut ejus substantia est ignota, ita et *esse*. Secundo autem modo scimus quoniam Deus est, quoniam hanc propositionem in intellectu nostro concipimus ex effectibus ipsius" (*De pot.* 7.2, ad 1).

³⁰SCG 1.22 [10].

that is not God is not something whose essence is to exist. We could confidently assume that Aquinas made this simple inference, but the texts prove that in fact he did. "It is impossible that the substance of any being other than the First Agent be its very act of existing. Hence the name that Exodus (3:14) gives as the divine name, *He Who Is*, for it belongs properly to him alone that his substance be nothing other than his act of existing."³¹

These statements have two principal consequences. First, the Thomistic doctrine of *esse* was an event not only in the history of natural theology but also in that of theology pure and simple. The word of God is here being interpreted literally. To appreciate the importance of what is at stake we have only to compare Aquinas' interpretation of the text of Exodus with that of Augustine. When Augustine read the name of God, he took it to mean "I am he who never changes." Aquinas, reading the same words, understood them to mean "I am the pure act of existing."

Hence this second consequence: no historian can portray Thomas Aquinas' thought as containing philosophies as distinct from each other as their definitions would be. Neither the identity of essence and existence in God, nor the distinction between essence and existence in creatures, belongs to what has been revealed (*revelatum*), since neither of these two truths is beyond the range of natural reason taken as a faculty of judgment. Nevertheless, for Aquinas both belong to the revealable, and even to the revealable that has been revealed. Nowhere perhaps can we see more clearly, in the teaching of Thomas Aquinas, how complex is the economy of revelation, that is to say, the act by which God makes himself known to man. Thomas was far from believing or making others believe that long ago God had revealed to Moses the twenty-second chapter of Book 1 of the *Summa contra Gentiles*. If anyone should think this, it is not Aquinas who is naive. God has given us his name; it suffices that we believe it, lest any false god afterward seduce us. The theology of the Christian masters is only revelation carried forward by minds working in the light of faith. Time was needed for reason to do its work. Augustine was on the right path; Thomas Aquinas but followed the same road to its end. Everyone is free to imagine his genius as a living classification of the sciences. But those of us who do so will soon be at grips with the following problem. Is it Thomas the theologian who,

³¹Ibid. 2.52 [9]. This phrase is not absolutely perfect because it seems to indicate that God is composed of *Qui* and *est*. But it is the least imperfect of all because it is the simplest human understanding can conceive to designate God. All the others like "Who is one," "Who is good," etc. add to the composition of "Who" with "is" their composition with a third term. See *In Sent.* 1.8.1.1, ad 3, 4 [ed. Mandonnet-Moos 1: 196]. To say that it is the least imperfect, however, does not mean that it is not proper to God. This name "*qui est*" is *maxime proprium* to him; in this absolute sense it belongs to God alone (*ST* 1.13.11, *sed contra*). But it is still not a perfectly simple name for *Ipsum Esse*. The terms composing it can still be attributed to creatures, since it is from them that our intellect has fashioned them.

reading in Exodus the identity of essence and existence in God, taught Thomas the philosopher the distinction between essence and existence in creatures? Or is it Thomas the philosopher, who, pushing his analysis of the metaphysical structure of the concrete as far as the distinction between essence and existence, taught Thomas the theologian that the *He Who Is* in Exodus means the act of being? Aquinas himself as a philosopher thought of these two propositions as the two sides of one and the same metaphysical thesis, and from the day he understood them, he always thought of them as being in scripture. The word of God is too profound for human reason to exhaust its meaning. It is always the same meaning of the same word that the reasoning of the Doctors of the Church pursues to depths more and more profound. The genius of Thomas Aquinas is one and his work is one. One cannot separate in it, without destroying its delicate balance, what God has revealed to men from the meaning of what he has revealed to them.

For the historian at least, this sublime truth is the key to the understanding of Thomism. Aquinas' philosophical work is above all the discovery through human reason of the *ultima Thule* of metaphysics. It is difficult to reach it and almost as difficult to keep hold of it. This is what we are trying to do in following, even to its final consequences, this sublime truth (*hanc sublimem veritatem*) whose light illumines the whole doctrine.

At the beginning of this quest, as a provision for the journey, let us take with us the following formula, which is perhaps the fullest and clearest that Thomas himself has provided for it: "Being (*esse*) has two meanings. In the first sense it denotes the act of existing (*actum essendi*). In the second sense it denotes the composition of the proposition made by the mind in joining a predicate to a subject. If we take *esse* in the first sense, we cannot know what God's being is (*non possumus scire esse Dei*), any more than we can know his essence. We can know it only in the second sense, for we know that the proposition we form about God in saying 'God exists' is true, and we know this from his effects."³²

Section 2. The Knowledge of God

Once the existence of God has been demonstrated, a complete study of the problems relating to God should fall under three main headings: first, the unity of the divine essence; second, the Trinity of the divine persons; third, the effects produced by the divinity.³³ The second is no concern of philosophy. Although it is not forbidden to apply our mind to this mystery, we could not pretend to demonstrate it by means of reason without destroying it as a mystery. The Trinity eludes the grasp of human understanding; we know it by revelation alone.³⁴

³²ST 1.3.4, ad 2. See *De pot.* 7.2, ad 1.

³³*Comp. theol.* 1.2 [Leonine ed. 42: 84].

³⁴*Ibid.* 1.36 [p. 23].

Natural theology, then, is only able to examine two of these subjects, namely, the essence of God and the relations of his effects to him.

It should be added that even in these two cases human reason could not clarify everything. As we have said, reason is only at home with concepts and definitions. To define an object is first of all to assign it a genus (e.g., "animal"); to the genus is then added its specific difference (e.g., "rational animal"); finally, this specific difference can be further determined by individual differences (e.g., "Socrates"). Now, in the case of God all definition is impossible. He can be named, but to give him a name is not to define him. In order to define him, we should have to place him in a genus. Since God calls himself *Qui est*, his genus would be being (*ens*). But Aristotle had already seen that being is not a genus, because a genus is determinable by differences that, since they specify it, are not part of it. Now, we cannot conceive of anything that is not something, and consequently would not be contained in being. Over and above being there is only non-being, which is not a difference because it is nothing. Thus we cannot say that God's essence belongs to the genus of being, and since we could not assign any other essence to him, it is impossible to define God.³⁵

This does not mean that we are thereby reduced to complete silence. Failing to arrive at the essence of God, we can try to determine what it is not. Rather than beginning with an inaccessible essence and adding to it positive differences that would make us know better and better what it is, we can gather a considerable number of negative differences that give us a more and more precise knowledge of what it is not. It might be asked whether in this way we shall arrive at a true knowledge of it. The answer to this is Yes. Certainly such knowledge is imperfect, but it is better than simple ignorance. What is more, it eliminates a kind of positive pseudo-knowledge that pretends to say what the essence of God is but presents it as it cannot possibly be. When we posit an unknown essence and distinguish it from an ever-larger number of other essences, each negative difference determines with increasing precision the preceding difference, and thus encircles ever more closely the exterior outline of the object. For example, to say that God is not an accident but a substance is to distinguish him from all possible accidents. If we add, then, that God is not a body, we specify more exactly the place he occupies in the genus of substances. Thus proceeding in orderly fashion, and distinguishing God from all that is not God by negations of this kind, we come to a knowledge of his substance that is not positive but true, because we know it as distinct from everything else.³⁶ Let us follow this path as far as it can lead us. There will be time to take a new one when we shall have reached its end.

³⁵ST 1.3.5, resp. Moreover, this conclusion results directly from the perfect simplicity of God which we have established (ST 1.3.7). This makes it impossible to find in him the composition of genus and specific difference required for a definition.

³⁶SCG 1.14.

Section 2a. The Knowledge of God by Way of Negation

To make God known by way of negation is accordingly to show not how he is, but how he is not. Moreover, we have already begun to do this by proving his perfect simplicity.³⁷ To say that God is absolutely simple because he is the pure act of existing, is not to have a concept of such an act, but to deny of him, as we have seen, any composition whatsoever: composition of whole and parts as is found in bodies, form and matter, essence and substance, and finally essence and existence, that has led us to affirm God as a being whose essence is to exist. Beginning from there, we can add to the divine simplicity a second attribute that follows necessarily from the first, namely, his perfection.

Here again, it is impossible for us to conceive of a perfect being, but we must at least affirm God to be such, denying him all imperfection. This is what we do in affirming that God is perfect. Just as we conclude that God exists, although we cannot conceive the nature of his act of existing, so we conclude that God is perfect, although the nature of his perfection is beyond our reason. For us to remove all conceivable imperfections from the notion of God is to attribute to him all conceivable perfection. Human reason can go no further in its knowledge of the divine, but it should at least go this far.

This being, from whom we remove all the imperfections of creatures, is far from being reduced to an abstract concept by our understanding of what is common to all things, like the universal concept of being. It is in a way the meeting point and, as it were, the *locus metaphysicus* of all the judgments of perfection. This need not be understood in the sense that being must be reduced to a certain degree of perfection, but rather, conversely, in the sense that all perfection consists in the possession of a certain degree of being.

Let us consider, for example, the perfection of wisdom. For us to possess wisdom is *to be wise*. Accordingly, it is because we have gained a degree of being in becoming wise that we have also gained a degree of perfection. For a thing is said to be more or less noble, more or less perfect in the degree to which it is a definite mode—more or less lofty—of perfection. Hence, if we suppose a pure act of being, this absolute act of being will also be absolutely perfect, because any perfection is only a certain way of being. Now, we know something that is the absolute act of being; it is the same thing of which we have said that it is this act. That which is the act of being, or, in other words, that whose essence is only to exist, is necessarily the absolute being as well. In other words, it has the power to be in its supreme degree. A white thing cannot be perfectly white because it is not whiteness; it is white only because it participates in whiteness, and its nature is perhaps such that it cannot participate in integral whiteness. But if there existed a whiteness in itself, and whose being consisted precisely in being white, it would in no way be deficient in whiteness.

³⁷See above, pp. 84–97.

It is the same with being. We have already proven that God is his act of existing. Accordingly, he does not receive this act. We know, however, that to be a thing imperfectly amounts to receiving it imperfectly. God, who is his act of existing, is therefore the pure being to whom no perfection is wanting, and since God possesses all perfections, he has no defect. Just as everything is perfect in the degree to which it is, so also everything is imperfect in the degree to which, in a certain respect, it is not. But since God is pure being, he is entirely free from non-being. Thus God alone has no defects and possesses all perfections; in short, he is completely perfect.³⁸

How then can the illusion arise that in denying God a certain number of modes of being we would lessen his degree of perfection? Simply from an equivocal understanding of the words *to be only*. Unquestionably, what only exists is less perfect than what is living. But this is the way we reason about the being of essences that are not the act of existing. With them, it is a question of imperfect and participated beings that increase in perfection as they increase in being: "The measure in which a thing has *esse* is its measure in nobility" (*secundum modum quo res habet esse est suus modus in nobilitate*). Then we can easily conceive that what *is only* the perfection of the body is inferior to what *is*, in addition, the perfection of life. The expression *is only* denotes, then, nothing else than an inferior mode of participation in being. But when we say of God that he is only his act of being, without being able to add that he is neither matter, body, substance, or accident, we mean that he possesses absolute being, and we put aside whatever would be contradictory to the pure act of existing and the fullness of his perfection.³⁹

To be perfect is to lack no good. To say that God is perfect, then, is equivalent to saying that he is pure goodness; and since his perfection is nothing else but the purity of his act of existing, it is as pure actuality of being that God is pure goodness. When we assert that God is good, we should not imagine that he has a quality added to his being. *To be is to be good*, as Augustine already said in the *De doctrina christiana* (Bk. 1, ch. 32), and as Thomas repeats to support his own theme: "insofar as we are, we are good" (*in quantum sumus, boni sumus*). However, we should note carefully the adjustment that must be made in Augustinism before it can be brought into Thomism. True, the adjustment is easily made, as is that of Aristotelianism placed by Thomas in the same melting-pot. Why, Thomas asks, can we say with Augustine that we are good

³⁸SCG 1.28; ST 1.4.1, resp. and 1.4.2, ad 2. It goes without saying that even the word "perfect" is inadequate to describe God. To be perfect is to be finished or completely made. Here we are extending the range of the word from what reaches its completion at the end by a process of becoming to what possesses completeness by full right without ever having gone through a process of becoming. See SCG 1.28 [10].

³⁹Ibid. 1.28. See *De ente et essentia* 5 [Leonine ed. 43: 378.30-34].

insofar as we exist? Because the good and being are really the same. To be good is to be desirable. As Aristotle says in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (Bk. 1, ch. 1) the good is "what everyone desires." Now, everything is desirable insofar as it is perfect, and everything is perfect insofar as it is in act or "actual." To be, therefore, is to be perfect, and consequently to be good. We could hardly wish for a more complete agreement among Aristotle, Augustine, and Thomas Aquinas. However, Thomas' reconciliation of his predecessors is not purely eclectic. His own thought literally transforms that of the two philosophers he invokes. In order to alter their common ontology of essence, he has only to transpose their doctrines from the level of being to that of the act of being. He actually does this in so simple a phrase that there is danger of its profound meaning escaping us: "It is therefore clear that a thing is good insofar as it is being; indeed, to be (*esse*) is the actuality of everything, as can be gathered from what has been said."⁴⁰ Thus the identity of the good and of being, as had been taught by his predecessors, becomes for Thomas Aquinas the identity of the good and the act of existing.

Accordingly, we must also transform the doctrine of the primacy of being over the good into the doctrine of the primacy of the act of existing. We must insist on this all the more, since once again Thomas relies upon a Platonic text to effect this transformation, this time from the *De causis* 4: "The first created thing is being" (*Prima rerum creatarum est esse*).⁴¹ This primacy of *esse* is presented as a primacy of being in the order of knowledge. Being is the first intelligible object. Hence we can only conceive as good what we first conceive as being.⁴² We must go further. Since being (*ens*) is what has actual existence (*habens esse*), the noetic primacy of being over the good is only the conceptual expression of the ontological primacy of *esse* over the good. At the root of everything good there is a being that is the definite perfection of a certain act of existing. If God is perfect, it is because for a being "that is its own act of existing, it is appropriate to exist in the fullest sense of the term."⁴³ Similarly, the reason why anything is good is because for a being that is a certain essence, it is appropriate to be good according to the degree of this essence. The case of God, however, remains unique, because we must here *identify* what is called good with what is called "to exist." The same conclusion is also valid for all the particular perfections we would like to attribute to God. "Since every thing is good insofar as it is perfect, and since the perfect goodness of God is his divine

⁴⁰ST 1.5.1, resp. The text to which Thomas is here referring is ST 1.3.4, resp. See SCG 3.20 [2].

⁴¹ST 1.5.2, sed contra. [See *Liber de causis* 4.37, ed. Adriaan Pattin, *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie* 28 (1966): 142.]

⁴²ST 1.5.2, resp.

⁴³SCG 1.28 [3].

act of existing (*ipsum divinum esse est ejus perfecta bonitas*), it is the same thing for God to be and to live, to be wise, to be happy and, generally speaking, to be anything seeming to imply perfection and goodness. This amounts to saying that the total divine goodness is the divine act of being itself (*quasi tota divina bonitas sit ipsum divinum esse*).⁴⁴ In brief, for God to be good and to be the pure act of existing are one and the same thing.⁴⁵

To affirm that God is perfection and the absolute good is at the same time to affirm that he is infinite. According to Aristotle (*Physics* 3.6), all the ancient philosophers recognized that God is infinite. Thomas was very conscious of the sense in which they meant this. Since they considered the world eternal, they could hardly regard the principle of a universe of infinite duration to be anything other than infinite. Their error concerned the kind of infinity belonging to this principle. Regarding it as material, they attributed to it a material infinity. Some of them posited an infinite body as the first principle of nature. And indeed the body is infinite in a sense, in that it is not of itself finite or determined. It is form that determines it. On the other hand, the form of itself is non-finite or incompletely determined, since, being common to the species, it is only determined by matter to be the form of a given singular thing. It is to be noted, however, that the two cases are very different. Matter gains in perfection by being determined by form, and so its non-finiteness is an indication of a true imperfection in it. Form, on the contrary, loses its natural amplitude when it is contracted, so to speak, to the dimensions of a given matter. Therefore the non-finiteness of form, which is measured by the fullness of its essence, is rather a mark of perfection. Now, in the case of God, what is at stake is the form par excellence, since, as we have said, the act of existing is the most formal of all that there is (*illud quod est maxime formale omnium, est ipsum esse*). God is absolute and subsistent *esse*, who is neither received nor contracted by any essence, since he is *suum esse*. Clearly, the pure and absolute act of existing is infinite in the most positive sense of the term and by full right.⁴⁶

If God is infinite, it is impossible to conceive of anything real in which he is not present. Otherwise there would be being external and foreign to his, placing a limitation upon him. This consequence, which is of the greatest importance in Thomistic metaphysics, affects both our notions of God and of created nature. To deny that there is anything in which God is not present is to affirm that he is in all things. But we cannot affirm this without denying at the same time that he is in beings as a part of their essence or as an accident of their substance. The principle that allows us to affirm his omnipresence is given to us

⁴⁴Ibid. 3.20; *ST* 1.6.3, resp.

⁴⁵"Deo vero simpliciter idem est esse et esse bonum simpliciter" (*SCG* 3. 20 [7]). On being and the good see Gilson, *Elements of Christian Philosophy*, pp. 153–159.

⁴⁶*ST* 1.7.1, resp.

by the proof of his existence: *Deus est ipsum esse per suam essentiam*. If we assume that pure being (*ipsum esse*) acts as a cause, (and we shall see later on that it does so in the role of creator), its proper effect will be the being (*esse*) of creatures. This effect God will cause not only when they are created, but also as long as they endure. Things exist by virtue of the divine act of existing as the light of the sun exists by virtue of the sun. As long as the sun shines it is day; when its light ceases to reach us it is night. Similarly, if the divine act of existing ceases for a moment to keep things existing, there is nothingness.

Hence, even on the level of metaphysics, the Thomistic universe is clearly a sacred universe. Other natural theologies, such as Augustine's, take delight in contemplating the footprints of God in the order, the rhythms and the forms of creatures. Thomas also finds pleasure in this. These natural theologies go further: they see this order, these rhythms, and these forms conferring upon creatures the stability of being, so that the whole world of being is a transparent mirror reflecting to the eyes of reason the immutability of the divine being. Thomas follows them up to this point, but then he moves beyond them. The Thomistic universe is a world of beings, each of which gives witness to God by its very act of existing. All things in it are not of the same rank. There are splendid beings like the angels, noble ones like humans, and more modest ones like animals, plants, and minerals. Of all these beings there is not one that does not bear witness that God is the supreme act of existing. Like the highest of the angels, the lowliest blade of grass does that most astonishing thing: it exists. The world of Thomas Aquinas is one in which it is wonderful to be born, in which the distance between the least being and nothing is strictly infinite. It is a sacred world, impregnated to its inmost fibers with the presence of a God whose supreme existence saves it constantly from nothingness.

Once you have crossed the threshold of this enchanted universe you can no longer live in any other. The plain technical language in which Thomas speaks of it has done much to conceal the entrance to it. Yet it is there that his simple formulas beckon us, formulas besides which all others used before him seem suddenly so feeble when you understand his own. The thought that all things are full of gods is beautiful indeed. Thales of Miletus had it, and Plato borrowed it from him. Now, all things are filled with God. Or we can say again, God is the existence of all that exists, since every existing thing exists only by his own existence (*Deus est esse omnium, non essentiale, sed causale*).⁴⁷ Or we can say finally, to return simply to the conclusion of our analysis of being:⁴⁸ "As long as a thing exists, God must be present to it insofar as it exists. Now, to exist is what is most intimate and deepest in each thing, because the act of existing is formal with

⁴⁷*In Sent.* 1.8.1.2, sol. [ed. Mandonnet-Moos 1: 198]. See Bernard of Clairvaux, *In Cantica canticorum* 4.4 (PL 183: 798b [ed. Jean Leclercq et al., 1957, p. 20.17-18]).

⁴⁸See above, pp. 41-43.

respect to all that there is in this being. Therefore, God must exist in all things, and intimately so (*unde oportet quod Deus sit in omnibus rebus, et intime*).⁴⁹

Accordingly, God is everywhere or in all places. This is a well-worn phrase that is often little more than a pious expression. Here it takes on its full meaning which gives substance to piety. To be in all places means to be the act of existing of whatever exists in place.⁵⁰ It would perhaps be even better to say that God is present to everything in all conceivable ways of being present. Because his presence impregnates each being in its very act of existing, which is the ground of all other acts, God is in all things by his essence, as the *Esse* causing their *esse*. For the same reason he is in them by his presence, for what has no existence except from him is naked and open to his eyes. For the same reason he is in them by his power, for nothing acts save insofar as it is; and since God is the cause of the being of each thing, he is also the cause of its actions.⁵¹ It pertains to God, then, to be in all things by his essence, by his presence, and by his power, because he is there by himself (*per se*) in virtue of the fact that he is the pure act of existing.

This brings us to that divine attribute whose importance Augustine had so rightly emphasized, but whose root Thomas Aquinas at last disclosed, namely, immutability. To say that God is the immovable being was, for Augustine, to have plumbed his very depths. For Thomas, beyond the divine immutability there is a reason for it. To change is to pass from potency to act. Now, since God is pure act he could not change in any way.⁵² We have known this already when we proved God's existence as the first immovable mover. To deny that he is subject to movement is to affirm his complete immutability.⁵³ Completely immovable, by the same token God is eternal. Once more, let us give up the idea of conceiving what an eternal act of existing can be. The only mode of existing we know is that belonging to temporal things, that is to say, having a duration in which "an after" continually replaces "a before." All we can do is deny that God's act of existing admits of a before or after. This must be so, because God is immutable and his being undergoes no succession. To say that a duration admits of no succession is to affirm that it has no terminus, whether beginning or end. Hence it is affirmed as doubly interminable. At the same time it is to assert that it is not truly what we call a duration, since it is without succession. Eternity is existing all at once (*tota simul existens*).⁵⁴ This

⁴⁹ST 1.8.1, resp. See *In Sent.* 1.37.1.1, sol. [ed. Mandonnet-Moos 1: 857].

⁵⁰ST 1.8.2, resp.

⁵¹Ibid. 1.8.3, resp. and ad 1.

⁵²Ibid. 1.9.1, resp

⁵³Thus God's immutability is immediately affirmed *per viam remotionis* in SCG 1.14 [4].

⁵⁴ST 1.10.1, resp.

eternity is the uniformity of the very act of existing that is God; and since God is his essence, he is his eternity.⁵⁵

Perhaps the simplest way to summarize the preceding is to say that God is one, for what we have done thus far amounts to denying any multiplicity in his essence. Like the good, the one is simply being itself under one of its aspects. This time it is no longer being insofar as it is desirable, it is being insofar as it is undivided. Indeed, a being divided is no longer the being it was; the result is two things, each of which is one. We cannot speak of *one being* save where there is a *being one*. As Thomas puts it so forcefully: "Just as each thing preserves its being, so also it preserves its unity" (*unumquodque, sicut custodit suum esse, ita custodit suam unitatem*).⁵⁶

Does this mean that the two terms, "one" and "being," can be used interchangeably? Not at all. It is the same with the one as with the good. It is not the one that exists; it is being that is one, even as it is good, true, and beautiful. These properties, often called the *transcendentals*, have no meaning or reality apart from being, which affirms all of them in affirming itself. Thus it is not meaningless to say "being is one," for even though one adds nothing to being, our mind adds something to the notion of being by conceiving it as undivided, that is to say, as one.⁵⁷ It is the same with our notion of God. To say that God is one is to say that he is the being that he is. Not only is he this, but he is this preeminently, since he is his own nature, his own essence, or better his own act of existing. If the one is only undivided being, what is supremely being is also supremely one and supremely undivided. Now, God is supremely being, for he is *esse* itself, pure and simple, without any other qualification of nature or essence added in order to determine it. God is also supremely undivided, because the purity of his act of existing makes him perfectly simple. It is therefore clear that God is one.⁵⁸

⁵⁵Ibid. 1.10.2, resp.

⁵⁶Ibid. 1.11.1, resp. Note the important reply to the first objection following this response. Thomas here distinguishes between two kinds of unity: quantitative, belonging to one, the principle of numbers, and metaphysical, belonging to being as undivided. In this historically profound view, Thomas sees in the confusion between these two sorts of unity the origin of two doctrines which he rejects. Pythagoras and Plato clearly saw that transcendental unity is equivalent to being, but they confused it with numerical unity, and hence concluded that all substances are composed of numbers, which in turn are composed of units. On the other hand, Avicenna clearly saw that numerical unity is not the same as the unity of being; you can add up substances, subtract from the resulting number, multiply it or divide it. But he treated the unity of being like the unity of number and hence concluded that the unity of a being is added to it as something accidental. There is a remarkable parallel between the accidentality of the one and the accidentality of existence in relation to substance in Avicenna's teaching. Thomas commented on this several times, while he himself only developed his own principle by reducing the metaphysical and transcendental unity of each being to the individualness of its act of existing.

⁵⁷Ibid. 1.11.1, ad 3.

⁵⁸Ibid. 4, resp. Let us understand here, at the same time and for the same reason, one in himself and unique. For there to be several gods, God's being taken in itself would have to

Section 2b. *The Knowledge of God by Way of Analogy*

The preceding conclusions amounted to a series of negative* judgments that concealed the absence of any quidditative concept, for a being that is absolutely simple and without a conceivable essence apart from its act of existing is not an object falling within the range of human understanding. There would be no hope of reaching it by any conceivable method. There is here an essential disproportion between the mind and its object that nothing could make proportionate, except God himself in another life and for man in another state. In his present state, man draws his concepts from sensible knowledge. Now, with this beginning we cannot arrive at a vision of the divine essence, which would be necessary if we were to have a positive knowledge of what God is. However, sensible things are effects of God, and so we can use them to seek to know him indirectly as their cause. We have done this in proving his existence by starting from the sensible world; so we should also be able to do this in order to prove, not that he is, but what he is.⁵⁹ The problem that arises then is to know whether, in taking this second route, we can hope to know anything more about him than what he is not.

We describe the nature of God by attributing perfections to him and consequently giving him various names. For example, we call him good or wise or powerful, and so on. The general principle governing these attributions is that, since God is the first cause, he ought to possess in an eminent degree all the perfections to be found in creatures. The names signifying these perfections must accordingly be fitting to him; but they are only fitting to him in a limited sense, because it is a matter of transferring these names from the creature to the creator. This transference makes them veritable metaphors in the proper sense of the term,** and these metaphors are doubly deficient. For one thing, they designate the divine act of existing by means of names intended to designate an infinitely different way of existing, namely, that of created things. On the other

be divisible, and therefore he would not be one. Thomas shows the inconsistency of the hypothesis of a plurality of gods by establishing that none of the beings in question would be sufficiently in act in order to be God (ibid. 3, resp.).

* [Gilson's text reads "jugements positifs"; we follow Shook's interpretation in *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, p. 103.]

⁵⁹ST 1.12.12, resp.

** [This statement could be misleading. Gilson does not mean that all names predicated of God are said of him metaphorically in the usual sense of not properly but figuratively. As he explains elsewhere, Thomas distinguishes between names signifying a limited, specific perfection, like stone or man, and names signifying an absolute perfection like goodness, wisdom, or being. The former are said of God metaphorically, the latter properly. See ST 1.13.3; Gilson, *Elements of Christian Philosophy*, pp. 139–140. In calling all names said of God "veritable metaphors in the proper sense of the term," he seems to mean they are all transferred from creatures to creator, "transference" being the root meaning of the Greek μεταφορά.—A.M.]

hand, the names we use to designate an object are bound up with our manner of conceiving that object. The natural objects of our mind are bodily substances, composed of matter and form, each of which is a complex *quod est* determined by a simple *quo est* that is its form. The substance exists, but it is complex, whereas God is simple. The form is simple, but it does not exist, whereas God does exist. In our human experience, then, we have no example of a simple act of existing, with the result that all the names transferred from creatures to God only apply to him in a sense that eludes us. Take, for example, goodness and a good thing. A good thing is a substance that exists, and God also exists; but a good thing is a concrete substance that can be broken up by analysis into matter and form, essence and existence, which is not at all the case with God. As for goodness, it is a *quo est*, namely, that by which a good thing is good; but it is not a substance, whereas God is supremely subsistent. In brief, what the names of such perfections signify certainly belong to God, the supremely perfect being, but the way in which these perfections belong to him escapes us, as does the divine act of existing which they are.⁶⁰

How are we to characterize the nature and import of so deficient a knowledge of God? Since we wish to speak of him as the cause of creatures, the whole problem comes down to the degree of resemblance to God we can attribute to his effects. Now, it is a question of effects much inferior to their cause. God does not bring forth creatures as a man begets a man. A man who has been begotten has the same nature and rightfully carries the same name as the one who begot him (a child is called human just as the father), whereas the effects created by God do not agree with him either in name or in nature. Although here the effect is most deficient in relation to its cause, the case is not unique. Even in nature some efficient causes produce effects of an order specifically inferior to themselves. Since they produce them, these causes must in some way contain these effects, but they contain them in another way and under another form. Thus, for example, solar energy at the same time causes terrestrial heat, drought and many other effects. However, we do not call this energy itself heat or drought. But it can cause them, and because it is their cause, beginning with these effects we say, for example, that the sun is a hot body. We call causes of this kind *equivocal* causes, whose order of perfections belongs to a different genus than that of their effects.⁶¹

It is precisely as an equivocal cause that God contains the effects he creates and consequently that their perfections can be attributed to him.⁶² We know

⁶⁰SCG 1.30. Thomas agrees with the opinion of Dionysius that all names of this kind can be both affirmed and denied of God: affirmed as to what they signify, denied as to their manner of signifying it.

⁶¹Ibid. 1.29.

⁶²Ibid. 1.31 [1].

that they are in him but we do not know how. All we know is that in him they are all what he is and as he is. Thus nothing can be said univocally of God and his creatures. Their perfections and various powers are first contained in the one and simple perfection of God. Moreover, what they possess in virtue of essences distinct from their existences is first of all in God through his pure act of existing. As Thomas says: "Whatever is in God is the divine being itself" (*nihil est in Deo quod non sit ipsum esse divinum*).⁶³ Now, there seems to be no conceivable mean between the univocal and the equivocal. The conclusion is therefore inevitable, that everything we say about God by starting from his creatures is equivocal; and this, from the point of view of natural theology, is somewhat discouraging.

Thomas has corrected this conclusion, as we shall see, but perhaps not so radically as is commonly thought. He seems never to have said that the names we give to God are not equivocal, but only that they are not purely equivocal. When different things have by chance the same name, they are purely equivocal. Their common name implies neither a real relation nor any resemblance between them. The word "dog" used for the constellation and the animal is purely equivocal, for the name is all they have in common. This is not the case with the names we give to God, since they correspond to a relation of cause and effect.⁶⁴ There is always, then, this positive feature in what we say about God, that there must be a kind of resemblance, not between God and things, but rather between them and God: the resemblance an effect always bears to its cause, however inferior it may be. This is why Thomas repeats so often that we do not speak about God by pure equivocation (*secundum puram aequivocationem*), and that we are not condemned to speak of God only by pure equivocation or entirely equivocally.⁶⁵ This way of speaking "not altogether equivocally" about God is exactly what Thomas calls *analogy*.

Judging from the numerous articles, papers and volumes devoted to elucidating this notion,⁶⁶ we might think that Thomas himself dealt with this subject

⁶³Ibid. 1.32 [3]; *ST* 1.13.5, resp.

⁶⁴*SCG* 1.33 [1].

⁶⁵Ibid.

⁶⁶See among others, F.-A. Blanche, "Sur le sens de quelques locutions concernant l'analogie dans la langue de saint Thomas d'Aquin," *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 10 (1921): 52–59; B. Desbuts, "La notion d'analogie d'après saint Thomas d'Aquin," *Annales de philosophie chrétienne* 151 (1906): 377–386; Bernard Landry, *La notion d'analogie chez saint Bonaventure et saint Thomas d'Aquin* (Louvain: Institut Supérieur de Philosophie, 1922); Maurilio T.-L. Penido, *Le rôle de l'analogie en théologie dogmatique* (Paris: Vrin, 1931), pp. 11–78; Jacques Maritain, *Distinguish to Unite; or The Degrees of Knowledge*, trans. Gerald B. Phelan et al. (New York: Century, 1959), pp. 418–421; Louis Bertrand Geiger, *La participation dans la philosophie de saint Thomas*, 2d ed. (Paris: Vrin, 1953); Cornelio Fabro, *La nozione metafisica di partecipazione*, 3d ed. (Rome: Società Editrice Internazionale, 1963).

at length. But this is not so. His texts on the notion of analogy are relatively few, and in each case they are so restrained that we cannot but wonder why the notion has taken on such an importance in the eyes of his commentators. Perhaps it is due to their secret wish to redeem from an all too-apparent wretched or sorry state the knowledge of God that Thomas concedes to us. Commentators have gradually come to the stage where they speak of analogy as if it were a kind of univocity rather than equivocity. They treat it as if it were not a pure univocity but capable of becoming a source of almost positive knowledge, enabling us to conceive more or less confusedly the essence of God. However, it may not be necessary to bend the Thomistic texts in order to obtain from this notion the help we expect from it. All we have to do is to interpret them as Thomas himself did, not in the order of quidditative concepts, but in the order of judgment.

What Thomas asks of the notion of analogy is that it enable the metaphysician, or the theologian using metaphysics, to speak of God without constantly falling into pure equivocation and consequently into sophistry. It was clear to him that the danger is avoidable, because Aristotle had demonstrated a great deal about God. But Aristotle's God, inaccessible as he was, was far less so than the *He Who Is* of Thomas Aquinas.⁶⁷ To avoid pure equivocation, then, it becomes necessary to rely upon the relation binding each effect to its cause, the only link enabling us to make a sure ascent from creature to creator. This relation Thomas calls analogy, or in other words proportion.

Analogy or proportion, as conceived by Thomas Aquinas, is to be found in two principal cases. In the first, several things are related to another thing, although their relations to it are different. There is said to be analogy between the names of these things because they are all related to the same thing. Thus we speak of a healthy medicine and a healthy urine. The urine is healthy because it is a sign of health; a medicine is healthy because it is the cause of health. So there is analogy between all things that are healthy, in no matter what sense they may be, because whatever is healthy is so in relation to the health of a living being. In the second case it is no longer a question of the analogy or proportion binding together several things because they are all related to another thing, but of the analogy binding one thing to another because of the relationship uniting them. For example, we speak of a healthy medicine and a healthy person because this medicine causes the health of this person. This is no longer the analogy of the sign and of the cause of one and the same thing (urine and a medicine), but rather the analogy of the cause and its effect. Certainly, when we say that a medicine is healthy, we are not pretending that it is in good health. So the term "healthy" is not *purely univocal* to the remedy and to the sick per-

⁶⁷ST 1.13.5. As a philosopher Thomas is reassured by Aristotle's example, as a theologian by St. Paul's words (Rom 1:20): "Invisibilia Dei per ea quae facta sunt, intellecta conspiciuntur."

son. The remedy is nevertheless healthy because it causes health. The term "healthy" is not *purely equivocal* to the medicine and the sick person.

It is precisely in this sense that we can name God from his creatures. God is no more good, just, wise, and powerful than the healing remedy is healthy. Nevertheless, what we call goodness, justice, wisdom, power is certainly in God because he is its cause. We are therefore perfectly certain that God is every positive perfection possessed by creatures. But we also know that God is this positive perfection only as the effect is its cause in a necessarily deficient mode of being. In this way, to affirm of God the perfections of creatures, but in a mode that eludes us, is to take our stand between univocity and pure equivocity.⁶⁸ The perfections of things are signs and effects of God, but they are not what God himself is. He himself is what things are in an infinitely higher way. Accordingly, to speak of God by analogy is to say in each case that God is pre-eminently a certain perfection.

The meaning of this doctrine has been much discussed, some emphasizing as strongly as possible the agnostic element that it contains, others strongly insisting on the positive value of our knowledge of God that it preserves. The discussion can last as long as each side can discover new texts, all authentically Thomistic, to justify itself. On the quidditative level, there is no middle ground between univocity and equivocity. Here the two interpretations in question are irreconcilable,⁶⁹ but undoubtedly they would not be if we transfer them to the level of judgment. In the case of God, every judgment, even if it takes the form of a judgment of attribution, is really a judgment of existence. Whether we speak of his essence, or substance, or goodness, or wisdom, we do no more than repeat: he is *esse*. This is why his name par excellence is *He Who Is*. If we take the divine attributes one by one and ask if each is in God, we shall have to reply that it is not, at least as such and as a distinct reality. And since we can in no way conceive of an essence that is only an act of existing, we can in no way conceive what God is, even with the help of such attributes. To make Thomas say that we have at least an imperfect knowledge of what God is, is accordingly to betray his expressly stated and repeated thought. Indeed, he not only says that

⁶⁸ST 1.13.5, resp.

⁶⁹See A.-D. Sertillanges, "Renseignements techniques," following his translation of the *Somme théologique* (Paris: Desclée, 1926) 2: 379-388; same author, *Le christianisme et les philosophies* 1: 268-273, where Thomas' position is defined as "an agnosticism of definition." A contrary view is to be found in Jacques Maritain, *Degrees of Knowledge*, pp. 422-429. Although unnecessarily provocative, the phrase "agnosticism of definition" is nevertheless correct. We tend to forget the positive element of negative theology. It is not merely not knowing what God is, but, at the end of the attempt to know him, to know that one does not always know what he is. This knowledge by ignorance, this knowing that you do not know, comes at the end of a most intense intellectual effort: *docta ignorantia*.

the vision of the divine essence is not given to us here below,⁷⁰ but he states expressly: "There is something pertaining to God that is entirely unknown to man in this life, namely, what God is." To say that *quid est Deus* is something *omnino ignotum* for man in this life,⁷¹ is to assert that all knowledge, perfect or imperfect, of the essence of God is radically inaccessible to us here below. To every interpretation of Thomas to the contrary, the deservedly famous text of the *Contra Gentiles* presents an insuperable obstacle: "We cannot grasp what God is, but what he is not, and the relation other things have with him."⁷²

On the other hand, Thomas certainly concedes us a certain knowledge of God, a knowledge of what Paul calls in his *Epistle to the Romans* the *invisibilia Dei*. But we must see where this stops. If it were a question of a knowledge of God himself, Paul would not have said *invisibilia* but *invisibile*, for God is one and his essence is one as the blessed see him, but as we do not. Paul's words in no way invite us to qualify the statement that we cannot know the divine essence. It is not even a question here of such knowledge. All Paul concedes us is a knowledge of the *invisibilia*, that is, of many aspects of God, many ways of conceiving him (*rationes*), which we designate by names borrowed from his effects and that we attribute to God. "In this way the mind envisages the unity of the divine essence under the concepts of goodness, of wisdom, of virtue, and of other things of the same sort, that are not in God (*et hujusmodi, quae in Deo non sunt*). He has accordingly called them the *invisibilia* of God, because what in God corresponds to these names or concepts, is one, and it is not seen by us."⁷³

Unless we admit that Thomas Aquinas has glaringly contradicted himself, we must assume that the knowledge of God that he allots to us in no way bears upon his essence, that is, upon his *esse*. Such in fact is the case, and he constantly repeats it. Every effect of God is analogous to its cause. The concept that we form of this effect cannot be transformed for us into the concept of God that we lack; but by an affirmative judgment, we can attribute to God the name designating the perfection corresponding to this effect. This procedure does not affirm that God is like the creature. It is based on the certitude that, since every effect resembles its cause, the creature with which we start certainly resembles

⁷⁰ST 1.12.11, resp.

⁷¹In *Epistolam ad Romanos* 1.6 (Vivès ed. 20: 398). "De Deo quid non sit cognoscimus, quid vero sit penitus manet incognitum" (SCG 3.49 [8]). This statement sends us back to Dionysius' *De mystica theologia*. It is hardly possible to go further in the negative way (*via negativa*) than *penitus ignotum*. It is the *pantélôs agnôston* of Dionysius.

⁷²SCG 1.30 [4].

⁷³In *Epistolam ad Romanos*, 1.6 (Vivès ed., p. 399). According to Thomas, St. Paul could even have said in what follows *et divinitas* rather than *et deitas*, because *divinitas* signifies participation in the Godhead while *deitas* signifies his essence. Moreover, that the expression *bonitas est in Deo* can only be taken as a manner of speaking, can be seen from SCG 1.36 [2].

God.⁷⁴ So we attribute to God several names, such as good, intelligent or wise; and these names are not synonyms, since each of them designates our distinct concept of a distinct, created perfection.⁷⁵ Nevertheless, this multiplicity of names designates a simple object, because we attribute all of them to the same object by way of judgment.

With a little reflection we shall see how well the nature of the judgment is adapted to play this role. To judge is always to affirm a unity by a complex act. Where our judgments concern God, each of them affirms the identity of a certain perfection with the divine *esse* itself. This is why our mind “expresses the unity of the thing by a composition of words, which is a sign of identity when it says ‘God is good’ or ‘God is goodness,’ so that the diversity in the composition of the terms can be attributed to the mind’s knowledge, whereas the unity is attributable to the thing known.”⁷⁶ In the last analysis, then, what Aquinas calls our knowledge of God consists in our ability to form true propositions about him. Undoubtedly, each of these propositions amounts to predicating the same thing about him. But the mind can do this by reasoning, as if the subject of its proposition were a sort of substratum to which the predicate would be added as a form. Thus in the proposition “God is good,” we speak as though God were a real subject informed by goodness. This is necessary because a judgment is made up of several terms. Let us not forget, on the other hand, that it is not a simple juxtaposition of these terms; it is a *composition* of them, a term that Thomas Aquinas almost always uses, not in the passive sense of being composed, but in the active sense of the act of composing. Now, in making the composition of the terms in the judgment, it is precisely their real identity that the mind signifies, since it is the proper function of the judgment to signify this identity (*identitatem rei significat intellectus per compositionem*). And what is true of each of our judgments about God taken separately is equally true of them taken together. As we have said, no two names given to God are synonymous. Our mind grasps him in many ways, even as creatures represent him in many ways. But since the subject of all our judgments about God remains one and the same, we can say here, once again, that although our mind “knows God through many concepts, it nevertheless knows that it is one and the same reality that corresponds to all its concepts.”⁷⁷

Thus we see how the two interpretations, the affirmative and the negative, that have been offered of Aquinas’ natural theology meet on a higher plane, for both are true in their own order. It is true that, according to Thomas, none of the definite forms signified by each of the divine names exists in God (*quodlibet*

⁷⁴SCG 1.29.

⁷⁵Ibid. 1.35; *De pot.* 7.6, resp.

⁷⁶SCG 1.36 [2].

⁷⁷ST 1.13.12, resp.

enim istorum nominum significat aliquam formam definitam, et sic non attribuantur).⁷⁸ It cannot be said that goodness as such, intelligence as such, nor power as such exist as definite forms in the divine being. It would be equally untrue to say that we assert nothing positive about the subject "God" when we say that he is good, just or intelligent. What we affirm in each case is the divine substance itself.⁷⁹ To say "God is good" is not simply to say, "God is not bad." It is not even simply to say, "God is the cause of goodness." The true meaning of the expression is that "what we call goodness in creatures preexists in God and in a higher way. From this it does not follow that it pertains to God to be good inasmuch as he causes goodness, but, on the contrary, that it is because he is good that he diffuses goodness into things."⁸⁰ There is no contradiction in these two theses for the simple reason that they are but two sides of the same doctrine, the one that Thomas so strongly emphasized apropos of the divine act of existing.

What do we know about God? Unquestionably this, that the proposition "God exists" is true. However, we know nothing of what it means for God to exist, for "God's existence is the same as his substance, and as his substance is unknown so also is his existence."⁸¹ The situation is exactly the same with the divine attributes. After we have shown what they are, we will not know any more what God is. Aquinas keeps repeating: "We do not know what God is" (*Quid est Deus nescimus*).⁸² The illusion that the case can be otherwise comes from the fact that we think we know what *esse* we are dealing with when we prove God exists. With greater reason we believe we know what goodness, intelligence, and will we are dealing with when we prove that God is good, intelligent, and willing. In fact, we know no more about them, because all these names signify the divine substance, which is identical with the divine *esse*, and which, like it, is unknown to us.⁸³ Nevertheless, we are certain that even as

⁷⁸*De pot.* 7.5, ad 2.

⁷⁹*Ibid.* resp. In using this text, on which Maritain bases his own interpretation (*Degrees of Knowledge*, pp. 422-429), we must keep in mind the exact thesis Thomas is developing there, namely, that the divine names signify the substance of God, that is, they designate it as being what the names signify. It does not follow from this that these names give us a positive conception of what the divine substance is, since we conceive each of them with a distinct concept, while the divine substance is the simple unity of its act of existing.

⁸⁰*ST* 1.13.2, resp.

⁸¹*De pot.* 7.2, ad 1.

⁸²*Ibid.*, ad 11.

⁸³*ST* 1.13.2, sed contra. Sertillanges says that "'He who is' is only the name of a creature." Maritain calls this statement "altogether equivocal" (*Degrees of Knowledge*, p. 428). Let us say it is, at most, provocative, for it is wrong only in that it takes for granted that Thomas' teaching is understood. The three words "he who is" are borrowed from common language. They were fashioned in order to designate something entirely different from God. Therefore *quantum ad modum significandi*, the phrase is applicable first of all to creatures.

the proposition "God exists" is true, so the propositions "God is good," "God is living," "God is intelligent," and others of the same kind, are also true. That God is what we call goodness, life and will we know as surely as we know that he is what we call being. The conceptual content of these terms does not change when we apply them to God. All these true judgments direct our understanding toward the same goal, the direction of which we know but which, because it is at infinity, is beyond the reach of our natural powers. We do not reach it by multiplying the affirmative propositions that denote it. To make these propositions, however, is neither to waste our words nor our efforts because it at least turns us toward him.

Section 3. The Perfections of God

Among the perfections we can attribute to God by analogy with his creatures, three deserve particular attention because they constitute the highest perfections of man, who is the most perfect of earthly creatures. They are intelligence, will and life. No doubt some will call this anthropomorphism. However, if we are obliged to start from God's effects, it seems wise to start with man rather than with a stone. What risk, indeed, do we run of conceiving God in the image of man in a doctrine in which we know beforehand that our concept will always be infinitely lower than its object, no matter what effect we take as our starting point?

God's intelligence can be immediately deduced from his infinite perfection. Since we attribute to the creator all the perfections of creatures, we can hardly deny him the noblest of all, namely, intelligence, by which a being can become in some way all things.⁸⁴ We can find a deeper reason than this, one based on the very nature of the divine being. We can note first that any being is intelligent insofar as it is free from matter.⁸⁵ Next we can grant that beings with knowledge are distinguished from beings lacking knowledge in that the latter only possess their own form, while beings with knowledge can also apprehend the form of other things. In other words, there is a correspondence between the

On the other hand, *what* the phrase signifies—*esse* itself—belongs first of all to God, who is the pure act of existing. Maritain invokes this distinction in his answer to Sertillanges (*ST* 1.13.3, resp. and 1.13.6, resp.), when in fact the latter's expression was based on it. If imposed in the first way, the names we attribute to God are the names of creatures and the concepts corresponding to them in thought remain to the end concepts of creatures. To say that the *id quod*, which in the creature we only know as participation, belongs *per prius*, or by right of priority, to God, is equivalent to saying that what it is in God eludes us. To escape the "agnosticism of definition," to which some are ill-resigned where God is concerned, it is not necessary to seek refuge in a more or less imperfect concept of the divine essence, but in the negative judgments which, beginning with the many effects of God, locate so to speak the metaphysical position of an essence that we cannot absolutely conceptualize.

⁸⁴*SCG* 1.44 [6].

⁸⁵*Ibid.* [1].

power of knowing and the increased breadth and extension of being in the knowing subject. There is also a correspondence between the lack of knowledge and the limitation and restriction of the being lacking it. Aristotle expresses this when he says: "the soul is in a way all things" (*anima est quodammodo omnia*).

A form, then, will be more intelligent to the extent that it will be more capable of becoming, through knowledge, a larger number of other forms. Now, it is only matter that can restrict and limit this extension of form; that is why it can be said that the more immaterial the forms, the more they approach a sort of infinity. So it is evident that the immateriality of a being makes it capable of knowing and the degree of knowledge depends on the degree of immateriality. A short inductive survey will serve to convince us of this. Plants lack knowledge because of their materiality. The senses, on the contrary, are already endowed with knowledge because they receive sensible species without matter. The intellect is capable of a still higher degree of knowledge, being more thoroughly separated from matter. So its proper object is the universal and not the individual, since it is matter that is the principle of individuation. Finally, we come to God who, as has already been shown, is completely immaterial. Consequently, he is also supremely intelligent: "Since God is immaterial in the highest degree, it follows that he occupies the highest place in knowledge."⁸⁶

By bringing together this conclusion and our other one, that God is his being, we find that God's intelligence is one with his existence. Knowledge is the act of an intelligent being. Now, the act of a being can pass into another being exterior to it. The act of heating, for example, passes from what heats into what is heated. Certain acts, however, remain within their subject, and the act of knowing is one of them. An intelligible object experiences nothing from the fact that a mind apprehends it. But it happens that the mind then acquires its act and its perfection. Accordingly, when God knows, his act of knowing remains within him. But we know that whatever is in God is the divine essence. God's knowledge is accordingly one with the divine essence and therefore with the divine act of existing that is God himself; for, as we have shown, God is the identity of his essence and his act of existing.⁸⁷

This also shows that God understands himself perfectly; for if he is supremely intelligent, as we have seen above, he is also the supreme intelligible object. A material thing can only become intelligible when it is separated from matter and its material condition by the light of the agent intellect. Consequently, we can say of the intelligibility of things what we said of their degree of knowledge: it increases with their immateriality. In other words, the immaterial as such and by its nature is intelligible. On the other hand, everything intelligible is apprehended according as it is one in act with the being that apprehends

⁸⁶ST 1.14.1, resp.; *De ver.* 2.1, resp.

⁸⁷SCG 1.45.

it. Now, the intelligence of God is one with his essence, and his intelligibility is also one with his essence. It follows that here the intelligence is one in act with the intelligible being, and consequently God, in whom are united the supreme degree of knowledge and the supreme degree of knowability, understands himself perfectly.⁸⁸ Let us go further. The only object that God knows by himself and immediately is himself. Indeed it is evident that in order to know immediately by himself an object other than himself, God would have to turn from his immediate object, which is himself, in order to direct his attention toward another object. But this other object could only be inferior to the first; and so the divine knowledge would then lose some of its perfection, and this is impossible.⁸⁹

God knows himself perfectly and he knows only himself immediately. This does not mean that he does not know anything besides himself. This conclusion would contradict everything we know about the divine intelligence. Let us start from the principle that God knows himself perfectly—a principle, moreover, that is so evident it hardly needs to be proven, since the intelligence of God is his being, and his being is perfect. It is clear, moreover, that to know a thing perfectly we must know its power perfectly, and to know its power perfectly we must know the effects to which this power extends. Now, the divine power extends to other things than God himself, because he is the first efficient cause of all beings. So it is necessary that in knowing himself God also knows everything else. This conclusion becomes still more evident if we add to the preceding that the intelligence of God, the first cause, is one with his being. From this it follows that all the effects preexisting in God as in their first cause are first in his intelligence, and that they all exist in it under their intelligible form.⁹⁰ This very important truth requires some precision.

First of all, it is important to note that by extending God's knowledge to all things we do not make it dependent upon them. God sees himself in himself, for he sees himself by his essence. As for other things, on the contrary, he does not see them in themselves but in himself, inasmuch as his essence contains in itself the archetype of everything that is not himself. The divine knowledge is not specified by anything else than the very essence of God.⁹¹ But the real difficulty is not here. It consists rather in determining under what aspect God sees things. Is his knowledge of them general or particular? Is it limited to what is real or does it extend to what is possible? Finally, should even future contingents come under it? Such are the debatable points on which it is essential to take a stand, and all the more firmly as they are the subject of the most serious Averroist errors.

⁸⁸*De ver.* 2.2, resp.; *SCG* 1.47; *ST* 1.14.3, resp.

⁸⁹*SCG* 1.48.

⁹⁰*ST* 1.14.5, resp.

⁹¹*Ibid.* ad 2 and 3.

It has been held, in fact, that God knows things with a general knowledge, that is, as beings, but not at all with a distinct knowledge, that is, as constituting a number of distinct objects, each endowed with its own reality. A doctrine of this sort is obviously incompatible with the absolute perfection of divine knowledge. Each thing has a nature consisting in a certain mode of participation in the perfection of the divine essence. God would not know himself if he did not know distinctly all the ways in which his own perfection can be participated. Nor would he even know perfectly the nature of being if he did not know distinctly all the possible modes of being.⁹² God's knowledge of things is therefore a proper and definite knowledge.⁹³

Can it be said that this knowledge extends even to the individual? Some have contested this, not without some semblance of reason. To know a thing amounts to knowing the constituent principles of that thing. Now, every individual essence is made up of a definite matter and a form individuated in this matter. Hence the knowledge of the individual as such presupposes the knowledge of the matter as such. But we see that in man the only powers that can apprehend the material and the individual are the imagination and the senses, or other powers resembling them in that they also use material organs. The intellect, on the contrary, is an immaterial power whose proper object is the universal. The divine intellect is much more immaterial than the human intellect. Its knowledge must accordingly be even farther removed than human intellectual knowledge from every particular object.⁹⁴

The principles of this argument do not support its conclusion. They allow us to affirm that one who knows a definite matter and the form individuated in this matter knows the individual object constituted by this particular form and this particular matter. But the divine knowledge extends to the forms, to individual accidents and to the matter of each being. Since his intelligence is one with his essence, God surely knows whatever is in his essence in any way whatsoever. Now, everything that possesses being in any way and to any degree exists in the divine essence as in its primary source, since his essence is the pure act of being. But matter is a certain mode of being, since it is being in potency. Accident is also a certain mode of being, since it is that which exists in another (*ens in alio*). So matter and accidents, as well as form, come under the essence and consequently under the knowledge of God. Thus one cannot deny him knowledge of individuals.⁹⁵ In all of this, Thomas Aquinas openly resists the

⁹²SCG 1.50; ST 1.14.6, resp.

⁹³*De ver.* 2.4.

⁹⁴SCG 1.63 [1].

⁹⁵*Ibid.* 1.65; ST 1.14.11, resp.; *De ver.* 2.5, resp.

Averroism of his time. A Siger of Brabant, for example,⁹⁶ interpreting the doctrine of Aristotle on the relations of God and the world in the strictest sense, conceived of God as only the final cause of the universe. According to him, God was not the efficient cause of natural beings in either their matter or their form; and not being their cause, he did not exercise providence over them nor even know them. So it is the denial of the divine causality that led the Averroists to deny God's knowledge of individuals, and it is the affirmation of the universal divine causality that led Thomas Aquinas to attribute it to him. *Esse* itself, the God of Aquinas, causes and knows the totality of being (*ens*).

Consequently, God knows all real beings, not only as distinct from one another, but also in their very individuality, with the accidents and the matter which make them individuals. Does he also know possibles? There could be no reasonable doubt about this. What does not actually exist but can exist, is at least a virtual existence and in this it is distinguished from pure nothingness. Now, it has been shown that because God is the pure act of existing he knows everything that exists, of whatever sort its existence may be. God therefore knows possibles. When it is a question of possibles that do not actually exist but have existed or will exist, God is said to know them by his knowledge of vision. When it is a question of possibles that could have been realized, but that do not exist, have never existed, nor will ever exist, God is said to know them by his knowledge of simple intelligence. In any case, possibles never escape God's perfect intelligence.⁹⁷

This conclusion extends to the class of possibles known as future contingents, of which we could not say whether they would or would not be realized. A future contingent can be considered in two ways: in itself and actually realized, or in its cause and capable of realization. For example, Socrates can be sitting or standing. If I see Socrates sitting, I see this contingent event actually present and realized. But if I simply see in the notion of Socrates that he can be sitting or not sitting as he wills, I see the contingent in the form of a future happening not yet determined. In the first case there can be certain knowledge; in the second, certain knowledge is impossible. So someone who knows a contingent effect only in its cause can only surmise that it will happen. But God knows at one and the same time all future contingents in their causes and in themselves as actually realized. Although future contingents are realized successively, God does not know them successively. We have established that God

⁹⁶See Pierre Mandonnet, *Siger de Brabant et l'averroïsme latin au XIII^e siècle* (Louvain: Institut Supérieur de Philosophie, 1908–1911) 1: 168, 2: 76. [Gilson is here following Mandonnet. Later studies have shown that in several works Siger of Brabant teaches that God is not only the final but also the efficient cause of the universe. See Fernand Van Steenberghen, *Maître Siger de Brabant* (Louvain: Publications universitaires, and Paris: Jander-Oyez, 1977), p. 304.—A.M.]

⁹⁷ST 1.14.9, resp.

exists outside of time; his knowledge, like his being, is measured by eternity. Now, eternity exists all at once, embracing the whole of time in an immovable present. God, then, knows future contingents as actually present and realized,⁹⁸ and nevertheless his necessary knowledge of them in no way deprives them of their contingent character.⁹⁹ In this way Aquinas distances himself from Averroism and even from the most authentic Aristotelianism.¹⁰⁰ According to Averroes and Aristotle, the essential characteristic of a future contingent event is that it can come to pass or not. It is inconceivable, therefore, that it can become the object of knowledge for anyone at all. And from the moment that a contingent event becomes known as true, it ceases to be contingent and at once becomes necessary. But Aristotle did not conceive of God as the pure act of existing, the efficient cause of all existence. Supremely necessary in itself, the divine mind dominating Aristotle's world knew nothing except what was necessary. It was neither creative nor provident; in short, it was not the cause of the existence of the universe.

We have now shown in what sense we should ascribe intelligence to God. The next step is to show in what sense we ought to attribute will to him. We can conclude that God wills from the fact that he knows. Since it is the good insofar as it is an object of knowledge that constitutes the proper object of the will, it follows necessarily that from the moment the good is known it is also willed. From this it follows that a being that knows the good is by that very fact endowed with will. Now, God knows the good. Since he is perfectly intelligent, as has already been shown, he knows at the same time being as being and also as good. Thus God wills only because he knows.¹⁰¹ This conclusion is valid not only for God but also for every intelligent being. For a thing is so related to its natural form that when it does not possess it, it tends toward it, and when it does possess it, it rests in it. Now, the natural form of the intelligence is the intelligible. Thus every intelligent being tends toward the intelligible object when it does not possess it, and rests in it when it does possess it. This inclination and satisfying repose pertains to the will. We can therefore conclude that in every intelligent being there must also be a will. In short, God possesses intelligence and therefore will.¹⁰² We know from before that God's intelligence is identical with his act of existing. Since he wills insofar as he is intelligent, his will must also be identical with his act of existing. Consequently,

⁹⁸ST 1.14.13, resp.; SCG 1.67; *De ver.* 2.12, resp.

⁹⁹ST 1.14.13, ad 1.

¹⁰⁰Mandonnet, *Siger de Brabant* 1: 164–167; 2: 122–124.

¹⁰¹SCG 1.72.

¹⁰²ST 1.19.1, resp. See *De ver.* 23.1, resp.

just as God's knowledge is his act of existing, so too is his willing.¹⁰³ Thus neither the will nor the intelligence introduce any sort of composition in God.

Flowing from this principle, we shall see consequences parallel to those we have deduced concerning God's intelligence. The first is that the divine essence constitutes the first and principal object of God's will. The object of the will, we have said, is the good apprehended by the intellect. Now, as we have seen, what the divine intellect apprehends immediately and of itself is nothing else than the divine essence. The divine essence is, therefore, the first and principal object of the divine will.¹⁰⁴ This confirms our former certainty that God is dependent on nothing exterior to himself; but it does not follow that God wills nothing exterior to himself.

Will, indeed, proceeds from intelligence. Now, the immediate object of the divine intelligence is God. But we have seen that in knowing himself God knows all other things. Similarly, God wills himself as his immediate object, and he wills all other things in willing himself.¹⁰⁵ This same conclusion can be established by a more profound principle that reveals the source of God's creative activity. With respect to its own good, every natural being has not only an inclination which makes it tend toward it when it does not possess it, or to repose in it when it does possess it. It also tends to expand as much as possible, and to diffuse its own goodness into other beings. This is why every being endowed with will naturally tends to communicate to others the good it possesses. And this tendency is especially characteristic of the divine will, from which we know every perfection derives by way of resemblance. Consequently, if natural beings communicate their own good to others to the extent to which they possess a perfection, much more does it pertain to the divine will to communicate its perfection to other things by way of resemblance and to the extent that it is communicable. Hence God himself wants to exist and wants other things to exist. But he wills himself as an end, and other things as related to their end, that is, to the extent that it is fitting for them to participate in the divine goodness.¹⁰⁶

From the point of view just defined, we see immediately that the divine will extends to all particular goods just as the divine intelligence extends to all particular beings. In order to safeguard the divine simplicity, it is not necessary to concede that he only wills other beings in general, that is, insofar as he wishes to be the principle of all the goods issuing from himself. There is nothing to prevent the divine simplicity from being the principle of a host of participated goods, nor God from remaining simple while willing particular goods. On the

¹⁰³ST 1.19.1; SCG 1.73.

¹⁰⁴SCG 1.74. This conclusion follows immediately from the principle that in God *suum esse est suum velle* (ibid. [4]).

¹⁰⁵Ibid. 1.75.

¹⁰⁶ST 1.19.2, resp.

other hand, we know that God must will these particular goods. From the moment that a good is known by the intelligence, it is by that very fact willed. Now, God knows particular goods, as has already been shown, and so his will extends to particular goods.¹⁰⁷

The divine will even extends to simple possibles. Since God knows possibles, including future contingents, in their proper nature, he wills them also with their own nature. Now, it pertains to their nature that they must either be or not be actualized at a definite moment in time. So God wills them in this way, and not only as existing eternally in the divine intelligence. But this does not mean that in willing them in their own nature, God creates them. For will is an action completed in the one willing. Hence, in willing temporal creatures, God does not thereby confer existence upon them. They will only acquire existence through the divine actions that end in an effect exterior to God, namely, the actions of producing, creating and governing.¹⁰⁸

Now that we have settled upon the objects of God's will, let us see in what ways it is exercised. First of all, are there things God cannot will? To this question the answer has to be Yes. This must at once be qualified. The only things God cannot will are those that in the last analysis are not things at all, namely, all those contradictory in themselves. For example, God cannot will that a man be a donkey, because he cannot will that a being be reasonable and lacking reason at one and the same time. To will that the same thing be itself and its contrary, at the same time and in the same respect, is to will that it be and not be at the same time. It is to will what is contradictory in itself and impossible. Let us recall, moreover, the reason why God wills things. He only wills them, we have said, insofar as they participate in his resemblance. Now, the first condition they must fulfill to resemble God is to be, because God is the first being and source of all being. God would not have any reason to will what would be incompatible with the nature of being. Now, to affirm what is contradictory is to affirm a being that destroys itself; it is to affirm being and non-being at the same time. Therefore God cannot will what is contradictory.¹⁰⁹ This is the only limitation that can rightly be placed on his all-powerful will.

Let us now consider what God is able to will, namely, everything that can in any way whatsoever be entitled to the name "being." If it is a question of the divine being itself, considered in its infinite perfection and its supreme goodness, we must affirm that God necessarily wills this being and this goodness, and that he could not will what is contrary to them. It has been proven already that God wills his being and goodness as his principal object and as his reason for willing other things. Consequently, God wills his own being and goodness in

¹⁰⁷SCG 1.79.

¹⁰⁸Ibid.

¹⁰⁹Ibid. 1.84.

everything he wills. It is impossible, on the other hand, that God should not will something actually, for then he would be willing only in potency, which is impossible because his act of willing is his act of existing. Therefore God wills necessarily, and he wills necessarily his own act of existing and his own goodness.¹¹⁰

The situation is not the same where other things are concerned. God only wills them insofar as they are related to his own goodness as to their end. When we will a certain end, we do not necessarily will the things related to it, except when they are of such a nature that it is impossible to attain this end without them. If, for example, we wish to live we necessarily want food, and if we wish to cross the sea we must want a boat. We do not have to will something we do not need in order to reach our end. If, for example, we want to take a walk, we do not have to wish for a horse, for we can walk on foot. So it is for all the rest. Now, God's goodness is perfect; nothing existing outside it can increase his perfection in any way. That is why God, who wills himself necessarily, is in no way constrained to will anything else.¹¹¹ What remains true is that if God wills other things he cannot not will them, for his will is immutable, but this purely hypothetical necessity introduces into him no true and absolute necessity or constraint.¹¹²

Finally, it might be objected that if God wills other things with a will free from all constraint, he does not will them without a reason, since he wills them in view of their end, which is his own goodness. Are we to say, then, that the divine will remains free to will things, but that if God wills them, a cause can be assigned to this will? This would be badly expressed, because it is not true that the divine will is caused in any way. This is easy to see if we remember that will flows from understanding, and that the causes by reason of which a being endowed with will wills belong to the same order as those by reason of which an intelligent being knows.

When it is a question of knowledge, if the intellect understands the principle and the conclusion separately, its knowledge of the principle is the cause of the scientific knowledge it acquires of the conclusion. But if this intellect perceived the conclusion within the principle itself, grasping both in a single intuition, its scientific knowledge of the conclusion would not be caused in it by the understanding of principles, because nothing is its own cause; and yet the intellect would understand that the principles are the cause of the conclusion. It is the same in the case of the will, where the end is related to the means as in knowledge the principles are related to the conclusions. If the end were willed by one act and the means to this end by another, the act by which it would will the end would be the cause of that by which it would will the means. But if both means

¹¹⁰*Ibid.* 1.80.

¹¹¹*ST* 1.19.3, resp; *SCG* 1.81, 82.

¹¹²*SCG* 1.83.

and end were willed by one single act, this would no longer hold, because it would be to assert that one and the same act is its own cause. Nevertheless, it would remain true to say that this will wills to order the means in view of their end. Now, just as God by one single act knows all things in his essence, so he wills by one single act all things in his goodness. Now, just as God's knowledge of the cause is not the cause of his knowledge of the effect, and yet he knows the effect in its cause, so his willing of the end is not the cause of his willing of the means, and yet he wills the means as directed to their end. He wills, therefore, that one thing be the cause of another, but it is not because of the latter that he wills the former.¹¹³

To say that God wills the good is to say that he loves it, for love is nothing else than the first movement of the will in its tending toward the good. In attributing love to God, we must not imagine him as moved by a passion or inclination distinct from his will and moving him. Divine love is only the divine willing of the good, and as this willing is only the *esse* of God, divine love in its turn is this same *esse*. Such too is the teaching of scripture: God is Love (*Deus caritas est*, 1 Jn 4:8). Once again natural theology and revealed theology find common ground on the level of existence,¹¹⁴ as could be shown point by point in an analysis of the object of divine love. It is God's will that is the cause of all things. The cause of the fact *that they are*, the divine will is therefore the cause of *what they are*. Now, God has only willed that they are, and that they are what they are, because they are good in the very measure in which they are. To say that the will of God is the cause of all things is therefore to say that God loves all things, as reason shows and scripture teaches: "For you love everything that exists and hate none of the things you have made" (Wis 11:24).

Let us note too that the divine simplicity is in no way divided by the multiplicity of the objects of the divine love. We must not imagine that the goodness of things moves God to love them. It is he who creates their goodness and infuses it into them. For God to love his creatures is always to love himself in the simple act by which he wills himself, and which is identical with his act of existing.¹¹⁵ Thus God loves everything in loving himself; and as every being has as much good as it has being, God loves each being in proportion to its degree of perfection. For him to love one thing more than another is to will it more than another.¹¹⁶ To prefer one thing to another is to will, like him, that some things be in fact better than others.¹¹⁷ In brief, it is to will that they be exactly what they are.

¹¹³ST 1.19.5, resp.

¹¹⁴Ibid. 1.20.1.

¹¹⁵Ibid. 2.

¹¹⁶Ibid. 3.

¹¹⁷Ibid. 4.

Intelligent and free, God is also a living God. He is such, first of all, by the very fact that he possesses intelligence and will, for it would be impossible to know or to will without living. But he is living, too, for a more direct and profound reason, drawn from the very notion of life. Among the various kinds of beings, life is attributed to those containing an interior principle of motion. This is so true that we extend it spontaneously to inanimate beings themselves when they appear to have spontaneous motion. Water surging from a well we think of as living water in contrast to the dead waters of a cistern or a pond. Now, knowing and desiring are among those actions whose principles are within the being performing them. In the case of God it is much more evident that such acts arise from his most hidden depths since, as the first cause, he is preeminently the cause of his own actions.¹¹⁸

Thus God appears to us as a living source of efficacy whose acts spring eternally from his being, or, more precisely, whose operation is one with his act of existing. What we mean by the term "life" is, in the case of being, the very fact of living, considered in the abstract, just as the term "run" is a simple word to express the concrete act of running, but with much greater reason, since the life of a being is what makes it exist. In the case of God, the conclusion is forced upon us in a still more absolute sense, for he is not only his own life as particular beings are the life they have received, but because he is his life as one who lives by reason of himself and as the cause of life in all other things.¹¹⁹ It is from this eternally fecund life of an intelligence ever in act that the divine happiness flows, the happiness in which ours could only be a participation.

The term "happiness" is inseparable from the notion of intelligence, since to be happy is to know that one possesses one's own good.¹²⁰ Now, it is the proper good of any being to accomplish as perfectly as possible its most perfect activity; and the perfection of an activity depends upon four principal conditions, each of which is eminently realized in the life of God.

First, this activity must be sufficient and be entirely completed within the being performing it. This is necessary because an operation that is completely carried out within a being is performed, in the last analysis, for that being's own benefit. What is achieved is its own acquisition and constitutes a positive gain that it keeps entirely to its own advantage.¹²¹ Actions that are completed outside their author, on the contrary, are of less benefit to their author than to

¹¹⁸SCG 1.97 [3].

¹¹⁹Ibid. 1.98. See *ST* 1.18.4, resp.

¹²⁰"Cujuslibet enim intellectualis naturae proprium bonum est beatitudo" (*SCG* 1.100 [2]).

¹²¹These are what Thomas calls *immanent* operations, like knowing, etc., as opposed to *transitive* operations, the effects of which are exterior to the being that is the cause of the operation, like building, healing, etc.

the work they produce, and they could not constitute a good of the same order as the preceding. It is therefore an activity immanent in God that will provide his beatitude.

The second condition of this activity is that it be accomplished by the highest power of the being under consideration. In the case of man, for example, happiness could not consist in the act of a purely sensible knowledge, but only of a perfect and certain intellectual knowledge.

We also have to take into account the object of this activity. Thus in our case, happiness presupposes an intellectual knowledge of the highest intelligible order. This is the third condition.

The fourth consists in the way in which the activity is carried out. It must be perfect, easy and pleasurable. Such is precisely and in the most perfect degree God's activity. He is pure intelligence, totally in act. He is his own proper object, which amounts to saying that he knows perfectly the supreme intelligible object. Finally, since he is the act by which he knows himself, he does it easily, without trouble and with joy. Therefore God is happy.¹²² To put it more correctly: God is his own happiness since he is happy through an act of understanding, and this act of understanding is his very substance. Here is a happiness, then, that is not only very perfect but without any common measure with any other beatitude. To enjoy the sovereign good is assuredly happiness. But to possess one's self as being the sovereign good, is no longer only to participate in happiness but to be it.¹²³ We can say of this attribute, then, as of all the others, that it belongs to God in a unique sense (*Deus qui singulariter beatus est*). It is because he *is* happiness first of all that creatures can possess it.

These last considerations bring us to the point where we should pass from the divine essence itself to an examination of its effects. An inquiry of this sort would be completely closed to us if we had not previously determined, as far as possible, the principal attributes of God, the efficient and final cause of all things. Whatever the importance of the results obtained, if we regard them from the point of view of our own human knowledge, it is well not to forget their extreme poverty in comparison with the infinite object they allege to make us know. Certainly it is a precious blessing to know that God is eternal, infinite, perfect, intelligent and good, but let us not forget that the "how" of the attributes escapes us. If some certainties would make us forget that the divine essence remains unknown to us here below, it would be far better for us not to have them. Our intellect cannot be said to know what a thing is save when it

¹²²SCG 1.100 [3].

¹²³"Quod per essentiam est, potius est eo quod per participationem dicitur . . . Deus autem per essentiam suam beatus est, quod nulli alii competere potest. Nihil enim aliud praeter ipsum potest esse summum bonum . . . et sic oportet ut quicumque alius ab ipso beatus est, participatione beatus dicatur. Divina igitur beatitudo omnem aliam beatitudinem excedit" (SCG 1.102 [4]).

can define it, that is, when it represents it under a form corresponding at every point to what it is. Now, we must not forget that because God's act of existing eludes our grasp, all our knowledge about him is inadequate. We can conclude, therefore, with Dionysius the Areopagite,¹²⁴ that the highest knowledge we can acquire about the divine nature in this life is the certainty that God transcends everything we know about him.¹²⁵

Section 4. The Creator

We have seen that, according to Thomas Aquinas, the sole subject of philosophy as revealable is God. We must first consider his nature, then his effects. It is time now to turn to this second topic. But before examining the effects of God, that is, creatures taken in their hierarchical order, we should once again consider God himself in the free act by which he gives existence to everything else.¹²⁶

The word "creation" means the way all beings emanate from their universal cause. It signifies either the act by which God creates or the things that result from his act of creating. In the first sense, creation is the absolute production of an act of existing. Applying this notion to the sum total of existing things, we say that creation, which is the production of the whole being, consists in the act by which *He Who Is*, that is, the pure act of being, causes finite acts of being. In the second sense, creation is neither a coming into being (since nothingness cannot come to anything), nor a transformation by the creator (since there is nothing to transform). It is only a "beginning of being and a relation to the creator from whom it has being."¹²⁷ This is what we wish to express when we say that God has created the universe from nothing. It is important to note that in a statement of this sort the preposition "from" in no way implies a material cause but simply an order. God has not created the world from nothing in the

¹²⁴Dionysius, *De mystica theologia* 1.1 [PL 122: 1171-1174].

¹²⁵*De ver.* 2.1, ad 9.

¹²⁶On this question see the articles of J. Durantal, "La notion de la création dans saint Thomas," *Annales de philosophie chrétienne* 163 (1911-1912): 449-495, 561-595; 164 (1912): 156-177, 225-266; A. Rohner, "Das Schöpfungsproblem bei Moses Maimonides, Albertus Magnus und Thomas von Aquin," *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie des Mittelalters* 11.5 (Münster: Aschendorff, 1913). On the question of the eternity of the world see Th. Esser, *Die Lehre des heil. Thomas von Aquin über die Möglichkeit einer anfangslosen Schöpfung* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1895); C.-J. Jellouschek, "Verteidigung der Möglichkeit einer Anfangslosen Welterschöpfung durch Herveus Natalis, Joannes a Neapoli, Gregorius Ariminensis, und Joannes Capreolus," *Jahrbuch für Philosophie und spekulative Theologie* 26 (1912): 155-187, 325-367; M. Sladczek, "Die Auffassung des hl. Thomas von Aquin in seiner Summa theologica von der Lehre des Aristoteles über die Ewigkeit der Welt," *Philosophisches Jahrbuch* 35: 38-56; A.-D. Sertillanges, *L'idée de création et ses retentissements en philosophie* (Paris: Aubier, 1946-1948); James F. Anderson, *The Cause of Being* (St. Louis: Herder 1953).

¹²⁷*De pot.* 3.3, resp.; see *ST* 1.44.1, resp.

sense that he would have made it spring from nothingness as from a kind of preexisting matter, but in the sense that after nothing being appeared. In short, to create from nothing means not to create from something. Far from asserting that there is matter at the origin of creation, this expression radically excludes anything of the sort that we could possibly imagine.¹²⁸ In this sense we say that a man is sad over nothing when there is no reason for his sadness.¹²⁹

This conception of the creative act is immediately challenged by philosophers because it is so contrary to their ordinary habits of thought.¹³⁰ For the physicist, for example, any act whatsoever is by definition a change, that is, a sort of movement. Now, whatever passes from one place to another, or from one state into another, presupposes an initial place or state, which is the point of departure of its change or movement. So true is this that where there would be no point of departure, the very notion of change would become impossible. For example, I move a body. It was therefore in a certain place from which I was able to cause it to pass to another. I change the color of an object. So it had to be an object of some color or other for me to change it to another. Now, in the case of the creative act as just defined, it is precisely this point of departure that would be lacking. Without creation there is nothing; with creation there is something. But does not this notion of a passage from nothingness to being involve a contradiction, since it presumes that what does not exist can nevertheless change its state and that what is nothing becomes something? Nothing comes from nothing (*ex nihilo nihil fit*) is the philosopher's first objection to the very possibility of creation.

The objection, however, only has weight if one concedes its point of departure. The physicist argues from the notion of movement. He claims that the conditions required for movement are not satisfied in the case of creation and concludes that creation is therefore impossible. Actually, the only legitimate conclusion to be derived from his argument would be that creation is not a movement. But then it would be completely legitimate. It is absolutely true that all movement is the changing of the state of a being, and when we hear of an act that would not be a movement, we are at a loss how to think about it. No matter how we might try, we will always *imagine* creation as if it were a change—an image that renders it contradictory and impossible. But in actual fact, it is

¹²⁸ST 1.45.1, ad 3.

¹²⁹De pot. 3.1, ad 7.

¹³⁰Like the divine *Esse* with which it is identical, the creative act eludes quidditative concepts. It is we who imagine it as a sort of causal relation binding God to the creature: "Creatio potest sumi active et passive. Si sumatur active, sic designat Dei actionem, quae est ejus essentia, cum relatione ad creaturam; quae non est realis relatio, sed secundum rationem tantum" (*De pot.* 3.3, resp.). We shall see, on the contrary, that taken passively, as the effect or terminus of the creative act, creation is a real relation or, to be more exact, it is the creature itself in its dependence upon God from whom it has being.

something entirely different, something we are at a loss to put into words, so unfamiliar is it to the conditions of human experience. To call creation the "giving of being" is also misleading, for how can something be given to what does not exist? To call it a "receiving of being" is scarcely any better, for how could something be received by what is nothing? Let us call it then, if you will, "a reception of the act of existing," without pretending to be able to represent it to ourselves.¹³¹

We can only conceive the act of existing under the notion of being. It is hardly surprising, then, that the relation between two acts of existing, one of which is nothing but the act of existing and the other the proper effect of the first, remains inconceivable. This is a subject that Aquinas has explained many times and as precisely as we could wish. It is also one of those points where we are naturally most tempted to relax the rigor of his principles. Each time he speaks directly of creation as such, Thomas uses the language of the act of existing, not that of being. "God brings things into existence (*esse*) from nothing" (*Deus ex nihilo res in esse producit*).¹³²

It is a question here of an act that, beginning with *Esse*, terminates directly and immediately with *esse*. Because of this, "to create is the proper action of God and of him alone" (*creare non potest esse propria actio, nisi solius Dei*), and the proper effect of this specifically divine activity is also the most universal effect of all, the one presupposed by every other effect, namely, the act of existing: "Among all effects the most universal is the act of existing itself. Now, to produce the act of existing absolutely, and not merely as this or of such a kind, belongs to the nature of creation. So it is clear that creation is the proper act of God himself."¹³³ This is why, when Thomas asks what is the root of the creative act in God, he refuses to place it in any one of the divine persons: "To create, indeed, is properly to cause or to produce the act of existing of things. Since anything that produces causes an effect resembling itself, we can see by the nature of an effect that of the action producing it. What produces fire is fire. This is why creation belongs to God by reason of his act of existing, which is

¹³¹"Creatio non est factio quae sit mutatio proprie loquendo, sed est quaedam acceptio esse" (*In Sent.* 2.1.2, resp. and ad 2). See *SCG* 2.17; *De pot.* 3.12; *ST* 1.45.2, ad 2, 3.

¹³²*ST* 1.45.2, resp. It is a question here of *creatio* as a divine act. But the term can be taken as signifying the effect of this act, and then *creatio* must be defined as an *aliquid*, which amounts to the ontological dependence of the creature on the creator. To put it another way, it is the real relation by which the created act of existing depends upon the creative act. See *ST* 1.45.3; *De pot.* 3.3. This is what Thomas calls *creatio passive accepta* (*De pot.* 3.3, ad 2), and that is sometimes called more briefly *creatio passiva*. The creature is the terminus of creation as such, and is, as it were, the subject of this real relation to God which is the *creatio passiva*. It is "prius ea in esse, sicut subjectum accidente" (*ST* 1.45.3, ad 3).

¹³³*ST* 1.45.5, resp. "Quod aliquid dicatur creatum, hoc magis respicit esse ipsius, quam rationem" (*ST* 3.2.7, ad 3).

his essence, and which is common to the three persons.”¹³⁴ Here we have a very instructive theological application, since it brings to light the ultimate, existential significance of the Thomistic notion of creation: “Since God is the act of existing itself through his own essence, his proper effect must be the created act of existing” (*Cum Deus sit ipsum esse per suam essentiam, oportet quod esse creatum sit proprius effectus ejus*).¹³⁵

If this is the kind of production meant by the word “creation,” we see at once why God alone can create. The Arabian philosophers, notably Avicenna, deny this. The latter, while admitting that creation is the proper action of the universal cause, nevertheless regards certain inferior causes, acting as instruments of the first cause, as capable of creating. Avicenna teaches that the first separated substance created by God subsequently creates the substance of the first sphere and its soul, and that afterward the substance of this sphere creates the matter of lower bodies.¹³⁶ Similarly, the Master of the Sentences¹³⁷ says that God can communicate the power of creating to a creature, but only as his minister and not on its own authority. But the notion of a creature-creator is contradictory. Any creation through the mediation of a creature would evidently presuppose the existence of this creature. We know, however, that the creative act presupposes nothing anterior, and this is also true of the efficient cause and matter. It causes being to succeed non-being, purely and simply. Creative power, therefore, is incompatible with the status of a creature, for a creature does not exist of itself and hence it could not confer an existence that does not belong to it by its essence. It can only act in virtue of the act of existing that it previously received.¹³⁸ God, on the contrary, is being *per se*, and therefore he can also cause being. As he alone is being *per se*, he is also the only one who can produce the very existence of other beings. To a unique mode of being there corresponds a unique mode of causality. Creation is the act of God alone.

It is interesting to look into the basic reason why the Arabian philosophers gave creatures the power to create. It is because, in their view, a cause that is one and simple could only produce one effect. From what is one, only one can proceed. If, then, we are going to explain how a number of things can come

¹³⁴ST 1.45.6, resp. For Duns Scotus, on the contrary, for whom the ontology of *esse* is overshadowed by that of *ens*, to attach creation to the divine essence would be to think of it as the operation of a nature, not as a free act. This is a necessary consequence in a philosophy in which the essence of God is not his pure act of *Esse*. In order to assure the free character of the act of creating, Duns Scotus must locate its roots, not in God’s essence but in his will. See the criticism of Thomas’ position in Duns Scotus, *Quaestiones Quodlibetales* 8.7 [Vivès ed. 25: 345] where he clearly has in mind the *Summa theologiae* of Thomas, 1.45.6.

¹³⁵ST 1.8.1, resp.

¹³⁶See Mandonnet, *Siger de Brabant*, 1: 161, 2: 111–112.

¹³⁷Peter Lombard, *Sent.* 4.5.3 (Quaracchi ed. 2: 267, n. 3).

¹³⁸ST 1.45.5, resp.; SCG 2.21.

from a first and simple cause, namely, God, we have to grant a succession of unique causes, each producing but one effect. Now, it is true to say that from a principle that is one and simple there can proceed but one effect; but this is only true for something acting by natural necessity. Thus it is basically because they consider creation to be a necessary production that the Arabian philosophers posit creatures that are at the same time creators. If we are to provide a complete refutation of their doctrine, we must examine whether God produces things by natural necessity and see how the multitude of created beings can come from his one and simple essence.

Thomas' reply to these two questions is contained in a single statement. We affirm, he says, that things proceed from God by way of knowledge and intelligence, and in this way a multitude of things can proceed immediately from a God who is one and simple and whose wisdom embraces all beings within itself.¹³⁹ Let us examine the implication of this statement and see how it adds new depths to the notion of creation.

There are three reasons why we should hold firmly that God has given being to creatures by a free act of his will and without any natural necessity. First, we must recognize that the universe is ordered in view of a certain end; otherwise everything in the universe would be produced by chance. Thus God has an end in view in creating it. It is very true that nature, like the will, acts for an end; but nature and will tend toward their ends in different ways.¹⁴⁰ Nature does not know the end, nor its reason for acting for an end, nor the relation of the means to their end. So it cannot propose an end to itself, nor move toward it, nor order and direct its actions in view of this end. The being acting through will, on the contrary, possesses all this knowledge that nature lacks. It acts for an end in the sense that it knows it, that it proposes it to itself, that so to speak it moves itself toward it, and that it directs its actions in relation to it. In a word, nature only tends toward an end because it is moved and directed toward this end by a being endowed with intelligence and will, as an arrow moves toward a specific target because of the guiding hand of the archer. Now, what only exists through another is always posterior to what exists through itself. Accordingly, if nature tends toward an end assigned to it by an intelligence, then that first being, from which it has both its end and its disposition to that end, must have created it not by natural necessity but by intelligence and will.

The second proof is that, unless hindered, nature always works in one and the same way. The reason for this is that everything acts according to its nature, so that it acts in the same way as long as it remains itself. But whatever acts naturally is limited to a single mode of being. Thus nature always performs one

¹³⁹*De pot.* 3.4, resp.

¹⁴⁰*Ibid.*

and the same action. Now, the divine being is not at all limited to a single mode of being. On the contrary, we have seen that it contains within itself the whole perfection of being. Therefore, if it acted by natural necessity, it would produce an infinite and unlimited sort of being. But two simultaneous infinite beings are impossible.¹⁴¹ Consequently, it is contradictory that God should act by natural necessity. Now, there is only one possible kind of action besides natural action, namely, voluntary action. We can conclude, therefore, that things came forth as so many definite effects from the infinite perfection of God according to his intelligence and will.

The third reason is derived from the relation binding effects to their cause. Effects only preexist in their cause in the mode of being of this cause. Now, the divine being is its intelligence. Accordingly, its effects preexist in it in a mode of intelligible being. It is also in this mode that they proceed from it, and this, in the last analysis, is by the mode of willing. God's inclination to accomplish what his intelligence has conceived belongs to the domain of the will. It is accordingly the will of God that is the first cause of all things.¹⁴² There still remains to be explained how a multitude of particular beings can come from this one simple being. God is the infinite being from which everything that exists holds its being. On the other hand, God is absolutely simple, and whatever is in him is his own *esse*. How can a diversity of finite things preexist in the simplicity of the divine intelligence? The theory of ideas will enable us to resolve this difficulty.

By ideas are meant forms considered as existing outside things themselves. Now, the form of a thing can exist outside the thing for two different reasons: either because it is the exemplar of that of which it is called the form, or because it is the principle by which that thing can be known. In both senses we must posit the existence of ideas in God.

First of all, ideas are found in God under the form of exemplars or models. In every act of generation that does not result from mere chance, the form of what is generated is the end of the generation. Now, the agent could not act in view of this form unless it had its likeness or model within itself. This is possible in two ways. With some beings the form of what they are to produce preexists according to its natural being, as is the case with natural agents. Thus man begets man and fire begets fire. With other beings, on the contrary, the form preexists in a purely intelligible mode. This is the case of beings that act with intelligence. This is the way the likeness or model of the house preexists in the architect's mind. Now, we know that the world is not the result of chance; we know, too, that God does not act by natural necessity. Therefore we must

¹⁴¹*ST* 1.7.2, resp.

¹⁴²*Ibid.* 1.19.4, resp.; *De pot.* 3.10, resp.

grant that there exists in the divine intelligence a form in whose likeness the world has been created. This we call an idea.¹⁴³

Let us go further. There exists in God not only an idea of the created universe, but also a host of ideas corresponding to the various beings that make up this universe. This proposition will become evident when we consider that when any effect whatsoever is produced, its last end is just what the producer principally intended to realize. Now, the final end in view of which all things are disposed is the order of the universe. But if God's intention in creating all things was the order of the universe, he must have had within himself the idea of this universal order. Now, there is no true idea of a whole without the ideas of the parts of which it is composed. Thus the architect can have no true idea of a house unless he has within him the idea of each of its parts. It is absolutely necessary, therefore, that the ideas of all things be contained in the mind of God.¹⁴⁴

At the same time we see why the plurality of ideas is not inconsistent with the divine simplicity. The difficulty this is thought to create rests on a simple equivocation. There are, in fact, two kinds of ideas: copies and models. Ideas we form in us in the likeness of objects fall into the first category. These are ideas *by means of which* we understand forms, making our intellect pass from potency to act. It is only too evident that if the divine intellect were composed of a number of ideas of this sort, its simplicity would be destroyed. However, this does not at all follow if we posit in God all the ideas in a form similar to that of the idea of a work in the mind of a workman. Then the idea is no longer *that by which* the intellect knows but *that which* it knows, and that by which the intelligent being can complete its work. Now, a plurality of ideas of this kind introduces no composition into the intellect in which they exist. On the contrary, their knowledge is implied in God's knowledge of himself. We have already said that God has perfect knowledge of his own essence. He knows it in every way it can be known. Now, the divine essence can be known not only as it is in itself but also as it is in some way able to be participated by creatures. Every creature possesses its own being, which is nothing else than a certain participation in the likeness of the divine essence, and the idea proper to this creature only represents this particular mode of participation. Accordingly, insofar as God knows his essence as imitable by a given creature, he possesses the idea of that creature. And so it is with all the other ideas in God.¹⁴⁵

We now know that creatures preexist in God in the mode of intelligible being, that is, in the form of ideas, and that these ideas introduce no complexity into the divine mind. There is nothing, then, from preventing us from considering him as the sole and immediate author of the host of beings constituting this

¹⁴³ST 1.15.1, resp.

¹⁴⁴Ibid. 1.15.2, resp.

¹⁴⁵Ibid. See *De ver.* 3.1, resp.

universe. But the most important result of all these considerations is to show us how vague and inadequate was our first attempt to define the creative act. When we said that God created the world *ex nihilo*, we were removing from the creative act any resemblance to the activity of a workman who applies preexisting matter to the work. But if we take this expression in a negative sense, as we have seen we must, it leaves totally unexplained the first origin of things. It is only too certain that nothingness is not the original womb from which all creatures can come forth. Being can only issue from being. We now know from what first being all others have come. They only exist because every essence is derived from the divine essence (*omnis essentia derivatur ab essentia divina*).¹⁴⁶ This formula does not do violence to the true thought of Aquinas, for the only reason things exist is because God is virtually all of them (*est virtualiter omnia*); and it adds nothing to the oft-repeated assertion of the philosopher that each creature is perfect to the extent that it participates in the divine being.¹⁴⁷

It may be asked how creatures can be derived from God without either being confused with him or added to him. The solution of this problem brings us again to the problem of analogy. Creatures have no goodness, perfection, or modicum of being that they do not hold from God. But we know already that none of these is in creatures in the same way that they are in God. The creature is not what it possesses; God is what he possesses. He is his act of existing, goodness, and perfection. That is why, even though creatures derive their act of existing from that of God, since he is *Esse* in its absolute sense, they possess it nevertheless in a participated and deficient manner which keeps them infinitely distant from the creator. A mere *analogue* of the divine being, the created being can neither constitute an integral part of the divine being, nor be added to it nor subtracted from it. Between two magnitudes of different orders there is no com-

¹⁴⁶*De ver.* 3.5, sed contra 2. "Sicut sol radios suos emittit ad corporum illuminationem, ita divina bonitas radios suos, id est, participationes sui, diffundit ad rerum creationem," *In Sent.* 2, prol. 1 (ed. Mandonnet-Moos 2: 1-3); *ST* 1.6.4, resp. For the phrase cited in the text see *SCG* 2.15 [7]. The term *virtualiter*, to be sure, implies no passivity of the divine substance. It indicates that the divine being contains, by its perfect actuality, the sufficient reason of the analogous being of things. It contains them as the artist's thought contains his works. "[E]manatio creaturarum a Deo est sicut exitus artificiorum ab artifice; unde sicut ab arte artificis effluunt formae artificiales in materia, ita etiam ab ideis in mente divina existentibus fluunt omnes formae et virtutes naturales," *In Sent.* 2.18.1, 2 [ed. Mandonnet-Moos 2: 451].

¹⁴⁷Let us remember, so as to avoid all equivocation: first, that creatures come from God in that they have their exemplars in him ("omne esse ab eo exemplariter deducitur," *In De divinis nominibus*, 1.1 [ed. Pera, p. 9, n. 29]; see Aquinas, *Sent.* 1.17.1.1 [ed. Mandonnet-Moos 1:394]); second, that to participate, in Thomistic language, does not mean to be a thing, but rather not to be one. To participate in God is not to be God (*ST* 1.75.5, ad 1, 4). Here, as in all Thomistic ontology, the notion of analogy is fundamental.

mon measure. The problem, then, is a false one. It vanishes as soon as the question is properly stated.

The question remains why God wished to realize outside of himself the many particular beings that he knew to be possible. In him, and considered in his intelligible being, the creature is indistinguishable from the divine essence. Still more precisely, the creature as idea is nothing else than the creative essence.¹⁴⁸ How is it that God has projected outside of himself, if not his ideas, at least a reality whose whole being consists in imitating some of the ideas he thinks in thinking himself?

We have already met the only explanation within the reach of our human reason: the good naturally tends to diffuse itself outside itself. Its characteristic is that it seeks to communicate itself to other beings to the extent to which they are capable of receiving it.¹⁴⁹ What is true of every good being to the extent to which it is such, is eminently true of the sovereign good we call God. The tendency to expand outside itself and to communicate itself expresses no more than the superabundance of an infinite being whose perfection overflows and distributes itself in a hierarchy of participated beings. Even so the sun shines upon all that shares its light without having either to reason or to choose, but by the mere fact that it is present.

This comparison, which was used by Dionysius, requires further clarification. The internal law ruling the essence of the Good and bringing it to communicate itself, must not be thought of as a natural necessity that God would have to obey. If the creative action is like the sun's illumination in that God, like the sun, allows no being to escape his influence, it differs from it regarding the absence of will.¹⁵⁰ The good is the proper object of the will. It is therefore the goodness of God, as willed and loved by him, that is the cause of the creature. But it is only the cause of the creature through the intermediary of the will.¹⁵¹ Thus we affirm at the same time that there is in God an infinitely powerful tendency to diffuse himself externally or to communicate himself, and that nevertheless he only communicates or diffuses himself by an act of the will. These two affirmations, far from being contradictory, corroborate each other.

The "voluntary" means nothing else than inclining to a good apprehended by the understanding. God, who knows his own goodness both in itself and as imitable by creatures, accordingly wills it in itself and in creatures who can participate in it. But because such is the divine will, it does not at all follow that God is subject to any kind of necessity. The divine goodness is infinite and complete. All creation could not increase this goodness by any amount, no

¹⁴⁸*De pot.* 3.16, ad 24.

¹⁴⁹*ST* 1.19.2, resp.

¹⁵⁰*De pot.* 3.10, ad 1.

¹⁵¹*Ibid.* ad 6.

matter how little it might be. Conversely, if God were never to impart his goodness to any being, it would still remain undiminished.¹⁵² Hence no creature can introduce necessity into God's will.

Shall we say at least that if God wished to create, he had to create the universe he actually did? By no means and for the same reason. God wills necessarily his own goodness, but this goodness is not increased because of the existence of creatures, and it would not diminish were they to disappear. Consequently, just as God manifests his goodness by means of the things actually existing and by the order he introduces here and now into the very depths of these things, so he could manifest it by means of other creatures disposed in a different order.¹⁵³ Since the present universe is the only one that exists, it is by that very fact the best there is, but it is not the best that can exist.¹⁵⁴ Just as God was free to create or not to create a universe, he could have created it better or worse without his will being subject to any necessity.¹⁵⁵ In every case, since all that is, is good insofar as it is, any universe created by God would have been good. Every difficulty that could arise on this subject springs from the same confusion. It supposes that creation establishes a relation between God and the creature as with an object. Hence one is led naturally to look for the cause in the creature determining the divine will. In fact, creation does not introduce into God any relation with the creature. Any relation here is unilateral and is established only between the creature and the creator as between a being and its cause.¹⁵⁶ So we should not waver in the conviction that God wills himself and that he wills only himself necessarily. If the superabundance of his being and his love moves him to will and love himself even in the finite participations of his being, we should see all this only as a gratuitous gift and nothing remotely resembling necessity.

To attempt to push this inquiry further would be to exceed the limits of what is knowable or, more exactly, to try to know what does not exist. The only other questions we can ask would be the following: Why did God create the world when he did not have to do so? Why did he create this particular world when there were others he might have created? But these questions do not call for a reply, unless one is not satisfied with the simple statement that these things are so because God willed them. We know that the divine will has no cause. Certainly, effects presupposing some other effect are not dependent upon the will of God alone, but the first effects do depend solely upon the divine will. We say, for example, that God willed to give man his hands that they might

¹⁵²Ibid. ad 12.

¹⁵³*De pot.* 1.5, resp. *ST* 1.25.5, resp.

¹⁵⁴*De pot.* 3.16, ad 17.

¹⁵⁵*ST* 1.25.6, ad 3.

¹⁵⁶*ST* 1.45.3, resp. and ad 1; *De pot.* 3.3, resp.

obey the intellect and carry out its orders. He willed that man be endowed with an intellect because without it he would not be a man. Finally, he willed that there be human beings for the greater perfection of the universe, and because he willed that such creatures should exist in order to enjoy him. It remains absolutely impossible to assign an ulterior cause to this last will. The existence of the universe and of creatures capable of enjoying their creator has no other cause than the pure and simple will of God.¹⁵⁷

Such is the true nature of the creative act insofar as it is given to us to understand it. We have now to consider its effects. Before examining them in themselves and according to the hierarchy in which God has placed them, we must examine in general the natural theology of Thomas Aquinas in order to bring out the original features setting it apart from those preceding it and the greater part of those following it.

¹⁵⁷*ST* 1.19.5, ad 3; *De pot.* 3.17, resp. This is why the Neoplatonic axiom “Bonum est diffusivum sui” ought not to be understood in Thomism in the Platonic sense of the efficient causality of the Good, but only in the sense of the final cause: “Bonum dicitur diffusivum sui per modum finis,” *In Sent.* 1.34.2.1, ad 4 [ed. Mandonnet-Moos 1: 796]; *SCG* 1.37 [5]. See on this point the excellent work of Julien Peghaire, “L’axiome ‘Bonum est diffusivum sui’ dans le néoplatonisme et le thomisme,” *Revue de l’Université d’Ottawa* (January 1932), special section, pp. 5–32.

PART I. Chapter Four

The Thomistic Reform

Though a theologian, Aquinas profoundly influenced philosophy. On at least two points he handed it on to his successors in an altered state from what he had found it: first, the notion of God; second, the notion of finite being. We shall consider first his main contribution to theology, then his metaphysics of created being or ontology.

Section 1. A New Theology

It is impossible to appreciate Thomas' theology¹ at its true value, or even to understand it fully, without locating it in the history of the problem. This is not difficult to do, at least to the extent that Thomas himself has done it. Beyond this, however, difficulties arise until they finally become insurmountable. I can at least attempt to define the nature of his theology, entrusting to others the task of proposing a definitive interpretation.

Thomas has sketched out the historical development of the problem of the radical origin of things with sufficient precision to allay any fear of seriously misrepresenting his thought. At least twice he has described it in the same way. His description is that of a philosopher eager to find in the very structure of human knowledge the reason for the various phases through which the study of the problem has passed.

Our first knowledge has to do with the sensible, that is, with the qualities of bodies. Thus the earliest philosophers thought that there was no being other than material things, that is, sensible bodies. These bodies, moreover, were uncreated. The production of a new body was simply the appearance of a new grouping of sensible qualities. These philosophers did not extend the study of the origin of things beyond the problem of their accidental changes. They explained these changes as various types of motion, for example, rarefaction and condensation; and they attributed the cause of these motions to principles that varied according to their particular doctrines: affinity, discord, intellect and others of the same sort. Such was the contribution of the pre-Socratics to the problem. It is not surprising that they got no further than this, since it is by slow stages that we make progress in knowing the truth.

¹We can speak of natural theology as the theology Thomas formulated in his effort to arrive at an understanding of faith. But he himself never gave this title to any part of his work, any more than he did the name "Christian Philosophy." His whole endeavor was to gain the wisdom that *sacra doctrina* confers.

At the second stage of this evolution, we meet the work of Plato and Aristotle. These two philosophers observed that every material being is formed from two elements, matter and form. Like their predecessors, neither Plato nor Aristotle raised the question of the origin of matter. In their view, matter was uncaused. However, they ascribed an origin to the forms of bodies. According to Plato, substantial forms came from the Ideas. According to Aristotle, Ideas could not adequately explain the generation of the new substances we continually experience. Even if they did exist, which Aristotle does not concede, Ideas are not causes. It would be necessary in every case to admit a cause for these participations of matter in the Ideas, which are called "substantial forms." It is not health-in-itself that heals the sick, it is the doctor.²

In the case of the generation of substances, the efficient cause is the movement of the sun in its ecliptic course. This motion accounts for both the continuity of generations and corruptions, and the duality, without which it would be impossible to understand how it can cause generations and corruptions.³

Without going into all the particulars of these doctrines, it will be enough for us to keep this one in mind: to give the origin of substances, it is enough to state the reason why forms are united to matter. The philosophers mentioned above had started from substances already existing. As though there were no call to justify their existence, they merely explained why—given specifically distinct substances—individuals are distinguished from one another within each species. To rise in this way from what makes a being to be *this being* to what makes it *such and such a being* was to advance from the level of accidents to that of substances—progress to be sure, but not yet final.

To explain the existence of a being is to explain the existence of everything it is. The pre-Socratics had accounted for the existence of individuals as such. Plato and Aristotle had explained the existence of substances as such. None of them seems even to have dreamed that there was any need to explain the existence of matter, though matter, like form, is a constituent element of bodies. After Plato and Aristotle, then, there remained a last possible step forward: to give the ultimate cause of the total being, that is, of its matter, its form and its accidents; in other words, no longer simply to say of a being why it is *this being* or why it is *such and such a being*, but why it is *a being* (*ens*). When we come to the stage of asking why beings exist as such, including their matter and forms and accidents, there is but one possible answer: God's creative act.⁴

²Aristotle, *De generatione et corruptione* 2.9, 335b. I am completing Thomas' analysis in *ST* 1.44. 2, resp., drawing on Aristotle's *De generatione* 2.6–10, from which Thomas has taken the material for his own explanation.

³Aristotle, *De generatione* 2.10, 336a–b.

⁴*ST* 1.44.2, resp. See also the similar text of *De pot.* 3.5, resp. and the remarks of my *Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy*, pp. 68–70.

When human reason has arrived at this point, it has exhausted the question as far as it is able, and the problem of the radical origin of being is resolved.

This alone would justify our concluding that, in Thomas' eyes, Aristotle's doctrine did not completely solve the problem of being. If we only reflect on the infinite distance between a God who is a creator and one who is not a creator, we can conclude that Thomas clearly saw how greatly his God differed from Aristotle's. This weakness in Aristotelianism Thomas expressly criticized as one of the chief errors opposed to the articles of the Christian faith.⁵ To which thinkers must we give the credit for having gone beyond Plato and Aristotle to the problem of the origin of being as being? The passage of the *Summa theologiae* we have just been examining introduces the authors of this metaphysical reform anonymously: "And later (after Plato and Aristotle) there arose some who considered being as being."⁶ This is surely a reference to Avicenna, for Thomas at least once called him the author of this important metaphysical development. The name of Avicenna makes us aware of our profound ignorance of history. We often cite the Islamic philosophers Avicenna and Averroes, forgetting that Avicenna himself came in the wake of many Muslim theologians whose religious thought influenced his own. In fact, Thomas' definition of creation is the very one given by Avicenna. I am speaking of the definition, which is not

⁵"Secundus est error Platonis et Anaxagorae, qui posuerunt mundum factum a Deo, sed ex materia praeciocenti, contra quos dicitur in Ps 148:5: *Mandavit, et creata sunt*, id est, ex nihilo facta. Tertius est error Aristotelis, qui posuit mundum a Deo factum non esse, sed ab aeterno fuisse, contra quod dicitur Gen 1:1: *In principio creavit Deus coelum et terram*," *De articulis fidei* [Marietti ed. 1: 142, n. 601].

⁶Thomas defines creation as an "emanationem totius entis a causa universali" (*ST* 1.45.1, resp.). On the other hand, in *In Phys.* 8.1.2 [Leonine ed. 1: 368, n. 5], he asserts that Plato and Aristotle "pervenerunt ad cognoscendum principium totius esse." He even goes so far as to say that, according to Aristotle, even what prime matter owes to *esse* derives "a primo essendi principio, quod est maxime ens. Non igitur necesse est praesupponi aliquid ejus actioni, quod non sit ab eo productum," *ibid.* 1.2 [367, n. 4]. Thirdly, we have just seen in *De articulis fidei* that Aristotle "posuit mundum a Deo factum non esse." It is difficult to reconcile these texts by supposing a development in Thomas' thinking on this point, because the respective dates of the *Summa* and the *Commentary on the Physics* are uncertain. They can be brought into agreement if we remember that *esse* has both a strict and a broader meaning. Its strict and properly Thomistic sense is "to exist." In its broader and properly Aristotelian meaning *esse* indicates substantial being. Now, Thomas always gave Aristotle (and Plato) credit for having risen to the cause *totius esse*, understood in the sense of total substantial being, that is, of the complete composite, including matter and form. See *ST* 1.45.1, resp. In this sense the celestial bodies are *causae essendi* for the lower substances which they produce, each according to its species (*ST* 1.104.1, resp.). But Thomas never admitted that the cause in virtue of which a substance exists as a substance was *ipso facto a causa essendi simpliciter* (*SCG* 2.21 [4]). Accordingly, he was able to say, without contradicting himself, both that Aristotle rose to a first *causa totius esse*, in the sense of substantial being, and also that he never rose to the notion of a God creator, that is, the cause of existential being.

necessarily the notion. As to the point we are dealing with at present, there can be no doubt at all. In the Disputed Question *De potentia* 3.5, resp., Thomas concludes that we must posit a being that is its own being, and that is the cause of all other beings that *are* not their being but *have* being by participation. To which he adds: *haec est ratio Avicennae*.

We find ourselves here at a crossroad of history, the thought of which boggles the mind. To find our bearings, we would first have to have some acquaintance with the thought of the Muslim *theologians*, which their own philosophers—Alkindi, Alfarabi, and Avicenna—have tried to interpret rationally. After this it would be necessary to show how the religious elements that Muslim philosophers have integrated into their philosophies have been useful for their integration in the great Christian theologies of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Finally, it would be necessary to show how Averroes' criticism of the religious factors introduced into Avicenna's philosophy has put Thomas on his guard and made him prudent on this point. Thomas has certainly taken into account Averroes' criticism of Avicenna and of Muslim theology. It is this mixture of faith and reason that he forthrightly condemns. Nevertheless on important matters, Thomas aligns himself with Avicenna and the theologians whose doctrine he interpreted. Creation is one such subject. God, who is *esse*, the cause of beings (*entia*) (as Avicenna taught) passed over, with necessary adjustments, into Thomas' theology.

Thomas dealt with the Augustinian basis of the doctrine at some length. On the word of Moses, Augustine never wearied of repeating that God is I AM. He always regretted that Moses, having said this, never explained the meaning of his words. Augustine was obliged to provide his own commentary. For him, the words of Exodus meant: I am the immutable being; I am "He who never changes."

Setting out from this principle, Augustine seems to have had no great difficulty in solving the problem of the divine names. Whatever unity, order, intelligibility and beauty is to be found in nature, would provide him with a basis for as many attributes of God. To do this, he had only to bring each positive good to its perfection, attribute it to God under this form, adding that what we learn as a host of distinct attributions are, in God, identical with his being. "God is what he possesses"⁷ is Augustine's oft-repeated phrase, whose implications he worked out on the level of immutability, as Thomas had to do on the level of *esse*. The difficulties facing Augustine lay elsewhere, at the point where, in seeking to define the relation between beings and Being, he was to come to grips with the problem of creation.

Like every Christian, Augustine knew that to create meant to produce beings out of nothing. No one could reasonably charge that he made any mistake

⁷See *The Christian Philosophy of Saint Augustine*, trans. Lawrence E.M. Lynch (New York: Random House, 1960), pp. 217–218.

about the meaning of creation. But the question arises as to what this notion meant for him when he called upon the light of natural reason to define it. Augustine always presents the creative act as the production of being by Being, which is a creation *veri nominis*, and bearing upon being itself. "How, O my God, have you made the heavens and the earth? ... It is not in the universe that you have created the universe, because there was no place where it could be born before it was made to be. You had nothing at hand that could be of service in forming the heavens and the earth. Whence would have come this matter that you did not make and out of which you would have made things? What is there that *is*, if not because you *are*?" And again: "It is you, O Lord, who have made the heavens and the earth ... you who *are*, for they *are*."⁸ No truth could be stated better, nor could its limitations be better revealed. Augustine knows very well that God exists and that the creative act has made the world exist. Just as the existence of God is intelligible to him only when conceived as the divine being, so also is the existence of things confused in his mind with their being. Creation then becomes the act in virtue of which "He who is what he is" makes things to be what they are.

Hence the twofold embarrassment of his interpreters who push the analysis of certain texts of Augustine to this point. One can speak only of one thing at a time. To be perfectly fair here, we would have to say both that Augustine knows very well the meaning of creation, for he knows it is the production of being, but that his Platonic notion of being leaves him helpless to affirm distinctly the act of existing. So it is, as one of his best interpreters has rightly observed, that all his explanations of creation naturally tend to move on the level of participation.⁹ For Augustine, the terms *creata* and *facta* are simple words borrowed from common speech. When he looks for their technical equivalent in order to designate created beings as such, his choice falls upon the ex-

⁸Augustine, *Confessions* 11.5.7 [CCL 27: 197]. For the second text see *ibid.* 11.4.6 [CCL 27: 197]. The quotations have been somewhat condensed.

⁹Ambroise Gardeil, *La structure de l'âme et l'expérience mystique* (Paris: Gabalda, 1927) 2: 313–325. The profound critical remarks addressed to me by Gardeil in these splendid pages show at that time how much better he understood this problem than I did. Rereading them today, however, I see that he had not yet plumbed its depth. See especially p. 319, where Gardeil contrasts Augustine's notion of creation as a *participation* in the divine ideas with Thomas who, "taking his inspiration from Aristotle and pushing causality back to its final logical consequences, attributes it immediately to divine efficient *causality*." In reality, Aristotle had already pushed back moving causality to its final logical consequence in the order of substance. It was not more logic that was now needed to go beyond it; what was needed was more metaphysics. The Thomistic reform of natural theology on this point was rather to change Aristotle's moving cause into a truly efficient cause by linking the effect which is the existence of beings to the causality of the pure act of existing. On the other hand, Gardeil's metaphysical keenness correctly revealed the constant shifting of the Augustinian notion of creation toward the Platonic notion of participation.

pression: things formed from the unformed, *ex informitate formata*.¹⁰ Here it is as though the proper and direct effect of the creative act was not the act of existing, but that condition of reality that justifies the use of the term “being” in speaking of it. The unformed in the present instance is matter. The informing of matter is its intelligible determination by the divine idea. Augustine certainly knows that matter itself is created, or, as he puts it, concreated with form. In his thought it is precisely this stabilization of matter by the rule of form that is evoked by the word “creation,” and necessarily so! In a doctrine in which being and immutable being are one and the same thing, creating can only consist in producing essences, which can only be called beings because their relative stability imitates the perfect immobility of Him Who Is.

Thus, no matter how we look at it, the natural theology of Augustine seems to be dominated by the Platonic ontology of essence. Obsessed by the mystery of the divine name, he finds himself in the same difficulty of explaining the being of things. Exactly corresponding to the texts in which we heard him complain that Moses had not explained the *Qui est* of Exodus, there is a passage in the *Confessions* in which he laments the fact that Moses went away without elucidating the first verse of Genesis: “In the beginning God created the heavens and earth.” Moses wrote this and moved on: *scripsit et abiit*. Were he still here, says Augustine, I should cling to him, I would pray to him, and would beg him in God’s name to explain its meaning; but Moses is no longer here, and even if he were, how would we understand the meaning of his words?¹¹

Whenever Augustine finds himself face to face with being, he speaks like a man haunted by the restlessness that springs from believing more than he knows, and he is always turning to the divine being for further knowledge. What he has learned from Plato places an insuperable limit to his natural impulse: “The angel—and in the angel the Lord—said to Moses who asked his name: ‘I am who am. You shall say to the children of Israel: *He Who Is* has sent me to you.’ The word ‘being’ means ‘to be immutable’ (*Esse, nomen est incommutabilitatis*). All changing things cease to be what they were and begin to be what they were not. Nothing has true being, pure being, authentic being save what does not change. He has being to whom it has been said: You shall change things, and they will be changed, but you, you remain the same (Ps 101: 27–28). What is meant by ‘I am who am’ if not ‘I am eternal’? What is meant by ‘I am who am’ unless ‘I cannot change’?”¹²

By a strange paradox, the philosopher who most completely identified God with the transcendent immutability of essence was at the same time the Christian

¹⁰Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram* 5.5.14 (PL 34: 326).

¹¹Augustine, *Confessions* 11.3.5 (PL 32: 811 [CCL 27: 196]).

¹²Augustine, *Sermo* 7.7 (PL 38: 66). See *De civitate Dei* 12.2 (PL 41: 350 [CCL 47: 2.356–357]); *De Trinitate* 5.2.3 (PL 42: 912 [CCL 50: 208.5–17]).

most aware of the immanence of divine efficacy in nature, in the universal history of humanity, and in the personal history of the individual conscience. When he speaks of these things as a theologian, Augustine seems infallible. Here he is without rival in the history of Christian thought; he has only disciples. His greatness is not that of a philosopher but of a theologian whose philosophy lags behind his theology without for a moment retarding its progress.

The point at which Augustine felt the presence of God in nature could easily be shown from his doctrine of providence. It is better to insist upon the Augustinian immanence of God in the history of the world and of souls, because nowhere is the philosophical inadequacy of his Christian Platonism more evident. Augustine's entire religion, as it appears in *The City of God*, is based on a history dominated by the memory of two major events, creation and redemption, and upon the expectation of a third, the last judgment. In order to make a philosophy of history out of this theology of history, Augustine found few resources in his ontology of the Immutable One. Instead of having to explain the detail of existences by a supreme existing Being, he had to explain what is always other through what remains immutably the same. In brief, he could not explain philosophically the relation between history and God except in terms of the opposition between time and eternity. It is conceivable that time is in eternity,¹³ but, conversely, how it is conceivable that eternity is in time? Yet it must be, at least if the presence of God to history and in history is to be assured. It is generally agreed that Augustine succeeded as far as possible, but it must also be recognized that to justify Christianity as history by means of an ontology in which becoming hardly deserves to be called being was a very difficult undertaking.

Perhaps as much ought to be said about the relation of Augustine's spirituality to his metaphysics. No one has felt more intensely than he God's indwelling in the soul that he transcends: "You were more inward than my own interior self and loftier than my most lofty self" (*Tu autem eras interior intimo meo et superior summo meo*).¹⁴ Yet it is none the less true that Augustine was far better equipped to establish God's transcendence than to justify his immanence. The pathos of the *Confessions* is perhaps in part due to its image of a soul haunted by God's presence but failing to understand it. Every time Augustine dares to say that God is within him, he hastens to add an *An potius*: "I would not be, O my God! I would absolutely not be, if you were not within me. Or rather, I would not be, were I not in you, from whom, by whom and in whom

¹³Augustine, *Confessions* 1.6.10 (PL 32: 665 [CCL 27: 5]). See *ibid.* 7.15.21 (PL 32: 744 [CCL 27: 106]). On Augustine's difficulty in thinking of history in terms of Platonism see the penetrating remarks of Jean Guittou, *Le temps et l'éternité chez Plotin et saint Augustin* (Paris: Boivin, 1933), p. 322, beginning of no. 3.

¹⁴*Confessions* 3.6.11 (PL 32: 687-688 [CCL 27: 32-33]).

all things exist.”¹⁵ So it is that all his proofs of the existence of God, which are but so many impassioned quests of the divine presence, always lead Augustine to situate God much less within the soul than beyond it.¹⁶ Each proof tends to end in mystical experience, where the soul finds God only by escaping from its own becoming, in order to rest for a moment in the stability of the Immutable One. These brief experiences only serve to anticipate, in time, from which they would liberate us, the final event of universal history, in which the entire order of becoming will be transformed in the peace of eternity.

Augustine knows better than anyone that everything, even becoming, is the work of the Immutable One; but it is precisely at this point that the mystery deepens for him. It would have been impossible for anyone to clear it up, but at least it was possible to show what latent intelligibility lay locked in the mystery. This was only possible, however, by reducing the antinomy of time and eternity to the analogy of beings to Being, that is, by rising from God as eternity to God as Act of Existing. “Eternity is the very substance of God” (*Eternitas, ipsa Dei substantia est*).¹⁷ These words of Augustine, which clearly mark the ultimate limit of his ontology, reveal that his mind conceived as an antinomy of eternity and mutability the relation of man to God that his whole experience assured him was the intimacy of a mutual presence. “God is his own act of existing” (*Deus est suum esse*): these words of Thomas, which clearly mark the decisive progress achieved by his ontology, also explain the ease with which his thought could bind time to eternity, creature to creator. For He Who Is signifies

¹⁵Ibid. 1.2.2 (PL 32: 661–662 [CCL 27: 2.11–13]). The last words refer to Rom 11:36.

¹⁶It is well known that Augustine was obsessed by the awareness of the intimate presence of God. All the books on Augustine quote the unforgettable passages of the *Confessions*. The problem here is entirely different. As a philosopher, did Augustine have the means of conceiving a presence of which he was so profoundly aware? It could be shown, quite easily perhaps, that the intense pathos of the *Confessions* comes, in part at least, from the anxiety experienced by a soul that felt the divine presence within it, and yet was unable to conceive that it could actually be there. This seems to be the meaning of the famous assent to God in Book 10, which concludes: “Ubi ergo te inveni ut discerem te, nisi in te supra me” (ibid. 10.26.37); and in the no less famous “ecstasy at Ostia” (ibid. 9.10.25), that veritable foretaste of the beatific vision. Despite appearances, the Thomistic immanence of *Esse* in beings is more penetrating than that of the interior master in the disciple, which Augustine so magnificently describes. Once again, let us recall that we are here dealing exclusively with the technical comparison of two solutions of the same philosophical problem. What Thomas and Augustine knew as philosophers could never measure up to what they knew as theologians (and even less with the latter than with the former), nor to what they were as saints.

¹⁷Augustine, *Enarratio* in Ps 101.10 (PL 37: 131 [CCL 40: 1445.27]). In the Augustinian Trinity, eternity is appropriated to the Father: “O aeterna veritas et vera caritas et cara aeternitas!” *Confessions* 7.10.16 (PL 32: 742 [CCL 27: 103.141–143]). St. Bernard, recalling in his turn the text of Exodus, adds: “nil competentius aeternitati, quae Deus est,” St. Bernard, *De consideratione* 5.6 [ed. Jean Leclercq and Henri Rochais, *S. Bernardi Opera* 3: 877.12–13].

God's eternal present,¹⁸ and the immanence of the divine efficacy in his creatures is at the same time the cause of their being and duration: "Being is innermost in each thing, and most fundamentally present within all things . . . Hence it must be that God is in all things, and most inwardly" (*Esse autem est illud quod est magis intimum cuiuslibet, et quod profundius omnibus inest. . . Unde oportet quod Deus sit in omnibus rebus, et intime*) (ST 1.8.1).

Advancing beyond those who regarded God as below existence, Aquinas also advanced beyond those who raised him above existence. Among the latter were Dionysius the Areopagite and some of his Western disciples.

To us who are so far removed from these matters, it seems that the Augustinian obstacle ought to have been far more formidable than the Dionysian. This was not so in the thirteenth century. Since this time the imposing figure of Dionysius has been reduced to the much more modest stature of the Pseudo-Dionysius, the author whose doctrinal authority has steadily diminished in the church while Augustine's, if it has not increased, has at least held its own. Moreover, by its very nature, the work of Dionysius presented Thomas with a problem that was serious in a way quite different from that of Augustine. As we have said, Augustine's philosophy lagged behind his theology, but his theology itself was perfectly sound. Hence Thomas could take it as it stood, find therein exactly the same truth, but penetrate it more deeply than Augustine had done. We are far from being able to say as much about Dionysius' theology. Resplendent with the authority that the thirteenth century gave him, Dionysius must have seemed to Thomas to say many things that he could scarcely have thought. Thomas' clever sleight of hand in appropriating the riskiest Dionysian formulas must not blind us to the fact that Thomas never took over a formula without altering its content.¹⁹ The sleight of hand artist is also a magician. Sometimes Thomas himself is hard put to extract from these Sibylline formulas the correct meaning with which he actually gives them. At such moments he pauses to grumble a little. This Dionysius is very obscure! "In all his books he uses an obscure style" (*In omnibus suis libris obscuro utitur stylo*), and that he should do so deliberately (*ex industria*) does not alter the case. Again, he imitated the Platonists (*Platonicos multum imitabatur*). Still, Thomas does not give up; and from his hard work there results a Thomistic Dionysius in whom the historical Dionysius would have trouble recognizing himself.

In one of its most obvious aspects, the work of Dionysius appears as a commentary on sacred scripture, that is, as the work of a Christian theologian.²⁰

¹⁸ST 1.13.11, resp.

¹⁹For a study of this problem see J. Durantel, *Saint Thomas et le Pseudo-Denis* (Paris: Alcan, 1919). This is a useful collection of the texts of Dionysius used by Thomas and his interpretations of them.

²⁰The date of the collection of works making up the *Corpus Dionysiacum* is uncertain. Some say they go back to the third century; others attribute them to an author living at the end of the fifth or the beginning of the sixth century. Having no competence to discuss the ques-

This is pre-eminently the case with his treatise *On the Divine Names*. Here he deals directly with the problem of our knowledge of God, and when Thomas read his solution he must have often been puzzled. Like Augustine, Dionysius borrows the essentials of his philosophical technique from the Platonism of Plotinus. And again like Augustine, he has to use this technique in order to elucidate Christian dogma, but the Greek concedes far more to Plotinus than Augustine ever did.

The chief characteristic of the philosophy of Plotinus is that it is founded on a metaphysics of the One rather than of Being. To affirm that the One is the first principle of everything that is, is to grant at the same time that the One is not a being. Since it is the principle of whatever deserves the name of being, it is not itself a being. Being, properly speaking, makes its first appearance in the universal hierarchy with *νοῦς*, or Intelligence. At the same time that it is the first being, this second hypostasis is the first god. As such, this theology was clearly useless for a Christian. To identify the God of Exodus with the One is either to reduce the latter to the level of being, which Plotinus regards as inferior to the One; or else to raise God above being, which for Christianity is the least inappropriate of all the divine names. The first of these alternatives would betray Plotinus, the second the scriptures. Augustine did not hesitate to betray Plotinus. Let us see how Dionysius tries to betray neither alternative more than is necessary, while avoiding complete agreement with either.

The expression *superessentialis divinitas* often turns up in Eriugena's translation of Dionysius. This pays homage to Plotinus and at the same time betrays his thought. But this is only proper for a Christian. If, like Plotinus, we identify Intelligence, Being and God, we can no longer say that God is above intelligence and being. If we make the transposition demanded by Christianity and identify God with the One of Plotinus, we have to think of God as above intelligence and being. We arrive then at Plato's Good, or at Plotinus' for that matter, but now conceived as a God who would be beyond being (*ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας*). That is why Dionysius' God is *superessentialis*, and is so by full right. Now, being and essence are one. Accordingly, a superessential God is not a being.

tion, we shall take it as agreed, as the evidence shows, that their author was a Christian who was elaborating a proper Christian theology under the supreme authority of scripture. The Dionysian writings, commented on during the seventh century by Maximus the Confessor, influenced the high Middle Ages through John Scotus Eriugena, who during the ninth century translated the writings of Dionysius and the commentaries of Maximus, commenting on them in part and basing on their principles his own masterpiece, the *De divisione naturae*. I am only dealing here with Dionysius in the text by which he first influenced the Middle Ages: his translation by John Scotus Eriugena. Regarding this last author and his work see Maïeul Cappuyens' *Jean Scot Erigène, sa vie, son oeuvre, sa pensée* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1933). See also Gabriel Théry, "Scot Erigène, introducteur de Denys," *The New Scholasticism* 5 (1933): 91-108.

Indeed, he is much more than a being, but precisely because he is more than a being he is not a being. This amounts to saying that God is a non-being, and that non-being, or "what is not," is the supreme cause of all that is.²¹

Starting with this notion, the Platonic hierarchy of principles will necessarily tend to be re-established within the Christian order. Taken in himself, God will be identified with the One, that is, with a perfect simplicity transcending the order of number. The One does not generate number by way of division, because it is indivisible. If we must find a simile for this, it can be compared to the center of a circumference at which all the radii coincide. Or again, it is like a Monad, anterior to all number, which contains all beings without being one of them. Similarly, the One, which precedes being, contains within itself all the being that itself is not. But as this being is not the One, it will be called "the being of existing things" (*ipsum esse existentium*).²² As we shall see, this is a saying whose influence will be deep and lasting. However, if we wish to designate the first principle in its creative fecundity, we shall give it the title of honor Plato had conferred upon it: the Good, or the *Optimum*.²³ From this it becomes clear that if it must be taken as the supreme "non-being," this is by way of excess and not of defect. Taken in the full sense, as it ought to be, this apparent negation affirms a first principle which, situated beyond life, knowledge and being, is the cause of whatever possesses them. Whatever is, is only by participation in the good, which itself transcends being.²⁴

In a doctrine that insists strongly on the primacy of the good, the *I Am Who Am* of Exodus is necessarily subjected to a restricted interpretation that greatly weakens its significance. Writing a treatise on the divine names, that is, on the names given to God in sacred scripture, Dionysius could not ignore this text; but he simply cites it, along with many others, as one of the names of the unnamable.²⁵ To speak of being apropos of God, is not to speak of him but of his effect. Being, of course, always bears the mark of the One, which is its cause. It is even because it is the effect of the One that being only is insofar as it is one. The imperfect, unstable and always divisible unity of beings nevertheless exists in them as the causal energy by which they are. Let the transcendent One cease to penetrate one of them with its light and it ceases at once to exist. It is in this profound sense that God can be called the being of everything that is: $\omega\nu$,

²¹Dionysius the Areopagite, *De divinis nominibus*, trans. by John Scotus Eriugena, 1 (PL 122: 1113c) and 5 (1148a-b). See Hilduin's translation of Dionysius in Gabriel Théry, *Etudes Dionysiennes 2: Hilduin traducteur de Denys* (Paris: Vrin, 1937), p. 168.18-20. Ibid., note 8, one can see that it is in fact the $\epsilon\pi\acute{\epsilon}\kappa\epsilon\iota\nu\alpha$ τῆς οὐσίας ("beyond being") of Plato that is the source of these texts.

²²Dionysius, *De divinis nominibus* 5 (PL 122: 1148b and 1149a-b).

²³Ibid. 4 (PL 122: 1128d-1129a). See 13 (PL 122: 1169b-d).

²⁴Ibid. 4 (PL 122: 1130a).

²⁵Ibid. 1 (PL 122: 1117b). See 2 (PL 122: 1119-1120).

totius esse. Yet God only appears under the aspect of being as the cause that makes things to be. To be exact, being is but the revealing or manifesting of the One; in a word, its "theophany."²⁶ As for the One, it is prior to being (*ὤν*), and it is not involved in the order of its participations.²⁷

From the point of view of the history of Christian theology, this doctrine seems to be a step backward compared to Augustine's. In Augustinism, the influence of Plotinus could only have been generalized under certain extremely strict conditions. Although, in his doctrine, being is conceived as a Platonic kind of intelligible and immutable essence, God is not only identified with the Good and the One, as in Dionysius, he is also identified with Being. This was a decision of paramount importance that Dionysius does not seem to have made. From this oversight many difficulties arise for Christian commentators and even for ordinary historians. Either they perceived the danger and reinstated being into the One of Dionysius and so restored his teaching to the norm of orthodoxy, or they accepted it literally, and as they explained it more fully gave it a more pantheistic appearance. What interests us for the moment is how a theologian as manifestly Christian as Dionysius could have developed a doctrine of this sort without embarrassment.

To maintain that his feeling for God was pantheistic would be to go counter to the obvious meaning of all his texts, in which God always appears as being before (*ante*) or above (*super*) everything we can say of him. Dionysius had an acute, almost exacerbated feeling for the divine transcendence. If, while experiencing this feeling, he was able to maintain that God is the being of all that is, it is precisely because, for him, God is not being. He has being only in the sense that, in his capacity as transcendent principle and cause, he is "the being of that which is." If, on the contrary, we read his doctrine so as to translate it into the language of a theology in which God is essentially being, we make it pantheistic. If Dionysius never has any fears on this score, it is because in his mind there could be no confusion of being between things and God, for the simple reason that things are, while God, since he is the One, is not.

This inferiority of being in relation to God is clearly indicated by the special metaphysical status Dionysius gives to the Ideas. Like everything intelligible and immutable, the Ideas exist; it can even be said that they preeminently exist. Because they exist, they are principles and causes (*et sunt, et principia sunt, et primo sunt, deinde principia sunt*).²⁸ However, it inevitably follows that since they exist, they are not God. The very title of the fifth chapter of *The Divine Names* would be enough to prove that this is truly his doctrine: "On Being, and also on the Ideas." When he begins to speak of being in this chapter, he natural-

²⁶Ibid. (PL 122: 1147a).

²⁷Ibid. (PL 122: 1148a-b). See PL 122: 1150a and 1151a.

²⁸Ibid. (PL 122: 1148c-d).

ly begins to speak of the first beings, namely, the Ideas. The opening of the chapter is likewise remarkable: "Let us proceed now to the true theological name of the essence of what truly is. We only remark that it is not our intention here to reveal the superessential essence. Since this is superessential, it is ineffable, unknowable and absolutely inexplicable. It is transcendent Unity itself (*superexaltatam unitatem*). But we wish to praise the emanation (maker of substance) of the primary divine essence into all existing things."²⁹ It would be impossible to insist more strongly on the gulf between the order of being, its principle and the latter's "superexistentiality." By the same token, the divine Ideas are excluded from this same "superexistentiality," for they only exist because they participate in it. In a system in which being proceeds, not from Being, but from the One and the Good, we enter at the same time the order of being and participation. Hence, in Dionysius, we find that characteristic doctrine of Ideas as "participations *per se*," anterior to everything else, causes of everything else, and which, because they are the first participations (*primum participantia*), are also the first beings (*primum existentia*).³⁰

One of the first consequences of this doctrine is to de-existentialize completely the notion of creation. For Thomas, God gives existence because he is the Act of Existing. For Dionysius, the One gives being because it itself does not exist. Hence a second consequence, that the invisible things of God (*invisibilia Dei*) cannot be known if we begin with the created world. In a doctrine like this, reason can still mount from beings to beings right up to the divine Ideas, which are the first beings. Here it is stopped by an impassable abyss, for it could go no higher without mounting to God, who transcends being itself. How would reason do this, since everything it knows exists?

The negative theological method had perforce to become the Dionysian method par excellence. To begin with, whatever Dionysius says on the subject is so consonant with what Thomas will say about it that it is not surprising that the latter often cites it approvingly. Notice, however, how he cites it: "Dionysius says (in the *Divine Names*) that we reach God from creatures, namely, by causality, by elimination, and by eminence."³¹ This is exactly the Thomistic method as we have already described it, but we are far from the text to which Thomas appeals! He has in mind John Sarrazin's version of Dionysius' text: *Ascendemus in omnium ablatione et excessu et in omnium causa*. Thomas has been praised for improving upon the logical order of these operations by reversing the order of the words: *per causalitatem, per remotionem, per eminen-*

²⁹Ibid. (PL 122: 1147a).

³⁰Ibid. (PL 122: 1148d-1149a). This text is followed by others which strongly emphasize that God is not yet a being, a *nondum ōv* (1148a). Because he himself does not exist, he is the being of all that exists; in brief, a God who as principle and cause of being transcends it (1148b).

³¹*In Sent.* 1.3, Divisio primae partis textus [ed. Mandonnet-Moos 1: 88].

tiam.³² In fact, this inverts the entire doctrine of Dionysius. The *Divine Names* says that we arrive at the cause of everything by eliminating the given and by transcending it.³³ To follow such a method is indeed to begin with sensible data in order to ascend to their cause. It is also to rely upon a certain relationship, a kind of analogy, between the effect and its cause. We only rely on the relationship to deny that it teaches anything about the nature of the cause. Could it be otherwise in a universe in which things are because God is not?

The two consequences of this principle that we here emphasize are but two sides of a single thesis: creation does not consist in a relationship of beings to Being; the creative cause cannot be known from created beings. All that Dionysius can grant is that, beginning from the order of things, we can gain some knowledge of the divine Ideas, which, as we have just seen, are not God. To the question "How do we know a God who is neither intelligible, nor sensible, nor in general any of the things that exist?" Dionysius replies by asking another question: "But is it not true to say that we know God in some other way than by his nature?" And here is his explanation: "For this nature is something unknown that surpasses all understanding, all reason and all thought. But by starting with the disposition of all things that he himself sets forth to us, including images and likenesses of its divine exemplars, by pruning and transcending them we raise ourselves as best we can, thanks to the life and to the order of the whole, right up to the cause of all things."³⁴ To know God in this life, therefore, is only to know some image of Ideas, beyond which he dwells as in an eternal inaccessibility.

In order to remove the Dionysian obstacle, a transformation had to be effected in the very notion of God. Though admirably conceived as the principle of rational intelligibility, Dionysius' One could only with difficulty fulfill the functions that all religions expect of God. At the very most it made way for the return to a doctrine of salvation by knowledge, like that formulated by Plotinus. It could not in the least assure that intimate and personal union with God that we look for in religion. That is why we find Thomas constantly re-establishing, on the plane of existence and existential causality, all the relationships of creatures to God that Dionysius conceived as participations of being in the One.

For Dionysius, God was *superesse* because he was "not yet" the *esse* that he only becomes in his highest processions. For Thomas, God is *superesse* be-

³² J. Durantel, *Saint Thomas et le Pseudo-Denis*, p. 188. Here the very text of the quotation made in Thomas' *In Boet. De Trin.* 1.2, resp. [Leonine ed. 50: 85.116-117; ed. Decker, p. 66.17] has been corrected in the Thomistic sense. Thus it reads: "cognoscitur (Deus) ex omnium causa et excessu et ablatione." The same correction is found in Thomas' *In De divinis nominibus* 7.4 (Marietti ed., p. 275, n. 732).

³³Dionysius, *De divinis nominibus* 7.3. Eriugena's translation reads: "redeundum, omnium ablatione et eminentia, in omnium causa" (PL 122: 1155b).

³⁴Ibid.

cause he is eminently being: *Esse* pure and simple, taken in its infinity and perfection. Touched, as it were, by a magic wand, the doctrine of Dionysius is thereby transformed. Thomas preserves it in its entirety, but nothing in it has the same meaning.³⁵ God's *esse*, it is true, still remains unknowable to us; but no longer is our knowledge of things a knowledge of something that God is not. We can now truly say of everything that is, that God is also it, and even that he is it preeminently; that the name rightly belongs to him before it belongs to his creature. It is God's mode of being that completely escapes us.³⁶ After eliminating all that is necessary, this at least remains, that every human concept of every being and of every mode of being, authorizes us to conclude that since the thing I conceive is, God is it. In such a doctrine, the *invisibilia Dei* continue to transcend our knowledge; but they transcend it in the line of knowledge, since all God's attributes, known from created being, only become invisible to us when identified with the perfect simplicity of *Esse*.

In making this decisive progress Thomas finally solved the basic problem of natural theology. From the very beginning, Greek thought was faced with the

³⁵Thomas is generally quite careful to handle Dionysius tactfully, for example in *ST* 1.13.3, ad 2, but he does stand up to him when the Christian notion of God is at stake. Here is an interesting case: "Praeterea, intellectus creatus non est cognoscitivus nisi existentium. Primum enim, quod cadit in apprehensione intellectus est ens; sed Deus non est existens, sed supra existentia, ut dicit Dionysius; ergo non est intelligibilis, sed est supra omnem intellectum. Ad tertium dicendum, quod Deus non sic dicitur non existens, quasi nullo modo sit existens, sed quia est supra omne existens, in quantum est ipsum esse. Unde ex hoc non sequitur, quod nullo modo possit cognosci, sed quod omnem cognitionem excedat, quod est ipsum non comprehendi" (*ST* 1.12.1, ad 3). It is to be noted that the "Respondeo" of this same article is directly aimed at, or at least replies to, the teaching of John Scotus Eriugena that it is impossible to see the divine essence even in the beatific vision.

³⁶Anxious to retain some knowledge of the divine essence, one of Thomas' most profound interpreters cites him as follows: "Essentiam Dei in hac vita cognoscere non possumus *secundum quod in se est*; sed COGNOSCIMUS EAM *secundum quod repraesentatur in perfectionibus creaturarum*" (*ST* 1.13.2, ad 3). Cited by Jacques Maritain, *The Degrees of Knowledge*, trans. Gerald B. Phelan et al. (New York: Scribners, 1959), p. 426. Italics and capitals belong of course to Maritain. A different emphasis is not impossible, but no typographical artifice can alter the meaning of a well-turned phrase. Taking it without emphasis of any kind, we find that Thomas says two things: first, that we do not know God's essence as it is in itself; second, that we do know it according as it is represented by the perfections of creatures. Not to know God's essence as it is in itself, is not to know it in itself. Thomas is therefore repeating here what he says elsewhere, that in itself we do not know it at all. To know it as it is represented in the perfections of creatures is still only to use our concepts of creatures to represent God. In what way do these abstract concepts of sensible things represent God's essence? In none whatsoever. We must not transform into any concept whatsoever of God's essence, knowledge made from judgments that affirm that *what things are, God is*, because that *pre-exists* in him, but in a higher way. We affirm this eminent mode of existing, but it eludes us; and this is exactly what we must know if we are to know the essence of God at all.

difficulty of uniting the gods of religion and the principles of philosophy in the same account of reality. In order to understand *what* things are there must be principles, but to understand *that* things are there must be causes. The Greek gods were precisely such causes. Entrusted to resolve all problems about the origin of things, they intervened whenever it was a question of explaining the existence of something, whether it was the existence of the world itself, as we see in the case of Hesiod's *Theogony* or in the *Iliad*, or whether it was simply the existence of the events that take place in this world. It could easily be shown that this dualism of essence and existence accounts for the dualism of philosophy and myth in the work of Plato. All Platonic myths are existential, as all Platonic dialectic is essential. That is why none of Plato's Ideas, not even the Good, is a god; nor is any of Plato's gods, even the Demiurge, an Idea. In order to resolve this antinomy, it was possible to decide to identify the highest god with Plato's Good. But this did not resolve the antinomy; it only introduced it into the First Principle itself. We have shown this to be the case with Augustine and Dionysius the Areopagite. How can we make a god out of an essence without at the same time making an essence of a god? Once God has been essentialized, one immediately has to face, as did Augustine, the insurmountable difficulty of accounting for existences, beginning with the *Essentia* assigned to them as their principle. To avoid the difficulty, the only other course is to remove, with Dionysius, the first principle beyond both essence and existence, thereby denying creatures any positive knowledge of their creator.

It is entirely different in a natural theology like that of Thomas Aquinas. His God is *Esse*. Now, the act of existing is like the very stuff from which things are made. Reality, therefore, is only intelligible by the light of the supreme Act of Existing, which is God.

In Thomas' writings God plays the role of a supreme principle of philosophical intelligibility, as we established when treating of the description of his essence, and verified again with each of his attributes. By him and by him alone, everything that participates in any degree in unity, goodness, truth and beauty is one, good, true and beautiful. Thus the God of religion has truly become the supreme principle of philosophical intelligibility. This principle of intelligibility itself is identical with the God of religion. This identity cannot come about without danger both for God's divinity and for the intelligibility of the principle, except in the unique case in which all these problems are ultimately settled on the level of the act of being. There the radical cause of all existences is at the same time their supreme principle of intelligibility.

This is the God of Thomas Aquinas: not only the principle but also the creator, not only the Good but also the Father. His providence extends to the least detail of being because his providence is nothing but his causality. To cause something is simply to intend that it come to be. Moreover, it must be said of

everything that exists and acts that it depends immediately upon God for both its existence and its actions.³⁷

What the God of Aquinas is in his eternal self, he is also as the cause of events. Creatures passing through time have given him various names. Each name designates a relationship between creatures and him, not between him and creatures. We emerge from nothingness—and call God our creator. We recognize this creator as our supreme master—and call him Lord. We sin and are lost, but the Word is made Flesh—and we call God our redeemer. This long history takes place in time and in a changing world, but God is not changed by it, any more than a column moves from right to left as we pass to and fro before it. God is a creator for those whom he creates and whom his eternal efficacy redeems each moment from nothingness. He is a savior for those whom he saves and lord for those who profess to serve him. In him creation and redemption are but his action that, like his power, is one with his Act of Existing.³⁸ In order that the first principle of philosophy be joined in this way to the God of religion, and in order that the same God of religion be author of nature and the God of history, it has been necessary to adopt the meaning of the name of God in its profoundest existential implication. *I Am* is the only God of whom it can be said that he is the God of philosophers and scientists, and also the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Section 2. *A New Ontology*

It has often been said that Thomas' metaphysics, and consequently his whole philosophy, is dominated by his notion of reality and being.³⁹ This is perfectly

³⁷ST 1.22.13, resp.

³⁸Ibid. 1.13.7, resp. and ad 1. Clearly it is not only a question here of defining a type of unilateral relations whose existence we have to affirm but that we could not conceive. This is true of creation, and infinitely more true of the Incarnation, that miracle of miracles to which all others are directed (SCG 4.27). The Redemption is only cited here as a particularly striking example of the reduction of an event to the divine Act of Existing as to its cause.

³⁹On the notion of being as the keystone of Thomas' philosophy see Norbertus Del Prado, *De veritate fundamentali philosophiae christianae* (Fribourg, CH: Société S.-Paul, 1911), especially the Introduction, pp. xxvi-xxix, and pp. 7-11. For a general introduction to the problem see Francesco Olgiati, *L'anima di san Tommaso, saggio filosofico intorno alla concezione tomista* (Milan: Vita e pensiero, 1923). For both an historical and philosophical introduction to the problem of the metaphysical structure of beings we could not recommend more highly Aimé Forest, *La structure métaphysique du concret selon saint Thomas d'Aquin* (Paris: Vrin, 1931). On the "existential" character of the Thomistic notion of being see Benoît Pruche, *Existentialisme et acte d'être* (Grenoble: Arthaud, 1947); Jacques Maritain, *A Preface to Metaphysics: Seven Lectures on Being* (London/New York: Sheed and Ward, 1943), especially pp. 21-25 and 37, n.13; same author, *Existence and the Existent*, trans. Lewis Galantière and Gerald B. Phelan (New York: Pantheon, 1948); L. Oeing-Hanhoff, "Ens et unum convertuntur-

true. Perhaps we should go even further and say that this notion puts in question the very existence of a philosophy that is Thomas' own. Failing to have understood its originality and depth, excellent historians thought they could say that Thomas did nothing but repeat Aristotle. Others have said that he could not even repeat Aristotle correctly. Still others have claimed that he only succeeded in producing a mosaic of odd fragments borrowed from irreconcilable philosophies without a central intuition unifying them. We must acknowledge, too, that his most famous interpreters have sometimes distorted the Thomistic notion of being and at the same time his whole doctrine.

The misunderstandings bedeviling this problem derive first of all from the very structure of human reason. We shall have to return to this point later. These misunderstandings also derive to a certain extent from difficulties in language that are especially troublesome in French. Latin, which Thomas used, has two different words to designate a being: *ens*, and the act of being: *esse*. French, on the other hand, has only one word for the two of them: *un être* and *être* both signify something that is, and the fact that what is, is or exists. Now, as we shall have many occasions to show, it is here a question of two aspects of reality that metaphysical analysis must carefully distinguish. If we dislike the unusual form *étant*, it is generally preferable not to translate the *esse* Thomas is speaking of by the word *être*, but to render *ens* by *être* and *esse* by *exister*.⁴⁰

Beginning, as Thomas himself does, with *entia* or *étants* (beings) given in sense experience, we shall call them "substances." Each substance forms a com-

ture," *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie und Theologie des Mittelalters* 37.3 (Münster: Aschendorff, 1933).

⁴⁰Thomas' reason for avoiding the technical use of the word *existere* to designate the act of being seems to have been twofold. In the first place, *esse* designates the act adequately, especially in that it is the root of both *ens* and *essentia*. Now, it will be seen that Thomas insists on maintaining intact the unity of this verbal group and the relations of meaning it implies. Moreover, it will also be seen that *existere* did not have at this date the meaning of actual existence we attribute to it. We shall also note that it is not always necessary to translate *ens* so strictly, for Thomas himself often used *ens* with the sense of *esse*. But we must hardly ever translate *esse* as *ens*, and still less as *ipsum esse*, because the use of this infinitive almost always corresponds to the existential meaning of the act of being in Thomas' thinking. The only important exception to this semantic rule is the case where, preserving the language of Aristotle but going beyond his thought, Thomas uses the term *esse* to designate substance. Even here he takes care to point out that in this case this term does not designate *esse* taken absolutely but only by accident. (See *ST* 1.104. 1; *SCG* 2. 21 [10]). The only satisfying solution of the problem would be to have the courage to return to the terminology tried by some 17th century French scholastics who translated *ens* by *étant* and *esse* by *être*. This is what I would do now if I could start over again. In any case the French translations that render *ens* and *esse* indiscriminately by *être*, make Thomas' thought completely unintelligible. Bāñez was already using *existentia* to render *esse* in Latin, which hardly works. This is my excuse for having used *exister*.

plete whole, endowed with a structure that we shall analyze and that constitutes one ontological unity, or if you prefer, a unity of being, capable of being defined. Insofar as a substance can be conceived as one and defined, it is given the name "essence." Essence then is only substance insofar as it can be defined. To speak exactly, essence is what the definition says the substance is. This is also why, following Aristotle's terminology, Thomas introduces a third term into his description of reality. To signify that a substance is, is to reply to the question: what is it (*quid sit*)? This is why essence, as expressed in the definition, is called "quiddity." "Substance," "essence," "quiddity" (that is, the concrete ontological unity taken in itself, then taken as capable of definition, and finally taken as designated by the definition) is the first group of terms to which we must constantly resort. They are so closely related that they are often used interchangeably, but we ought to know, when necessary, how to reduce them to their original meanings.

Since essence is substance insofar as it is knowable, it ought to include substance in its complete being, and not just one or the other of the elements composing it. Substance is sometimes defined as "a being by itself" (*ens per se*). This is not false, but it is not the whole truth, and it is by completing this formula properly that we discover the correct meaning of the notion of essence. Substance is not conceivable, and so is indefinable, unless taken as a definite substance. That is why "a being by itself" that would be nothing else would either be God, or it could not exist without some added determination. The essence alone carries such a determination. Thus substance must be defined as an essence or quiddity that can exist through itself, if it receives its own *esse*.⁴¹

This is better understood from an examination of the meaning of the words "to be or exist by oneself" (*être par soi*). Let us take any substance at all, for example a man. A man is said to exist by himself because he is a distinct essence containing in himself all the determinations required for his existence, on the condition that such an essence *exists*, that is, that it possesses the act of existing. His other determinations do not exist in him by the same title nor in the same manner. There are first the determinations that the definitions express. In this case, the essence is a man because it is an animal endowed with reason. Let us posit this as actualized by its *esse*, and that all the added determinations that go with being a man will be there at the same time and will be there through his *esse*. Because he is an animal, a man has to have a certain color and a certain height. He will necessarily occupy a certain place in space and a certain position. We call the subject of these added determinations a *substance* and the determinations themselves *accidents*. In our experience, no doubt, there do not

⁴¹*ST* 1.3.5, ad 1. To speak strictly, only God is an *ens per se*, that is to say, as we shall see, a being whose essence is to exist. Moreover, God is not a substance. The term "substance" always designates an essence or quiddity capable of existing by itself, when actualized by its own *actus essendi*, or *esse*.

exist more substances without accidents than accidents without substances, but it is the accidents that belong to the substance, not the substance to the accidents.

All this can give rise to a misunderstanding. Some say that Thomism imagines the structure of reality to be analogous to that of human language. Because sentences are made up of subjects and predicates, Thomas would have concluded from this that reality is made up of substances of which accidents are predicated, and of accidents that are attributed to substances. This is to misunderstand Thomas' thought and to confuse his logic with his metaphysics. To raise the problem of being, and to define the kind of beings called substances, is to become involved in the mystery of what exists. The analytical language used in describing it signifies an object beyond language itself, and on which language strives to model itself. To speak of things as substances is not to think of them as groups of accidents bound to a subject by a copula. It is rather that they present themselves as units of existence, all the elements of which *are* in virtue of one and the same act of being (*esse*), which is that of the substance. The accidents have no existence of their own, which would be added to that of the substance so as to complete it. They have no other existence than that of the substance. Their existence is simply "to exist in the substance," or, as is sometimes said, their *esse est inesse*.⁴² The full meaning of the expression "to be by itself" is revealed here in its depth. Substance does not exist by itself in the sense that it would have no cause of its existence. God, who alone exists without a cause, is not a substance. Substance exists by itself in the sense that what it is belongs to it through a unique act of existing, and it is immediately explained by this act, which is the sufficient reason for everything it is.

The analysis of what constitutes the very being of things can thus abstract from accidents, which do not have their own being, and focus on substance. The only substances of which we have a direct experience are sensible things with perceptible qualities. A remarkable property of these substances is to be divisible into classes, each of which is the object of a concept that can be expressed by a definition. No matter how we explain it, it is a fact that we think by means of general ideas or concepts. For this undoubted fact to be possible, the datum of our sensible experience must at least be conceptualizable; in other words, its nature must lend itself to conceptual knowledge. Let us give a special name to that which in the real thing makes the conceptual knowledge possible. Let us call it the *form* of the substance. We shall say, then, that every substance implies a form, and that this form places the substance in a definite species,⁴³

⁴²"*Nam accidentis esse est inesse*," *In Metaph.* 5.9 [ed. Cathala-Spiazzi, p. 239, n. 894]. Hence an accident has only a relative and borrowed existence: "*Esse enim album non est simpliciter esse, sed secundum quid*," *ibid.* 7.1 (p. 317, n. 1256). Accidents are not beings, but beings of a being; "*non dicuntur simpliciter entia, sed entis entia, sicut qualitas et motus*," *ibid.* 12.1 (p. 568, n. 2419).

⁴³*Ibid.* 2.4 (p. 90, n. 320).

whose definition expresses the concept. It is also a fact of experience that species do not exist as such. "Man" is not a substance; the only substances we know are individuals. Accordingly, in the individual there must be a factor distinct from form, something that precisely distinguishes one member of a species from another. We designate this additional factor of reality by a special name *matter*.⁴⁴ We shall say, then, that every substance is a unit of being that is at one and the same time and indivisibly a unit of a form and a matter. If we ask why this substance can be called a being (*ens*), we are asking if what makes it *exist* should be sought in its matter, or in its form, or in the composite of the two.

It is certain that matter cannot make a substance *exist*, because matter cannot exist without some form. It is always the matter of a substance which, because it has a form, is the object of a concept and a definition. This is why matter can be an integral part of the substance without destroying its existential unity. It does not exist taken precisely as matter, separated from the whole of which it is a part. As Thomas says, "Being (*esse*) is the act of that whereof we can say that it is. Now, we cannot say that matter is; it is the whole that exists. Hence matter cannot be called that which is; rather, the substance itself is that which is."⁴⁵ Having no existence of its own, matter could not cause the existence of the substance. Thus, it is not through its matter that we can say of any substance that it is a being (*ens*) or that it *is*.

We must come to the same conclusion regarding the form, and for the same reason. Form is certainly a nobler part of substance than matter, because it is form that determines substance and endows it with intelligibility. The form of an individual human being, Socrates for example, is that by which his matter is the kind belonging to the organized body called a human body. The matter is only a potentiality determinable by the form, but the form itself is the act that makes matter the kind belonging to such and such a definite substance. The specific role of the form is therefore to constitute the substance *as substance*. As Thomas puts it, it is the perfection of substance (*complementum substantiae*).⁴⁶ In this sense, the form is *that by which* the substance is *what it is*. This recalls the distinction between *quo est* and *quod est*,⁴⁷ which has become commonplace for readers of Boethius. Though this distinction plays a considerable role in Thomism, by its deepest inclination it has always tried to go beyond it.

⁴⁴"Relinquitur ergo quod nomen essentiae in substantiis compositis significat id quod ex materia et forma compositum est" (*De ente et essentia* 2 [Leonine ed. 43: 370.38-40]). "Essentia in substantiis compositis significat compositum ex materia et forma," Cajetan, *In De ente et essentia* 2 (Marietti ed. no. 26, p. 45).

⁴⁵SCG 2.54 [3].

⁴⁶Ibid. [5].

⁴⁷For the history of this distinction see M.-D. Roland-Gosselin, *Le De ente et essentia de S. Thomas d'Aquin* (Paris: Vrin, 1926), pp. 137-205.

It is important to understand clearly on what level Thomas raises problems when he examines them from the point of view of substance. In the order of finite being, which we are at present considering, only substances exist. Each substance, composed as it is of matter and form, is a "something that exists," a specifically determined being (*ens*). Thus any problem relating to the order of substance is duly and properly raised on the level of being, but it could not go beyond it. To explain a being as a substance is to say why this being "is what it is." This is already to say a good deal, and we have seen Thomas admire Plato and Aristotle for having raised themselves this high. However, more needs to be said, for once it has been explained why a being is what it is, we still have to explain what makes it exist. Since neither the matter nor the form can exist apart from each other, it is clear that the existence of their composite is possible, but not how their union could bring about the actual existence. How would existence have arisen from something that does not exist? So we must conclude that being comes first as the ultimate term to which the analysis of reality can attain.

Thus when we regard form in relation to existence, the form no longer appears to be the ultimate determination of reality. Let us agree to call "essential" any ontology, or doctrine of being, that identifies the notions of substance and being. We shall then assert that in an "essential ontology" the factor completing the substance is the ultimate factor of reality. This can no longer be the case in an "existential ontology," in which being is defined in function of existence. From this latter point of view, substantial form is nothing more than a secondary *quo est*, in subordination to the first *quo est*, which is the very act of existing. Thus beyond form, which makes a being to be such and such a being, entering into such and such a definite species, we must put *esse* or the act of existing which makes a substance thus constituted to be a being (*ens*). As Thomas says: "Being (*ipsum esse*) is compared even to form itself as act. For in things composed of matter and form, the form is said to be the principle of existence (*principium essendi*), because it completes the substance whose act is being itself (*ipsum esse*)."⁴⁸ Thus the form is only the principle of existence insofar as it completes the substance, which is that which exists. But the form itself only exists through a supreme determining factor, which is its own act of being. In this sense, the *esse* is the *quo est* of the form, which itself is the *quo est* of the substance. Thus *esse* is what makes the substance a being (*ens*), as having the act of existing. Thomas continues: "The form, however, can be called *quo est* inasmuch as it is the principle of being (*principium essendi*). The whole substance, however, is the *quod est*; while being itself (*ipsum esse*) is that by which the substance is called a being (*ens*)."⁴⁹ In brief, in concrete substances which

⁴⁸SCG 2.54 [5].

⁴⁹Ibid. [6]. This is not the case with pure intellectual substances called angels. Since angels are intelligences, not souls joined to a body, they are simple substances. The only composition

are the objects of sense experience, there are two metaphysical compositions varying in depth: first, that of matter and form, which constitutes the very substantiality of the substance; second, that of the substance with its act of existing, which constitutes the substance as a being (*ens*).

It is worth pausing over this doctrine, which is at the center of Thomism, in order to grasp its meaning and to try to realize its consequences. To say that being (*esse*) functions like an act even in regard to form (*ad ipsam etiam formam comparatur esse ut actus*) is to affirm the radical primacy of existence over essence. Light is not what it is, and it only exists because it exercises an act of lighting that causes it. White is not what it is, and it only exists because there exists a being that exercises the act of being white. Similarly, the form of the substance is not the substance, and it only exists in virtue of the existential act that makes the substance a being.⁵⁰ Thus understood, the act of existing is situated at the heart, or, if you prefer, at the very root of reality. It is therefore the principle of the principles of reality. Absolutely first, it precedes even the good, for a being is only good if it is a being; and it is only a being in virtue of the *ipsum esse* that allows us to say of it: it is.⁵¹

To understand the nature of this principle, we must remember that, like every verb, the verb *esse* (to be) designates an act⁵² and not a state. The state in which *esse* places whatever receives it is the state of *ens*, that is to say, the state of what is called "a being." We tend constantly to descend from the level of the act of existing to the level of being. This is our natural tendency, but the

to be found in them is that of act and potency. The angels are forms that themselves are substances whose only *quo est* is their act of being. "In substantiis autem intellectualibus, quae non sunt ex materia et forma compositae, ut ostensum est (see *ibid.* 2.50, 51), sed in eis, ipsa forma est substantia subsistens, forma est *quod est*, ipsum autem esse est actus et *quo est*. Et propter hoc, in eis est unica tantum compositio actus et potentiae, quae scilicet est ex substantia et esse, quae a quibusdam dicitur ex *quod est* et *esse*; vel ex *quod est* et *quo est*. In substantiis autem ex materia et forma est duplex compositio actus et potentiae: prima quidem ipsius substantiae, quae compositur ex materia et forma; secunda vero ex ipsa substantia iam composita et esse; quae etiam potest dici ex *quod est* et *esse*; vel *quod est* et *quo est*" (*SCG* 2.54 [7,8,9]).

⁵⁰"Tertio, quia nec forma est ipsum esse, sed se habet secundum ordinem: comparatur enim forma ad ipsum esse sicut *lux* ad *lucere*, vel *albedo* ad *album esse*" (*ibid.* [4]). See Anselm, *Monologion* 5 (PL 158: 153a), where the comparison is to be found in almost the same terms but with a diametrically opposite meaning. For Anselm, existence is only a property of essence. For this doctrine and its consequences see above, pp. 44–45.

⁵¹"Omne ens, in quantum est ens, est bonum" (*ST* 1.5.3, resp.). "Esse est actualitas omnis formae, vel naturae; non enim bonitas, vel humanitas significatur in actu, nisi prout significamus eam esse; oportet igitur, quod *ipsum esse* comparetur ad essentiam, quae est aliud ab ipso, sicut actus ad potentiam" (*ibid.* 1.3.4, resp.). "Intantum est autem perfectum unumquodque, in quantum est in actu: unde manifestum est, quod intantum est aliquid bonum, in quantum est ens; *esse* enim est actualitas omnis rei" (*ibid.* 1.5.1, resp.).

⁵²"Esse actum quemdam nominat" (*SCG* 1. 22 [7]).

metaphysician must make the effort to tend in the opposite direction. He must raise being (*ens*) to the level of the act of existing (*esse*), not to confuse the two but to call attention to the fact that a being is what it is only through and in its relation to the act of existing.⁵³ This is not the case in most other philosophies. We often find interpreters of Thomas bypassing the true meaning of his doctrine and taking part in controversies that were never his, or, bombarding him with pointless objections. So we have to advance to this point to understand him, and once we are there we must know how to stay there. Beyond what is most perfect and most profound in reality, there is nothing else. What is most perfect is the act of being (*ipsum esse*) “because it is related to everything as its act. Indeed, nothing is actual unless it exists. The act of existing (*ipsum esse*) is the actuality of everything else, including forms themselves. Its relation to other things is not that of a receiver to what is received, but rather that of what is received to a receiver. When I say of a man or a horse or anything else: ‘it exists,’ the act of existing (*ipsum esse*) is taken as formal and received, not as something to which the act of existing belongs.”⁵⁴ Clearly, Thomas here is making an extreme effort—so that the meaning almost overwhelms the statements—in order to express the specificity of *ipsum esse* and its transcendence. Precisely because it is the peak of reality, it is also its heart: “Being (*esse*) is most intimate to everything determining it.”⁵⁵

We can hardly conceive of an ontology more totally and more consciously centered on actual being than that of Thomas Aquinas. This also makes it so very difficult to teach without betraying it. It is most often distorted by being presented as principally concerned with essences, whereas it is a philosophy that only speaks of them in order to locate existing things [in their genera and species]. But this is not what is most serious. It is even more often betrayed by being made a doctrine of being as being, while Thomas himself thought of it as a doctrine of the act of being. This mistake is nowhere more noticeable than on

⁵³“Nam cum ens dicat proprie esse in actu” (*ST* 1.5.1, ad 1). It is only in this sense that it is true to say with the Platonists that God is above *ens*; but it is not so as concerns *bonum* or *unum*, it is only so as concerns *esse*: “Causa autem prima, secundum Platonicos quidem, est supra ens in quantum essentia bonitatis et unitatis, quae est causa prima, excedit etiam ipsum ens separatum . . . : Sed secundum rei veritatem causa prima est supra *ens* in quantum est *ipsum esse* infinitum, ens autem dicitur id quod finite participat *esse* et hoc est proportionatum intellectui nostro” (*In De causis* 6 [ed. Saffrey, p. 47.8–14]).

⁵⁴*ST* 1.4.1, ad 3. “Hoc quod dico *esse* est inter omnia perfectissimum . . . Unde patet quod hoc quod dico *esse* est actualitas omnium actuum, et propter hoc est perfectio omnium perfectionum. Nec intelligendum est quod ei quod dico *esse*, aliquid addatur quod sit eo formalius, ipsum determinans sicut actus potentiam; *esse* enim quod huiusmodi est [*scil.* the act of existing, which is our concern here] est aliud secundum essentiam ab eo cui additur determinandum” (*De pot.* 7.2, ad 9). Note here the force of the expression: “The act of existing in question is *essentially other* than that to which it is added to be determined.”

⁵⁵*In Sent* 2.1.1.4, sol. [ed. Mandonnet-Moos 2: 25].

the point now at issue. The Thomistic distinction between essence and being has been discussed for centuries, and never has a doctrine been more harshly disputed nor less understood. The very title given this famous controversy explains why. To speak of the distinction between essence and being is to speak as though existence were itself an essence: the essence of the act of being. This is to treat as a thing something that is an act, thereby almost certainly condemning oneself to imagine that the composition of essence and the act of existing is a kind of chemical composition, in which a very powerful agent, God for example, would take an essence on the one hand, an act of being on the other, and would make a synthesis of them under the action of a creative ray.

What we are dealing with here is something very different, and regrettable as this may be, something very difficult even to conceive. If someone absolutely wanted to use his imagination—which is better to avoid in metaphysics—he should rather symbolize the act of existing by a point of energy of a given intensity producing a cone of force, of which the act of existing would be the peak and essence would be the base. However, this would be a very crude analogy. The only path leading to the end is also the most difficult. It penetrates at once to the very heart of the act of existing. To posit such an act without any other determination is to posit it as pure, since it is nothing other than the pure act of existing (*Ipsum esse*). It is also to posit it as absolute, since it is entirely the act of existing. Finally, it is to posit it as unique, since nothing can be conceived as being that the pure act of existing is not. If this is the act of existing we are talking about, no problem of essence and existence could be raised. This we call God. But the existing things we are talking about here are entirely different. As we have said, they are concrete substances and objects of sense experience. We do not know any of them as a pure act of existing. We distinguish each of them from the others as being an existing tree, an existing animal, or an existing man. This specific determination of acts of existing, which places each of them in a definite species, is precisely what we call their essence. Now, if it is the case of a tree, an animal or a man, their essence is to be either a tree, or an animal, or a man. In no case is their essence being. So the problem of the relation of the essence to its act of being arises inevitably regarding everything whose essence is not the act of existing.

This is also the meaning of the so-called composition of essence and existence, which no doubt might better be called the composition of essence and act of being (*esse*). That this composition is real, no one could doubt. It arises in the metaphysical order of act and potency, not in the physical order of the relation of parts within a material whole.⁵⁶ This composition is real in the highest degree, because it expresses the fact that a being whose essence is not the

⁵⁶The most common usage speaks of the *distinction* between essence and existence, but Thomas himself prefers the word *composition*, doubtless because in fact the *essentia* and its *esse* can never be separated. They join together without ever having existed apart.

act of being does not possess of itself the wherewithal to exist. That beings like this exist we know from experience, for we do not know directly any other kind. Thus they exist, but we also know that they do not exist by full right. Since this lack of existential necessity is natural to them, it must accompany them throughout their entire duration. As long as they exist, they remain beings whose existence cannot be accounted for by their essence alone. The composition of essence and being does just that; and because it is profoundly real it obliges us to raise the question of the cause of finite beings, which is the problem of the existence of God.

When we posit this composition on the level of the act of existing, it no longer rules out the unity of substance. Rather, it calls for it, and for the following reason. The conceptual nature of our knowledge naturally invites us to conceive of the act of existing as an undetermined value to which the essence would be added from outside in order to determine it. It is clear that reason reaches its limit here, when we see Thomas' difficulty in finding in our conceptual language words to express this kind of relationship. It is a general rule that in every relation between what determines and what is determined, what is determined is passive and what determines is actual. In the present case, however, this rule would not apply. Anything you can imagine determining the act of existing—form or matter, for example—cannot be pure nothing, and therefore it belongs to being, and it belongs to being only in virtue of an act of existing. Thus it is impossible that what determines an act of existing should come to it from outside, that is, from something other than itself. In fact, the essence of a finite act of existing consists *in being only* such or such an act of existing (*esse*),⁵⁷ not the pure, absolute and unique act of existing we have been discussing. The act of existing is therefore specified by what it lacks, so that here it is the potency that determines the act, at least in the sense that its own degree of potentiality is included in each finite act of existing. The force of the expres-

⁵⁷See the sequel to the text cited above in note 54: "Nec intelligendum est, quod ei quod dico *esse*, aliquid addatur quod sit eo formalius, ipsum determinans sicut actus potentiam; *esse* enim quod hujusmodi est, est aliud secundum essentiam ab eo cui additur determinandum. Nihil autem potest addi ad *esse* quod sit extraneum ab ipso, cum ab eo nihil sit extraneum nisi non ens, quod non potest esse nec forma nec materia. Unde non sic determinatur esse per aliud sicut potentia per actum, sed magis sicut actus per potentiam. Nam in definitione formarum ponuntur propriae materiae loco differentiae, sicut cum dicitur quod anima est actus corporis physici organici. Et per hunc modum *hoc esse* ab *illo esse* distinguitur, in quantum est talis vel talis naturae" (*De pot.* 7.2, ad 9). Since the act of existing includes the whole reality, it necessarily includes its own determination. This is why, while including it, it is distinguished from it, since inversely, taken in itself, the essence does not include the act of existing. Hence it is not enough to say that the possible essence is distinct from actual existence; it is in the actual existing thing itself that essence remains distinct from the act of existing. To deny that essence is distinct from it, is to assert that this eminently positive act of existing (for it is such, lowly as may be its degree of being) is of the same order as that which limits it; in short, that the act is of the same nature as potency. This Thomas refuses to accept.

sions Thomas uses and which, so to speak, leaves its stamp on these thoughts, shows clearly enough that the limits of language are reached with the limit of being. Each essence is posited by an act of existing which it is not, and which includes it as its self-determination. Outside the pure act of existing, nothing can exist save as this or that act of existing. Thus it is the hierarchy of acts of existing that establishes and regulates the hierarchy of essences, each of which expresses only the specific intensity of a given act of existing.

Other philosophers had preceded Thomas along this path, and all of them helped him to follow it through to the end, particularly those among them who clearly raised the problem of existence. Alfarabi, Algazel, Avicenna among the Arabs, Moses Maimonides among the Jews, had already noted the truly exceptional position that existence occupies in relation to essence. This is not the place to ask to what extent their attention was drawn to this matter by problems raised by their religious notion of creation. Whatever may have been its origin, their teaching underlined the difference between the fact of a thing's being and the fact of its being what it is. What seems to have especially intrigued these philosophers is that, however far you push the analysis of essence, existence is never included in it. Hence in the case of an existing essence, existence must be added to it in some way from outside, as an extrinsic determination conferring on it the act of existing. It was only natural to draw this conclusion. These philosophers started from essence, and using analysis they sought to discover existence within it, but they did not find it there. Hence their conclusion: existence was extraneous to essence as such. Indeed, the essence of man or that of horse remains for thought exactly what they are, whether existence is attributed to them or not. Like the hundred thalers that Kant was to make famous,* these essences in no way change their content, whether conceived as existing or not existing. It would be quite different, observes Alfarabi, if existence** were included in our understanding of essence: "If the essence of man implied his existence, the concept of his essence would also be that of his existence, and it would suffice to know what a man is in order to know that he exists, so that each concept ought to be followed by an affirmation. This is certainly not the case, and we doubt the existence of things until we perceive them directly through our senses or indirectly through some proof." Then we must also take into account the proposition that defines the exteriority of existence to essence: Whatever does not pertain to an essence as such, but adds something to it, is one of its accidents. So Alfarabi concludes: "Existence is not a constitutive factor; it is only an accessory accident."⁵⁸

* [See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B 627, trans. and ed. Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 567.]

** [By inadvertence the text has "essence" instead of "existence."—A.M.]

⁵⁸We take this text from Djémil Saliba, *Etude sur la métaphysique d'Avicenne* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1926), p. 84. See in the same sense the statement of Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed* 1.56 [trans. Pines, p. 131], quoted by Saliba, pp. 86–87.

Thomas, following Averroes, often attributes to Avicenna the notion that existence is an accident. In fact, Avicenna himself seems to have accepted it with many qualifications. For him, the term "accident" is a makeshift. It does not adequately express the intimacy of existence to essence. Nevertheless, Avicenna did accept the notion,⁵⁹ and necessarily so, for if he is right and existence is defined as a function of essence, since it is not essence itself it can only be an accident of essence. With his usual lucidity, Algazel summarized this doctrine in his chapter on accidents. What struck him above all was the fact that substances do not exist by the same title as accidents, and that among the nine categories of accidents, no two of them exist in the same way. Thus existence cannot be a genus common to all the different categories of accidents, and still less a genus common to accidents and substances. This is what Algazel calls the *ambiguity* of the notion of being, and what Thomas will call its *analogy*. Whatever we call it, we cannot determine this characteristic of being beginning with essence, without being compelled to conceive existence as an accident. Hence Algazel's conclusion: "It is therefore clear that being belongs to the order of accidents" (*Manifestum est igitur quod ens accidentale est*).⁶⁰

⁵⁹Saliba, pp. 82–83, 85–87. Note, however, that, if it is correct to attribute to Avicenna the thesis that existence is an accident of essence, he did not subscribe to it as naively as Averroes' summary of the doctrine would lead us to suppose. What we definitely find in Avicenna is that the essence of composite beings does not include their existence. Moreover, with Avicenna as with Thomas Aquinas, the distinction between essence and existence expresses the radical lack of necessity that characterizes composite substances. The passing of the essence of a possible being to actual existence can only be brought about through creation. Finally, Avicenna was well aware that existence was not just any accident comparable to the nine others, but that it flowed in some way from the essence at the moment that the essence received it. In spite of everything, what separates Avicenna from Thomas Aquinas is that Avicenna never got beyond the notion of an essence whose existence would follow by virtue of an extrinsic creative act, and never rose to Thomas' notion of an essence whose created existence would be the innermost center and the deepest reality. The Platonic essentialism that Avicenna will hand down to Duns Scotus, did not allow Scotus' metaphysics to establish the clearly existential ontology toward which it was moving. On this point see the very useful analyses of Amélie M. Goichon, *La distinction de l'essence et de l'existence d'après Ibn Sina (Avicenne)* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1937), particularly pp. 120–121, 136–145. The most easily accessible texts of Avicenna himself are to be found in *Avicennae Metaphysices Compendium*, trans. Nematallah Caramé (Rome: Institut Pontifical d'Études Orientales, 1926). See especially, pp. 28–29, where the *one* is placed with *existence* as an accident of essence. See also the curious text on pp. 37–38, marvellously expressing the quality of indifference, or the neutrality of essence with regard to existence in Avicenna, as opposed to the positive ordering of essence to existence in the thought of Thomas Aquinas. Note the felicitous and pertinent remarks of Goichon, pp. 143–145.

⁶⁰Joseph T. Muckle, *Algazel's Metaphysics: A Mediaeval Translation* (Toronto: St. Michael's College, 1933), p. 26.10–11. On the distinction between essence and existence (*anitas* et *quiditas*) see *ibid.*, p. 25.12–25. Here is the conclusion of the text in translation (p. 26): "The act of existing (*esse*) is therefore an accident that comes to all quiddities from without.

There was something in this doctrine to attract Thomas, especially its acute sense of the specificity of the existential order. These philosophers at least understood that the act of existing cannot be conceived as included in essence, and that consequently it had to be added to it. It also seems that at first Thomas followed rather closely the method of proof used by Alfarabi and Avicenna, and that to some degree it influenced all his work. When he wrote his *De ente et essentia*, his statements strongly reflect Avicenna's method of analyzing essences: "Everything that does not belong to the concept of an essence comes to it from outside and enters into composition with it. Indeed, no essence can be conceived without the parts of the essence. Now, every essence or quiddity can be understood without knowing anything about its existence. For example, I can conceive of *man* or *phoenix* yet not know whether or not they exist in nature. Therefore it is clear that existence (*esse*) is something other (*aliud*) than essence or quiddity."⁶¹

Thus a good deal of Avicenna's doctrine and of the philosophical group to which he belonged passed into Thomism. Nevertheless, Thomas rarely cites it, save to criticize it. And indeed, what radical opposition there was on this common ground! As Aquinas understood Avicenna's doctrine, it ended up making existence simply an accident of essence, while Thomas himself made it the act and ground of essence, the most intimate and profound factor within it. The same distance separates every ontology of essence from an ontology of being like that of Thomas Aquinas. For a philosopher who begins with essence and proceeds by way of concepts, existence necessarily ends up as an extrinsic appendage to essence. If, on the contrary, we begin with the concrete being given in sense experience, the relationship must be the reverse. No doubt even then existence does not seem to be included in essence, so that it always remains true to say that the essence does not exist in virtue of itself. But it is at once

This is why the first cause is being (*ens*) without an added quiddity, as we shall show. Thus being is not a genus for any of the quiddities. And this same accident (namely, *existence*) belongs to the nine (other) categories in the same manner. Indeed, each of them has its own essence in itself, by which it is what it is. But accidentality belongs to them with reference to the subjects in which they exist, that is, the name accident applies to them with reference to their subjects, not with reference to what they are." Algazel then extends this same character of accidentality from being to unity (*ibid.* p. 26.27-30). On the parallelism of the two problems of the accidentality of existence and the accidentality of unity see Forest, *La structure métaphysique du concret*, pp. 39-45.

⁶¹*De ente et essentia* 4 [Leonine ed. 43: 376.94-103]. The expression "hoc est adveniens extra" does not here mean that the act of existing is added to the essence from without, as an accident would be, but that it comes to it from an efficient cause transcending the essence and hence exterior to it, namely, God [*ibid.*, p. 377.135-146]. The *esse* caused by God in the essence is what is most deep-seated in it, since, although the *esse* comes from outside, it nevertheless constitutes the essence from within.

apparent that it is the being that includes the essence, and that it nevertheless is distinguished from being (*esse*) because the act of existing and its essential determination belong to two distinct orders: the first to the order of act and the second to the order of potentiality. The fatal misconception awaiting the philosopher who interprets this doctrine is to think of the relation of essence to existence as between two things. Such a person ends up distinguishing them as though they were two physical parts of one and the same composite, namely, the concrete existing thing. By what is deepest in Thomas' thought, he completely rejects this approach. Being (*esse*) does not exist; it is that by which a being exists. It is that without which everything else would not be. This is why the distinction of essence and existence must never be conceived apart from that other thesis, which grounds rather than completes the intimate union of essence and *esse* in the concrete existing thing.

Such is the meaning of Thomas' critique of Avicenna on this point. *Esse* does not come from *essentia*; *essentia* comes from *esse*. We do not say of any object whatsoever that it *is* because it is a being. Rather we say, or we ought to know, that it is a *being* because it *is*.⁶² This is why the act of existing is not properly an accident of the essence: "Being is most inward and deepest in everything, because it is formal in respect to everything in the thing."⁶³ Between Avicennian "extrinsicism" of the act of being and Thomistic "intrinsicism" of the act of being, no conciliation is possible. The passage from one to the other is not an evolution but a revolution.

This has led a number of Thomas' interpreters to believe that he simply took the side of Averroes against Avicenna on this salient point—an illusion all the more excusable in that Thomas, who was inclined to express his thought in the language of others, often used Averroes' texts to oppose the position of Avicenna. Indeed, Averroes on many occasions criticized this doctrine, in which he seems to have seen at first only a certain naïveté and a technical expression of a popular belief. If we believe him, the Arab word meaning "to exist" would come from a root originally meaning "found." The man on the street, then, seems to have taken "existing" to mean something like "being there." *Sein* we would say today is *Dasein*, and if so, it is hardly surprising that existence should be taken as an accident. But can we conceive this accident in relation to

⁶²"Esse enim rei quamvis sit aliud ab eius essentia, non tamen est intelligendum quod sit aliquod superadditum ad modum accidentis, sed quasi constituitur per principia essentiae. Et ideo hoc nomen *ens*, quod imponitur ab *ipso esse*, significat idem cum nomine quod imponitur ab ipsa essentia," *In Metaph.* 4.2 [ed. Cathala-Spiazzi, p. 155, n. 558]. The expression "quasi constituitur" indicates clearly that, properly speaking, *esse* is not constituted by the principles of the essence; it is only so because *esse* is always that of an *ens* and therefore of an essence. It is only as the act of this essence that it is constituted by its principles.

⁶³"Esse autem est illud quod est magis intimum cuilibet, et quod profundius omnibus est, cum sit formale respectu omnium quae in re sunt" (*ST* 1.8.1).

other things? To formulate this relationship philosophically would be to run into formidable difficulties. We can say of everything, whether a substance or an accident, that it exists. Will we then imagine existence to be a supplementary accident added to the nine other accidents, and even to the category of substance? In this case we end up by saying that substance, which means having being by itself, is only by accident a being by itself,⁶⁴ which is clearly absurd. Moreover, the order of what is by itself is the same as the order of what is necessary, and, in its turn, what is necessary is only such because it is simple. If existence were added to substance as an accident, the latter would be a composite and therefore a purely possible being. No longer being necessary, it would no longer be by itself; and hence it would no longer be a substance.⁶⁵ However we look at it, Avicenna's doctrine leads to impossibilities.

It is easy to see how Thomas could use Averroes against Avicenna, for Averroes showed that the unity of a substance is in danger if existence were attributed to it only as an accident. The text of Averroes makes it clear that existence must be consubstantial with substance, and on this point he was right, but all too facily so. For Averroes, essence and existence are identical. To be by itself and to exist are not absolutely the same. This is easily seen in the way the two notions of substance and necessity are identified in his criticism of Avicenna. It is different in Thomism, in which the existence of what is necessary is not necessary in full right. Existence only becomes necessary from the moment the necessary thing exists. If Averroes is correct against Avicenna, Thomas does not grant that this is for Avicenna's reason. To the contrary, it is rather Avicenna who would be right here, at least that existence is not identical with the "being by itself" of substance. It is not identical with it because it is its act.⁶⁶

To return to the authentic thought of Thomas Aquinas, then, we must not look for it in Avicenna or Averroes, nor in an eclecticism that would propose a compromise to bring their differences together. Beyond both of them, it shines

⁶⁴*Die Epitome der Metaphysik des Averroes*, translated into German by S. Van den Bergh (Leiden: Brill, 1924), pp. 8-9. See the commentary of Maimonides, *Guide des égarés*, trans. Salomon Munk, 3 vols. (Paris: A. Franck, 1856) 1: 231, n. 1, by Aimé Forest, *La structure métaphysique du concret*, pp. 142-143. On the accidental nature of existence in Maimonides see Louis-Germain Lévy, *Maimonide*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Alcan, 1932), p. 133.

⁶⁵See the text of Averroes' *Metaphysics* reproduced by Forest, p. 143, n. 2.

⁶⁶Thomas' earliest texts incline us to think that he immediately went beyond Avicenna's point of view, but Thomas' terminology shows that he used him in order to transcend him. The number and importance of the quotations from Avicenna in the *De ente et essentia* is remarkable, and the *Commentary on the Sentences* 1.8.1.1, sol. [ed. Mandonnet-Moos 1: 195] cites him on this crucial point. One could also write, although in a different sense than in connection with Duns Scotus, an "Avicenna and the Point of Departure of Thomas Aquinas." [Gilson is here alluding to his article "Avicenna et le point de départ de Duns Scot," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen âge* 2 (1927): 89-149.—A.M.]

with the brilliance of the act of existing. By transcending the level of essential ontology, which they have in common, Thomas avoids the conflict between them. By rising to this level, he sees at once how essence and existence are distinguished and how they are united in reality. They are distinguished, for the root of the act of existing does not dwell in essence, and the act of existing itself dominates the essence of which it is the act. Nevertheless, they are closely united, for if essence does not contain the act of existing, it itself is contained in that act, so that existence is most intimately and deeply present in it. Avicenna and Averroes contradict each other because they are on the same level. Thomas contradicts neither of them. Rather, he rises above them by going to the very ground of being (*actus essendi, ipsum esse*).

In noting how difficult it is to enter this existential order, we observed that we could only have access to it by going against the natural bent of our reason. The time has come to explain what I mean by this. How do we know being? The reply is simple, and numerous statements of Thomas support it. Being is a first principle and even the first of all principles, because it is the first object presented to our mind.⁶⁷ Whatever we might conceive, we apprehend it as something that is or can be, and we could say that because this notion is absolutely first it accompanies all our concepts. This is true, and the reply is correct, provided we understand it as we should, as having to do with being (*ens*), carefully distinguishing it from the act of existing (*esse*). We could not repeat too often that a being is not and cannot be the ultimate concept except as referring to being (*ens*), which means *habens esse*.⁶⁸

⁶⁷When Thomas proposes this thesis, he often supports it by appealing to the authority of Avicenna, whose "essentialist" ontology found complete satisfaction in it: "... primo in intellectu cadit ens, ut Avicenna dicit," *In Metaph.* 1.2 [ed. Cathala-Spiazzi, p. 13, n. 46]; "... est aliquod primum quod cadit in conceptione intellectus, scilicet hoc quod dico ens," *ibid.* 4.6 (p. 168, n. 605); "Sic ergo primo in intellectu nostro cadit ens," *ibid.* 10.4 (p. 476, n. 1998); "... ens et non ens, qui primo in consideratione intellectus cadunt," *ibid.* 11.5 (p. 525, n. 2211).

⁶⁸"[H]oc nomen *ens* ... quod imponitur ab ipso esse," *In Metaph.* 4.2 [ed. Cathala-Spiazzi, p. 155, n. 558]. Note that in this text *ipso esse* refers to *ipsum esse*, hence to the act of existing. "[E]ns dicitur quasi esse habens," *ibid.* 12.1 (p. 567, n. 2419). The term *essentia* is connected in the same manner to the verb *esse*: "[Q]uiditatis vero nomen sumitur ex hoc quod definitionem significatur. Sed essentia dicitur secundum quod per eam et in ea ens habet esse" (*De ente et essentia* 1 [Leonine ed. 43: 370.49–52]). To prevent any uncertainty in the reader's mind, let us be precise about the meaning of this last phrase. It does not mean that the *essentia* confers *esse* on the substance, but that substance receives *esse* in and by the mediation of *essentia*. We can be sure of this by comparing what Thomas says here of essence with what he says elsewhere about form: "Invenitur igitur in substantia composita ex materia et forma duplex ordo: unus quidem ipsius materiae ad formam, alius autem ipsius rei iam compositae ad *esse* participatum. Non enim est *esse* rei neque forma eius neque materia ipsius, sed aliquid adveniens rei per formam" (*De substantis separatis* 8 [Leonine ed. 40: D55.213–218]).

Why does our mind naturally tend to abandon the level of the act of existing to fall back to the level of being? The reason is that the human mind moves at ease with concepts, and we have a concept of being but not of the act of existing. In a passage, often cited for its clarity, Thomas distinguishes between two acts of the mind. The first, which Aristotle called the apprehension of simple essences (*intelligentia indivisibilium*), consists in apprehending an essence as an indivisible unit. The second act consists in uniting essences or separating them from one another by forming propositions about them. This second act, which Thomas calls *compositio*, is what we today call "judgment." Both of these two distinct acts aim at reality, but they do not penetrate it to the same depth. Apprehension reaches the essence, which is signified by the definition. Judgment reaches the very act of existing (*Prima operatio respicit quidditatem rei, secunda respicit esse ipsius*).⁶⁹ When we speak of any being whatsoever (*ens*), we speak of something having the act of existing (*habens esse*). What comes first into the mind is accordingly the essential being or the being of nature; it is not yet the act of existing.

After all, nothing is more natural. The act of existing is an act, so there must be an act to express it. This is why the active center of the judgment, its copula, is always a verb, and precisely the verb *is* (*est*). The judgment expresses all its relations in terms of being because its proper function is to signify the act of existing.

This is clearly evident in the case of a judgment of existence; for example, *Socrates exists*. This kind of proposition clearly expresses by its very composition, the composition of substance Socrates and of existence in reality. In propositions like *Socrates is a man* or *Socrates is white*, the verb *is* only plays the role of a copula; it simply signifies that it is Socrates' essence to be a man, or that the accident *white* is in Socrates' substance. Its existential value is accordingly less direct and therefore less apparent, but we shall see that nonetheless it has this value.

Let us observe first, as Thomas explains, that the copula *is* (*est*) always bears upon the predicate: *semper ponitur ex parte praedicati*,⁷⁰ and no longer on the subject, as was the case in judgments of existence. In the proposition *Socrates is*, the verb signifies Socrates himself as existing; in *Socrates is white*, it is no longer the existence of Socrates but the *white* in Socrates that is signified. When the verb *is* is used as a copula in this way, it no longer plays the principal and full role of signifying actual existence, but it has a secondary meaning deriving from its principal one. What is first presented to the mind

⁶⁹In *Sent.* 1.19.5.1, ad 7 [ed. Mandonnet-Moos 1: 489]. On this point see the excellent explanations of André Marc, *L'idée de l'être chez saint Thomas et dans la scolastique postérieure* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1933), pp. 91-101.

⁷⁰In *Peryermenias* 1.5 [Leonine ed. 1*1: 27.111-112].

when we say *is*, is the act of existing, that is, the absolute actuality that is actual existence. Beyond the actuality of the act of existing, which is its principal signification, this verb secondarily designates actuality in general, notably that of both substantial and accidental form. Now, to form a judgment is to signify that a certain form, and therefore a certain act, exists *actually* in a subject. *Socrates is a man* signifies that the form *man* inheres in Socrates as the constitutive act of his substance. *Socrates is white* signifies the actual specification of the subject *Socrates* by the accidental form *white*. So the copula also designates a composition, no longer the composition of essence and existence, but that of every form with the subject that it specifies. As this composition is brought about by the actuality of the form, the verb *is*, which principally signifies actuality, is naturally used to designate it.⁷¹ This is why this verb alone plays the role of copula. It is because the verb *is* first signifies actuality that it can signify secondarily (or as Thomas puts it, “consignify”) the composition of every form with the subject of which it is the act. The formula or phrase expressing this composition is precisely the proposition or judgment.

This enables us to understand why only the judgment can reach existence. In order to express an experience such as ours, one in which all its objects are composite substances, we require a thought that is itself composite. To express the activity of the principles determining these substances, the mind must duplicate the exterior act of the form by the interior act of the verb. Since act is the very root of reality, only the act of judging can reach reality in its root. This it does first by using the verb *is* as a copula in order to state that such and such a substance “exists with-such-and-such a determination.” Perhaps it only exists this way as something possible and only in my thought, or also as real, but we don’t know this yet. Inasmuch as the proposition only uses this word as a copula, it expresses nothing more than the community of the act of the subject and its determination. In order that the unity thus formed is also affirmed as a real being, that is, one having its whole being outside of thought, the ultimate act of existing must determine that unity. Only then can the mind use the verb *is* with the existential meaning proper to it, because just as the act of existing is the act

⁷¹“Ideo autem dicit (*scil.* Aristoteles) quod hoc verbum ‘est’ consignificat compositionem, quia non principaliter eam significat, sed ex consequenti: significat enim id quod primo cadit in intellectu per modum actualitatis absolute; nam ‘est’ simpliciter dictum significat *actu esse*, et ideo significat per modum verbi. Quia vero actualitas, quam principaliter significat hoc verbum ‘est,’ est communiter actualitas omnis formae vel actus, substantialis vel accidentalis, inde est quod cum volumus significare quamcumque formam vel actum actualiter inesse alicui subiecto, significamus illud per hoc verbum ‘est’” (*ibid.*: 31.391–404). See Jacques Maritain, *An Introduction to Logic*, trans. Imelda Choquette (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1937), pp. 51–54. I could not recommend too highly these lucid and rich pages which, from a scarcely different approach, conclude concisely: “Thus the verb ‘to be’ always signifies existence in a proposition with a verb copula just as much as in a proposition with a verb predicate” (*ibid.* p. 52).

of acts (*actualitas omnium actuum*) the verb *is* signifies first of all existing in act (*est simpliciter dictum, significat "in actu esse"*).

The radical ordering of the judgment to existing reality had already been forcefully noted by Aristotle, but in his doctrine it could not go beyond the level of being such as he had understood it. Now, for Aristotle, it is indeed true that substances alone exist, but it is equally true that, in his eyes, existence is reduced to the fact of being a substance. For him, "to be" is above all to be something. More especially and in the full sense, it is to be one of those things that, thanks to their form, possess in themselves the sufficient reason for what they are. Thus Aristotle's being is the *οὐσία* and *τὸ ὄν*, that is, "that-which-a-thing-is." Translated into Thomas' language, this position amounts to identifying being with *ens*, that is, with "that-which-has-the-act-of-being," but not with the act of being itself. As Thomas puts it, *ens* does not principally signify *esse*, but *quod est*, minus the very act of what possesses it (*rem habentem esse*).⁷² Thus Aristotle has the great merit of emphasizing the role of act that form plays in the constitution of substance and, indeed, in the actuality of substantial being. But his ontology does not rise above the level of "entitative" being, or the being of *ens*; it did not reach the existential act itself of *esse*.

Thus we can understand the fact, noted by one of the best Aristotelian scholars, and which many of his readers must also have observed, that for Aristotle, "in the verb *ἔστι* the meaning of *existing* and the meaning attaching to the copula are strangely blended." For "Aristotle very confusedly blends the two meanings of the verb *to be*,"⁷³ namely, the being of existence and that of logical predication. Perhaps it would be better to say that, rather than blending them, Aristotle did not distinguish between them. In Aristotle's works these two meanings appear to be confused to us who clearly distinguish between them. For him, to say that a just man exists, and to say that a man is just, is to say that a man exists with the attribute of being just. These amount to the same thing. In taking as his own the ontology and logic of Aristotle, Thomas transposed them from their original point of view, which was that of essence, to his own point of view, which was that of being. The ontology of Thomas, considered in terms of what is new that it brings to Aristotle, is a doctrine of the primacy of the act of existing.

This first remark calls for a second. It is a curious fact that, according to the way it is viewed, Thomas' doctrine would seem to be the fullest or emptiest of all. The fervent enthusiasm of those who support it is only matched by the

⁷²In *Peryermenias* 1.5 [Leonine ed. 1*1: 371].

⁷³Octave Hamelin, *Le système d'Aristote* (Paris: Alcan, 1920), pp. 159–160. See the similar remarks of Waitz and Zeller on p. 150, n. 1. This inability of Aristotle to disengage from being the very act of existing probably explains the aporia so cleverly noted and analyzed by André Bremond, *Le dilemme aristotélicien* 4, especially no. 2 (Paris: Beauchesne, 1933), pp. 36–40.

scorn its opponents heap upon it. The reason is that, if Thomistic philosophy is interpreted as a metaphysics of *ens*, it is reduced to the Aristotelian level of *quod est*—an expression, as Thomas himself notes, in which the *quod* designates the thing and the *est* the act of existing. Now, as we have seen, the principal and direct meaning of *ens* is not the act of existing, but the existing thing itself.⁷⁴ Thomism then becomes a “thing-ism,” that can be accused of “reifying” all the concepts it touches, and of transforming them into a mosaic of entities, which enclose in their own essences the living tissue of reality.

The better interpreters of Thomas know very well that, on the contrary, he had a very lively awareness of the fullness and continuity of the concrete. But those among them who reduce Thomistic being to essence run into serious difficulties when they try to express this awareness by the concept of being. Being is the first of all concepts and also the most universal and abstract, the richest in extension and the poorest in comprehension [i.e. the intelligible notes included in the conception]. A philosophy that would begin with the sole concept of being would therefore undertake to deduce the concrete from the abstract. Since the time of Descartes, this error has constantly been imputed to Thomas and more widely to scholasticism in general. To meet this criticism, an attempt has sometimes been made to fill out the ontological void of the concept of being, and to feed and enrich it by giving it the fullness of an intuition of existentiality. This comes closer to the truth, but there is no certainty that it has yet been reached. Conceived as an intellectual intuition of being as being, this knowledge would enable us to attain by a simple view the inexhaustible and incomprehensible reality of real being in all the purity and fullness of its own intelligibility or its own mystery. Thus understood, the intellectual view of being would not require, to be sure, a special faculty, but that special intellectual light that makes the metaphysician⁷⁵ and that makes *metaphysical experience* possible.⁷⁶

Whether such an intuition of being is possible, it is up to those who have it to tell us about it. We shall be careful not to deny it. Perhaps a special gift is necessary here, one resembling religious grace rather than the natural light of the metaphysician. For everyone has the same light but some use it better than others. To limit ourselves to the proper metaphysical order of human knowledge, and not the mystical, let us observe first that the concept of being occupies in it a privileged and even unique place. It is the proper concept in which the very basis of reality, namely, the act of existing, is immediately expressed. We cannot conceive the act of existing without enclosing it in a con-

⁷⁴See above, note 72.

⁷⁵Maritain, *A Preface to Metaphysics*, p. 44.

⁷⁶Maritain, *The Degrees of Knowledge*, p. 278. This problem is studied in depth in the work of Laura Fraga de Almeida Sampaio, *L'intuition dans la philosophie de Jacques Maritain* (Paris: Vrin, 1963).

cept; and whatever the act of existing we experience may be, this concept is always the same. All *esse* is given to us in an *ens*. It is, therefore, perfectly true to say that we cannot think of *ens* without *esse* (at least, if we think about it as we should), and much less, *esse* without *ens*. The act of existing is always the act of something that exists.⁷⁷ Being is, then, first in the conceptual order; and since our judgments are made up of concepts, being is equally first in the order of judgment.⁷⁸ Nevertheless, the concept of being always contains in the same manner an infinity of acts of existing, all of which are different. In order to fill it up, must we imagine an intuition that would obscurely perceive the distinction of these acts in the unity of one idea? Thomas himself nowhere speaks of this intuition which, had he judged it necessary, should have occupied a place of honor in his teaching. Nothing allows us to think that between the being that comes first and by itself in the understanding, and the being as being of metaphysics, he saw any other difference than that which distinguishes the rough datum of common sense from that same datum in its philosophical development. Thomas always spoke of this development as a progressive effort of abstraction. The result of this effort, in his view, is that universal notion of "that which is" with special emphasis on "that which" rather than on the "is." In short, the subject of metaphysics is for him, as he has said on many occasions, *ens commune*,⁷⁹ taken in its universality and absolute indetermination. We readily grant that an effort is needed to reach it, and that the effort is difficult, but it is an effort that takes place entirely in the conceptual order. The very judgments it requires tend to the definition of concepts. Everything looks, in fact, as if the being as being of Thomistic metaphysics was only the most abstract of abstractions.

No one could doubt, of course, that this is so; but there is much more to Thomistic metaphysics. When it is reduced to the conceptual order, it is made a science of being and thing, that is, an abstract expression of what can be conceptualized in reality. Thomism, thus conceived, has been made the object of many syntheses, at least one of which is a masterpiece,⁸⁰ but it is not the Thomism of Thomas Aquinas. What characterizes his Thomism is that in it every concept of a thing connotes an act of existing. A metaphysics of being as being "consignifies" existence. It does not "signify" it, unless it makes use of the second operation of the mind and employs all the resources of judgment. The sound

⁷⁷This point has been forcefully developed in the excellent work of Marc, *L'idée de l'être chez S. Thomas et dans la scolastique postérieure*, particularly pp. 88-89. This book should be read in its entirety.

⁷⁸See Etienne Gilson, *Thomist Reform and the Critique of Knowledge*, trans. Mark A. Wauck (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), pp. 197-198.

⁷⁹In *Metaph.*, prooem. [ed. Cathala-Spiazzi, p. 2] and 4.5 [p. 164, n. 593].

⁸⁰Alberto Lepidi, *De ente generalissimo prout est aliquid psychologium, logicum, ontologicum* (Placentiae: J. Tedeschi, 1881). A perfect exposition of a Thomistic ontology completely "essentialized."

opinion that the universal concept of being is the contrary of an empty notion will find its vindication here. The wealth of this concept consists, first, in all the judgments of existence that it comprises and connotes, but even more in its permanent reference to the infinitely rich reality of the pure act of existing. This is why Thomas' metaphysics pursues through the essence of being as being the supreme existent that is God.

In a philosophy in which the act of existing can only be conceived in and through an essence, but in which every essence points to an act of existing, concrete riches are practically inexhaustible. But reason dislikes what is inconceivable, and because this is true of existence, philosophy does all it can to avoid it.⁸¹ It is inevitable that this natural tendency of reason should affect our interpretation of Thomism. Even those who vigorously deny this tendency know very well that they will succumb to it. We must know it at least as a temptation inviting us to err. A Thomism remaining on the level of concepts will exhaust itself by making one inventory after another of the concepts it has inherited. Raised to the level of judgment, Thomism will again make contact with the very heart of the reality it elucidates. It will become fruitful and creative again.

⁸¹I have tried to show this in *The Unity of Philosophical Experience* (New York: Scribners, 1937). See my *Being and some Philosophers*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1952).

Part II. NATURE

Chapter One: Creation

One of the most difficult problems is the beginning of the universe. Some claim they can demonstrate that the universe has always existed, others, on the contrary, that the universe had to have a temporal beginning.¹ Supporters of the first thesis appeal to Aristotle's authority, though the philosopher's works are far from explicit on the subject. In *Physics* 8 and *De coelo* 1, Aristotle seems to want to establish the eternity of the world only in order to refute the teachings of certain older philosophers who assigned an unacceptable beginning to the world. He tells us, furthermore, that there are dialectical problems for which there is no demonstrable solution, and he gives as an example whether the world is eternal.² Accordingly, the authority of Aristotle cannot be invoked on this subject, and in any case it would not settle the question.³ In fact this is a typical Averroist doctrine,⁴ condemned by Stephen Tempier, Bishop of Paris, in 1270: "That the world is eternal and that there never was a first man." Among the numerous arguments brought forth to prove the eternity of the world, the one appealing to the all-powerful causality of the creator must be mentioned first because it takes us to the very heart of the matter.

If we posit a sufficient cause, at the same time we posit its effect. A cause whose effect is not immediate is an insufficient cause because it lacks something it needs in order to produce its effect. Now, God is the sufficient cause of the world, either as final cause since he is the supreme good, or as exemplary cause since he is supreme wisdom, or as efficient cause since he is omnipotent. But we know from what has gone before that God exists from all eternity. Hence the world, like its sufficient cause, also exists from all eternity.⁵ Moreover, it is evident that the effect proceeds from its cause through the action exercised by the cause. But God's action is eternal. If it were not, we should have to admit that God was first in potency with regard to his action and that afterward he was brought from potency to act by some prior agent, which is impossible;⁶ or indeed, we would lose sight of the fact that God's action is

¹ST 1.19.5, ad 3; *De pot.* 3.17, resp.

²Aristotle, *Topics* 1.9.

³ST 1.46.1, resp.

⁴Max Horten, *Die Hauptlehren des Averroes* (Halle, 1912), p. 112; Pierre Mandonnet, *Siger de Brabant et l'averroïsme latin au XIII^e siècle* (Louvain: Institut Supérieur de Philosophie, 1911) 1: 168–172.

⁵ST 1.46.1; *SCG* 2.32 [5]; *De pot.* 3.17.

⁶*SCG* 2.32 [4]; *De pot.* 3.17.

his own substance, which is eternal.⁷ It is therefore necessarily true that the world has always existed.

Next, if we consider the problem from the point of view of creatures, we are forced to the same conclusion. We know that in the universe there exist indestructible creatures, like the celestial bodies or intellectual substances. What is indestructible, that is, what is capable of existing always, cannot be considered as existing at one time and not existing at another, for it exists just as long as it has the power to be.⁸ Now, anything that begins to exist is one of those things that exist at one time and not at another. Therefore, nothing indestructible can have a beginning. We can conclude, then, that the universe, outside of which indestructible substances would have neither place nor reason to be, exists from all eternity.⁹

Finally, the eternity of the world can be deduced from the eternity of motion. Nothing begins to move unless the mover or the thing moved is in a different state from that in which it was a moment ago. In other words, a new motion is never produced without a previous change either in the mover or the thing moved. But to change is nothing else than to move. There is, accordingly, always a motion previous to the one that is beginning. Consequently, as far as we might wish to go back in this series, we always encounter motion. But if motion has always existed there must also have always existed a thing moved, for motion only exists in a thing moved. Therefore the universe has always existed.¹⁰

These arguments are all the more convincing, as they seem to be based on the most authentic Aristotelian principles; but they cannot be taken as genuinely conclusive. First of all, we can eliminate the last two arguments by making a simple distinction. From the fact that there has always been motion, in the sense just demonstrated, it does not at all follow that there has always been something moved. The only conclusion justified by this kind of argument is that there has always been motion from the moment of the existence of a thing moved. But the thing moved could only have come into existence by creation. Aristotle established this proof in Book 8 of the *Physics*¹¹ against those who admit eternal movable objects and yet deny the eternity of motion. It has no force against us, who maintain that there has been motion ever since movable things have existed.

The same holds for the proof based on the indestructibility of the heavenly bodies. We must grant that what is naturally capable of existing forever cannot be considered as existing at one time and not existing at another. However, it

⁷ST 1.46.1.

⁸The notion of *virtus essendi* originated with Dionysius. It signifies the intrinsic aptitude of form for existence. [See Gilson, "Virtus essendi," *Mediaeval Studies* 26 (1964): 1-11.]

⁹ST 1.46.1; *De pot.* 3.17.

¹⁰ST 1.46.1; *SCG* 2.33 [4].

¹¹Aristotle, *Phys.* 8.1, 250b11-252b7.

must be remembered that for a thing to be able to exist always it must first exist, and that nothing can be indestructible before it exists. Accordingly, the argument of Aristotle in Book 1 of the *De coelo* does not conclude simply that indestructible bodies never began to exist, but that they did not begin to exist through natural generation like beings subject to generation or destruction.¹² Thus the possibility of their having been created is fully safeguarded.

Must we, on the other hand, grant the eternity of a universe we know to be the effect of an eternal, sufficient cause and of an eternal action, which are the omnipotent efficacy and eternal action of God? There is nothing to compel us to do this if it is true, as we have previously shown, that God does not act by necessity of nature but by free will. No doubt, it might at first appear contradictory that an omnipotent, immovable, and immutable God should have willed to confer existence at a definite point in time on a universe that did not exist before. But this difficulty becomes a mere illusion, easily dissipated, as soon as we re-establish the true relationship between the duration of created things and the creative will of God.

We already know that if it is a question of finding a reason for the production of creatures, we must distinguish between the production of one particular creature and the coming forth of the entire universe from God. It is possible to explain the production of any given creature either by referring to some other creature or by referring to the order of the universe, in which every creature is ordered in view of the whole. But when we consider the coming to be of the entire universe, it is no longer possible to look to another created reality for the reason why the universe is what it is. Since the reason for the specific constitution of the universe cannot be found in the divine power which is infinite and inexhaustible, nor in the divine goodness which is self-sufficient and in need of no creature, the only reason for the choice of this particular universe is the pure and simple will of God.

Let us apply this conclusion to God's choice of the moment he chose for the appearance of the world. We must say, in this case, that just as it depends on the simple will of God that the universe has a definite quantity, so far as its dimension is concerned, so also it depends on this same will of God that the universe receives a definite quantity of duration. This is particularly so inasmuch as time is a quantity truly extrinsic to the nature of the thing existing in time and wholly a matter of indifference as far as the will of God is concerned.

It may be objected that a will only delays something it proposes to do because of some modification causing it to decide to do at a certain moment in time what it had been proposing to do at another. If, then, the immovable will of God wills the world, it must always have willed it, and consequently the

¹²Aristotle, *De coelo* 1.12, 281a28-283b21.

world has always existed. But this reasoning subjects the action of the first cause to the conditions governing the action of particular causes acting in time. The particular cause is not the cause of the time in which its action takes place, whereas God is the cause of time itself, for time is included in the totality of things created by him. Hence, when we are speaking of the way in which the being of the universe has issued from God, we need not wonder why God willed to create this being at one moment rather than at another.

This question presupposes that time exists before creation while in fact it is subject to it. The only question we could ask about the creation of the universe is not why God created it at a given moment in time, but why he allotted such and such an extent to the duration of this time. Now, the extent of time depends solely upon the divine will. And since the Catholic faith teaches us that the world has not always existed, we can admit that God willed to set a beginning to the world and to assign it a limit in duration, just as he assigned it a limit in space. Accordingly, the words of Genesis¹³: "In the beginning God created heaven and earth" remain acceptable to reason.¹⁴

We know that we cannot demonstrate that the world is eternal. Let us see if we can go further and demonstrate that it is not eternal. This position, which was generally adopted by the defenders of Augustinian theology, was considered logically unacceptable by Aquinas. The first argument, which we already know from the pen of Bonaventure, maintains against the Averroists that if the universe has existed from eternity, today there must actually exist an infinite number of human souls. Since the human soul is immortal, all those that have existed during infinite time should still exist today. There are, then, an infinite number of them. Now, this is impossible. Therefore the universe had a beginning.¹⁵ It is only too easy to object to this argument by pointing out that God could have created the world without human beings or souls, and besides, that it has not yet been demonstrated that God could not have created an actual infinity of simultaneously existing beings.¹⁶

Again, the doctrine of the creation of the world in time is based on the principle that it is impossible to go beyond the infinite. If the world has not had a

¹³Gen 1:1.

¹⁴*De pot.* 3.17; *ST* 1.46.1; *SCG* 2.35–37.

¹⁵Bonaventure, *In Sent.* 2.1.1.1.2, prop. 5 [Quaracchi ed. 2: 21b].

¹⁶*ST* 1.46.1, ad 8; *SCG* 2.38 [14]; *De aeternitate mundi* [Leonine ed. 43: 85–89]. For the doctrinal milieu in which this controversy was born see Michael Gierens, *Controversia de aeternitate mundi* (Rome: Pontificia Universitas Gregoriana, 1933); Wilfrid J. Dwyer, *L'Opuscule de Siger de Brabant, De aeternitate mundi. Introduction critique et texte* (Louvain: Institut Supérieur de Philosophie, 1937); J. de Blic, "A propos de l'éternité du monde," *Bulletin de littérature ecclésiastique* 47 (1946): 162–170.

beginning, an infinite number of celestial revolutions must have taken place, so that to reach the present day the universe must have passed through an infinite number of days, which is said to be impossible. Therefore, the universe has not always existed.¹⁷ But this argument is not conclusive, for even if we grant that an actual infinity of simultaneous beings is impossible, it still remains true that an infinite number of successive beings is possible, because every successive infinity is really ended by its present term. Thus the number of celestial revolutions that would have taken place in a universe of infinite past duration would, properly speaking, be finite, and it would not be impossible for the universe to have passed through this number in order to reach the present moment. If we wish to consider all the revolutions taken together, it must be admitted that, in a world that would have always existed, none of them could have been the first. Now, every passage presupposes two termini: a terminus from which and a terminus to which. Since the first of these is wanting in an eternal universe, the question whether the passage from the first day to the present is possible does not even arise.¹⁸

Finally, an argument against the eternity of the world might be based on the fact that it is impossible to add to the infinite, because what receives an addition becomes larger, and nothing is larger than the infinite. But if the world had no beginning, it would have had, perforce, an infinite duration, and nothing more can be added to it. Now, this statement is clearly false, since each day adds one more celestial revolution to the preceding revolutions. Therefore the world cannot have always existed.¹⁹ But the distinction we have already made removes this new difficulty. For there is no reason why the infinite cannot receive an addition on the side on which it is really finite. From the fact that eternal time can be affirmed of the origin of the world, it follows that this time is infinite so far as the past is concerned but finite at its present moment, for the present is the terminus of the past. Thus from this point of view, the eternity of the world is not an impossibility.²⁰ In fact there is no demonstrative argument proving the truth that the world is not eternal. This truth is like the mystery of the Trinity, which cannot in any way be demonstrated by reason but must be accepted on faith. The arguments that some use to establish it—even those that are merely persuasive—should be opposed, lest the Catholic faith seem to rest on empty reasons rather than on the unshakable teaching of God.²¹ The creation of the world in time cannot be necessarily deduced from a consideration either of the

¹⁷Bonaventure, *In Sent.* 2.1.1.1.2, prop. 3 [Quaracchi ed. 2: 21a].

¹⁸*SCG* 2.38 [11]; *ST* 1.46.2, ad 6.

¹⁹Bonaventure, *In Sent.* 2.1.1.1.2, prop. 1 [Quaracchi ed. 2: 20b].

²⁰*SCG* 2.38 [12].

²¹*Ibid.* [8].

world itself or of God's will. The principle of any demonstration is to be found in the definition of the essence from which the properties can be deduced. Now, an essence in itself is indifferent to time and place. This is the reason why universals are said to exist always and everywhere. The definitions of man, of heaven or of the earth do not imply in any way that such beings have always existed; but neither do they imply that they have not always existed.²² Much less can creation in time be proved from God's will, for his will is free and has no cause. Hence we can prove nothing about it, except in regard to what concerns God himself and what it must necessarily will. But the divine will can be made known to us by revelation, which is the foundation of faith. On the strength of the divine word, then, we can believe that the universe had a beginning even if we cannot know it.²³

Thus, the soundest position on this difficult question lies somewhere between those of the Averroists and the Augustinians. Thomas Aquinas maintains the possibility of the world's beginning in time. But he maintains also, even *contra murmurantes*, the possibility of its eternity. In order to resolve the problem of creation, Thomas has undoubtedly made use of the work of his predecessors, notably Albert the Great and Moses Maimonides, but his position is not the same as that of any predecessor. Maimonides will only admit the creation of the world on the ground of revelation;²⁴ Thomas Aquinas, on the contrary, bases it on demonstrative arguments. But the two philosophers agree on this point, that it is impossible to demonstrate the world's beginning in time, and that it is always possible to deny the eternal existence of the universe.²⁵ Albert the Great, on the other hand, grants with Maimonides that creation *ex nihilo* can only be known by faith. Thomas Aquinas, closer here than his master to the Augustinian tradition, thinks this demonstration is possible. On the other hand, he regards the creation of the world in time to be not demonstrable, while Albert, closer here than his disciple to the Augustinian tradition, thinks that the beginning of the world in time can be demonstrated once creation itself has been admitted. Hence, against both of the philosophers, Thomas Aquinas maintains the possibility of demonstrating the creation of the universe *ex nihilo*, and in this regard we see him resolutely opposed to Averroes and his disciples. But in conceding, with Maimonides, the theoretical possibility of a universe created from all eternity, he refuses to confuse truths of faith with those that are capable of proof. In this way his doctrine harmonizes the infallible teaching of Christianity and whatever truth the doctrine of Aristotle contains.

²²ST 1.46.2.

²³*De pot.* 3.14, resp.

²⁴Louis-Germain Lévy, *Maimonide* (Paris: Alcan, 1911), pp. 71-72.

²⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 72-74.

Let us suppose that the moment has come when what is possible comes forth from God in order to actually exist. The problem then arises why and how a host of distinct beings, and not just one being, is produced by the creator. The Arabian philosophers, and particularly Avicenna, explain the plurality and diversity of things by the mode of action of the first efficient cause, which is God. Avicenna supposes that the First Being understands himself and that insofar as he knows and comprehends himself he produces but one effect, namely, the first separated Intelligence. It is inevitable—and on this point Thomas will follow Avicenna—that the first Intelligence will lack the simplicity of the First Being. This Intelligence is not its own being; it possesses it because it receives it from another, and so it is in potency with regard to its own being. In this Intelligence, then, potency immediately begins to blend with act. Let us consider, in turn, this first Intelligence insofar as it is endowed with knowledge. First, it knows the First Being, and from this act there proceeds an Intelligence below the first Intelligence. Second, it knows the potency within itself, and from this knowledge proceeds the body of the first heaven which this Intelligence moves. Finally, it knows its own proper act, and from this knowledge proceeds the soul of the first heaven. By the same reasoning it can be explained why different beings are multiplied by a multitude of intermediary causes, beginning from the First Being or God.²⁶

This position, however, is untenable. The first and decisive reason is that Avicenna and his disciples attribute to creatures a creative power that belongs to God alone. We have already dealt with this point and it would be superfluous to return to it. A second reason is that the teaching of the Arabian commentators and their disciples amounts to attributing the origin of the world to chance. In their hypothesis, the universe would not proceed from the intention of a first cause but from the conjunction of many causes whose effects would be added one after another, and this is precisely what is meant by chance. Avicenna's teaching, therefore, amounts to saying that the multiplicity and diversity of things, which, we shall see, contribute to the completion and perfection of the universe, comes from chance, and this is clearly impossible.²⁷

The primary origin of the multiplicity and distinction of things is not in chance but in the intention of the first cause, which is God. Moreover, it is not impossible to show a certain expediency in having a creator produce a multiplicity of creatures. Every being that acts tends to implant its likeness in the effect that it produces, and it is the more successful in doing this as it is itself more perfect. Thus, the hotter a thing is the more heat it gives off, and the more ex-

²⁶*De pot.* 3.16. For this doctrine see Djémil Saliba, *Étude sur la métaphysique d'Avicenne* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1926), pp. 125–146.

²⁷*De pot.* 3.16; *ST* 1.47.1, resp.

cellent an artist is the more perfect is the artistic form he introduces into matter. Now, God is the sovereignly perfect agent. It is therefore in conformity with his nature to introduce his likeness into things as perfectly as their finite nature allows. Now, it is evident that no one species of creatures could successfully express the creator's likeness. Since here the effect—which is finite in nature—is not of the same order as its cause—which is infinite in nature—one single species would only obscurely and inadequately reveal the cause from which it springs. For a creature to represent its creator as perfectly as possible, it would have to be its equal, which is a contradiction.

We know of only one case in which there proceeds from God a person who can be said to express him totally and perfectly, namely, the Word. Here, however, it is not a question of a creature or of a relationship of cause and effect, but of someone remaining within God himself. On the contrary, where it is a question of finite and created beings, a multitude will be necessary to express under the greatest possible number of aspects the simple perfection from which they proceed. Hence the reason for the multiplicity and variety of created things is that this multiplicity and variety are necessary to show forth as perfectly as creatures can the likeness of God the creator.²⁸

If we posit creatures of different species, however, we necessarily posit creatures of unequal perfection. How are the many distinct things that manifest the divine likeness distinguished? It can only be by their matter or their form. Any distinction in them based on a difference of form divides them into separate species, while any distinction based on matter makes them numerically different individuals. Matter, however, exists only in view of form; and beings are numerically distinct by their matter only to make possible the formal distinction between species. With incorruptible beings, there is only one individual to each species; in other words, there is neither numerical distinction nor matter. This is because the individual is incorruptible and therefore sufficient to assure the conservation and differentiation of the species. With beings capable of generation and corruption, many individuals are necessary in order to insure the conservation of the species. Accordingly, individuals only exist as numerically distinct within a species in order that the species might exist as formally distinct from other species. The true and principal distinction we can find in things is in the line of formal distinction. Now, no formal distinction is possible without inequality.²⁹ The forms that determine the different natures of beings, and by reason of which things are what they are, in the last analysis are only different

²⁸SCG 2.45 [2]; ST 1.47.1, resp.

²⁹Let us recall here that essence limits the fullness of each act of existing. Hence every variation, increasing or decreasing this act, implies *ipso facto* a correlative variation of the essence. This is expressed by the symbolic adage: "Forms vary like numbers."

quantities of perfection or being. This is why we can say with Aristotle that the forms of things are like numbers, whose species are changed by the addition or subtraction of a unit. Since God cannot adequately express his likeness in any single creature, and since he wishes to produce in being a plurality of formally distinct species, he had necessarily to produce unequal species. That is why species are ordered hierarchically and arranged according to degrees. Their degrees of being place them in species. Just as compounds are more perfect than elements and plants are more perfect than minerals, so animals are more perfect than plants and human beings are more perfect than other animals. In this progression each species surpasses the preceding in perfection. Thus the reason why the divine wisdom causes the inequality of creatures is the same as that which disposes it to will their distinction, namely, the highest perfection of the universe.³⁰

A difficulty could be raised at this point. If creatures can be placed in hierarchical order according to their unequal degrees of perfection, it is not at once clear how they can proceed from God. An excellent being can only will excellent things, and among truly excellent things there are no grades of perfection. Therefore God, who is excellent, must have willed that all things be equal.³¹ But this objection is based on an equivocation. When an excellent being acts, the effect produced must be excellent in its totality, but it is not necessary that each part of the total effect be excellent. It is enough that it be excellently proportioned to the whole. Now, this proportion can require that the excellence of certain parts be mediocre. The eye is the noblest part of the body; but the body would be badly formed if all its parts had the same dignity as the eye, or, even worse, if each part were an eye, because each of the other parts has its function, which the eye in spite of all its perfection could not fulfill. It would also be unfitting for each part of a house to be a roof. Such a dwelling could not achieve its perfection nor fulfill its end, which is to protect its inhabitants from rain and heat. Consequently, far from being opposed to the nobility of the divine nature, the inequality in things is a clear indication of God's sovereign wisdom. We do not mean that it was necessary for God to will the finite and limited beauty of creatures; we know that they add nothing to his infinite goodness. But in his wisdom he fittingly arranged that the unequal multiplicity of creatures should assure the perfection of the universe.³²

³⁰*ST* 1.47.2, resp.

³¹*Ibid.*, ad 1.

³²*De pot.* 3.16, resp. Thomas raised the much debated question of the plurality of worlds. He answered it by denying that God produced several worlds. (See *ST* 1.47.3). But the principle upon which he based his reply imposes no definite limit upon creation. All that he says is that the divine work possesses unity of order. Whatever the size or number of the astronomical systems created, they would still form but one world embraced by the unity of divine order.

It is clear, then, why there is a difference between the degrees of perfection in the various orders of creatures. We can still legitimately wonder, however, whether this explanation exonerates the creator for having willed a universe that inevitably contains evil.

We have said that the perfection of the universe demands inequality among beings. Since God's infinite perfection can only fittingly be imitated by a host of finite beings, it is appropriate that all the degrees of goodness be represented in things, so that the universe may constitute as perfect as possible an image of the creator. Now, to possess so excellent a perfection that it can never be lost is one grade of goodness. It is quite another grade of goodness to possess a perfection that can be lost at a given moment. Now, we find these two grades of perfection represented in things. Some have a nature such that they can never lose their being; these are incorporeal and incorruptible creatures. Others can lose their being; for example, corporeal and corruptible creatures. Hence, by the very fact that the universe demands the existence of corruptible beings, it requires that certain beings be capable of losing their degree of perfection. Now, the loss of a grade of perfection, and consequently a deficiency in some good, is the definition of evil. Consequently, the presence of corruptible beings in the world inevitably implies the presence of evil.³³ To say, then, that it was consonant with divine wisdom to will the inequality of creatures is to say that it was fitting for it to will evil. Does not this endanger the infinite perfection of the creator?

In one sense this objection raises an insoluble problem. It is certain that the production of any order of creatures would inevitably end up by furnishing a subject, and as it were a basis, for imperfection. This was not only fitting but also a real necessity. It is characteristic of creatures as such to be deficient in their degree and mode of being. "The *esse* of creatures has been taken from the divine *esse* with a deficient likeness" (*Esse autem rerum creaturarum deductum est ab esse divino secundum quamdam deficientem assimilationem*).³⁴ Creation is not only an exodus; it is also a descent: "No creature receives the whole fullness of divine goodness because perfections come from God to creatures by way of a descent."³⁵ We shall observe a continuous series of reductions of being as we pass from the more noble creatures to those more base. But this deficiency will appear even with the first degree of created beings. Indeed, it

³³ST 1.48.2, resp.

³⁴In *De divinis nominibus* 1.1 [Marietti ed. p. 9, n. 29].

³⁵SCG 4.7 [9]. We keep the term "exodus" deliberately over the objection of one of our critics who detects in it a distressingly pantheistic flavor. It is authentically Thomistic: "Aliter dicendum est de productione unius creaturae, et aliter de *exitu* totius universi a Deo" (*De pot.* 3.47, resp). Thomas freely used the terms *deductio*, *exitus*, *emanatio*, to describe the procession of creatures from God. There is no inconvenience in keeping his language, provided of course that we keep his meaning.

will appear even from that strictly infinite moment, because it will measure the gap between he who is Being *per se*, and what only possesses being insofar as it has received it from another.

Undoubtedly—and we shall see why later on—a finite and limited being is not a bad thing if there is no defect in its proper essence. But we also know that a universe of finite beings would require a multiplicity of distinct essences, that is, in the last analysis, a hierarchy of unequal essences, some of which would be incorruptible and removed from evil while others would be corruptible and subject to evil. Now, we have said that it is impossible to know why God willed these imperfect and deficient creatures. However, a reason can be given for it: the divine goodness that wills to diffuse itself outside of itself in finite participations of its sovereign perfection. But no cause can be given, for God's will is the first cause of all beings, and consequently no being can play the role of cause where he is concerned. If we simply ask how it is metaphysically possible for a limited and partially evil world to issue from a perfect God without the evil of the creature reflecting upon the creator, this is a question the human mind cannot leave unanswered. In fact, the only foundation of this apparently frightening problem is a confusion.

Is it best to appeal, as the Manicheans do, to an evil principle as the creator of everything corruptible and deficient in the universe? Or ought we to consider that the first principle of all things has established the grades of being in a hierarchy by introducing into the universe, within each essence, the proportion of evil necessary to limit its perfection? To do this would be to misunderstand that basic truth proposed by Dionysius:³⁶ "Evil neither exists nor is good." We have already met the notion that whatever is desirable is good. Now, every nature desires its own existence and its own perfection. Consequently, the perfection and being of every nature are truly good. But if the being and perfection of all things are good, then it follows that evil, which is the opposite of good, has neither perfection nor being. The term "evil," therefore, can only mean an absence of goodness and being, for, since being as such is a good, the absence of one necessarily involves the absence of the other.³⁷ Hence, evil is, if we may use the expression, a purely negative reality. More exactly, it is in no way an essence or a reality.

Let us state this conclusion precisely. What is called an "evil" in the substance of a thing is only a lack of some quality that it should naturally have. For a man to have no wings is not an evil, because it is not the nature of a human body to have wings. Similarly, there is no evil in not having fair hair, for hav-

³⁶*De divinis nominibus* 4.32 [PL 122: 1146A]. See J. Durantel, *Saint Thomas et le Pseudo-Denis* (Paris: Alcan, 1919), p. 174, where the various forms of this adage are brought together.

³⁷*ST* 1.48.1, resp.

ing fair hair is compatible with human nature but is not necessarily associated with it. On the contrary, it is an evil for a person to have no hands, while it is not so for a bird. Now, the term *privation*, considered strictly and in its proper sense, designates the absence or want of what a being ought naturally to possess. Thus evil is reduced to privation as just defined.³⁸ It is not an essence nor a reality,³⁹ but a pure negation in a substance.

Since there is nothing positive about evil, its presence in the universe would be unintelligible apart from the existence of real subjects to support it. It must be admitted that this conclusion is somewhat paradoxical. Evil is not a being; everything good, however, is a being. Is it not strange to maintain that non-being demands a being in which to exist as in a subject? The objection holds only if we take non-being as simple negation, in which case it is irrefutable. The mere absence of being cannot demand a subject to support it. But we have just said that evil is *a negation in a subject*, that is, a lack of what is normally a part of a subject; in a word, a *privation*. There can be no privation, then, and hence no evil, without the existence of substances or subjects in which privation can be located. Thus it is not true that every negation demands a real and positive subject, but only those particular negations called privations, because "privation is a negation in a subject." The only true subject of evil is the good.⁴⁰

The relation between evil and the good that supports it is never such that evil can consume or, as it were, totally exhaust the good. Could it do so, evil would consume or totally exhaust even itself. So long as evil exists, it must have a subject in which to exist. Now, the subject of evil is the good. Hence there always remains some good.⁴¹ Moreover, we can assert that in a sense evil has a cause, and that this cause is nothing else than the good. In fact, it is absolutely necessary that whatever exists in something else as in its subject have a cause, and this cause must be attributable either to the principles of the subject or to some extrinsic cause. Now, evil exists in the good as in its natural subject, and consequently it has to have a cause.⁴² But only a being can serve as a cause, because in order to act a thing must be. Now, every being, as such, is good. Good, as such, therefore, remains the only possible cause of evil. This may easily be verified by an examination of each of the four kinds of causes.

First, it is evident that the material cause of evil is the good. This conclusion follows from the principles we have already set forth. It has been shown that the good is the subject in which evil exists, that is, it is its true matter,

³⁸SCG 3.6 [1].

³⁹Ibid. 3.7 [1]. See *De malo* 1.1; *De pot.* 3.6, resp.

⁴⁰SCG 3.11; *ST* 1.48.3, resp. and ad 2; *De malo* 1.2, resp.

⁴¹SCG 3.12 [1]; *ST* 1.48.4, resp.

⁴²SCG 3.13 [1].

although only its matter *per accidens*. Second, evil has no formal cause, for it is reduced to a simple privation of form. Third, the same is true for the final cause, because evil is simply the privation of order in the disposition of means to their end. On the other hand, evil sometimes admits *per accidens* of an efficient cause. This can be seen if the distinction is made between the evil in the actions of various beings and that which is found in their effects. Evil can be caused in an action by the lack of any one of the principles from which the action originates. Thus the faulty movement of an animal can be accounted for by the weakness in its motor faculty as in the case of infants, or by the malformation of a member as in the case of cripples. Evil is also found in the effects of efficient causes and this for a variety of reasons.

First of all, it can appear in an effect that is not the proper effect of these causes. In this case, the lack comes either from the active power or from the matter on which it is acting. It comes from the active power itself, considered in all its perfection, when the efficient cause is unable to achieve the form it aims to achieve without destroying another form. Thus the presence of the form of fire entails the privation of the form of air or water. The more perfect the active power of the fire, the more successful it is in impressing its form in the matter upon which it is acting, and the more completely it eliminates the contrary forms that it encounters. Hence the evil and the destruction of air and water are caused by the perfection of fire; but they only result *per accidens*. The end toward which the fire tends is not to deprive the water of its form, but to introduce its own form into the matter, and it is only because it tends toward this end that it is the source of an evil and privation. If we consider, finally, the deficiencies that can appear in the proper effect of fire, for example the inability to heat, we shall have to find their source either in a failure of the active power, as we have already discussed, or in a bad disposition of the matter, poorly prepared perhaps to receive the action of the fire. But all these deficiencies can only reside in a good. for only what is good or a being can act or be a cause. We can legitimately conclude that evil has no other causes than causes *per accidens*, but that, with this reservation, the only possible cause of evil is its contrary, namely, the good.⁴³

This brings us to a final conclusion: the cause of evil always resides in a good; and yet God, who is the first cause of everything good, is not the cause of evil. From the foregoing considerations it follows that whenever evil results from a defect in some action, its cause is invariably a defect in the agent. Now, there is no defect in God, but on the contrary supreme perfection. Hence the evil that is caused by a defect in the agent cannot be caused by God. But if we consider the evil that consists in the destruction of certain beings, it must, on

⁴³ST 1.49.1, resp.

the contrary, be attributed to God as to its cause. This is equally evident both for beings that act naturally and for those that act by will. We have said that when a being acts so as to cause a form, whose production entails the destruction of some other form, its action must be regarded as the cause of this privation and defect. Now, the principal form that God clearly intends in created things is the good of the order of the universe. As we have already seen, this order requires that some things be deficient. God is therefore the cause of the destruction and defects in all things, but only because he wills to cause the good of the universal order, and, as it were, *per accidens*.⁴⁴ In sum, the effect of the deficient secondary cause can be imputed to the first cause, which is itself free from all defect, in what concerns the being and perfection of such an effect, but not in what concerns its evil and defectiveness. Just as the movement in a lame man's walk can be attributed to his motor faculty while his limp is imputable to his deformed limb, so all the being and action of a bad thing can be attributed to God, but any defect in the action is to be imputed to the deficient secondary cause, not to the omnipotent perfection of God.⁴⁵

Thus no matter from what angle we approach the problem, we come to the same conclusion. Evil taken by itself is nothing. It is inconceivable, then, that God can be its cause. If one asks what is its cause, the answer is that it is ascribed to the finiteness of the creature. Undoubtedly we can conceive of finite and limited beings in which there would be no evil. In fact, the universe contains indestructible creatures that never lack anything belonging to their nature. But there is some good even in those creatures that are less perfect and destructible. And if God has created them, it is because it was consonant with the divine perfection to form a more perfect image of himself by expressing himself in unequal creatures, some of which would be destructible and others indestructible. However, if we consider either one of these, we see nothing but goodness, being and perfection. In the descent of all things from God we find only the effusion and transmission of being. The lowliest of all creatures, whose infinitesimal perfection is almost entirely consumed by evil, still enriches with its tiny share of perfection the total perfection of the universe. With its wretched degree of being, it still manifests something of God. Let us examine, then, the hierarchy of created goods that God, by an act of his uncaused free will, formed to his own image. And let us begin with the highest grade in this hierarchy: creatures entirely free from all matter, namely, angels.

⁴⁴Ibid. 2, resp.

⁴⁵Ibid., ad 2; SCG 3.10 [8].

PART II. Chapter Two

The Angels

The order of creatures in which the highest degree of created perfection is realized is that of pure spirits, commonly called angels.¹ Some historians pass over in complete silence this part of Thomas' work or are content simply to allude to it. This admission is particularly regrettable in that his study of the angels is not in his own view exclusively theological. Philosophers have known the existence of angels; their existence can be demonstrated and in certain exceptional cases they have even been seen. To disregard them destroys the balance of the universe considered as a whole. Moreover, the nature and actions of lower creatures, humans for example, can only be well understood by comparison, and often by contrast, with the angels. In short, in a doctrine in which the ultimate reason of beings is most often drawn from the place they occupy in the universe, it is difficult to omit the consideration of one whole order of creatures without upsetting the equilibrium of the system. Thomas Aquinas' treatise on the angels is the culmination of a long development in which there converge heterogeneous elements of both religious and philosophical origin.

We know today² that three springs fed this part of Thomism. First, astronomical theories about certain spiritual substances considered as the causes of the movement of the spheres and stars. Second, metaphysical speculation about pure spirits considered as degrees of being and, so to speak, as marking stages in the progressions by which the many issue from the One; finally, the biblical accounts of angels and demons.

The astronomical data come directly from Aristotle, who was in this regard influenced by Plato. According to Aristotle, the first immovable mover moves insofar as it is desired and loved. But desire and love presuppose knowledge.

¹On this question see A. Schmid, "Die peripatetisch-scholastische Lehre von den Gestirngeistern," *Athenaeum, philosophische Zeitschrift* 1 (Munich: J. von Froschammer, 1862) 1: 549-580; J. Durantel, "La notion de la création dans saint Thomas," *Annales de philosophie chrétienne* 164 (1912): 1-32; Wilhelm Schlössinger, "Die Stellung der Engel in der Schöpfung," *Jahrbuch für Philosophie und spekulative Theologie* 25: 451-485 and 27: 81-117; same author, "Das Verhältnis der Engelwelt zur sichtbaren Schöpfung," *Jahrbuch für Philosophie und spekulative Theologie* 27: 158-208. The two latter studies consider the problem for itself. They are useful, however, because their conclusions are generally based on the authentic teaching of Thomas Aquinas. The richest source on this question remains the second part of Clemens Baeumker, *Witelo, ein Philosoph und Naturforscher des XIII Jahrhunderts* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1908), pp. 523-606: "Die Intelligenzen" and "Intelligenzenlehre der Schrift *De intelligentiis*."

²Schmid, "Die peripatetisch-scholastische Lehre," p. 549ff; Baeumker, *Witelo*, p. 523ff.

Hence, the heavenly spheres can only owe their motion to intelligent substances acting as motive forces. Plato had already placed the principle of universal order in the world-soul and had considered the heavenly bodies to be moved by divine souls. The successors of Plato and Aristotle wavered between these two points of view. While the Platonists, properly so-called, attributed real souls to the heavenly bodies, the Fathers and Doctors of the Church adopted a more reserved attitude. None held this doctrine unreservedly; some considered it possible; many rejected it. As for Aristotle's doctrine, which seems to have been limited to motive intelligences without attributing souls in this strict sense to the heavenly bodies,³ it will be interpreted in various ways during the Middle Ages. Some Arabian commentators, like Alfarabi, Avicenna and Algazel, placed the first principle of astronomical motion in real souls, while others put it either in a soul stripped of every sensible function and reduced to its intellectual part (Maimonides), or in an Intelligence pure and simple (Averroes). All the great scholastic philosophers held this last view in opposition to Avicenna. They did not consider the heavenly bodies to be the cause of their own motion, as is the case with the elements, nor did they consider the spheres to be directly moved by God. Rather, they placed pure Intelligences, created by God, at the origin of astronomical motion.

Metaphysical speculations on the hierarchical degrees of being, which in this context deserve our closest attention, originate in the neo-Platonic doctrine of emanation. Already in Plotinus, besides the four degrees characterizing the exodus of things from the One, there is a kind of rough differentiation within the first degree itself, namely, the Intelligence. In it, Plato's Ideas maintain a subsistence of their own and a sort of individuality. They are even arranged in a kind of hierarchical subordination analogous to that of species under their genus and of the particular disciplines under science in general. We find that organization completed by the successors and disciples of Plotinus: Porphyry, Jamblicus, and above all Proclus. It is to this last-named philosopher that we owe the definitive formulation of the doctrine of the Intelligences; their absolute incorporeity and simplicity, their subsistence beyond time, the nature of their knowledge, and so on.

From the earliest times we see a growing tendency to assimilate the Intelligences, which lie between the One and the rest of creation, to certain other beings of a very different origin, which will eventually be identified with them. We are speaking, of course, of the angels, who in holy scripture are often assigned the role of messengers sent by God to the human family. Philo at an early date speaks of pure spirits that dwell in the air, called demons by the

³This is not certain, and interpreters of Aristotle differ about it. It is easier to understand Aristotle's world if stars are living, but his statements are obscure on this point. See Octave Hamelin, *Le système d'Aristote* (Paris: Alcan, 1920), p. 356.

philosophers and angels by Moses.⁴ Porphyry and Jamblicus reckon angels and archangels among the demons. Proclus has them entering into composition with demons, properly so-called, and with heroes, to form a triad that would fill up the gap between the gods and men.⁵ With Proclus too, we see the precise formulation of the doctrine of angelic knowledge that was to prevail in the schools, and the presentation of that knowledge as simply illuminative and not discursive. Dionysius the pseudo-Areopagite gathered all this data together and made a definite synthesis of the biblical concept of angelic messengers and the speculation of the neo-Platonists. The Fathers of the Church and medieval philosophers simply adopted this synthesis and worked out its details.⁶ From this time on, there was a growing tendency to think of the angels as pure spirits. Gradually, the neo-Platonic notion of the total incorporeity of the angels triumphed over the early doubts and hesitations of the Patristic period;⁷ and, while some scholastics maintained the distinction between matter and form in angelic substances, it was not a question of corporeal matter, even luminous or ethereal, but of a simple potentiality and a principle of change. The pseudo-Areopagite not only defined the angels of the Bible as pure spirits, but he arranged them in a masterly classification,⁸ dividing them into three hierarchies, each of which is composed of three classes. This classification will enter unchanged into Thomas' doctrine.

Finally, we are left with the problem of relating the angels, conceived as Intelligences by the philosophers, to the motion of the spheres. A priori, this identification was in no way necessary. Indeed, apart from a few isolated indications in a number of the neo-Platonists, we have to wait for Oriental philosophers to find it definitely made.⁹ The Arabians and Jews liken some orders of angels mentioned in the Koran or Bible either to the Intelligences that move the heavenly bodies or to the souls of heavenly bodies that are dependent upon these Intelligences. The influence of Avicenna and Maimonides in this matter is important. The scholastics in the West, however, are far from accepting their conclusions without modification. Albert the Great flatly refuses to identify angels

⁴See Émile Bréhier, *Les idées philosophiques et religieuses de Philon d'Alexandrie* (Paris: Vrin, 1925), pp. 126-133.

⁵On these different issues see Baumker, *Witelo*, pp. 531-532.

⁶For Dionysius' dependence upon the neo-Platonists see Hugo Koch, *Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagitica in seinen Beziehungen zum Neuplatonismus und Mysterienwesen. Eine literarhistorische Untersuchung* (Mainz: Franz Kirchheim, 1900); H.F. Müller, *Dionysios, Proklos, Plotinos*, in *Beiträge* 20.3-4 (Münster: Aschendorff, 1918). On the later influence of Dionysius see Josef Stiglmayr, *Das Aufkommen der pseudo-dionysischen Schriften und ihr Eindringen in die christliche Literatur bis zum Laterankonzil* (Feldkirch, 1895).

⁷See Joseph Turmel, "Histoire de l'angéologie des temps apostoliques à la fin du Ve siècle," *Revue d'histoire et de littérature religieuses* 3 (1898) and 4 (1899); esp. 3: 407-434.

⁸*De caelesti hierarchia* 1 and 7-10 [PL 122: 125-143, 176-228].

⁹For copious references and texts on this question see Baumker, *Witelo*, pp. 537-544.

and Intelligences; nor do Bonaventure and Thomas accept this identification. Only the Averroists could be fully satisfied with it, and they alone accepted it without reservations.

These are the historical elements, varied in nature and from many sources, that Thomas was able to fashion into a coherent and, in many respects, original synthesis. Holy scripture attests to the existence of angels as an order of entirely incorporeal creatures: "Who makest thy angels spirits."¹⁰ Nothing gives greater satisfaction to the mind than this testimony of scripture because, if we reflect we are bound to affirm the existence of incorporeal creatures. God's principal end in creation is the supreme good, which is becoming like God; we have already seen that this is the only reason for the existence of the universe. Now, an effect is not perfectly like its cause if it does not imitate that by which its cause is capable of producing it. Thus the heat of the body resembles the heat that produces it in the body. But we know that God produces creatures by knowledge and will. It follows that the perfection of the universe requires the existence of intellectual creatures. Now, the object of the intellect is the universal. Bodies insofar as they are material, and all bodily powers, are on the contrary determined by nature to a particular mode of being. Hence truly intellectual creatures must be incorporeal; and this amounts to saying that the perfection of the universe demands the existence of beings totally stripped of matter or of body.¹¹ Moreover, the general plan of creation would show an obvious gap if there were no angels in it. The hierarchy of beings is continuous; every nature of a higher order in its least noble element borders on what is most noble in creatures of the order immediately below it. Thus intellectual nature is superior to corporeal nature, and yet the order of intellectual natures borders on the order of corporeal natures by the least noble intellectual nature, the rational human soul. On the other hand, the body to which the rational soul is united is, by the very fact of this union, raised to the highest grade in the genus of bodies. It is fitting, therefore, in order to preserve proper proportion, that the order of nature keep a place for intellectual creatures superior to the human soul, that is, for angels, who are in no way united to bodies.¹²

At first sight it may seem that an argument of this sort is nothing but one of convenience and harmony. We would be wrong, however, to regard it as satisfying our need for logical and abstract symmetry. If it is satisfying for reason to admit the existence of intelligences free from bodies which are to souls joined to bodies what animated bodies are to bodies deprived of souls, it is because there is no discontinuity in the hierarchy of created perfections. And this continuity constitutes the profound law governing the procession of things from

¹⁰Ps 103:4.

¹¹ST 1.50.1, resp.

¹²SCG 2.91 [4].

God. Thomas Aquinas refuses to fragment the creative activity, unlike the Arabian philosophers and their Western disciples. But although he does not admit that each higher grade of creatures gives being to the grade immediately below it, he firmly maintains this hierarchical multiplicity of grades. A sole and unique creative power produces and sustains creation in its entirety; but if it no longer bursts forth like a new spring at each new stage of creation, it still pervades every one of them.

This is why the effects of the divine power are naturally ordered in a continuous series of decreasing perfection. It is why the order of created things is such that, in order to travel from one end to the other, we have to pass through all the intermediary grades. Immediately below celestial matter, for example, there is fire; below fire air, below air water, and finally, below water earth. All these bodies are arranged in this way according to the order of nobility and decreasing subtlety. Now, we discover at the highest degree of being an absolutely simple being, namely, God. It is impossible to put corporeal substance, which is very composite and divisible, immediately below God. We must posit a great number of intermediate steps by which we can descend from the sovereign simplicity of God to the multiplicity of material bodies. Some of these grades will be made up of intellectual substances united to bodies. Others will be made up of intellectual substances free from all union with matter; it is precisely these that we call angels.¹³

Thus angels are completely incorporeal. Can we go further and consider them as totally immaterial? Many philosophers and masters say they are not. If the excellence of the angelic nature from now on appeared to everyone as including their incorporeity, it is more difficult to give up the notion that they at least consist of matter and form. By matter we do not necessarily mean a body, but in a broad sense every potency that enters into composition with an act to constitute a being. Now, the only principle of motion and change is to be found in matter. Hence there must be matter in anything that moves. Created spiritual substance is movable and changeable, because God alone is unchangeable by nature. Accordingly, there is matter in every created spiritual substance.¹⁴ Second, we must consider that nothing is active and passive at the same time in the same respect; moreover, that nothing acts except by its form nor is acted upon except by its matter. Now, created spiritual substances known as angels act insofar as they enlighten angels immediately below them, and they are acted upon in that they are enlightened by the angels immediately above them. Consequently, angels are necessarily composed of matter and form.¹⁵ Finally, we

¹³*De spiritualibus creaturis* 1.5, resp.

¹⁴*Ibid.* 1.1, obj. 3. See this argument in Bonaventure, *In Sent.* 2.3.1.1.1 [Quaracchi ed. 2: 89, n. 2].

¹⁵*De spirit. creat.* 1.1. See Bonaventure, *In Sent.* 2.3.1.1.1 [p. 90, n. 4].

know that whatever exists is either pure act, pure potency, or composed of potency and act. Created spiritual substances are not pure act, because this is proper to God alone. Nor are they pure potency, as is evident. They are accordingly composed of potency and act, and this amounts to saying that they are composed of matter and form.¹⁶

These arguments, inviting as they are, are incompatible with the Thomistic notion of the first cause presiding over creation. We know that the need for positing these incorporeal creatures called angels is based in Thomism on the necessity for an order of pure intelligences placed immediately under God. Now, the nature of pure intellectual substances must be in harmony with their action, and the characteristic act of intellectual substances is the act of knowing. It is easy, moreover, to specify the nature of this act from its object. Things can be grasped by the intelligence insofar as they are free from matter. Forms present in matter, for example, are individual forms and, as we shall see, they could not be apprehended as such by the intellect. A pure intelligence, whose object is the immaterial as such, must accordingly also be free from all matter. The total immateriality of angels is therefore demanded by the very place they occupy in the order of creation.¹⁷

This means that the objection drawn from the mobility and mutability of the angels cannot be regarded as decisive. The modifications to which they are subject in no way affect their very being, but only their intelligence and their will. To account for this, therefore, it is enough to grant that their intellect and their will can pass from potency to act; but nothing compels us to posit a distinction of matter and form within their unchanging essence.¹⁸ The same holds for what concerns the impossibility of their simultaneous activity and passivity. The illumination that an angel receives and that which it transmits presuppose an intellect that is at one time in act and at another in potency, and not at all a being composed of form and matter.¹⁹

There is one last objection: a spiritual substance that would be pure act would be identical with God. Hence, we must grant that an angelic nature contains a mixture of potency and act, and in the last analysis, a mixture of form and matter. In one sense this argument is completely acceptable. It is true that an angel, placed immediately below God, is as distinct from him as a finite being is from an infinite being. The angel's being, therefore, must contain a certain amount of potentiality limiting its actuality. Consequently, if we take potency as a synonym for matter, we cannot deny that the angels are in a sense

¹⁶*De spirit. creat.* 1.1; *ST* 1.50.2. See Bonaventure, *In Sent.* 2.3.1.1.1, resp. See E. Gilson, *The Philosophy of St. Bonaventure*, trans. Illtyd Trethowan and Frank J. Sheed (New York/London: Sheed and Ward, 1938), pp. 246-250.

¹⁷*ST* 1.50.2, resp.; *De spirit. creat.*, 1.1, resp.

¹⁸*De spirit. creat.*, 1.1, ad 3.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, ad 16.

material. But it is not necessary to identify potency with matter in this way, and an examination of material things will enable us to see why.

In material substances we can discern a double composition. First, they are composed of matter and form and this makes each of them a nature. If we think of this nature itself, composed as it is of matter and form, we are also aware that it is not its own act of being. Taken in respect to the *esse* it possesses, the nature is related as a potency to its act. In other words, apart from the hylomorphic composition of a created being, we find that it is also composed of its nature or essence and the existence the creator has conferred upon it and in which he preserves it. This is the case not only with a material nature but also with a separated intellectual substance or angel. Self-sufficient and immaterial, this substance is still related to its act of being as potency to act. Hence it is infinitely removed from the first being, or God, who is pure act and the whole plenitude of being. Accordingly, it is not necessary to introduce any matter into the angelic nature in order to distinguish it from the creative essence. A pure intelligence and simple form, free from all matter, it has nevertheless only a limited amount of being, and the being it has is not identical with it.²⁰

Our certainty of the complete immateriality of angels enables us to solve the disputed question of how they are distinguished from each other. The masters who thought there is matter in angelic substances were attracted to this opinion because it helped them to distinguish between individual angels. Matter provides the basis for numerical distinction in each species. Hence, if angels are pure forms unlimited by matter, there seems to be no way of distinguishing one from another.²¹ The answer to this is that no two angels are in the same species.²² The reason for this is clear. Beings of the same species but differing in number as distinct individuals have a similar form united to different matters. Hence, if angels have no matter, each of them is specifically distinct from all the others. In this case the individual as such forms a species by itself.²³ Against this conclusion the objection can be raised that by making it impossible for individual angelic natures to be multiplied in a species we lessen the total perfection of the universe. It is by its form that each being is distinct in species from every other being, and form clearly surpasses in dignity the material principle of individuation that places the being in a species by making it an individual. Accordingly, the multiplication of species adds more nobility and perfection to the whole universe than the multiplication of individuals in one and the same species.

²⁰*Ibid.*, resp.; *ST* 1.50.2, ad 3; *SCG* 2.50 [7], and 51, 52; *Quodl.* 9.4, resp. [ed. Spiazzi, p. 190].

²¹Bonaventure, *In Sent.* 2.3.1.1.1 [Quaracchi ed. 2: 88, n. 3].

²²For Thomas' agreement with Avicenna on this point and his opposition to most of the masters see Baumker, *Witelo*, p. 543.

²³*ST* 1.50.4, resp.

Now, the universe owes its perfection mainly to the separated substances. Therefore, substituting a number of different species for a number of individuals of the same species does not lessen the total perfection of the universe; rather, it increases and multiplies it.²⁴

No doubt many of our contemporaries will consider this kind of discussion foreign to philosophy. But there is no better vantage point for revealing the meaning and significance of Thomas' existential reform of Greek metaphysics. This must be emphasized, particularly because the reform was one of the great events in the history of philosophy. If we do not grasp its meaning, we allow its fruits to perish.

Reduced to essentials, the whole medieval controversy on the hylomorphic composition of angels leads to the solution of the problem of how to conceive of simple spiritual substances that are not gods.

The whole of natural theology was occupied with this problem—a veritable watershed dividing Christian philosophy from Greek philosophy. For Aristotle, all beings fall into two classes—those having a nature and those that do not.²⁵ All beings composed of matter and form have a nature. They are recognizable because they have within themselves the principle of their motion and rest. This principle is nature itself, “for nature is a principle and a cause of movement and rest for the thing in which it resides immediately, by essence and not by accident.”²⁶ But since it is an active principle, the nature of a being cannot be its matter, and hence it must be its form. Since this being is the seat of movement, there must be matter in it, as the principle of that potentiality which, by movement, its nature brings into act. Thus we call every being composed of matter and form²⁷ a “natural being,” and its nature is only its form considered as the internal cause of its becoming.

The science of natural or “physical” beings is called physics.²⁸ Beyond this science there is another—the science of beings beyond physical beings. It is called the science of “meta-physical” beings, or, as we say, metaphysics.

²⁴SCG 2.93 [5]; *De spirit. creat.* 1.8, resp.

²⁵On this distinction see Gilson, *Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy*, p. 432, n. 8.

²⁶Aristotle, *Phys.* 2.1, 192b21–23.

²⁷Ibid. 193b6–9.

²⁸“Physics is, in fact, like the other sciences, the science of a genus of determinate being, that is, of the kind of substance that possesses in itself the principle of its movement and of its rest” (Aristotle, *Metaph.* 4.1, 1025a18–21). Similarly, we shall see that theology is also the science of a genus of determinate being. “There must, then, be three theoretical philosophies, mathematics, physics, and what we may call theology (*φιλοσοφία θεολογική*), since it is obvious that if the divine is present anywhere, it is present in things of this sort. And the highest science must deal with the highest genus. Thus, while the theoretical sciences are more to be desired than the other sciences, this is more to be desired than the other theoretical sciences” (ibid. 1026a18–23; Oxford trans.).

What distinguishes this second group of beings from the first is that they are self-subsisting forms. Without matter, these beings are entirely in act; they are said to be pure acts. For the same reason, they are not subject to any movement; they are said to be immovable pure acts. Being immobile, these beings have no nature and they are not natural beings. They can be called "meta-natural" quite as well as "metaphysical," for the two words mean the same thing. Inversely, since they are above natural beings, these pure acts of Aristotle could be called "superphysical" or "supernatural" beings. Thus in Aristotle's philosophy the boundary between the natural and the supernatural is that which separates material forms from pure forms. The same boundary line separates the natural world from the divine world. In this sense, since it is the science of the divine, Aristotle's metaphysics can rightly be called divine science or theology. It is even theology in the ultimate meaning of the term. As there are no beings more divine than those with which Aristotle's metaphysics is concerned, there is no room in it for any theology, nor indeed for any science beyond it.

The pure forms that Christian theologians called angels rightly belonged in the class of beings that Aristotle called gods. Hence the perplexity of these theologians. The Bible forbade them to deny the existence of angels. Sometimes they tried to make them corporeal beings, but too many sacred texts suggested they are pure spirits for this notion to win out in the end. To make gods of them would have been to fall back into polytheism. Thomas' treatise *De substantiis separatis*, an incomparably rich historical work, enables us to some extent to follow step by step the evolution of this problem and to disentangle the various doctrines involved in its history. All the evidence shows that for Christian thinkers, the problem came down to finding another criterion for the divine than immateriality, but time was needed to discover it. As a matter of fact they had to wait for the existential metaphysics of Thomas Aquinas.

Here as elsewhere the hardest obstacle to remove was the Platonism of essence. Aristotle himself had failed to remove it, or rather, he had not even tried. For him, as for Plato, being was ultimately identified with the immovable. What he called "being as being" was accordingly "being as not becoming." It is true—and the point is important—that for Aristotle the stability of all "being as being" expressed the purity of an act. Moreover, this is why, unlike Plato's Ideas, pure Acts exercise a causality different from that of principles in the intelligible order; because they are Acts, Aristotle's highest principles are truly gods. They are eternal immobile beings and causes of an eternal becoming. However, when all is said, their actuality amounts to that of a perfect essence whose pure immateriality excludes all possibility of change. For those who were positing angels as so many immaterial substances, Aristotle was providing no excuse for not making them so many gods.

This explains why the thesis of the hylomorphic composition of angels received such a good reception among Platonists of every sort, and that it mounted so vigorous a defense against its rival. Just as they could not conceive of being

other than as a mode of being, so they could not conceive of an absolutely immaterial being that was not a god.²⁹ In pushing his analysis of being to the very act of being, Thomas was eliminating one of the principal reasons used to support this hylomorphism. If the divine is identified with the immaterial, and being with essence, then every being whose essence is purely immaterial has a right to be called a god. But if we locate the ground of essence in its act of being, it is at once evident that further distinctions have to be introduced among immaterial beings.

Though an immaterial substance is completely actual in the order of form, it is not necessarily so in the order of existence. Free from all potentiality as regards matter, this substance nevertheless remains in potency with regard to its own proper *esse*. There is only one substance that escapes this particular deficiency, and that is the substance whose *essentia* is identical with its *esse*, namely, God. "Form is act" objected the defenders of the hylomorphism of the angels, "and what is form alone is pure act; now an angel is not pure act, for this belongs to God alone; the angel, therefore, is not only form, but has a form that is in matter."

To this, Thomas Aquinas could now reply:

Although there is no composition of form and matter in an angel, nevertheless an angel contains both act and potency. We can be assured of this by considering material things, which contain two compositions. The first is that of form and matter, a composition to be found in all natures. A nature thus constituted is not its act of being; rather, the act of being is its act. Nature itself stands in relation to its act of being as potency to act. If matter is removed, and if it is granted that the form itself subsists without matter, the form is still related as potency to act with regard to its act of being. It is in this sense that we must understand the composition of angels. ... But in God, there is no difference between the act of being and what he is ... hence it follows that God alone is pure act.³⁰

Whether he was aware of it or not, Thomas was here destroying the entire Aristotelian theology of Immovable Movers. He was erecting above the essentiality of Plato's Ideas, even above the substantiality of Aristotle's pure Acts, sublime in its solitude, the unique pure Act of Being.

We are now in the presence of a number of angelic creatures both specifically and numerically distinct from one another. Their number is probably enor-

²⁹Gilson, *The Philosophy of St. Bonaventure*, pp. 207-209. On Ibn Gebirol (Avicbron), considered as the source of this hylomorphism, see Thomas Aquinas, *De substantis separatis* 5 [Leonine ed. 40: d48-d49].

³⁰ST 1.50.2, ad 3. For the sake of simplicity, we pass over Thomas' discussion of the Boethius-inspired thesis that placed in the angel a composition of *quo est* and *quod est* (ibid.). To reduce *esse* to *quo est* in this way is once again to be confined to the order of essence and not to proceed to that of the act of existing.

mous, much greater, indeed, than the number of material things, if we grant that God ought to have produced a greater abundance of more perfect creatures in order to assure a greater nobility to the universe as a whole.³¹ We know, besides, that species differ from one another like numbers, that is, they represent greater or lesser amounts of being and perfection. There is reason, then, for trying to find out in what way this vast host of angels is ordered and distributed.³²

If each angel in itself constitutes a single species, we ought to be able to descend by a continuous chain from the first angel—"the nature closest to God"³³—to the last, whose perfection is nearest that of the human species. Our mind would become lost in trying to follow so vast a number of grades of being, particularly since the individual knowledge of angels is not given to us in this world.³⁴ The only possibility left is to attempt a general classification by orders and hierarchies based on their different activities. The proper activity of pure intelligences is clearly intelligence itself. Accordingly, the angelic orders could be distinguished by the differences in their modes of intelligence.

From this point of view, the whole angelic hierarchy, collectively considered, is radically different from the human order. No doubt the original source of knowledge is the same for both angels and humans. In both cases they are enlightened by divine illuminations, which angels and men receive in different ways. Humans, as we shall see later, take from sensible things the intelligible factor hidden in them; angels perceive it immediately and in its intelligible purity. Thus they have been given a mode of knowledge exactly proportionate to their place in the scheme of creation, that is, between the human and divine. Situated immediately below God, the angelic being differs from him in that its essence is not identical with its existence. This multiplicity, characteristic of creatures, is to be found in their way of knowing. God's knowledge is one with his essence and act of existing, because his act of existing, being purely and simply infinite, embraces being in its entirety. The angel, for its part, is a finite essence endowed by God with a certain act of being and its knowledge does not extend by right to all being.³⁵ On the other hand, the angel is a pure intelligence, that is, it is not naturally joined to a body. Accordingly, it cannot apprehend the sensible as such. Sensible things come within the grasp of the senses, while intelligible things come within the grasp of the intellect. Every substance that receives its knowledge from sensible things is united by nature to a body,

³¹ST 1.50.3, resp.; SCG 1.92; *De pot.* 6.6.

³²On the progressive effort at synthesis on this point to be observed in the thought of Thomas Aquinas see J. Durantel, "La notion de la création dans saint Thomas," *Annales de philosophie chrétienne* (April 1912): 19, n. 2.

³³*De spirit. creat.* 1.8, ad 2.

³⁴ST 1.108.3, resp.

³⁵ST 1.54.2 and 3, resp.

because sense knowledge requires senses and consequently bodily organs. Hence, angelic substances cannot know by means of sensible things.³⁶

Thus the very nature of the being conferred by God on the angels brings with it an original mode of knowing. It cannot in any way resemble abstraction, by which human beings uncover the intelligible buried in the sensible. Nor can it in any way resemble the act by which God *is* the intelligible and at the same time apprehends it. It can only be a knowledge acquired through species that are received by the intelligence and enlighten it. These species are purely intelligible, that is, proportionate to a completely incorporeal being. To satisfy all these conditions, we say that angels know things through species that are connatural to them, or, if you prefer, by innate species.³⁷ All the intelligible essences that preexisted from eternity in God in the form of ideas proceeded from him at the moment of creation in two distinct and parallel lines. On the one hand, they were individuated in material beings and constituted their forms. On the other, they flowed into angelic substances, thus conferring upon them knowledge of things. We can say, then, that the angels' intellect is superior to our human intellect, just as a being completed and endowed with its form is superior to formless matter. And if our intellect is like a blank tablet on which nothing is written, the intellect of the angel would be rather like a canvas covered with its painting, or, better still, like a mirror reflecting the luminous essences of things.³⁸

The innate possession of intelligible species is common to all angels and is characteristic of their nature. But all angels do not possess the same species; and here we are coming to the basis for distinguishing among them. What constitutes relative superiority among created beings is their greater or lesser proximity to the first being, or God. Now, God's total fullness of intellectual knowledge is gathered at one single point: the divine essence, in which he knows everything. This intelligible fullness is found in created intelligences, but in an inferior way and less simply. Thus the intelligences inferior to God know by a multiple means what God knows in a single object; the lower the grade of the intelligence, the more numerous must be its means of knowing. In brief, the superiority among angels is greater the fewer the species necessary for them to apprehend all intelligibles.³⁹

We know, moreover, that each individual angel constitutes a distinct degree of being. The simplicity of their knowledge, then, is continually lessened and fragmented unceasingly from the first angel to the last. However, it is possible to distinguish three principal degrees. In the first degree are those angels who know intelligible essences as proceeding from the first universal principle, which is

³⁶SCG 2.96 [2].

³⁷ST 1.55.2, resp.

³⁸De ver. 8.9, resp.; ST 1.55.2, resp. and ad 1.

³⁹De ver. 8.10, resp.; ST 1.55.3, resp.

God. This mode of knowing belongs properly to the first hierarchy, which is in immediate attendance upon God, and of which we can say with Dionysius⁴⁰ that it dwells in the antechamber of the divinity. In the second degree are those angels who know intelligibles as subject to the most universal created causes. This mode of being is proper to the second hierarchy. Finally, in the third degree are those angels who know intelligibles as applied to singular things and dependent upon particular causes. These last form the third hierarchy.⁴¹ There is, then, decreasing generality and decreasing simplicity in the distribution of the angels' knowledge. Some are turned solely to God and contemplate intelligible essences in him alone. Others contemplate them in the universal causes of creation, that is, in a plurality of objects; others, finally, contemplate them as particular effects, that is, in a multiplicity of objects equal to the number of created beings.⁴²

When we try to be more specific as to how separated substances apprehend their object, we observe further that there are three different orders within each of these hierarchies. We have said that the first hierarchy contemplates intelligible essences in God himself. Now, God is the end of every creature. Accordingly, angels in this hierarchy contemplate as their proper object the highest end of the universe, which is the goodness of God. Those who behold it most clearly are called Seraphim, because they are as it were on fire with love for this object which they know so perfectly. The other angels in the first hierarchy contemplate the divine goodness, not directly and in itself, but under the aspect of providence. They are called Cherubim, that is, fullness of knowledge, because they see clearly the pristine operative power of the divine model of things. Immediately below the preceding come the angels who contemplate in itself the disposition of the divine judgments. Since the throne is the sign of judicial power, they are called Thrones. This does not imply that God's goodness, essence, and knowledge, by which he knows the disposition of beings, are three distinct realities in him. There are simply three aspects under which those finite intelligences who are angels can behold his perfect simplicity.

The second hierarchy does not know the reasons of things in God himself as in a simple object, but in the plurality of universal causes. Thus its proper object is the general disposition of means in view of their end. Now, this universal disposition of things presupposes the existence of many directors; these are the Dominations, whose name indicates authority because they prescribe what other angels must carry out. The general directives issued by the first angels are received by others who multiply them and channel them according to the various effects to be produced. These angels are called Virtues, because they confer on the general causes the energy required to carry out their numer-

⁴⁰*De caelesti hierarchia* 7.2 [PL 122: 179aB].

⁴¹*ST* 1.108.1, resp.

⁴²*Ibid.* 6, resp.

ous operations without fail. This order, then, presides over the activities of the entire universe, so that we can reasonably ascribe to it the movement of the heavenly bodies, which are the universal causes from which come all the particular effects that take place in nature.⁴³ To these spirits, too, apparently belong the carrying out of those divine effects outside the ordinary course of nature and that are often immediately dependent upon the influence of the stars. Finally, the universal order of providence, already at work in its effects, is preserved from all disorder by the Powers, whose task is to safeguard it from all those baneful influences that might possibly disturb it.

With this last class of angels we approach the third hierarchy, which knows the order of divine providence, not in itself, nor in its general causes, but as it can be known in the multiplicity of particular causes. These angels are placed in immediate charge of the administration of human affairs. Some of them are especially appointed to the common good and the general welfare of nations and cities. Because of their dignity they are called Principalities. The distinction of kingdoms, the transference of temporary supremacy to one nation rather than to another, the leadership of princes and great men belong directly to their ministry. Beneath this very general order of goods comes one that effects both the individual taken by himself and, under the same title, a great number of individuals. Such are the truths of faith that must be believed, and divine worship that must be respected. The angels, whose proper object is these goods, which are both particular and general, are called Archangels. They also bring to people the most solemn messages from God. It was the archangel Gabriel who came to announce the incarnation of the Word, the only Son of God, a truth everyone is obliged to accept. Finally, there is a still more particular good that concerns every individual in himself and as an individual. In charge of this order of goods are the angels properly speaking, the guardians of men and women and God's messengers for less important announcements.⁴⁴ With them, we reach the end of the lowest hierarchy of separated intelligences.

It is easy to see that the foregoing arrangement concerns the continuity of a universe in which the lowest members of a higher grade approach very closely the highest members of a lower grade, as the least perfect members of the animal kingdom border on plants. The first and highest order of being is that of the divine Persons, which terminates in the Spirit, that is, in Love proceeding from the Father and the Son. The Seraphim, who are closely united with God in a burning love, stand in close affinity with the third person of the Trinity. The third degree of this hierarchy, the Thrones, has an equally close affinity with the highest degree of the second, that is, the Dominations. It is they who transmit to the second hierarchy the illumination necessary for the knowledge and execution of the divine decrees. Similarly, the Powers are very close to the

⁴³See *In Sent.* 4.48.1.4.3, sol. 3 [Vivès ed. 11: 443].

⁴⁴*SCG* 3.80 [3]; *ST* 1.108.5, ad 4.

Principalities, because there is very little distance between those who make particular effects possible and those who produce them.⁴⁵ The grouping of the angels in hierarchies thus makes us aware of a continuous series of pure intelligences through which the divine illumination shines from one end to the other. Each angel transmits to the one immediately below it the knowledge it receives from above; but it transmits the knowledge particularized and parcelled out to match the capacity of the angel following it. In this regard the angel proceeds like teachers, who perceive directly the consequences lying hidden in principles, but expound them by making many distinctions in order to bring them within the reach of their listeners.⁴⁶

In this way the elements Thomas owes to the philosophical tradition are brought into a harmonious synthesis. He confirms the existence of angels in the strict sense in their biblical role of announcers and messengers. He refuses to reduce them, as do the oriental philosophers, to the very small number of separated intelligences that move and guide the celestial spheres. Yet he continues to assign these functions to the angels. Finally, the neo-Platonic hierarchy as adapted by pseudo-Dionysius reappears in Thomas Aquinas' hierarchy of pure intelligences. Thomas closely binds these notions of such varied origin to his own principles, firmly putting his imprint upon them. In distributing the angelic hierarchies according to the progressive darkening of their intellectual illumination, he is conferring a totally new organic structure upon the world of separated substances. The internal principle governing it is the same as that which Thomism places at the very source of the order of the universe. At the same time we find that the angelic world occupies a place in creation of such importance that it simply must be considered if the universe is to remain intelligible. Between God's pure actuality and human rational knowledge based upon sensible things, the angels introduce an infinite number of intermediary degrees. As we come down along this long chain, we find two parallel and diminishing graduations: a knowledge becoming less and less simple, and an *esse* whose actuality grows less and less pure. No doubt, the vast host of angels, being finite creatures, does not fill completely the gap between God and creation. But if there is always discontinuity in the mode existing, there is however continuity of order: "Such is the order of things that we go from one extreme to the other only through intermediaries" (*Ordo rerum talis esse invenitur ut ab uno extremo ad alterum non perveniatur nisi per media*). Knowledge comes down in stages from God, the source of all light. It comes first to the angels, those intelligences by nature full of intelligible essences. Then it comes to us humans whom we see seeking and gathering the intelligible multiplied in sensible things. Finally, its ray comes to be imprisoned in matter under the form of finality.

⁴⁵ST 1.108.6, resp.

⁴⁶ST 1.106.1 and 3, resp.

PART II. Chapter Three

The Corporeal World and the Efficacy of Secondary Causes

An examination of the universe as a whole certainly must begin with the study of pure intelligences, but it is not so obvious how we should proceed to the lower grades of being. Two different procedures are possible corresponding to the two principles governing the order of the universe. One method would be to follow the hierarchy of created beings, taken in their diminishing order of perfection, and so pass from the study of the angels to the study of man. The other method would be to abandon this perspective and consider the order of ends. This attitude is suggested by the account of creation in Genesis. Man, who so far as the order of perfection is concerned ranks immediately after the angels, does not appear in the scriptural account until the completion of creation, of which he is the true end. It is for him that the imperishable heavenly bodies have been created, that God divides the waters with the firmament, calls the dry land to appear from under the waters, and peoples it with animals and plants. Consequently, it is quite legitimate to place the study of corporeal things right after that of the purely spiritual beings, concluding with the study of man, who is the bond of union between the world of intelligences and the world of bodies.¹

The order of natural science is surely the one where Thomas Aquinas has made fewest innovations. Here the Christian doctor adds nothing to the doctrine of Aristotle, or so little that it would be hardly worth mentioning. He did not have the curiosity of a Robert Grosseteste in the fertile field of mathematical physics. No doubt the very spirit of his Aristotelian philosophy was opposed to this, although it did not prevent him from following the studies of his master, Albert the Great, in the areas of zoology and the natural sciences. Yet, once again we see him go his own way. The questions of the *Summa theologiae* commenting on the work of the six days provided him with many occasions to exercise his natural ingenuity in one or the other of these two directions. Thomas has no heart for the task and saves his ingenuity for other subjects. The essential thing in his eyes is to preserve intact the very letter of scripture; being well aware, moreover, that it is not a treatise on cosmography for the use of scholars, but an expression of the truth intended for the simple people whom Moses was addressing, and thus it is sometimes possible to interpret it in a variety of ways.² For example, when it speaks of the six days of creation, we can inter-

¹ST 1.65.1, prooem.

²"Aërem autem, et ignem non nominat, quia non est ita manifestum rudibus, quibus Moyses loquebatur, hujusmodi esse corpora, sicut manifestum est de terra et aqua" (ibid. 66.1, ad

pret it as either six successive days, as Ambrose, Basil, Chrysostom, and Gregory do, and as is suggested by the letter of the biblical text, which is not addressed to scholars. Or we can, with Augustine, take it to refer to the simultaneous creation of all things, with days symbolizing the various orders of beings. This second interpretation is at first sight less literal, but rationally speaking it is more satisfying. It is accordingly the one that Thomas adopts, although he does not exclude the other, which can also be held.³

In whatever way or different ways Thomas thinks it possible to reconcile the visible universe as he sees it with the account of Genesis, he accepts essentially the universe of Aristotle. It consists of seven concentric planetary spheres, contained within an eighth sphere, that of the fixed stars, and containing in their turn the earth at the center.⁴ The matter of each of the celestial spheres is strictly incorruptible, because for a thing to corrupt it must be able to become different than it is. It must, as they say, be *in potency*. Now, the matter of the heavenly spheres is in some way saturated by its form and is no longer in potency to any way of being. It is all it could be, and it can no longer change except in place. To each sphere is assigned a motive intelligence which maintains and directs its circular movement, but it is not, properly speaking, either its form or its soul. Beneath the lowest sphere, which is that of the moon, the four elements of fire, air, water, earth, are arranged in tiers. By right, each of them ought to be completely gathered together in its natural place, and when it is in its natural place it is in a state of rest and equilibrium. Act " however, the elements are more or less mixed together, and this natural tendency to return to their natural place produces the various movements they undergo. Fire always tends to move up-

2). See in the same sense: "Quia Moyses loquebatur rudi populo, qui nihil nisi corporalia poterat capere ..." (ibid. 67.4, resp.). "Moyes rudi populo loquebatur, quorum imbecillitati condescendens, illa solum eis proposuit quae manifeste sensui apparent" (ibid. 68.3, resp.). "Moyes autem rudi populo condescendens ..." (ibid. 70.1, ad 3, also 70.2, resp.). The guiding principles of the Thomistic exegesis are as follows: "Primo, quidem, ut veritas scripturae inconcussa teneatur. Secundo, cum scriptura divina multipliciter exponi possit, quod nulli expositioni aliquis ita praecise inhaereat, ut si certa ratione constiterit hoc esse falsum, quod aliquis sensum scripturae esse credebat, id nihilominus asserere praesumat, ne scriptura ex hoc ab infidelibus derideatur, et ne eis via credendi praecludatur" (ibid. 68.1, resp.). Thomas is here in full agreement with Augustine, from whom he expressly claims to have taken this double principle: (1) to maintain steadfastly the literal truth of scripture; (2) never to be so exclusively attached to one of its possible interpretations as to cling to it even when its contrary has been scientifically demonstrated. See Paul Synave, "Le canon scripturaire de saint d'Aquin," *Revue biblique* 9 (1924): 522-533; same author, "La doctrine de saint Thomas d'Aquin sur le sens littéral des Écritures," *Revue biblique* 11 (1926): 40-65.

³In *Sent.* 2.12.1.2, sol. [ed. Mandonnet-Moos 2: 305-306].

⁴The invisible world would begin above the sphere of the fixed stars. Naturally, its structure is more Aristotelian: the heaven of waters, or the crystalline sphere; and the heaven of light, or the ethereal. See *ST* 1.68.4, resp.

ward; earth downward; air and water settle between the two in the intermediary places where they belong. This whole cosmology falls between frameworks drawn from other sources. Where Aquinas is at home and able to perform with ease the task that comes more naturally to him, is in the metaphysical deepening of the principles of natural philosophy. Here once again the Christian philosopher shows his inventiveness, because it is a question of the relation binding being and the efficacy of secondary causes to God, and he is directly interested in its exact delineation.

In studying the notion of creation, we came to the conclusion that only God is a creator, since creation is an action proper to him⁵ and that nothing exists that was not created by him. Perhaps it is not out of place to recall this general conclusion when we are about to launch into the study of bodies, the more so since for a long time the error has become widespread that their nature was something bad in itself and that they were consequently the work of some evil principle other than God.⁶ This was a doubly pernicious error, for in the first place all existing things have at least one constitutive feature in common—their *esse*. There must, then, be some principle from which they have this factor that causes them to be, whatever may be their mode of being, whether invisible and spiritual or visible and corporeal. Since God is the cause of being, his causality extends necessarily to bodies as well as to spirits. In the second place, there is a cogent reason based on the end of things. God has no other end than himself. But things have an end other than themselves, namely, God. This is an absolute truth that is valid for every order of reality whatsoever, and for bodies no less than spirits. There is something more to be added. A being cannot exist for God unless it also exists for itself and for its own good. Thus in this huge organism called the universe each part has first its own act and its own end, as the eye is for seeing. In addition, each of the less noble parts exists with a view to the more noble, as creatures lower than man are in the universe with a view to man. Further, all these creatures, taken one by one, are only in it with a view to the collective perfection of the universe. Finally, the collective perfection of creatures, taken all together, is only there as an imitation and representation of the glory of God himself.⁷ This radical metaphysical optimism does not exclude anything deserving the name of being, in any sense whatsoever, the world of bodies no less than anything else. Matter exists with a view to form: lower forms with a view to higher forms, and higher forms with a view to God. What-

⁵See above, pp. 128.

⁶Thomas' constant preoccupation with refuting the Manichaean doctrine is owing to the development of the doctrine in the Albigensian heresy, which the order of St. Dominic fought from the very moment of its inception.

⁷*ST* 1.65.2, resp. See my *Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy*, pp. 108–127.

ever is, accordingly, is good.⁸ Consequently, in spite of the objection raised, whatever is, has God for its cause.

In analyzing this conclusion, we see a first consequence issue from it: God is the first and immediate cause of *bodies*, that is to say, not of their form taken by itself, nor their matter by itself, but the substantial unity of the matter and form that constitutes them. Here is how we are to understand this.

What experience immediately presents us with are bodies subject to constant change and movement. It is this concrete data that analysis must break up into its constitutive elements. In the first place, the very fact that beings become something other than they were implies the basic distinction of two points of view toward being: what being is; what it can still become. This is the distinction between *act* and *potency* to which we have been constantly referring. That which is capable of being a certain thing, but is not that thing, is that thing in potency. That which the thing already is, it is in act.⁹ The notion of possibility or passive potency does not express sheer nothingness, absolute lack of actuality. It signifies, rather, the aptitude toward a certain eventual reality which is realizable even though not yet realized. The block of marble is in potency to the form of the statue; a liquid mass is not. It is not that the outline of the statue is more present in the marble than in the liquid. It is not in the marble, but can be drawn out of it. The marble is *in potency* to it as long as no sculptor makes it a statue *in act*.

Among all the kinds of potentiality, the first kind we meet is the potentiality to substantial being. What is "that which can become a substance"? This pure "possibility of being a substance" is called *prime matter*. Taken by itself and separately, it cannot be conceived, for the simple reason that it possesses no being of its own. *Nullum esse habet*, Averroes says of it. That it is nothing in itself, however, does not prove that it is absolutely incapable of existing. Prime matter exists in the substance from the very moment that the substance itself exists, and by virtue of the act that makes it exist. This act, constituting the substance, is the *form*. From and by the form, substance receives whatever is positive in its being, since, as we have said, it is in and by the form that its act of being penetrates it. This also remains true of matter: *forma dat esse materiae*.¹⁰ Prime matter is the very possibility of substance, and it is to the form of the substance that matter owes whatever actual being it has.

⁸See above, pp. 185–186.

⁹"Nota quod quoddam potest esse licet non sit, quoddam vero est. Illud quod potest esse dicitur esse potentia, illud quod jam est dicitur esse actu," *De principiis naturae* [Leonine ed. 43: 39.1–4].

¹⁰*Ibid.* [p. 39.33]. This absence of form in matter is called *privation*. Thus marble is a being in potency, or matter. The absence of artistic form in it is a privation, its shape as a statue is its form.

Form, accordingly, is an act. The form of the substance is the act that constitutes the substance as such; hence it is called *substantial form*. Once substance is constituted by the union of form and matter, it is in potency to further determining factors. Substance, regarded as in potency to such factors, is called a *subject*. The further determining factors are called *accidents*.¹¹ The relation of matter to form is accordingly the inverse of subjects to accidents, for matter has no being but what it has from the form, while accidents have no being but what they hold from the subject. Moreover, this whole ontological structure is, in each substance, but the unfolding of an individual act of being, created and continually kept in being by God's power. In and by its form, the creative *Esse* penetrates substance to its very matter and the subject to its very accidents.

These fundamental elements permit us to understand the complex act of becoming. Form explains what a substance is, because it is the act and the positive factor of its being. Form would not explain, by itself alone, how a being can acquire something that it was not or lose something that it was. In either case there is the actualizing of a potency or possibility. This actualization of any kind of possibility is called *movement* or *change*. For there to be movement, there must be a being that moves; hence there must be a being and consequently an act. On the other hand, if this act were perfect and complete, the being that it constitutes would have no possibility of changing. For there to be change, therefore, there must be an incomplete act that admits of a margin of potency to be actualized. Thus it is said that movement is the act of what is in potency, insofar as it is merely in potency. A good example of change is the act of learning a science not already known. In order to learn a science there must be a mind, and a mind that already knows something. Insofar as the mind exists, and insofar as it knows, it is in act. But the mind must also be able to learn, and accordingly it is in potency. Finally, the mind must not already possess the science in question, and hence it lacks that science. The change that we call learning is the progressive actualization of an already existing act, and which, because it is an act, actualizes its possibilities little by little. Because learning is transforming step by step an ability to know into acquired knowledge, learning is a kind of change.¹²

In its widest sense, then, movement is a passage from potency to act under the impulse of an act that is already realized. Or, what amounts to the same

¹¹Matter is not a *subjectum*, for it only exists through the determination it receives. Of itself, it is not there in order to receive it. On the contrary, because the *subject* is a *substance* it does not owe its being to accidents. Rather, it lends them its own being. See above, pp. 155–156. See *ST* 1.66.1, resp. Note that matter, being in potency, cannot exist on its own. However, it is not only potentially good but absolutely good, because it is ordered to form, and this of itself constitutes a good. So there is a sense in which the good is more extensive than being. See *SCG* 3.20 [5].

¹²For a purely technical analysis of becoming see *In Phys.* 3.2 [Leonine ed. 2: 104–105].

thing, it is the introduction of a form into matter suitable to receive it. These terms and expressions must not be allowed to make us forget the concrete reality they express: an imperfect act that is being completed; or more simply, a being on the way to realization. If this is so, the body we have been speaking of could not be reduced either to its matter or to its form. For a pure form, capable of subsisting on its own, like an intelligence, would not be suitable for a body. As for pure matter, since it is the mere possibility of becoming all things without actually being anything, it would truly be nothing and consequently could not exist. The correct expression for God's production of bodies and of their substantial principles would be to say that God *created* bodies but *co-created* their form and their matter, not separately, but one in the other indivisibly.¹³

We must realize above all that by his providence God governs beings constituted in this way, that he is intimately present to their substance and actions, and nevertheless the intimacy of the assistance he gives them leaves their efficacy entirely intact. The universal order of things reveals at once that the world is governed. But we are forced to the same conclusion by the very idea of God that we obtained from the proofs of his existence. For reason demands such a God as the first principle of the universe; and since the principle of a being is also its end, God must be the end of all things. Hence he relates and directs them to himself, and this amounts to governing them. The final end in view of which the creator administers the universe would seem to be transcendent and exterior to things. Once again, what is true of the principle is equally so of the end.

The aspect richest in metaphysical consequences that God's government of things presents to the reflecting mind is their conservation. Thomas takes us to the heart of his metaphysics of bodies by a steady progress of thought. He first develops all the implications of the notion of divine conservation. Then, when he has, so to speak, left nothing to things in their own right, he shows that the divine *concursum*, which seems to take away their powers and their being, in reality confers these gifts upon them.

¹³Thomas accepts Aristotle's classification of the four kinds of causes: material, formal, efficient, and final (*De principiis naturae* [Leonine ed. 43: 42.42-43]). In fact, matter and form are only causes in that they are constitutive elements of being. Matter cannot actualize itself, nor can form impose itself upon matter. Marble does not make a statue of itself. The form of a statue does not sculpt itself. For actualization of matter by form, there must be an active principle: "Oportet ergo praeter materiam et formam aliquid principium esse, quod agat; et hoc dicitur causa efficiens, vel movens, vel agens, vel unde est principium motus" (ibid.). Whether Aristotle ever truly got beyond the level of motor cause to efficient causality requires examination. If, as it seems, he never went beyond the level of motor cause (see André Bremond, *Le dilemme aristotélicien* [Paris, 1933], pp. 11, 50-52), then Thomas' notion of an efficient cause must be connected to the Thomistic deepening of the notion of *esse*. In this case, Thomas' philosophy of nature would lie as far beyond Aristotle's as his natural theology goes beyond that of the Philosopher.

Every effect depends on its cause, and it depends on it precisely to the extent to which the cause has produced it. The word "cause" here designates something very different from that "constant relationship between phenomena" to which empiricism has reduced it. For Aquinas, an efficient cause is an active force, that is, it is a being that produces being. Now, if we look into this closely, we find that acting or causing is still being, for it is only the unfolding or procession of being from its cause in the form of its effect. There is no point in introducing a new notion in order to pass from being to causality. If we conceive existing as an act, we shall see it in that primal act by which a being which first exists in itself, equally exists outside itself in its effects.¹⁴ Every being exists in view of its activities. Hence, just as God's causality extends to the act of being of all beings, so does it extend to all their activities.

To begin with, the divine efficacy extends totally to the being of creatures. Let us consider the case of the artisan who produces a work or of the architect who constructs a building. The work or building is indebted to its author for its exterior form and the outward shape of its distinctive parts but for nothing else, because the materials out of which the work is fashioned already existed in nature. The artisan did not have to produce them but only make use of them. The nature of this causal relation is very well expressed by the relation uniting the artisan and his work. Once it has been made, the work exists independently of the artisan. Since it is not indebted to him for its being, it has no need of him in order to preserve its being.

It is precisely the same with natural beings. Each generates other beings by virtue of a form that it has itself received and of which it is not the cause. But it generates them in such a way that it produces their form but not the act of being by which their effects exist. Thus we see that an infant continues to live after the death of its father, just as a house remains standing long after the

¹⁴"Hoc vera nomen causa importat influxum quemdam ad esse causati," *In Metaph.* 5.1 [ed. Cathala-Spiazzi, p. 208, n. 751]. This is why the operation of a being (second act) is only an extension of the act which this being is: "Actus autem est duplex: primus et secundus. Actus quidem primus est forma, et integritas rei. Actus autem secundus est operatio" (*ST* 1.48.5, resp.). The expression is not perfect because it does not extend beyond form to the act of existing. In this sense, the classical adage "operatio sequitur esse" would be better. Note that we actually know the second act first. A being operates, therefore it acts, it performs an act. It is this that we see. Tracing our way back from there by thought to the active energy that causes its act or operation, we locate its origin in the first act of existing. This act reaches being by its form and confers *esse* upon it. Thus we affirm this first act by a judgment based on its observable effect, namely, operation. See *In Metaph.* 9.8 (ed. Cathala-Spiazzi, p. 447, n. 1861); Joseph Owens, "The Causal Proposition—Principle or Conclusion?" *The Modern Schoolman* 32 (1955): 159–171, 257–270, 323–339. [The last reference appears in Laurence Shook's translation of the fifth edition of *Le Thomisme* but not in the sixth edition. It was probably added by Gilson himself.—A.M.]

builder has disappeared. In both cases we are dealing with causes that make a thing *become* what it is but do not make it exist.¹⁵

It is quite different with the relationship between things and God. First, because God is not only the cause of the form that clothes things, but of the very *esse* in virtue of which they exist, so that for them to cease for a moment to depend upon their cause would be to cease to exist at all. Second, the relationship between things and God is different because it would be somehow contradictory that God should make creatures capable of doing without him.¹⁶ It is of the essence of a creature that it have its existence from another, whereas God has his existence from himself alone and exists independently. For a creature to be able to exist even for an instant without God's assistance, it would be God.¹⁷ Thus the first effect of the providence of God over things is the immediate and permanent influence by which he assures their conservation. This influence is, in a way, only the continuance of the creative act. Any interruption of this continued creation by which God maintains things in being would send them instantly back into nothingness.¹⁸

If we go further and follow closely God's influence within things, we shall see that it extends from their existence to their causality. Since nothing exists save in virtue of the divine existence, neither can anything do anything save by virtue of the divine efficacy. Accordingly, if one being causes the existence of another being, it is only because God confers on it the power of doing so. This truth is immediately evident if we remember that *esse* is the effect proper to God; creation is his proper action and to produce *esse*, properly speaking, is to create.¹⁹

We must go still further, however, and say that what is true of the causal efficacy of beings is equally so of their activities. God is the cause of, and the reason for, the actions of all beings. Why so? Because to act is always in some way to produce. What produces nothing does nothing. Now, we have just pointed out that every real production of being, slight as it may be, belongs properly to God alone. Consequently, every action presupposes God as its cause. Let us add to this that no being acts save in virtue of the powers at its disposal and by applying to their effects the natural forces that it can utilize. Neither the forces nor the powers come, in the first instance, from the being itself but from God,

¹⁵To this corresponds the technical distinction between a *causa fiendi* and a *causa essendi*. When a man begets a man apart from himself, he is his *causa fiendi*. When the sun produces light, and the light ceases just as soon as the sun disappears, it is its *causa essendi*.

¹⁶SCG 2.25 [19].

¹⁷ST 1.104.1, resp.

¹⁸"Nec aliter res (Deus) in esse conservat, nisi in quantum eis continue influit esse; sicut ergo antequam res essent, potuit eis non communicare esse, et sic eas non facere; ita postquam jam factae sunt, potest eis non influere esse, et sic esse desinerent, quod est eas in nihilum redigere" (ibid. 3, resp.).

¹⁹SCG 3.66.

who, as the universal cause, is their author, so that, in the last analysis, it is God who is the principal cause of all the actions performed by his creatures.²⁰ They are in his hands as tools in the hands of a workman.

Consequently, God is present everywhere and acting efficaciously as the supreme Act of Being (*Esse*). He is intimately present to the very *esse* from which the actions of creatures flow. He sustains them, animates them from within, guides them in their actions, applies them to their acts, so that they neither are nor do anything except through him, just as they would not exist without him. This is the teaching of the Bible: "Do not I fill heaven and earth says the Lord."²¹ Or, again: "If I ascend into heaven, you are there; if I descend into hell, you are present." It must also be the necessary conclusion to which we are led by the notion of a God who is the universal cause of all being. From this perspective, the entire world is but a unique instrument in the hands of its creator.

At this point, when Thomas seems to be dissolving beings in the divine omnipotence and submerging their activity in his efficacy, he turns sharply against his irreconcilable opponents who would strip natural things of their own actions. This is an unexpected change of direction for the unsuspecting reader of the *Summa contra Gentiles*.²² Nowhere is this characteristic trait of Thomas' method—never to weaken one truth in order to more firmly establish another—more clearly illustrated. Although we do not have to take back a single word of what we have just said, we now have to put forward a new proposition: Thomistic philosophy, in which the creature is nothing and does nothing without God, is nevertheless opposed to any doctrine that would refuse to confer upon secondary causes the full share of being and efficacy to which they are entitled.

The varieties and shades of error misrepresenting the proper activity of secondary causes are innumerable. It is not a question here of adopting or rejecting the solution of a particular difficulty, but rather of taking a position for or against an entire philosophy. Behind each of the doctrines he refutes, Thomas shows the hidden presence of Platonism. If he rejects them, it is because he feels that the philosopher's task is to interpret the real world of Aristotle, not the world of appearance described by Plato. And if he attaches himself firmly to Aristotle's real world, it is an affirmation of simple good sense, which has

²⁰"Causa autem actionis magis est id cuius virtute agitur, quam etiam illud quod agit, sicut principale agens magis agit quam instrumentum. Deus igitur principalius est causa cuiuslibet actionis quam etiam secundae causae agentes" (*SCG* 3.67 [5]).

²¹Jer 23:24 For the text following see Ps 138:8. See *SCG* 3.68; *ST* 1.8.1, resp.

²²Here is the order of the chapters [in book 3], in the course of which this change of direction takes place: ch. 65, "Quod Deus conservat res in esse"; ch. 66, "Quod nihil dat esse nisi in quantum agit in virtute divina"; ch. 67, "Quod Deus est causa operandi omnibus operantibus"; ch. 68, "Quod Deus est ubique et in omnibus rebus"; ch. 69, "De opinione eorum qui rebus naturalibus proprias subtrahunt actiones."

the last word in these matters. Causes and effects regularly produce one another in the sensible world. A warm body always warms a body that is brought near it and never chills it. A human being never begets anything but a human being. Clearly the nature of the effect produced is inseparably bound to the nature of the cause that produces it. It is this constant relationship between natural effects and their secondary causes that rules out the supposition that there is a pure and simple substitution of God's power for theirs. For if God's action were not diversified according to the different things in which it operates, the effects that it produces would not be diversified in the way that the things themselves are, and anything might produce anything.²³ Hence the existence of the laws of nature rules out the idea that God has created beings deprived of causality.

It is perhaps more remarkable that those who deny all efficacy to secondary causes in order to reserve the privilege of causality to God do no less injury to God than to things. The excellence of the work shows forth the glory of the workman, and how poor indeed would be a world entirely devoid of efficacy! In the first place, it would be an absurd world. In giving someone the principal, one does not deny the collateral. What sense would there be in creating heavy bodies incapable of moving downward? If God by giving being to things made them like to himself, he ought also to have given them this likeness by imparting to them the activity that issues from being, and consequently conferring on them actions of their own. Moreover, a universe of inert beings would imply a less perfect cause than a universe of active beings capable of communicating their perfections to one another by acting upon one another, just as God communicated to them something of his own in creating them, linked together and placed in order by the reciprocal actions they perform. The urge by which certain philosophers are driven to take everything from nature in order to glorify the creator is inspired by a good intention, but a blind one. In fact, to deprive things of actions of their own is to belittle God's goodness: "To take away the actions proper to things is to derogate from the divine goodness" (*detrahere actiones proprias rebus est divinae bonitati derogare*).²⁴

²³"Si enim nulla inferior causa, et maxime corporalis, aliquid operatur, sed Deus operatur in omnibus solus, Deus autem non variatur per hoc, quod operatur in rebus diversis, non sequetur diversus effectus ex diversitate rerum in quibus Deus operatur. Hoc autem ad sensum apparet falsum; non enim ex appositione calidi sequitur infrigidatio, sed calefactio tantum, neque ex semine hominis sequitur generatio nisi hominis; non ergo causalitas effectuum inferiorum est ita attribuenda divinae virtuti, quod subtrahatur causalitas inferiorum agentium" (*SCG* 3.69 [12]).

²⁴*Ibid.* [16]. On the Arabian and Latin adversaries whom Thomas opposes here see E. Gilson, "Pourquoi saint Thomas a critiqué saint Augustin," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen âge* 1 (1926-1927): 5-127. Maurice de Wulf has severely criticized the plan of this article in "L'augustinisme 'avicennisant'," *Revue néoscholastique de philosophie* 33 (1931): 15. He really criticizes the plan of the *Contra Gentiles* 3.69, on which my article is but a commentary.

The problem in the final analysis comes to this. We must hold firmly to two apparently contradictory truths. God does whatever creatures do, and yet creatures themselves do whatever they do. It is a question, then, of understanding how one and the same effect can proceed simultaneously from two different causes: God and the natural agent that produces it. At first sight this is incomprehensible, and most philosophers seem to have backed away from it. They could not see how one action could proceed from two causes; if a natural body is doing it, then God could not be doing it. What is more, if God is performing the action, then it is much less intelligible that a natural body can be performing it at the same time, because God's causality reaches to the very depths of being and no longer leaves anything to be produced by its effects. Indeed, the dilemma appears unavoidable, unless we are to resign ourselves to placing contradiction within the very heart of things.²⁵

Actually, the opposition metaphysics encounters here is not as complete as it seems. Perhaps at bottom it is only superficial. It would be contradictory to say that God and bodies were causes of natural effects at the same time and in the same respect. They are such at the same time, but not from the same point of view. An example will enable us to see how this is so.

When a workman produces something, he must employ tools and instruments of one kind or another. The choice of instruments is justified by their form, and he himself does nothing more than move them in order to put them to work and make them produce their effects. When an axe cuts a piece of wood, the axe is certainly the cause of the effect produced. However, we can say with even greater reason that the workman who wields the axe also causes the effect. We cannot divide the effect into two parts, one coming from the axe, the other from the workman. The axe produces the whole effect and so does the workman. The real difference is that the two of them do not produce it in the same way, for the axe only cuts the wood by virtue of the efficacy that the workman imparts to it. He is the first and principal cause, while the axe is the secondary and instrumental cause of the effect.

We must conceive an analogous relationship between God, the first cause, and the natural bodies that we see acting before our eyes. We say "analogous relationship" because God's influence upon the secondary cause penetrates far more deeply into it than does the influence of the workman into his tool. When God gives existence to things, at the same time he confers upon them their form, their movement and their efficacy. Nevertheless, this efficacy belongs to them from the moment they receive it, and consequently these actions are carried out by them. The lowliest being acts and produces its effect, even though it does so by virtue of all the higher causes to whose action it is subjected, and whose efficacy is transmitted to it by degrees. At the head of this series is God,

²⁵SCG 3.70 [1].

the total and immediate cause of all the effects produced and of all the activity released therein. At the bottom comes the natural body, the immediate cause of the action that it performs, even though it only performs it by virtue of the efficacy conferred upon it by God.

When we examine from this perspective the actions and movements continually performed in the universe, we notice that no part of this double causality can be considered superfluous. God's action is necessary to produce natural effects, since secondary causes owe all their efficacy to the first cause, which is God. But neither is it not superfluous that God, who can produce all natural effects himself, should accomplish them by means of certain other causes. The intermediaries that he has chosen are not needed by him because he would be unable to do without them. Rather, it is for themselves that he willed them. The existence of secondary causes points to no lack in his power but to the immensity of his goodness.²⁶ The universe as represented by Thomas is not a mass of inert bodies passively moved by a force passing through them, but a collection of active beings each enjoying the efficacy delegated to it by God along with its existence. At the first beginnings of a world like this, we have to place not so much a force being exercised as an infinite goodness being communicated. Love is the unfathomable source of all causality.

Perhaps this is also the best point from which to view the general economy of the Thomistic philosophy of nature. Seen from without, this doctrine appears to some of its opponents as a defense of the rights of creatures against those of God. This accusation is the more dangerous in that Aquinas is obviously inspired by Aristotle, and thus appears to be yielding to the influence of pagan naturalism. Those who took their own interpretation to the extreme have never forgiven him for introducing *natures* and *efficacious causes* between natural effects and God.²⁷

Seen from within, Thomas' metaphysics seems, on the contrary, to extol a God whose principal attribute would not be power but goodness. Certainly, productive fecundity and efficacy are something divine. If God did not communi-

²⁶"Patet etiam quod, si res naturalis producat proprium effectum, non est superfluum quod Deus illum producat. Quia res naturalis non producit ipsum, nisi in virtute divina. Neque est superfluum, si Deus per seipsum potest omnes effectus naturales producere, quod per quasdam alias causas producantur. Non enim hoc est ex insufficientia divinae virtutis, sed ex immensitate bonitatis ipsius per quam suam similitudinem rebus communicare voluit, non solum quantum ad hoc quod essent, sed etiam quantum ad hoc quod aliorum causae essent" (*SCG* 3.70 [6,7]).

²⁷From this point of view the philosophy of Malebranche is the absolute antithesis of Thomism. For Malebranche, God alone is a cause and he reserves efficacy exclusively to himself. Moreover, the preface to *Recherche de la vérité* opens with a protest against the Aristotelian, and therefore pagan, inspiration of Thomistic scholasticism. See the two rich and suggestive volumes of Henri Gouhier, *La vocation de Malebranche* (Paris: Vrin, 1926), and *La philosophie de Malebranche et son expérience religieuse* (Paris: Vrin, 1926).

cate them outside of himself to the multitude of beings he has created, none of his creatures would be able to provide itself with the least portion of these attributes; in short, all efficacy originally participates in his power. Or better, divine power is so perfect and eminent in itself that we can readily imagine how a religious soul will be very slow to attribute to itself the slightest share of it. But when studying the nature of the creative act, we saw that it originates in the infinite expansiveness of the Good. Consequently, the notion of a universe willed by a Good that communicates itself could not be that of a universe willed by a power that reserves efficacy to itself. Whatever this power would have the right to keep for itself, goodness would wish to give away, and the higher the gift, the higher will also be the brand of love with which it will be able to satisfy itself. The profound metaphysical intuition that ties together these two main pieces of the system is that a universe like Aristotle's demands as its cause a God like the God of Dionysius the Areopagite. Our highest glory is to be the coadjutors of God through the causality we wield: *Dei sumus adiutores*.²⁸ Or, as Dionysius also says, what is most divine is to be God's cooperators: *omnium divinius est Dei cooperatorem fieri*.²⁹ Thus the efficacy of secondary causes flows from the pristine outpouring of creatures that renders this cooperation possible. No other kind of universe would be equally worthy of infinite goodness.³⁰

One of the first consequences of this doctrine is to clarify the true meaning of what is called the "naturalism" or "physicalism" of Thomas Aquinas. If no philosophy is so preoccupied with safeguarding the rights of creatures, it is because it sees this as the only way to safeguard the rights of God. Far from encroaching upon the creator's privileges, all the perfections attributed to secondary causes can only increase his glory, since he is their first cause, and this is a new occasion for glorifying him. It is because there is causality in nature that we can go back step by step to the first cause, which is God. In a universe stripped of secondary causes, the most obvious proofs of the existence of God would be impossible, and his highest metaphysical attributes would consequently remain hidden from us. On the other hand, the whole host of beings, natures, causes and activities that the universe presents to us can no longer be regarded as existing or acting for itself. If God has conferred efficacy upon them as the sign of their divine origin, then it is a constant effort to assimilate themselves with God who sets them to work and moves them to act. Beneath each natural form there lies hidden a desire to imitate by action the creative fecundity and pure actuality of God. This desire is unconscious in the domain of bodies, but it is the same straining toward God that will blossom forth into the moral life with human intelligence and will. Thus, if there is a physics of bodies, it is

²⁸St. Paul, 1 Cor 3:9.

²⁹*De caelesti hierarchia* 3 [PL 122: 174]. Text cited in SCG 3.21 [8].

³⁰See *Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy*, pp. 128-147.

because there is first a mystical theology of the divine life. The natural laws of the communication of motion imitate the pristine creative outpouring from God, and the efficacy of secondary causes is but the analogue of his fecundity.

As soon as we realize the significance of this principle, all shadow of anti-nomy between God's perfection and that of created beings disappears. A universe that is only willed by God as resembling him will never be too beautiful nor too powerful. It will never realize itself too perfectly. It will never tend too vehemently toward its own perfection in order to reproduce, as it should, the image of its divine model. "Anything that tends toward its own perfection, tends toward the divine likeness" (*Unumquodque tendens in suam perfectionem tendit in divinam similitudinem*).³¹ This is a principle of inexhaustible fruitfulness in Thomistic philosophy because it governs both human morality and at the same time the metaphysics of nature: Let us be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect.

Looked at in this way, Thomas' real reason for criticizing previous metaphysics is easily understood. He sees all philosophies, save Aristotle's from which he drew his inspiration,³² falling into two classes depending on the two ways of denying to secondary causes the efficacy that is rightfully theirs. On the one hand, there is Platonism and its derivatives: the doctrines of Avicenna, Ibn Gebirol, etc. According to them, anything new appearing in the world of bodies comes from outside. Hence it is a question here of a basic "extrinsicism," whether the exterior cause of forms or actions of the sensible world resides in the efficacy of the Ideas of Plato, the separated Intelligence of Avicenna, or the divine will of Gebirol. In every case, the problem is amenable to the same solution, whether it is a question of explaining the physical actions of bodies, the cognitive activity of the mind, or the moral acts of the will. In the three cases the entire efficacy resides in an extrinsic agent that imparts from without the sensible form to the body, the intelligible form to the intellect, or virtue to the will.

On the other hand, there is what could be called "Anaxagorism"* under all its forms. Here we have an "intrinsicism" no less radical than the "extrinsicism" we have just been discussing, and its result is the same. In this second case, the various effects come, not from outside, but on the contrary they are already preformed and realized virtually from within. There are seminal reasons included in matter and developed under the stimulation of an exterior agent. There are innate ideas residing in the soul, which blossom forth of themselves

³¹SCG 3.21 [6].

³²We are here speaking of Aristotle as Thomas looked at him, or wished to do so. If, as we have suggested, Thomas went far beyond the Aristotelian notion of motive cause to that of a truly efficient cause, it was Aristotle's Platonism he was effectively leaving behind on this matter.

* [A reference to the philosophy of the Presocratic philosopher Anaxagoras, who taught that all things are present in everything.—A.M.]

under the gentle shock of sensation. There are natural virtues, rough cast initially in the will, which perfect themselves spontaneously as life provides them with an occasion for doing so. In the first case the secondary cause did nothing at all because it received everything from outside. In the second case, it does very little more, since the effects it seems to produce are already virtually present, and its action is limited to removing the obstacles standing in the way of its development.³³

Although these errors are opposed to each other, they are in fact closely related and that is why some philosophers will find a way to combine them. An example are the Augustinians for whom knowledge comes to the soul from outside by way of divine illumination, while sensible forms develop in matter from within, thanks to seminal reasons hidden therein. Actually, we have here two different ways of detracting from the perfection of the universe, whose very structure is fashioned from the order and the connection between causes. All causes are indebted to the infinite goodness of the first cause, both for the fact that they exist and that they are causes. We shall now verify this in the particularly important case of the human composite.

³³“Utraque autem istarum opinionum est absque ratione. Prima enim opinio excludit causas propinquas, dum effectus omnes in inferioribus provenientes, solis causis attribuit: in quo derogatur ordini universi, qui ordine et connexione causarum contextitur, dum prima causa ex eminentia bonitatis suae rebus aliis confert non solum quod sint, sed etiam quod causae sint. Secunda opinio in idem quasi inconveniens redit: cum enim removens prohibens non sit nisi movens per accidens, ... si inferiora agentia nihil aliud faciunt quam producere de occulto in manifestum, removendo impedimenta quibus formae et habitus virtutum et scientiarum occultabantur, sequitur quod omnia inferiora agentia non agant nisi per accidens” (*De ver.* 11.1, resp.).

PART II. Chapter Four

The Human Person

At the summit of the world of forms are the Intelligences completely separated from matter, known as angels. At the bottom are forms entirely embedded in matter. In between are human souls that are neither separated forms nor forms whose existence is bound up with the existence of matter. Let us begin with an exact statement of their condition.

The notion of soul is much wider than that of the human soul. In its broad sense the soul is defined as the first act of an organized body capable of performing the functions of life.¹ Thus, like all forms, a soul is an act. Like every act, it is not directly known to us; we simply infer it from its effects and affirm it by a judgment.² The first effect to strike the observer is the presence within it of centers of spontaneous movement. Bodies are of two kinds. Some are by nature inert; others, on the contrary, are seen to grow, to change, and in the case of the most perfect among them, to move about in space with a kind of inner spontaneity. The latter are called “living beings,” a name extending to vegetables, animals, and humans. Since they perform actions proper to themselves, they must have their own principle of action, and this principle is called a soul.

We must not regard a living being as a machine, inert in itself but with a soul as its mover. This is what Descartes wanted to substitute for Aristotle’s notion of a living being. For Thomas Aquinas, as for Aristotle, the soul does not just make a body move; it first makes it a body. A corpse is not a body. The soul makes it exist as a body. It is the soul that brings together and organizes what we call today the biochemical elements (organic or even inorganic elements), but never *formless*, in order to make a living body from them. In this full sense, the soul is the body’s *first act*; or in other words, that which makes it to be. Thanks to this first act, the living thing can exercise all its secondary acts, the vital functions that are its operations.

The soul, the form of organized matter, is immaterial and incorporeal, as is the very humblest of forms.³ But there is a vast difference between the conditions of souls in the various degrees of the hierarchy of living things. The human soul, under discussion here, not only exercises the physiological functions of every living thing but also cognitive activities. It especially knows the existence and properties of bodies. Now, in order for it to know something, it

¹*In De anima* 2.2 (ed. Pirotta, p. 83, n. 233 [Leonine ed. 45, 2.1: 72.358–365]).

²*Ibid.* 2.3 (p. 91, n. 253 [2.3: 79.106–127]).

³*Ibid.* 2.1 (pp. 83–84, nn. 217–234 [2.1: 69.142–73.392]). See *ST* 1.75.1, resp.; *SCG* 2.65.

itself must not be that thing. To be exact, in order to be able to know a given genus of beings, the knower must not be one of the species of beings in that genus. For example, when a sick man has a bitter tongue he finds that everything he eats is bitter. He can no longer distinguish other tastes. Similarly, if the human soul were a body, it would not know other bodies. Human knowledge is the activity of a form that, insofar as it is fitted for knowing bodies, is essentially foreign to everything material. Since the human soul performs functions in which the body has no part, it is a form in which the body does not participate. To act by itself it must exist by itself, because being is the cause of action, and everything acts in proportion to its existence. What exists by itself is a substance. Hence the human soul is an immaterial substance—a conclusion that had to be demonstrated.⁴

To understand that the human soul is an immaterial substance is to see at the same time that it is immortal. Properly speaking, the immortality of the soul need not be demonstrated, at least for anyone who knows its nature. It is a kind of evidence *per se nota* and follows from the definition of a rational soul, just as it follows from the definition of the whole that the whole is greater than its part. However, there is sometimes much to be said for pointing out something that really needs no demonstration.⁵

To be immortal is to be indestructible. Now, what is destructible can only be destroyed by itself (*per se*) or by accident (*per accidens*). But things lose their existence in the same way they acquired it. They lose it *per se* if, being substances, they exist *per se*. They lose it *per accidens* if, being accidents, they only exist *per accidens*. Since the soul is a substance, it exists *per se* and hence it cannot be corrupted *per accidens*. But this is what would happen if the death of the body entailed the death of the soul, as happens in the case of plants and animals deprived of reason. The rational soul, as a substance, is not affected by the dissolution of the body, which only exists because of the soul, whereas the soul does not exist because of the body. If there is anything that can cause the soul to be destroyed, we must look for it in the soul itself.

It is impossible to find it there. Every substance that is a form is indestructible by definition. Whatever belongs to a being by virtue of its definition cannot be taken away from it. Now, just as matter is potency by definition, so form is

⁴The very nature of this demonstration implies that the conclusion is valid for the human soul alone, not for the soul of animals. Animals are sentient but have no intellect. Now, sensation implies participation of the body. Since the sensitive soul of the animal does not operate separately, it does not subsist apart from the body. Accordingly, it is not a substance. See *ST* 1.74.4, resp., 1.75.4, resp.; *SCG* 2.82.

⁵Thomas always held that according to Aristotle himself the soul of each person is a spiritual substance that, although united to a body, is capable of existing without it. See E. Gilson, "Autour de Pomponazzi. Problématique de l'immortalité de l'âme en Italie au début du XVI^e siècle," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen âge* 28 (1962): 163–279.

act by definition. Hence, just as matter is a possibility of existence, so form confers* an act of existing. This is easily seen in the case of bodies, because they acquire being when they receive their form and lose being when they lose their form. But if we can conceive of a body separated from its form and from the act of existing that the form confers upon it, we cannot conceive of a subsistent form capable of being separated from the act of existing it confers. Consequently, as long as a rational soul remains itself, it exists. This is what we mean when we say it is immortal.⁶

Though a subsistent form, the soul is subject to the same imperfection as the angelic substance. By definition the soul is a form in the totality of its being. If we claimed to discover some matter in it, this matter would not be the soul itself but the body that the soul animates.⁷ Nevertheless, it is true that the soul, like the angel, is composed of potency and act. In it, moreover, existence is distinct from essence. Unlike God, who is pure act, the soul only possesses the degree of being that its finite nature calls for, according to the law that the degree of being of each creature is in proportion to the capacity of the essence that participates in it.⁸

There is another way of distinguishing souls from separated intelligences, which we already know are infinitely removed from God. The human soul is neither matter nor a body, but by its essence it can be united with a body. No doubt some will object that the body united to the soul is not of the essence of the soul considered by itself. Consequently, they will say that the human soul, considered precisely as a soul, is a pure intellectual form of the same species as angels. But this is to fail to see clearly the new degree of imperfection that is here being introduced into the hierarchy of created beings. In saying that the human soul is naturally capable of union with a body, we do not simply mean that the soul can be accidentally united to the body by a chance encounter without any basis for it. On the contrary, association with a body is essential to the soul. We are no longer dealing with a pure intelligence, like the angelic substance, but with a simple intellect, that is, with a principle of knowledge that needs a body in order to carry out its own function. Hence the human soul occupies a lower degree of intellectuality in comparison with an angel.⁹ The truth of this conclusion will become clearer when we have shown how the soul is united to the body to make up the human composite.

* [By inadvertence the text reads "is" instead of "confers."—A.M.]

⁶ST 1.75. 6, resp. This justification of the immortality of the soul is a transposition of a proof from the *Phaedo* seen through Augustine's *De immortalitate animae* 12.19 (PL 32: 1031). On the natural desire to exist as a sign of immortality see ST 1.175.6, resp. and SCG 2.55 and 79. See Jules Martin, *Saint Augustin* (Paris: Alcan, 1923), pp. 160–161.

⁷On the contrary, see Bonaventure, *In Sent.* 2.17.1.2, concl. [Quaracchi ed. 2: 414].

⁸ST 1.75.5, ad 4; *De spirit. creat.* 1, resp.; *De anima* 6, resp.

⁹ST 1.75.7, ad 3.

What is this body, and what kind of beings are these composites? We should not think of the body as evil in itself. When the Manicheans considered matter to be evil and assigned it another creative principle than God, they were not only guilty of heresy but they also made a philosophical mistake. If matter were evil in itself it would be nothing; and if it is something, to the extent to which it is, it is not evil. Like everything else in the created world matter is good and created by God.¹⁰

What is more, not only is matter good in itself, but it is a good and a source of good for the forms that are united to it. It would be completely foreign to the Thomistic perspective to regard the material universe as the result of some calamity, and the union of the soul and body as the consequence of a fall. In a universe created by pure goodness all its parts are so many reflections of God's infinite perfection. Origen's teaching that God created bodies in order to imprison sinful souls in them is most alien to Thomas' thought. The body is not the prison of the soul, but a servant and instrument placed in its service. The union of soul and body is not a punishment of the soul, but a salutary bond through which the human soul will reach its full perfection.

This is not a theory invented expressly for the particular case of the soul. Rather, it governs the case of the soul through a metaphysical principle of universal import: the less perfect is ordered to the more perfect as to its end; in short, the less perfect is for the sake of the more perfect, not in opposition to it. Within the individual each organ exists for the sake of its function, as the eye for sight; and each lower organ exists for a higher organ and function, as the senses exist for the intellect and the lungs for the heart. The array of these organs, in its turn, exists only with a view to the perfection of the whole living thing, as matter for form and the body for the soul, for the parts are, as it were, the matter of the whole. Now, it is exactly the same if we consider the disposition of individual beings within this whole. Each creature exists for its own activity and perfection. Less noble creatures exist for the more noble. Individuals exist for the perfection of the universe and the universe itself exists for God. Hence the reason for the existence of a given substance or mode of existence is never to be found in an evil but in a good. Let us now try to find out just what good the human body can bring to the rational soul that animates it.¹¹

¹⁰*De pot.* 3.5; *ST* 1.65.1; *SCG* 2.6 and 15.

¹¹*ST* 1.47.2, resp. and 1.65.2, resp. We are here very close to the ultimate basis of individuation. Without actually discussing them, let us note that the various criticisms to the effect that it is impossible to save personality in Thomas' system, in which individuation is through matter, misunderstand a basic Thomistic principle, namely, that matter makes possible the multiplicity of certain forms but is itself there only in view of these forms. We naively imagine a soul by itself, then a body by itself, and we are scandalized that a substance as excellent as the soul can be individualized by a bit of matter. In fact, the body only exists by the soul, and both together only exist by the unity of the existential act that causes them, penetrates

Since final causes reside in the essences of things and consequently in their forms, we should look to the soul for the reason for the body's existence. If the soul were an intelligence of the same degree of perfection as an angel, it would be a pure form existing and operating without the assistance of an exterior instrument, fully realizing its own definition and concentrating in a single individuality the total perfection of an essence. Recall that each angel completely fills one of the possible degrees of participation in God's perfection. The human soul, on the contrary, situated lower on the ladder of beings, still belongs to the order of forms that do not possess enough perfection to exist separately. While each angelic intelligence exists apart with a clearly defined degree of being, there does not and cannot exist anywhere a unique form corresponding to the human soul's degree of perfection and realizing it fully. Now, it is a principle that every unattainable unity is imitated by a multiplicity. Individual human souls, whose continual succession assures the perpetuation of the species, allow the human degree of perfection to be always represented in the universe. But although the human representation of God's perfection demanded by the order of creation is safeguarded in this way, each soul, taken individually, is only an incomplete realization of an ideal type. Insofar as it fulfills its own definition, it is accordingly in act and enjoys being what it ought to be. Insofar as it only realizes its definition imperfectly, it is in potency, that is, it is not all that it could be, and it is even in a state of privation because it feels that it ought to be what it is not.

Thus a human soul or any bodily form is a kind of incomplete perfection, but it can be completed and it feels the need or experiences the desire for it. This is why the form, tormented by the privation of what it lacks, is the principle of the activity of natural things. Each act of existing, to the extent that it is, strives to be. It only acts in order to preserve itself in existence and to assert itself more completely. Now, the human intelligence is the faintest light in the order of knowledge. Its light is so weak that no intelligible object appears in it; left to itself or placed before a pure intelligible object, like the kind angels easily perceive, it would be blind and perceive nothing. It is an incomplete form, fundamentally incapable of completing itself by its own resources. It is in fact in potency to all the perfection that it lacks but, having no means to acquire it, it is incapable of the activity that would complete it. So the soul would be condemned to sterility and inaction unless it furnished itself with an instrument, also incomplete by itself, that the soul will organize and animate from within, and that will enable the soul to enter into relationship with an intelligible object that it can take within itself. That it may become conscious of what it lacks and

them, and contains them. See the basic text *De anima* 1, resp. and the remark: "Unumquodque secundum idem habet esse et individuationem" (*ibid.*, ad 2). The substance is individual by itself, since it is the same thing for it to be itself and to exist.

that, urged on by the sense of its emptiness, it may begin to seek out the intelligible residing in the sensible, human intelligence must be a soul and must profit from the advantages that its union with a body will bring to it. Let us see how this union can be achieved.

First, let us lay down a condition that must be satisfied by any solution of the problem. Since the specific act of an intelligible soul is intellectual knowledge, we must find a mode of union of body and soul allowing us to attribute intellectual knowledge not to the soul alone but to the entire human being. This requirement is certainly legitimate. Every human being knows from inner experience that it is itself and not just a part of itself that knows. So we have only two hypotheses to choose from. Either a human being is no more than the intellectual soul, in that case it is self-evident that intellectual knowledge belongs to the whole person. Or else the soul is only a part of the human being, and in this case there must be a sufficiently close union between soul and body that the activity of the soul may be attributed to the human person.¹² Now, we cannot hold that the soul alone is the human being. A human being may be defined as that which performs the function of a human being, and a human being not only performs intellectual functions but sensory functions as well. These latter clearly cannot be done without modifications occurring in a bodily organ. Sight, for example, supposes a change in the pupil by the species of color, and the same holds for the other senses.¹³ If sensation, then, is truly a human act, even though it is not the defining human act, it is obvious that the human person is not just a soul but some kind of composite of soul and body.¹⁴ What is the nature of this union?

We must at once eliminate the hypothesis that the soul and body make up a mixed being whose powers participate in both the spiritual and corporeal substances that constitute it. In a real mixture the component parts no longer exist except virtually, after the mixture is complete, because if they actually existed, it would not be a mixture but a simple juxtaposition. Thus in a mixture we do not find any of the elements that compose it. Now, since intellectual substances are not composed of matter and form, they are simple and consequently indestructible.¹⁵ Hence they could not constitute, along with the body, a mixture in which their own nature would no longer exist.¹⁶

In opposition to this doctrine, which identifies the soul with the body to the point of negating its very essence, we encounter another that makes such a radical distinction between the two that nothing remains but an external contact and

¹²ST 1.76.1, resp.

¹³Ibid. 1.75.3, resp.

¹⁴Ibid. 4, resp.

¹⁵SCG 2.55 [2].

¹⁶Ibid. 56 [3].

the relationship of mere contiguity. This is Plato's position. He would have the intellect united to the body only as its mover. This sort of union is insufficient for the action of the intellect to be attributed to the whole composite of the intellect and the body. The action of the mover is not ascribed to the thing moved except by way of an instrument, as when the carpenter's action is attributed to the saw. If intellectual knowledge is imputed to Socrates himself only because it is the action of the intellect moving his body, then it can be attributed to Socrates only by way of an instrument. Now, in this case Socrates would be a bodily instrument, since he is composed of soul and body. And, as intellectual knowledge requires no bodily instrument, it may be legitimately concluded that, in making the soul the mover of the body, we would not be allowed to attribute intellectual activity to the entire human being.

It is true that sometimes the action of one part can be attributed to the whole, as when we attribute to the human being the act of the eye that sees, but the action of one part is never ascribed to another part except incidentally. We do not say that the hand sees because the eye does. If, therefore, Socrates and his intellect are two parts of the same whole, joined as a thing moved to its mover, it follows that the action of his intellect cannot, properly speaking, be attributed to the whole Socrates. If, on the other hand, Socrates himself is a whole, composed of the union of his intellect with the rest of what goes to make up Socrates, without his intellect being united to the body other than as its mover, it follows that Socrates has only an accidental unity and an accidental being, which we cannot rightly say about the human composite.¹⁷

Actually, we here have an error that we have already refuted. Plato only wished to unite the soul to the body as its mover because he did not place the human essence in the composite of soul and body but in the soul alone, using the body as an instrument. That is why we find him saying that the soul is in the body as a pilot is in his ship. From a Platonic point of view, to say that a human being is composed of a soul and body would amount to thinking of Peter as a composite formed of his humanity and his clothes, whereas on the contrary Peter is a man who uses his clothes, as a man is a soul that uses his body. This doctrine is clearly unacceptable. An animal and a human being are in fact natural beings, that is, physical composites of matter and form. This would not be true in the hypothesis that the body and its parts would not belong to the essence of a human being or an animal, for the soul in itself is in no way sensible or material. If we remember, moreover, that besides those acts, like pure knowing, in which the body does not share, the soul exercises a great number in common with the body, such as sensations and emotions, we shall be led to the conclusion that a human being is not merely a soul using a body as a mover

¹⁷ST 1.75.4, resp. See *ibid.* 1.76.1; *SCG* 2.56 [10].

uses what it moves, but that the human person is the true whole, the unity of soul and body.¹⁸

So there remains but one possible mode of union between the soul and the body—that proposed by Aristotle when he makes the intellectual principle the form of the body. If this hypothesis were verified, knowing would rightly be attributed to the human being, the substantial unity of soul and body. We cannot doubt that this is actually the case. That by which a being passes from potency to act is the proper form and act of this being. Now, the living body is only alive in potency until the soul has come to inform it. Only while it is vivified and animated by its soul does the human body really deserve its name. The eye or arm of a corpse is no more a real eye or arm than if painted on canvas or sculpted in stone.¹⁹ If the rational soul is what places the body in the species of human bodies, it is the soul that confers upon it its actual being. The soul, then, is really its form, as we had conjectured.²⁰ Not only can we deduce this conclusion from a consideration of the human body that the soul animates and vivifies, but also from the definition of the human species taken in itself. We know the nature of a being by its activity. Now, the specific activity of the human being, considered as such, is intellectual knowledge. Through it humans surpass in dignity all the other animals. It is for this reason that we see Aristotle placing our sovereign happiness in this characteristic operation.²¹ Hence it is this principle of intellectual activity that puts us in the species in which we find ourselves. But the species of a being is always determined by its proper form. Therefore the intellectual principle, or human soul, is the proper form of the human being.²²

However, some philosophers find it difficult to accept this conclusion. They find it hard to admit that an intellectual form of great dignity like the human soul is immediately united to the matter of the body. In order to reduce what might be regarded as shocking in such a disproportion, they introduce between the highest substantial form of the human being—that is, the intellectual principle itself, and the prime matter it informs—a number of intermediary forms. Matter, as subjected to its first form, then becomes the subject of the second form, and so on until the last form. In this hypothesis the proximate subject of the rational soul would not be corporeal matter pure and simple, but the body already informed by the sensitive soul.²³

¹⁸SCG 2.57 [5]; *De anima* 1, resp.

¹⁹*De anima*, 1, resp.

²⁰SCG 2.57 [14].

²¹*Eth. Nic.* 10.7, 1177a12.

²²In *De anima* 2.4 [ed. Pirotta, pp. 97–98, nn. 271–278 (Leonine ed. 45.1: 85.155–86.260)]; *ST* 1.76.1; *De spirit. creat.* 2, resp.

²³See Maurice de Wulf, *Le traité des formes de Gilles de Lessines* (Louvain: Institut Supérieur de Philosophie, 1901), pp. 37–42. Insofar as the actual state of the texts permits us to

This opinion is easily explained from the point of view of the Platonic philosophers. They begin from the principle that there is a hierarchy of genera and species, and that within this hierarchy the higher degrees are always intelligible in themselves and independently of the lower degrees. Thus man in general is intelligible in itself and abstracting from this or that particular man, animal is intelligible independently of man, and so on. These philosophers reason as though there always existed in reality a distinct and separate being corresponding to each of the abstract concepts our intellect can form. Thus, seeing that it is possible to consider mathematics in abstraction from sensible things, the Platonists posited the existence of mathematical beings existing outside the sensible world. Similarly, they posited man-in-himself above particular human beings, and they moved on up to being, the One, and the Good, which they placed at the highest degree of things.

In thus considering universals as separated forms in which sensible beings participated, they were led to say that Socrates is an animal insofar as he participates in the idea of animal, man insofar as he participates in the idea of man, and this amounts to placing in him a multiplicity of hierarchical forms. If, however, we consider things from the point of view of sensible reality, which is that of Aristotle and true philosophy, we shall see that this cannot be true. Among all the predicates that can be attributed to things, there is one belonging to them in a particularly intimate and immediate fashion, namely, being itself. Since it is the form that confers on matter its actual being, it is absolutely necessary that the form from which that matter holds its being belong to it immediately and before anything else. Now, it is the substantial form that gives substantial being to matter. Accidental forms give to the things they inform a simply relative and accidental being such-and-such. They make them a white being or a colored being, but they do not make them a being. A form that does not give substantial being to matter but is merely added to an already existing matter by reason of a preceding form, cannot be considered a substantial form. This amounts to saying that it is by definition impossible to insert a number of intermediary substantial forms between the substantial form and its matter.²⁴

If this is true, we can posit only one substantial form in each individual. To this single substantial form, which is the human form, man owes not only his being man but also his being animal, living, body, substance and being. This can be explained as follows: Any being that acts impresses its own resemblance in the matter on which it acts. This resemblance is what is called a form. Now, it can be observed that the greater the dignity of an active and operative power,

judge, this conception can be attributed to Alexander of Hales, *Summa theologica* 2.63.4 [cited by de Wulf, p. 39, n. 2]. Bonaventure's position is open to discussion. See Eduard Lutz, *Die Psychologie Bonaventuras, nach den Quellen dargestellt* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1909), pp. 53-61.

²⁴*De anima* 9, resp.; *SCG* 2.58 [3]; *ST* 1.76.4, resp.

the greater the number of other powers it brings together and includes in itself. It does not contain them as distinct parts that would constitute it in its own perfection. Rather, it gathers them into the unity of its own perfection. Now, when something acts, the form it imprints in matter is more perfect according as the agent itself is more perfect; and since the form resembles the agent that produces it, a more perfect form must be able to accomplish by a single act as much as, and even more than, forms lower in dignity accomplish by several acts. If, for example, the form of the inanimate body gives to matter its being and its being a body, the form of the plant could also confer these on it, and it will in addition give it life. Now, let a rational soul be added, and it will be able by itself to bestow on matter being, corporeal nature and life, and in addition it will give it reason. Thus, in man as in all other animals, the coming of a more perfect form always entails the destruction of the preceding form, in such a way, however, that the second form possesses all the perfection of the preceding one.²⁵

We find at the heart of this thesis—as we have already seen several times and as a simple examination of the universe shows—that the forms of natural things are only distinguished from one another as the perfect from the more perfect. The species and forms determining them are differentiated by the greater or lesser degree of the act of existing they share. Species are like numbers. Add or subtract a unit and the species is changed. Better still, we can say with Aristotle that the vegetative form is in the sensory form, the sensory form in the intellectual form, just as the triangle is in the tetragon and the tetragon in the pentagon. The pentagon contains virtually the tetragon, because it has all that the tetragon has and even more; but it does not have it in such a way that what belongs to the tetragon could be distinguished in it apart from what belongs to the pentagon. Similarly, the intellectual soul contains virtually the sensory soul, since it has everything the sensory soul has and even more; but it does not have this in such a way that it is possible to distinguish two different souls in it.²⁶ Thus, one single substantial form, namely, the human intellect, suffices to constitute man in his own being, bestowing upon him at one and the same time being, body, life, sense, and intellectual knowledge.²⁷

The immediate consequences of this conclusion are very important and must be pointed out. We see, in the first place, why the word “man” cannot properly mean either the human body or human soul, but the composite of soul and body taken as a whole. If the soul is the form of the body, it constitutes with the body a physical composite of the same nature as all other composites of matter and form. In this case, it is not the form alone that constitutes the species but

²⁵ST 1.118.2, ad 2.

²⁶*De spirit. creat.* 3, resp.

²⁷*De anima* 9, resp.

the form and matter in their unity.²⁸ So we are justified in considering the human composite as one single being and rightly attributing intellectual knowledge to it. It is not the body alone, nor even the soul alone, but the man, who knows. The union of soul and body is so close that the soul penetrates or envelopes the body to the point of being wholly present in each of its parts.²⁹ This is self-evident, if the soul is truly the form of the body. It must be added that the union of soul and body is substantial and not merely accidental. Clarifying more precisely the meaning of this statement, we shall be able to specify the exact position occupied by the human soul in the hierarchy of created beings.

An accidental composition is one that unites an accident to an underlying subject. A substantial composition is one that results from the union of matter with the form investing it.³⁰ And the kind of union established between the beings under consideration is very different in the case of these two compositions. Accidental union amounts to grafting one essence upon another that could have existed without it. Substantial union, on the contrary, makes one complete substance of two beings, each of which is incapable of existing without the other. Matter and form are incomplete realities, considered in themselves, but which by reason of their union make up one complete substance.

This is the exact relation of the human intellectual soul to the body it animates. Aquinas expressed this relation by saying that the human soul is one part of man and the body another part.³¹ This is what is meant by those who say that, according to Aquinas, the human soul and body are two incomplete substances that, when united, form the complete substance, man.

This second formula is not the better one. It tends to overindulge our natural tendency for the oversimplified Thomism we know; one thing for each concept, one concept for each thing. If there were a rule to this effect, we should in this case be confronted with an exception, but there is no such rule. The substantial reality we are dealing with is the human being itself in its unity. It would be contradictory to imagine this being as one and yet composed of two other things, a soul and a body. Let us recall—we cannot insist too strongly on it—that the functions of the body and soul in the human composite are very unequal. If we consider the problem from the basic point of view of the act of existing, the *esse* of the soul in no way depends on that of the body. The opposite is true. The soul, as substantial form, possesses in itself its complete act of existing; and this act of existing is so ample that it suffices for the body whose act it is. Hence there is only one act of existing for the soul and the body; and

²⁸ST 1.75.4, resp.

²⁹ST 1.76.8, resp.; SCG 2.72; *De spirit. creat.* 4; *De anima* 10, resp.

³⁰ST 1.3.7, resp.; 1.76.4, sed contra; 1.85.5, ad 3; SCG 2.54 [4]; *Quodl.* 7.3, ad 1 [ed. Spiazzi, p. 142].

³¹ST 1.75.2, ad 1.

this act of existing of the composite is furnished by the soul alone.³² The unity of the human being is not a sort of adjustment binding together its component parts; it is the very unity of its act of existing.

Why, then, do we still speak of the soul as a part? Because in fact it is one. We have said several times that species differ like numbers. To be exact, the species "soul" does not exist by itself. There is no real being that is a "human soul," that is just this and nothing else. The hierarchy of real substances is as follows: angel, man, animal, plant, mineral. The human soul is not listed here because it does not constitute by itself a degree of being specifically distinct from the others. To find the soul we must look for it where it is: in a human being where it makes a body for itself, without which it is incapable of knowledge.³³ The human soul has to have a body in order to be able to exercise its specific function of knowing. Now, in order to form a complete species it must have the means of exercising the action belonging to that species. The characteristic action of the human species is rational knowledge, and what the rational soul lacks in order to exercise this activity is not intelligence but sense knowledge. Because sense knowledge requires a body, the soul must be united to a body in order to constitute, by its union with the body, the specific grade of being that is a man and to exercise his activities.

The only concrete and complete reality for fulfilling all these conditions is the human composite. Concepts of soul and body certainly designate realities and even substances, but not real subjects each of which would possess alone the wherewithal to exist without the other. A finger, an arm, a foot are substances, but they can only exist as part of the whole, the human body. So, here also, the soul is a substance, the body is a substance, yet every substance is not a distinct subject nor a distinct person.³⁴ Thus we do not have to think of the concepts of a human soul and a human body as pointing to distinct existences in reality.

Dealing correctly with such concepts is never easy, but at least Thomas Aquinas does not forget to remind us of their meaning. For example, it is as an intellect that the human soul is an immaterial substance. Still, recalling that intellectual knowledge presupposes sensation, and consequently requires the collaboration of the body, Thomas does not hesitate to say that the intellect is the form of the human body: "We must assert that the intellect, which is the principle of the intellectual act, is the form of the human body" (*necesse est dicere*

³²This is so true that Thomas' real difficulty is to avoid making the union of soul and body accidental, as it is in Plato: "Licet anima habeat esse completum, non tamen sequitur quod corpus ei accidentaliter uniatur; tum quia illud idem esse, quod est animae, communicat corpori, ut sit unum esse totius compositi; tum etiam quia, etsi possit per se subsistere, non tamen habet speciem completam; sed corpus advenit ei ad completionem speciei" (*De anima* 1, ad 1).

³³Ibid. resp.

³⁴ST 175.4, ad 2.

quod intellectus, qui est intellectualis operationis principium, sit humani corporis forma).³⁵ This is absolutely right, provided that when we say it we remember that the intellect is the form of the body through the unique act of existing whose efficacy establishes the concrete human being, body and soul, as an individual reality outside of thought. That is why, although the human soul is not man, its notion has no meaning except in its relation to the notion of man, which it connotes much as the concept of a cause connotes the concept of its effect. When Thomas proceeds in this line of thought as far as possible, he does not stop at the concept of soul but pushes on to the affirming of *esse*. To posit a human *esse* is to posit at the same time a human soul along with the body whose form it is; in a word to posit a concrete and really existing individual. Thus does it become true to say that every subject possesses individuation in the same way that it possesses existence.³⁶ Moreover, this is why the individuation of the soul survives the death of the body as surely as does the soul itself. When the body dies, it is because the soul ceases to make it exist. Why should it cease to exist? It is not the soul's body that gives the soul its being. It is rather the soul that gives the body its existence. The soul receives its existence only from God. If, then, the soul retains its being, how would it lose its individuation? "The act of being and individuation of a thing are always found together" (*Unumquodque secundum idem habet esse et individuationem*). Then, it is to the divine efficacy, not to the body, that the soul owes its act of existing in its own body; so it is to this same efficacy that it must owe its existence apart from its body. No doubt, Thomas adds in a significant remark, the individuation of the soul has some relation to its body, but its immortality is the immortality of its *esse*. The presumption is that its *esse* follows the line of its individuation.³⁷

Looked at in this way, the human soul holds an important place in the hierarchy of created beings. On the one hand, it is lowest in the order of intellects and furthest from the divine intellect (*Humanus intellectus est infimus in ordine intellectuum et maxime remotus a perfectione divini intellectus*).³⁸ On the other hand, if it is important to stress the strict dependence of the human soul on matter, it is equally important not to involve it so completely in matter that it loses its real nature. The soul is not an intelligence, but it is a principle of intellectual knowledge. Last in the order of intellects, it is first in the order of material

³⁵Ibid. 1.76.1, resp.

³⁶*Esse* is not an efficient cause; its causality is in the order of form, of which it is the act.

³⁷"Unumquodque secundum idem habet esse et individuationem Sicut igitur esse animae est a Deo sicut a principio activo, et in corpore sicut in materia, nec tamen esse animae perit pereunte corpore, ita et individuatio animae, etsi aliquam relationem habeat ad corpus, non tamen perit corpore pereunte" (*De anima* 1, ad 2).

³⁸*ST* 1.79.2, resp. "Anima enim nostra in genere intellectualium tenet ultimum locum, sicut materia prima in genere sensibilium" (*De ver.* 10. 8, resp.).

forms, and that is why we see it as the form of the human body, exercising functions in which the body could not participate.

If we could doubt that such beings—at once dependent on and independent of matter—can have a natural place in the hierarchy of created things, a rapid induction is enough to verify it. Clearly, the nobler the form and the more it dominates its bodily matter, the less deeply is it immersed therein and the more it goes beyond it in power and action. Thus the forms of the elements, which are the least of all and closest to matter, exercise no activity beyond active and passive qualities, such as rarefying, condensing and the like, which can be reduced to simple arrangements of matter. Above these forms come those of mixed bodies, whose activity is not merely reducible to that of elementary qualities. If, for example, a magnet attracts iron, it is not because of its heat or cold, but because the iron participates in the power of the heavenly bodies that places it in its proper species. Above these forms are the souls of plants, whose activity (superior to that of mineral forms) produces nourishment and growth. Next come the sensory souls of animals, whose activity extends even to a certain degree of knowledge, though this knowledge is limited to matter and is only produced by material organs. Finally, we come to human souls which, surpassing in nobility all the preceding forms, must rise above matter by an operative power in which the body does not participate. This, precisely, is the intellect.³⁹

Thus is verified once again the continuity of order that binds to the creative act the universe it produced: “If the human soul, inasmuch as it is united to the body as a form, has an act of existing that transcends the body and does not depend on it, obviously the soul itself is established on the boundary line of corporeal and separate substances” (*Si anima humana, in quantum unitur corpori ut forma, habet esse elevatum supra corpus, non dependens ab eo, manifestum est quod ipsa est in confinio corporalium et separatarum substantiarum constituta*).⁴⁰ The transition that the separated substances formed between God and man, human souls make in their turn between pure intelligences and bodies deprived of intelligence. Thus we always move from one extreme to another by way of some mean. Keeping in mind this guiding principle of our study, we shall now examine in detail the workings of the human composite.

³⁹*De anima* 1, resp.; *ST* 1.76.1, resp.

⁴⁰*De anima* 1, resp.

PART II. Chapter Five

Life and the Senses

There exists in the human person but one substantial form and consequently but one soul, which provides the person with reason, senses, movement and life. Thus the one soul displays many powers, which is only natural given our place in the created order. Lower beings are incapable of achieving complete perfection, but they manage to reach a mediocre degree of excellence by means of a number of movements. There are higher beings that can acquire complete perfection by means of a large number of movements. Still higher beings reach their complete perfection by a small number of movements. The highest are those that possess their perfection without making any movement at all in order to acquire it. Persons with the poorest health are never able to be truly well, but they maintain a precarious state of health by taking a number of medicines. More satisfactory is the state of those who achieve perfect health by using many medications. Even more satisfactory is the state of those who achieve the same result by means of a few medicines. Completely satisfactory is the state of those who are always well without taking any medicines at all. Similarly, things lower than humans lay claim to some particular perfections by a small number of fixed and definite actions. Human beings, on the contrary, can acquire a universal and perfect good, since they attain the sovereign good. Yet they are the lowest degree of beings capable of reaching beatitude because they are the least of intellectual creatures. Hence it is fitting that the human soul should acquire its specific good by means of many actions, and this presupposes a diversity of powers. Above the human soul come the angels, who attain beatitude by a lesser diversity of means. Finally, there is God, in whom there is no power nor any action apart from his one simple act of being. We would come to the same conclusion if we reflected that humankind is situated on the border of the world of spirits and the world of bodies, and consequently it must share in both of their powers.¹ What distinctions can we find in these various powers?

Any power of acting as such is directed to its act. Hence the powers of the soul are distinguished from one another in the same way as their acts. Now, it is clear that acts are distinguished according to their different objects. To an object that plays the role of a principle and a motive cause, there must be a corresponding passive power that is subject to its action. For example, when color impinges on sight, it is the source of vision. To an object that plays the role of terminus and end, there must correspond an active power. Thus the perfection

¹SCG 2.72 [5]; ST 1.77.2, resp.

of stature, which is the end of growth, is the terminus of the faculty of growth in living beings.² A consideration of the actions of heating and cooling leads to the same conclusion. These two actions certainly differ in that the cause of the former is heat, while the cause of the latter is cold. But they differ above all by the ends toward which they tend. Since an agent only acts in order to produce its likeness in a being, heat and cold act in order to produce something hot and cold. Thus actions and the powers from which they flow are clearly distinguished from one another by their objects.³

We can use this conclusion to distinguish between the powers of the soul. We shall see that they are arranged in a hierarchical order, because the many always proceed from the one in an orderly way (*ordine quodam ab uno in multitudinem proceditur*).⁴ Their hierarchy is based on the degree of universality of their objects. The higher the power, the more universal is its object. At the lowest level we find a power of the soul whose sole object is to vivify the body to which it is united. This power is called vegetative, and the vegetative soul only vivifies its own body. There is another kind of power of the soul whose object is more universal, namely, perceiving all sensible bodies by means of the body to which it is united. This power belongs to what is called the sensory soul. Above it there is a power of the soul with a still more universal object: not merely sensible bodies in general, but all being taken in its universality. This is called the intellectual soul.⁵

Moreover, corresponding to the differences between the objects of the soul there are differences in the way it operates. The soul's actions go beyond the actions of corporeal nature to the extent that its object is more universal. From this point of view we can again distinguish between three distinct degrees. First, the soul's action transcends the action of the nature of inanimate things. The proper action of the soul is life. Now, we say that something that initiates its own action is living. Accordingly, the soul is a principle of immanent action, whereas all inanimate bodies receive their movement from an exterior principle. Although the vegetative powers of the soul are only exercised on the body to which it is immediately united, they place it in a degree of being clearly higher than that of purely corporeal nature. Nevertheless, it should be noted that if the way in which a soul exercises its vegetative functions is not reducible to the way in which bodies act, their functions are identical in both cases. The action that inanimate things receive from an external principle, living things receive from their soul. Hence, above the vegetative functions of the soul there is room for actions of a higher order, surpassing those exercised by natural forms both from

²ST 1.77.2, resp.

³De anima 13, resp.

⁴ST 1.77.4, resp.

⁵Ibid. 1.78.1, resp.

the point of view of what they do and how they do it. All these functions depend on the soul's natural aptitude for receiving all things into itself with an immaterial mode of being.

We should note that insofar as the soul is endowed with sense and intellect it is in a way all beings. However, if all things can be in the soul in an immaterial mode of being, there are degrees of immateriality in the way they come into it. In the first degree things are in the soul stripped of their proper matter but nevertheless conforming to their particular being and with the conditions of individuality consequent on their matter. This is the case with the senses: the likeness (*species*) of things enter into them from those individual things; and if they receive these species stripped of matter, they nevertheless receive them in a bodily organ. The intellect has a higher and more perfect degree of immateriality. Without using a bodily organ, it receives species completely stripped of matter and the conditions of individuality consequent upon it.⁶ Thus the soul from within exercises natural functions in the body to which it is united. It also exercises sensory functions that are indeed immaterial, yet accomplished by means of a bodily organ. Finally it exercises intellectual functions without a bodily organ. Thus all its actions are arranged in a hierarchy and with them their corresponding powers. We have now considered them in their proper order; it remains to consider them in themselves. Here the order of generation is the reverse of the order of perfection.⁷ So we shall examine first the least perfect of all the powers, namely, the vegetative power.

The object of the vegetative power is, as we have said, the body considered as receiving the life of the soul that informs it. Now, the nature of the body demands that the soul exercise a threefold function in it, to which corresponds a threefold division of the vegetative power. By the first of these functions the body receives existence from the soul, and it is to this that its generative power is directed. We note, moreover, that natural inanimate things receive at the same time their specific being and their due size or quantity. This cannot be the case with living beings. Produced from a seed, at the beginning of their existence they can only have an imperfect being, as far as quantity is concerned. Hence, besides the generative power, they must have an augmentative power through which they grow to their natural size. But this increase in being would be impossible unless something was changed into the substance of the being to be increased and was thereby added to it.⁸ This transformation is the work of the bodily warmth that works upon and digests all the foods introduced from without. Accordingly, the conservation of the individual demands a nutritive power to restore continually what it has lost, and to bring to it what it lacks in

⁶*De anima* 13, resp.; *ST* 1.78.1, resp.

⁷*ST* 1.77.4, resp.; *De anima* 13, ad 10.

⁸*De anima* 13, ad 15.

order to reach its perfect size, as well as what it needs to produce the seed necessary for its reproduction.⁹ Thus the vegetative power itself presupposes a generative power that gives the living thing its existence, an augmentative power that gives it its fitting size, and a nutritive power that keeps it alive and in its proper quantity.*

We must, once more, introduce a hierarchical order among these powers. The nutritive and augmentative powers produce their effect in the being in which they reside. It is the body united to the soul that is increased and preserved by the soul. The generative power, on the contrary, does not produce its effect in its own body but in someone else's, for nothing can beget itself. This power, then, is closer than the other two to the dignity of the sensory soul, which exercises its functions on external objects. Moreover, the activities of the sensory soul are of a higher excellence and greater universality. Once again, we find Dionysius' principle borne out: the highest grade of a lower order touches upon the lowest grade of a higher order. The nutritive power is subordinate to the augmentative, the augmentative to the generative,¹⁰ and with the generative power we almost arrive at the power of sense, which will definitely free the individual from its restriction to its limited mode of being.

The sense power of the soul is the lowest form of knowledge we can encounter in the universe. When we consider sense knowledge in its totality, we see that it must have five functions in order to take care of the necessities of animal life. Some of these functions can themselves be broken down into an orderly series of subsidiary operations. The simplest of all depends upon the particular sense (*sensus proprius*), which is first in the order of the sense powers and corresponds to the immediate modification of the soul by sensible realities. The particular sense in turn is subdivided into distinct powers according to the different kinds of sensible impressions it is equipped to receive. Sensible things act on the particular sense by the species they impress upon it.¹¹ Contrary to the general opinion, these species are not taken into the sense in a material way; otherwise the sense would become the sensible object itself: the eye would become color and the ear sound. Nonetheless, some types of sensation are accompanied by very definite organic modifications in the animal experiencing them. Let us begin, then, with the principle that the senses receive sensible species

⁹Ibid.

* [By inadvertence, the text reads "quality." The fifth edition correctly reads "quantity."]

¹⁰ST 1.78.2, resp.

¹¹The action of the bodies on the senses is explained by the radioactivity of forms in the space around them. Each form radiates an emanation resembling itself. This emanation contacts the sense organ and causes sensation. The activity of the form depends on the fact that it is an act and naturally, a cause: "Omnis forma, in quantum hujusmodi, est principium agendi sibi simile; unde cum color sit quaedam forma, ex se habet, quod causat sui similitudinem in medio," *In De anima* 2.14 (ed. Pirota, p. 106, n. 425 [Leonine ed. 45, 2.14: 130.362-366]).

without matter; and let us classify them according to the increasing immateriality of the modifications the senses undergo.

First, we find some sensible objects whose species, although received immaterially in the sense, modify materially the animal experiencing them. Such are the qualities causing changes in material things, namely, heat, cold, dryness, humidity and the like. Since sensible objects of this kind produce material impressions in us, and since every material impression is made by contact,¹² these sensible objects must touch us in order that we may perceive them, and so the sense power that apprehends them is called touch.

There is a second kind of sensible object whose impression does not itself modify us materially, but yet is accompanied by a secondary material modification. Sometimes this accompanying modification affects both the sensible object and the sense organ. This is the case with taste. Although flavor does not modify the organ perceiving it to the extent of making it itself sweet or bitter, still it cannot be perceived without both the flavored object and the tasting organ themselves being modified in some way. Both the tongue and the object seem especially to require moistening for this effect. This is not like the action of heat that warms the part of the body on which it acts. We simply have here a physical change that conditions sensible perception but does not constitute it. At other times it happens that the material change associated with sensation only affects the sensible quality itself. It can consist in a sort of alteration or decomposition of the sensible object, such as happens when bodies give off odors, or are reduced to a simple local movement, as is the case when we perceive sound. Hearing and smell presuppose no material change in the sense organ. They perceive from a distance and across the external medium the material changes that have affected the sensible object.¹³

Finally, there is a last class of sensible objects that act upon the senses without any bodily change accompanying their action. These are color and light. The process by which such species emanate from the object to act upon the subject is entirely spiritual.¹⁴ Here, with the noblest and most universal of all the senses, we reach an activity very similar to intellectual activities properly speaking. Numerous indeed are the comparisons that can be drawn between intellectual knowledge and sight, between the eye of the soul and the eye of the body.¹⁵ This, then, is the hierarchy of the five external powers of sense.

¹²Ibid. (p. 108. n. 432 [132.82–92]). For the kind of scientific explanation to which this qualitative physics corresponds see Émile Meyerson, *Identité et réalité*, 4th ed. (Paris: Alcan, 1932), ch. 10 and 11.

¹³In *De anima* 2.16 (ed. Pirotta, p. 111, n. 441 [Leonine ed. 45, 2.15: 132.82–92]).

¹⁴Ibid. 2.14 (ed. Pirotta, p. 105, n. 418 [Leonine ed. 45.2.14: 127.262–128.282]).

¹⁵*ST* 1.67.1, resp; *In Sent.* 2.13.1.2 [ed. Mandonnet-Moos 2: 329–330].

Above them are the four internal sense powers, whose role and purpose can easily be ascertained.¹⁶

Nature neither makes beings in vain nor multiplies them needlessly, but she never refuses them anything they require. Accordingly, the sensory soul must exercise as many functions as are required for the life of a perfect animal. Those functions of the soul that cannot be reduced to one common principle presuppose the existence in the soul of different powers corresponding to them. After all, a power of the soul is simply the proximate principle of an activity of the soul.¹⁷

Once we have admitted these principles, we must note that the particular sense is not self-sufficient. The particular sense judges the particular sensible object and distinguishes it from all other sensible objects it can perceive. It distinguishes, for example, white from black or from green, and in this respect it is self-sufficient. But it cannot distinguish a white color from a sweet flavor. Sight can distinguish one color from all other colors because it perceives them all. It cannot distinguish between a color and a flavor because it does not perceive flavors, and in order to distinguish between qualities it is first necessary to know them. Thus we must posit a *common sense*, at which all the perceptions of the particular senses terminate, so that it may judge them and distinguish between them.¹⁸ The common sense not only perceives the sensible objects whose species are transmitted to it, but also the sensory functions themselves. It is obvious that we are aware that we see. Now, this knowledge cannot belong to a particular sense, which only knows the sensible form that impinges on it. But when the modification this form has impressed upon it has caused the act of seeing, the visual sensation in its turn modifies the common sense, which then perceives the act of seeing.¹⁹

It is not enough for an animal to perceive sensible things while they are present; the living being must also be able to represent them to itself even when they are absent. Since the movement and actions of the animal are determined by the objects it perceives, it would never make a move toward satisfying its needs if it could not represent these objects to itself in their absence. Thus the

¹⁶Avicenna distinguishes five of them. See *ST* 1.78.4, resp.

¹⁷*Ibid.*

¹⁸*De anima* 13, resp.; *ST* 1.78.4, ad 2; *In De anima* 2.13 (ed. Pirotta, p. 100, n. 390 [Leonine ed. 45, 2.13: 119.92–105]).

¹⁹*ST* 1.178.4, ad 2. The common sense is like a fountainhead from which the sense faculty is diffused throughout the organs of the five senses. See *In De anima* 3.3 (ed. Pirotta, p. 152, n. 602, and p. 151, n. 609 [Leonine ed. 45, 2.27: 183.51–65; 184.161–185.183.]) Its proper organ is localized at the very root of the sense of touch, that is, of the particular sense which is spread throughout the whole body. See *ibid.* (p. 152, n. 611 [184.161–185.83.]) See Bernard J. Muller-Thym, "The Common Sense, Perfection of the Order of Pure Sensibility," *The Thomist* 2 (1940): 315–343.

animal's sensory soul must be capable not only of receiving sensible species, but also of holding and preserving them within itself. Now, as we observe in bodies, it is not the same principles that receive and preserve. What is moist, for example, receives readily but preserves badly, while, on the contrary, what is dry receives badly but preserves well. Since, then, the soul's power of sense is the act of a bodily organ, it must have two different powers, one to receive sensible species, the other to preserve them. This capacity to preserve is called either *fantasy* or *imagination*.²⁰

The sense knowledge that is essential to a living being must, in the third place, be able to discern a number of properties in things that the senses by themselves would be unable to perceive. All the sensible objects the animal perceives are not of equal value for its preservation. Some are useful, others are harmful. We humans can compare our particular perceptions with each other, reason about them, and thus come to distinguish the useful from the harmful. We do this by means of what is called our *particular reason* or *cognitive power*. But an animal, which has no reason, must apprehend the useful and harmful aspects of things, even though they are not, strictly speaking, sense qualities. Accordingly, it must have an additional sense power to do this. It is by this power that the sheep knows it must flee when it sees the wolf and by which the bird is advised to pick up the wisp of straw. The sheep does not avoid the wolf, nor the bird glean the straw because the shape and color of the objects are pleasing or displeasing to them, but because they perceive them directly as either opposed to their nature or in accord with it. This new power is called the *estimative power*.²¹ It makes possible the fourth internal power of sense, namely, *memory*.

The living being has to be able to recall for its actual consideration species that have been previously apprehended by the senses and interiorly preserved by the imagination. Now, the imagination is not always adequate for this purpose. It is a kind of treasury in which forms apprehended by the senses are stored; but we have seen that the particular senses do not suffice to grasp all aspects of sensible things. The useful and harmful as such escape them. So a new power is required in order to preserve their species.²² Moreover, different movements presuppose different motive principles, in other words different powers causing them. Now, the movement of the imagination proceeds from things to the soul. Objects first impress their species in the particular sense, then in the common sense, in order that the imagination may preserve them. The

²⁰In *De anima* 2.6 (p. 78, n. 302 [92.84–93.105]). *ST* 1.78.4, resp. On the whole array of problems about the *phantasia* see *In De anima* 3.5 (pp. 158–160, n. 637–654 [192–200]).

²¹*ST* 1.78.4, resp. Thomas' description of the *aestimativa* closely follows Avicenna's *De anima seu sextus de naturalibus* [ed. van Riet, 1: 89].

²²*ST* 1.78.4, resp.

movement in the memory begins in the soul and ends in the species it calls forth. With animals it is the recollection of the useful or harmful that evokes the representation of previously perceived objects. Here we have a spontaneous restoration of sensible species that depend upon the memory, properly speaking. We humans, on the contrary, have to make an effort to search out the species stored by the imagination so that we actually consider them again. Here we no longer have to do with memory alone but with something called *recollection*. Let us add that, in both cases, the objects are presented again in their character of something past—quite a different quality than the particular sense, left to itself, could perceive.²³

Thus the examination of the highest sensory powers of the soul bring us to the very threshold of intellectual activity. As recollection corresponds to memory in animals, so in us there corresponds to the estimative power (in which animals apprehend what is harmful and useful) the *particular reason*, or, as it is sometimes called, the *passive intellect*.²⁴ This is not an appropriate term, for we are not dealing with an intellect, properly speaking. The passive intellect remains a power of the sensible order because it only acquires knowledge of particulars, while it is characteristic of the power of intellect to apprehend the universal. So too, reminiscence differs from the spontaneous recovery of the recollections that specify animal memory. It presupposes a sort of syllogistic dialectic by which we move from one recollection to another, until we reach the one we are looking for. This search has only to do with particular representations; here too the universality required for intellectual knowledge is wanting.²⁵ It can be said, then, that the sensory powers of the soul have exactly the same nature in animals and in us, at least if we only take into account what is specifically sensory in them. Their higher capacity in human beings comes from the intellect on which they border, in relation to which their activities are directed, and whose eminent dignity seems to filter down into their acts.²⁶ Therefore we are going to make a momentous leap when we rise from the sensory powers of the soul to its intellectual powers.

²³*Ibid.*; *De anima* 13, resp. The difference between human and animal memories is not based on the way they are constituted as sense faculties. The superiority of the human memory comes from its contact with human reason which has a sort of reflected influence upon it (*ibid.*, ad 5).

²⁴SCG 2.73 [14].

²⁵ST 1.78.4.

²⁶*Ibid.*, ad 5.

PART II. Chapter Six

The Intellect and Rational Knowledge

The intellect is the power that places the human soul in its degree of perfection, and yet properly speaking the human soul is not an intellect. The angel, whose whole power can be reduced to the intellectual faculty and to the will that issues from it, is a pure intellect. That is why it is also called an Intelligence. The human soul, on the other hand, exercises vegetative and sensory functions and cannot rightfully be given this title. We can only say that the intellect is one of the powers of the human soul.¹ Let us examine its structure and principal activities.

In its humblest aspect the human intellect appears to be a passive power. The Latin verb *pati* ("to suffer") can have three different meanings. First and properly, it signifies that a thing has been deprived of something belonging to its essence or that is the object of its natural inclination, for example, water loses its cold temperature when it is being heated, or a man falls sick or becomes sad. Second and less properly, the verb signifies that a thing is divested of what may or may not rightly pertain to it. From this point of view recovering health is a *passio* as well as being sick, and so too is being joyful as well as being sorrowful. Third—and this is the most general sense of the word—it signifies, not the loss or deprivation of one quality in order to receive another, but merely the actualizing of potency. In this sense, whatever passes from potency to act may be regarded as passive; but such passivity is a source of riches and not of impoverishment. It is in this third sense that our intellect is passive, and the reason for this passivity can at once be deduced from the relatively low degree the human person occupies in the hierarchy of being.

An intellect is said to be in potency or in act according to its relation with universal being. Examining the possibilities of this relation, we find in the highest degree that intellect whose relation with universal being consists in its being the pure and simple act of existing. This is the divine intellect, the divine essence itself, in which all being exists originally and virtually as in its first cause. Because it is in fact the total act of being, the divine intellect is nothing in potency but, on the contrary, pure act.

It is different with created intellects. For one of these intellects to be the act of universal being, taken in its totality, it would have to be an infinite being, which is contrary to the very condition of created being. No created intellect is the act of all intelligible objects. It is a finite and participated being, and so it is in potency to all intelligible reality that it is not. Intellectual passivity, therefore, is a natural correlative of limitation of being.

¹ST 1.79.1, ad 3; *De ver.* 17.1, resp.

There are two ways of looking at the relation uniting potency to act. There is a kind of potentiality in which potency is never deprived of its act, as is the case with the matter of heavenly bodies. There is also a kind of potentiality in which potency is sometimes deprived of its act and must pass into act in order to possess it. Such is the matter of corruptible beings. It is clear at once that the angelic intellect is characterized by the first of these two grades of potency we have just described. Its proximity to the first Intellect, which is Pure Act, makes it always possess its intelligible species in act. The human intellect, however, being last in the order of intellects and as far removed as possible from the divine intellect, is in potency to intelligible realities, not only in the sense that it is passive relative to them when it receives them, but also in the sense that it is naturally deprived of them. This is why Aristotle says that the soul is at first like a blank tablet on which nothing is written. We are compelled, then, to posit a certain passivity at the source of our intellectual knowledge because of the extreme imperfection of our intellect.²

We must also admit the existence of an active power if we are to explain human knowledge. Since the possible intellect is in potency to intelligible realities, it is necessary that they activate our intellect if human knowledge is to be born. It is clear that in order for something to activate, it must first exist. Now, there would be nothing intelligible, properly speaking, in a universe in which there were only passive intellects. An intelligible object, in fact, is not such that it can be encountered in a pure state in the sensible world. Aristotle showed, contrary to Plato, that the forms of natural things do not subsist apart from matter. Now, forms in matter are not intelligible of themselves, because intelligibility is due to immateriality. So it is necessary that natures, that is, the forms our intellect knows in sensible things, be made actually intelligible. But a being already in act can reduce what is in potency from potency to act. Consequently, the intellect must have an active power in order to render actually intelligible the intelligible factor that sensible reality contains in potency. This power is called the agent or active intellect.³

It can easily be seen that this fact dominates the whole structure of human knowledge. Since sensible things are endowed with an actual existence outside the soul, it is unnecessary to posit an agent sense. This is why the sensory power of the soul is entirely passive.⁴ Since we reject the Platonic doctrine of Ideas as realities subsisting in the nature of things, there must be an agent intellect to disengage the intelligible factor contained in sensible things. Finally, since there are immaterial substances that are actually intelligible, like the angels or God,

²ST 1.79.2, resp.; SCG 2.59 [3].

³De anima 4, resp.; ST 1.79.3, resp.

⁴ST 1.79.3, ad 1. On the inutility and even the impossibility of an "agent sense" in Thomism see the excellent remarks of Charles Boyer, *Archives de philosophie* 3 (1925): 107.

we must realize that our intellect cannot know such realities in themselves; it must be resigned to acquiring some knowledge of them by abstracting intelligible forms from material and sensible things.⁵

Is this agent intellect a power of the soul, or is it something above the soul, apart from its essence, and conferring the faculty of knowing from outside? It is understandable that some philosophers subscribe to this last position. Clearly, we must posit above the rational soul a higher intellect from which it holds its faculty of knowing. What is participated, movable, and imperfect, always presupposes some being that is such essentially, immutable, and perfect. Now, the human soul is an intellectual principle only by participation, as can be seen from the fact that it is not totally but only incompletely intelligent, or from the fact that it ascends to truth by a discursive movement and not by a direct and simple intuition.

Hence there must be an intellect of a higher order than the soul, conferring on it its power of knowing. This is why some philosophers consider the agent intellect to be a higher intellect of this kind. They regard the agent intellect as a separated substance that illuminates the images in the sensory powers impressed in us by things,⁶ and makes them intelligible. But though we granted the existence of this separated agent intellect, we should still have to posit in the human soul a power participating in this higher intellect and capable of making sensible species actually intelligible. Whenever universal principles come into play, we find that there are particular principles of action subordinate to them, governing the specific actions of each being. Thus the active power of the heavenly bodies that extends to the whole universe does not prevent lower bodies from being endowed with powers of their own governing their specific activities. This is particularly easy to see in perfect animals. There are lower animals whose generation is adequately accounted for by the actions of the heavenly bodies; for example, animals produced by putrefaction. But in addition to the activity of the heavenly bodies, the generation of perfect animals requires some particular power found in their seed. Now, the most perfect activity of sublunar beings is intellectual knowledge, that is, the act of the intellect. Consequently, even after positing a universal active principle for all intellectual knowledge, such as the illuminating power of God, we must also posit in each one of us an

⁵*De anima* 4, resp. With Thomas we shall reserve the name "passive intellect" for the faculty of the human composite that Aristotle designates by this name, and "possible intellect" for the immaterial and immortal faculty that Thomas, as opposed to Averroes, attributes to us. For the origin of this terminology see Aristotle, *De anima* 3.4, 429a15–16; Albert the Great, *De anima* 3.2.1 [ed. Clemens Stroick, *Opera omnia* 7.1: 177]; Thomas, *In De anima* 3.7 (ed. Pirotta, p. 164, n. 676 [Leonine ed. 45, 3.1: 202.75–90]).

⁶See Pierre Mandouret, *Siger de Brabant et l'averroïsme latin au XII^e siècle* (Louvain: Institut Supérieur de Philosophie, 1911) 1: 172–180.

active principle of our own, conferring on us actual understanding. This principle is called the agent intellect.⁷

This conclusion obviously rules out the existence of a separated agent intellect. Since the intellectual knowledge of each person and each soul demands an active principle of operation, we must admit the existence of many agent intellects. Indeed, there must be as many as there are souls or human beings, because it would be absurd to attribute one and the same principle of operation to many different subjects.⁸ This eliminates the errors resulting from the doctrine that there is but one agent intellect for all humans; for example, the denial of personal immortality or free will. Let us now examine the principal functions of this intellect.

In the first place, memory is fittingly attributed to it. All philosophers do not agree on this point, even among those who follow Aristotle. Avicenna denies it because he accepts the doctrine of the unity of the agent intellect that we have just refuted. According to him, we can imagine that the passive intellect, bound to a corporeal organ, preserves sensible species while not actually apprehending them; but this would not be true of the active intellect. In this totally immaterial power, nothing can exist save under an intelligible and therefore an actual form. As soon as an intellect actually ceases to apprehend an object, the species of the object disappears from the intellect. If it wishes to know it again, it must turn to the agent intellect, which is a separated substance, and the intelligible species will be deposited in the passive intellect. By repeating and exercising this movement of turning toward the agent intellect, a kind of habit or ability to perform the operation is formed in the passive intellect. This, says Avicenna, is what is meant by possessing a science. For Avicenna, then, knowing does not consist in preserving species that are not actually apprehended, and this amounts to eliminating from the intellect what we properly call memory.

This doctrine has little to commend itself to human reason. There is a principle that "Whatever is received in something is received in it according to the mode of the receiver" (*Quod recipitur in aliquo recipitur in eo secundum modum recipientis*). Now, the intellect is naturally more stable and unchangeable than corporeal matter. Consequently, if we find that corporeal matter not only retains forms while it is receiving them, but also preserves them for a long time after it has been informed by them, how much more should the intellect preserve the intelligible species that it apprehends? If, therefore, memory means only the capacity to retain species, we must acknowledge that there is a memory in the intellect. If, on the other hand, we consider it to be characteristic of memory to apprehend the past precisely as past, we must grant that there is no memory except in the sensory power of the soul. The past as such is reduced

⁷*De anima* 5, resp.

⁸*SCG* 2.76 [15]; *ST* 1.79.4 and 5, resp.

to the fact of existing in a definite moment of time, and this mode of existence is only proper to individual things. But it is the sensory power of the soul that perceives what is material and individual. We can conclude, therefore, that if memory of the past is dependent upon the sensory soul, there also exists an intellectual memory that preserves intelligible species and whose proper object is the universal, abstracted from all conditions limiting it to a particular mode of existence.⁹

Memory, as we have just defined it, is of the essence of intellectual activity. Hence it is not, properly speaking, a power distinct from the intellect.¹⁰ The same conclusion holds equally for reason and intellect, strictly speaking. They are not different powers, as we can easily see if we examine their distinctive acts. Understanding is the simple grasping of an intelligible truth. Reasoning is the movement of thought from one object of knowledge to another in order to reach intelligible truth. The angels, for example, who possess perfectly the knowledge of intelligible truth to the degree that their particular level of perfection allows them to know it, discover it by a simple act that is in no way discursive. They are intelligences in the fullest sense of the word. We humans, on the contrary, come to know intelligible truth by proceeding from one object of knowledge to another. That is why we are not properly called intelligences, nor even intelligent beings, but rather rational beings.

Reasoning is to understanding what movement is to rest or acquisition to possession. These are related as the imperfect to the perfect. Now, we know that movement starts from a state of rest and ends in one; and so it is with human knowledge. Reasoning begins with first principles that are apprehended purely and simply by our intellect. It ends with the same first principles to which it returns to collate them with the conclusions of its inquiry. Understanding is therefore present at the beginning and end of reasoning. Now, rest and movement clearly come under one and the same power. This is verified even in natural things, in which we can observe the same nature putting things into motion and keeping them at rest. Much more do understanding and reason belong to one and the same power. It is clear, then, that in man, the terms "intellect" and "reason" refer to one and the same power.¹¹

This enables us to see the precise point at that the human soul and the separated intelligence meet in the hierarchy of created beings. The mode of knowing that is characteristic of human thought is reason or discursive knowledge. Discursive knowledge, however, must have two fixed termini, a beginning and an end, both of which are included in the intellect's simple apprehension of truth. The reasoning process begins and ends with the understanding of principles. Thus, although reasoning is the human soul's distinctive mode of knowing, it

⁹SCG 2.74; *De ver.* 10.2, resp.; *ST* 1.79.6, resp.

¹⁰*ST* 1.79.7, resp.

¹¹*Ibid.* 8, resp.

nevertheless presupposes a kind of participation in that simple mode of knowing that we find in the higher intellectual substances. Once more the words of Dionysius ring true: "Divine wisdom always joins the ends of prior things to the beginnings of secondary things" (*divina sapientia semper fines priorum conjungit principiis secundorum*).¹² But it is only true if we deny that man has an intellectual power distinct from his reason.

The hierarchy of the universe is not based on the assumption that the lower possesses whatever the higher possesses, but on the fact that the lower has a certain participation in what the higher possesses. Thus the animal, whose nature is purely sensory, is deprived of reason, but it is endowed with a kind of prudence and natural judgment that is a certain participation in human reason. Similarly, man does not have a pure intellect that permits him to grasp knowledge of the truth immediately and without discursive reasoning, but he participates in this mode of knowing by a kind of natural disposition, which is the understanding of principles. In brief, human knowledge, as it appears now at the close of this discussion, is nothing but the activity of a reason that participates in the simplicity of intellectual knowledge. Hence the discursive power and the power that perceives truth are not different but one and the same. "Reason itself is called understanding because it shares in intellectual simplicity, by reason of which it is the beginning and terminus in its proper activity."¹³ Let us now examine this activity itself and see how human reason apprehends its various objects.

The basic problem, whose solution dominates our subsequent conclusions, is how the human intellect knows bodily substances inferior to itself.¹⁴ Plato

¹²*De divinis nominibus* 7.3 [PL 122: 1155D]. On reason as a simple movement of the intellect see the fundamental book of Pierre Rousselot, *L'intellectualisme de saint Thomas* (Paris: Alcan, 1908). This book established decisively that the Thomism of St. Thomas himself is an intellectualism, not a rationalism.

¹³*De ver.* 15.1, resp.

¹⁴On the Thomistic doctrine of knowledge see principally Pierre Rousselot, "Métaphysique thomiste et critique de la connaissance," *Revue néo-scholastique* 17 (1910): 476-509; Le Guichaoua, "A propos des rapports entre la métaphysique thomiste et la théorie de la connaissance," *Revue néo-scholastique* 20 (1913): 88-101; Domenico Lanna, *La Teoria della conoscenza in S. Tommaso d'Aquino* (Florence, 1913), with a bibliography; Matthias Baumgartner, "Zur thomistischen Lehre von den ersten Prinzipien der Erkenntnis," *Abhandlungen aus dem Gebiete der Philosophie und ihrer Geschichte: eine Festgabe zum 70. Geburtstag Georg von Hertling* (Freiburg-im-Breisgau: Herder, 1913), pp. 1-16; same author, "Zum thomistischen Wahrheitsbegriff," *Festgabe für Clemens Baeumker* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1913), pp. 241-260; A.-D. Sertillanges, "L'être et la connaissance dans la philosophie de saint Thomas d'Aquin," *Mélanges Thomistes*, in *Bibliothèque Thomiste*, 3 (Le Saulchoir: Kain, 1923): 175-197; George P. Klubertanz, *The Discursive Power: Sources and Doctrine of the Vis Cogitativa according to St. Thomas Aquinas* (St. Louis: The Modern Schoolman, 1952), pp. 331-346. (Extensive bibliography).

taught that the human soul has a natural innate knowledge of all things. No one, he says in the *Meno*, can give the correct answer about things he does not know. But an ignorant person will always give the right answer to questions put to him if they are asked in the right way.¹⁵ Hence everyone knows of things even before acquiring a scientific knowledge of them, and this amounts to saying that the soul knows everything, including bodies, by naturally innate species.

This doctrine, however, runs into serious difficulty. Since form is the principle of all action, it is necessary that everything have the same relationship with form as with the action produced by this form. Granted, for example, that motion upward is produced by lightness, we can say that what is in potency to this movement is potentially light and that what is actually moving upward is actually light. Now, it is clear that from the point of view of both the senses and the intellect, we are often potential knowers. We are brought from potency to act by sensible things acting on our senses, and by teaching and discovery acting upon our intellect. Hence it must be acknowledged that the rational soul is as much in potency to sensible species as to intelligible species. But when it is in potency to these species, it obviously does not actually possess them. Consequently, the soul does not know everything by naturally innate species.¹⁶ It is true, of course, that a form can be actually possessed and yet be incapable of performing its action because of some external impediment. Thus what is light is sometimes prevented from rising because there is an obstacle in its way. Plato himself, observing that the soul does not always actually know, claimed that the human intellect is naturally filled with all intelligible species, but that its union with the body would sometimes in fact prevent it from knowing them.

One observation is quite enough to reveal the fallacy of this argument. When a sense is lacking, all the knowledge acquired by that sense vanishes with it. Where a sense is lacking, so too is knowledge. Men born blind know nothing of colors. They would know them if the intellect possessed by nature the innate intelligible notions of all things. We can go beyond the mere observation of this fact, however, and show that such knowledge would not be in harmony with the nature of the human soul.

If we adopt the Platonic point of view, we would regard the body as a sort of screen placed between our intellect and its object. We would have to say, in this case, that the soul does not acquire its knowledge with the help of the body to which it is united, but in spite of it. Now, we have seen that it is natural for the human soul to be united to a body. If we accept Plato's position, we must suppose that the soul's natural activity, which is intellectual knowledge, meets its greatest obstacle in its natural union with the body. This is disturbing to contemplate. Nature, which made the soul for knowing, can surely not have

¹⁵*Meno* 82b-84.

¹⁶*ST* 1.84.3, resp.

united it to a body that would prevent it from knowing. Nay more, it ought not to have given a body to the soul unless it facilitated its intellectual knowledge.

This is understandable if we recall the lowly position of the soul and its radical imperfection. In all intellectual substances there is a faculty of knowing under the influence of the divine light. Considered in its primary source, this light is one and simple. But the more distant intelligent creatures are from the primary source, the more divided and dispersed this light becomes, like rays diverging from a common center. This is why God knows all things by his one act of existing. Higher intellectual substances know by more than one idea, but they only use a limited number of them. Moreover, they apprehend very universal ideas, and as they are endowed with an extremely powerful faculty of knowing, they discern within these universal ideas the multiplicity of particular objects. In lower intellectual substances, on the contrary, we find a greater number of less universal ideas. As we get farther away from the first source of all knowledge, these ideas no longer permit particular objects to be apprehended as distinctly. Consequently, if lower substances only possessed universal intelligible ideas like those found in angels, they would not be able to discern the multiplicity of particular things in these ideas, because they are only enlightened by a very feeble and obscure luminous ray. Their knowledge would have a vague and confused generality. It would be like that of ignorant persons who cannot discern in principles the consequences they learned see in them. Now, we know that in the natural order human souls come last among intellectual substances. It was necessary, then, either to give them a general and confused knowledge, or else to unite them with the sort of body that would enable them to receive a precise knowledge of the nature of sensible things from the things themselves. God has dealt with the human soul as we do with dull minds that can only learn with the help of examples taken from the sensible world. So it is for its own good that the soul is united to the body, since the soul uses it to acquire knowledge. "It is clear, then, that it was for the soul's good that it was united to a body, and that it understands by turning to phantasms."¹⁷ Again, "It is fitting for them (that is, souls) to seek their intelligible perfection from and through bodies; otherwise it would be useless for them to be united to bodies."¹⁸ In brief, it is by turning toward the body that the soul is raised to knowledge of its objects, and not by turning away from it, as the Platonic doctrine of innate ideas would demand.

We must try to be precise as to how the human intellect acquires a knowledge of objects. According to Augustine, whose doctrine is going to set us on our way to the truth, the intellectual soul discovers all things in eternal essences, that is, in the immutable truth in God. "If we both see that what you say is true,

¹⁷Ibid. 1.89.1, resp,

¹⁸Ibid. 1.55.2, resp.

and we both see that what I say is true, where, I ask, do we see it? Certainly not I in you, nor you in me, but both in the unchangeable truth which is above our minds."¹⁹ Augustine felt that we should always take possession of the truths contained in pagan philosophies. As he himself had been steeped in Platonic doctrines, he always tried to save anything good he found in the Platonists, and even to improve and correct whatever he found in them contrary to the faith. Now, Plato called Ideas the forms of things considered as existing by themselves and apart from matter. The knowledge our soul acquires of all things would then be reduced to its participating in these forms. Just as matter becomes stone by participating in the idea of stone, so our intellect would know stone by participating in that Idea. However, it was too obviously contrary to faith to posit separated Ideas, existing by themselves and endowed with a kind of creative activity. So Augustine substituted for Plato's Ideas the essences of all creatures united in the divine mind. All things would be created in conformity with these essences, and through them the human soul would know everything.

There is a sense in which even this doctrine would be unacceptable. When it is said, with Augustine, that the intellect knows everything in the eternal essences and consequently in God, the expression "to know in" can mean that the eternal essences constitute the very object of the intellect. But we cannot agree that in our present state the soul can know all things in the eternal essences, which are God; and we have just discovered the exact reasons for this in our criticism of Plato's innate Ideas. Only the blessed who see God, and who see all things in God, know all things in the eternal essences. Here below, on the contrary, the proper object of the human intellect is not the intelligible but the sensible. But the expression "to know in" can indicate the principle of knowledge and not its object. It can mean "to know by," or "that by which we know," and not "that which we know."²⁰ Taken in this sense, it only serves to convey the great truth that we have to posit at the source of our understanding the divine light and the first principles of intellectual knowledge that we owe to it.

The soul knows all things in the eternal essences as the eye sees in the sun all that it sees with the aid of the sun. It is important to grasp the exact meaning of this statement. In the human soul there is a principle of understanding, namely, an interior intellectual light that is nothing other than a participated resemblance of the uncreated light. And since the uncreated light contains the eternal essences of all things, it can be said in a certain sense that we know everything in the divine exemplars. Consequently, "to know in the eternal essences" will

¹⁹*Confessions* 12.25 [PL 32: 840; CCL 27: 235.33-36].

²⁰ST 1.84.5, resp. Thomas knew very well that these differences separate Aristotle's theory from Augustine's. See especially the remarkable texts: *De spiritualibus creaturis* 10, ad 8, and *De ver.* 11.1.

simply mean to know by means of a participation in the divine light in which are contained the essences of all things. Hence, we read in Psalm 4 [:6], “Many say: who will show us good things?” and the Psalmist replies: “The light of your countenance, O Lord, is signed upon us,” as though to say: “Everything is made known to us by the seal of the divine light within us.” But the faculty of knowing that God has given us and that is the divine image in us, is not enough by itself. We have seen that by its nature it does not contain the intelligible species Plato attributed to it. Far from possessing innate knowledge, the intellect is at first in potency to all intelligible objects.

Thus understood, the natural light of our intellect does not confer upon us knowledge of material things by simply participating in their eternal essences. It still requires intelligible species abstracted from sensible things.²¹ Accordingly, the human intellect possesses a light that only suffices to acquire the knowledge of the intelligible objects to which it can raise itself by means of things perceived by the senses.²² In a certain sense we have within us the germ of all knowledge (*praeexistunt in nobis quaedam scientiarum semina*).²³ These preformed seeds of which we have natural knowledge are first principles: *prima intelligibilia principia*.²⁴ These principles are the first conceptions our intellect forms when it enters into contact with sensible things. To say they preexist in it is not to say that the intellect actually possesses them in itself, independently of the action that bodies exercise on the soul. It is simply to say that they are the first intelligible objects our intellect conceives starting from sensible experience. The actual knowledge of principles is no more innate in us than are the conclusions of our deductive reasoning.²⁵ But while we discover the former spontaneously, we have to acquire the latter by our own effort. Some examples will throw light on this truth.

Principles can be complex, for example, the whole is greater than the part; or simple, for example, the notions of being, unity and the like. Complex principles preexist *in some way* in the intellect. From the moment that the rational soul knows the definitions of whole and part, it knows that the whole is greater than the part. So it was naturally ready for the immediate grasping of this truth. But it is no less evident that by itself the intellect did not possess this truth, and that left to its own resources the intellect would never have acquired it. To know that the whole is greater than the part, we must know the definitions of

²¹ST 1.84.5, resp.

²²Ibid. 1-2.109.1, resp. But since the proper object of the intellect is the intelligible, it cannot know the particular, from which it extracts the intelligible, except mediately and through a reflection. This process is analyzed in *De ver.* 10.4, resp.

²³*De ver.* 11.1, resp.

²⁴SCG 4.11 [17].

²⁵Ibid.

part and whole, and these can only be known by abstracting certain intelligible species from sensible matter.²⁶ Therefore, if we cannot know what the whole and the part are without appealing to sensory perception, and if we cannot know that the whole is greater than the part without this previous knowledge, it follows that the grasping of the first intelligible conceptions must presuppose the intervention of sensible objects.

This conclusion is still more evident if we consider the simple principles of knowledge. We would not know what being and unity are if we had not previously perceived sensible objects from which we could abstract intelligible species. Hence the exact definition of the simple principles of knowledge would be as follows: "The first conceptions of the intellect that are known at once by the light of the agent intellect through species abstracted from sensible objects."²⁷

These principles are the first source and the guarantee of all our certain knowledge. It is from them that we set out to discover the truth, and in the end reasoning always refers back to them in order to verify its conclusions. On the other hand, our ability to form them on contact with the sensible world reflects in all human souls that divine truth in which they participate. Thus we can say in this sense, but only in this sense, that inasmuch as the soul knows all things by the first principles of knowledge it sees everything in the divine truth or in the eternal essences of things.²⁸

We have now specified the necessary and sufficient conditions of human knowledge, by showing the need of an intellectual light coming from God and the impotence of this light left to its own resources. The conclusion to which we have been constantly returning is that intellectual knowledge begins from sensible things (*principium nostrae cognitionis est a sensu*). The only problem we

²⁶ST 1-2.51.1, resp.

²⁷*De ver.* 11.1, resp. The interpretation of the Thomistic doctrine of the principles of knowledge supported by J. Durantel, *Le retour à Dieu par l'intelligence et la volonté dans la philosophie de saint Thomas* (Paris: Alcan, 1918), pp. 46, 156-157, 159, etc., seems to me to be difficult to reconcile with the texts of SCG 2.78 [5], and *De anima* 5, at *Quidam vero crederunt*. Durantel's remark on p. 161, n. 3, seems to indicate that the author conceives of no middle term between sensualism and Platonism, namely, that "innatism" of the intellect without an "innatism" of principles that describes exactly Thomas' position. As "the theory of first principles is the central and characteristic point of the doctrine of knowledge in St. Thomas" (*ibid.*, p. 156), the error made here leads to others. Thus the principles have been understood as Kantian categories originating in God (p. 162 agrees with p. 159, "car il faut ..."). The reason for this is that the meaning of the Thomistic term *determination* has been understood and interpreted as the intrinsic development of a virtual content, and not understood in the proper sense of determining, as the elaboration of a content that the intellect has received from outside and intellectualized.

²⁸SCG 3.47 [9]; see especially *Comp. theol.* 1.129 [Leonine ed. 42: 130-131]; *De ver.* 10.6, resp.

still have to resolve, then, is to explain the exact relation between the intellect and the sensible object within knowledge.

Democritus thought that the sole cause of our knowledge is the presence within the soul of the image of the bodies we are thinking about, in opposition to Plato who held that the intellect directly participates in separated intelligible forms. According to Democritus, all action can be explained as the movement of material atoms passing from one body into another. He imagines that little images issue from objects and penetrate into the matter of our soul. We know, however, that the human soul has one activity in which the body has no share,²⁹ namely, the act of understanding. Now, the matter of bodies cannot leave its impression on an incorporeal substance like an intellect. The imprint of sensible bodies alone would not suffice to produce an act like understanding, and it cannot adequately explain it. We have to appeal to a loftier principle of activity, without however turning to Plato's separated intelligible forms. This will be our conclusion if we take the middle road Aristotle marked out between Democritus and Plato; we will posit an agent intellect capable of extracting the intelligible from the sensible by means of an abstraction whose nature we shall now analyze in some detail.

Let us suppose that, following the operations described above,³⁰ a sensible body impressed its image in the common sense. And let us call this image a phantasm (*phantasma*). We still do not have the total and perfect cause of intellectual knowledge; we do not even have its sufficient cause, but at least we have the matter on which this cause works.³¹ What indeed is a phantasm? It is the image of a particular thing (*similitudo rei particularis*).³² Still more precisely, phantasms are images of particular things impressed on, or preserved in, bodily organs (*similitudines individuorum existentes in organis corporeis*).³³ In brief, we are here in the domain of the sensible both from the point of view of the object and the subject. Colors, for example, have the same mode of existence whether in the matter of an individual body or in the visual power of the sen-

²⁹See above, pp. 219–220, 232.

³⁰See above pp. 236–238.

³¹ST 1.84.6, resp.

³²Ibid. 7, ad 2. Let us remember that sensible species are not sensations scattered in physical surroundings looking for knowing subjects in which to reside. They are physical radiations emanating from objects. Like their causes, species have no existence distinct from that of the object that produces them and of which they are but the continual emanation. Proceeding from the form of the object (not from its matter), species retain their active power. It is by them, accordingly, that the object actualizes the sensory organ and assimilates it to itself. The *phantasma* is the *similitudo* of the object resulting from the action of the species on the proper sense, then on the common sense.

³³ST 1.85.1, ad 3; *In De anima* 3.3 (ed. Pirota, p. 187, n. 794 [Leonine ed. 45, 3.7: 237.105–113]).

sory soul. In both cases they exist in a definite material subject. This is why colors are by nature able by themselves to impress their resemblance in the organ of sight. For this same reason it is now clear that neither the sensible object as such nor consequently the phantasms can ever penetrate into the intellect.

Sensation is the act of a bodily organ suited for the reception of a particular object as such, that is, a universal form existing in a material individual.³⁴ The sensible species, the medium through which it passes, and the sense itself are realities of the same order, since all three fall into the genus of the particular. The same is true of the imagination in which phantasms reside. But it is not the same with the possible intellect. As an intellect it receives universal species. The imagination, on the contrary, contains only particular species. Between the phantasm and the intelligible species, the particular and the universal, there is a difference of genus (*sunt alterius generis*).³⁵ This is why phantasms, which are necessary requisites for intellectual knowledge, only constitute its matter and serve it, so to speak, as instruments.³⁶

For an exact notion of just what human understanding is, it is well not to forget the role we have assigned to the agent intellect. We are situated in a universe in which we do not encounter intelligible objects in their pure state. Moreover, our intellect is so imperfect that intuition of what is purely intelligible is completely beyond us. The proper object of the human intellect is a quiddity, that is, a nature existing in an individual material thing. Our object is not the idea of stone but the nature of this particular stone, and this nature is the result of the union between a form and its proper matter. Similarly, the object of our knowledge is not the idea of horse; we have to know the nature of horse as it is realized in a particular instance of a horse.³⁷ In other words, the objects of human knowledge contain a universal and intelligible factor that is associated with a particular and material factor. The distinctive act of the agent intellect is to dissociate these two factors in order to furnish the possible intellect with the intelligible and universal elements that are involved in the sensible object. This act is called abstraction.

The object of knowledge being always in due proportion to the cognitive faculty that apprehends it, we can distinguish three degrees in the scale of faculties of knowing. Sensible knowledge is the act of a corporeal organ, namely, sense. That is why the object of all the senses is a form existing in matter. And since matter is the principle of individuation, all the powers of the sensory soul

³⁴*ST* 1.85.1, resp.

³⁵*De anima* 4, ad 5.

³⁶*De ver.* 10.6, ad 7.

³⁷*ST* 1.84.7, resp. "In mente enim accipiente scientiam a rebus, formae existunt per quamdam actionem rerum in animam; omnis autem actio est per formam; unde formae quae sunt in mente nostra, primo et principaliter respiciunt res extra animam existentes quantum ad formas earum" (*De ver.* 10.4, resp.).

are incapable of knowing anything but individual objects. At the opposite extreme we find knowledge that is neither the act of a bodily organ nor in any way tied up with a bodily organ. Such is angelic knowledge. The distinctive object of this knowledge is a form existing outside matter. Even when angels apprehend material objects, they only perceive them through immaterial forms, that is, in themselves or in God.

The human intellect occupies an intermediary position. It is not the act of a bodily organ like the sense, but it belongs to a soul that, unlike an angel, is the form of a body. This is why it is proper to this intellect to apprehend forms existing individually in matter, but not apprehend them as they exist there. Now, to know what is in matter without taking into account the matter it is in, is to abstract the form from the individual matter represented by phantasms.³⁸

From the simplest point of view, abstraction is first of all the agent intellect's apprehending in every material thing what places it in its own species, leaving aside the individuating principles belonging to its matter. Just as we can consider separately the color of a fruit without taking account of its other properties, so our intellect can consider separately, in the phantasms of the imagination, what constitutes the essence of man, horse or stone, without taking into account what differentiates the individuals in these species.³⁹

The activity of the agent intellect is not limited to separating in this way the universal from the particular. Not only does it separate intelligible objects, it also produces them. In order to abstract the intelligible species from phantasms, the agent intellect does not simply convey it as it is into the possible intellect; it must produce it. For the sensible species of the thing to become the intelligible form of the possible intellect, it must undergo a considerable change. This is what is meant by saying that the agent intellect turns to phantasms in order to illuminate them. The illumination of sensible species is the very essence of abstraction. It abstracts from species the intelligible features they contain⁴⁰ and begets in the possible intellect the knowledge of what the phantasms represent. But it considers in them only their specific and universal features, while abstracting from the material and the particular.⁴¹

It is very difficult to see what Thomas means here because we unconsciously tend to imagine this operation and try to form a concrete picture of what takes place. However, there is no psycho-physiological mechanism underlying this description of understanding.⁴² We are now in another order—that of the

³⁸ST 1.85.1, resp.

³⁹Ibid., ad 1.

⁴⁰Ibid., ad 4.

⁴¹Ibid., ad 3; *De anima* 4, resp. See *Comp. theol.* 81–83 [Leonine ed. 42: 107–108.]

⁴²Aristotle himself says almost nothing about it. He simply compares the nature of the agent intellect to a sort of light, which is a metaphor rather than an explanation.

intelligible. Thomas' solution to the problem of knowledge consists before all else in defining the conditions required for the carrying out of an operation that we know takes place. This cannot be understood without returning to the data of the problem at hand.

The universe contains a knowing being, whose nature is such that the intelligible cannot reach it without being mixed with the sensible. The possibility of such a being is probable a priori, because it is consistent with the principle of continuity governing the universe. But we still have to grasp the order of the relations this kind of act implies between the intelligible in act, its higher terminus, and matter, its lower terminus. The resolution of the problem consists in finding intermediaries to fill in the gaps between them.

A first intermediary is found in the sensible thing itself. As we have said, the sensible thing is the union of a form, and hence of something intelligible, with a particular matter. Therefore, the sensible thing contains in potency an intelligible factor, but it is an intelligible factor actually determined to a given mode of particular being. If we pass on now to man, we find something intelligible in act, namely, his intellect—the part of him that is contiguous with the lowest orders of angels—but this intelligible element lacks determination. It is a light by which we can see, but in which we no longer see anything. If it is to enable us to see, this light must fall upon some objects, and for it to do so there must be objects related to it. The intelligible in act, our intellect, will die of inanition unless it finds nourishment in the world in which we are placed. Obviously, it will only find it in the sensible world. Thus the solution to the Thomistic problem of knowledge is only possible if the sensible thing, which is determined in act and intelligible in potency, can communicate its determination to our intellect, which is intelligible in act but only potentially determined.

It is to resolve this problem that Thomas Aquinas admits the existence in the same individual substance—not in two distinct subjects as the Averroists maintain—of a possible intellect and an agent intellect. If it is not contradictory to hold for the co-existence of these two powers of the soul in a single subject, we can claim to solve the problem, since this hypothesis satisfies all the data.

Now, to hold this is not contradictory. Rather, it is contradictory that one and the same thing should be, at the same time and under the same aspect, in potency and in act. It is not contradictory that it be in potency under one aspect and in act under another. Indeed, this is the normal condition of every finite and created being. It is also the condition of the rational soul in relation to the sensible world and to the phantasms presenting it. The soul has intelligibility in act, but determination is wanting. Phantasms have determination in act, but intelligibility is wanting. The soul confers intelligibility on the phantasms, and in this respect it is an agent intellect; and it receives determination from them, and in this respect it is a possible intellect. For the operation to be successful, one condition is required—a metaphysical condition based upon the requirements of order: the action of the agent intellect that renders phantasms intelligible must

precede the reception of this intelligible object into the possible intellect (*actio intellectus agentis in phantasmatis praecedit receptionem intellectus possibilis*). Because the sensible as such cannot penetrate the intelligible as such, our intellect, seeking to receive information from the sensible world, begins by rendering the action possible by raising that world to its own order. Only in this way (and it was the only problem we had to solve): “the little intelligible light that is connatural to us suffices for our act of understanding” (*parvum lumen intelligibile quod est nobis connaturale sufficit ad nostrum intelligere*).⁴³

This is the way the human soul knows bodies. The conclusion is true not only for the acquisition of knowledge, but equally for the use we make of it after we have acquired it. Any injury to common sense, imagination or memory at the same time takes away phantasms and the knowledge of the intelligible objects corresponding to them.⁴⁴ This conclusion also enables us to show how the human soul knows itself, as well as how it knows objects above itself. The intellect knows itself in exactly the same way as it knows other things. The human intellect can only know itself insofar as it passes from potency to act under the influence of species abstracted from sensible things by the light of the agent intellect.⁴⁵

This accounts for the numerous acts required for such knowledge and the order in which they occur. Our soul only comes to know itself because it first knows other things (*ex objecto enim cognoscit suam operationem, per quam devenit ad cognitionem sui ipsius*).⁴⁶ It first knows its object, then its act, and finally its own nature. At first it simply perceives that it is an intellectual soul, since it apprehends its intellectual act. Then it is raised to the universal knowledge of the nature of the human soul by a methodic reflection on the conditions required by such an act.⁴⁷ In both cases the process of thinking is the same. Thomas writes: “And there is yet another intellect, namely, the human intellect, that is not its own act of understanding, nor is the first object of its act of understanding its own essence, but something external, namely, the nature of a material thing. Therefore what is first known by the human intellect is an object of this kind, and what is known secondarily is the act by which that object is known; and through the act the intellect itself is known, whose perfection is the act itself of understanding.”⁴⁸

⁴³SCG 2.77 [4].

⁴⁴ST 1.84.7, resp.

⁴⁵Ibid. 87.1, resp.

⁴⁶De anima 3, ad 4. See De ver. 10.8, resp.

⁴⁷ST 1.87.1, resp.

⁴⁸Ibid. 1.87.3, resp; De ver. 10.8. See on this point Blaise Romeyer, “Notre science de l'esprit humain d'après saint Thomas d'Aquin,” *Archives de philosophie* 1.1 (1923): 51–55. This work somewhat ‘augustinizes’ Thomas’ doctrine on this point. It seem hard to accept that Thomas grants us a direct knowledge of the essence of the soul, and one that does not come

As for the way in which the human soul knows what is above itself, whether it be totally immaterial substances like angels or the infinite and uncreated essence we call God, a direct apprehension of the intelligible as such is completely denied it.⁴⁹ We can claim no more than an inability to form some very imperfect representation of an intelligible nature from sensible things. That is why neither the soul nor God is the first object known by the intellect. Our intellect has to begin with the consideration of bodies; and it will never advance further in its knowledge of intelligible objects than its starting point, the sensible world, will allow it to go. Here our method of demonstrating God's existence and analyzing his essence finds its complete justification. Aquinas writes: "The knowledge of God that can be taken in by the human mind does not go beyond the kind of knowledge derived from sensible things, since even the soul knows what it itself is as a result of understanding the natures of sensible things."⁵⁰

This truth dominates his whole philosophy. Failure to understand it correctly leads us to assign objects to the intellect that it is by nature incapable of grasping, with the consequence that we mistake the proper value and limitation of our knowledge. The most dangerous form this illusion takes is to believe that what is more knowable and intelligible in itself is better known to us. By now we know that our mind is formed to extract the intelligible from the sensible. Because it can draw out of individual matter its universal form, this does not mean (except for a sophist) that it can a fortiori apprehend what is purely intelligible. The intellect can be compared to an eye that would be able to perceive colors and would also at the same time be luminous enough to render these colors actually visible. Assuming that such an eye was able see a weak light, it would be unable to see a strong one. In fact there are some animals whose eyes are said to produce enough light to illuminate the objects they see. These animals see better by night than by day. Their eyes are weak; a little light illuminates them, a strong light blinds them. So it is with our intellect. Before the supreme intelligible realities it is like the eye of an owl, unable to see the sun in front of it. Thus we have to be content with the small intelligible light that is ours by nature and suffices for our intellectual needs. But we must be careful not to ask of it more than it can give. We only know the incorporeal by comparing it with the corporeal. Every time we aspire to a knowledge of intelligible realities, we must turn to the phantasms that bodies produce in us, even though

from sense knowledge. What is true is that the soul's presence to itself makes a corresponding *habitus* unnecessary (*De ver.* 10.8, resp.). Thus we have habitual knowledge of the soul's essence, and we have immediate certitude of its acts (see Aristotle, *Eth. Nic.* 9.9, 1170a25ff), but we infer its existence and its nature from its operations. For a more profound study of this question see Ambroise Gardeil, "La perception de l'âme par elle-même d'après saint Thomas," *Mélanges Thomistes*, in *Bibliothèque Thomiste* 3 (Le Saulchoir: Kain, 1923): 219-236.

⁴⁹ST 1.88.3, resp.

⁵⁰SCG 3.47 [8].

there are no phantasms of intelligible realities.⁵¹ Acting in this way, we behave like the lowly intellects we are, and we accept the limitations imposed upon our knowing faculty by our place in the hierarchy of created beings.⁵²

⁵¹ST 1.84.7, ad 3.

⁵²Besides the works we have cited and which bear directly on the Thomistic doctrine of knowledge, there are a number of classical studies of the relation between Thomas' doctrine of knowledge and those of Augustine, Bonaventure, and the Augustinian school in general. It is unwise to take up this problem before studying the Thomistic and Augustinian texts themselves. Afterward, philosophers will necessarily be led to it and their reflection on it will be fruitful both historically and philosophically. See Joseph Kleutgen, *Die Philosophie der Vorzeit*, 2 vols. (Münster, 1860) (French trans. by Constant Sierp: *La philosophie scolastique exposée et défendue*, 4 vols. (Paris: Gaume Frères et J. Duprey, 1868-1890); Alberto Lepidi, *Examen philosophico-theologicum de Ontologismo* (Louvain, 1874), and same author, "De Ente generalissimo prout est aliquid psychologicum, logicum, ontologicum," *Divus Thomas* 1 (1881): 173-177, 194-197, 213-216; Tommaso Maria Zigliara, *Della luce intellettuale e dell'ontologismo secondo le dottrine dei SS. Agostino, Bonaventura, et Tommaso* (Rome, 1874); also in *Oeuvres complètes* 1, trans. A. Murgue (Lyon: Vitte et Perrussel, 1881) 11: 379-384. There is an interesting, though sometimes debatable, general introduction to the problem in *De humanae cognitionis ratione anecdota quaedam S.D. Sancti Bonaventurae* (Quaracchi, 1883); see especially *Dissertatio praevia*, pp. 1-47.

PART II. Chapter Seven

Knowledge and Truth

We have now described the cognitive acts of the rational soul, and in doing so we have in a way situated man in his place in the hierarchy of created beings. This is a good place to pause and clarify Thomas' notions of human knowledge and truth.

Most people are not concerned with knowing what knowledge is.¹ A simple survey of nature, however, is enough to show us that knowing is not necessarily implied by the mere fact of existing. A rapid induction assures us of this. There are, in the first place, artificial things made by human hands, which are inactive and incapable of spontaneous movement. If a bed falls, it is as wood, not as a bed. If it is buried in the earth and grows, it is not a bed that grows, but a tree. Next come natural beings endowed with an internal principle of movement, such as lightness or heaviness, implicit in their form. These beings move only through an internal principle, without the slightest adaptation of their movements to the conditions of the external world. Left alone, the stone falls and the flame goes up in a straight line, the one being drawn downward, and the other upward. There are more complex natural movements, for example, those of a plant that is animated by a vegetative life and that spreads its roots, branches, leaves in space. Here too, it is a question of an energy* regulated and conditioned from within, without the exterior world doing anything except permitting or preventing its deployment. An oak grows if it can, as a stone falls if it is released. When its growth is completed, it dies, having never been anything else than an oak, in other words, all it was able to become.

In the animal kingdom the situation changes completely. The movements of animals, governed like those of the vegetative kingdom by internal principles, cannot be explained by them exclusively. A dog can do more than fall by its own weight or grow by its own life; it moves about in space to seek its prey,

¹See A.-D. Sertillanges, "L'idée générale de la connaissance d'après saint Thomas d'Aquin," *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 2 (1908): 449-465; M.-D. Roland-Gosselin, "Sur la théorie thomiste de la vérité," *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 10 (1921): 222-234 (and see also the important remarks, *ibid.* 14 [1925]: 188-189 and 201-203); Léon Noël, *Notes d'épistémologie thomiste* (Louvain: Institut Supérieur de Philosophie, 1925). For a general discussion of the interpretations proposed see E. Gilson, *Thomist Reform and the Critique of Knowledge*, trans. Mark A. Wauck (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986); Georges van Riet, *Thomistic Epistemology: Studies concerning the Problem of Cognition in the Contemporary Thomistic School*, trans. Gabriel Franks (St. Louis: Herder, 1963).

* [By inadvertence, Gilson's text reads "inertie." The fifth edition correctly reads "énergie."—A.M.]

springs to seize it, runs to retrieve it. All these actions presume that the prey in question, existing first of all for itself, exists also for the dog. The goat does not exist for the shrub on which it grazes, but the shrub exists for the goat, whatever other way of existing it can have. The existence of one being for another, which begins with animality and develops in man, is precisely what is meant by knowledge. It is a fact that there is knowledge in the world. The question remains, under what conditions is knowledge in general possible.

Let us put the problem as bluntly as possible. What does it mean for one living being to be conscious of another being? If we consider the knowing being in itself, it is first its own essence, that is, it falls within a genus, is defined by a species, and is individualized by all the properties distinguishing it from other beings of the same nature. As such, it is itself and nothing else: a dog, a goat, a human being. As a knowing being, it becomes something besides itself, in that the prey the dog pursues, the bush the goat browses on, the book the person reads, from that moment exist in some way in the dog, in the goat, in the person. Since these objects are now in the subjects that know them, they have all in some way become these objects. To know, then, is to come to be in a new and richer way than before, because it is essentially causing what before existed for itself to enter into something else that had previously existed for itself.² This is expressed by saying that knowing a thing is a way of becoming it.³

An observation is called for if we want to give these statements their full significance. Whatever may be the subsequent interpretation of the facts we are considering here, they clearly mean that we are confronting two different modes of beings. Between a being that is never anything but itself, and a being that is capable of expanding itself so as to take over the being of other things, there is a considerable distance—the exact distance separating the material from the spiritual. Everything corporeal or material in a being tends to contract and limit it;

²In Thomistic language, since a being is defined by its form, a knowing being is distinguished from a non-knowing one in that it possesses, besides its own form, the form of the thing it knows: “Cognoscentia a non cognoscentibus in hoc distinguuntur, quia non cognoscentia nihil habent, nisi formam suam tantum, sed cognoscens natum est habere formam etiam rei alterius; nam species cogniti est in cognoscente. Unde manifestum est, quod natura rei non cognoscentis est magis coarctata et limitata. Natura autem rerum cognoscentium habet majorem amplitudinem et extensionem: propter quod dicit Philosophus, III *De anima* [3.8, 431b21] *quod anima est quodammodo omnia*” (ST 1.14.1, resp.).

³This is the meaning of the well-known statement of John of St. Thomas: “Cognoscentia autem in hoc elevatur super non cognoscentia, quia id quod est alterius ut alterius, seu prout manet distinctum in altero possunt in se recipere, ita quod non solum sunt quod in se sunt, sed etiam possunt fieri alia a se,” *De Anima* 4.1 [John of St. Thomas, *Cursus philosophicus thomisticus*, 3 vols., ed. Beatus Reiser (Turin: Marietti 1930–1937), 3: 104]. This statement is not Thomas’ but it is consistent with his thinking. For an interpretation see the controversy between Nicolas Balthasar and Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange in *Revue néo-scholastique de philosophie* 25 (1933): 294–310, 420–441.

what is spiritual in it, on the contrary, tends to enlarge and amplify it. In the lowest grade of being are minerals, which are only what they are. In the highest degree (or better, beyond every conceivable degree) is God, who is everything. Situated between the two are human beings, who in a certain way are capable of becoming all things through their senses and intelligence.⁴ Thus the problem of human knowledge lies basically in the mode of existence of a spiritual being that is not purely spiritual.

A second observation confirms the first; there are not two conceivable solutions of the problem of knowledge, one for the intelligence and another for the senses. Sensible knowledge and intellectual knowledge can be, and indeed are, two different species or two different stages of the same kind of activity, but they can be explained in the same way. If we had to make an ideal cleavage in the order of things, it would fall between animals and plants, not between animals and humans. Though limited in their field of activity, animals are still increased by the being of other things through the sensation they experience. Accordingly, they are clearly, though still incompletely, freed from the purely material.⁵ Hence we have to describe* cognitive activities in such a way that we can connect both intelligence and sensation to the same principle and judge them by the same rules.

A first condition for the possibility of such knowledge is that things also participate to some degree in immateriality. Were we to grant the existence of a purely material universe, one void of every intelligible factor, it would by def-

⁴In *De anima* 3.13 (ed. Pirota, p. 187, n. 790 [Leonine ed. 45, 3.7: 236a.48-61]). See: "Forma autem in his quae cognitionem participant, altiori modo invenitur quam in his quae cognitione carent. In his enim quae cognitione carent invenitur tantummodo forma ad unum esse proprium determinans unumquodque, quod etiam naturale uniuscujusque est In habentibus autem cognitionem sic determinatur unumquodque ad proprium esse naturale per formam naturalem, quod tamen est receptivum specierum aliarum rerum: sicut sensus recipit species omnium sensibilium, et intellectus omnium intelligibilium. Et sic anima hominis fit omnia quodammodo secundum sensum et intellectum, in quo, quodammodo, cognitionem habentia ad Dei similitudinem appropinquant, in quo omnia praeexistunt" (*ST* 1.80.1, resp.). "Patet igitur, quod immaterialitas alicujus rei est ratio quod sit cognoscitiva, et secundum modum immaterialitatis est modum cognitionis. Unde in *De anima* 2.12, 424a32, dicitur quod plantae non cognoscunt propter suam materialitatem. Sensus autem cognoscitivus est, quia receptivus est specierum sine materia, et intellectus adhuc magis est cognoscitivus, quia magis separatus est a materia, et immixtus Unde, cum Deus sit in summo immaterialitatis ... sequitur quod ipse sit in summo cognitionis" (*ST* 1.14.1, resp.). See *In De anima* 2.5 (p. 74, n. 283 [88.55-60]).

⁵"Hujusmodi autem viventia inferiora, quorum actus est anima, de qua nunc agitur, habent duplex esse. Unum quidem materiale, in quo conveniunt cum aliis rebus materialibus. Aliud autem immateriale, in quo communicant cum substantiis superioribus aequaliter," *ibid.* (p. 74, n. 282 [88.55-60]).

* [By inadvertence, Gilson's text reads "écrire." The fifth edition correctly reads "décrire."—A.M.]

inition be impervious to the mind. Since it is not, it follows that outside the mind in its capacity somehow to become a thing, there must be an aspect of the thing making it capable of entering the mind. The factor in an object that a thought can assimilate is precisely its form. Consequently, to say that the knowing subject becomes the object known is equivalent to saying that the form of the knowing subject is augmented by the form of the known object.⁶ We already knew from a metaphysical point of view that this intimate relationship between thought and things was possible, since the universe, even in its least parts, is a participation in the highest intelligible, which is God. Now, we find that this relationship is necessarily required for such things as concepts and sensations to be conceivable. It is not enough to arrange a meeting point for the mind and things; things must still be such that the mind can meet them.

If the possibility of this twofold assimilation is granted, what becomes of the notion of knowledge? One and the same fact will be presented to us under two aspects, according to whether we look at it from the point of view of what the known object provides, or from the point of view of what is provided by the knowing subject. To describe knowledge from one of these two complementary perspectives and to speak of it as though from the other, involves one in inextricable difficulties.

Let us first consider the point of view of the object, which is easier to understand. If we are to be true to the principles just stated, we must grant that the being of the object itself is imposed on the being of the knowing subject. If to know a thing is to become it, this must mean that, at the moment the act of knowledge takes place, a new being begins, more ample than the first, because it embraces in a richer unity the knowing being as it was before the act of knowing and as it has become since enlarged by the accretion of the object known. The synthesis thus produced involves, therefore, the fusion of two beings that coincide at the moment of their union. The sense differs from the sensible object, and the intellect differs from the intelligible object; but the sense is not different from the object sensed, nor the intellect from the object it has actually come to know. Thus it is literally true that the sense, taken in its act of sensing, is identical with the sensible object taken in the act by which it is sensed, and that the intellect taken in its act of knowing is identical with the intelligible object taken in the act by which it is known: "The sensible in act is the sense in act, and the intelligible in act is the intellect in act."⁷

⁶See above, note 2.

⁷"Unde dicitur in libro *De anima* 3.2, 426a16, quod sensibile in actu est sensus in actu, et intelligibile in actu est intellectus in actu. Ex hoc enim aliquid in actu sentimus, vel intelligimus, quod intellectus noster, vel sensus, informatur in actu per speciem sensibilis vel intelligibilis. Et secundum hoc tantum sensus, vel intellectus alius est a sensibili, vel intelligibili, quia utrumque est in potentia" (*ST* 1.14.2, resp). See *In De anima* 3.2 (ed. Pirotta, pp. 148–149, nn. 591–593 and 724 [Leonine ed. 45, 2.26: 179.129–180 and 3.3: 216.61–86]).

An immediate corollary of this is the Thomistic thesis that every act of knowledge assumes the presence of the object known in the knowing subject. Many texts state this explicitly. We must not minimize their importance merely because, for present purposes, they are only used to state in another way the fundamental thesis of the coincidence of the intellect or of the senses with their objects in the act of knowledge. Nevertheless, a complication arises, and it will make us introduce a new factor in our analysis: namely, sensory species for knowledge by the senses, and intelligible species for knowledge by the intellect.

Let us start from the fact that knowledge of an object is the very presence of that object in thought. Now, an object must not encroach upon thought to the point that it ceases to be a thought. In fact, this is the sequence of events: the sense of sight perceives the form of stone, but it does not turn to stone. The intellect conceives the idea of wood, but it does not turn into wood. Rather, it remains what it was, and it even continues to be capable of becoming still other things. When we take cognizance of this new factor, the problem of knowledge takes this more complex form: under what condition can the knowing subject become the object known without ceasing to be itself?

To meet this difficulty, we have seen Thomas introduce the notion of "species." In every order of knowledge there exists a subject, an object, and an intermediary between the object and the subject. This holds for the most immediate types of sensation, such as touch and taste,⁸ and becomes more and more manifest as we go up the ladder of knowledge. To resolve the difficulty, then, we would only have to conceive of an intermediary which, without ceasing to be the object, would be capable of becoming the subject. Under this condition, the thing known would not encroach upon thought—which in fact it does not do—and it would still be known through the presence of the species in the thought that knows it.

In order to conceive of such an intermediary, which the very fact of knowledge forces us to admit, we must not try to imagine it. It is already dangerous to imagine sensible species as sensations travelling through space. When it is a question of an intelligible form, its extension toward our thought can only be conceived as having an intelligible nature. We shall not even speak here of extension, for we have left the physical realm and entered the metaphysical. The operation we are analyzing takes place entirely outside of space; the intelligible aspect of the thing, which is in space by reason of its matter, has no space to cross in order to be joined to the mind, which is dependent upon space by reason of its body. The imagination is the worst obstacle to understanding a problem of this sort. It is only a matter here of conceding to thought and to things what they require in order to be able to do what they do, that is, something by

⁸*In De anima* 2.15 (ed. Pirota, p. 109, nn. 437–438 [Leonine ed. 45: 134.146–156]). See M.-D Roland-Gosselin, "Ce que saint Thomas pense de la sensation immédiate et de son organe," *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 8 (1914): 104–105.

which the object can coincide with our intellect without being itself destroyed and without our intellect ceasing to be what it is.

The species, which must play this role, should be conceived first of all as being nothing but the intelligible or sensible aspect of the object with another mode of existence. It is almost impossible to speak of the species except as an image, that is, as an equivalent to, or substitute for the object; Thomas himself uses this language. It is important to understand that the species of an object is not one being and the object another. It is the object itself under the mode of species, that is, it is still the object considered as acting and impressing itself on a subject. Only on this condition will we be able to say that it is not the species of the object that is present in thought, but the object through its species. As it is the form of the object that is its active and determining principle, so it is the form of the object that the intellect, which knows it through its species, becomes. The whole objectivity of human knowledge depends, in the last analysis, upon the fact that the species is not a superadded intermediary, or a distinct substitute introduced into our thought in place of the thing. It is rather the sensible species of the thing itself which, rendered intelligible by the agent intellect, becomes the form of our possible intellect.⁹ A last consequence of the same principle will bring to light the continuity of the species with the form of the object.

We have said that it was necessary to introduce the notion of species into the analysis of knowledge in order to safeguard the individuality of subject and object. Let us now suppose, in order the better to guarantee their individuality and distinction, that we conceded to the species uniting them an existence of their own. The result would be that the object of knowledge would cease to be the intelligible form of the thing known and would become the intelligible species that has just been substituted for it. In other words, if the species were distinct from their forms, our knowledge would focus on species, not upon objects.¹⁰ This is unacceptable for two reasons. First, because in this case all our

⁹See Thomas' striking statement on this operation: "[C]um vero praedictas species (*scil.* intelligibiles) in actu completo habuerit, vocatus intellectus in actu: sic enim actu intelligit res, cum species rei facta fuerit forma possibilis intellectus" (*Comp. theol.* 1.83 [Leonine ed. 42: 108]). The term "similitudo" which Thomas often gives to the species (e.g. *SCG* 2.98) ought to be taken in a strong sense: it is a participation in the form that represents the form because it is nothing but the prolongation of that form. The "similitudo formae" is not a picture or carbon copy of it, otherwise knowledge would only grasp the shadows of objects: "Sciendum est autem quod cum quaelibet cognitio perficiatur per hoc quod similitudo rei cognitae est in cogniscente; sicut perfectio rei cognitae consistit in hoc quod habet talem formam per quem est talis, ita perfectio cognitionis consistit in hoc, quod habet similitudinem formae praedictae," *In Metaph.* 6.4 [ed. Cathala-Spiazzi, p. 311, n. 1234; see *ibid.* 1235-1236]. It is because having the "similitudo" of the form is equivalent to having the form, that we shall end with Thomas' definition of truth.

¹⁰"Quidam posuerunt, quod vires cognoscitivae, quae sunt in nobis, nihil cognoscunt, nisi proprias passiones: puta, quod sensus not sensit nisi passionem sui organi: et secundum hoc

knowledge would cease to deal with external realities and would only extend to their representations in our consciousness. Then we would be falling into Plato's error, which regards our knowledge as a knowledge of ideas, whereas it is a knowledge of things. Second, because there would no longer be any criterion for certitude. Each person would be the sole judge of what is true, seeing that it would now be a matter of what he thinks about it rather than of what it is, independent of thought. Since, however, there is demonstrative knowledge about things, and not mere opinions, the objects of knowledge must be things in themselves and not images distinct from them. The species, then, is not *what* the mind knows of a thing, but *that by which it knows it*.¹¹ In the act of knowledge there is no intermediate being between the mind and its object.

Let us shift our approach now and look at the same act from the point of view of the mind. How will it appear to us from this perspective? What first catches our attention is that the act of knowledge is immanent in its subject. By this we mean that it takes place in the subject and benefits the subject alone. From now on the unity of the intellect and its object, which we have been emphasizing so strongly, will be seen under a new light. Up to the present, counting on the fact that the act of knowledge was common to the one knowing and the thing known, we could speak indifferently of thought becoming its object or of the object becoming the knowledge which a thought has of its object. Now, we see clearly that when a thing becomes "intellectualized" in thought, it does not become anything more or less than it was. For an object with no consciousness of being, to be known is no event. In its case, it is as though nothing happened. Only the being of the knowing subject has gained anything by the operation.

What is more, as soon as we see that the act of knowledge is completely immanent in thought, it will not be enough to say that it is thought that becomes the object; we will also have to say that the object is accommodated to the thought's mode of being in order that thought may become it. It is not its own being and in addition that of its object except for the fact that the object takes

intellectus nihil intelligit, nisi suam passionem, id est speciem intelligibilem in se receptam: et secundum hoc species hujusmodi est ipsum *quod* intelligitur. Sed haec opinio manifeste apparet falsa ex duobus," etc. (*ST* 1.85.2, resp.). "Intellectum est in intelligente per suam similitudinem. Et per hunc modum dicitur, quod intellectum in actu est intellectus in actu; in quantum similitudo rei intellectae est forma intellectus, sicut similitudo rei sensibilis est forma sensus in actu; unde non sequitur quod species intelligibilis abstracta sit id quod actu intelligitur, sed quod sit similitudo ejus" (*ibid.*, ad 1).

¹¹"Manifestum est etiam, quod species intelligibiles, quibus intellectus possibilis fit in actu, non sunt objectum intellectus. Non enim se habent ad intellectum sicut *quod* intelligitur, sed sicut *quo* intelligit . . . Manifestum est enim quod scientiae sunt de his quae intellectus intelligit. Sunt autem scientiae de rebus, non autem de speciebus, vel intentionibus intelligibilibus, nisi sola scientia rationalis [i.e. logic]," *In De anima* 3.8 (ed. Pirota, p. 170, n. 718 [Leonine ed. 45, 3.2: 213.264–279]).

on a being in thought of the same order as its own: *Omne quod recipitur in altero, recipitur secundum modum recipientis*. For iron or a tree to be in thought as something known, they must be there without their matter and only by their form, that is, according to a spiritual mode of being. This mode of existence that things have in the thought that assimilates them is called "intentional" being.¹² If we reflect on it, this is a profound transformation of a concrete datum by the mind receiving it. Experience furnishes the mind with a particular object composed of form and matter; the senses, and after them the intellect, receive a form more and more freed from every material feature; in short, they receive its intelligibility.

This is not all. The act of knowledge is going to be further liberated from the object in a still clearer way when it produces the interior word or concept. The name "concept" is given to what the intellect conceives in itself and expresses by a word.¹³ The sensible species and then the intelligible species, by which we know but which we do not know, was still the form of the object itself. The concept is the likeness of the object that the intellect brings forth under the action of the species. We are now dealing with a true substitute for the object. The substitute is no longer either the substance of the knowing intellect nor the known thing itself, but an intentional being incapable of existing outside of thought,¹⁴ which is designated by a word and which later will be fixed by the definition.

This shows us more clearly how complex a relation unites our knowledge with its object. Between the thing, considered in its own nature, and the concept the intellect forms of it, there is a twofold likeness that we must be able to distinguish. First, there is a likeness of the thing in us, that is, the resemblance of the form that is the species. This is a direct likeness which the object produces by its very nature and imprints in us. It is as indistinguishable from the object as is the action a seal exerts on wax from the seal itself. Consequently, this likeness is not distinguished from its source, because it is not a representation of it but its expression and, as it were, its extension. Second, there is the likeness of the thing that we conceive in ourselves and which is not the form itself but nothing more than its representation.¹⁵ The question now arises: how can we guarantee the fidelity of the concept to its object?

¹²Ibid. 2.24 (p. 138, nn. 552-553 [169.27-57]).

¹³"Dico autem intentionem intellectam (sive conceptum) id quod intellectus in seipso concipit de re intellecta. Quae quidem in nobis neque est ipsa res quae intelligitur neque est ipsa substantia intellectus, sed est quaedam similitudo concepta intellectu de re intellecta, quam voces exteriores significat; unde et ipsa intentio verbum interius nominatur, quod est exteriori verbo significatum" (SCG 4.11 [6]).

¹⁴In *De anima* 2.12 (ed. Pirotta, p. 98, nn. 378-380 [Leonine ed. 45: 115-116.96-151]); ST 1.88.2, ad 2.

¹⁵"[I]ntellectus, per speciem rei formatus, intelligendo format in seipso quandam intentionem rei intellectae, quae est ratio ipsius, quam significat definitio. ... Haec autem intentio

We cannot doubt that the concept of the thing, the first product of the intellect, is really distinct from the thing itself. We experience, so to speak, the dissociation happening before our eyes. The concept of man, for example, exists only in the intellect that conceives it, while men themselves continue to exist in reality even when they are no longer known. That the concept is no longer the species directly introduced into us by the object is no less evident since, as we have just seen, the species is the cause of the concept within us.¹⁶ Lacking identity between knowledge and the object known, or even between the intelligible species and the concept, we can at least observe the identity between the object and the subject that begets in itself the likeness of the object. The concept is not the thing; but the intellect that conceives the concept is truly the thing of which it forms a concept for itself. The intellect that produces the concept of a book only does so because it has first become the form of a book, thanks to a species that is nothing but that form. That is why the concept necessarily resembles its object. Just as at the beginning of the operation the intellect was one with the object because it was one with its species, so also at the end of the operation the intellect has in itself only one faithful representation of the object, because before producing it, in a way it had become the object itself. The concept of an object resembles it because the intellect must be impregnated by the species of the object itself in order to be able to beget the concept.¹⁷

intellecta, cum sit quasi terminus intelligibilis operationis, est aliud a specie intelligibili quae facit intellectum in actu, quam oportet considerari ut intelligibilis operationis principium: licet utrumque sit rei intellectae similitudo. Per hoc enim quod species intelligibilis, quae est forma intellectus et intelligendi principium, est similitudo rei exterioris, sequitur quod intellectus intentionem formet illi rei similem. Quia quale est unumquodque, talia operatur. Et ex hoc quod intentio intellecta est similis alicui rei, sequitur quod intellectus, formando hujusmodi intentionem, rem illam intelligat" (*SCG* 1.53 [3.4]).

¹⁶"Id autem quod est per se intellectum non est res illa cujus notitia per intellectum habetur, cum illa quandoque sit intellecta in potentia tantum, et sit extra intelligentem, sicut cum homo intelligit res materiales, ut lapidem vel animal aut aliud hujusmodi: cum tamen oporteat quod intellectum sit in intelligente, et unum cum ipso. Neque etiam intellectum per se est similitudo rei intellectae, per quam informatur intellectus ad intelligendum. Intellectus enim non potest intelligere nisi secundum quod fit in actu per hanc similitudinem, sicut nihil aliud potest operari secundum quod est in potentia, sed secundum quod fit actu per aliquam formam. Haec ergo similitudo se habet in intelligendo sicut intelligendi principium, ut calor est principium calefactionis, non sicut intelligendi terminus. Hoc ergo est primo et per se intellectum, quod intellectus in se ipso concipit de re intellecta, sive illud sit definitio, sive enuntiatio, secundum quod ponuntur duae operationes intellectus, in [Averroes] *De anima* 3, com. 12 [ed. Crawford, pp. 426–427]. Hoc significatur per vocem" (*De pot.* 9.5, resp., *ibid.* 8.1, resp.; *De ver.* 3.2, resp.).

¹⁷See *De natura verbi intellectus* from "Cum ergo intellectus, informatus specie natus sit agere ..." to "Verbum igitur cordis ...", and especially the words: "Idem enim lumen quod intellectus possibilis recipit cum specie ab agente, per actionem intellectus informati tali specie diffunditur, cum objectum (*scil.* conceptum) formatur, et manet cum objecto formato" [*ibid.* *Opuscula omnia* 5, ed. Pierre Mandonnet (Paris, 1927), pp. 370–371]. Not being able to es-

The act by which the intellect begets a concept in itself is a natural act. In performing it, then, it is only acting according to its nature. Since the operation is carried on as we have just described it, we can conclude that its result is naturally unerring. An intellect that only expresses the intelligible if the object has first impressed itself in it, cannot err in its expression. Let us give the term "quiddity" to the essence of the thing thus known. We can say that the quiddity is the proper object of the intellect, and that it never errs in apprehending it. If, to simplify the problem, we disregard accidental causes of error, which are capable of falsifying an experience, we shall see that this is indeed the case. By rights, and almost always in fact, a human intellect, confronted by an oak, forms in itself the concept of a tree, and confronted with Socrates or Plato forms in itself the concept of man. The intellect conceives essences as hearing perceives sounds and sight colors.¹⁸

This concept is normally in conformity with its object. Nevertheless, its presence in the intellect does not yet constitute the presence of a truth. All that can be said of it thus far is that it is there, and the intellect that has made it does

establish an identity between the concept and its object, Thomas maintains at least the continuity of the intelligibility of things and of that which it permits the intellect to introduce into the concept. This is why the texts in which Thomas declares that the immediate object of the intellect is the concept, not the thing, in no way contradicts the objectivity of the concept. On the contrary, if our intellect had an immediate intuition of the object (as sight sees color) the concept formed from the intuition would only be an image of our intuition and consequently a mediate image of the object. When Thomas considers the concept, that is, the intellect's object, as the product of the intellect made fruitful by the object itself, he feels that he is guaranteeing the strictest continuity between the intelligibility of the object and that of the concept. It is from this point of view that the necessity for taking the species as a principle and not as an object of knowledge fully appears. First of all, there is the object, and this is not itself grasped in itself by an intuition. Next there is the species, and this is still only the object, and it also is still not grasped by an intuition. Then there is the intellect informed by the species which thus becomes the object, and it still has no direct intuition of what it has thereby become. Finally there is the concept, the first conscious representation of the object. *No intermediary representation, therefore, separates the object from the concept which expresses it.* It is this which confers objectivity upon our conceptual knowledge. The full weight of this doctrine, therefore, rests upon the twofold aptitude of our intellect, first to become the thing, and secondly to bring forth the concept while thus being fecundated. [Note: the *De natura verbi intellectus* is listed among the nonauthentic or doubtfully authentic works of St. Thomas. See Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas 1: The Person and His Work*, trans. Robert Royal (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1996), p. 360. The doctrine of this work, however, appears to be truly Thomistic.—A.M.]

¹⁸"Quidditas autem rei est proprium objectum intellectus: unde sicut sensus sensibilium propriorum semper est verus, ita et intellectus in cognoscendo quod quid est" (*De ver.* 1.12, resp.). See *ST* 1.16.2: "Cum autem omnis res sit vera secundum quod habet propriam formam naturae suae, necesse est quod intellectus in quantum est cognoscens sit verus, in quantum habet similitudinem rei cognitae, quae est forma ejus in quantum est cognoscens."

not know how it has made it. The concept is not born from the intellect's reflecting upon and considering the intelligible species and then trying to fashion an image in its likeness. The unity of the intellect and the species, the guarantee of the objectivity of knowledge, prevents our supposing any duplication of this sort.¹⁹ The most evident consequence of this continuity in the operation is that, if the concept is in conformity with the object, the intellect begetting it knows nothing of it. This simple and direct apprehension of reality by the intellect presupposes on its part no conscious and reflective activity. It is the operation of a being acting according to its nature and under the action of an external reality, rather than the free activity of a mind dominating and enriching this reality.

In order that this conformity of the concept to the object become something known and take the form of truth in consciousness, the intellect must add something of its own to the exterior reality it has just assimilated. This addition begins when, not content just to apprehend a thing, it makes a judgment about it and says: this is a man, this is a tree. Now, the intellect adds something new—an affirmation that exists in it and not in things, but of which we can ask whether it corresponds with reality or not. The definition of truth as an "adequation" between the thing and the intellect: *adaequatio rei et intellectus*, simply expresses the fact that the problem of truth can have no meaning until the intellect is regarded as distinct from its object. Until then, since the intellect is one with the thing through its species, or acts only under its immediate influence in the concept, to be in accord with the object would simply be to be in accord with itself. Then judgment intervenes—an original act of the mind that is posited for itself in the mind. There are now two distinct realities, so that the question of their relation to one another can arise. Truth is nothing but the agreement between the judgment of reason and the reality the judgment affirms. Error, on the other hand, is nothing but their disagreement.²⁰

Adaequatio rei et intellectus is one of philosophy's best known adages. For some it signifies a profound truth; for others it represents the most simplistic and most naively sophistic definition of truth. It is not the task of the history of philosophy to refute or justify the notion, but it should at least make it understood, which is impossible without drawing attention to the meaning of the adage in the existential metaphysics of Aquinas.

¹⁹"Sed sciendum est quod cum reflexio fiat redeundo super idem; hic autem non sit reditio super speciem, nec super intellectum formatum specie, quia non percipiuntur quando verbum formatur, gignitio verbi non est reflexa" (*De natura verbi intellectus*, p. 373). "[N]on enim intellectus noster inspiciens hanc speciem (*scil.* intelligibilem) tamquam exemplar sibi simile, aliquid facit quasi verbum ejus. Sic enim non fieret unum ex intellectu et specie, cum intellectus non intelligat nisi factus unum aliquid cum specie, sed in ipsa specie formatus agit tamquam aliquo sui, ipsam tamen non excedens. Species autem sic accepta semper ducit in obiectum primum" (*ibid.* p. 372). [On the doubtful authenticity of this work see above note 17.]

²⁰*De ver.* 1.3, resp.

The notion of truth itself does not apply directly to things, but to the mind's knowledge of them. As we have said, neither truth nor error is possible except where there is judgment. Now, judgment is an act of reason associating or disassociating concepts. Consequently, truth properly speaking exists in thought. In other words, thoughts rather than things are true. On the other hand, if we look from the point of view of its basis at the relation of thought to things, we will have to say that truth is in things rather than in thought. I say that Peter exists; if this judgment of existence is true, it is because Peter does indeed exist. I say that Peter is a rational animal; if I am speaking truly, it is because Peter is a living being endowed with reason. Let us go further. I say that a thing cannot be both itself and its contrary. If this principle is true, it is because each being is the being that it is and not another. This principle is obviously true, because the first basis of everything true we can say of any being is the primary and indubitable fact that this being is what it is.

Thus far, Thomistic realism is only the heir of everything that was sound in previous realist philosophy, with which it explicitly and rightly claims kinship.²¹ Here as elsewhere, however, Thomas goes beyond it by making it more profound in the existential sense. Taken in what we may call its static or essential form, ontological truth merely means that truth is a transcendental: "being and truth are convertible" (*ens et verum convertuntur*). Indeed, whatever is, is intelligible, that is to say, the object of true knowledge, actual or possible. When we extend this abstract relation of convertibility to the real case of God, we see at once that, not only rightfully but in fact, whatever is, is actually known in its truth, adequately and such as it is. Nevertheless, this is still not the ultimate basis of this thesis, because the priority of being over truth begins where being itself begins, namely, in God. Divine knowledge is true because it is commensurate with the divine being; or better, it is identical with it. If God is truth, it is because his truth is one with his very act of being. In comparison with this identity, the commensuration of our true knowledge to its object is but a weak and deficient imitation.

Weak and deficient though it be, it is no less a faithful imitation, provided it is properly understood for what it is. It is well here to remember that the objects of knowledge are beings only because God creates and conserves them as acts of being. Metaphysics dominates noetic as it dominates the rest of philosophy. In such a philosophy, truth will never realize the adequation of understanding with being unless it attains the adequation of understanding with the act of existing. As Thomas himself observes, the reason why judgment is the mind's most perfect act is that it alone is capable of attaining, beyond the essence of the

²¹See the sayings of Augustine, Anselm, Hilary of Poitiers, Avicenna and Isaac Israeli which Thomas gathered together, *ibid.* 1.1. On the intrinsic character of the being of truth thus understood see the pertinent remarks of Pedro Descoqs in his *Institutiones metaphysicae generalis* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1915) 1: 350-363.

beings grasped by concepts, that *ipsum esse* which is, as we know, the very source of all reality.²²

All this shows what a cardinal role the apprehension of concrete existence plays in the noetic of Thomas Aquinas. It is constantly repeated that the first Thomistic principle of knowledge is the notion of being, and rightfully so. Being is first in the order of the simple apprehension of concepts and it is also first in the order of judgment. This must be so, since every judgment is made from concepts. However, it must be added that the word "principle" has two different meanings in Thomas' philosophy, as indeed in any other philosophy. Descartes severely reproached scholasticism for positing as the first principle the universal notion of being and the principle of identity that derives immediately from it. What real knowledge, asked Descartes, can anyone hope to derive from such formally abstract notions? Hence his conclusion that it is not the principle of identity nor of contradiction, evident as it may be, but rather the first judgment of existence that constitutes the first principle of philosophy. If to know is to progress from existences to existences, the first principle of philosophy can only be the judgment of existence that precedes and conditions all the others: I think, therefore I am.

Descartes was right, at least in the sense that he was emphasizing what could never afterward be forgotten, namely, the distinction between the principles governing thought, such as the principle of identity or contradiction, and principles of the acquisition of knowledge, such as the *Cogito* was for him. Insofar as he accused scholasticism of having elevated the principle of contradiction to be the principle of the acquisition of knowledge, his criticism missed the point, at least insofar as the teaching of Thomas is concerned. In Thomistic philosophy, the starting point of the acquisition of knowledge is nothing but the sensible perception of actually existing concrete beings. The entire structure of knowledge of the Thomistic sort, from the lowest sciences right up to metaphysics, rests on this fundamental existential experience, whose content human knowledge will always progressively explore.

Beginning with this central point, we can see how the main theses of Aquinas' noetic come together, and how texts that his interpreters usually believe to be contradictory are in full agreement. First of all, it is true that the primary object of knowledge is the thing itself (*id quod intelligitur primo est res*), provided that it be present in the mind through its species: "the thing of which the intelligible species is the likeness" (*res, cujus species intelligibilis est similitudo*).²³ In saying in this precise sense that what we first know is the object, the intention is not to oppose the knowledge of the object to the concept that expresses it, but

²²For the epistemological consequences of this principle see my *Thomist Realism and the Critique of Knowledge*, pp. 195-215.

²³ST 1.85.2, resp.

rather to the knowledge of the intellectual act that conceives it and the knowledge of the subject that accomplishes this act. The expression "that which is primarily understood is the thing" means that the mind first forms the concept of the object; then, reflecting upon this object, it observes the act by which it just grasped it; and finally, knowing the existence of its acts, it discovers itself as their common source. "And therefore that which is first known by the human intellect is an object of this kind, and that which is known secondarily is the act by which that object is known; and through the act the intellect itself is known, whose perfection is the act itself of understanding."²⁴

In the second place, it is equally true to say that the first object of the intellect is the thing as given in the concept. This is true on condition that we understand it in the only sense the proposition had in Thomas' mind when he formulated it. What is known, properly and absolutely speaking, is not a being considered with its own real existence, since this remains what it is whether I know it or not. What is known is only this same being insofar as it has become mine by my intellect's becoming one with its species, from which the act of the concept will result. Consequently, to say that the immediate object of thought is the concept is not to deny that it is the thing, but rather to affirm that it is the thing inasmuch as its intelligibility constitutes the whole intelligibility of the concept.²⁵

Once we have grasped these guiding themes of Thomas' doctrine, it becomes possible to conceive of an epistemology that would faithfully develop it, and perhaps this development has been even more complete than is generally imagined.

In a doctrine of this sort, it would be well to give primacy of place to a criticism of Kant's Critique, with the task of inquiring whether the basic argument of idealism would not imply a false stance on the problem of knowledge. If we suppose, first, that things are for themselves and the intellect is for itself, that is, if we suppose that it is impossible for them to meet, then there is no bridge to allow thought to cross over to things, and idealism is true. It is contradictory to ask whether or not our ideas conform to things if things are only known to us through their ideas. The argument is irrefutable, and here again idealism is true, unless indeed the argument begs the question.

Aquinas, they say, has not pointed out this difficulty. But perhaps it is because he had already resolved another difficulty that idealism in its turn had not raised, and whose solution renders impossible the very position from which the idealist problem emerges. Thomas has not asked under what conditions a mathematical physics is possible, but, on the contrary, he has asked what conditions are necessary if we are to have an abstract notion of any physical body whatsoever. The possibility of our knowledge in general is perhaps already contained in the conformity of our humblest concept to its object. It becomes possible, contrary to idealism, to know whether or not our ideas conform to things in a

²⁴Ibid. 1.87.3, resp.

²⁵*De pot.* 8.1 and 4.5.

doctrine in which the presence of things in us is the very condition of the conception of ideas. Accordingly, the true Thomistic reply to the critical problem is to be found in an earlier critique, in which inquiry into the possibility of knowledge in general precedes the inquiry into the possibility of science in particular. To ask Thomas for a direct refutation of Kant's Critique is to ask him to solve a problem that from his perspective is simply pointless.

With this preliminary clearing of the ground, it would seem that for Thomas a complete theory of knowledge would perhaps dispense with the Kantian Critique. There is knowledge; this knowledge is true, at least under certain conditions.²⁶ It is true whenever it is formed under normal conditions, by a normally constituted mind. How does it happen, then, that there is agreement among minds, and that beyond the conflict of opinions, there is a truth? The intellect, in search of this impersonal basis of given truths, reflects upon its act and judges that this basis lies both in the specific identity of nature that belongs to all human concepts, and in the impersonal objectivity of things known by those concepts.

Is it possible to conceive of the act of a mind that extends to a thing? To be sure of it, the regressive analysis that has brought us to the concept must mount in the end from the concept back to the intellect. Does there exist in us a principle of such a kind that it can produce a concept whose conformity to the object is assured? Yes, if it is true that we have an intellect, that is, when all is said and done, if it is true that we are not enclosed in our own being, but capable of becoming the being of others by way of representation.²⁷ This is the only possible keystone of a Thomistic theory of knowledge. The adequation of the intellect to reality, which is the definition of truth, is legitimately confirmed in a doctrine in which the intellect, reflecting upon itself, finds that it is capable of becoming reality (*secundum hoc cognoscit veritatem intellectus, quod supra se reflectitur*). From the moment when the intellect, which judges things, knows that it can only conceive them by being united with them, no scruple could prevent it from affirming as valid the judgments in which the content of its concepts becomes explicit. The initial fact of knowledge, which this analysis tries to penetrate, is accordingly the direct grasping of intelligible reality by an intellect served by a sensibility.

²⁶On this point see the important article by M.-D. Roland-Gosselin, "La théorie thomiste de l'erreur," *Mélanges Thomistes in Bibliothèque Thomiste* 3 (Le Saulchoir: Kain, 1923): 253-274.

²⁷"In intellectu enim est (*scil.* veritas), sicut consequens actum intellectus, et sicut cognita per intellectum; consequitur namque intellectus operationem secundum quod iudicium intellectus est de re secundum quod est, cognoscitur autem ab intellectu, secundum quod intellectus reflectitur supra actum suum, non solum secundum quod cognoscit actum suum, sed secundum quod cognoscit proportionem ejus ad rem: quod quidem cognosci non potest nisi cognita natura ipsius actus; quae cognosci non potest, nisi cognoscatur natura principii activi, quod est ipse intellectus, in cujus natura est ut rebus conformetur; unde secundum hoc cognoscit veritatem intellectus quod supra seipsum reflectitur" (*De ver.* 1.9, resp.).

PART II. Chapter Eight

Appetite and Will¹

Thus far we have only considered the cognitive powers of the human intellect. But the soul is not only capable of knowing; it is also capable of desiring. This is something it shares with all natural forms, and it only takes on a special character in the human soul because it is a form endowed with knowledge. Some kind of inclination follows upon every form. Fire, for example, is inclined by its form to move upward and to produce fire in the bodies it touches. Now, the form of beings endowed with knowledge is more perfect than the form of bodies without it. In the latter the form determines the particular being proper to each thing. In other words, it only confers on it its natural being. The inclination following upon a form of this sort is rightly called a *natural appetite*.

Beings endowed with knowledge, on the other hand, are determined in their natural being by a form that is, to be sure, their natural form, but that is at the same time capable of receiving the species of other beings. Thus the senses receive species from all sensible objects and the intellect from all intelligible objects. Consequently, the human soul is equipped to become, in a way, all things, thanks to its senses and intellect. In this way it somewhat resembles God himself, in whom the exemplars of all creatures pre-exist. If, therefore, the forms of knowing beings are of a higher grade than those without knowledge, the inclination proceeding from them must be more excellent than a natural inclination. It is here that we encounter appetitive powers by which the animal tends toward what it knows.²

Let us add, moreover, that animals participate more fully in the divine goodness than inanimate things and require a larger number of acts and means in order to acquire their perfection. They are like those persons we spoke of earlier who can acquire perfect health, but only by utilizing a sufficiently large number of means.³ The natural appetite, directed to only one object and to a mediocre perfection, requires but a single act in order to acquire it. The animal's appetite, on the other hand, must take many different forms and be capable of extending to all the animal's needs. That is why its nature must have an appetite accompanying its faculty of knowing and allowing it to tend toward all the objects it apprehends.⁴

¹On the will see Johannes Maria Verweyen, *Das Problem der Willensfreiheit in der Scholastik* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1909).

²ST 1.80.1, resp.

³See above p. 233.

⁴*De ver.* 22.3, resp. and ad 2.

It should now be clear that the nature of the appetite is closely linked to the degree of knowledge from which it proceeds. It will hardly be surprising, then, to find as many appetitive powers attributed to the human soul as it has cognitive powers. Now, the soul apprehends objects by means of two powers, a lower sensory power, and a higher intellectual or rational power. Accordingly, it tends toward its object by two appetitive powers, a lower one called *sensuality*, which is divided into *irascible* and *concupiscible*, and a higher power called *will*.⁵

It cannot be doubted that these are distinct powers of the human soul. Natural appetite, sensory appetite and rational appetite are distinguished as three irreducible degrees of perfection. The closer a nature is to the divine perfection, the more clearly we see in it the express resemblance to the creator. Now, it is characteristic of God's perfection that he moves, inclines and directs everything without himself being moved, inclined or directed by another. Accordingly, the closer a nature is to God, the less he directs it and the more it is capable of directing itself. Because of its materiality, insensible nature is infinitely distant from God and is therefore inclined toward a definite end. It cannot be said to incline itself toward that end, but only that it has a tendency toward it. The arrow the archer aims at the target is like this, and so is the stone that tends downward.⁶ Sensory nature, on the other hand, is nearer to God and has an inner principle of its tendency, namely, the desirable object it apprehends. However, this inclination is not itself within the animal's power but is determined by the object. In the preceding case the object of the inclination was external and the inclination was determined. In the present case, the object is internal but the inclination remains determined. Animals, in the presence of something desirable, cannot not desire it, for they are not masters of their inclination. Thus we can say, with John Damascene, that they do not act but rather are acted upon (*non agunt sed magis aguntur*). The reason for this inferiority is that the sensory appetite of the animal is bound, like the senses themselves, to a bodily organ. Because of its closeness to the dispositions of matter and corporeal things, it deserves a nature less fitted to move than to be moved.

The rational nature, however, being much closer to God than the preceding, is bound to have an inclination of a higher order and distinct from the other two. Like animate beings, it contains inclinations toward definite objects, for example, insofar as it is the form of a natural heavy body that tends downward. Like animals, it has an inclination that can be swayed by the desirable objects it apprehends. It has, in addition, an inclination that is not necessarily determined by the desirable objects it apprehends, and it can be moved or not, as it pleases. Its movement, consequently, is not determined by anything other than

⁵Ibid. 25.3, resp.

⁶Ibid. 22.1, resp.

itself. Now, no being can determine its own inclination toward an end if it does not first know the end and the relations of the means to their end. Such knowledge belongs only to rational creatures. An appetite not necessarily determined from without is therefore very closely linked to rational knowledge, and hence it is called the rational appetite or will.⁷ The distinction, then, between sensuality and will rests first of all on the fact that one is determined in its inclinations while the other determines itself. This supposes two powers of a different order. And as this diversity in mode of determination demands a difference in the mode of apprehending objects, we can say that, secondarily, appetites are distinguished according to the degrees of knowledge to which they correspond.⁸

Let us examine each of these powers in turn, beginning with the sensory appetite or sensuality. A natural thing is fixed in its natural being. It can only be what it is by nature; and consequently it has only one inclination toward a definite object. And this inclination does not require that it be able to distinguish what is desirable from what is not. It is enough that the author of nature has made provision for this by conferring upon each being its appropriate inclination. The sensory appetite, on the contrary, tends toward any object that is desirable and useful to it, though it does not tend to the desirable and the good in general which only reason apprehends. Just as the sense, to which it corresponds, has for its object any particular sensible thing, so the sensory appetite has for its object any particular good.⁹

We are dealing here with a faculty that, taken in itself, is solely appetitive and in no way cognitive. Sensuality gets its name from sensory movement, as sight gets its name from seeing, and as in general a power gets its name from its act. Indeed, sensory movement, defined precisely and in itself, is only the appetite following the sense perception of a sensible object. Unlike the action of the appetite, this apprehension does not involve a movement. The act by which the senses apprehend their object is completely finished when the object apprehended has passed into the power that apprehends it. The act of the appetitive power, on the contrary, reaches its end when the being endowed with appetite tends toward the object it desires. Thus the act of the knowing powers resembles repose, while that of the appetitive power is more like movement. Hence sensuality has no place in the realm of knowledge but solely in the realm of appetite.¹⁰

Within the sensory appetite, which is a sort of generic power called sensuality, we can distinguish between two specific powers: the *irascible* and the *concupiscible*. The sensory appetite has in common with the natural appetite the fact

⁷Ibid. 22.4, resp.

⁸ST 1.80.2, resp.; *De ver.* 22.4, ad 1.

⁹*De ver.* 25.1, resp.

¹⁰ST 1.81.1, resp.; *De ver.* 25.1, ad 1.

that it always tends toward an object suitable to the being that desires it. Now, it is easy to observe in the natural appetite a twofold tendency, corresponding to the twofold action of the natural being. By the first of these actions the natural being strives to acquire what it needs to preserve its nature. Thus a heavy body moves downward to the place where it naturally remains. By the second action each natural thing makes use of some active quality directed against anything that can be opposed to it. Corruptible beings must be able to act in this way, for if they could not destroy what is opposed to them they would quickly perish. Thus the natural appetite tends toward two ends: to acquire what is in accord with its nature, and to win a sort of victory over all its adversaries. The first action is receptive in nature while the second is active, and as action and receptivity depend upon different principles, there should be different powers at the origin of these different actions. The same holds for the sensory appetite. By its appetitive power the animal tends toward what is agreeable to its nature and capable of preserving it. This function is performed by the concupiscible appetite, which has for its proper object whatever the senses apprehend as pleasing. On the other hand, the animal clearly desires to dominate and conquer everything hostile to it. This function is performed by the irascible appetite, whose object is not what is pleasing but what is difficult and arduous.¹¹

It is obvious, then, that the irascible appetite is a different power than the concupiscible. The nature of the desirable is not the same in what is attractive and what is adverse. Generally speaking, what is arduous or adverse cannot be overcome without the sacrifice of some pleasure and without running the risk of suffering. In order to fight, the animal will tear itself away from the greatest pleasure and will not give up the struggle in spite of the pain that comes from its wounds. On the other hand, the concupiscible appetite tends to receive its object, for it only wants to be united to what pleases it. The irascible appetite, on the contrary, is directed to action, since it wants to triumph over anything dangerous to it. Now, what we said about the natural appetite is true also of the sensory; receiving and acting are always related to different powers. This is even true of knowledge, since we have had to distinguish between the agent intellect and the possible intellect. Consequently, we must consider the irascible and the concupiscible as two distinct powers.

This distinction does not prevent their being related to each other. The irascible appetite is related to the concupiscible, for it is its guardian and defender. The animal has to vanquish its foes by means of the irascible appetite, so that

¹¹ST 2, resp. This distinction might seem to be superfluous. See A.-D. Sertillanges, *Saint Thomas d'Aquin* (Paris: Flammarion, 1931), p. 215. But it has been resurrected and studied at length by Maurice Pradines, *Philosophie de la sensation 2: Les sens du besoin* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1932); 3: *Les sens de la défense* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1934). In modern psychology we find part of the irascible power under the name "aggressiveness."

the concupiscible may enjoy its pleasurable objects in peace. Indeed, it is always for the sake of procuring some pleasure that animals fight—the pleasures, for example, of sex or food. Thus the movements of the irascible appetite begin and end in the concupiscible. Anger begins with sadness and ends in the joy of revenge, and both of these belong to the concupiscible appetite. Hope begins with desire and ends in pleasure. Thus the movements of sensuality always go from the concupiscible appetite to the concupiscible appetite by way of the irascible.¹²

The question now arises whether we can distinguish any difference in degree of perfection between these two distinct but closely associated powers. Can we speak of the superiority of either the concupiscible or irascible appetite, as we have previously noted the superiority of the sensory appetite over the natural appetite? If we consider the sensory power of the soul by itself, we observe first of all that from the point of view of both knowledge and appetite it includes some faculties that belong to it by the very fact of its sensory nature, and others, on the contrary, that it possesses through a kind of participation in the higher power of reason. This does not mean that the intellectual and sensory faculties merge into each other. The higher degrees of the sensory appetite border on the lower degrees of reason, according to the principle of Dionysius: “Divine wisdom joins the ends of primary things to the beginnings of secondary ones” (*divina sapientia conjungit fines primorum principiis secundorum*).¹³

Thus the imagination belongs to the sensory soul as perfectly conforming to its proper degree of perfection; what perceives sensible forms is naturally equipped to conserve them. It is perhaps not the same in the case of the estimative power. Let us recall the functions we have already attributed to this sensory power: it apprehends species that the senses are incapable of receiving, since it perceives objects as useful or harmful and things as friends or enemies. The assessment the sensory soul thus makes of things gives animals a kind of natural prudence, with results analogous to those reason obtains by entirely different means. Now, it seems that the irascible appetite is superior to the concupiscible, just as the estimative power is to the imagination. When an animal, through its concupiscible appetite, tends toward an object that pleases it, this is perfectly in accord with the nature of the sensory soul. Should an animal, moved by its irascible appetite, forget about its pleasure in order to desire a victory it can only obtain with pain, this would be the act of an appetitive power extremely close to an order superior to the sensory power. Just as the estimative power achieved results analogous to those of the intellect, so the estimative power obtains results analogous to those of the will. We can therefore place the irascible appetite above the concupiscible appetite, even though its purpose is to safeguard the latter’s action. It is the noblest instrument

¹²*De ver.* 25.5, resp.

¹³*De divinis nominibus* 7.3 [PL 122: 1155aD].

with which nature has endowed animals for maintaining themselves in existence and assuring their preservation.¹⁴

This conclusion concerning animals is also valid for humans endowed with will and reason. The powers of the sensory appetite have exactly the same nature in animals and in humans endowed with reason. The movements are identical, only their origin is different. As found in animals, the sensory appetite is moved and directed by the judgment of their estimative power. Thus the sheep fears the wolf because it spontaneously judges the wolf to be dangerous. Now, we have already noted above¹⁵ that in humans the estimative power is replaced by a cogitative faculty, which collates the images of individual objects. Thus it is the cogitative power that directs the movements of our sensory appetite. And as this particular reason itself, which is sensory in nature, is moved and directed in us by universal reason, our appetites are dependent on our reason.

It is easy to be sure of this. Syllogistic reasoning proceeds from general premises in order to draw particular propositions from them. When a sensible object is perceived as good or bad, useful or harmful, we can say that the perception of this particular harmful thing or of this useful thing is conditioned by our general intellectual knowledge of what is harmful and useful. Acting on our imagination with appropriate arguments, reason can make an object appear to be pleasant or dangerous, agreeable or painful. We can calm our anger or allay our fear by reasoning about it.¹⁶ We should add, however, that in the case of humans, the sensory appetite cannot carry out any movement by the soul's motive power without first obtaining the assent of the will. With animals, the irascible or concupiscible appetite immediately calls for certain movements. The sheep fears the wolf and at once runs away. Here there is no higher appetite to inhibit movements of the sensible order. It is not so in the case of us humans. Our movements are not infallibly initiated by the inclinations of our appetites, but they always await the higher order of the will. In all graded motive powers the lower only move by virtue of the higher; the sensory appetite, which is in a lower grade, could not specify any movement without the consent of the higher appetite. Just as the lower celestial spheres are moved by the higher, so the appetite is moved by the will.¹⁷

We have now come to the very threshold of the activity of the will and of free will itself in the strict sense of the term. To reach it we have but to attribute to the appetite an object proportionate to that of rational knowledge in terms of universality. What places the will in its proper degree of perfection is that it has for its first and principal object the desirable and good as such.

¹⁴*De ver.* 25.2, resp.

¹⁵See above p. 239.

¹⁶*De ver.* 25.4, resp.

¹⁷*ST* 1.81.3, resp.

Particular things can only become objects of the will to the extent that they participate in the universal nature of the good.¹⁸ Let us see what particular relations can obtain between the appetite and this new object.

Each appetitive power is necessarily determined by its proper object. In the case of the animal lacking reason, the appetite is infallibly moved by the desirable object apprehended by the senses. The wild animal cannot not desire something delectable when its senses perceive it. It is the same with the will. Its proper object is the good in general; and it is an absolute natural necessity for the will to desire it. This necessity follows directly from its definition. What is necessary cannot not be. When the necessity belongs to a being in virtue of one of its essential principles, whether material or formal, it is said to be natural and absolute. In this sense, everything composed of contrary elements is said to be necessarily corruptible, and the angles of every triangle are said necessarily to equal two right angles. So too, the intellect by definition necessarily adheres to the first principles of knowledge. Similarly, the will must necessarily adhere to the good in general, that is, to the last end, which is beatitude. It is an understatement to say that this kind of natural necessity is not contrary to the will. Rather, it is the formal principle constituting its essence. Just as, at the origin of all our speculative knowledge there is the understanding of principles, so too, at the origin of all our voluntary actions there is the adherence of the will to the final end. It cannot be otherwise. What a being possesses as required by its nature and in invariable fashion, is necessarily the basis and principle of everything else in it, whether they be properties or operations, for the nature of everything and the origin of all movement is always found in an unchanging principle.¹⁹ We can conclude, then, that the will necessarily seeks the good in general. This necessity means simply that the will cannot not be itself; and this immutable adherence to the good as such constitutes the first principle of all its activities.

Because the will cannot not will the good in general (*bonum secundum communem boni rationem*),²⁰ does it follow that the will necessarily wills whatever it wills? Obviously not. Let us return to the parallel between appetite and knowledge. The will, we said, adheres naturally and necessarily to the last end, which is the supreme good, as the intellect adheres naturally and necessarily to first principles. Now, there are some propositions that are intelligible to human reason but not necessarily connected to these principles. These are contingent propositions, that is, those that can be denied without contradicting the first principles of knowledge. The intellect's immutable adherence to principles does not compel it to accept such propositions. But there are necessary propositions,

¹⁸*De ver.* 25.1, resp. The whole hierarchy of the relations among the various types of forms and the various types of appetitive inclinations is superbly summed up in *SCG* 2.47 [4].

¹⁹*ST* 1.82.1, resp.

²⁰*Ibid.* 1.59.4, resp.

so-called because they flow necessarily from first principles, from which they can be deduced by way of demonstration. To deny these propositions would amount to denying the principles from which they flow. If, then, the intellect sees the necessary connection between these conclusions and their principles, it must necessarily accept the conclusions, just as it accepts the principles from which it deduced them. But its assent is not necessary as long as the necessity of the connection has not been demonstrated. The same holds for the will. There are very many particular good things that we do not need to be happy. They are not necessarily connected with happiness, and consequently the will is not naturally bound to will them.

Let us now consider the goods that are necessarily connected with happiness, such as all those that bind us to God, in whom alone true happiness consists. The human will must cleave to them. By right, this is how it should be, but it is not so in fact. Just as conclusions are necessarily forced upon us only if we see them implied in their principles, so we would only cleave wholeheartedly to God and to the things of God if we clearly saw the divine essence and the necessary connection of the particular goods attached to it. This is the case of the blessed, who are confirmed in grace; their will adheres necessarily to God because they see his essence. In this world, however, we cannot see the divine essence. So our will necessarily longs for beatitude, but that is all. It is not immediately evident to us that God is the sovereign good and the only beatitude, and we do not discover with the certitude of demonstration the necessary connection that can exist between God and what is truly of God. Thus not only does the will not necessarily will whatever it wills, but since it is so imperfect that it is only presented with particular goods, we can conclude that, except for the good in general, it is never under necessity to will what it wills.²¹ This truth will appear even more clearly when we have determined the relations between the intellect and the will within the human soul.

It is helpful for the understanding of the nature of our free will to inquire whether one of these two powers is superior to, and nobler than, the other. Now, the intellect and the will can be considered either in their essence or as particular powers of the soul exercising specific acts. Essentially, the intellect's function is to apprehend the universal nature of being and truth. The will, for its part, is essentially the desire of the good in general. If we compare them from this point of view, the intellect appears to be more eminent and noble than the will because its object is included in that of the intellect. The will tends toward the good as desirable. Now, the good presupposes being, for there is a desirable good only where there is a being that is good and desirable. But being is the proper object of the intellect. The essence of the good that the will desires is precisely that which the intellect apprehends. Consequently, if we compare

²¹*De ver.* 22.6, resp.; *De malo* 3.3; *ST* 1.82.2, resp.

the objects of these two powers, the object of the intellect will appear to be absolute and that of the will relative. And since the order of the soul's powers corresponds to that of their objects, we must conclude that, taken in itself and absolutely, the intellect is higher and nobler than the will.²²

We come to the same conclusion if we compare the intellect in relation to its universal object and the will as a particular and specific power of the soul. The universal being and truth that the intellect has for its proper objects contain the will, its act, and even its object, as so many particular beings and truths. The will, its act, and its object are things to be understood by the intellect, just like a stone, a piece of wood, and all the beings and truths the intellect apprehends. On the other hand, if we consider the universality of the object of the will, which is the good, and consider the intellect as a special power of the soul, the relative perfection of the will and intellect will be reversed. Each individual intellect, all intellectual knowledge, and every object of knowledge, are particular goods. As such, they fall under the universal good, which is the proper object of the will. From this point of view, the will is superior to the intellect and capable of moving it.

Accordingly, the intellect and will include and move each other. One thing can move another because it constitutes its end. In this sense, the end moves that which achieves it, since it acts with a view to achieving it. So the intellect moves the will, because the good apprehended by the intellect is the object of the will and moves it as its end. But we can also say that one thing moves another when it acts upon it and modifies its state. Thus, what alters a thing moves that which is altered; the mover moves the movable object, and in this sense the will moves the intellect. In all mutually related active powers, the one concerning the universal end moves the powers concerning particular ends. This is easily verified in the natural order as well as in the social order. The heavens, whose actions are directed to the conservation of generable and corruptible bodies, move all lower bodies that act only with a view to conserving their species or their own individuality. So too, the king, whose actions are for the general welfare of the entire kingdom, by his orders moves the officials who govern each city. Now, the object of the will is the good and the end in general; the other powers of the soul are only directed to particular ends. The eyes, for example, have for their end the perception of colors and the intellect has for its end the knowledge of truth. The will accordingly causes the acts of the intellect and the other powers of the soul, except the natural functions of vegetative life, which do not fall under our free decisions.²³

²²ST 1.82.3, resp.

²³Ibid. 4, resp. See Albert Ancel, "L'influence de la volonté sur l'intelligence," *Revue de philosophie* 28 (1921): 308-325.

It now becomes easy to understand what free will is, and under what conditions its activity is exercised. First of all, we can take it as evident that the human will is free from constraint. Some philosophers would even limit human liberty to this absence from restraint. This is a necessary but hardly a sufficient condition of our liberty. It is only too clear that the will can never be constrained. To speak of constraint is to speak of violence, and by definition violence is contrary to the natural inclination of a thing. The natural and the violent are mutually exclusive, and we cannot conceive something having both these properties at the same time. Now, the voluntary is simply the will's inclination to its object. If constraint and violence were introduced into the will, they would destroy it at once. Consequently, just as what is natural is done by the inclination of a nature, so what is voluntary is done by the inclination of the will; and just as it is impossible for something to be violent and natural at the same time, so it is also impossible for a power of the soul to be at the same time constrained, that is, violent and voluntary.²⁴

However, we have seen that there is something more: the will is not only by definition free from constraint, it is equally free from necessity. To deny this is to remove from human acts what makes them culpable or meritorious. It does not seem we could merit or lose merit by performing acts we could not avoid. Now, a doctrine that ends up by removing the notion of merit, and consequently all morality, must be considered non-philosophical (*extranea philosophiae*). If we have no freedom, and if our willing is necessarily determined, deliberations and exhortations, precepts and punishments, praise and blame—in a word, all the objects of moral philosophy—immediately disappear and lose all their meaning. A doctrine of this sort, we say, is non-philosophical, as indeed are all opinions that destroy the principles of any part of philosophy whatsoever; for example, the proposition: "nothing moves," because it would rule out the whole philosophy of nature.²⁵ Now, the denial of free will, except where it merely refers to the incapacity of some persons to control their passions, is based entirely on sophistry, and above all on ignorance of the activities of the human soul and their relations with their objects.

The movement of any power of the soul can be considered from the point of view of either the subject or the object. For example, sight, taken in itself, can be made more or less clear by changes in the disposition of the organ of sight. In this case the source of the modification lies in the subject. But it can be in the object, as when the eye perceives something white that takes the place of something black. The first kind of modification has to do with the exercise of the act; it causes the act to be exercised or not, and to be exercised more or less successfully. The second kind of modification concerns the specification of

²⁴ST 1.82.1, resp.

²⁵De malo 6, resp.

the act, because the species of the act is determined by the nature of its object. Now, let us consider the exercise of the voluntary movement under these two aspects; and let us begin by noting that the will is not subject to any necessary determination as regards the exercise of its act.

We have already established that the will moves all the powers of the soul, and so it moves itself just as it moves all the other powers. The objection might be raised that the will is then in potency and in act at the same time and in the same respect, but the difficulty is only apparent. Let us consider, for example, the intellect of a man who is trying to discover the truth. He sets himself on the way to knowledge, for he is proceeding from what he actually knows to something he is ignorant of and knows only potentially. So too, when a man actually wills something, he brings himself to will something else that he does not yet will but wills only potentially. Thus, when he wants health, his willing to recover health prompts him to take the appropriate medication. As soon as he wills health, he begins to deliberate about the means to acquire it; and the result of his deliberation is that he wills to take the remedy. What actually takes place in this situation? The deliberation precedes the will to take a remedy; but the deliberation itself presupposes that the man wanted to deliberate; and since his will had not always wanted to deliberate, it must have been moved by something. If by itself, we have to suppose there was a previous deliberation, itself proceeding from an act of the will. Since we cannot keep going backward to infinity, we have to admit that the first movement of the human will is explained by the action of an exterior cause under whose influence the will began to will.

What can this cause be? It seems that the first mover of the will and the intellect must necessarily be above the will and the intellect. Hence it is God himself. And this conclusion introduces no necessity into our voluntary determinations. God, indeed, is the first mover of everything movable, but he moves everything movable in conformity with its nature. He who moves light things upward and heavy things downward also moves the will in accord with its nature. So he does not give it a necessary movement, but rather a naturally undetermined movement that can direct itself toward different objects. If, then, we consider the will in itself, as the source of the acts it exercises, we find nothing else than a succession of deliberations and decisions, each decision presupposing a prior deliberation and each deliberation presupposing in its turn a decision. If we go back to the very beginning of the movement, we find God, who confers it on the will, but only as undetermined. Thus, from the point of view of the subject and exercise of the act, we find no necessary determination in the will.

Let us now consider the act of the will from the point of view of the specification of its act, which is that of its object. Here again, we find no necessity. What indeed is the object capable of moving the will? It is the good apprehended by the intellect as suitable (*bonum conveniens apprehensum*). If, accordingly, a certain good is proposed to the intellect, and if the intellect sees it as good,

without however considering it as suitable, this good will not suffice to move the will. On the other hand, deliberations and decisions have to do with our acts, and our acts are individual particular things. The fact that an object is good in itself and suitable for us in a general way is not enough, then, for it to move the will. We must also apprehend it as good and suitable in the given case, taking into account all the particular circumstances attaching to it.

Now, there is only one object that presents itself to us as good and suitable under all aspects, namely, beatitude. Boethius describes it as follows: "a state of life made perfect by the accumulation of all goods" (*status omnium bonorum congregatione perfectus*).²⁶ Clearly this object does move our will necessarily. Let us note well, however, that necessity in this instance only has to do with the specification of the act. Hence it is strictly limited to the fact that the will cannot will what is contrary to beatitude. This reservation might be expressed in another way, by saying that if the will performs an act while the intellect is thinking of beatitude, then this act would be necessarily determined by such an object. The will would not wish it if this were not the case. But the exercise of the act itself remains free. If we cannot not will beatitude while we are thinking about it, we can nevertheless will not to think about beatitude. The will remains in control of its act and can use it as it pleases with regard to any object whatsoever (*libertas ad actum inest voluntati in quolibet statu naturae respectu cuiuslibet objecti*).²⁷

Let us suppose, on the other hand, that the good proposed to the will is not good in all respects. In this case, not only is the will free to exercise its act or not, but the act is chosen without any necessity about it. In other words, the will could, as always, not will to think of the object. We could even will a different object while thinking about the other object. All that is needed is that this new object be presented to us as good under some aspect.

Why does the will prefer some objects to others among all the particular goods offered to it? Three main reasons may be suggested. One object may surpass another in excellence; in choosing it, the will is moving in conformity with reason. Again, it may happen that because of its external dispositions or some exterior circumstance, the intellect may pause over some particular characteristic of one good rather than another. The will then adjusts itself to that thought, whose source is quite accidental. Finally, we must take into account the disposition in which the entire man finds himself. The will of an angry man does not make decisions like the will of a calm man, for the same object is not agreeable to both. As a man is, so is his end. The healthy man does not eat like the sick man. Now, the disposition that makes the will consider a certain object good or

²⁶*De consolazione philosophiae* 3, prosa 2 [ed. Adrianus a Forti Scvto (London: Burns, Oates, and Washburne, 1925), p. 62.10-11].

²⁷*De ver.* 22.6, resp.

suitable can have two sources. If it is a question of a natural disposition out of reach of the will, the will conforms to it by natural necessity. Thus everyone naturally desires to be, to live, and to know. On the other hand, if it is a question of a disposition that is not a natural part of man but one dependent upon his will, the individual is under no necessity to conform to it. If, for example, some passion makes us consider a particular object to be good or bad, our will can react against this passion and so alter our estimation of the object. We can calm our anger so as not to be blinded by it when we judge a particular object. If the disposition concerned is a habit, it will be more difficult to get rid of it, because it is harder to overcome a habit than to control a passion. Nevertheless, it is not impossible, and here again the will's choice will be free of all necessity.²⁸

Let us summarize the preceding conclusions. To suppose that the will can be compelled to will something is a contradiction in terms and an absurdity. Therefore, the will is entirely free from constraint. Is it free from necessity? Here we must distinguish. The will is always free from necessity in the exercise of its act. We are able not to will even the sovereign good, because we are able not to think about it. In what concerns the specification of the act, we cannot not will the sovereign good or the objects of our natural dispositions while we are thinking about them. We can, however, freely choose among all particular goods, including those that acquired dispositions make us regard as such, without any of them being able to compel the movement of our will. More briefly still, the will is always free to will or not to will anything whatsoever. When it wills, it is always free to settle upon any particular object. We have now sketched the elements that constitute the human act. It remains for us to clarify their relations more precisely, by examining the acts by which we move toward the beatitude that constitutes our supreme good and our end.

²⁸*De malo* 6, resp.

PART III. MORAL SCIENCE

Chapter One: The Human Act

It is common to regard the creative act as having no other effect than to produce all created beings from non-being. This is an incomplete and one-sided view of what creation actually is. The efficacy of the creative act is not exhausted by the impulse that causes beings to issue forth from God. At the very moment when creatures receive the movement that gives them a being relatively independent of and exterior to the creator's, they receive a second movement that brings them back to their point of departure and tends to make them return as close as possible to their source. We have examined the order according to which intelligent creatures come from God and have defined their characteristic activities. It now remains to establish the goal toward which these creatures tend and the end toward which they are directed.¹

It is only for man that this very difficult problem arises. The lot of the angels was definitely decided from the first moment after their creation. This does not imply that the angels were created in the state of beatitude.² They were probably created in the state of grace, and those who so willed turned toward God by a single act of love and merited at once their eternal happiness.³ Conversely, by a single act of their free will, the bad angels turned irrevocably from him.⁴ As for creatures below man, that is, those lacking intellectual knowledge, the solution of the problem is equally simple. Deprived of intelligence and

¹On Thomas' moral doctrine in general see A.-D. Sertillanges, *La philosophie morale de saint Thomas d'Aquin* 2nd ed. (Paris: Alcan, 1916); Etienne Gilson, *Moral Values and the Moral Life*, trans. Leo Richard Ward (St. Louis: Herder, 1941); Michael Wittmann, *Die Ethik des hl. Thomas von Aquin* (Munich: Max Hueber, 1933); Gustav Ermecke, *Die natürlichen Seinsgrundlagen der christlichen Ethik* (Paderborn: Bonifacius Drückerei, 1941); Wolfgang Kluxen, *Philosophische Ethik bei Thomas von Aquin* (Mainz: Matthias-Grünewald Verlag, 1964); [Josef Pieper, *Die ontische Grundlage des Sittlichen nach Thomas von Aquin* (Münster: Helios-Verlag, 1929); Vernon J. Bourke, *Ethics* (New York: Macmillan, 1951). The last two items appear in Shook's translation of the fifth edition but are not cited in the sixth edition].

²*In Sent.* 2.4.1 (ed. Mandonnet-Moos 2: 132-134).

³*ST* 1.62.5, resp. The reason for this lies in the perfection of the angelic nature. The angel naturally lives under the regime of direct intuition. It has no discursive knowledge. It can, accordingly, attain its end by one single act. Man, however, has to go searching for it. He needs time and a life of some duration to attain his end. The length of human life is therefore based upon man's mode of knowing: "Homo secundum suam naturam non statim natus est ultimam perfectionem adipisci, sicut angelus: et ideo homini longior vita est data est ad merendum beatitudinem, quam angelo" (*ibid.*, ad 1). See *ibid.* 1.58.3 and 4; 1.62.6, resp.

⁴*Ibid.* 1.63.6, resp.

will, they can only reach their last end, which is God, by bearing some resemblance to their creator. Endowed with being, life or sense knowledge, they constitute in various degrees so many resemblances of the God who formed them, and the possession of this resemblance is the possession of their final end.⁵

This conclusion is evident. It is clear that the end always corresponds to the beginning. If, therefore, we know the beginning or principle of all things, it is impossible not to know their end. We have seen above that the first principle of all things is a creator who transcends the universe he has created. The end of all things, then, must be a good, and a good exterior to the universe, since the good alone can play the role of an end. This end is nothing other than God.

It still remains to know how creatures without intelligence can have an end outside themselves. When it is a question of an intelligent being, the end of its activity is what it proposes to do, or the goal toward which it tends. In the case of a being lacking intelligence, however, the only way it can have an end outside itself is either to have it in fact without knowing it or to represent it. In this sense we can say that Hercules is the "end" of the statue by which the artist wishes to represent him. In this sense too, we can say that the sovereign good outside the universe is the end of all things insofar as it is possessed and represented by them. Insofar as they exist and act, all creatures tend to participate in and to represent the sovereign good, each in the measure it can do so.⁶

Man's case is different because he is endowed with free will, that is, with intelligence and will. The inclination that God implanted in him at the moment of his creation is not only natural; it befits the nature of a will. As a consequence, man is not only a likeness of God like all the others, but he is also his image. As such, man is intelligent and master of his choice of acts. We have now to inquire what his last end is, and by what means he can arrive at it.

Section 1. The Structure of the Human Act

It has already been established that man is a being endowed with a will, a property inseparable from a rational and free agent. We also know where this freedom comes from: it is the result of the gap always encountered in this life between the will and its object. In conjunction with an understanding open to universal being, the will tends toward the universal good. In fact, it always finds itself in the presence of particular goods, and since these are incapable of completely satisfying its desire, they are not ends that compel it to choose them. As a consequence, it remains entirely free in their regard. "If the will is offered an object that is good universally and from every point of view, the will tends to it of necessity if it wills anything at all, since it cannot choose the opposite. If, on the other hand, the will is offered an object that is not good from every

⁵Ibid. 1-2.1.8, resp.

⁶SCG 3.17; ST 1.103.2, resp. and ad 2; *De ver.* 13.1 and 2.

point of view, it will not tend to it of necessity."⁷ So we know the general principle ruling our rational activity; but we have yet to analyze how it works and to see how it functions in practice.

Let us start from the conclusion we have just reached. It can only be understood if we place the will on one side and the object toward which it tends on the other. The movement of the will, which moves itself and all the other powers of the soul toward its object, is called *intention*. It is essential, moreover, that we determine precisely the respective roles of the intellect and the will at this starting point of human activity. They act on each other but in different ways. Let us consider the object of these two powers. The object of the intellect is universal being and truth. But universal being and truth constitute the first formal principle it is possible to assign; and the formal principle of an act is also that which places it in a determinate species. For example, the act of heating is only such by reason of its formal principle, which is heat. Now, the intellect moves the will by presenting it with its object, which is universal being and truth. By doing so it places the act of the will in its proper species, as opposed to the acts of the sensory or purely natural powers. So we have here a real and effective moving of the will by the intellect. The will in its turn moves the intellect, in the sense that it can in certain cases put it effectively into motion. If we compare all our active powers with one another, the one that tends toward the universal end will necessarily appear to act upon those tending toward particular ends. For everything that acts, acts in view of an end, and the art that aims at a given end directs and moves the arts that procure the means of attaining this end. Now, the object of the will is precisely the good, that is, the end in general. Consequently, since every power of the soul tends toward a particular good which is its own proper good, as sight to the perception of colors and the intellect toward the knowledge of truth, the will, whose object is the good in general, must be able to use all the powers of the soul, and especially the intellect, since the will encompasses the intellect.⁸

Thus the will moves all the powers of the soul toward their ends. To it belongs properly the first act of "tending toward" (*in aliquid tendere*), called *intention*. In its act of intention the will turns toward its end as toward the terminus of its movement. Since in willing the end it also wills the means, it follows that the intending of the end and the willing of the means constitute but one single act. It is not difficult to see why. A means is related to the end as the middle to the terminus. Among natural beings, the movement that passes through the middle is the same as that which reaches the terminus. The same is true of movements of the will. Willing a remedy with a view to health is one

⁷ST 1-2.10.2, resp.

⁸Ibid. 1.82.4, resp.; 1-2.9.1; SCG 1.72; 3.26; *De ver.* 22.12, resp.; *De malo* 6.1, resp.

single act of willing. We only will the means for the sake of the end, so that willing the means is one with the intending of the end.⁹

The proper object of the intention is the end willed in itself and for itself; it constitutes a simple and indivisible act or movement of our will. But the will's activity becomes extremely complex at the moment when we pass from the intention of the end to the choice of the means. It tends, in one act, toward the end and toward the means when it has opted for such and such determined means. But the option in favor of this or that means does not properly pertain to the will's act of intention. The opting is the fact of choosing, and it is itself preceded by deliberation and judgment.

Human actions always have to do with the particular and contingent. Now, when we pass from the universal to the particular, we leave behind the fixed and certain to enter the realm of the variable and uncertain. This is why knowing what we ought to do is full of uncertainty. Now, reason never risks making a judgment in doubtful and uncertain matters without some previous deliberation. This deliberation is called *counsel (consilium)*. As we have just noted, the object of deliberation is not the end itself. It could not be a question of intending an end, because the end is the very principle from which the action takes its point of departure. If this end can in its turn become the object of deliberation, it could not be as an end, but only insofar as it itself can be considered as a means ordained in view of some other end. What is an end in one deliberation can be a means in another, and in this role it can be a matter of discussion.¹⁰ Whatever the case may be, deliberation must close with a judgment, or else it would go on indefinitely without any decision being made. Limited by its initial term, which is the simple intention of the end, it is equally limited by its final term, which is the first action we think ought to be done. Thus deliberation concludes with a judgment of the practical reason. All this part of the voluntary process is carried out in the intellect alone, without the will intervening for anything else than to put it into motion and start it on its way.

Let us suppose that the will is presented with the results of a deliberation. Since practical reason is exercised in particular and contingent matters, it will usually arrive at two or more judgments, each of which will represent an action as good in some way or other. When the intellect shows the will that a number of ways of acting are possible, there is a corresponding movement of pleasure in the will toward what is good in each of these actions. In this pleasure and attachment the will has a kind of experience of the object to which it attaches itself (*quasi experientiam quamdam sumens de re cui inhaeret*),¹¹ and in doing

⁹ST 1-2.12.3, resp. and 4, resp.; *De ver.* 22.14, resp.

¹⁰ST 1-2.14.1, resp. and 2, resp.

¹¹Ibid. 15.1, resp.

so gives it its consent. The act by which the will applies and attaches itself to the result of deliberation is called *consent*.

Deliberation, however, could not end with this consent. Since it ends with several judgments, each of which receives the will's consent, there is still required a decisive act by which the will chooses one of the objects of its consent in preference to the others. Deliberation brings us to the point where we observe that several means can bring us to the end to which we are tending. Each of these means pleases us, and to the extent that it does so we cleave to it. But of all these means that please us, we finally opt for one, and this option properly belongs to an act of choice (*electio*). It may happen that reason proposes only one means. In this case only one means pleases us, and choice can be said to be the same as consent.¹²

What is choice? It is an act depending in part on the intellect and in part on the will. Aristotle speaks of it as "desirous thought or intellectual desire" (*appetitivus intellectus vel appetitus intellectivus*).¹³ In its full sense it is nothing more than the complete act by which the will comes to a conclusion, and which comprises, at one and the same time, the deliberation of reason and the decision of the will. Reason and understanding are required for deliberation, as just explained, and for judgment about what seems to be the preferable means. The will is required for consenting to these means and for the choice following upon that act, that is, for the option of preferring one of them.

We still have to determine whether, considered in its own essence, the act by which deliberation comes to a definite end depends on the intellect or the will. To decide this we must observe that the substance of an act depends on both its matter and its form. Among the acts of the soul, one that depends on a lower power for its matter can nevertheless possess its form, and consequently receive its specification, from a power of a higher order, because the lower is always ordained to the higher. If, for example, someone performs an act of fortitude for the love of God, it is truly and materially an act of fortitude, but it is formally and therefore essentially an act of love. We can apply this reasoning to the act of choice. The intellect in a sense provides the matter of the act by proposing judgments for the will to accept. But for this act to have the nature of choice there is needed a movement of the soul toward the chosen good. Choice, then, is essentially an act of the will.¹⁴

Such, in its general lines, is the structure of the human act. In it we see the intellect and the will acting and reacting on each other. It would be a mistake, however, to fail to distinguish them in the unity of the one act. Though they always intertwine, they never mix. Perhaps we can see this more clearly if we

¹²Ibid. 3, ad 3.

¹³In *Eth. Nic.* 6.2 [ed. Spiazzi, p. 311, n. 1137].

¹⁴ST 1.83.8, resp.; 1-2.13.1, resp.; *De ver.* 22.15, resp.

distinguish between spontaneous and commanded acts. Every act of the will is either spontaneous, as when the will tends toward its end as such; or commanded, as when reason issues the command: Do that! Nothing being more in our power than voluntary acts, we can always issue such a command to ourselves.¹⁵ What happens then? Reason may simply say: "This is what should be done." Obviously, reason alone is here at work. But it can also happen that reason may command: Do that! In this case reason moves the will to will it. Thus the issuing of the command is on the part of the intellect, but the motive factor in it pertains to the will.¹⁶

Again, let us consider the activities of reason implied in a human act. If it is a question of the exercise itself of the rational act, it can always be the object of a command, as when we order someone to pay attention or listen to reason. If it is a question of the possible object of such an act, we must distinguish carefully between two cases. On the one hand, the intellect can simply grasp a certain truth regarding any matter whatsoever; this depends upon our natural light and not on our will. It is not in our power to perceive or not perceive the truth when we discover it. On the other hand, the intellect can give or withhold its assent to what it apprehends.¹⁷ Hence, if what it apprehends falls into the category of propositions to which by its very nature it must give its assent, for example, the first principles, it is not in our power either to give or to refuse our assent to them. If, on the other hand, the propositions apprehended are not so convincing to our intellect, so that it can affirm or deny them, and can at least suspend its refusal or consent, assent or denial remain in our power and they fall within the scope of the will.¹⁸ In all cases, it is the understanding alone that apprehends truths, that accepts or rejects them, that gives orders; but the movement it receives or transmits always comes from the will. Thus all movement is voluntary, even when it seems to come from the intellect. All knowledge remains intellectual, even though it originates in a movement of the will.

Section 2. Habits

We have just defined human acts in themselves and in the abstract. But they are not performed in the abstract. Real persons carry them out. Now, these real individuals are not pure substances; they also have accidental traits. Each acting subject is influenced in its actions by certain ways of being proper to it, and also by permanent dispositions affecting it, the principles of which are called habits.

¹⁵ST 1-2.17.5, resp.

¹⁶Ibid. 1, resp.

¹⁷On the distinction between "to assent," which is reserved to the intellect, and "to consent," which is reserved in principle to the will, because of the union that it seems to suppose between the power and the object, see *ibid.* 15.1, ad 3.

¹⁸Ibid. 17.6, resp.; *De virtutibus* 1.7, resp.

Humans, as we well know, are discursive beings whose lives must have some duration if they are to attain their end. Now, this duration is not that of an inorganic body, whose mode of being remains invariable throughout its whole course; it is the duration of a living being. Every effort we make to attain our goal, far from being lost forever, becomes part of us and leaves its mark on us. Our soul, just like our body, has its history. It conserves its past in order to enjoy and use it in a perpetual present. The most general form of this fixing of past experience is called habit. A habit, in Thomas' view, is actually a quality. It is not our substance, but rather a kind of disposition added to our substance and modifying it. What differentiates habit from the other species of quality is that it is a disposition of the subject in relation to its own nature. In other words, the habits of a being determine the way it realizes its own definition.

It follows from this that no habit whatsoever can be described without the qualification of good or bad entering into its description. Now, a thing is defined by its form. The form, however, is not only the essence of the thing but its very *raison d'être*; and the form of a thing is also its end. To say that habits determine how a being realizes its definition is to say at the same time how it realizes its essence, and how far it is from its proper end. If the habits of a being draw it close to the ideal type toward which it is tending they are good; on the contrary, if they draw it away from this ideal they are bad. Thus habits can be defined in general as dispositions according to which a being is well or ill-disposed.¹⁹ And if habits are qualities and accidents, they are clearly those closest to the nature of the thing, those that come closest to entering into its essence and becoming part of its definition.²⁰

What conditions are required for a habit to develop? The first, and the one that basically implies all the rest, is the existence of a subject that is in potency to several different determinations, and in which several different principles can combine to produce only one of these determinations.²¹ This means, for example, that since God is totally in act, he cannot be the subject of any habit. It also means that the heavenly bodies, whose matter is totally actualized by their form (except with regard to place), do not have the indetermination required for the birth of habits. Finally, it means that the qualities of elementary bodies, which are necessarily and inseparably linked to these elements, could not provide the occasion for them. In fact, the true subject of habits is a soul, such as the hu-

¹⁹ST 1-2.49.2, resp.; Aristotle, *Metaph.* 4.20, 1022b10.

²⁰ST 1-2.49.2, resp. This also justifies the insistence upon stability before speaking of a habit. All habits are dispositions, but all dispositions are not habits. A disposition is only transitory, a habit is a permanent disposition. Here again we are not in the realm of the definite and fixed. A disposition is more or less a habit according as it is less or more easy to lose it. A habit is an organism in development: "Et sic dispositio fit habitus, sicut puer fit vir" (*ibid.*, ad 3).

²¹*Ibid.* 49.4, resp. See Placide de Roton, *Les habitus, leur caractère spirituel* (Paris: Labergerie, 1934), ch. 5, "La vie des habitus."

man soul, because it contains a factor of receptivity and potentiality. Being a principle of many activities through its multiple powers, the soul satisfies all the conditions required for the development of habits.²²

Within the human soul itself we can point out still more precisely the ground on which habits will develop. They cannot reside in the sensory powers of the soul as such. These powers, considered in themselves and independently of reason, are fixed in their activity by a sort of natural inclination, and they lack the indefiniteness needed for the development of habits. This leaves only the intellect as an appropriate place for them. Only in it do we find those many undetermined powers capable of being combined and organized among themselves in a great variety of ways. And since it is potentiality that makes a habit possible, it must be situated in the possible intellect. As for the will, that faculty of the rational soul whose free indecisiveness depends on the universality of reason itself, it can also be the subject of habits.

This clarifies the nature of habits and the role they play in the anthropology of Aquinas. When we were examining the powers of the soul by themselves, we had to look at them from a static and inorganic perspective. Habits, however, introduce a dynamic factor of progress and organization into the doctrine. From the most profound point of view, habits are needed for progress or decline, in any event as necessary for life in the human intellect and, by way of the intellect, in the entire human soul. They are said to be necessary, because if all the conditions required for the development of habits are present together their development is not only possible but also necessary. Every nature has a right to the instruments it requires in order to reach its end. If a natural form necessarily reaches its end through the determination that limits it to a single activity, the intellectual form, by reason of its universality and indetermination, would never reach its end unless there were a complementary disposition to incline it to do so.

Habits are just such complements of nature. They are added determining factors that set up definite relations between the intellect and its objects or its possible activities.²³ Thus any given intellect is in fact inseparable from all the habits enriching or impoverishing it. Habits are so many self-provided instruments, among which the intellect is always free to choose and over which it is finally the master; but it has only provided itself with them because it had to acquire them in order to satisfy the conditions demanded by the nature of its activity.

If we set aside those habits that are but simple dispositions to being, like the aptitude of matter to receive form, all habits are oriented to certain activities, either cognitive or voluntary. Some of them are in a way natural and innate.

²²ST 1-2.50.2, resp.; *In Sent.* 2.26.1.3, ad 4 and 5 [ed. Mandonnet-Moos 2: 675-676].

²³ST 1-2.49.4, ad 1; *In Sent.* 3.23.1.1 [ed. Mandonnet-Moos 3: 696-700]. See Thomas Pègues, *Commentaire français littéral de la Somme théologique de saint Thomas d'Aquin* (Toulouse and Paris: Privat, 1926) 7: 562-570.

This is the case with knowledge of first principles. It is as though our intellect were born with a natural disposition to know them from our first sense experiences. Moreover, from the point of view of the individual and not of the species, each of us is born with the beginnings of cognitive habits. Indeed, our sense organs, whose collaboration is so indispensable to the act of knowing, predisposes us to know more or less well. The same is true of the will, always with this difference, that in the case of the will it is no longer the habit itself that is already present in outline, but only principles that can constitute a habit, as, for example, the principles of common law, sometimes called the seeds of the virtues. In the body, on the contrary, we find the beginnings of certain voluntary habits; some persons, by natural constitution and temperament, are at birth predisposed to gentleness, chastity and other similar habits.

As a general rule, however, habits come less from our natural dispositions than from our acts. Sometimes a single act is enough to overcome the passivity of the power in which the habit develops. This is the case with an immediately evident proposition, which suffices to convince the intellect once and for all and to make it accept forever a given conclusion. Sometimes, on the contrary—and this is by far the most frequent case—many similar and repeated acts are required in order to generate a habit in a power of the soul. Probable opinion, for example, does not prevail the first time, but it becomes habitual belief only when the agent intellect has impressed it upon the possible intellect by a great number of acts. The possible intellect in its turn must go on repeating them for the benefit of the lower faculties, as, for example, when it wishes to fix a certain belief in the memory. Thus the active power usually requires time in order to gain complete domination over the matter concerned. It is like a fire that does not consume combustible material at once nor set it ablaze at the first try, but gradually overcomes all contrary dispositions and so assimilates it to itself.²⁴ Thus repetition of acts, which fill matter more and more completely with its form and a power of the soul with a new disposition, progressively builds up a habit. So too does cessation of these acts, or the performance of contrary acts, destroy and corrupt it.²⁵

Section 3. Good and Evil. The Virtues

If we understand the nature of habits we also understand the nature of virtues, because virtues are habits firmly disposing us to act well. We have said above that habits are dispositions for acting either well or badly. Since a habit places us nearer to, or farther from, our proper end, rendering us either more or less in conformity to our nature, we must distinguish between the habits disposing us to act consistently with our nature and those disposing us to act out of har-

²⁴ST 1-2.51.2 and 3, resp.

²⁵Ibid. 52.2. resp. and 53.1, resp.

mony with that nature. The former are good habits or virtues, the others are bad habits or vices.²⁶ But to define virtue precisely, we now have to ask what acts are suitable for human nature, and we shall know at the same time the nature of moral good and evil, and how to distinguish between virtue and vice.

As a being is, so will its operations and activities be (*unaquaeque res talem actionem producit, qualis est ipsa*); and the excellence of things is always measured by their degree of being. Since we are deficient and imperfect, we must accordingly perform incomplete and deficient acts. This is why good and evil combine in varying proportions in our actions.²⁷

The goodness in a human action can be looked at from four points of view. In the first place it falls within the genus of *action*; and as every action has value according to the perfection of the one performing it, there is already in the very substance of any action an intrinsic value corresponding to a given degree of excellence and goodness. Second, actions derive their goodness from their species; and as the species of each action is determined by its object, it follows that every action is said to be good, from this new point of view, according as it is or is not applied to a suitable object.²⁸ Third, human actions are good or bad by reason of the circumstances that accompany them. Just as a natural being does not receive all its perfection from its substantial form alone, which places it in a given species, but also from many accidents, as is the case of man his figure, color, and so on, so too an action does not receive its goodness from its species alone but also from a large number of accidents. These accidents are the due circumstances, without which the action is vitiated.²⁹ Fourth and finally, human action derives its goodness from its proper end. We have already said that the order of the good and the order of being are proportionate to each other. Now, some beings are such that they do not depend on anything else; and in order to evaluate their actions it is enough to consider in itself the being from which the actions flow. But there are beings that depend upon some other being, and their actions can only be evaluated by taking into account the cause on which they depend. We must particularly take into account—and this is the central point—the relation of human acts to the first cause of all goodness, namely, God.³⁰

We can be even more precise about this last point. In every voluntary action two different acts are to be distinguished, namely, the interior act of the will and the exterior act. Each of these acts has its corresponding object. The object of an interior voluntary act is nothing but its end, and the object of an exterior act is that to which this act is referred. Of these two acts, one must command

²⁶Ibid. 54.3, resp. and 55.1–4.

²⁷*De malo* 2.4, resp.; *ST* 1-2.18.1, resp.

²⁸*ST* 1-2.18.2, resp. and 19.1, resp.

²⁹Ibid. 18.3, resp. For the study of these circumstances see *ibid.* 7.1–4.

³⁰Ibid. 18.4, resp.

the other. The exterior act receives its specification from the object which is its terminus or to which it is applied. The interior act of the will, on the contrary, receives its specification from its end as from its proper object. The will's contribution here is to impose its form on the exterior act; for the members are instruments that the will uses in order to act, and exterior acts are moral only to the extent that they are voluntary. In order to go back to the highest principle that distinguishes acts as good or bad, we must say that human acts are formally specified by the end toward which the interior act of the will tends, and materially specified at most by the object to which the exterior act is applied.³¹

What must this end be? Dionysius has an appropriate answer to the question. The human good, he writes,³² is to be in accord with reason; human evil, on the contrary, is everything opposed to reason. The good of each thing is what is suited to it in view of its form; its evil is what is contrary to its form and consequently tries to destroy its order. Accordingly, since the human form is the rational soul, every act conforming to reason will be called good and every act not conforming to reason will be called evil.³³ Thus, when a human act includes something contrary to the order of reason, it falls by that very fact into the category of bad actions, for example, theft, which is taking possession of another's goods. If the end or object of an act has no relation to the order of reason, say when someone picks up a wisp of straw from the ground, the act is morally indifferent.³⁴ On the other hand, an act conforms to reason when it is directed to an end and to a series of means approved by reason. Thus the many particular good acts that we do can be called an ensemble of acts directed to their ends and justifiable from the point of view of reason.

Among the conditions required for a human act to be morally good, the first and most important is that it be directed to its legitimate end. Now, as we have seen, the movement by which the will tends toward a certain end is called its *intention*.³⁵ It seems, then, that the morality to which we are being led is essentially a morality of intention. There is some justification for this conclusion provided that we do not understand it in a narrow and exclusive sense. Taken in itself, the intention by which a will turns toward its end can be considered the seed of the completed voluntary act. It is because I will the end that I will the means, that I deliberate, choose and act. What the intention is, such will also be the act it engenders: good if the intention is good, bad if the intention is bad, but not all in the same degree and in the same manner. When the intention is

³¹Ibid. 18.6, resp.

³²*De divinis nominibus* 4 [PL 122: 1145BC].

³³*ST* 1-2.18.5, resp.; *SCG* 3.9; *De malo* 2.4, resp.; *De virtutibus* 1.2, ad 3.

³⁴*ST* 1-2.18.8, resp.; *De malo* 2.5, resp.

³⁵"Unde hoc nomen *intentionis* nominat actum voluntatis, praesupposita ordinatione rationis ordinantis aliquid in finem" (*ST* 1-2.12.1, ad 3).

bad, the act is irremediably bad, because all its constituent elements are only called into existence to serve evil. When, on the contrary, the intention is good, the will's original orientation toward the good can never fail to affect the entire act resulting from it, but it is not enough to define the morality of the act. We cannot give equal ranking to two acts with equally good intentions, one of which will be mistaken about the choice of means or will not succeed in putting these means to work, while the other will choose the more appropriate means and will unfailingly guarantee their execution. Thus a moral act always gains by being inspired by a good intention. Even one that fails to be completed at least retains the merit of having meant to do what is right; it often merits even more than it seems to do. A perfectly good moral act, on the other hand, is one that fully satisfies all the demands of reason both in its end and in each of its parts. Not content to will the good, it does it.

Such being the nature of the moral good, we can see the nature of virtue. It consists essentially in a permanent disposition to act in conformity with reason. The complexity of the human being, however, calls for a certain complexity in the notion of its virtue. Indeed, the first principle of human acts is reason, and all their other principles (whatever they may be) obey reason. If man were a pure spirit, or if the body to which the soul is united were completely subject to it, he would only have to see what should be done in order to do it. Then Socrates' thesis would be true; there would only be intellectual virtues. But we are not pure spirits; and, since original sin, it is not even true that our body is in perfect submission. Hence for us to act well, not only must our reason be well disposed by the habit of intellectual virtue, but our appetite or faculty of desiring must also be well disposed by the habit of moral virtue. Thus moral virtue must be distinguished from intellectual virtue and added to it. And just as the appetite is the principle of human acts to the extent that it participates in reason, so moral virtue is a human virtue in the measure in which it conforms to reason.³⁶

It is just as impossible to reduce one of these two kinds of virtue to the other as it is to isolate them. Moral virtue cannot dispense with all intellectual virtue, because an intellectual virtue is needed to determine that an act is good. Now, an act presupposes a choice, and when examining the structure of the human act we saw that choice presupposes both the deliberation and judgment of reason. So the intellectual virtues that are not directly related to action can in-

³⁶Ibid. 58.2, resp. On the adequacy of this division see *ibid.* 3, resp. On the fundamental identity of the two notions *virtus* and *honestum* see *ibid.* 2-2.145.1, resp. The term *honestum* signifies in effect *quod est honore dignum*. Now, honor rightly pertains to excellence (*ibid.* 103.2 and 144.2, ad 2); and since men are excellent through virtues, *honestum* properly taken is identical with virtue. *Decorum*, however, is the kind of beauty proper to moral excellence. More exactly, it is the "spiritual beauty" that consists in agreement between action or moral life and the spiritual clarity of reason. See *ibid.* 145.2, resp.

deed do without moral virtues, but not prudence, which must lead to definite actions. This intellectual virtue not only ascertains what ought to be done in general, for this is a task it can do by itself without the help of the moral virtues, but it goes right down to the details of particular cases. Once again it is not a pure spirit that judges but a composite of soul and body. A person who is swayed by concupiscence judges his desires to be good, even when his judgment contradicts the common judgment of reason. It is to counteract these passionate sophisms that he has to fortify himself with moral habits, thanks to which it will become almost connatural for him to make a sound judgment of the end.³⁷

Among the intellectual virtues four are most important: understanding, science, wisdom and prudence. The first three are purely intellectual and are arranged in order under wisdom, as the lower powers of the soul are arranged under the rational soul. Truth can be either evident and known *per se*, or known as a conclusion deduced from principles. Truth known *per se* and immediately plays the part of a principle. The first habit and virtue of the intellect is the immediate knowledge of principles through contact with sense experience. It is the first permanent disposition the intellect acquires and the first perfection to enrich it. Accordingly, understanding is called the virtue that disposes the intellect to know truths immediately evident, or principles.

On the other hand, truths that are not immediately evident but deduced and concluded do not depend immediately on understanding but on reasoning. Now, reason can come to conclusions that are last in a given genus and provisional, or it can come to conclusions that are absolutely last and the loftiest of all. In the first case it is called science, in the second wisdom. Since science is a virtue that enables reason to make sound judgments about a given order of knowable objects, there can be, and even ought to be, many sciences in a human mind. Since wisdom, on the contrary, deals with final causes and with the most perfect and universal object, there can be but one object of knowledge in this order and consequently but one wisdom. This, finally, is why these three virtues (understanding, science, and wisdom) are not merely juxtaposed but fall into hierarchical order. Science, which is the habit of conclusions deduced from principles, depends upon understanding, which is the habit of principles. Both science and understanding depend on wisdom which contains and governs them, since it is the judge of understanding and principles, even as it judges science and its conclusions (*convenienter iudicat et ordinat de omnibus, quia iudicium perfectum et universale haberi non potest, nisi per resolutionem ad primas causas*).³⁸

Thanks to these three virtues, the possible intellect, which at first was like a blank tablet on which nothing was yet written, acquires a series of perfections that enables it to perform the activities of knowledge. Until now it is only capa-

³⁷Ibid. 1-2.58.4-5, resp.

³⁸Ibid. 57.2, resp. and ad 2

ble of carrying out its activities. To bring it nearer to its full perfection, an added determination is needed to render it capable not only of knowing, but also capable of using the virtues it has just acquired. It is not enough for us to think; we must also live and live well. To live well means to act well, and to act well we must take into account not only what we ought to do but how we ought to do it. It is not enough merely to decide to act well; what matters is to decide reasonably and not by blind impulse or passion.

The principle of this kind of deliberation is not provided by the intellect but by the end that the will seeks. In human actions, ends play the role that principles play in the speculative sciences. To will a fitting end depends on a virtue, but this time on a moral virtue and not on an intellectual one. Once the end is willed, it is an intellectual virtue that will deliberate and choose the means appropriate to the end. There must, then, be an intellectual virtue that will put reason in a condition to decide fittingly the means to that end. This virtue is prudence (*recta ratio agibilium*), a virtue necessary for right living.³⁹

The moral virtues bring into the will the same perfections that the intellectual virtues bring into knowledge. Some of these virtues regulate the content and nature of our actions, independently of our personal dispositions at the moment of acting. This is especially so in the case of justice, which assures the moral value and rectitude of all acts concerning what is due and what is not due. For example, the acts of buying and selling imply the acknowledgment or rejection of a debt to a neighbor, and therefore they depend on the virtue of justice. Other moral values, on the contrary, bear on the qualities of acts considered in relation to the one performing them. Thus they concern the interior disposition of the agent at the moment he does them; in a word, they concern his passions. If the agent is drawn by passion toward an action contrary to reason, the agent must call on the virtue whose particular function it is to restrain and restrict passions, that is, the virtue of temperance. If the agent, instead of being drawn into action by a passion, is restrained from action by fear of danger or the effort involved, he needs another moral virtue to strengthen him in his resolutions dictated by his reason. This is the virtue of fortitude.⁴⁰ These three moral virtues, along with the intellectual virtue of prudence, are commonly known as principal or *cardinal* virtues. They alone imply both the faculty to act rightly and the actual accomplishing of the good act itself. They alone, then, perfectly fulfill the definition of virtue.⁴¹

Thus we arrive gradually at the notion of virtue in its most perfect form. It owes its quality of moral good to the rule of reason, and it has as its matter actions and passions: "moral virtue derives its goodness from the rule of reas-

³⁹Ibid. 57.5, resp.

⁴⁰Ibid. 60.2, resp. and 61.2, resp.

⁴¹Ibid. 56.3, resp. and 61.1, resp.

on."⁴² It is this, too, that makes intellectual and moral virtues consist in a just mean. The act that governs a moral virtue is in conformity with right reason; and what reason does is to assign a just mean, equally removed from excess and defect in each given case. Sometimes it happens that the mean assigned by reason is the mean of the thing itself, as in the case of justice, which regulates activities relating to exterior acts, and must assign to everyone his due, neither more nor less. Sometimes, on the contrary, it happens that the mean fixed by reason is not the mean of the thing itself but one that is a mean only in relation to us. This is the case with all of the other moral virtues bearing not on acts but on passions. Having to take into account internal dispositions that are not the same for everyone, not even for an individual at different times, temperance and fortitude establish a just mean in conformity with reason in relation to us and to the passions affecting us. It is the same with the intellectual virtues. Every virtue seeks to determine a mean and a good. Now, the good of the intellectual virtue is truth, and the measure of truth is the thing. Our reason attains the truth when what it says exists does exist, and when what it says does not exist does not exist. It errs by excess when it affirms the existence of what does not exist, and by defect when it denies the existence of what does exist. Truth, therefore, is the just mean determined by the thing itself; and it is this same truth that confers moral excellence on a virtue.⁴³

Voluntary acts dictated by practical reason, habits, and especially virtuous habits: these are the internal principles regulating our moral activity. We have now to define the principles that regulate this activity from without, namely, laws.

Section 4. Laws

The preceding considerations tend to make us think of moral activity as totally dependent upon itself, or to use a non-Thomistic expression, as entirely autonomous. Thomistic morality is unquestionably autonomous, for every intelligent creature is autonomous by definition. If we are to understand it properly, however, we must also consider the laws that govern the human will, even though this means that afterward we shall have to explain how the will can be master of itself when external legislation imperiously prescribes its end.

First of all, what is a law? It is a rule that prescribes or forbids an action. In short, it is the rule of an activity. If this is so, then the notion of law must be universal in extension. Whenever anything is done, there ought to be a rule in conformity to which the thing is done and consequently a law. Yet a definition like this is incomplete and vague and we must try to make it more precise.

⁴²Ibid. 64.1, ad 1.

⁴³Ibid. 64.2 and 3, resp.; *De virtutibus cardinalibus* 1, resp.; *De virtutibus in communi* 13, resp.

When we try to grasp the essential meaning of the word "law," we find, beyond the idea of mere rule, the much more profound notion of obligation. Whenever an activity is subject to a rule, the rule becomes, so to speak, the measure of its legitimacy. The activity is attached to the rule as to a principle and it is obliged to respect the principle. Now, with what principle regulating activities are we at present familiar, other than reason? Reason in every domain is the rule and measure of what is done. If the law is truly nothing more than the formulation of this rule, it appears at once as an obligation based on the demands of reason.⁴⁴ Law is a decree that is at least based on custom and is in accord with universal conscience. The decrees of an unreasonable tyrant can usurp the name of laws, but they can never be true laws. When reason is wanting, there is neither law nor equity but sheer iniquity.⁴⁵

Moreover, a command based on reason is not enough to constitute law. The order must also be directed to an end other than purely individual ends. Indeed, to say that law is a rule of reason defining what ought to be done, is to link law with practical reason, whose proper duty it is to prescribe what acts should be performed. But this practical reason, in its turn, depends upon a principle that rules it. For it only prescribes a given act with a view to leading us to a given end. Consequently, if there is an end common to all our acts, that end constitutes the first principle on which all decisions of practical reason depend. Now, there is such a principle. A being that acts rationally must always pursue its own good, and the good that each of its actions seeks, beyond its particular ends, is the supreme good, namely, the good that would satisfy us fully if we were granted its possession.⁴⁶ We can assert, then, even before we have fully determined the object it pursues, that through its many particular acts, the will aims at one single end, which is happiness. Every law, as a prescription of practical reason, is the rule for some action directed to the attaining of happiness.

There remains one last condition, which seems at first more external but which constitutes an important element in the definition of law. Since law aims essentially at the realization of some good without reservation of any kind, it cannot restrict itself to the good of particular individuals. What it prescribes is the absolute good, hence the common good, and consequently also the good of a community. This is why the authority qualified for establishing law can only belong to the head entrusted with the interests of a community, or to the community itself. The origin of law is not simply practical reason decreeing what has to be done with a view to happiness. The individual's reason is constantly telling him what he must do to be happy, and its orders are scarcely laws. Rather, it is practical reason decreeing what the individual ought to do for the

⁴⁴*ST* 1-2.90.1, resp.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, ad 3.

⁴⁶See below, pp. 399-405.

good of the community of which he is a member. The people or their representative, invested with legitimate powers to lead the community they rule to a happy life, are alone qualified to establish laws and to promulgate them.⁴⁷

What is true of a people is true of every community of beings ruled with a view to their common good by a sovereign whose decisions are dictated by reason. We shall have as many kinds of laws as there are communities of this kind. The first, and widest in extent, is the universe. All beings created by God and maintained in existence by his will may be regarded as one society in which all of us are members, along with animals and even with things. There is not a single creature, animate or inanimate, that does not act in conformity with certain rules with a view to certain ends. Animals and things are subject to these rules and tend toward their ends without knowing them. Man, on the contrary, is conscious of them, and his moral justice consists in accepting them voluntarily. All the laws of nature, all the laws of morality or of society, ought to be considered as so many particular cases of one and the same law, namely, the divine law. Now, the rule according to which God wills to govern the universe is necessarily eternal, like God himself. Thus the name *eternal law* is given to this first law, the sole source of all other laws.⁴⁸

As rational creatures, we have the duty of knowing what eternal law demands of us and of conforming to it. This would be an insoluble problem were this law not in some way written in our very substance, so that we have only to observe ourselves attentively in order to discover it there. In us, as in everything, the inclination that draws us toward certain ends is what the eternal law demands of us. Since it is the eternal law that makes us what we are, we have only to yield to the legitimate inclinations of our nature in order to obey it. The eternal law, thus shared by each one of us and written in our nature, is called *natural law*.⁴⁹ What are the prescriptions of this law?

The first and most universal of all is that which all living beings assert in yielding to it: do good and avoid evil. This seems to be a truism, but it attests to the least contestable and most universal experience. It is a fact that every living being moves under the influence of its desires or its aversions. What we call good is really only the object of a desire, and what we call evil the object of an aversion. If there were an object that all desire, it would be by definition the absolute good itself. To say that we must do good and avoid evil is not arbitrarily to decree a moral law; it is merely to read a natural law written in the very substance of beings and to bring to light the hidden spring of all their activities: I have to do this because it is in my nature to do it. This precept is, first of all, the statement of a fact.

⁴⁷ST 1-2.90.3, resp.

⁴⁸SCG 3.115; ST 1-2.91.1 and 93.

⁴⁹ST 1-2.91.2, resp.

The precepts of the natural law correspond exactly to our natural inclinations and their order is the same. To begin with, we are beings like everything else. More particularly, we are living beings like all other animals. Finally, by the privilege of our nature, we are rational beings. Thus there are three great natural laws binding us from these three perspectives.

First, we are beings. As such, we wish to conserve our being by making sure of the integrity of whatever belongs by right to our nature. What we commonly call "the instinct of self-preservation" captures the meaning of this law: each of us tends with all our might toward whatever can conserve our life or protect our health. The tendency to persevere in our being is, accordingly, the first precept of the natural law to which we are subject.

The second precept embraces all the laws that bind us by the fact that we are animals and exercise animal functions: to reproduce ourselves, to raise our children, and other similar natural obligations. The third devolves upon us as rational beings and enjoins upon us the task of seeking whatever is good according to the order of reason. To live in society in order to unite the efforts of all and to help one another; to seek truth in the realm of the natural sciences or, what is better, in what concerns the highest intelligible being, namely, God; correlatively, not to injure those with whom we are called to live; to avoid ignorance and to do what we can to dispel it. All these are the binding prescriptions of the natural law, which is but one aspect of the eternal law willed by God.⁵⁰

Thus understood, the natural law is literally and indelibly written on the fleshy tablets of the heart. We may well wonder how it comes about that everyone does not live in the same way. It is because between the natural law and human actions there is a third order of precepts, namely, those derived from *human law*. What is their *raison d'être*?

We readily agree on formulating the most general and abstract principles of conduct. No one doubts that we must do good, avoid evil, acquire knowledge, avoid ignorance, and obey all the dictates of reason. The real difficulty begins in determining what is good or evil, and how we are to act so as to satisfy the demands of reason. Between the universal principles of natural law and the details of the particular acts that should be in conformity with it, an abyss opens up that no individual thought can cross by itself and that is the particular task of human laws to close.

From this arise two important consequences touching upon the nature of this law. First, it is clear that human law has no principles of its own to invoke; it is strictly limited to defining ways of applying natural law. When princes or states legislate, they only deduce from the universal principles of natural law the particular consequences necessary for life in society. Second, it is clear from the preceding that he who spontaneously follows natural law is more or less predis-

⁵⁰Ibid. 94.2, resp.

posed to acknowledge human law and to receive it willingly. When human law is promulgated, it can be an obstacle to the vicious or rebellious person, but the just individual conforms to it with so perfect a spontaneity that it is as though for him civil law did not exist.⁵¹

Human laws aim at prescribing particular acts that the natural law imposes upon individuals for the common good, and they only bind to the extent that they are just, that is, insofar as they satisfy their own definition. Even when they are just, they may be hard to bear and demand difficult sacrifices from the people, but there is still a strict duty to obey them. If, on the other hand, the state or the prince establishes laws solely to satisfy their own cupidity or thirst for glory, or if they promulgate such laws without the authority to do so, or if they distribute burdens among the citizens unfairly, or if the burdens they impose are excessive and disproportionate to the good that is sought, then they are unjust laws and no one is bound in conscience to obey them. There can, of course, be a temporary obligation to observe them in order to avoid scandal and disorder, but sooner or later they must be modified. Human laws in any way contrary to God's rights are not to be obeyed under any pretext, because, as Scripture says, it is better to obey God than men.⁵²

The true nature of laws—natural, human or divine—enables us to understand the meaning of the notion of sanction. Too often, rewards and punishments are considered to be incidental spurs to moral progress, like the devices used by legislators to encourage people to do good or to turn them from evil. The spectacle of human law and social order in which sanctions play so important a role, as we have seen, obscures their true nature and the place they occupy in the universal order. By the same token, they lose their true significance and find themselves justly excluded from the moral order by all consciences that recognize as good only actions performed for the pure love of the good.

The true relation of an act to the sanction attached to it best appears in the realm of purely natural beings, that is, beings that act only through their natural form and not through a will. We have said above that such beings already obey a rule, although they do not know it, and that it is written in some way in their very substance. They do not act, they are acted upon. Now, the very fact that they obey the nature God gave them, puts these beings deprived of knowledge in a situation similar to that of rational beings governed by a law. This universal legislation, promulgated by God for nature, is expressed by the psalmist: "He has made a decree and it shall not pass away."⁵³ But it happens that some bodies, because of their situation and role in the general economy of the universe, are prevented from acting as their nature requires, and consequently also from

⁵¹Ibid. 91.3, resp. and 95.1, resp.

⁵²Acts 4:19; *ST* 1-2.96.4, resp.

⁵³Ps 148:6, cited in *ST* 1-2.93.5, resp.

attaining their end. The result is that they suffer in their actions and substance, die and disintegrate. The death of an animal or the destruction of an inanimate object are not accidental additions to the disorder that prevents them from acting according to their nature. They are not even a consequence of it. Death or destruction is exactly the state in which the body or animal is placed because of this disorder; and it is this that gives order to the disorder that caused them. Nothing escapes law. When something claims to be escaping law, it is actually destroying itself to the extent that it succeeds in doing so. In this way it attests to the indestructible character of the legislation it claimed to violate.

In the continued existence of bodies that observe the law and the destruction of those that break it, we see in a concrete and quasi-material way the essence of moral sanction. Though we are subject to the divine law like the rest of the universe, we are endowed with a will that gives us the option of either submitting to this order or revolting against it. But it does not depend on us whether this order exists or not, or whether effects are realized or not in the universe. God can leave to our will the responsibility of ensuring respect for the law on certain points, but he cannot abandon to our whim the law itself, which is an expression of the divine order. The will that submits to law, and the one that opposes it may for a time appear to escape from the consequences of their acts; but ultimately they must come face-to-face with the eternal law.

It is precisely the role of sanction to place them there. The only difference between the consequences of natural law and sanction is that the first result naturally from observing or transgressing the law; the second is the effect of a will replying to the act of a will. Among bodies, good follows necessarily from any activity in conformity with the natural law. In the case of the will, this good is freely conferred by God on humans who have freely observed the natural law. The evil that necessarily befalls a disordered body is, in the case of a bad will, freely inflicted by God on the person who freely rebelled against order. It is this willed character of reward and punishment that also makes sanctions, properly speaking, of the good and evil suffered by individuals.⁵⁴ This should not make us forget that, in either case, there is nothing more to a sanction than

⁵⁴“Sicut res naturales ordini divinae providentiae subduntur, ita et actus humani. ... Utrobique autem contingit debitum ordinem servari, vel etiam praetermitti: hoc tamen interest, quod observatio vel transgressio debiti ordinis est in potestate humanae voluntatis constituta; non autem in potestate naturalium rerum est quod a debito ordine deficiant vel ipsum sequantur. Oportet autem effectus causis per convenientiam respondere. Sicut igitur res naturales, cum in eis debitus ordo naturalium principiorum et actionum servatur, sequitur ex necessitate naturae conservatio et bonum in ipsis, corruptio autem et malum cum a debito et naturali ordine receditur; ita etiam in rebus humanis oportet quod, cum homo voluntarie servat ordinem legis divinitus impositae, consequatur bonum, non velut ex necessitate, sed ex dispensatione gubernantis, quod est praemiari; et e converso malum, cum ordo legis fuerit praetermissus, et hoc est puniri” (*SCG* 3.140 [4]). See *ST* 1-2.93.6.

the strict observance of the law, the satisfaction found in order, and the realization of a perfect balance between acts and their consequences. To the extent that a person has not willed to fulfill the divine law, he will in the end have to submit to it, and herein will lie his punishment.⁵⁵

Understood in this pure and strict sense, sanction does not introduce anything opposed to law in the moral order. Reward and punishment do not confer on an act its morality or immorality. The act I do is not good because it will have its recompense, but it will have its recompense because it is good. Similarly, it is not to avoid punishment that I do good; but if I do good I shall avoid punishment, just as I have only to do good to be recompensed. To be sure, there can be no question of denying that hope of a reward or fear of a penalty are efficacious aids to moral progress. But we stand in relation to divine law as the citizen to civil and human laws. In order not to suffer the restraint of law we have only to embrace it. The good we first willed because of something else, or because what we thought was something else, we gradually come to love and will for itself, as the universal good and the universal order in which our own good is definitely assured. It is in this that the liberty of the children of God ultimately consists, for they obey him as a father whose law of love only binds them for their own good.

⁵⁵"Cum igitur actus humani divinae providentiae subdantur, sicut et res naturales, oportet malum quod accidit in humanis actibus, sub ordine alicuius boni concludi. Hoc autem convenientissime fit per hoc quod peccata puniuntur. Sic enim sub ordine iustitiae, quae ad aequalitatem reducit, comprehenduntur ea quae debitam quantitatem excedunt. Excedit autem homo debitum suae quantitatis gradum dum voluntatem suam divinae voluntati praefert, satisfaciendo ei contra ordinationem Dei. Quae quidem inaequalitas tollitur dum, contra voluntatem suam, homo aliquid pati cogitur secundum ordinationem divinam. Oportet igitur quod peccata humana puniantur divinitus: et, eadem ratione, bona facta remunerationem accipiant" (SCG 3.140 [5]).

PART III. Chapter Two

Love and the Passions

No exposition of the general principles of a morality of this kind suffices to give an accurate idea of it. The genius of Thomas Aquinas is perhaps most clearly revealed in his application of these principles to the concrete details of moral experience. Moreover, he had good reason to engage meticulously in this study, for as he says, "General statements about moral matters are less useful, because actions are about particular affairs" (*sermones enim morales universales minus sunt utiles, eo quod actiones in particularibus sunt*).¹ This common-sense remark poses an insoluble problem for both its author and the author's historian. Since the details of particular moral problems are infinite, Thomas had to choose from among them, and we, in our turn, regretfully have to make a choice from among the problems he selected. Besides this difficulty, there is another concerning the order to be followed in such an exposition. Here again we have at our disposal only the commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics*, which represents the order of Aristotle's moral teaching and is entirely devoted to the morality of the city-state, and the *Summa theologiae*, in which the moral virtues are integrated with the gifts of the Holy Spirit. We are inevitably condemned, then, to a certain arbitrariness in presenting these problems; but we can at least limit ourselves to say nothing except what Thomas himself has said about them.

As soon as the moralist takes up the discussion of concrete cases, he is faced with the fundamental fact that human beings are moved by their passions. The study of the passions must accordingly precede any discussion of moral problems, in which we shall continually be encountering them as the matter, as it were, on which the virtues are exercised. These are "human" factors in the highest sense, since passions belong to human beings as a unity of soul and body. A purely spiritual substance like an angel could not feel passions, but the soul, which is the form of the body, necessarily experiences reactions to changes in the body. Inversely, since it is the soul that moves the body, it can be the principle of changes the body must undergo. We can, then, distinguish the passions according to their source. *Bodily* passions arise from the action of the body on the soul, which is its form. *Animal* passions arise from the actions of the soul (*anima*) on the body it moves. In either case, the passion ultimately affects the soul. The cutting of a bodily member causes a sensation of pain in the soul: this is a bodily passion. The thought of danger causes in the body the disturbances that accompany fear: this is an animal passion. But we all know from experience that disturbances in the body have repercussions in the soul,

¹ST 2-2. prol.

so that ultimately every passion is a modification of the soul resulting from its union with the body.²

However, this only brings us close to the notion of passion. Strictly speaking, the above definition could also apply to sensations, for they too are modifications of the soul resulting from its union with the body. Nevertheless, sensations make up a class of facts distinct from those that we simply call the passions. The latter are not knowledge, but disturbed states that arise within us when we perceive objects that more or less directly concern the life and well-being of the body. Passions, properly speaking, affect the soul in its function of animator of the body at the point where it is most deeply engaged in this function.

Just as the will accompanies the intellectual activity of the soul, so a more modest form of desire accompanies its animating activity. This is the sense appetite, which is also called sensuality, and which is but the desire arising from the perception of an object of interest to the life of the body. It is this lowest form of desire that is the seat of the passions. They are its most intense movements; and it is through them that we experience most strongly, sometimes most tragically, that we are not a pure intelligence but the union of a soul and a body.

In studying this form of the appetite, we noted the dual nature of its reactions, as it found itself face to face with useful or harmful objects. Its behavior with reference to the first forms what we called the concupiscible appetite, with reference to the second the irascible appetite. Passions fall naturally into two groups according to this basic distinction. The first of them we call love.

Love, the root of all the passions, is many-sided. It changes its aspect according to the various activities of the soul with which it can be associated. Fundamentally, it is a modification of the human appetite by something desirable. The modification itself consists in the fact that the appetite takes pleasure in this object. This pleasure (*complacentia*) is an immediate experiencing of a natural affinity and a complementarity of the living being and the object it encounters. It is this pleasure that constitutes love as a passion. Scarcely is it produced, when this passion arouses a movement of the appetite toward a real, and not merely intentional, taking possession of the object agreeable to it. This movement is the desire born of love. If it reaches its ends, the terminus of this movement is repose in the possession of the object loved. Such repose is joy, the satisfying of desire.

It is here in the order of vital and organic desire that the passion of love, in the proper sense of the term, is encountered. It is only by extension that the name is generalized to include a higher order, that of the will.³ Wherever the appetite moves toward a good there is love, but its nature varies according to

²*De ver.* 26.2, resp. On this problem see Henri-Dominique Noble, *Les passions dans la vie morale*, 2 vols. (Paris: Lethielleux, 1931, 1932).

³*ST* 1-2.26.1, resp.

the nature of the movement concerned.⁴ Let us first look at inanimate things. We can say that even these desire whatever agrees with their nature. At least, it is as though they desired it, because someone does desire it for them. In creating them, God endowed them with active natures, capable of operating for an end that they do not know but that he does. This natural bent of all beings to follow their nature is natural appetite. We can give the name *natural love* to this selective affinity (*connaturalitas*) that inclines a thing toward what is agreeable to it. The corporeal world does not know the love that moves it, but Love knows the world that God moves, because he loves it, and he loves it with the same love with which he loves his own perfection. We are not yet in the order of passion, strictly speaking.

Above these lived desires there are felt desires, which animals experience as a consequence of their perceptions. Thus the sense appetite is the seat of a sort of *sensory love*. But just as sensation is necessarily determined by the object, this love is necessarily determined by sensation. It is a passion properly speaking, but poses no moral problem because it does not offer any matter for choice. We experience this passion of love in our capacity as animals but in an entirely different way, because in us it stands in relation to a higher appetite, the *rational or intellectual appetite*, which we have called *will*. The pleasure (*complacentia*) of a will in its object is called *intellectual love*. Like the will that experiences it, this love is free. Intellectual love is the soul's pleasure in a good decreed to be such by a free judgment of the reason. Here we are in the order of the intellect and the immaterial, where it is no longer a question of a passion properly speaking. Passions, however, remain in us, and in us alone are they matter of morality. As animals, we experience all the passions of the sense appetite; as endowed with reason, we dominate the appetite and passions by free judgments. Hence human sensuality differs from that of the animal in that it is capable of obeying reason and therefore participates in liberty. Our love, like all our passions, is free. If it is not actually so, it can and ought to become free, and consequently the passion of love raises moral problems.

Because love has dealings with reason it is diversified in us in several ways, each with its special name. First, there must be some way of indicating that a rational being can freely choose the object of its love; accordingly we speak of *dilection*. The object that is thus freely chosen can be desired for its great value, a value that renders it eminently worthy of being loved; the sentiment experienced in this case is called *charity*. Finally, we can try to express the fact that a love has lasted sufficiently long to become like a permanent disposition of the soul or habit; in this case love is called *friendship*.⁵ It remains true that all

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid. 26.3, resp. Friendship is not a passion but a virtue. Thomas' principal source on this subject is the *Eth. Nic.* 8 and 9. See *In Eth. Nic.* 8 [ed. Spiazzi, pp. 409–460, nn. 1538–1756], and 9 [pp. 463–508, nn. 1757–1950].

these affections of the soul are but so many variations of love. We can see, then, that the single notion of love extends to a great number of situations and moral problems. This brings us into the inexhaustible realm of particular acts.

There is at least one general distinction that makes it possible to bring some order into all this multiplicity. The distinction arises from the nature of friendship, which we have just described as a kind of love. A person can be said to love wine, but cannot ordinarily be said to have friendship with wine. This difference in language indicates a difference in the feelings concerned. I love wine for the pleasure it gives me; but if I love someone only for the advantages I receive, can I truly call myself a friend? So we have to distinguish between the love of a person and the love of a thing. The former goes straight to the person; he is loved for himself because his dignity entitles him to be loved. It is this kind of love that is called the love of friendship. Even better, it is love pure and simple.

In fact, love consists in taking pleasure in the good. Love, pure and simple, then, takes pleasure in a good because it is good in itself. The other kind of love is not addressed to a good as a good in itself, but only as good for another. It is called love of concupiscence (*amor concupiscentiae*) because we are the other for whom we covet the good. Since this love is not directed to the good for itself, it is subordinate to the former and only secondarily deserves to be called love.⁶ This already shows us Thomas' lofty notion of friendship. To be sure, anyone may love the pleasures and advantages he draws from the love of his friends, but in this case he is coveting rather than loving. Such covetousness or cupidity may go along with friendship, but it is not friendship itself.⁷

What, then, is the cause of love? First, as has just been said, it is goodness, because our desire for or our tendency toward something finds in it the full satisfaction that makes it take pleasure and repose therein. Added to the good, however, is that other object of love, namely, the beautiful. Between the good and the beautiful, both of which are inseparable from being, there is only a mental distinction. In the good, the will is at rest; in the beautiful, it is the sensible or intellectual apprehension that is at rest. Every one of us has often experienced this in the case of the objects of sight and hearing, the two senses used by reason. The perception of colors or sounds and harmonies is accompanied by the feeling that the perception itself is its own end. The beautiful is something, the very seeing and hearing of which is the totally sufficient reason for seeing and hearing it. We can also call something beautiful, the intellectual knowledge of which finds its complete justification in the very act of knowing it: "It pertains to the nature of the beautiful that our apprehension rests in its

⁶ST 1-2.26.4, resp.

⁷Ibid. The source of friendship is the virtue *benevolentia*, which consists in an inner movement of affection for someone. When it is stabilized into a habit it is friendship. See *In Eth. Nic.* 9.5 [ed. Spiazzi, p. 480, n. 1820].

sight or knowledge" (*ad rationem pulchri pertinet quod in ejus aspectu seu cognitione quietetur apprehensio*).⁸

Two misconceptions appear to have obscured this profound notion of the beautiful in the mind of its interpreters, preventing the full development of an aesthetic such as we might rightly expect from those who take their inspiration from it. First, we must avoid confusing the finality of an apprehension with the finality of knowledge. Knowledge need not be last in the order of knowing for its apprehension to be so. For this it is enough that, quite apart from what it teaches us, it offers the understanding the object of an apprehension so perfect that, *as apprehension*, it leaves nothing to be desired. This is the concrete meaning of the frequently quoted expression: Beauty is the splendor of truth. Literally, this would be nothing but a brilliant metaphor. In its full sense, however, it means that certain truths present themselves in so bare a form, so free from mixture of any kind, that they offer the mind the rare joy of a pure apprehension of truth. Sensible beauty is of the same nature. Beautiful colors, forms and sounds fill to overflowing the expectation and power of sight and hearing in offering them sensible objects so pure in their essence that their perception becomes an end in itself and leaves no more to be desired.

This brings us to that other definition of beauty, no less well-known than the preceding: "That which pleases on being seen" (*id quod visum placet*).⁹ As a definition it is true, but it contributes to the second misconception we should try to avoid. Beautiful colors and beautiful forms are those that are pleasing to sight; but it is not enough that the sight of them pleases for them to be beautiful. There is no aesthetic joy whose cause is not in the beauty of the object. We know now in what this beauty consists. The joy it gives is a joy *sui generis*, the distinctive quality of which we all know from experience. This is the wonder with which certain perfect acts of knowing are surrounded as by a halo, and which confers on certain sensible things the nature of a contemplation. Then too is born the love of beauty: the pleasure or satisfaction of a knowing subject in an object in which the act that apprehends it finds, along with its ultimate contentment, its perfect repose.

Whether it is a question of the beautiful or the good, love presupposes knowledge of the object loved. It is, therefore, the sight of a sensible beauty or good that is at the source of sensible love. Similarly, the spiritual contemplation

⁸ST 1-2.27.1, ad 3. It is from this metaphysical notion of beauty, rather than from the notion of art, that we should have to begin in order to establish an aesthetic based upon authentic Thomistic principles. The notion of art is common to the fine arts and the useful arts. To proceed from art to aesthetic, it is therefore necessary to return to the notion of the beautiful considered in itself.

⁹For the elements of aesthetics in St. Thomas see Jacques Maritain *Art and Scholasticism*, trans. Joseph W. Evans (New York: Scribners, 1962); Etienne Gilson, *Painting and Reality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955).

of beauty or good is at the origin of spiritual love.¹⁰ Nevertheless, love is not measured by knowledge. We can love perfectly an object very imperfectly known. It is enough that knowledge offers it to love for love to take possession of it in its entirety, love loving what it does not yet know of it for the love of what it does know. Who is there who has not experienced what it is to love a science when, in the first enthusiasm of its discovery, love presents the mind with a knowledge that it already loves in its entirety and wishes therefore to know in its entirety? And how would perfect love of God be possible if we could only love him in proportion to what we know of him?¹¹

Knowledge is actually the principle or source of love rather than its cause. We might say that it is a necessary condition for it. The cause of love, properly speaking, lies in the relation between the lover and the loved. This relation itself is of two kinds. When a being lacks something and encounters what it lacks, it covets it. Love of concupiscence arises, then, from the fact that two beings are complementary, or to speak in technical fashion, from the fact that one is in potency what the other is in act. Sometimes, however, two beings meet and are both in act and in the same respect, for example, when an artist meets an artist or a scholar a scholar. There is a specific community of form or resemblance between them (*convenientia in forma*). In this case there is usually established a love of friendship. We say usually, because we must not forget the extreme complexity of situations of this kind. The first of all loves, that is, the interested love that everyone has for himself, underlies all other loves. In principle, artists love artists, but a virtuoso does not much love another virtuoso who is to play in the same concert.¹²

Defined in this way, love presupposes no other passion; but the other passions all presuppose love. Love underlies each of them. Indeed, every passion requires either a movement toward or repose in some object. Hence every passion presupposes the connaturality that begets friendship or the complementarity that begets covetousness or cupidity. In both cases the necessary and sufficient condition of love is present. So it can happen, and frequently does, that a passion (admiration, for example) contributes to the birth of love. This is because, just as one good can be the cause of another good, one love can be the cause of another love.¹³

The most immediate and general effect of love is the union between the lover and the beloved. It is an effective union too, extending even to the real possession of the loved by the lover when it is a question of love of concupiscence. It is a union of feeling and purely affective if it is a question of the love

¹⁰ST 1-2.27.2, resp.

¹¹Ibid., ad 2.

¹²Ibid. 3, resp.

¹³Ibid. 4, resp.

of friendship, wherein one wishes for the other the same good as for oneself. This second union, though spiritual, is no less intimate than the first. On the contrary, to will for another what we will for ourselves, to love another for himself as we love ourselves for ourselves, is to treat the beloved as another self. It is to make an *alter ego* of him. It is no longer just a union like that of the knower with the thing known that is here at stake. That union was effected by means of the species and its resemblance to the object, whereas love, as it were, makes two things become a single thing. Thus the unitive power of knowledge is less than that of love.¹⁴

To appreciate the closeness of this union, it is well to observe the curious transference of personalities that naturally accompanies love. In some way the personalities can be said to pass into each other. The beloved is, so to speak, in the lover, and the lover in the beloved by knowledge and by desire: by knowledge, for the loved one rests in the thought of the lover; and in turn the latter never grows weary of listing in thought the perfections of the beloved. So the Holy Spirit, who is divine love,¹⁵ is said to “search even the deep things of God” (1 Cor 2:10).

Of human love it can be said that it also seeks to penetrate by thought to the heart of the beloved, and the same is true of desire. It can be seen in the joy of the lover in the presence of the beloved. Let the beloved be absent and the good wishes of his friend accompany him, or the desire of his lover pursues him, depending on whether he loves him in friendship or concupiscence. There is no better word than *intimate* to characterize this “invisceration” of the beloved in the lover. Indeed, do we not speak of the “bowels of charity”? This is exactly what we mean. But the lover is no less intimately in the beloved. If he covets someone, he will not rest satisfied until he has taken perfect possession. If he loves someone in friendship, it is no longer in himself that the lover lives but in the one he loves. Whatever good or evil befalls either one of two friends, befalls the other as well. The joys and sorrows of one are also the other’s. For two to have but one will (*eadem velle*), this is true friendship.

How could it be otherwise? We have reasoned as though the lover was in the beloved *or* conversely; we should rather say *and* conversely. In the love of friendship, the lover is the beloved and the beloved the lover, so that in rendering love for love they are doubly the one in the other and other in the one. Perfect love allows but one life to subsist for two beings. Each can speak of “my self” and “my other self.”¹⁶

Another way to put it is to say that love is ecstatic. For a “me” to be in ecstasy is to be transported out of myself. Ordinarily what is designated by this

¹⁴Ibid. 28.1, resp. and ad 3.

¹⁵On the theological extensions of this doctrine of love see SCG 4.19.

¹⁶ST 1-2.28.2, resp.

term is the state of a faculty of knowing elevated by God to the understanding of objects beyond its reach. It can also be applied to the state of a wild or insane person who is also said to be "beside himself" or "out of his mind." The case of love is rather different. Although this passion disposes thought to a kind of ecstasy, since the lover loses himself in meditation upon the beloved, the ecstatic quality in love pertains rather to an ecstasy of the will. We already see it in the love of concupiscence, in which the lover, not content with the good he has, transports his will beyond himself to attain the good he covets. But it is even more apparent in the love of friendship. The affection we have for our friends simply ceases to concern ourselves. It goes beyond us. The friend wills nothing but the good of his friend, does nothing but what is good for his friend, takes care of his friend, provides for his friend. In brief, friendship takes us out of ourselves and is ecstatic by definition.¹⁷

When love is thus intensely directed toward the object loved, it seeks naturally to exclude all that can stand in the way of its attaining it, or if it possesses it already, that might threaten its possession. Thus jealousy arises—that complex sentiment in which love blends with hatred, but of which, when all is said and done, love is the cause. In love of concupiscence there is nothing more common than the jealousy of the husband who wants his wife for himself alone, or of the ambitious man who is jealous of every rival capable of displacing him. Even friendship knows jealousy. Who is not aroused in indignation against those whose acts or words threaten the reputation of their friend? And when we read in John 2:17 "The zeal of thy house hath eaten me up," do we not see that this zeal is a holy jealousy ceaselessly occupied in correcting evil committed against God, or failing this, in deploring it?¹⁸

Love itself is not necessarily that destructive passion so often described by the poets. On the contrary, it is natural and therefore beneficial to desire something we lack in order to attain our perfection. Love of what is good can only improve the lover. The ravages produced by love arise from two causes, neither of which is a necessary consequence of love. Sometimes love is deceived in its object; it can mistake an evil for a good. At other times, even when the love is genuine, it is so violent that the organic disturbances accompanying it threaten the body's equilibrium. Normally this is not the case. Love usually begets tenderness in the heart of the lover, delight in the beloved's presence, listlessness and fervent desire in his absence. The nature of the passion of love demands that certain organic modifications accompany these various sentiments, but their

¹⁷Ibid. 3, resp. But this does not imply forgetfulness of self. To love a friend is not to love him more than oneself but as oneself. Therefore the love we always have for ourselves does not prevent that detachment from self demanded by all true friendship. See *ibid.*, ad 3.

¹⁸ST 1-2.28.4, resp.

intensity follows that of the passion; there is nothing pathological about them unless the passion itself be unregulated.¹⁹

Such is love, that universal force we find everywhere at work in nature, since whatever acts only acts with a view to an end, and this end is for each being the good it loves and desires. It is clear, therefore, that whatever action a being performs, it is moved by some kind of love in performing it.²⁰

The contrary of love is hate. Just as love is the consonance or accord of the appetite and its object, hate is dissonance or discord between them. Hate is a rejection of what is repugnant and harmful. As love has the good for its object, hate has evil.²¹ This is why even hate has love as its cause, for we hate the contrary of what we love. Again, although the emotions of hate are often stronger than those of love, love is in the last analysis the stronger of the two.²² We cannot not love the good, neither in general nor in particular. We cannot even not love being and truth in general. It may happen that a certain being stands in the way of a good we covet, or that between our desires and their objects there stands our knowledge of a particular truth. Sometimes, too, we would like to be less well informed about morality than we are. However, we only hate beings and truths that disturb us; we never hate being or truth itself.

To the basic linking of love and hate there is immediately joined another, that of desire and abhorrence. Desire is merely the form love takes when its object is absent. Abhorrence is the kind of repulsion with which the mere thought of an evil inspires us. Closely related to fear, it is sometimes confused with it, but it is quite different. Fear is of slight importance in comparison with desire. The two chief varieties of desire are concupiscence or covetousness and cupidity. Concupiscence is common to men and animals. It is the desire for the goods of animal life such as food, drink and sexual satisfaction. Cupidity, on the contrary, is peculiar to man. It extends to anything that knowledge, rightly or wrongly, represents to us as good. Although acts of cupidity are reasoned acts, they are not always reasonable. This is because reason in these cases is only serving our appetites. Acts of cupidity belong to the sensory appetite and are less acts of choice than of passion.²³ What limits are we to assign to them? Concupiscence is infinite; there are no limits to what reason can know and consequently none to what cupidity can desire.²⁴

Let us suppose for the moment that desire is satisfied. If it is a question of the satisfaction of a natural concupiscence, it is called pleasure (*delectatio*). If it

¹⁹Ibid. 5, resp. and replies to the objections.

²⁰Ibid. 6, resp.

²¹Ibid. 29.1, resp.

²²Ibid. 2 and 3.

²³Ibid. 30.3, resp. and ad 3.

²⁴Ibid. 4, resp.

is a question of the satisfaction of cupidity, it is called joy (*gaudium*). Pleasure is a movement of the sensory appetite produced when the animal possesses the object capable of satisfying its need. It is therefore truly a passion. In a being endowed with reason, certain pleasures can be joys at the same time, but there are pleasures from which a rational animal draws no joy nor in which it even takes any pride. Bodily pleasures are more vehement than spiritual joys but are nevertheless inferior to them in many ways. By themselves, pleasures are passions in the strict sense. They are accompanied by a bodily disturbance to which they owe a violence that joys never have. In compensation, the joy of understanding far surpasses the pleasure of feeling. So true is this that no one would prefer loss of reason to loss of sight. If many prefer the pleasures of the body to the joys of the mind, it is because the latter presuppose the acquisition of those intellectual virtues and habits called sciences. For those in a position to choose, hesitation is out of the question. The good man will sacrifice all his pleasures for the sake of honor. The man of learning simply cannot limit himself to the superficialities of sense perceptions; he wishes to go to the very essence of things by way of the intellect. Finally, how are we to compare the precarious nature of sense pleasures with the stability of the joys of the mind? Goods of the body are corruptible, goods of the spirit incorruptible; and as the latter reside in the mind, they are naturally inseparable from sobriety and moderation.²⁵

A moral doctrine whose principles are so profoundly rooted in reality, so strictly dependent upon the very structure of the being they rule, has no difficulty about its foundation. The basis of morality is human nature itself. Moral good is every object, every activity enabling man to achieve the potentialities of his nature and to actualize himself according to the norm of his essence, which is that of a being endowed with reason. Thomistic morality is accordingly a naturalism, but it is at the same time an intellectualism because reason acts as its rule. Just as nature makes those beings not endowed with reason act according to what they are, so it lets beings endowed with reason find out what they are so that they may act accordingly. Become what you are, is their highest law; actualize to their ultimate limits the potentialities of the intelligent being you are!

This kind of naturalism in morals is entirely different from that expressed as follows. Whatever exists, is in nature and accordingly natural. A statement like this appears to be obvious, but only because it is imprecise. Literally, the statement means that from some point of view reality is always intelligible. Understood in this way, it puts the normal and the pathological on the same plane, which is legitimate, provided that we do not thereby abolish the distinction between what is normal and what is not. Whatever is, even sickness and monsters, can be explained by the laws of nature. It is natural for a monster to conduct itself according to its monstrous nature, but it does not follow that it is

²⁵Ibid. 31.5, resp. and ad 2.

natural to be a monster. For Thomas and his Greek masters, nature is not a chaos—a juxtaposition of facts without order, structure or hierarchy. On the contrary, it is a system of natures, each of which is the concrete realization of some standard; and although no individual realizes it perfectly, all represent it in their own way. When they perfect themselves through their activities, they are striving to represent the standard to the best of their ability. This standard is normal; any corruption of it is a deviation into the pathological. Whatever is in nature is natural, but not everything in nature is normal. It is natural for the abnormal to be pathological; this distinction must be strongly emphasized in any discussion of the value of the passions called pleasures.

Dominating any discussion of this kind is the fact that certain natural principles pertaining to a species can fail or be perverted in individual cases. Then, too, pleasures contrary to nature as far as the species is concerned become natural to certain individuals. It is natural for a homosexual to satisfy his or her sexual cravings with individuals of the same sex. But though it is natural for such a person to act as a homosexual, it is not at all normal for a person to be homosexual (*cujuslibet membri finis est usus ejus*).²⁶ “Corydon’s sophism”* becomes clear if we extend its justifications to other cases. Homosexuality is not the only sexual inversion; bestiality is another one. If it is natural for some persons to seek their pleasure with animals, it is certainly not natural for them to use their power of reproduction in these sterile unions. Thus all pleasures are in nature, but there are in nature pleasures opposed to nature. For the individual whose idiosyncrasy relegates him to the margin of his species, the need for such pleasure is a regrettable misfortune. Moral science by itself cannot condemn men or absolve them, but it can distinguish good from evil, and it sees to it that vice is not exalted into virtue.²⁷

The moral quality of pleasures, then, does not directly depend upon either their intensity or their causes. Every activity relieving a natural craving is a cause of pleasure. We are changeable creatures and take pleasure in our very mutability, to such an extent that there is hardly any change without its share of pleasure. “Still, it’s a change,” people say, and we know what they mean. The very memory of a pleasure is still a pleasure, and hope of a pleasure is a still greater one, particularly when the excellence or rarity of the desired good gives rise to admiration. Even memory of pain has its share of pleasure, since the pain exists no longer. When one “nurses his tears,” it is because he finds repeated comfort in them.

²⁶SCG 3.126 [1].

* [For Corydon see Virgil’s *Eclogues* 2, ed. and trans. H. Rushton Fairclough, rev. by C.P. Gould (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 31–37.]

²⁷ST 1-2.31.7, resp.; SCG 3.122 [9].

What we take most delight in is the unity arising from resemblance. Love tends toward this oneness and attains it in pleasure. We then experience a dilation and enlargement of our whole being to the accompaniment of lively pleasures and great joys. Yet, the act is better and more quickly accomplished in intense concentration.²⁸ Whatever their causes or effects, the moral value of pleasures depends upon that of the loves from which they result. All sense pleasure is good or evil according to whether or not it is in accord with the demands of reason. In moral science, reason is nature. We remain, therefore, in the norm and in order when we are taking sensible pleasure from an act in agreement with moral law. Good pleasures only become better by being more intense; the bad only become worse.²⁹

Thomistic moral science is accordingly frankly opposed to that systematic destruction of natural tendencies that is often considered characteristic of the medieval mind. Nor does it even include that hatred of sense pleasures in which some would find the specific difference between the Christian spirit and Greek naturalism. It is wrong, according to Thomas, to hold, as certain heretics do, that all sexual relations are sinful.³⁰ If that were so, it would mean that sin lies at the very source of that eminently natural cell, the family. As we have said, the use of the sexual organs is natural and normal when regulated by its proper end, which is reproduction. Now, in the human species, the generation concerned is that of a being endowed with reason and capable of using it well. Accordingly, the function of reproduction includes, in addition to the biological process of generation properly speaking, the education of the beings thus begotten. Even among animals not endowed with reason, the male remains with the female during the period necessary to raise the young, when the female is not able to raise them herself, as in the case with birds. It is the same, and much more obviously so, with humans. Sometimes the woman herself has the necessary resources to raise the children. However, the general rule in the human species is that the father should provide for their education. And moral science must first of all concern itself with the general rules of action.

²⁸It must be remembered that the pleasure under discussion here is the pleasure of a given act. When pleasure wholly engrosses the one performing that act, it can make any other pleasure difficult or even impossible. Thus intense sensible pleasures and the exercise of reason are incompatible. See *ST* 1-2.33.3, resp.

²⁹*Ibid.* 34.1, resp. Hence the first object of moral philosophy is not the preventing of the manifestations of nature, but ordering them according to reason (*SCG* 3.121). Thus normal pleasure controlled by reason is by that fact morally good. This is so true that Thomas holds that the pleasure that accompanies the sexual act would have been greater in the state of innocence than since original sin: "fuisset tanto major delectatio sensibilis, quanto esset purior natura, et corpus magis sensible" (*ST* 1.98.2, ad 3).

³⁰*SCG* 3.126.

The very word "education," used with reference to human beings, is enough to show that something more than mere rearing is at stake. Education implies instruction; and all instruction takes time. It takes longer to educate humans than to teach birds to fly. The father, therefore, must remain with the mother the whole time required to ensure the education of the children born of their union. It is thus that the natural society we call marriage is constituted. And since it is natural for a man to remain with his wife, all sexual relations outside of marriage are contrary to moral law because contrary to nature.³¹

For the same reason marriage must be indissoluble. It is natural that the father's solicitude for his children last as long as they live, and that the mother be able to count on him for help until the task of education is done. Besides, it would hardly be just that a man should marry a woman in the flower of her youth and cast her off when she has lost her fruitfulness and beauty. Finally, marriage is more than a bond; it is a friendship. In fact, it is the most intimate of all friendships, for it adds to carnal union, which alone is enough to render the common life sweet to animals, the union of days and hours implied by the family life of human beings. Now, the greater a friendship is, the more solid and durable it also is; and the greatest of all friendships ought to be the strongest and most lasting of all.³²

All this takes for granted that the society in question be that of one man and one woman, the father tending naturally to provide for the children whom he knows surely to be his own, and the friendship between father and mother being such that any notion of sharing each other is revolting.³³ Thus, although sexual pleasure pursued as its own end is gravely immoral and unnatural, it is both natural and moral when directed to that higher end of the conservation of the species. This end itself implies another—the setting up of the social cell, called the family, which itself is based on the most perfect of all friendships, the mutual love of father and mother united for the rearing of their children.³⁴

The opposite of pleasure is pain. Taken as a passion in the strict sense, pain is the sensitive appetite's perception of the presence of evil.³⁵ This evil affects the body, but it is the soul that suffers. Corresponding to joy, which is a mental apprehension of a good, there is grief, caused by an internal apprehension of some evil. All grief does not imply the complete absence of joy. We can, for

³¹Ibid. 122.

³²Ibid. 123.

³³Ibid. 124.

³⁴These and other arguments used by Thomas are not impaired by exceptions to the contrary (a mother who is capable of raising her children alone, or of raising them better alone than with the help of the father, or for whom it is impossible to raise them otherwise than alone since she is a widow, etc). The moral law sets a general rule to cover all normal cases. It cannot regulate exceptions.

³⁵ST 1-2.35.1, resp.

example, be sad about one thing and joyful about something else unrelated to it. Grief and joy are also perfectly compatible when their objects are contraries. Thus, to rejoice about the good and to grieve over evil are two closely related sentiments. Moreover, there is a joy that has no contrary grief; the joy of contemplation, for example, has no contrary. When contraries are grasped by the intellect, they contribute to the understanding of each other; even the contrary of truth can contribute to the knowledge of truth. Moreover, since intellectual contemplation is the work of the mind, fatigue and weariness have no part in it. Only indirectly, through the exhaustion of the sense powers the intellect uses, do weariness and sadness keep us from contemplating.³⁶

Pain and grief are caused by the presence of evil and result in a general lessening of activities in the one who experiences them. Bodily suffering does not prevent our remembering what we already know. A deep love of learning can even help us to forget about our pain. As a rule, however, violent pain renders learning practically impossible. Even simple sorrows can cause depression, render action impossible, and plunge a person into a dull stupor. Grief can affect physiological as well as psychological activity. Hence it is important to resist that weakening of vital forces following pain and grief. To this end all pleasures and joys can be useful. Even tears are a consolation because they give exterior expression to pain and enable the sufferer to do something related to his state. The compassion of a friend is one of the surest remedies for grief. Since we regard grief as a burden, we feel that our friend is helping us to bear it. Above all, the grief a friend experiences for us is a visible proof of his love for us. Since every joy effectively combats grief, it is helpful to know that we have a friend. We have to attack this evil from two sides at once—in thought by study and contemplation, in the body by such appropriate remedies as sleep, baths and other sedatives. Although all grief is an evil in itself, all grief is not bad. Just as joy, itself a good, becomes bad if it is joy in evil, so grief, which is itself an evil, becomes good when experienced over what is evil. The grief that is a protest against evil is morally praiseworthy. The grief that stirs us to fly from evil is morally useful because there are worse evils than pain and sorrow. It is far worse, for example, not to judge evil what is truly evil, or, judging it to be evil, not to avoid it.³⁷

Love and hate, desire and aversion, pleasure and pain, are the six basic passions of the concupiscible appetite. We have still to consider the passions of the irascible, the second group of movements of the sensitive appetite distinguished above. Here, too, with the exception of one single case, the passions turn up in pairs of contraries.

³⁶Ibid. 5, resp.

³⁷Ibid. 39.4, resp.

The first of these pairs is hope and despair. Like all the passions of the irascible appetite, hope presupposes desire. This is why we have spoken incidentally of hope as the desire of a future good. Hope, however, is more than this, and different too. We do not hope for what we are sure to obtain. What characterizes hope is the feeling that difficulties stand between our desire and its fulfillment. We only hope for what is more or less difficult to obtain. We keep hope within us in the face of some obstacle, annihilating it so to speak by desire; and thus it belongs with the passions of the irascible appetite.³⁸ If the difficulty becomes extreme to the point of appearing insurmountable, a sort of hate takes the place of desire. Then, not only is the pursuit abandoned but also we no longer wish to hear this impossible good so much as mentioned. This retreat of the appetite from itself and the accompanying rancor against its former object is called despair.³⁹

Hope is intimately bound up with our constant effort to live, act and realize ourselves, and it beats in the heart of everyone. Persons of age and wisdom have great hope, because experience enables them to undertake tasks that seem impossible to others. In the course of their long life, how often have they not seen the un hoped-for come to pass! The young are full of hope too, but for the opposite reason. They have little past and a vast future, little memory and large expectations. The ardor of youth that has never been frustrated makes them believe that nothing is impossible. In this respect they are not unlike drunkards and certain kinds of lunatics. They are unable to figure things out and believe everything is possible.⁴⁰ They will try almost anything and sometimes they succeed, for hope is a driving force. A person will often fail simply because he judges a task impossible and takes it up without conviction. It is very difficult to jump a ditch when we despair of clearing it; hope gives us a better chance of doing it. Even despair can give us strength, provided it is accompanied by hope. The soldier who despairs of finding his safety through flight can battle away like a hero, if he hopes at least to be avenged thereby.⁴¹

The second pair of passions of the irascible appetite comprises fear and daring. Next to sadness, fear best reveals the characteristics of passion because it is eminently passive, and the organic disturbances it produces are most apparent. Fear is a reaction of the sensory appetite, not before a present evil like sadness, but before a future evil that is imagined as present. There are many kinds of fears, for example, shame, anguish, stupor, fright and so on. All of them are related to some evil or the possible occasion of evil. We fear death; we fear, too, the company of the wicked. In the second case, however, it is not

³⁸Ibid. 40.1, resp.

³⁹Ibid. 4, resp.

⁴⁰Ibid. 6, resp.

⁴¹Ibid. 8, resp. and ad 3.

so much the actual company that is feared as the enticement to evil. If the evil is sudden and unusual, we fear it more; and fear reaches its peak before a difficult evil that it is impossible to avoid. The feeling that we are without friends, without resources, without power in the face of peril, always contributes to increase fear. We shrink back into ourselves. The strength remaining in us melts away, like the inhabitants from the ramparts of an invaded city. A chill passes through us, our body trembles, our knees buckle, we become incapable of speech. Although our minds can still deliberate about what we ought to do, as we think about the dangers confronting us our fear exaggerates them and all our calculations go awry. In a word, a lively fear causes extreme weakness, though a slight fear can be useful because it may warn its victim to be careful and to take measures against the danger.

Daring or boldness is the contrary of fear. It can even be called its extreme opposite since, instead of wilting before imminent danger, it attacks it in order to overcome it. It is a passion commonly found in persons of good hope who readily believe that victory is possible. As in all the passions, the body has a part to play. A certain warmth of heart accompanies it, and the use of stimulants contributes to it. Just as drunkenness facilitates hope, so can it make a person more daring.⁴² We must not take this passion for a virtue. Boldness is an impulse of the sensory appetite and is not based on prudent calculation of the chances of success. Daring persons instinctively hurl themselves into danger, but once they are at grips with it they often find more difficulties than they expected. If they are merely daring they give up, but if they are strong, once they have taken on the danger after reasoned deliberation, they often find the task less arduous than they feared and carry it through successfully.⁴³

There remains the passion that we have said has no contrary, namely, anger. Anger is a reaction of the sensory appetite against a present evil whose effects are actually being experienced. It arises from the meeting of several causes, themselves passions: sadness or grief over a present evil, the desire and hope of possible revenge. This is proved because if the cause of the evil is beyond our reach, if it is, for example, a person of exalted rank, we experience sadness but not anger. Anger implies hope of vengeance, and it is not without a certain pleasure; but if it tends toward vengeance as toward a good, it is directed against the adversary as against an evil. It does not will evil against an evil as does hatred, but seeks the pleasure of being avenged on evil.

The fact that anger is made up of contrary passions, one of them being a desire for the good, makes it much less serious than hatred. Basically, anger is a substitute in the passions for a desire for justice. Justice can also seek to punish evil. Hence all that is wrong with anger is that it is a blind passion. It does

⁴²Ibid. 45.3, resp.

⁴³Ibid. 4, resp.

not proceed from a rational, objective moral judgment.⁴⁴ The angry person always has the impression that he is a victim of injustice. He thinks that he is being opposed, scorned, misunderstood, outraged, in short, that he is being belittled, and he is thereby offended. The more reason he has to think that he is deliberately being injured the more indignant he becomes, and the more violent his anger the surer it is that the feeling of injustice lies behind his passion. A person may be highly esteemed, but this is no protection against anger. In fact, it is but an occasion for others to hurt him the more and for him to become the more annoyed. The pleasure we seek in revenge is actually found there. We find it even in anger that is soothed by the bodily emotions it creates. If the signs of our anger become excessively violent it is positively dangerous and imperils our use of reason.⁴⁵

Such are the basic passions which are, as it were, the matter on which the virtues are exercised. In themselves passions are neither good nor bad. The Stoic notion of the wise man as one whom no passions ever disturbs is a grand ideal but hardly a human one. To be completely free of passion, we should have to be without a body, to be something more than just a man. Cicero was wrong in describing the passions as "sicknesses of the soul."⁴⁶ For the soul to be united to its body and to feel its organic modifications in a sensible way is not evil. It is absolutely normal. Morally speaking, passions are neutral, but if they get out of reason's control they become evil. On the contrary, it is normal that in a completely regulated moral life nothing in us escapes reason's rule. To say that we must pursue truth with our whole soul is to say that we must also pursue it with our whole body, for the soul does not know without the body. Similarly, we must pursue good with our whole body if we really wish to pursue it with our whole soul. To act in any other way is to pretend to the morality of angels and thereby run the risk of not attaining even our own moral life. Practical wisdom does not exclude the passions but busies itself with regulating, ordering and using them. In short, the passions of the wise are an integral part of their moral life.

⁴⁴Ibid. 46.6, resp.

⁴⁵Ibid. 48.3, resp.

⁴⁶Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* 3.10; cited *ST* 2-2.123.10, resp. [ed. and trans. by John Edward King (London: Heinemann; Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1960), p. 252. In fact, Thomas does not cite Cicero explicitly in this place but in *ST* 1-2. 24.2, resp. In Gilson's reference, Thomas refers in general to the Stoic doctrine of passions. Seneca is cited in obj. 2 and reply.—A.M.]

PART III. Chapter Three

The Personal Life

Our moral life consists in the highest development of the potentialities of our nature by acting in all circumstances under the direction of reason. It is no longer a matter of deducing knowledge from its principles, but of regulating and ordering our actions in view of their common end, which is our perfection and consequently our happiness. To the science of the general principles of morality must be added the art of applying them. Now, it is the virtue of prudence that enables us to choose means in the order of practical reason. Hence we can regard prudence as a kind of general moral virtue, whose function it is to guide the other virtues in choosing the means leading to their ends.¹

The difficulty is not to know the nature of prudence but to acquire it. It is a life's work. The carefully and patiently constructed virtue that Thomas calls prudence is a far cry from the practical experience amassed by every individual in the give and take of daily life, and by which we think we have become prudent. In order to become prudent we must start at it early and with determination. Since it requires experience, memory must first be cultivated, not only by accumulating useful memories but by reliving them so as not to forget them.² We will cultivate even more carefully certain mental qualities indispensable for acting prudently. In short, when deciding every particular case we must know how to go about it so that we will arrive at our goals. What we have to acquire in order to become prudent is the ability to discern the particular act that must be done in order to obtain the desired result.

This is truly an art. How am I to deal with individuals in particular circumstances without humiliating or injuring them? This is the kind of problem the virtue of prudence raises for us. In order to solve these problems it is not enough just to be able to grasp principles and deduce their logical consequences. We must also acquire a sort of special sense that is the privilege of a reason long accustomed to move among the details of concrete cases and effectively to resolve practical problems.³

Everything has to be put to work in order to acquire this quality. We must know how to listen, how to follow the advice of those whom knowledge and age have equipped to counsel us. Docility is a part of prudence.⁴ But it is not

¹ST 2-2.47.4, resp. The principal source of this doctrine is *In Eth. Nic.* 6.4-5 [ed. Spiazzi, pp. 318-323, nn. 1161-1183] and 7 [pp. 328-331, nn. 1195-1216].

²ST 2-2.49.1, resp.

³Ibid. 2, resp. and ad 3.

⁴Ibid. 3, resp.

enough to learn from others; we must acquire the habit of discovering quickly and correctly on our own how to act in a particular case. This is called shrewdness (*eustochia, solertia*), and it too is a part of prudence. It can also be called a practical presence of mind.⁵ All these qualities demand a well-trained reason, capable of working out the particulars of a problem, of foreseeing the probable consequences of an act, of using circumspection, of weighing the special circumstances of a situation, of exercising caution lest good intentions ultimately do more harm than good. Reasoning, foresight, circumspection, precaution are all essential elements of prudence, and there is no real prudence without them.

In general, prudence seems principally to depend upon that freedom of mind by which we judge accurately the particular data of a practical problem, appreciate the moral quality of acts, and assess their significance. Whatever disturbs this balance of judgment diminishes prudence. And since there is nothing that more directly disturbs this balance than sense pleasures, lust can be called the worst enemy of prudence. Lust blinds our power of judging⁶ and is the mother of imprudence in all its forms. First, it prevents us from acquiring prudence, and makes us directly scorn her counsel. Then it drives out all the virtues annexed to prudence. The ability to deliberate wisely (*eubulia*), for example, is expelled by rashness or boldness. Instead of giving evidence of good judgment (*synesis, gnome*), the lustful person is inconsiderate. And when it is a question of making the actual decision, inconstancy and negligence are the very mark of the imprudent person.⁷

Since prudence is everywhere called upon, we must not be surprised that false prudence often tries to insinuate itself into the moral life. Its counterfeits and imitations abound. First, there is prudence of the flesh, which consists in placing the goods of carnal life as the highest end of life, as though we should not tend beyond material goods to the perfection of reason.⁸ Less radical, but only too frequent, is the vice of allowing oneself to be overwhelmed by temporal cares. Some devote such efforts to the pursuit of material goods that they have no time to attend to the things of the spirit, which are the most important of all. Others fear that if they do what they should they will be deprived of the very necessities of life, forgetting that to those who seek first the goods of the soul, the rest will be added.⁹ Others, finally, not content with their daily task, live in a state of perpetual anxiety about tomorrow. These are examples of false

⁵Ibid. 4, resp. It is not here a question of *eubulia* or the ability to deliberate soundly. Some people discover the proper way to act, but slowly and sometimes too late. Shrewdness is a promptness of practical judgment, which hits at once on the correct solution. On *eubulia*, a virtue annexed to prudence, see *ibid.* 51.1.

⁶*De malo* 15.4, resp., and *ST* 2-2.53.6, resp. and ad 1.

⁷*ST* 2-2.53.2, resp. On negligence as a special vice see *ibid.* 54.2, resp.

⁸Ibid. 55.1, resp.

⁹Ibid. 6, resp.

prudence because they seek false ends.¹⁰ There is also a false prudence that uses false means, like cunning which invents means, or deceit (*dolus*) which employs them, or fraud which deceives not by word but by actions. All these caricatures of prudence are but so many forms of avarice. Continually wanting all things for oneself is the surest way of missing the highest and noblest goods, whose nature it is to be always common to all.

The liberty of mind demanded by prudence presupposes as complete a mastery over all the passions as possible. Above all, it presupposes mastery over the passion that most disturbs the judgment of reason, namely, fear. The virtue that makes this possible is fortitude.¹¹ Fortitude of mind makes the will capable of pursuing the good that reason proposes to it, in spite of difficulties to be overcome and dangers to be avoided. It is a genuine virtue, since it helps us to follow the law of reason.¹² But it is not to be confused with other things that sometimes produce similar effects. We sometimes describe persons as strong who accomplish difficult things easily, whether they do so because they are unaware of, or hope to escape, danger, as they have so often in the past, or because they rely upon their experience to carry them through the difficulty, like old soldiers who do not regard war as dangerous because they have learned how to defend themselves. All these have the same effects as fortitude, but are not the same thing. Nor is it fortitude to throw oneself into danger in anger or despair. These two passions can imitate the virtue of fortitude, but they are not virtues. We can go further and say that there are those who face danger courageously and deliberately, without the ardor of passion, but only to win honor, to assuage the thirst for pleasure or the desire of money, sometimes merely to avoid shame or blame or an evil worse than the danger itself.¹³ There is no virtue of fortitude in such cases, because there is no deliberate exposing oneself to danger in order to obey the dictates of reason.

Fortitude is also to be distinguished from simple firmness of soul, which it presupposes and to which it adds the power to endure in the face of grave peril. The object of fortitude is the overcoming of fear, and also the restraining of rashness, which is not a healthy attitude in the face of danger.¹⁴ It is before the greatest of all dangers, that of death, that this virtue is revealed in all its fullness, and especially death in time of war. Let us not forget, however, that fortitude is a virtue. It is of its essence that it tend toward a good. To be in danger of death as the result of an illness, or because one is caught in a storm, or attacked by criminals, is assuredly an occasion for displaying fortitude of

¹⁰Ibid. 7, resp.

¹¹The source of this teaching is *In Eth. Nic.* 3. 14–18 [ed. Spiazzi, pp. 151–167, nn. 528–594].

¹²ST 2-2.123.1, resp. See *De virtutibus* 1.12.

¹³ST 2-2.123.1, ad 2. See *ibid.* 126.2, resp.

¹⁴Ibid. 123.2, resp.

soul. Some will conduct themselves better than others in such circumstances, but the only merit to be derived from it is in the act of showing a stout heart against misfortune. A truer fortitude of soul is present where we deliberately expose ourselves to the danger of contagion, say, in order to care for a sick friend, or in braving the perils of the sea or the road in order to accomplish some holy work. But it is truly in war, provided of course that it is a just one, that courage shines forth in all its purity. There are just wars, those, for example, in which men engage in order to defend the common good. One can fight in a general conflict as a soldier in the army, but one can also fight on one's own, like judges who, at peril of their lives, risk a monarch's displeasure in order to maintain law and justice. To act in this way is still to join battle. After all, what is martyrdom if not fighting to serve God?¹⁵

We have said that the virtue of fortitude consists in overcoming fear and restraining rashness. The first is more difficult than the second. It takes more courage to hold one's ground in danger than to attack, and in this fortitude principally consists. To hold firm is above all to act in a manner worthy of oneself. It is to affirm oneself in an attitude that the strong man wishes to adopt because it resembles himself. A person who is overcome by weakness in the face of danger will say sometimes: "I wasn't myself!" when he reproaches himself for a moment of weakness. But fortitude keeps in view a more distant end, indeed an ultimate end. To strengthen oneself in this way is to maintain in the face of the gravest peril the will to reach the last end in spite of all obstacles. This last end, as we shall see, is happiness or God.¹⁶

No matter how it manifests itself, the virtue of fortitude has something of the heroic about it, because it normally appears in the midst of suffering. There are bodily pains corresponding to the bodily pleasures of touch, and it is up to fortitude of soul to withstand blows and torture. There are sorrows of the soul corresponding to the delight the soul takes in some of its perceptions, and fortitude of soul properly consists in facing these sorrows with courage. Losing one's life is always a cruel prospect because we all love to live. For good persons, it is a still harder sacrifice, because they know that to surrender their lives is also to give up the completion of the works begun, devoting their lives to others, and practicing virtue.

No doubt there is always some satisfaction in acting as virtue demands. Courage contains its own satisfaction, but bodily pain prevents our experiencing it. It takes a special grace from God to feel joy in the midst of suffering, as when St. Tiburtius was able to walk barefooted over burning coals and said that he seemed to be walking on roses. No moral doctrine can promise such consolations. But if fortitude does not give joy, at least it enables the soul not to allow

¹⁵Ibid. 5, resp. and all of 124.

¹⁶Ibid. 123.7, resp.

itself to be absorbed in pain. Hence, though the man of fortitude does not actually rejoice in his sufferings, he is not sad about them.¹⁷ Trained to meet danger, he is not taken unawares even when it comes suddenly upon him. Nor is he what is sometimes called a Stoic. Fortitude of soul is not sheer impassivity. The man of fortitude does not neglect anything that can help him stand firm in danger. If anger helps him to fight it, then he is not above anger; and his anger, willed as an aid to fortitude, becomes a means to virtue.¹⁸

Fortitude is not the highest virtue. As we have said, prudence is the greatest of them all, and even justice excels fortitude, for reasons shortly to be explained. Fortitude is none the less a cardinal virtue of the first rank. A cardinal or principal virtue is one that is included in all the other virtues. Since firmness in action is common to all the virtues, there is no virtue lacking some element of fortitude.¹⁹ There are various kinds of fortitude, but none displays fortitude in all its purity.

Fortitude is defined in relation to the fear of death, because it is in overcoming this fear that fortitude is supremely necessary; but some fortitude of soul is necessary in facing less difficult tasks. Some people have a natural taste for great and noble actions deserving of honor and glory. This taste is the matter of a possible virtue called greatness of soul or magnanimity. The acquisition of this virtue does not consist in lowering our taste for honor and greatness and making due with lesser objects; this would hardly be magnanimity but its opposite, littleness of soul or pusillanimity. Greatness of soul is a virtue because it enables us to distinguish real from apparent greatness, true from false honor, and to choose with proper measure the means that best assures our attaining them.²⁰

Great hearts, animated by this noble desire, are always simple. They neither flatter nor despise anyone. We must not mistake for disdain the reticence and reserve they are bound to keep. How can they confide in those who cannot understand them? But they open their hearts freely and completely to other souls engaged like themselves in some noble enterprise. Although their ends are very different, the great scholar, the great artist, the great statesman are like brothers. They can understand one another. They all have this in common, that they live for a great cause. Moreover, noble enterprises are easily recognized by this sign: they do not pay.²¹ To devote oneself to them is truly, as is sometime

¹⁷Ibid. 8, resp.

¹⁸Ibid. 10, resp. On the other hand, the soldier must not allow himself to fight for the sheer pleasure of killing. The justifiable annoyance of any obstacle standing in the way of performance of duty is very different from the thirst to kill for the sake of killing. A soldier who yields to this passion would be an assassin. He is delighted with war because it provides him with an occasion for killing. See *ibid.* 64.7, end of resp.

¹⁹Ibid. 123.12, resp.

²⁰Ibid. 129.1, resp.

²¹Ibid. 3, ad 5.

said, to work for honor. Certainly it is not for honors, which are but cheap imitations of true honor. What the magnanimous man receives is the homage paid in his work to what his whole work was intended to honor. This homage is honor itself.²² It is the recompense due to all excellence, and the latter ought to know how to receive it.

We are perhaps beginning to have some idea of the vast scope of the moral teaching of St. Thomas. It is an outlook inherited from the Greeks, and in particular from the inexhaustible *Nicomachean Ethics*. What Thomas is trying to describe, classify and recommend, is all the virtues possible to man, all possible types of human perfection. The world he is thinking about is not a world of monks or friars. Even though he feels that they have chosen the better part, he is mindful that there are princes and subjects, soldiers and business men, philosophers, scholars, artists, all at grips with the problem of doing well whatever they have to do, and above all with the greatest of problems, not to ruin the only life it is theirs to live. Little do the extent and wealth of their personal gifts matter; what is essential is that each makes the best possible use of them. Some can aspire to very little, but there is great virtue in achieving and finding contentment in it. Others can aspire to great things, and they will sin seriously if they remain deaf to the call of their nature, indifferent to the duties the gifts they have received lay upon them.

Such a moral doctrine little resembles the conventional Middle Ages that so many historians have described. Let us try to realize, too, that the Middle Ages are not Thomas Aquinas, but that he does belong to the Middle Ages. We cannot be mindful of him and at the same time write as though it were evident that the Middle Ages despised man and all that contributes to his greatness. If we do, it is because we no longer know the meaning of fortitude and human glory and are only familiar with shallow ambition and vanity. Thomas values highly the virtue of fortitude. He knows how much an entire life devoted to the service of honor depends upon it. He rightly judges that the deserving man receives glory from it. And he is right in all this for the simple reason that nothing could exempt us from our duty, our joyful duty indeed, of honoring true excellence wherever it is to be found. Yes, the very greatest man does honor to himself in honoring the greatness he finds in things much less great than himself.²³ And the greater he really is, the more readily does he find greatness in them, and the more willingly does he pay them homage. True greatness is mindful of all the greatness it itself lacks. If we but consider how true greatness evaluates its own

²²Ibid. 103.1, resp. Honor is the reward paid by others to the virtuous. But the virtuous man does not directly act in view of this reward. He seeks happiness, which is the end of virtue. Honor is nonetheless a great thing in itself. Its greatness lies in the fact that it is the homage due to virtue. See *ibid.* 131.1, ad 2.

²³Ibid. 103.2, resp.

work, we will realize that all true greatness, even to the most sublime heights of glory, has no more faithful companion than humility.²⁴

It is a far cry from Thomas' man to the stunted human plant that some have imagined he would like to see cultivated. He aimed at the growth of the whole man, including his passions. He assigned them virtues whose object is to provide strength for the conquest of happiness. Thomas loves the daring, provided their daring be good, for it must be so to undertake great things and to succeed in them. There must also be that self-confidence (*fiducia*) that authorizes the magnanimous man to rely upon his own strength and on the help of his friends. Self-confidence in itself is a form of hope, and it is also a kind of fortitude. To be exact, it is the strength that the magnanimous man draws from the just evaluation of the means at his disposal and from the hopes they inspire in him.²⁵ And just as he does not despise his own worth, neither does the magnanimous man despise the goods of fortune. The matter of the soul's greatness is honor; its end is the doing of something great. Now, wealth attracts the crowd, itself sometimes a useful force, and wealth is a powerful means of action, at least in a certain order and for the attaining of certain ends.²⁶ This eulogy of self-confidence, of wealth, of love of honor and glory, does not come from the fifteenth-century court of some prince of the Italian Renaissance but from a thirteenth-century friar with vows of poverty and obedience.

It is true that greatness of soul is something rare because it supposes a difficult victory—maintaining the mean in greatness itself. To presume too much on its strength, to undertake more than can successfully be accomplished, is not real greatness of soul but presumption. The presumptuous man is not necessarily one who aims higher than the magnanimous man; he simply aims too high for himself. The excess that vitiates his attitude lies in the disproportion between the end and the means at his disposal to attain it. Some are mistaken about the amount of means, as are those who think themselves more intelligent than they are. Others are mistaken about their quality, as are those who think themselves great because they are rich, mistaking the means to greatness for greatness itself.²⁷

Nevertheless, this is neither the most common fault nor the most difficult to avoid. The disorder most fatal to greatness of soul is the longing for great things in order to make oneself great. It is here, in this greatness of soul free from all pride, that history would be correct to contrast some modern tenden-

²⁴Ibid. 129.3, ad 4. Therefore the contrary of magnanimity is not humility but pusillanimity or smallness of soul, which prevents a man from undertaking tasks worthy of his strength and truly worthy of himself. See *ibid.* 133.1, resp.

²⁵Ibid. 129.6, resp.

²⁶Ibid. 8, resp.

²⁷Ibid. 130.1 and 2.

cies with the moral ideals of the Middle Ages. As Thomas conceives him, the magnanimous man knows his greatness, but knows too that he owes it to God. His excellence is something of the divine residing in him. If he deserves any honor because of it, God deserves it even more. The magnanimous man only receives as belonging to God the honor others pay him on account of his merits, or for the greater facilities they provide him for rendering service to others. To seek honor for the pleasure of being honored and as a last end is not greatness of soul; it is ambition.²⁸

It is not the actual winning of glory that destroys magnanimity; it is not the knowledge that we merit it; it is not even the desire to obtain it. Nothing is more natural than that a truly great man should be admired by the crowd. But it is also possible to aspire only to the approval of the elite, or of one single person, even of oneself. It is a virtue to know oneself, and if we know that we deserve glory, why pretend that we do not? Why not desire for our work the approval we know it deserves? The real fault comes in seeking glory in what is unworthy of it, as in perishable and passing things. It is wrong, too, to rely upon the uncertain judgment of men for assurance that we deserve it; and it is wrong not to relate to the proper end the desire for glory that we experience. To commit any one of these faults is to fall from true greatness of soul into vainglory. There is only one glory that is not vain, namely, the glory that the truly deserving great man wisely offers as homage to God.²⁹

As for that cheap thing called vainglory, it superabounds and is met with everywhere. One of its best-known forms is boasting—braggadocio that wastes itself in idle words. Again, a man may itch with the desire to be noticed and, as they say, to make himself conspicuous. Hence arises the craving to cause astonishment by acting differently from everyone else (*praesumptio novitatum*). Some are satisfied merely with seeming to do wonderful things which they actually do not do. These are called hypocrites. Finally, there is nothing more common than the desire to glorify oneself by proving that one is better than someone else. There are the stubborn, too, who refuse to let go of their opinions, because to do so would be to admit that someone else can be more intelligent than themselves. With others it is not the mind but the will that refuses to yield. It is no longer a case of stubbornness (*pertinacia*), but of crass obstinacy, the mother of discord. Then there are some who pride themselves in surpassing others, not in depth of intelligence nor firmness of will, but in words. They are wranglers, arguing with a contentious spirit. Lastly, there are those who prefer to demonstrate their own worth by their actions, refusing to listen to the orders of their superiors. This is disobedience. None of these faults is simple. There is arrogance in boasting, as there is anger in the spirit of discord

²⁸Ibid. 131.1, resp.

²⁹Ibid. 132.1, and ad 3.

and contention. However, fundamentally they derive from vainglory and are a desire for excellence badly regulated by reason.³⁰

There is a virtue that is sometimes confused with magnanimity or greatness of soul but is nevertheless distinct from it, though both arise from the same cardinal virtue of fortitude, namely, the virtue of magnificence. For magnificence is after all a virtue. And why not? Every human virtue is a participation in the divine virtue, and God makes things magnificently: "His magnificence and his power are in the clouds" (*Magnificentia ejus et virtus ejus in nubibus*, Ps 68:34). To be sure of this, we have only to consider creation.

To be magnificent is not simply to tend toward something great but to make something great, or at least to aspire to make it. The notion of the work to be made is essential to this virtue, and it is by this that it is distinguished from magnanimity. In other words, just as a man is magnanimous in the order of doing, he displays magnificence in the order of making, by undertaking to make a truly great work or even simply to make things in a great way. The ideal of magnificence is to make something great in a great way.³¹

Thus understood, magnificence consists fundamentally in knowing how to spend money. Not everyone knows how to do this and many display meanness, wishing to build splendid buildings at very little expense or to entertain their friends at little or no cost. Unfortunately, this is impossible because it takes money to do a great many things. The magnificent person is one who does not shrink from expense in order to realize truly great projects. The matter upon which this virtue is exercised is the expense the magnificent man must lay out for a great work, the actual money he must spend, and also the love of that money, which he must be able to control in order to bring his work to a good end.³² There is room for magnificence in the simplest of lives, in proportion to the means at one's disposal, be it only, for example, to celebrate a marriage; but it is a virtue belonging particularly to the rich and to princes. The moral teaching of Thomas Aquinas stood ready, waiting for Lorenzo the Magnificent.

To behave with ease in the face of difficult situations is good; but it is also good to endure such situations when they are inevitable. To put up with them is not the same as letting oneself be crushed by the sadness they cause. To keep a calm soul in the face of adversity, not to allow sadness to deprive one of the energy necessary to escape from the difficulty is the virtue of patience.³³ Like magnificence, it is a secondary virtue attached to the principal virtue of fortitude. By fortitude we hold firm against fear; by patience we support grief,³⁴

³⁰Ibid. 132.5, resp. On *pertinacia* see ibid. 138.2.

³¹Ibid. 134.1, resp. and 4, resp.

³²Ibid. 134.3, resp. On meanness (*parvificentia*) see ibid. 135.1.

³³Ibid. 136.1, resp.

³⁴This is why fortitude depends upon the irascible appetite while patience depends upon

a less difficult thing. Patience is not the same as perseverance. The virtue of perseverance consists in being able to persist in a virtuous action as long as necessary to bring it to a successful conclusion. Perseverance is attached to fortitude because it allows us to surmount the added difficulty always implied by a prolonged effort. Certainly, it is far from equalling fortitude itself, for it is easier to persevere in good than to stand firm in the presence of death. Yet, it is a very important virtue by the very breadth of the domain in which it is exercised, since there is not a single virtuous pursuit in which it might not be necessary to persevere a long time before succeeding in it. It is by this virtue that we efficaciously resist indolence or lack of fortitude, and stubbornness, which we have already described as its false imitation.³⁵

It is of the essence of a virtue to be a solidly established habit of acting well. For everyone, to act well is to act according to reason. Now, one of reason's most important functions is to introduce moderation and balance into everything. It is the virtue of temperance that introduces this balance into human acts.³⁶ Temperance must be exercised on anything that directly threatens these qualities, such as on covetousness and voluptuousness, particularly when they are most intense because connected to the exercise of our animal nature. Thus temperance is exercised principally on drinking, eating and the pleasures of sex; in brief, on the pleasures of touch. Pleasures of taste, smell and sight can also depend upon temperance insofar as they prepare for pleasures of touch, or accompany or reinforce them. The taste and even the odor of food and the beauty or elegance of a woman are of this kind.³⁷

The object of temperance is not the elimination of these pleasures. In themselves, sensible and bodily goods are not irreconcilable with reason. They are instruments in its service and it must use them to attain its proper ends. If they hinder it, it is in the degree to which the inclination of the sense appetite to these goods is freed from the rules right reason imposes upon them. Reason itself finds these rules in the nature of things. It is a question here of pleasures connected with acts necessary to conserve life. The general rule that reason imposes upon us is to use these pleasures only to preserve our lives. This is in itself a strict rule but a flexible one in its applications, because the pleasures necessary for life do not just include those without which it would be impossible to live, but also those pleasures without which life would not be passed in a

the concupiscible appetite. For the reason the irascible appetite is connected with fortitude see *ibid.* 136.4, ad 2. On longanimity, the virtue of those whose hope is far-reaching see *ibid.* 136.5.

³⁵*Ibid.* 137.2, resp. Constancy only differs from perseverance in that it is not concerned with overcoming the tedium of a protracted effort but with overcoming the external obstacles that increase its difficulty. See *ibid.* 137.3, resp. On indolence and stubbornness see *ibid.* 138.1 and 2.

³⁶*Ibid.* 141.1, resp. The principal source is *In Eth. Nic.* 3.19–22 [ed. Spiazzi, pp. 169–180, nn. 595–648].

³⁷*ST* 2-2.141.6, resp.

fitting manner. The temperate person will never use what is injurious to health or well-being, but will fit the rest in with moderation according to place, time and the convenience of his fellow creatures. Even personal resources and duty of state come into consideration. The rule of temperance in eating and drinking is not the same for a monk, for an athlete, and for a dignitary who has continually to offer hospitality, even to give banquets for personal interests or for those of the state.³⁸

We have given the name "cardinal" to those virtues whose principal merit is one of those elements that go to make up the very notion of virtue. Now, moderation enters into the composition of every virtue, and since it is in sense pleasures that it is hardest to observe moderation, be it only because they are to a certain point necessary, temperance is par excellence the virtue of moderation. It is not the greatest of the virtues; indeed, it is the least heroic of all, but it is a cardinal virtue, and no other virtue can exist without it.³⁹

In order to regulate our desires we must have desires to regulate. Just as courage does not consist in being impervious to fear⁴⁰ but in dominating it, temperance does not consist in being insensible to pleasure but in ruling one's own sensibility. Every natural activity necessary for life is normally accompanied by pleasure; and since this pleasure invites us to perform these actions, it serves a useful vital function. To be incapable of experiencing pleasure is a lessening of being, a lacuna; in short, a vice. But insensateness must not be confused with voluntary abstention from certain natural pleasures imposed upon oneself for some higher end. We must be able to give up the pleasures of the table and to refrain from sexual relations for the sake of health: if an athlete, then to keep fit; if in need of doing penance, then in order to recover health of soul; if desirous of contemplation, then in order to keep the mind free.

Some accuse contemplatives of sinning against nature by refusing to contribute to the propagation of the species. But there is a hierarchy of natural activities, and it can be the vocation of some to give themselves up to that highest of all natural activities, that is, the contemplation of truth. Moreover, the contemplative's life is far from sterile. We can very properly speak of "spiritual fatherhood" and "spiritual sonship" between those who instill the life of the spirit in others and those who owe them their birth.⁴¹ It is not asceticism properly understood and prudently regulated that is injurious to nature; it is that dishonorable and execrable vice of intemperance that, by degrading man to the level of

³⁸Ibid. 7, ad 2 and ad 3.

³⁹Ibid. resp.

⁴⁰On fearlessness, or imperviousness to fear, taken as the opposite of courage, see *ibid.* 126.2. Fear is a useful natural reaction and therefore normal. It is just as dangerous to be incapable of fear as to be unable to overcome it. The same is true for pleasures.

⁴¹Ibid. 142.1, resp. See *ibid.* 152.2, ad 1.

the beast, extinguishes in him the light of reason, which is the very source of his humanity and honor.⁴²

There are many different kinds of temperance. The virtuous man finds as many occasions of practicing temperance as there are kinds of sense pleasure. The temperate man is the “decent person” (*honnête homme*) in the classical sense of the expression, because decency of manners is a kind of spiritual beauty. Beauty accompanies every virtue, but it is most at home with the temperance that saves man from the worst of all indecencies, that of behaving like a brute.

Civility of manners is not a virtue added to temperance but an integral part of it and, so to speak, the very condition of the temperate man.⁴³ He is capable of self-denial, even abstinence in eating and of sobriety in drinking. He avoids gluttony (*gula*) in all its many forms. The self-denying man can await the hour of meals. He does not concern himself about choice dishes. He does not stuff himself with food. Such measured use of nourishment protects him from the usual faults arising from intemperance: mental dullness, full-blown foolishness, the manners of a clown, endless chatter, and that perpetual eroticism of people gorged with food.⁴⁴ Frugal in his eating, the upright man is equally sober in his drinking. He does not condemn wine as a blameworthy drink. No food or drink is blameworthy in itself; blame only attaches to the use that is made of it. But temperance strictly excludes the drunkenness that results from abusing the use of wine. Anyone may be taken by surprise by a drink whose strength he has no reason to suspect. This happened once to Noah and could happen again; it is an accident rather than a fault. On the contrary, to know that a drink is intoxicating, and to prefer drunkenness to the effort of abstaining from it is a grave fault, and all the more degrading in that it deprives man of his essential dignity, which is his use of reason.⁴⁵ Only sins against God are more serious than sins against reason.⁴⁶

Just as it stands guard over the pleasures of eating and drinking, temperance is also in control of sexual pleasures. In this particular form it is called chastity when it concerns the sex act itself, and modesty when it is a matter of words, gestures and attitudes that prepare for or accompany this act.⁴⁷ In its

⁴²Ibid. 142.4, resp.

⁴³Ibid. 145.4, resp.

⁴⁴On impurity (*immunditia*) see *ibid.* 148.6 and 154.11, resp.

⁴⁵Ibid. 150.2, resp. For the influence of drunkenness on the culpability of acts see *ibid.* 151.1.

⁴⁶Ibid. 150.3, resp.

⁴⁷Ibid. 151.9, resp. Thomas distinguishes between chastity properly speaking and continence, which he does not think has all the qualities of a virtue. Continence is an aptitude for repressing evil desires on occasion. A continence that is stable and firmly rooted would be a virtue because it would become chastity. See *ibid.* 155.1.

extreme form, temperance in these matters extends to complete abstinence from all sexual pleasures and to the firm resolve to refrain from them. In this case it is called virginity, which is not only a licit virtue, since it is legitimate to forbid ourselves certain pleasures completely in order to keep the mind wholly free for contemplation, but it is also a very exalted virtue because it seems to realize the very type or model of spiritual beauty. Those who condemn virginity as a sin against the species are needlessly and wrongly disturbed about it. There is little danger of it becoming very widespread. When God commanded man to increase and multiply he was speaking to the human species as a whole; he did not say that each individual was bound to collaborate in it. Individuals divide among themselves the functions for attending to the needs of the species. Some do their part toward assuring the actual propagation of the species, and rightly so. However, the human species has other needs than this. It has, for example, the need for spiritual progress, and it is very good that there should be individuals busy about satisfying this need by keeping themselves totally free for contemplation.⁴⁸

At the opposite extreme of the virtue of chastity is lust, which is the inability to govern the sexual passions. To say of a lustful man that he is "dissolute" is literally true, because the effect of lust is a general dissolution of personality. Sexual pleasures, considered in themselves, are as normal and legitimate as those of the dinner table. As the latter naturally accompany acts necessary for the conservation of the individual, the former naturally accompany acts necessary for the conservation of the species. If sexual pleasures become vicious more readily, it is because they are so intense and so difficult for reason to master. When they are unregulated, the entire human person slowly disintegrates.⁴⁹

The lustful man becomes less and less capable of using intelligence and reason. Desire deceives him about beauty, and even beauty blinds him to its inability to keep its promises. He is incapable of seeing things as they are, and he is incapable of deliberating on them. He becomes so rash and headstrong that he ceases to be able either to reflect maturely or to judge correctly. When he has made a decision, no matter what its value, the dissolute man is only rarely capable of keeping to it. We are familiar enough with the quarrels of lovers who only want to believe what they like to be told. The least false tear is enough to make them change their opinion. But lust dissolves the will no less completely than the intelligence. To pursue pleasure in everything is to take self for an end, without troubling about others, and still less about God, in spite of the fact that God does remain our true end. It is also to be deceived as to means, since the dissolute man seeks happiness in his carnal pleasures and scorns the spiritual joys that alone can lead to it. As he speaks from the fullness of his heart, the

⁴⁸Ibid. 152.2, resp. and ad 1.

⁴⁹Ibid. 153.1 and 3.

one whom lust leads astray is easily recognized by the grossness of his language; no longer able to use his reason, he breaks out into thoughtless speech, into absurd jests and statements. In his foolishness he regards as uniquely wonderful the illusions created by his desire.⁵⁰

This is not the worst. To abuse nature is to go beyond her limits; and one who transgresses nature's boundaries is in grave danger of turning against her. Our study of the passions has enabled us to see that there are pleasures contrary to nature. Hence there are also vices contrary to nature and consisting in the habitual pursuit of these pleasures. To violate nature is to set oneself against God who has ordained nature. Now, the worst way of violating nature is to corrupt its very principle. Fornication, rape, adultery, incest are certainly grave faults, but they are not as serious as vice against nature. Moral errors, even incest, respect nature's order in the performing of the sexual act. Unnatural vice, however, refuses to respect this order. The worst form of lust is bestiality, and after it, sodomy, irregularities in the sexual act and onanism.⁵¹ Whatever its form, this vice affects man in what is most intimate to him, namely, his human nature, and herein lies its exceptional gravity.⁵²

Temperance is best expressed in control of sense pleasures, but it is also exercised on the passions of the irascible appetite. We speak often of "mastering" anger; this is the act of the virtue of meekness. To be capable of moderation in inflicting punishment, even when merited, is the virtue of clemency. Both deserve to be called virtues because they consist in subduing two passions, anger, and the desire for vengeance, and putting them under the control of reason. To measure their importance, we have only to consider the character of one who lacks these virtues.

The quick-tempered person is not merely one who gives in to anger. Anger is a passion that we examined along with the others and that, like them, is of itself neither good nor bad. Its moral value depends upon the use we make of it. Anyone absolutely incapable of becoming angry is abnormal. Their will is defective; in brief, their nature is vitiated because it is incapable of a reaction that would be entirely normal in certain circumstances.⁵³ The same must be said of the person who is incapable of the effort of will necessary to inflict punishment. We speak with some justice of "weak parents" or "weak judges" when referring to those unable to administer proper punishment where it is deserved. Meekness and patience are not exercised on the passions as such but on the passions as vicious because out of control. Violent and unjust anger on the

⁵⁰Ibid. 5, resp. and ad 4.

⁵¹Ibid. 154.12, resp. and ad 4.

⁵²Thus unnatural vice is even worse than incest, for "unicuique individuo magis est conjuncta natura speciei quam quodcumque individuum. Et ideo peccata quae sunt contra naturam speciei sunt graviora" (ibid. 154.12, ad 2).

⁵³Ibid. 158.8, resp.

slightest provocation is always evil. Some people are given to such outbursts and are difficult to live with. Others dwell ceaselessly upon their grievances and are said to be bitter. There are still others who insist at every turn upon getting all the satisfaction to which they think they are entitled. These are hard-hearted people who do not lose their anger until justice has been done.⁵⁴ The last are very likely to exaggerate the wrongs they suffer and consequently the punishment they demand. Hard-heartedness easily degenerates into cruelty,⁵⁵ unless the virtue of clemency or mercy is there to temper it.

Fortunately, we do not always have to struggle against such intense passions as love and anger. Yet, we need virtues for all occasions, even the most common ones. Magnificence is only required in great enterprises. When it is a question of offering a gratuity, magnificence becomes ridiculous. All that is called for here is generosity or liberality. Similarly, temperance is only required in the case of passions that are only overcome with difficulty. Otherwise, we speak not so much of self-mastery as of restraint, measure, moderation or, in brief, of modesty.⁵⁶

Modesty is a quiet virtue, but it is the more useful for its quietness because it is the virtue by which we deal with the little difficulties of which life is so full. These difficulties spring from many sources, the most common being pride. Pride has not all the immediate urgency of those movements subject to temperance, but it is deeply rooted in the will. It is praiseworthy to strive to actualize fully the perfection of one's own nature. This is the very principle of morality. But it is perverse and unreasonable to wish to be more than we are and to act as though we were. Pride is the movement by which the will is borne toward ends beyond its real limits. Pride is not present in all sins, but there is no sin that cannot eventually come from pride.⁵⁷ To will as though we were more than what we are, is a deep-seated disorder from which others may well follow. Pride is more than this; it is primarily the revolt of a being against its own nature; it is the permanent and deliberate refusal to accept its own limitations. It is true that these limitations hurt us, and sometimes we accept them reluctantly. Hence pride is related to the irascible appetite, although there is also an intellectual pride into which even pure spirits may fall, since we speak of the pride of the demons.⁵⁸

⁵⁴Ibid. 5, resp.

⁵⁵Thomas distinguishes between cruelty, that is, intemperance in the desire to punish, and brutality (*saevitia, feritas*) or pleasure in causing suffering for its own sake. Cruelty is a distorted desire for justice, brutality is one of the forms of bestiality. See *ibid.* 159.2, resp.

⁵⁶Ibid. 160.1 and 2.

⁵⁷Ibid. 162.1 and 2. On the meaning of the adage *Initium omnis peccati est superbia* see *ibid.* 162.7.

⁵⁸Ibid. 162.3, resp. As a movement of turning the will from God, refusing to submit to his rule, pride is really contempt of God. Since all sin is in part a rebellion against God, and

The specific remedy for pride is humility, which keeps us from willing beyond the limits of our nature as members of the species, and of our personal capacities as individuals. This virtue is mainly exercised on desires, which it restrains and directs toward fitting ends. It also implies self-knowledge by which each can know personal limitations and forestall any ambition to exceed them. Humility does not consist in considering ourselves the least among people, but in understanding that we owe all we are to God, and that, to the extent that we are good, the merit is to be attributed to him. One who is humble recognizes superiority in others and acts accordingly. However, humility does not demand that we feel inferior to others when we are not actually so. We must respect God's gifts in ourselves as in others. In sum, true humility consists in evaluating ourselves accurately, in judging our own abilities, and in conducting ourselves on all occasions as befits the place we justly occupy. To moderate human ambition in this way is to act directly on the passionate movements of hope. Humility, accordingly, is a form of temperance insofar as it restrains immoderate hopes and holds them within the bounds of reason.⁵⁹

Any desire, even the desire to know, is subject to intemperance. In itself, the taste for study is an excellent thing, but it can become pathological in many ways. It is possible, for example, to choose the wrong object of research. There are people who study everything but what they really ought to learn. Others pursue the knowledge of creatures for itself rather than in relation to its legitimate end, which is the knowledge of God. Some obstinately seek to know truths that they are not intelligent enough to understand, and they risk all kinds of misconceptions and error.⁶⁰ This is the vice of curiosity. It is a positive threat to the intelligence, and its ravages become more and more widespread as it takes possession of one's sensibility.

Our senses have been given to us for two purposes: first, as with other animals, to enable us to find the wherewithal to conserve life; second, since we are rational creatures, to make possible both speculative and practical knowledge. It is natural and consequently legitimate to use our senses for these different ends. But to use our senses merely for the sake of using them, to be devoured by the need to see everything, understand everything, touch everything, without any other object than the pleasure found in doing so is the lowest form of idle curiosity.⁶¹ Therefore, we need a special virtue to restrain these disorders of knowledge. This virtue is called *studiositas* and consists in knowing how to study. The studious individual is no less skillful at collecting sense experience

since pride is the very essence of this rebellion, pride is the sin of sins and therefore gravest of all. See *ibid.* 152.6, resp.

⁵⁹*Ibid.* 161.3 and 4.

⁶⁰*Ibid.* 167.2, resp.

⁶¹*Ibid.*

than the curious one, but his curiosity is useful and regulated. Pursuing sense knowledge for the sake of science, this person never gives way to studies beyond his capacity, and what knowledge is acquired in the study in which he is engaged is but another means of knowing God.⁶² Such a person has what is called a "modest" mind, that is, one that is able to control his desires even in intellectual matters.

Besides our animal passions and the desires of our soul, what else can temperance control? It also extends to the movements of the body and even to the care we give to its appearance. What we call modesty of bearing and dress obviously pertains to the virtue of modesty; but even if we only consider this virtue as moderating our bodily behavior, its domain is extensive indeed.

Let us consider, for example, the action of the human body in games. Sport is a necessary diversion that relaxes the mind and enables it to return to its occupation healthier than it was before. A bow that is always stretched ultimately breaks. Thus we rightly speak of sport as a relaxation of the mind. Here again moderation is needed, not only in the sense that we should shun base and obscene amusements, but also that games may be adjusted to age, sex, persons, time and place. Enjoyment (*eutrapelia*) is a virtue;⁶³ the passion for sport is a vice. Inability to amuse oneself is still another vice. No doubt this latter is the less vicious of the two. We only amuse ourselves in order to be able to work better. It is better to work without ever amusing oneself than to amuse oneself without ever working. Nevertheless, anyone who likes to work all the time could work better by consenting to include some distraction. Anyone who does not amuse himself, amuses others still less. Such folk are said to be rude and boorish (*duri et agrestes*).⁶⁴

Moral problems of the same kind arise with regard to clothes and dress. Some women, and some men too, affect a studied elegance either to attract attention or for the personal pleasure they take in it. There is nothing bad in dressing well. Clothes are a necessity of human life, and there is nothing more natural than to use them as a protection against cold, heat and the inclemency of the weather. But they should be used with decency and simplicity, taking into account accepted customs and the duties of one's state in life. Neither ostentation nor neglect is to be displayed in dress,⁶⁵ and each particular case must be judged from this double point of view.

There is, for example, the case of feminine elegance, where some would be inclined to see a mortal sin. To this, Thomas replies in the most astonishing *Sed contra* in the entire *Summa theologiae*, that if feminine elegance were a

⁶²Ibid. 166.2, resp.

⁶³Ibid. 3, resp.

⁶⁴Ibid. 168.4, resp.

⁶⁵Ibid. 169.1, resp.

mortal sin, then all dressmakers and milliners would be in the state of mortal sin. Actually, the problem is a little more complicated. If a married woman neglects her dress, what happens? Her husband pays less attention to her; and when a husband is not occupied with his wife, he begins to be interested in other women. So it is perfectly legitimate for a woman to try to please her husband, if for no other reason than to prevent his being tempted to adultery. The problem is different, however, when it is a question of women who are not married and neither can marry nor wish to marry. The latter have no reason for seeking to please men unless it is either to seduce them or to tempt them. To wish to be elegant in order to incite to evil is a mortal sin. However, many elegant women are merely light-headed or vain. They dress well just to show off and nothing more. Their case is not so grave as the preceding, and their sin but venial. Many other considerations must be taken into account. Thus the Apostle Paul does not want women to go out with head uncovered; neither do Augustine nor Thomas. But what are women to do in a country where it is not customary to cover their head? It is a bad custom, Thomas firmly maintains; but if it is not in style to wear hats, then it is not even a venial sin not to do so.⁶⁶ For a man who has been reproached for not knowing women except through books,⁶⁷ all this has not been badly thought out.

As we can see, the only universals in moral matters are principles. When it is a question of deciding upon any voluntary action whatsoever, a whole set of principles becomes necessary, plus detailed discussion of all the circumstances that surround it. Every moral act is a particular act. Even when he seems to be discussing particular cases, Aquinas can do no more than select certain typical cases by way of example, knowing very well that the diversity of concrete cases is infinite, and that the moralist must be content with first stating the principles and then putting some order into the complex facts and classifying them.

On Thomas' aptitude for defining and classifying there is nothing left to be said that has not already been said a hundred times. His genius for order is incontestable and nowhere is this more evident than in his moral teaching, where he systematically exploits the whole treasure trove of Christian and pagan wisdom. The study of the sources of Thomistic moral teaching could go on indefinitely. Bernard, Bede, Isidore, Gregory, Augustine, Jerome, St. Paul, Seneca, Macrobius, Cicero, and always, of course, the *Nicomachean Ethics* and twenty other titles that we could cite, keep turning up at one point or another, furnishing definitions, proposing classifications, specifying shades of meaning, as

⁶⁶Ibid. 2, resp.

⁶⁷Jordanus Wébert, *Saint Thomas d'Aquin, le génie de l'ordre* (Paris: Denod et Steele, 1934), pp. 257-258.

though so many original works had only been conceived to prepare for the synthesis of Thomas Aquinas.

Nevertheless, this synthesis and this order do not result from mere skill and intellectual know-how. If the elements Thomas uses lend themselves so readily to the order he imposes on them, it is because his moral doctrine is primarily a creation. To speak of personal morality is to use an expression that does not belong to Thomas' language. The term "person," however, is part of it, and it is certainly no betrayal of his thought to emphasize by this expression the intensely personal character of his moral doctrine.

A person is an individual endowed with reason. This notion, which enjoys so considerable a role in Christian theology and hence in Christian philosophy, seems to have been foreign to Aristotle's thought. It was probably borrowed from an entirely different source, namely, Roman Law.⁶⁸ As Thomas understands it, it signifies that definite class of individual substances that are distinguished from other substances in that they have mastery over their acts (*dominium sui actus*). Masters of what they do, these substances are not only "acted upon" by others, they themselves act, that is, each of them is directly and ultimately the cause of each single act it performs.⁶⁹ In all nature, then, there is nothing superior to the person (*persona significat id quod est perfectissimum in tota natura*).⁷⁰ Now, every man is a person. As a substance he forms a distinct ontological center that owes its being solely to its own act of existing. As a rational substance, the person is an autonomous center of activity and the source of its own determinations. What is more, it is the act of existing that gives a person that combination of gifts that he alone possesses: the double privilege of being a mind and a person. All he knows, all he wills, all he does, issues from that very act by which he *is* what he is.

If we apply this notion of the human person to morality, we quickly see its consequences. However we may look at them, it becomes necessary to relate all our moral acts to that which makes us a person in order to determine whether they are good or evil. Thus personal morality will mean primarily the morality of the person taken as a person, that is, the morality in which the person is conscious of being at once legislator, judge, and subject to the judgment of the law of good and evil that promulgates, applies and sanctions in the name of the demands of reason alone. But one of the principal acts of this reason is to

⁶⁸On recent controversies over the notion of the person see the bibliography in *Bulletin thomiste* 15 (1939): 466-477. It is useful to be familiar with these controversies, but it is possible to consider this notion peacefully as absolutely essential to grasping Thomas' anthropology.

⁶⁹ST 1.29.1, resp. For the many problems connected with this notion see my *Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy*, pp. 189-208.

⁷⁰ST 1.29.3.

recognize itself, on the one hand, as dependent upon its proper source, on the other, as determined by the concrete conditions under which it is exercised.

Accordingly, in the name of the same reason that constitutes the person, personal morality demands that the moral agent feels bound by a law of which its conscience is but the mouthpiece. This is certainly a limitation of its independence, but it doubly respects the inalienable and coessential part of its being. It is metaphysical knowledge alone that imposes this limitation. Now, to posit the person as a divine effect is to make it an image of God. And as the person is the very peak of nature, it is the most perfect image of God we can contemplate in nature. Man is not rational and free in spite of the fact that God created him in his own image, but for that very reason. The person is not free save insofar as he depends upon God. And this is so through the creative act which, constituting the person as a participation in an infinitely wise and free power, generously creates each individual as an act of existing endowed with the light of knowledge and the initiatives of the will.

What an enlarging of the perspectives that so limited Aristotle's moral teaching! We should see this much better if Thomas had himself thought it necessary to take the trouble to expound his own natural moral doctrine in purely philosophical terms. This is what we are making him do today, but he never actually did it himself. Why construct a completely self-sustaining moral doctrine as if there were no Christian revelation or as if it were not true? Christian revelation does exist, and it is true. This at least is Thomas' point of view. As a Christian teacher⁷¹ it was his duty as a friar in life to live only with God in order to speak only with him (*aut de Deo aut cum Deo*). Above all, he could not speak of morality in any other way because, if God exists, there are no personal duties prior to those toward him.

In this regard, as Aquinas clearly saw, his moral doctrine profoundly differed from Aristotle's. The *Nicomachean Ethics* is and remains a work of worldwide importance, which must ever inspire those whose ideal it is to mold moral subjects completely adapted to the social and political life of the city. But we must know there are virtues that Aristotle more or less overlooked because they played no role in the collective life, the demands of which were for him the norm of good and evil. For a man to accept his own limitations, to restrict his ambition to what his worth and resources permit, is assuredly a virtue. It is this submission to the established order, which, to the extent that this order is just, is a part of the virtue of justice. It is a long way from here to respecting

⁷¹We understate here, rather than accentuate, the rigor of the precept. If we are sure that Thomas was applying it to the Christian teacher, it is only because he is speaking in a general way of man's forgetfulness of God as the root of the vice of "vain curiosity." See *ST* 2-2. 167.1: "Tertio quando homo appetit cognoscere veritatem circa creaturas, non referendo ad debitum finem, scilicet ad cognitionem Dei."

the excellence of others, to feeling the joy that we experience in recognizing true greatness wherever we meet it, and in bowing before it even when it hurts our vanity. Here, of course, it is a question of humility, and society does not like the humble. It sees in them only weaklings who are rightly aware of their weakness, and it regards their honesty as an admission of such weakness. Deliberately to incur such social disfavor, one who is humble must place above everything else the duty of being clear-sighted and sincere in what concerns oneself. Just as the superiority that he recognizes in others is from God, the humble person knows greatness in bowing before others, because all virtue is great and particularly humility before God. These are thoughts very foreign to the doctrine of Aristotle, who never mentions the virtue of humility.⁷²

This is only the omission of a virtue, and we would not attach importance to it if it did not reveal a general and serious difference between the two moral doctrines. The doctrines of Aristotle and Thomas move in different directions because they are founded upon different natural theologies. However we interpret Aristotle's, we cannot go so far as to pretend that Pure Thought is much concerned with the details of our acts, has a right to demand that we render it an account of them, and that we should relate each one of them to it. Aristotle's god lives his eternal happiness; each person aims to the best of his ability to imitate this happiness. Even though it is given to certain rare sages during rare moments to participate occasionally in the joys of a quasi-divine contemplation, it is not on the life of their god that these privileged persons order their moral life. So extravagant a measure would be folly in their eyes. The ideal they never lose sight of in their pursuit of a strictly human wisdom is that of a human good under its most perfect form, the good of the city.

But it is entirely different in Thomas' moral doctrine. Created by a God who remains intimately present to our being, to our faculties, to their activities, and to every act proceeding from them, we can do nothing save through him, and since we are aware of this, we must do nothing save for him. The question here is not to know whether we can or cannot aspire to life in God as our supreme beatitude. Whether or not God has decided to grant us this grace, our moral duty remains exactly the same. Just as Aristotle's moral doctrine is a consequence of his own metaphysics, so does Thomas' moral doctrine follow upon his natural theology. This is why not only humility, but also fortitude and temperance, with all the particular virtues related to them, appear here as so many means we acquire by patient exercise in order to achieve ever more perfectly within ourselves that image of God whose attainment is our ultimate end.

⁷²Ibid. 161.1, ad 4. The analogous text on the virtue of patience (ibid. 136.3, ad 2) poses a problem that is specifically theological, bringing into question the very possibility of patience as a natural virtue. Since it is difficult to see a priori why this is a case peculiar to patience, the real problem seems to be whether there is such a thing as natural morality in Thomas Aquinas. We shall come back to this point when dealing with the virtue of charity.

PART III. Chapter Four

The Social Life

The notion of social morality immediately calls to mind that of social justice, and justice in its turn evokes the notion of right. Right (*jus*) demands what is just (*justum*), and to do what is just under all circumstances in the life of society is the object at which the virtue of justice (*justitia*) aims.¹ In order to analyze the various forms of justice, we have first to examine the various forms of right.

Justice is distinguished among the virtues by the fact that it governs relations among persons, and the simplest form under which we can first conceive what such relations ought to be is that of equality. To make two things equal, they are commonly said to require "adjusting." The virtues thus far discussed were able to be defined completely from the point of view of the agent. Now, it is absolutely necessary to take into account something besides the agent, and in a certain sense we speak of justice without even considering the agent. Certainly, it is correct to speak of a just person, but always with reference to someone else. Similarly, it is correct to speak of "something just," meaning by the expression that which justice demands someone do, even though no one actually does it. It is this "what is just" that is denoted by the word "right."²

This notion is by no means simple. Right can be considered from two points of view, namely, justice and equality. There is first the natural equality of things themselves. This equality is adequate for establishing a relationship of right and therefore of justice. For example, I can give so much in order to receive so much, be it only coin for coin. This is called "natural right," an expression signifying primarily what is naturally just and consequently right. An entirely different case is that in which there is equality or equivalence by voluntary agreement whether private or public. Two men can agree that the tenure of a property is worth a certain sum of money; a whole people can agree upon a fixed scale of prices; the people's representative or the head of state can

¹The principal source is *In Eth. Nic.* 5.5 [ed. Spiazzi, pp. 243-302]. For these questions in general see Martin Gillet, *Conscience chrétienne et justice sociale* (Paris: Revue des Éditions des Jeunes, 1922).

²ST 2-2.57.1, resp. See Odon Lottin, *Le droit naturel chez saint Thomas d'Aquin et ses prédécesseurs*, 2nd ed. (Bruges: Beyaert, 1931). On the transformation of the Roman notion of law by Christianity, see F. Hölscher, *Die ethische Umgestaltung der römischer Individual-Justitia durch die universalistische Naturrechtslehre der mittelalterlichen Scholastik* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1932), [Louis Lachance, *Le concept de droit selon Aristote et saint Thomas* (Montréal: Levesque, 1933); Clare Riedl, *The Social Theory of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Philadelphia, 1934). The last two items are found only in Shook's translation of the fifth edition.]

validly make the agreement in their place. These decisions create more flexible relations of equivalence than those of strict natural equality. All this is in accord with right as a convention and is called "positive law."³ Finally, certain notions of equity so clearly proceed from the exigencies of reason that they are found in almost every human society. As reason is common to all humans, the conventions deriving from it are also common. There is, accordingly, a positive law common to all humans called the "law of nations." The law of nations is dictated by natural reason and is not the object of a special institution. It arises spontaneously wherever reason prevails.⁴

Still other distinctions appear if, in addition to the different kinds of right, we examine the different relationships that rights establish among persons. To keep to fundamental cases, we shall first mention the relation established by rights between two persons who are not united to each other by any bond, for example, a contract made between two citizens. It is here a question of legal relations pure and simple. Such a right is the same for all and in all cases. The fact that certain citizens are soldiers, others magistrates, and so on, does not change the fact. Certainly there is a military law or right, a law for magistrates, a sacerdotal law and many others. But, whatever their functions, citizens have no *personal* authority over one another. All are bound immediately to the national community and its head. The relations uniting them, therefore, are relations of right and justice, properly speaking.

It is the same within a family between father and son, at least inasmuch as the child is a person distinct from the father. The proof that relations of strict right exist between them is that certain rights of the child are sanctioned by law. Here, however, all the relations no longer depend upon strict right. The child is not completely distinct from the father, who is prolonged in, and will survive in him. As Thomas puts it, "The son is something of the father" (*filius est aliquid patris*). Now, we have no rights in relation to ourselves. Hence the father can do certain things in virtue of a right that is something quite different from what we call "the law." It is his paternal right. On the other hand, relations of strict law and justice must be established in the very interior of the family between husband and wife. No doubt the woman belongs to her husband, for St. Paul says: "Husbands must love their wives as their own body" (Eph 5:28).

³ST 2-2.57.2, resp.

⁴Ibid. 3 and ad 3. On *jus gentium* see ST 1-2.95.4, ad 1. Serfdom and slavery, for example, do not belong to natural law. They are only to be justified to the extent that they serve the interest of both master and slave: "inquantum utile est huic quod regatur a sapientiori et illic quod ab hoc juvetur, ut dicitur in *Polit.* 1.4" (ibid., ad 2). Thus Thomas is far from considering slavery a natural condition. As soon as it ceases to be useful to both parties, it loses all legal character. On the practical value of Thomas' notion of law see Alice Piot, *Droit naturel et réalisme. Essai critique sur quelques doctrines françaises contemporaines* (Paris: Librairie générale de Droit et de Jurisprudence, 1930).

The wife is not thereby less, but more distinct from her husband than the child from the father. Her husband has freely taken her as a partner in order to found a kind of society. Their relations, accordingly, are more completely a matter of strict right and justice than those of the father and son. To distinguish this case from the others, we might call it "domestic justice," because the relations of right are here governed by the common good of the family as their end.⁵

Now that we have determined what right is, in what does justice consist? It is a permanent disposition of the will to render to each his right.⁶ Therefore we are always just or unjust in regard to another. But as the effect of this disposition is to assure that we act rightfully toward another according as reason would have us, it renders its possessor better. In short, it is a virtue.⁷ In a certain sense, we can even say that it is virtue itself, or that every virtue is justice and justice is all the virtues. Aristotle affirms this in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.⁸ And he is right, at least from his point of view. The virtue he is thinking of, as we have had occasion to observe, is the citizen's. The justice of which he is speaking in this passage is legal justice: that which the law specifies in prescribing how each person should conduct himself in view of the common good of the city. From this point of view, each individual is no longer considered except as a part of that whole known as the social body; and as the quality of the part is of some consequence to the quality of the whole, even the personal virtues each of us can acquire contribute to that common good toward which the justice of law ordains all citizens. Consequently, if we only consider persons as members of the social body, all their virtues refer to justice. This makes of justice a kind of general virtue including all other virtues.⁹

Let us observe, nevertheless, that even from Aristotle's point of view we cannot consider the essence of justice as identical with the essence of any other virtue. Legal justice only includes the others because it governs them and orders them all to its own end, namely, the good of the city. Aristotle himself recognizes this. A good man and a good citizen are not exactly the same.¹⁰ Thomas

⁵*ST* 2-2.57.4. Thomas likens the relations between lord and serf to those between father and son, because "servus est aliquid domini, quia est instrumentum ejus" (*ibid.*). The historical interpretation of this text would presuppose a study of slavery in the Middle Ages. There are the elements of such a study in Marc Bloch, *Feudal Society*, trans. L.A. Manyon, 2 vols., 1. *The Growth of Ties of Dependence*; 2. *Social Classes and Political Organizations* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961).

⁶According to *Digesta* 1.1. "De justitia et jure" [*Corpus iuris civilis*, ed. Theodore Mommsen and Paul Krueger (Berlin: Weidmann, 1928)]. This definition of justice is taken up and commented on in *ST* 2-2.58.2, resp. and 4, resp.

⁷*Ibid.* 3, resp.

⁸*Eth. Nic.* 5.3, 1130a9-10.

⁹*ST* 2-2.58.5, resp.

¹⁰*In Polit.* 3.3 [Vivès ed. 26: 214a] [See Aristotle, *Politics* 3.5, 1278b1-5].

hastens to profit by this admission to make a distinction between Greek justice, which is entirely directed to the good of the city, and a particular justice which enriches the soul that acquires and exercises it as one of its most precious perfections. This time it is no longer in Aristotle that Thomas finds the text authorizing him to proclaim that this justice exists; it is in St. Matthew's Gospel, 5:6: "Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for justice." Here we see how striking a transformation Greek morality must undergo in order to be able to endure in a Christian climate. Like the other virtues, justice must be interiorized if it is to become Christian. Before being just in the city, we must be just in our own eyes in order to be just in the eyes of God.¹¹

Thus we distinguish between legal justice, the virtue of acting justly toward a group, and particular justice, a virtue as distinctive as either temperance or fortitude, and by which an individual person conducts himself justly in regard to every other individual person.¹² The matter on which it is directly exercised is no longer the passions of the soul, as was the case with the personal virtues that we have studied, but the actions of men in their relations with other men, their comportment and dealings with one another. But what is its bearing upon the passions?

Acts governed by justice are voluntary acts; and the will does not belong to the order of the sensory appetite, the seat of the passions, but to the order of rational desires. No doubt it frequently happens that the passions lead to injustice; for example, the unrestrained coveting of riches leads a man to steal. However, it is not up to justice but to fortitude or temperance to control these passions. Justice only intervenes to redress the unjust act as such. Whatever a person's reason for stealing, justice demands that the ill-gotten goods be restored to their legitimate owner. It accordingly focuses upon the very acts that this virtue produces,¹³ and not upon what these acts should be interiorly, in relation to those performing them, as in the case of fortitude and temperance. Rather, it focuses on what our exterior acts ought to be, given the person or persons they affect. In other words, the virtues governing the passions permit the virtuous man to keep them in a just mean in relation to himself. They allow him to be angry or to experience fear when and as he should, and just as often as he should. But justice seeks this just mean in the relationship between two things that are outside the virtuous man himself: his act, and the person whom the act concerns. It is no longer a question of *someone who keeps himself in the just mean*, but of *the just mean of some thing*. What justice has in common with other virtues is that the just mean it seeks is the mean of reason, and this makes it a moral virtue in the full sense of the term.¹⁴

¹¹See my *Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy*, pp. 128-147.

¹²ST 2-2.58.7, resp.

¹³Ibid. 9, resp.

¹⁴Ibid. 10, resp. and ad 1.

The just mean of the thing itself is the right of the person concerned through the act that determines it. We can see its nature very well from the vices that destroy this type of relationship. Legal justice is thwarted by illegality—a contempt for the common good that disposes vicious persons to pursue only their own immediate individual interests, without any thought to the possible effect of their acts upon the general interest of the community. Illegality is a vice that is as general as the virtue it destroys. It can lead the vicious person into all kinds of faults, because it disposes him to violate all laws that interfere with him in any way. But injustice, properly speaking, consists in falsifying the equality in our relations with other persons, that is, in not respecting the equality that it is fitting to establish between each of our acts and each of their rights. An unjust act is an “iniquitous” act, an “iniquity” or “in-equity” committed upon someone. Thus, to wish to make more money from a buyer than the thing being sold is worth, or to wish to get an object away from a seller for less than it is worth, or to wish to obtain more money than the labor supplied warrants, or more work than the money paid warrants, is to break this fundamental equality between the act and the right that justice demands. Under given living conditions, an hour’s work, or a stated amount of the product of a specified work, is clearly worth a definite sum of money with a definite purchasing power. It is the responsibility of a well-informed reason to establish this relation honestly.¹⁵

We must not, however, blandly identify the doing of something just with justice, or the doing of something unjust with injustice. What is just and unjust are, as it were, the matter of justice or injustice, but they are not enough to constitute them. A just person may, through ignorance or an error in good faith, commit an injustice and be no less just because of it. We can go even further and say that we can be fundamentally just and yet be led by anger or covetousness to commit an injustice. We are just, then, but wrongly neglect to call upon our justice when we should be doing so. For all this, we do not lose our virtue of justice, but show that it is incomplete and still lacks the stability of a true virtue. Injustice, properly speaking, is the habit of performing unjust acts, which we know to be unjust and yet deliberately perform. The *habitual intention* to do what is unjust is accordingly essential to the vice of injustice, as the contrary intention is co-essential to justice taken as a virtue.¹⁶ To do things that are just or unjust in ignorance or in an outburst of passion is to fall into justice or injustice *per accidens*.

Since the just man’s will is regulated by reason, we can liken him to a judge continually meting out justice and pronouncing judgments. But this is only a metaphor or at least a stretching of the meaning. Strictly speaking, the judg-

¹⁵Ibid. 59.1, resp.

¹⁶Ibid. 2, resp. What is unjust is not necessarily evil. We can fail to be just both by excess and defect. We can, for example, voluntarily give someone more than is due to him (ibid. 3, resp). However, the term is habitually used in its pejorative sense even by Thomas.

ment that defines justice is the privilege of a head of state, for it is he who establishes positive rights by promulgating laws; the judge merely applies laws thus established. When he passes judgment he merely carries out the ruler's judgment. As for personal judgments based on the reason of individuals, they are only called judgments by analogy. The original meaning of the term "judgment" was the correct determination of what is just. From this the term was extended to signify the correct determination in any matter whatsoever, whether in the speculative or practical order.¹⁷ In any case, even when we take the term "judgment" in the strict sense, it is reason that judges. And if we designate this act by the term "judgment" (*judicium*), it is because it is governed by that stable disposition for judging accurately that is called justice (*justitia*). A judgment in the order of rights, therefore, is an act of justice (*actus justitiae*), that is, an act whose origin and cause are the very virtue of justice of the one pronouncing the judgment.¹⁸ As an act of justice, judgment is a legitimate act, provided always that it satisfies two other conditions.

The first condition is that the one who exercises justice should have authority from the ruler to do so, and should only pass judgment in matters over which he has an effective authority. Judgments handed down without this condition are "usurped" judgments. The second condition is that the judge only pass judgment where there is reasonable certitude. Of course, we do not mean that here, where we are speaking of contingent matters, there must be a conclusive certainty of a scientific kind. But the judge's reason must at least be as certain as it can in such matters. A judgment handed down in a doubtful or obscure case on the strength of more or less flimsy conjectures must be qualified as a "rash" judgment.¹⁹ Such a judgment is only based on suspicion, and as Cicero says, to be suspicious is to presume evil on slight evidence.

The wicked are quick to be suspicious because they judge others by themselves. But it is enough to despise someone, to hate him, to be irritated with him in order readily to think evil of him. And old men have seen so much of this that they generally display much suspicion. Indeed, we are all suspicious. To doubt someone's goodness on flimsy evidence is a human temptation that no one escapes, and to succumb to it is not a grave fault. But it is a grave fault to judge a person to be decidedly bad on mere conjecture, because, although we are not masters of our suspicions, we are of our judgments.

The judge who in justice condemns on mere suspicion commits the most serious of sins against justice, since instead of judging according to what is right he is violating it. His act is a direct offense against the very virtue it is

¹⁷No doubt this is why Thomas usually avoids the term *judicium* to designate what we today, in logic for example, called judgment. *Judicium*, for him, still connotes fundamentally the judgment of the prince who defines justice or of the judge who administers it.

¹⁸*ST* 2-2.60.1, resp.

¹⁹*Ibid.* 2, resp.

his duty to exercise.²⁰ Where there is no certitude, the benefit of the doubt should be given to the accused. The judge's duty, to be sure, is to punish the guilty, and all of us must condemn the wicked in our inner forum. But it is better to err many times by acquitting the guilty than even rarely to condemn the innocent. The first of these errors harms no one; but the second is an injustice and must be avoided.²¹

Let us leave judgment for the present and return to justice in order to distinguish its various species. In Book 5 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*,²² Aristotle distinguishes between the justice that governs exchange and that which governs distribution. They are called commutative justice and distributive justice. Both derive from private justice (as distinct from legal justice), because they both concern a particular person taken as part of the social body. If it is a question of judging the relations between two of these parties, that is, between two private persons, it is a matter of commutative justice. If, on the contrary, it is a question of regulating a relationship between the whole and one of its parts, that is, of assigning to some particular person his part of the goods collectively owned by the group, it is a matter of distributive justice. Between two private persons, indeed, everything boils down to some kind of exchange; between the social body and its members everything can be reduced to a problem of distribution.²³

These two sorts of relationships justify the distinction between two species of justice because they proceed from two different principles. When the state wishes to distribute among its members the part of the community's goods that reverts to them, it takes into account the place occupied by each of these parties in the whole. Now, these places are not equal, for every society has a hierarchical structure, and it is of the very essence of the organized body politic that all of its members be not of the same rank. It is like this under all regimes. In an aristocratic state classes are distinguished by worth and virtue; in an oligarchy wealth replaces nobility; in a democracy it is liberty, or as they say, the liberties enjoyed that arrange the members of the nation in a hierarchical order. In all cases—and we could cite others—each person receives advantages in proportion to the rank arising from his nobility, wealth, or the rights he has been able to win. These relationships are not based upon an arithmetic equality but rather, according to Aristotle's formula, on a geometric proportion. Hence it is natural that some should receive more than others, since the distribution of advantages is carried out according to rank. When each, according to his place, receives in proportion to the rest, justice is done and rights respected.

²⁰Ibid. 3, resp.

²¹Ibid. 4, resp.

²² Aristotle, *Eth. Nic.* 5.3, 1131b25–31. See Aquinas, *In Eth. Nic.* 5.4 [ed. Spiazzi, pp. 254–256, nn. 927–937].

²³ST 2-2.61.1, resp.

In exchanges between persons, the problems are different. It is here a question of rendering something to someone in return for what he has received from him. This is pre-eminently the case in buying and selling, the very type of all exchange. Here it is a matter of so adjusting transactions that each gives or receives as much as he receives or gives. And so we have to reach an arithmetic equality, where both parties end up with as much as they had before. Whether the relation that justice seeks to establish as its goal be proportional or arithmetic, it is always a relation of equality.²⁴

Like all virtues, these two kinds of justice are threatened by corresponding vices. What most frequently destroys distributive justice is respect of persons. Here the term "person" signifies any condition not related to the cause that justifies a gift. We have said that distributive justice consists in giving to each according to his merits. To show respect of person is to find something other than merit on which to proportion the gift. It is not then a case of retribution for a right, but favor to the person of Peter or Martin under the guise of acknowledging a right. Understood in this sense, the "person" varies according to case. Taking ties of blood into account in order to regulate an inheritance is not to show respect of persons, but it is a notable case of taking them into consideration. But it is showing respect of person to appoint someone a professor because the candidate happens to be our relative or the son of a friend. In this case, only the candidate's knowledge should be taken into account. Everything pertains to respect of person except his competence as a professor, which is the only thing that should be considered here.²⁵

All this is perfectly clear-cut and simple in theory. In practice, it is a different matter. So long as it is only a matter of distributing public posts or of meting out justice in the courts, respect of persons is always reprehensible. But it is very rare that the distinction between what attaches to the person and what does not is perfectly clear-cut. Knowledge alone does not make the professor, nor does even sanctity make the good bishop. A substantial personal fortune, close personal friendship with rulers, can increase a person's competence for diplomacy as a qualification for an ambassadorial post.

We must particularly distinguish between the granting of posts and the granting of honors. In the second case, it is a well-known fact that honors attach to the post, and rightly so. No doubt only virtue deserves to be honored. But the man who holds public office always represents something more than himself, namely, the authority he holds. A bad bishop represents God, and so we must respect God in the bishop. An instructor ought to be a scholar; parents ought to be good; old folk ought to have found time to become wise. Therefore

²⁴Ibid. 2, resp. On fines and damages see *ibid.* 4, resp. On problems concerning restitution see *ibid.* 62.

²⁵Ibid. 63.1, resp. This vice is more serious in the case of the distribution of ecclesiastical posts, since nothing is more sacred than the spiritual welfare of souls. See *ibid.* 2, resp.

we honor instructors, parents, and old folk, even though all are not scholars or good or as wise as they should be. As for the rich, whether we like it or not, they have a larger place in society than the poor. Their resources give rise to duties. If it is only for what it is able to do, their wealth is honorable. Let us therefore honor the rich since we have to, but let us honor in them the power to do good that they represent. To honor *their wealth*, the very sight of which draws respect from so many persons, is to show respect of persons. It is no longer a virtue but a vice.²⁶ Very decidedly, we can always count on Thomas' good sense.

The vices opposed to commutative justice are more numerous, because of the diversity of the goods that can be exchanged. The gravest are those that consist in taking without giving anything in return. The gravest of all breaches of justice is to take someone's life, because loss of life deprives the person of everything else. To sacrifice plants for animals and animals for humans is to remain within the scope of order. Homicide is the unjustified slaying of one who is, through reason, our associate and brother. There are justifiable killings, as when a judge inflicts the death penalty. In any given society individuals are only parts of the whole. And just as a surgeon has to cut off a gangrenous member in order to save a person's life, it can become necessary to cut off a member of society if its corruption is a menace to the social body. In such a case the death penalty is justified.²⁷ Still, this penalty can only be inflicted by regularly constituted justice. No private person has the right to set himself up as a judge. The courts alone have the right to condemn malefactors to death.²⁸

Suicide is homicide committed against oneself. We have no right to kill either others or ourselves without authority. Suicide is against nature, because everyone loves himself and naturally works to preserve himself. If the natural law has in the eyes of reason the value of moral law, then it is a grave fault to violate it. Moreover, each part as such belongs to the whole. Every man forms a part of the social group. In killing himself a man injures the community that has a right to his services; and to do so is an act of injustice, as Aristotle observes.²⁹ What Aristotle does not say, and what is much more important, is that suicide is injustice toward God, for it is God who gave us life and conserves us. To deprive ourselves of life is to commit against God the sin we commit against a man in killing his servant. Moreover, it is to commit the sin

²⁶Ibid. 3, resp.; *Quodl.* 10.6.12, resp. [ed. Spiazzi, p. 214].

²⁷*ST* 2-2.64.2, resp. See *ibid.* 6, resp.

²⁸Ibid. 3 and 65.1, ad 2. Clerics are even forbidden to take on such tasks because they are called to serve at the altar where there is a renewal of the passion of Christ crucified, who, *cum percuteretur, non repercutiebat* (1 Pet 2:23). See *ST* 2-2.64.6, resp. On problems concerning mutilation, blows, wounds, incarceration see *ibid.* 65.

²⁹Aristotle, *Eth. Nic.* 5.10, 1138a13. See Aquinas, *In Eth. Nic.* 5.10 [ed. Spiazzi, p. 301, n. 1096].

of usurping to ourselves a right to judge that we do not possess. God alone is judge of the limits of our life. "I will kill and I will make to live" (Deut 32:39). Both natural and divine law are accordingly united in condemning suicide as a sin against the person himself, against society and against God.³⁰

The taking of life, one's own or another's, is in Thomas' eyes so serious an act that it can be said, in spite of apparent exceptions, there is *no case* in that this act is morally justified. We mean by this that in no case is it licit to kill with the intention of killing. It can happen that the pursuit of a different and legitimate end may necessarily involve us in killing. Even here the killing must not be willed for itself and as an end. We have had occasion several times to observe that moral acts are specified by the intention that directs them. To kill with the final intention of killing is always a crime. For killing to be excusable, it must remain, as it were, outside one's line of intention and be considered as accidental to the end sought. Such is the case of killing in legitimate self-defense. It is legitimate in a case like this to wish to save one's own life, but it is not legitimate to kill an assailant if one can protect himself without doing so, nor is it legitimate even to have the intention of killing him in order to defend oneself. We ought only to have the intention of defending ourselves against him, and we may only kill him in defense of our own body.³¹

It is possible to injure another in his goods as well as in his person. From this arise many breaches of justice, all of them violations of the right to property. This right has given rise to many controversies. Some have denied this right, but they are certainly mistaken. Man is endowed with reason and will, and is naturally capable of using things; as he cannot subsist without using them, he naturally possesses the right to do so. Power to use a thing according to one's needs is to have proprietorship or ownership over it. We cannot conceive human life to be possible without, as a minimum, the right to own the goods necessary in order to live. To this extent, the right to ownership is a natural right.

In addition to this, it is a sacred right. Man is only capable of exercising his dominion over the things he uses because he is endowed with reason. Reason is the image of God in him. The supreme and absolute proprietor of nature is God, who created it. But he made man to his own image and likeness, and consequently capable, not of changing nature to his liking, but at least of exploiting its resources to his own profit. Thus man holds by divine delegation the power

³⁰ST 2-2.64.5, resp.

³¹Ibid. 7. This only concerns a relation between private persons. Where killing is a public function (as in the case of soldiers in battle or policemen in pursuit of a criminal) it becomes legitimate to intend to kill, but only by virtue of delegated public authority, and provided that those who carry out such tasks do so as delegated representatives and not through the personal desire to kill, nor to use the occasion for self-gratification. Involuntary homicides, where there is no suspicion of imprudence on the part of the killer, are really accidents, not sins. See *ibid.* 8, resp.

to use things put at his disposal in this way and he had the right to do so to the just extent of his needs.³²

It is true that the right to ownership, as ordinarily understood, seems to extend beyond the simple right to the use of property. To possess something is to have it not only for oneself but as one's own, so much so, that it seems that the goods possessed constitute, as it were, a very part of the person. If we take the point of view of natural law, no such appropriation of goods is called for. We do not say natural law prescribes community of goods nor, consequently, that their individual appropriation is contrary to natural law, but simply that it ignores it. It is reason that has added private appropriation of goods to natural law, because it is necessary for human life that each person possess certain goods as his own. In the first place, when a thing belongs to everyone, nobody takes care of it, whereas everyone is willingly busy with what belongs to him alone. Then, too, things are carried out with far more order when each is charged with a particular task than when everyone is put in charge of everything. This division of labor, as it is called today, seems to imply in Thomas' thought a certain individualization of property. Finally, more peaceful relations among people are thus established. The satisfaction all experience from the ownership of something makes each man content with his lot. It is enough to see how often the joint possession of goods is a source of disputes in order to be convinced of this. As lawyers say: joint possession must always be broken.

When this has been said, we must not forget that by natural law the use of all things is at the disposal of everyone. This fundamental fact cannot be removed by the progressive establishment of private ownership. That each should possess as his own what is necessary for his own use is entirely correct as a safeguard against want and neglect. But it is a very different matter when some accumulate more goods than they can use under the title of private property. To assume ownership of what we do not need is to appropriate goods that are fundamentally common and whose usage should remain common. The remedy for this abuse is never to consider even the goods possessed in our own name as reserved for our own use. Let us have them, since they are ours, but let us always keep them at the disposal of those who may need them. The rich man who does not distribute his superfluous wealth is robbing the needy of the goods

³²Ibid. 66.1, resp. Alexander Horvath, *Eigentumsrecht nach dem hl. Thomas von Aquin* (Graz: Moser, 1929); Jean Tonneau, "Propriété," *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique* 13: 757-846. For bibliographical data on the problems of Aquinas on property rights see *Bulletin thomiste* 10 (1932): 603-613, and 11-13 (1935): 474-482. On the very complex question of property rights in Thomas see J. Péres-Garcia, *De principiis functionis socialis proprietatis privatae apud divum Thomam Aquinatem* (Fribourg, CH, 1924); R. Brunet, "La propriété privée chez saint Thomas," *Nouvelle revue théologique* 61 (1934): 914-927, 1022-1041. [The last item is found only in Shook's translation of the fifth edition.]

whose use is theirs by right. He is defrauding them by violence. Wealth, let us recall, is not bad in itself; but we must know how to use it reasonably.³³

Since it is lawful to possess certain goods as our own, anything that impairs this right is a sin. Larceny consists in stealthily taking possession of another's goods and is a sin. So too is plunder, or the taking of another's goods by violence.³⁴ If such acts became general, human society would disintegrate. Moreover, they not only do harm to the love we ought to have for our neighbor but also that we should have for God.³⁵ On the other hand, there is no larceny or theft involved in taking what we need in case of necessity. As we have already said, by natural law things have been placed by God at the disposal of everyone to provide for their needs. The fact that human law has divided and appropriated the possession of goods cannot abolish the natural right to which it is an addition. What the wealthy possess over and above their needs is intended by *natural law* to provide for the needs of the poor. No doubt those who possess these goods are free to dispose of them according to their best judgment in order to feed the hungry and clothe the naked. But in the case of urgent and manifest necessity, a person in need can take possession of the goods of another, either by ruse or violence, without any sin on his part.³⁶

So much for injustice in acts. There is also an injustice in words.³⁷ The most important words in this regard are those of the judge whose proper function is to render justice. A judge's sentence is a kind of particular law made to cover a particular case. So it is that a judge's sentence, like the general law itself, has constraining force. It binds both parties, and its power of constraining private persons is the sure token that the judge who pronounces it is speaking for the moment in the name of the state.

No one, then, has the right to judge without a regular mandate.³⁸ The character of public person is so inseparable from the judge that he has not even the right to take into account in his judgments what he knows about the case as a private person. He can only base his judgments on what he knows *as a judge*. In the exercise of his public function, the judge only knows, on the one hand, divine and human law, on the other the evidence of the witnesses and other pertinent matter placed in the official dossier of the case. To be sure, what he knows of the case from private sources can help him bring about a more coherent and pertinent discussion of what are alleged to be proofs and thus show the

³³SCG 3.127 [7]; ST 2-2.66.2, resp. and ad 2.

³⁴On the ownership of found articles see ST 2-2.66.5, ad 2.

³⁵Ibid. 6, resp.

³⁶Ibid. 7, resp.

³⁷We are still in the order of vices contrary to commutative justice, which is based on relationships where equality obtains.

³⁸ST 2-2.67.1, resp.

weakness of the case. However, if he cannot juridically challenge such evidence, he has to base his judgment upon it.³⁹

For the same reason, a judge cannot pronounce on a case in which he is in any way an accuser or plaintiff, nor must he act like an accuser in a case of which he is the judge. As judge, he is only the interpreter of justice. As Aristotle says, he is a living justice.⁴⁰ Just as a judge must forget what he may happen to know as a witness, he must abstract completely from what he might have to say as an accuser. In brief, one cannot be judge and party to an action at the same time. It would be to exercise justice toward oneself, which cannot be said save by way of metaphor, because, as we have said, the virtue of justice directly concerns another.⁴¹

Finally, the judge has no authority to shield a guilty person from punishment. If the complaint is upheld, the plaintiff has the right to have the guilty person punished and it is up to the judge to recognize this right. Moreover, the judge is charged by the state to apply the law. If the law exacts the punishment of the guilty, the judge is once again bound to put aside his feelings as a private person and to apply the law strictly. The head of state who is the highest judge is not in the same position as other judges. Having full power, he can save a guilty person from punishment if he feels he can do so without prejudice to the interest of the community.⁴²

Constrained to restrict himself to what is pertinent to the trial in order to pass sentence, the judge would be at the mercy of plaintiff, defendant, and witnesses unless they too were bound to observe justice. It is our duty to accuse when it is a question of a fault that threatens the public good and we are in a position to prove our charge. On the contrary, if it is only question of a fault that appears not to prejudice public interests, there is no obligation to make accusations. Moreover, we are not bound to become involved in this way if we do not feel that we are in a position to back up our accusation with proofs, for we are never bound to do what we could not do as it should be done.⁴³

If we should and can accuse, we should do so in writing so that the judge may know exactly what to believe. Above all, we must be careful never to make an accusation that is not well-founded. To commit this fault is calumny. Some

³⁹Ibid. 2, resp.

⁴⁰*In Eth. Nic.* 5.6 [ed. Spiazzi, p. 261, n. 955] [see Aristotle, *Eth. Nic.* 5.4, 1132a20].

⁴¹*ST* 2-2.67.3, resp.

⁴²Ibid. 4, resp.

⁴³Ibid. 68.1, resp. This article makes the distinction between denunciation and accusation: "Haec est differentia inter denuntiationem et accusationem, quod in denuntiatione attenditur emendatio fratris, in accusatione autem attenditur punitio criminis." The reason that accusation is not obligatory (save when public interest is at stake) is that its only object is to punish the guilty party in this life, and it is not in this life that faults finally must be punished. Aristotle would have been surprised at this argument.

commit calumny because they are shallow and put faith in mere hearsay. Others do so deliberately and maliciously, and this is a great deal more serious. There is no justifying a calumnious accusation, not even the intention of serving the common good, because we have no right to serve the common good by injuring someone unjustly.⁴⁴ On the other hand, if the accusation is well founded and it has been decided to lay a charge, then it is our duty to push it as far as possible. To dissimulate in a fraudulent manner facts relating to the accusation being made, to refrain from bringing forward proofs, is to enter into collusion with the guilty party and become his accomplice. This fault is prevarication.⁴⁵

Like the plaintiff, the accused has his obligation in justice. The first of these is to acknowledge the judge's authority and to submit to it. The accused must, first of all, tell the judge the truth when he asks it, within the limits set forth by the law. To refuse to speak the truth that he is bound to speak, or to lie about it, is a grave fault. But if the judge pushes his inquiry beyond the legal limits, the accused can refuse to reply, denounce it as an abuse, or have recourse to any other subterfuge that procedure allows. But he must never lie. He who lies in order to excuse himself sins against the love of God to whom judgment belongs; he sins doubly against love of neighbor, by refusing the judge the truth to which he has a right, and by exposing his accuser to the punishment inflicted for false accusations.⁴⁶

The question now arises whether the accused who knows himself to be guilty must admit it. He is bound to admit an accusation when it is true. But he is not at all bound to admit something of which he is not accused; and nothing forbids his using the necessary reticence to prevent his faults that are not yet known from being brought out into the open. We sometimes hear of criminals who not only acknowledge the crime with which they are charged, as they should do, but who spontaneously confess other crimes of which no one even dreamed of accusing them. They are not bound to do so. They may even legitimately conceal by suitable means the truth they are not obliged to admit.

To consider the accused as morally bound to acknowledge the offense of which he is justly accused is to go beyond what the justice of the courts demands. Thomas knew this. As an objection against his own position he brought up the law stating that in criminal cases anyone is permitted to bribe his opponent. He also noted that, if the law punishes collusion between the accuser and the accused, it does not provide any sanction against collusion between them.

⁴⁴Ibid. 3, resp. and ad 1.

⁴⁵Ibid., ad 2. It goes without saying that if, on the contrary, one becomes aware during the course of the trial that one's accusation is groundless, one not only has the right but the duty to withdraw it (ibid., ad 3).

⁴⁶Ibid. 69.1, resp. The idea that we can fail in charity toward God by lying to a judge is entirely foreign to the ethics of Aristotle.

Why would moral teaching forbid what the laws allow? Because, Thomas replies, human laws allow many acts to go unpunished that God's judgment condemns as wrong. There is no law against fornication, yet it is a very grave moral offense. It is the same in this case. An accused tries to bribe his accuser so that he will withdraw his charge. This is clearly deceiving the judge, but what can the judge do about it if there is no longer any charge? Obviously nothing. What Thomas is expecting from the guilty person, as he himself says in so many words, is an act of perfect virtue (*perfectae virtutis*)—the refusal to bribe his accuser, even though by refusing to do so he would expose himself to capital punishment. The law does not demand this kind of heroism from anyone. The proper function of human law is to keep people in order, and such scrupulous respect for all the virtues can hardly be looked for in a very large number of people but only in a few. Law then permits bribing an adversary, but God forbids it.⁴⁷ Hence the man who knows himself to be guilty will refuse to have recourse to such subterfuges, and if condemned he will not even appeal a sentence that he knows has been justly handed down.⁴⁸

After plaintiff and defendant come the witnesses. Their moral code is complicated enough, and their difficulties begin with the question of knowing whether they are bound to give testimony. They are, of course, if an injunction has been issued by the judiciary and the facts are common knowledge or plainly evident. But when we are asked to reveal hidden offenses, knowledge of which is not current, we are not bound to give testimony. Besides, it can happen that the one who is asking for our testimony is merely a private person without authority over us. Two cases are to be distinguished here. If it is a question of saving an accused from an unjust conviction, we are morally bound to appear as a witness for the defense and, if we can do so, even to inform someone who can vouch for the truth on our behalf. But if it is a question, on the contrary, of having someone convicted, there is no obligation to intervene, not even to save the accuser from the penalty he will have to pay for making an accusation that, though morally justified, is juridically unsound. There is after all nothing to oblige him to take such a risk. Recall that before he is under obligation to lay a charge, he has to be able to prove it. It is up to him to foresee that he would be unable to prove his accusation.⁴⁹

The next problem is how to proceed after one has become a witness. Certainly a witness has to tell the truth. First of all, to take the witness stand he has to bind himself under oath, and he cannot make false statements without committing perjury. What is more, he would sin against justice if he unjustly makes or denies charges against the accused. Finally, giving false testimony is

⁴⁷Ibid. 2, ad 1 and 2. This discussion poses, in a particularly urgent way, the problem of the true character of Thomistic moral philosophy. We shall return to it later.

⁴⁸Ibid. 3 and 4.

⁴⁹Ibid. 70.1, resp.

forbidden because it is a lie.⁵⁰ But the real difficulties only start at this point. To bear witness according to justice demands that we only affirm what we are really sure of, and that we only present as doubtful what we have reason to doubt. This is not all. Feeling sure of something is no proof that what we affirm is certain. Memory is faulty, and although errors in memory committed in good faith excuse from perjury,⁵¹ it is necessary to take every precaution possible in order to avoid them.

The judge will also be bound to take into account the possibility of such faults. It is to guard against this that witnesses are asked to testify under oath. When a witness has sworn to tell the truth and fails to do so, he is guilty of perjury, one of the gravest offenses anyone can commit, since it directly affects God himself.⁵² But a witness' good faith is no safeguard against error. This is why, as a rule, one single piece of testimony is not considered to be a proof; two, or even better three, concordant testimonies are demanded. Even agreement by three witnesses is still not strictly speaking a proof, nor indeed is agreement by twenty always one. Legal evidence concerns that very particular, contingent and variable matter—human acts. In most cases, there is no hope of reaching more than probable certitude. We expect a certain percentage of error and never expect conclusive certitude. Therefore it is reasonable to admit the validity of the plaintiff's evidence when confirmed by two witnesses.⁵³

Again, witnesses must be in agreement, at least on what is essential. If several witnesses agree on the fact but not on certain essential circumstances capable of affecting the nature of this fact, for example, time, place or persons, it is just as though they disagreed on the fact itself. Indeed, they are not speaking about the same thing, and each of them is no longer any more than an isolated witness. However, if one of them merely declares that he no longer remembers one of these principal circumstances, their general agreement stands, though somewhat weakened. Finally, if the disagreement is only on details of secondary importance, for example, whether it was fair weather or foul, or on the color of a house, the fundamental agreement of the witnesses does not lose its value. After all, these are things to which we do not generally give much attention and they easily slip our mind. These petty disagreements tend to increase the trustworthiness of the testimony, because when several witnesses agree on the least details there is room to suspect that there has been collusion and that their testimony is false. But even this is not sure, and it is up to the prudence of the judge to decide. Finally, it is always up to him to weigh the evidence submitted. If he finds the witnesses contradicting one another, some favoring the plaintiff, some the defendant, it is his delicate duty to estimate the credibility

⁵⁰Ibid. 4, resp.

⁵¹Ibid., ad 1.

⁵²Ibid., ad 3.

⁵³Ibid. 2, resp and ad 1.

of the witnesses who appear before him and then to pass sentence in favor of the party whom the evidence supports. If the value of the testimony appears to be equal, the accused is to be given the benefit of the doubt.⁵⁴

We are not yet through with the actors in this little courtroom drama. After the judge, the plaintiff, the accused and the witnesses comes the figure who willingly assumes the leading role, the advocate or lawyer. Pleading is a profession. Hence, it is only just that he who pleads should receive an honorarium or retainer for doing so. When a pauper requires a lawyer's services, it is hardly fair to say that the lawyer is personally bound to take his case. If he does so, it is as a work of mercy. He has only to take it under this title, if it is an urgent case and no one is a more obvious choice than himself. To devote oneself to the legal defense of the poor is a splendid work, but demands as a rule a sacrifice of other duties. As Thomas says, "We are not bound to go about looking for indigents; it is enough if we show mercy toward those we meet."

The case of doctors is very similar. Like the lawyer, the doctor is bound to give free assistance to the poor in urgent need of it, provided no other doctor is more obviously bound to undertake it than himself. Certainly, he does a good work when he looks after those who ought to be the charge of a colleague richer than himself or who is closer to the particular patients. It is a good work on his part to do so, but he is not strictly bound to do it. Lawyers or doctors who spend their time looking for indigents would find their clientele growing too rapidly for their income. If merchants followed this principle they would not sell their goods but distribute them to the needy.⁵⁵

In order to carry on his profession properly, a lawyer must be capable of proving the justice of the causes he is to defend. He must have special professional competence plus the natural gifts required for public speaking. It is difficult to imagine a deaf-and-dumb lawyer. But a lawyer lacking morality ought to be no less unthinkable, because no lawyer is allowed to plead an unjust cause. If he does so in error and good faith, he commits no fault. But if he knows that the cause he is defending is unjust, he gravely offends against justice. He should even regard himself bound to repair any injury unjustly caused to the opposite party.⁵⁶

The lawyer is in an entirely different situation here than the physician who undertakes to look after a desperate case. To cure a desperate case and to win an evil cause no doubt demand exceptional talent. But if the doctor fails he does not injure anyone, while the lawyer does cause injury to someone in the event

⁵⁴Ibid., ad 2. Even this last conclusion is not absolute. A judge has to be slow to release a prisoner if to do so is contrary to the public interest in any serious way. Here, as elsewhere, he has to rely on his own prudence. On the characteristics that help him to weigh the value of a witness see *ibid.* 4, resp.

⁵⁵Ibid. 71.1, resp. On the right of lawyers and doctors to fees see *ibid.* 4, resp. and ad 1.

⁵⁶Ibid. 3, resp.

that he is successful. His professional triumph is a moral lapse.⁵⁷ Let the lawyer, then, only take on cases that he has every reason to believe just, and let him defend them as skillfully as he can, never resorting to falsehoods but allowing himself those ruses and reservations necessary for the triumph of justice. If in the course of the trial he becomes convinced that his cause is not just, he is hardly to be expected to betray it, go over to the other side and reveal the secrets he has learned. But he can and even should give up his defense and try to make his client acknowledge his guilt, or at least try to obtain from his adversary a friendly arrangement recognizing his rights.⁵⁸

Let us here leave the courtroom and return to common life. Breach of justice by speech is not rare. It can come about through verbal assaults upon a neighbor's honor. In this sense, contumely (*contumelia*) becomes more and more harmful as it is spoken in the presence of more people.⁵⁹ What makes contumely and insult serious faults is the very thing that makes them what they are, that is, words uttered with the intention of depriving someone of his honor.⁶⁰ This is no less serious an offense than larceny or plunder, because a man is as attached to his reputation and honor as to his goods. Therefore extreme discretion and prudence must be shown in administering public rebukes. We can be within our right in inflicting them; it can even be our duty to do so, but in no case nor under any pretext have we the right to disgrace another. This is not merely saying that we must never *have the intention* of disgracing anyone, but that we must never rob a man of his honor. To do so by a blundering choice of words can be a mortal sin even when there is no intention of causing dishonor.

Contumely must not be confused with teasing, a favorite pastime of playful people. We do not tease in order to wound but to entertain and create laughter. Within limits, there is no evil in it. But we should only tease in order to make the one we are teasing laugh. If we go a little too far, we hurt him and this is no more legitimate than wounding another physically by hitting him too hard in playing. Above all, teasing is for the entertaining of the one being teased, not for the amusement of others. The latter is a real affront.⁶¹

⁵⁷Ibid., ad 1.

⁵⁸Ibid., ad 2, 3.

⁵⁹Ibid. 72.1, ad 1. On the slight differences between contempt (*contumelia*), insult (*convicium*, ridiculing someone for a corporal infirmity), and defamation (*improperium*, words belittling a person) see *ibid.*, ad 3.

⁶⁰Contempt consists essentially of words. But it is possible to insult someone by gestures, offenses or blows—a box on the ear, for example. In these cases, the act or gesture is taken as a sign of the desire to show contempt or to insult. They are therefore a kind of language. Thus the box on the ear is, by extension, a form of contempt (*ibid.* 1, resp.).

⁶¹Ibid. 2, ad 1.

In general, contumely arises from an angry impulse. You may remember that this passion implies a desire for vengeance. Now, the first form of vengeance to which everyone is inclined and which is handy for every occasion, is an insulting remark directed toward the person who has offended us. Feeling that he has slighted us or attacked our honor, we seek to attack his. It is not pride, then, that directly inspires insulting words, but it disposes us to make them because it is those who think they are superior to others who are quick to speak scornfully to them. The proud regard any resistance to their will as an injury and are quick to anger and have a ready insult on their lips.⁶² When we find that we are the victims of such anger, we should bear it patiently. Patience has to do with what is said against us as well as what is done against us. True patience under these circumstances resides in the ability to accept an affront without saying a word. In other words, there is no affront that a patient man is unable to put up with.

This does not mean that it is always necessary to endure such things without protest. Virtue consists in being able to put up with them if we have to, but we do not always have to. It is good for those who insult others to have their boldness checked and to be put in their place. To treat them like this is to render a service to many others. We are not only responsible for what we are, but for what we represent as well. A preacher of the Gospel, for example, who would allow himself to be publicly insulted without a word of protest would be allowing dishonor to fall upon the Gospel. Those whose morals he ought to correct would only be too happy to believe that his are bad. They could hardly ask for a better pretext for not correcting their own.⁶³

What calumny does openly, sometimes publicly, detraction continues secretly.⁶⁴ Some detract in order to attack the good name of another; others take a guilty pleasure in whispering embittered words in the ears of mutual friends so as to destroy their friendship.⁶⁵ Others have recourse to derision in order to cover another with confusion. Ridicule is a fearful weapon; and although mere mockery can be but a game or at most a light fault, derision properly speaking is a grave fault, graver than detraction and even than calumny. The calumniator at least takes seriously the evil of which he is accusing others, but the

⁶²Ibid. 4, resp. and ad 1.

⁶³Ibid. 3, resp.

⁶⁴Defamation (*detractio*) differs from contempt in the manner in which language is used and in the end in view. An insulter speaks openly, a defamer in secret. An insulter assaults honor, a calumniator harms a reputation (*ST* 2-2.73.1, resp.). It is sometimes necessary to harm a person's reputation; but this should not be done for its own sake. Defamation is harming a reputation for the pleasure of harming it, and this is a sin (*ibid.* 2, resp.).

⁶⁵Ibid. 74.1, resp. This form of detraction Thomas calls *susurratio*, the insinuation of the sower of discord.

one who ridicules them pretends that they are so despicable that he is only amused at them.⁶⁶

We have thus far been speaking of the vices opposed to commutative justice. We have been describing those vices that consist in simply seizing possession of some good or other without in any way compensating its possessor. Such, for example, are the vices of larceny and plunder. We must now examine those vices that crop up in voluntary exchange, and particularly fraud. These introduce injustice into buying and selling and into commercial exchange in general.

Fraud is the selling of an object at a higher price than it is worth. The price it is worth is called its just price. The great problem is to determine precisely what this notion really is. It is bound up in the two actions of buying and selling. It is a question here of practices introduced for the convenience of both buyer and seller. Each needs what the other has and so they must proceed to an exchange of goods. As the object of this exchange is to render service to both of them, it must not become a burden for either. The contract established between buyer and seller ought to show equality. In other words, there ought to be equality between what is delivered by the seller and the price paid by the buyer. The price is the measure of the extent to which things are useful for life. Each amount of these things is measured by a given price. Money was invented to represent this price.⁶⁷ If the price is higher than the value of the thing or if, conversely, the value is greater than the price, the equality required by justice is abolished. Therefore, it is obviously unjust and illicit to sell a thing dearer or cheaper than it is worth.

So much for the principle. In practice things are not quite so simple. The mean and normal value of an object is not always identical with the real value it has for a particular buyer or seller. The seller may need it very much, be strongly attached to it, and consequently experience great repugnance at parting with it, or the buyer may need it badly enough to pay more than it is worth. In such a case the just price should take into account the seller's sacrifice. The seller can licitly sell the object above what it is worth in itself and at the price it is worth to him. On the other hand, the buyer's need does not justify the seller increasing the price if he is not himself making an exceptional sacrifice in consenting to sell. We can only sell what we have. If selling involves some loss or detriment, it is *our* detriment; and if it is ours we can demand payment for it. But the buyer's urgent need is *his* need; and since it is his, we cannot sell it to him. In such a case a buyer may spontaneously add something to the price asked of him in order to show his gratitude for the exceptional service rendered him.⁶⁸

⁶⁶Ibid. 75.2, resp.

⁶⁷On the reasons for selecting gold and silver for money standards see *ibid.* 77.2, ad 1. On problems of just prices in general see Selma Hagenauer, *Das 'justum pretium' bei Thomas von Aquino, ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der objektiven Werttheorie* (Stuttgart: Kolhammer, 1931).

⁶⁸ST 2-2.77.1, resp.

These conditions may appear very strict, perhaps even excessive, and certainly civil law does not go so far. The law wisely leaves a margin to permit both buyer and seller to deceive each other a little. It is only in a grave and unmistakable case of fraud that a court binds either party to restitution. But we should recall once more that the object of law and of morality is not the same. Human laws are made for the people, that is, for more than merely the virtuous. Accordingly, the civil code cannot prohibit everything contrary to virtue. It is enough if it prohibits whatever renders life in society impossible. It is of little consequence to it that sellers overcharge slightly, provided that the regularity of commercial exchange be not affected. For the present we are concerned with morality whose rule is not civil law but reason, that is, when all is said and done, the law of God. Now, divine law does not allow anything contrary to justice to go unpunished; and as it demands a just balance between merchandise and its price, the seller who receives more than his merchandise is worth is bound to restitution. Let us hasten to add, however, that measure is necessary even in the evaluation of measure. The just price is not rigidly fixed. It is a matter for appraisal, and neither a little more nor a little less prevents a transaction from being just. What matters in morality is that the seller have a firm intention of always adhering as closely as possible to the just price and that he succeed in doing so.⁶⁹

As we can see, this is not very easy. If the seller knows that what he is selling is something other than what he pretends to be selling, or if he wittingly deceives the purchaser about the quantity he claims to be delivering, the case is clearly one of fraud and the defrauder is bound to restitution. The real difficulties concern the appraisal of the quality of the products sold. In certain cases the object sold is obviously inferior and the seller takes this into account when he fixes his price. Let us suppose, for example, that I sell a one-eyed horse and for this reason sell it very cheaply. I am not at all bound at the time of the deal to say that my horse is one-eyed;⁷⁰ it is up to the buyer to see this, more especially as the exceptionally low price I am asking is sufficient warning that something is wrong. If the purchaser is dishonest enough to pay so little for a sound horse, he would deserve what he is getting. But the seller must reduce his price proportionally and, if the defect is not apparent, he is in every way bound to declare it. We should sell a house much more cheaply, so that the price is fair, if its foundations are dangerously weak.⁷¹

Indeed, a merchant who wishes to be honest will find himself faced with many a trying case of conscience. If I take my wheat into an area where there

⁶⁹Ibid., ad 1.

⁷⁰Purchasers would be frightened off, concluding from this admission that the horse in question must have many other faults. Even blind, a horse is still able to work (ibid. 3, ad 2).

⁷¹Ibid., resp. and ad 1.

is a shortage, I can get a good price for it. Even without exploiting the situation, I shall only have to sell it at what I am offered in order to do very well. If I know that many other sellers are following me, attracted by the hope of gain, am I bound to warn buyers of this fact? If I do so, they will pay me less for my wheat or they will await the arrival of the others to put me into competition with them. Thomas does not feel that the seller offends justice in not announcing the coming of competitors and in selling his wheat at the price offered him; but he adds, it would be more virtuous either to announce this fact or to reduce his price.⁷²

All questions of this kind turn on one problem: Is it just to sell at a profit? Many hardly see any problem here. If for the present discussion we think of "the useless retailer," we shall see that there is a very real problem. Like all problems closely bound to the nature of things, there is always the question of the status quo. The society of which Thomas was thinking was very different in structure from free trade societies, where everything is a matter of trade and commerce, regulated solely by the law of supply and demand. As Thomas sees it, commerce is reduced to exchange in general, whether of money for money, or money for goods, or goods for money, that has gain for its object. Commerce in his eyes is an essentially private affair, pursuing a private end, which is to enrich the tradesman. He would never admit that trade could legitimately control, as happens in capitalistic society, the exchange and distribution of goods necessary for life. All problems of this kind depend directly or indirectly on the state, whose proper function is to assure the common good of its subjects. In a society as Thomas would have it and as justice demands, the providing of families and of citizens in general with goods necessary for life, pertain to the economists (*oeconomicos*) and to those endowed with public office (*politicos*). These things are not part of commerce, which is a private enterprise, but rather of public service.

Let us understand well Aquinas' position. There is no system here; there are only principles. The principle that he holds above all is that public service is not trade, and that consequently members of the body politic should receive the goods necessary for life at cost. How the state is to be organized to obtain this result is the business of politicians and economists. Such enterprises might be socialized provided that this does not turn out to be more expensive than leaving them in private hands. Merchants could be entrusted to supply the public; they might legitimately do this, even finding profit in it, provided that this profit represents the just salary for the work they accomplish for the public, and not that superfluous profit that is gain as such. What governs the question is the fact that every man has the right by natural law to the means necessary for existence. To make a profit on a right is an injustice. Accordingly, no ex-

⁷²Ibid., ad 4.

change of this kind ought to be an occasion for the enrichment of those who take part in it.⁷³

We have still to discuss trade, properly speaking. We have already seen that the merchant's end is profit (*lucrum*). Of itself, there is nothing wrong with making a profit. In the present state of our society it is almost necessary, since otherwise life would be impossible. We can even have a noble end in the pursuit of profit. This is the case of the merchant who expects his trade to enable him to support his house, raise his children properly, and leave him enough to help the poor. Certain businesses under given circumstances can render a service to the state. If they do, there should be a profit for those who conduct them. The important thing in all these cases is that the profit has a measure and limits. It is limited to needs and is measured by the service rendered. But when profit itself becomes its own end, measure no longer remains and limits disappear. This is why Thomas Aquinas seems to think, in spite of what has just been said, that there is something base in the very nature of commerce *as such*. Indeed, its proper end is profit, which is in itself (*in se*) boundless. In order to make it honorable, we have to make of this end a simple means with a view to an honorable or necessary end: "Trading, considered in itself, has a certain debasement attached to it, insofar as by its very nature it does not imply a virtuous or necessary end." If it has an honest or necessary end, let the merchant give himself to his business without scruple and realize a just and moderate profit. Like profit itself, trade is not a vice unless it is its own end.⁷⁴

The problem of interest is perhaps still more complicated. It is remarkable that Thomas uses the term, *usura*, for both interest and usury. Usury in its most general sense is the price paid for the use of certain goods: *pretium usus, quod usura dicitur*. In a strict sense it attaches to the notion of borrowing and lending. I need a sum of money; I borrow it from someone; someone lends it to me. If I am asked for recompense for the possession of the money thus temporarily given to me, the sum that is exacted is *usura*, that is, interest. Now, according to Thomas it is illicit to accept interest on a loan. It is illicit because it is unjust; it is unjust because it amounts to selling something that does not exist (*quia venditur id quod non est*).⁷⁵

⁷³Ibid. 4, resp. Exchanges, on the contrary, are perfectly licit and Thomas approves of them even for clerics when it is a matter of buying or selling in order to come by the necessities of life (ibid., ad 3). A unit like a Benedictine monastery, for example, could hardly survive without at least a small amount of such business.

⁷⁴Ibid. 4, resp. and ad 2. For the Aristotelian source of these notions see Aristotle, *Politics* 1.7 and 8.

⁷⁵ST2-2.78.1, resp. and ad 5. The whole discussion that follows is only a summary of this article. The objection based on the fact that the law authorizes interest on a loan is answered by Thomas in his usual way, that human law allows usury as it does many other sins. See ibid., ad 3, where Aristotle is praised for having seen *naturali ratione ductus*, that this way of making money is *maxime praeter naturam*.

There are things the use of which entails their destruction. To use wine is to drink it. To use bread is to eat it. In such cases it is impossible to reckon the use of the thing as separate from the thing itself. To possess the one is to possess the other (*cuicumque conceditur usus, ex hoc ipso conceditur res*). This is obvious when it comes to selling it. To sell separately wine and the right to drink the wine is to sell the same thing twice, or to sell what does not exist. In either case an injustice is done. It is the same when it is a question of a loan. When a thing is loaned to someone it is so that he can use it. If it happens to be wine that is lent to him, it is for drinking. All anyone has a right to expect is the return of the equivalent of what was loaned. It is unreasonable to claim an additional indemnity because the wine has been drunk.

Money happens to be one of those things the use of which entails its destruction. Wine is made to be drunk, money to be spent. This is literally true because money is a human invention designed especially to make exchange possible. If money is loaned to someone, it is that he may make use of it, that is, spend it. When he returns the money later on, to demand that he add to the sum borrowed an indemnity for having used it, is to ask to be reimbursed twice for the same sum.⁷⁶

Aquinas did not foresee the complexities of modern banking. This led him into a rather uncompromising position on the principle at stake. He is clearly thinking of the simple case in which a solvent man asks for a loan from a wealthier neighbor whose money is lying unused in his coffers. Thus Thomas is not swayed by the classic objection that to lend money is to forgo the gain that might otherwise be had from it. True enough, he replies, but the money you might have made you do not actually possess. What you might have been able to make you might very well never have seen. To sell money that you might have made is to sell something you don't yet possess and perhaps never will.⁷⁷

If this objection does not stop Thomas, there is at least one other whose value he certainly recognizes. Let us imagine a case in which a lender suffers real loss in lending his money. Has he not then some right to compensation? Yes, replies Aquinas, for the loss suffered, but not for the use of the money. This is particularly so when the borrower, thanks to the loan he has received, avoids a more serious loss than the lender has incurred in making the loan. The borrower can easily deduct from the loss he has avoided enough to compensate the lender for any loss on his part.⁷⁸

⁷⁶The case is entirely different when the objects used have not been destroyed. To use a house, for example, is to live in it, not to destroy it. One can sell the use of it without destroying it. That is what is done in selling a house and reserving the right to use it during one's lifetime, or in selling the use of it (renting it out, that is) yet retaining ownership. Receiving rent, therefore, is legitimate (*ibid.* 1, resp.).

⁷⁷*Ibid.* 2, ad 1.

⁷⁸*Ibid.*

But the Master goes even further than this. Thomas remains faithful to his principle and stoutly maintains that the use of money that is loaned cannot be sold, but he recognizes other ways of using money than merely spending it. For example, a sum of money can be laid out in wages; this is not spending it. In such a case, the use made of the money remains distinct from the money itself; hence it can be sold separately, and the lender has the right to receive more than he has loaned.⁷⁹

Many loans drawing interest in our days might very well call upon this distinction for justification. But lenders are not of great concern to Thomas. It is rather borrowers who find his indulgence. He is pitiless with usurers and lenient with those that use them. If there is injustice in usury, he says, it is the usurer who commits it; the borrower is but its victim. The poor man needs money; if he can obtain it only from a usurer, he has no choice but to accept the conditions imposed on him. None more thoroughly hate the sin of usury than those who have to resort to it. It is not usury they want but a loan.⁸⁰

If the obligations of justice between private citizens in the city are many and complex, they would appear simple in comparison with those that fall upon the head of state in relation to his subjects. Political problems are inevitable because it is man's nature to live in society. When we define man as a "social animal," we are often simply thinking of him as driven to seek the company of his fellows by a kind of instinct of sociability. Actually it quite another matter. Human nature is such that it is practically impossible for him to subsist unless he lives in a group. Most other animals can go off and live alone. They have teeth, claws and physical strength for attack, speed for safety, fur for vesture. Man has none of these. Rather, he has his reason with which to invent tools and he has hands to use them. It is difficult for an isolated individual by himself to get all he requires for himself and his family. Common life facilitates the solution of this problem through the division of labor thereby established.

This collaboration, which calls for the existence of social groups, is a collaboration of minds before it is one of hands and arms. Persons communicate their thoughts by means of language. Terms and propositions enable each to express his thought to others and to be instructed by theirs. The word "society" designates groups of a very different nature, depending on whether it is applied to human societies or to what are sometimes called "animal societies." There is no comparison between the eminently practical collaboration of ants or bees among themselves with the intimate commerce established among men by articulate language. The ultimate bond of human societies is reason.

⁷⁹Ibid. 1, ad 6. Putting money in a business is something else again. It is no longer a loan but a commercial partnership in which profits must be shared as well as risks (ibid. 2, ad 5).

⁸⁰Ibid. 4, ad 1.

To speak of a social group is to imply that it is *one*. It is so in about the same way as those organisms called living bodies are one. In other words, the social group is not an organism in the physiological sense of the term; but it can neither exist nor mature unless it is organized. This necessity derives from the distinction between the good of the individual and the good of the group, or common good.⁸¹ The first of these is that offered as immediately desirable to the individual as such; the second is that presented as ultimately desirable for the good of the group as such.

Between these two points of view conflict is inevitable. Each naturally prefers to do only what pleases him, as though he existed in an isolated state; but he lives in a group and he has to collaborate in the good of others as others do in his good. He must be a specialist in his own work and submit to common rules set up with an eye to the common good. The social body cannot reach its end unless it is directed to it. Just as the head governs the members of the body and as the soul governs the body itself, so must the social body have its head (*caput*), its *chief*, to organize and lead it. By whatever title he is designated, king, prince or president, the chief's first and principal duty is to govern his subjects by the rules of law and justice in view of the common good of the whole. To the extent that he has regard for law and justice, he governs with respect for their nature, which is that of free beings. A leader among men in very truth! If he loses sight of the end for that he exercises his power and uses it in his own service rather than for the welfare of the group, he rules a band of slaves. He is no longer the head of a state but a tyrant.

Tyranny is not necessarily confined to one man. It can happen among a people that a tiny group of men succeed in dominating all the rest and in exploiting them for their own ends. The fact that such a group is careful to identify the common good of the people with its own private ends does not alter the situation. Such tyranny can be exercised by a group of financiers, by a political party, or by the military. Those who exercise such power are said to form an *oligarchy*. If the dominant group reaches the dimensions of a social class determined to exercise power to its own profit, or to impose on the rest of the people its own way of life, such tyranny is given the term *democracy*. The term "democracy" is given a different meaning here from what it usually has today. It signifies the kind of tyranny that the people themselves exercise over certain classes of citizens. Each one of these tyrannies is the corruption of a corresponding form of just government. When the people assume power and exercise it justly in the interest of all, we have a *republic*. When a small group governs

⁸¹See Suzanne Michel, *La notion thomiste du bien commun. Quelques-unes de ses applications juridiques* (Paris: Vrin, 1932); Ignatius Th. Eschmann, "Bonum commune melius est quam bonum unius," *Mediaeval Studies* 6 (1944): 62-120; same author, "Studies in the Notion of Society in St. Thomas Aquinas," *Mediaeval Studies* 8 (1946): 1-42; 9 (1947): 19-55.

righteously, the country is said to be in the hands of an *aristocracy*. If the government is in the hands of a single person, and he rules justly, the head of state is called a prince or king and his regime is described as a *monarchy*. The term “king” also designates in a generic way anyone who is sole head of any political group of any size whatsoever—city, province, kingdom—and who governs it with a view to the common good of the group concerned, and not for his own profit.⁸²

Which of these forms of government is best? In raising this question, Thomas is aware that it is a theoretical problem whose solution, to be sure, has practical conclusions but no practical consequences applying here and now, regardless of the historical circumstances. He knew that there was an actual diversity of political regimes; both Roman and Jewish history were there to show that countries are often governed, not according to what is wanted but according to what is possible. The Romans, they say, were first governed by kings. Their monarchy degenerated into tyranny and kings were replaced by consuls. Thus Rome became an aristocracy. When the aristocracy became tyrannical, it degenerated into an oligarchy that, after several attempts to set up a democracy, reverted by reaction to monarchy in the form of an empire. Jewish history indicated an analogous situation,⁸³ and several modern instances would seem to confirm such observations. It is not here a question of some necessary law, but merely of facts depending upon what is called today collective psychology. That people often react in this way is no proof that they are right. Rather than ask themselves which is the better form of government and adhering to it, they waver between the desire for a monarchy at the risk of getting a tyrant, and the fear of tyranny, which makes them hesitate to take a king. People are made this way. Their bitterness against the corruption of a regime lasts far longer than their gratitude for the benefactions they have received from it.

The moralist must avoid two contrary fallacies. The first of these is to conclude that the better form of government is intrinsically inferior because it has no chance of succeeding for the moment. The other is to conclude, on the pretext that a given regime is intrinsically the best, that every citizen ought to direct his political action here and now toward the establishment or re-establishment of this form of government. As with any action, political action is exercised in particular circumstances. It can only have two things in view: the avoidance of tyranny in all forms, for it is always evil; and, with due consideration for circumstances, making the form of government as like as possible to what moral science recommends as absolutely the best.

As we shall show, this form of government is monarchy, provided it be completed by all that is good in the other forms of government.⁸⁴ If monarchy

⁸²*De regno* 1.1 [Leonine ed. 42: 451.173–175].

⁸³*Ibid.* 1.4 [Leonine ed. 42: 454.52–58]; *ST* 1-2.97.1, resp. Note that Augustine is cited.

⁸⁴Jacques Zeiller, *L'idée de l'état dans saint Thomas d'Aquin* (Paris: Alcan, 1910); Marcel

is in itself the best form of government, it is because, in the first place, the existence of the social body, like that of everything else, is its unity. Whatever assures its unity therefore assures its existence, and nothing can assure unity more completely nor in a more simple manner than the government of a single person. In the second place, since it is fear of tyranny that turns some people away from monarchy, it is important to note that all forms of government can degenerate into tyranny, and of all tyrannies that of a single ruler is the least intolerable. The tyranny that arises from a collective government leads as a rule to discord, while the tyranny of one ruler generally preserves order and peace. Moreover, it is rare that the tyranny of one person reaches down to all members of the social body. It usually falls heaviest on a few individuals. Finally, history shows that collective governments more often and more quickly lead to this so-dreaded tyranny than does the government by one person.⁸⁵ Accordingly, monarchy is essentially the best form of government.

We are to understand by this that the best form of government is that which places the social body under the direction of one person, but not that the best form of government is one in which the direction of the state is in the hands of one person. The prince or king, or whatever his title may be, can only ensure the common good of the people when he is dependent upon them. If he is to direct and unite them, therefore, he must appeal for the collaboration of all social forces useful for the common good. So we find Thomas speaking of a "well-proportioned" form of government and regarding it as the best.⁸⁶

This kind of government hardly resembles those absolute monarchies based on blood-ties whose supporters have sometimes appealed to the authority of Aquinas. In order to describe it, he simply turns to the Old Testament. He derives his politics from Scripture,⁸⁷ and also from Aristotle, and presents them in a text that we must quote in its entirety as a typical example of those doctrines he would lead us to believe he had borrowed and yet are found nowhere except in his works:

For the good ordering of power in a city or among any people whatsoever, two points are to be observed. First, all citizens should have some share in authority.

Demongeot, *La théorie du régime mixte chez saint Thomas d'Aquin* (Paris: Alcan, 1927), a very useful work that seems, unfortunately, to have been published only as a thesis in law without date or editor. See also Bernard Roland-Gosselin, *La doctrine politique du saint Thomas d'Aquin* (Paris: M. Rivière, 1928); Otto Schilling, *Die Staats- und Soziallehre des heiligen Thomas von Aquin*, 2nd ed. (Munich: M. Hueber, 1930).

⁸⁵*De regno* 1.5 [Leonine ed. 42: 454-455].

⁸⁶"Est etiam aliquod regimen ex istis commixtum, quod est optimum" (*ST* 1-2.95.4, resp.).

⁸⁷It is certain that the *regimen commixtum* of the preceding text is the one discussed in *ST* 1-2.105.1, resp. Here we read: "Talis enim est optima politia, bene commixta." Indeed, "hoc fuit institutum secundum legem divinam" (*ibid.*). A political regime established under God's law is certainly the best of all.

This is the way to preserve peace among people, because everyone likes an arrangement such as this and strives to maintain it, as Aristotle says in *Politics* 2.14. The second concerns the various forms of government or the distribution of authorities. Aristotle speaks of several forms of government in *Politics* 3.6, of which the following two are the most important: kingship (*regnum*), in which one man exercises power because of his virtue; aristocracy, that is, the rule of the best (*potestas optimatum*), in which a small number of men hold sway because of their virtue. Consequently, the best distribution of power in a city or kingdom should be as follows: first, a single ruler, chosen for his virtue, who presides over all, and secondly, several others under him chosen for their virtue. Although authority attaches to certain persons, it still belongs to everyone, because these persons can be chosen from among all the people or because they are actually so chosen. Here, then, is the best form of government (*politia*). It is well-proportioned (*bene commixta*), consisting of kingship, in which only one person is in charge; aristocracy, in which several persons exercise power because of their virtue; and finally democracy, that is, by the people's power (*ex democratia, id est, potestate populi*) inasmuch as the rulers can be chosen from the people, and the people have the right to choose their rulers.⁸⁸

It is clear, then, that Thomas' monarchy is different from what has since his time been given this name. It is not an absolute monarchy, and he has expressly refuted the notion of the divine right of kings. God did not originally set up kings, absolute or otherwise, but judges, because he was afraid that the kingdom might disintegrate into a tyranny. It was only later, in what can almost be called a new burst of anger, that God gave his people kings. And with how many warnings! Far from establishing the divine right of absolute monarchy, God "proclaimed that the kings were usurpers who were arrogating to themselves an unjust right because they were becoming tyrants and robbing their subjects."⁸⁹ The people Thomas has in mind had God for their king, and their only leaders by divine right were judges. If the Jews wanted kings, it was only because God was no longer their ruler. Thus, although Thomas Aquinas firmly holds the principle that monarchy is the best form of government, he is far from thinking that people stand a good chance of being well governed from the mere fact that they have a king. Unless his virtue is perfect (*nisi sit perfecta virtus*

⁸⁸Ibid. At first we may hesitate to translate *secundum virtutem* "according to virtue" (i.e. guided by virtue), or "by reason of virtue," "because of their virtue." The second sense seemed better in view of the commentary on the biblical texts invoked by this reply ("Eligebantur autem," etc.), in which we see that these judges of Israel were "chosen ... *secundum virtutem*." Moreover, the virtue of the kings is the only protection the people have against tyranny: "Regnum est optimum regimen populi, si non corrumpatur; sed, propter magnam potestatem quae regi conceditur, de facili regnum degenerat in tyrannidem, nisi sit perfecta virtus ejus cui talis potestas conceditur" (ibid., ad 2). So the meaning is certain.

⁸⁹Ibid. 1, ad 2 and 3.

ejus), the person who is given such power will easily degenerate into a tyrant. But perfect virtue is rare (*perfecta autem virtus in paucis invenitur*).⁹⁰ We can see, then, what a slight chance there is of people being well governed.

It is not likely that Thomas did any more in this matter than set forth a number of principles. He was not providing a political reform nor a political constitution for future ages. Rather his thought seems to have been moving in an ideal world, where everything unfolds according to the demands of justice under a perfectly virtuous king. We are somewhere or other, in some city or kingdom, a kingdom of, say, three or four cities. Popular elections have returned a number of leaders, all of them chosen for their wisdom and virtue: "So I took the heads of your tribes, wise and experienced men, and set them as heads over you" (Deut 1:15). An aristocracy, some will say! To be sure, says Thomas, "this was aristocratic; but it was democratic in that these rulers were chosen from among all the people. We read in Exodus 18:21: "... choose able men from all the people."⁹¹ From among these wise men who have come from the ranks of the people, the wisest and most virtuous is elected king.⁹² Here he is, then, charged with the frightening task of leading an entire people to its last end, which is to live according to virtue, so that its life may be good in this world and blessed in the next.

This is why it is essential to monarchy that the king be virtuous. If man's end were health, kings would have to be physicians or surgeons. If his end were wealth they would have to be bankers; if knowledge, professors. But the end of the social life is right living, and since right living is living according to virtue, we need virtuous kings. When this virtuous king ascends the throne, what is he going to do? He has to know the paths in the present world leading by way of virtue to eternal happiness. Priests know these ways (Mal 2:17). So the king should learn from them what he has to do, which can be reduced to three points: to establish a life of honor and virtue among his subjects; to maintain this state of affairs after establishing it; and finally, not only to maintain it but to improve it. This sums up the whole art of governing. Without clean, well-

⁹⁰*Ibid.*, ad 2. The excellent preface of Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange to the French translation of *De regno* sounds a more optimistic note. The statement, which he makes his own, that "monarchia est regimen imperfectorum ... , democratia est regimen perfectorum" (*Du gouvernement royal* [Paris: Éditions de la Gazette française, 1926], p. xvi), only holds from the subjects' point of view. It is quite the reverse from that of the sovereign. If there is any system which, for Thomas, demands that the possession of power be perfect, it is monarchy.

⁹¹ST 1-2.105.1, resp.

⁹²*Ibid.*, ad 2: "Instituit tamen a principio, circa regem instituendum primo quidem modum eligendi." The question here under discussion is the Old Law, but we must remember that Thomas sees in it the very model of an *optima politia*. See the *sed contra*: "Ergo per legem populus fuit circa principes bene institutus."

managed and well-provided cities, there can be no moral virtue.⁹³ Without just laws, no peace; without peace, no order or tranquillity to live truly human lives in the practice of justice and charity. The good king is concerned with this alone, and in this he finds his reward here below.

As the soul is in the body and God in the world, so is the king in his kingdom. Loved by his people, he finds in this love a support altogether different from the fear protecting the thrones of tyrants. Riches flow to him without extortion, glory surrounds him, his renown spreads afar. Even if he is denied these rewards, he can look forward to the recompense that God is reserving for him, with the certainty of obtaining it. The ruler of the people is the servant of God, and it is from God that this faithful servant will receive his reward. Those truly royal recompenses—honor and glory—will be his in fuller measure in the degree that his kingly office is higher and more divine. The pagans were confused in thinking that their kings became gods after their death. This is not the king's motive for governing justly. He has been God's deputy among his people, and he can therefore justly expect that, after leading his people to him, he will be closer to God in the next world and more intimately united with him.⁹⁴

With the virtuous sovereign we reach the noblest form of that virtue of justice described by Aristotle as virtue itself. Let us say, at least, that it is the rule of our relations with other people and the guardian of the social life. We might close our study of it right here, in a morality directed to no other end than adapting human beings to the common good of the city. But the moral doctrine of Thomas Aquinas has higher aims imposed upon it by the metaphysics from which its principles are derived. Unlike the human person in Thomas Aquinas, Aristotle's was not a creature. Is it surprising, then, that the intimate bonds uniting the creator and his intelligent creature should establish some kind of society between them? If such a society exists, is it not also subject to the supreme rule of the virtue of justice? This is an almost infinite broadening of perspective which, since metaphysics demands it, moral doctrine does not have the right to reject.

⁹³The detailed account of the measures to be taken was to have come in Book 2 of the *De regno* which, unfortunately, was never finished.

⁹⁴*De regno* 1.7-9 [Leonine ed 42: 456-461.] On the question as to whether this work is a treatise of political theology or of political philosophy see Jacques Maritain, *An Essay on Christian Philosophy*, trans. Edward H. Flannery (New York: Philosophical Library, 1955), pp. 99-100, and *Science and Wisdom*, trans. Bernard Wall (London: G. Bles, Centenary Press, 1940), p. 120, n. 1. See the remarks of M.-D. Chenu in *Bulletin thomiste*, 5 (1928): 298. We shall return to this problem in the general framework of Thomistic moral doctrine. It is very certain that *De regno* is a theological writing. But if we were to say that, consequently, it does not contain Thomas' politics, we should also, for the same reason, have to say that the *Summa theologiae* does not contain his moral teaching. We shall see what enormous difficulties this would raise.

PART III. Chapter Five

The Religious Life

To perform an act of justice is to render someone his due in such a manner that what is rendered is equal to what is owed. Thus two notions are inseparable from that of justice, the notion of debt and the notion of equality. There are virtues, however, in whose definition only one of these notions, that of debt, is contained. Through the notion of debt, they are linked with justice and so are annexed to it, but they are to be distinguished from it in this respect, that they do not bind the one practicing them to pay all that he owes.

The most striking example of this sort of relation is the one binding us to God. What do we owe to God? We owe everything. But it is hardly to be expected that we will pay off our indebtedness to God. It is precisely because we owe everything to him that we cannot pay him back measure for measure. If my neighbor gives me some of his wheat and I give him some of my wine, there is justice; but what sense would there be in my giving him some of my wine if, in order to be able to do so, he should first have to give it to me? This is exactly our case. We cannot give God anything he has not first given us. We have been created rational, and we are the object of a special arrangement of his providence, which governs us for our good and all the other creatures of this world for the same good.

This is why divine providence aims not only at the common good of the human species, but the good of each particular human being. Divine law is addressed personally to all human beings in order to make them subject to God, to attach them to God, and finally to unite them to him by love. For such is the purpose of this law: it prepares the way for the supreme good of the human race by making it enter, through love, a society of union with God.¹ Assuredly, such favors cannot be repaid; but not being able to repay a debt is no authorization to deny it. On the contrary, we are thereby more strictly bound to acknowledge it and to declare ourselves under obligation to him to whom we know we are indebted. For this a special virtue is required, a substitute for the justice that cannot in this case be exercised. The virtue by which we acknowledge a debt toward God that we are unable to acquit is the virtue of religion.²

¹SCG 3.116.

²ST 2-2.80.1, resp. It is the same with the other virtues annexed to justice. A child cannot give its parents all it owes them. Hence we speak of *filial piety* (see *ibid.* 101). There are merits that have to be acknowledged but that it is impossible to recompense. Hence we have the virtue of *respect* (*ibid.* 102). On the other hand, we can feel morally bound to render another his due where there is no legal indebtedness, properly speaking. In these cases it is not the equality that is lacking

We can practice the virtue of religion toward God alone. As Cicero says, it is religion that gives worship to that higher nature called the divine nature.³

It establishes a bond (*religio*=*religare*) whose effect is to attach us before all else to God as to the continuous source of our existence and as to our last end, which must be the object of all our voluntary decisions.⁴ Since the stable disposition to act in this way can only make us better, religion is a virtue. And since there is only one true God, there can only be one virtue of religion worthy of the name.⁵ This is sometimes put more succinctly by saying that there is only one true religion. Moreover, it is a distinct virtue, since it alone insures the definite good of rendering to God the honor that is his due. Whatever is superior has a right to homage. God is superior in a unique way, since he infinitely transcends all existing things and surpasses them in every way. To unique excellence, unique honor is due. We honor a king differently than a father, and we ought to pay a different honor to him whose perfection infinitely exceeds everything else.

Religion is not to be confused with any other virtue, and this should be taken in the strongest sense. It does not only mean that the virtue of religion consists in honoring God more than anything else. The goodness of the infinite being is not only *very much greater* than that of the best of finite beings; it is *essentially something else*. To honor God as he should be honored, an *essentially different honor* must be paid him. This is the full sense of the expression, whose force is only too easily lost by repetition: the virtue of religion consists in rendering God the homage due *to him alone*.⁶

but the debt. For example, it is true that "truth is owed to everyone," but this indebtedness is entirely metaphorical. Our debt here is really our strict obligation to tell the truth. Hence the further virtue annexed to justice, *veracity* or truthfulness (see *ibid.* 109), and its contrary vice, *lying* (*ibid.* 110). Again we may have received services that we cannot repay. These we simply acknowledge by practising the virtue of *gratitude* (*ibid.* 106). The contrary vice is ingratitude (*ibid.* 107). There are still those "deluxe" social virtues, if the term is permissible, which only bind us to embellish life and make it more pleasant, like *liberality* and *affability* (*ibid.* 114 and 117). Their contrary vices are avarice and quarreling (*ibid.* 118 and 116). We can hardly speak of indebtedness here, save in the sense that we have to do our best to increase good manners. But this is enough to permit us to attach such virtues to justice.

³Cicero, *De inventione rhetorica* 2. 53 [ed. with trans. H.M. Hubbell (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London: Heinemann, 1976), p. 328]. Cited in *ST* 2-2.81.1, *sed contra*.

⁴*ST* 2-2.81.1, *resp.*

⁵*Ibid.* 3, *resp.*

⁶*Ibid.* 4, *resp.* See especially the important ad 3, which shows why, on the contrary, the virtue of charity remains the same whether addressed toward God or neighbor. It is because God, in creating his creatures, communicates his goodness to them. Charity, as we shall see, consists in loving God's goodness in that of our neighbor. But God does not communicate his unique and infinite goodness to creatures, and hence only in him can it be honored as it ought to be.

It might very well seem that in speaking of religion we are definitely leaving the order of natural ethics. But the very fact that Thomas borrows his definition of religion from Cicero is enough to show that for him the virtue of religion does not exclusively nor necessarily depend on Christian revelation. Cicero was a religious man. His religion was that of a pagan who, although he did not suspect the existence of grace, was persuaded that there is a "divine nature," and that, since it exists, it has the right to man's worship. The virtue that enables us to fulfill this duty is accordingly a moral virtue related to justice. Consequently, moral science is perfectly in order when it deals with it.⁷

This conclusion may be surprising to those who take the notion of religion in a strict sense and confuse it in practice with the supernatural or Christian life. Thomas does not understand it in this way. The act by which we render to God the worship due to him is, to be sure, directed toward God, but it does not reach him. What gives such an act its value is the intention of rendering homage to God that inspires it. A sacrifice, for example, is the concrete manifestation of one's desire to acknowledge the infinite excellence of the divine nature. Nevertheless, the object of this desire is not God but the rendering of homage to God. Thomas formulates this important distinction when he says that by the virtue of religion God is not an object but an end. If religion were a theological virtue, God would not be its end but its object.⁸ This is the case with the virtue of faith. The act by which we believe, not only that which God says is true, but by which we believe *in God*, the act by which we entrust ourselves to him and attach ourselves to him as to the first truth justifying our faith in his word, is indeed an act of virtue with God as its direct object. It is for this reason that faith is a theological virtue and that religion is not.

Let us hasten to add that religion, though a simple moral virtue, is the highest of all, because the function of the virtues is to direct us to God as to our end, and no virtue brings us as near to him as that which honors him through worship. We can do little enough to honor God, and we are here very far from that perfect equality achieved through the virtue of justice. Yet it is the intention of the will that gives virtue its merit; and although religion fails to repay our debt with all the exactness called for by the excellence of the virtue of

⁷Ibid. 5, resp. Moreover, this is why Thomas shows that the virtue of religion is indispensable to man (SCG 3.119, 120). This is one of the questions "quae ratione investigantur de Deo" (SCG 4.1 [12]). Hence we are once again dealing with problems that directly belong to philosophy, strictly speaking.

⁸ST 2-2.2.2, resp. On the distinction between intellectual, moral and theological virtues see ibid. 1-2.62.2, resp. To the extent that God is their object, the theological virtues bear on an object that exceeds the grasp of human reason. This is not the case with the intellectual and moral virtues. This alone would indicate that religion is not a theological virtue.

justice, it still exceeds justice in the nobility of the intention from which it springs.⁹ If such a thing were possible, religion would be justice toward God.

Insofar as possible, religious worship consists primarily in interior acts by which we recognize that we are subject to God and by which we affirm his glory. These acts constitute the main part of religion. There are those who would like to think they constitute it in its entirety. They take themselves for angels. Anything pertaining to cult and ceremony strikes them as a corruption of true religion, which consists only in serving God in spirit and in truth.

We all know how profound has been the influence of Spinoza's *Tractatus theologico-politicus* in this regard. He was raised in Judaism and could never understand religious rite except in terms of Jewish ritualism. Hence we can say of him, and of many others, that they remain most Jewish in their very opposition to Judaism. The worship about which Thomas is thinking is very different from the kind of worship they are criticizing. It is a worship rendered to God by us, considered in the concrete and substantial oneness of our body and soul. If the body shares in worship, it is because we are our bodies, and God suffers no indignity in the homage paid by a body that was not beneath his dignity to create. It is also because we do not think without our body, nor even without bodies, the consideration of which raises us to knowledge of the divine nature. The body has full right to a place in religion. Indeed, it actually holds a place in it because the knowledge of God is dependent upon it. Rites and ceremonies are only the means by which it takes advantage of this fact. We should see in them signs that make it possible for human thought to ascend to those interior acts by which we accomplish our union with God.¹⁰

Thus religion is established as a moral virtue. But after this rather surprising step, Aquinas takes a second and perhaps even more surprising one: he identifies religion with sanctity. He has to do this if the meaning of ceremony and rite lies in honoring and striving to render homage to God. Sanctity or holiness is not a virtue distinct from religion. It differs from it only with regard to reason, which considers in religion not so much ceremonies, offerings, and sacrifices themselves, as the intention that confers upon them a religious meaning. Doing something for God demands that thought first turn aside from everything else in order to dwell completely upon him. This movement of conversion is a purification. As silver is purified from the lead that debases it, so thought (*mens*) is disengaged from lower things that are always drawing it downward. It strives not to become involved in them, and separates itself from them as much

⁹ST 2-2.81.6, resp. and ad 1.

¹⁰Ibid. 7, resp.; SCG 3.119. Thomas is not ignorant of the text of Jn 4:24: *Spiritus est Deus, et eos qui adorant eum, in spiritu et veritate oportet adorare*, but he concludes from it "quod Dominus loquitur quantum ad id quod est principale et per se intentum in culto divino" (ST 2-2.81.7, ad 1).

as possible, using them only to raise itself toward God. From the fact that it directly seeks the supreme being, the virtue of religion implies a purification of thought, and the resulting purity (*munditia*) is one of the first elements of sanctity.

Religion fastens this purified thought upon God in a twofold fashion: it worships him as a principle and approaches him as its end. *Sanctum* for the Latins was both what had been *purified* and *sanctioned* (*sancitum*). The ancients called *sanctum* anything whose violation the law forbade. A pure thought, one guided and steadied by its two unshakable poles, its First Principle and its Last End, is accordingly a holy thought. Thus sanctity and religion are in reality identical.¹¹

But religion demands still more. When thought renders to God the worship that is his due, it cannot dwell upon its own principle without recognizing its indebtedness to this principle for everything it has and is. This holds not only for thought itself but for man as well. To be aware of this dependence is to accept it spontaneously. The man who knows he belongs entirely to God wants to be entirely God's. When the will is dedicated to God from within, yields itself to him and devotes itself to his service, it is in possession of the virtue of devotion. The ancients were well aware of this. Let us but remember those heroes who were "devoted" to their false gods and who sacrificed their very lives for the safety of an army—men like Decius of whom Livy speaks.* Here is to be found devotion, that is, the virtue consisting in a will ever ready to serve God.¹²

Starting from this point, this highest of the moral virtues discloses some of its hidden riches. The carrying out of a ceremony that is not quickened by holiness of mind is neither worship nor religion. Such rites are signs signifying nothing. If the mind is to be fixed upon God so firmly that it is oblivious to anything else, if from holiness of mind there is to spring the will to offer one's entire self to God, the soul must first consider God's goodness and generosity and its own deficiency and need of help. It matters little that such considerations be called meditation or contemplation; but they are the indispensable sources of devotion.¹³ Religion, holiness, devotion and contemplation are inseparable. The contemplation referred to is not necessarily something scientific. Indeed, it is even possible for science to absorb the mind so completely that it makes a man over-confident in himself and prevent him from yielding himself entirely to God. A simple and holy woman, unhindered by science, may possess deep and abiding devotion. But we must not conclude from this that devotion in-

¹¹ST 2-2.81.1, resp.

* [Thomas refers to two Roman soldiers, both named Decius, who gave their lives for their army. See Livy, *Roman History*, 8.9, 10.28, ed. and trans B.O. Foster (London: Heinemann/New York: Putnam, 1919—) 4: 37-38, 467-469.]

¹²Ibid. 82.1, resp.

¹³Ibid. 3, resp. and ad 3. On the psychological effects—joy and sadness—accompanying devotion see *ibid.* 4, resp. On the acts of worship—prayer, adoration, sacrifices and offerings—see *ibid.* 83-86.

creases with ignorance. The more science a man has, or the more he has of any perfection, the more homage he is able to render God. The more he can place in God's service, the greater is his devotion.

In this way the society between God and man, which is the essence of religion, becomes firmly established. Man speaks with God, and this is prayer, in which human reason contemplates its Principle and dares to turn confidently to him to make known its wants. God the creator is not a Necessary Being,* but a Father. Although we cannot expect God to alter the order of his providence to answer our prayers, we can and should pray that God's will be done. Thus, through prayer we become deserving of what God has decided from eternity to grant us.¹⁴

Though Thomas is clearly thinking here of Christian prayer, he did not exclude other kinds of prayer, or other forms of worship, or other manifestations of the virtue of religion. After all, how could he ignore the fact that false religions, even paganism itself, were still religions? Nevertheless, the problem of knowing what morality and what virtues we are dealing with when following his explanation becomes important, and the answer is not simple. Assuredly, since we are following the *Summa theologiae*, it is a question of Christian and supernatural morality. But everything points to the fact that Thomas is not unmindful of natural morality. He does not claim that Christianity discovered the four cardinal virtues. It would take a long time indeed to point out his borrowings from Aristotle, Cicero, and other pagan moralists in dealing with them. Once more does the revealed take hold of the revealable in order to perfect and rectify it.

Thomas Aquinas often affirms that the pagans knew and practiced virtue. Human nature itself demanded it. The germ and seed of the acquired moral virtues are innate in all of us, and these seeds are themselves of a higher nature than the very virtues they are capable of bringing forth.¹⁵ These are the natural virtues, formed by the exercise of morally good acts through which we acquire the stable habit of performing them. Pagan virtues are of this kind. The virtues Christianity added to them are of a different nature. All virtues are defined in relation to the good toward that which they are directed. The end of natural moral virtues is the welfare of the city or state, which is the highest human good because it embraces and rules all the others. It concerns the terrestrial city, that is, political bodies whose history we are acquainted with: Athens, Rome or the place we happen to be living in, no matter where it may be.

* [A reference to Avicenna, for whom God is of himself the Necessary Being. See Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (New York: Random House, 1955), pp. 207-208.]

¹⁴ST 2-2.83.2, resp.

¹⁵ST 1-2.63.2, ad 3. See *ibid.* 1, resp.

Now, the Incarnation, which is at the very center of Christianity, has completely transformed the human condition. By making human nature divine in the person of Christ, God has made us sharers in the divine nature (*consortes divinae naturae*, 2 Pet 1:4). We are here in the presence of a profound mystery. The Incarnation is the miracle of miracles, the absolute miracle, the norm and measure of all others. For the Christian at least, it is the source of a new life, the pledge of a new society, a society founded on friendship between man and God and among all those who love one another in God. This friendship is love itself. So when Christianity substitutes God for the human city as the end of the moral life, it is obliged to add to the natural moral virtues an entirely new order of virtues as supernatural as the end whose attainment they make possible. In other words, as the terrestrial city has its own virtues, so too has the City of God—virtues by which we become no longer merely fellow-citizens of the Athenians or Romans but “fellow citizens with the saints and members of God’s household” (Eph 2:19).¹⁶ Supernatural in their end, these moral virtues must also be supernatural in their source. The natural man is unable to transcend his own nature. The germs of the virtues necessary to do this are not in him; they come to him from without, infused into him by God-like gifts or graces, for no man can be expected to acquire by himself something he is by nature incapable of acquiring.¹⁷

There is accordingly a twofold distinction to be made among virtues: first, between theological and moral virtues; second, between natural moral virtues and supernatural moral virtues. Theological virtues and supernatural moral virtues have in common that they are neither acquired nor acquirable by the practice of what is good. As we have said, we cannot naturally practice the good here in question. How could we form a habit of doing something of which we are incapable? On the other hand, the theological virtues are distinguished from the supernatural moral virtues in that the former have God for their immediate object, while the latter bear directly upon certain definite kinds of human acts. Since they pertain to supernatural moral virtues, these acts are directed toward God as to their end. But they are only directed toward him; they do not reach him. The virtue of religion furnishes us with a striking example of this difference. It is in every way a virtue directed toward God. One who possesses this virtue of religion must render to God the worship that is his due, when, where and as it should be rendered. The supernatural moral virtues allow him to act *for God*; the theological virtues allow him to act *with God* and *in God*. By faith we believe God and in God. By hope we entrust ourselves to God and hope in him because he is the very substance of our faith and hope. By charity the act of human love reaches to God himself. We cherish him as a friend whom we love and by whom we are loved, and who through friendship is transported

¹⁶Ibid. 4, resp.

¹⁷Ibid. 3 and 4.

into us and we into him. For my friend I am a friend; hence I am for God what he is for me.¹⁸

As to what moral virtues Thomas is actually speaking about in the *Summa*, the answer in principle is simple. He is speaking of the infused supernatural moral virtues and not the acquired natural moral virtues. However, we must not forget that philosophy is never absent from this synthesis of the revealed and the revealable. It is present in the moral parts as well as elsewhere. Perhaps it is especially present in the moral parts, because here it represents that nature which is presupposed by grace in order to perfect it and bring it to its goal. Thus, we are brought back by circumstances to that problem with which we were faced at the start of our inquiry, except that now it is in the realm of morals, whereas then it was in metaphysics.

Is there a "natural morality," founded on natural moral virtues, that can lay claim to the authority of Thomas Aquinas? The only way of approaching this problem historically is to raise it as Thomas did. Before the Incarnation can there be moral virtues worthy of the name without the theological virtue of charity? Put this way, the problem is clear-cut, because every moral virtue residing in us through charity is a supernatural infused moral virtue. Thus we have first to know whether Aquinas recognizes a moral order anterior to charity, then whether he recognizes a natural moral order existing side by side with charity.

Certainly natural moral virtues are possible apart from charity. The virtues of the pagans were and still are of this order. Now, what good were they? Only the theologian can explain the relationship between nature and grace. To reject theology is to sidestep the issue. Theology's first comment on the natural state of man without grace is this: his will has been wounded by original sin, with a consequent disordering of his concupiscence that no longer allows him to act always as his reason prescribes. The philosopher may not admit this religious doctrine, but he should at least be able to understand it as a religious sentiment very much alive in Thomas Aquinas and forming the basis of Kant's entire moral teaching, that man seems to be able to be better than he actually is. The divorce between his reason and his sensibility, however we regard it, is the underlying problem of many of our moral difficulties. The Christian solution of this problem is the doctrine of original sin. To accept it as Genesis explains it, is to be a theologian. To prefer Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason's* conceptual representation of this account is to be a philosopher, and the deeper the mystery we pretend to understand, the deeper a metaphysician we are. Thomas proceeds

¹⁸ST 2-2.23.1, resp. The supernatural moral virtues are distinguished from the natural moral virtues in a very concrete way because their acts can be different. Thus to be temperate as one ought to be for one's own good or for the public order is not to be temperate as one ought to be for God. The just mean is altered by the end that measures it (ibid. 1-2.63. 4, resp.). By the standards of natural temperance, monastic fast appears excessive, but by supernatural standards many a sober and moderate person is not nearly temperate enough.

as a theologian, saying simply that without original sin our will would be naturally capable of complying with the orders issued by our reason. But this is no longer the case. Here we have one reason for the weakness of any natural moral virtue not informed by charity.¹⁹

With relation to their end, however, the virtues have a far more serious limitation. Indeed, the whole value of a virtue, what actually makes it a virtue, consists in the fact that it makes the one possessing it better. But the only way to make us better is to direct us toward the good. The role of the good in morality is the same as that of indemonstrable principles in science, from which sciences are derived. Now, if we are mistaken about these principles, can we acquire a true science? Assuredly not. If, then, we are mistaken about the end, can we acquire virtues fully deserving of the name? No, and for the same reason.²⁰ The Gospel alone has revealed to us that our true end is union with God. Hence it is essential to purely natural moral virtues that they have ends that fall short of our supernatural end. Since all natural moral virtues suffer this inevitable limitation, none of them is fully capable of satisfying the definition of virtue.²¹ If the objection is made that the pagans could develop sciences and techniques fully satisfying the demands of learning and art, we have to reply that the argument does not hold. Every science or technique is referred by definition to some particular good. The mathematician seeks to know the relations of quantity, the physicist to inquire into the nature of bodies, the metaphysician to analyze being as being. Even in this last case, where the object is more general than the others, it is still a particular object, since it is the object of metaphysics alone and not of physics or mathematics. These sciences have always been and still are accessible to us without grace. When they attain the definite objects that specify them, they reach their goals.

It is different with the virtues. A virtue makes both us who possess it and the work we do good. The proper function of moral virtues is then, purely and simply, to make us good (*virtutes morales ... simpliciter faciunt hominem bonum*). To do this they have to refer us, not to a given particular good, but to the highest and absolute good, which is the last end of human life. It is only the virtue of charity that can do this. Hence no natural moral virtue satisfies perfectly the definition of virtue. Since it does not possess perfectly the essence of a virtue, it is not perfectly a virtue.²²

¹⁹This thesis is set forth in the discussion of the virtue of patience (ibid. 2-2.136.3, ad 1).

²⁰Ibid. 23.7, ad 2.

²¹This argument is presented in considerable detail and fully developed in the profound study of Jacques Maritain, *An Essay on Christian Philosophy*, trans. Edward H. Flannery (New York: Philosophical Library, 1955), pp. 61-100; also in his *Science and Wisdom*, trans. Bernard Wall (London: G. Bles, Centenary Press, 1940), pp. 137-241. This last work will direct the reader to the criticisms raised by Maritain's personal position on this question.

²²ST 2-2.23.7, ad 3.

Having gone this far, the question inevitably arises whether they are still true virtues. Thomas develops this point with his customary brevity and precision in an article in the *Summa theologiae*, in which he asks whether there can be a true virtue where there is no supernatural charity. We can see at once what is at stake. Had he replied that without supernatural charity there is no true virtue, it would immediately follow that natural morality and moral philosophy were impossible. If he decides that true virtues can exist even without charity, then both are possible. His reply is definite: there can be true virtues where there is no charity. Then he adds that, although these are true virtues, they are not perfect without charity.

Being a true virtue is to be really a virtue, that is, to fulfill the definition of a virtue. For a virtue to measure up to this, it must first of all dispose its possessor toward the good. In this sense, any stable disposition to act that has the effect of rendering its possessor better is a true virtue. On the other hand, there is a hierarchy of goods. In the case of any given being, there can always be assigned a principal and absolute good that is the rule and measure of all others. The closer its virtues approach this limit, the more will they merit the name of virtue. Every one of them is undoubtedly a true virtue, but the only one that will satisfy the definition of virtue perfectly is the one that disposes its possessor to the highest good. In our case this highest good is the sight of God, and the virtue that helps us to it is charity. Only charity, or at least those virtues directed and informed by charity, fully deserve this name. In this sense, there can be no true virtue, absolutely speaking, without charity (*simpliciter vera virtus sine caritate esse non potest*).

From this it does not follow that, even where charity is wanting, the other habits of doing good are not truly virtues. Let us for a moment consider one of them, that pagan "devotion" of the Roman heroes who "devoted" or dedicated themselves as a sacrifice to the gods for the safety of the army. The object of this virtue was a real good—the common good of both army and city. Every act dictated by the will for a good is a virtuous act. This sacrifice, therefore, took its origin from a true virtue, because it was willingly undertaken for a true good. However, the good at stake was a particular good, not the highest good. What was wanting in this sacrifice was that it was not dictated by, in addition to the love of country, the love of God, the highest good in which all goods are included. We have to say of every act performed under these conditions that the virtue accomplishing it is a true but imperfect virtue (*erit quidem vera virtus, sed imperfecta*).²³ We would say today, the sacrifice of Decius was one thing, that of Joan of Arc another.

²³*Ibid.* resp. Thomas does not say anything different, even in those passages in which he declares that "solae virtutes infusae sunt perfectae, et simpliciter dicendae virtutes" (*ibid.* 1-

We see at once the consequences of all this for morality. Charity is a theological and supernatural virtue. Without it there is no perfect virtue. Hence there can be no perfectly virtuous moral life where this supernatural virtue is wanting and where there is no grace.

At the same time, since every firm disposition to do good is a true virtue, a virtuous moral life is still possible without charity and without grace. The *Nicomachean Ethics*, the treatises of Cicero, the histories of Livy, still bear witness that such virtues really existed. The moral lives that such virtues directed were not perfectly virtuous, but the men possessing them were truly virtuous men.

This remark does not solve the problem raised by the Thomistic notion of morality or, better, by the notion of a Thomistic natural morality. When Thomas looked into the past, he saw the human race before the coming of grace submerged, as it were, in darkness or struggling along in a sort of twilight. The best humans possessed imperfect moral virtues, temperance or fortitude for example, but in them there were only natural or acquired inclinations to do good. Not only were these good habits inconstant, they were somewhat wanting in integration. They were not firmly rooted in the final end which, once charity has made it a reality, so arranges things that the presence of one virtue implies that of all the others. As Thomas puts it, only perfect virtues are "connected," the imperfect virtues are not.²⁴ Only the infused virtues are perfect. They alone merit unreservedly to be called virtues, because they alone direct us to our absolutely ultimate end. As for the other virtues which are acquired and only direct us to a relatively ultimate end, that is, ultimate only within a certain order, they are only virtues in a relative and not in an absolute sense. In the light of the Gospel the moral splendor of antiquity is but darkness. As St. Paul says (Rom 14:23), "whatever does not proceed from faith is sin," and the Gloss cites a phrase of Augustine that Thomas makes his own: "Where the knowledge of truth is wanting, even when morals are excellent, the virtue is false."²⁵ We can hardly imagine that Aquinas foresaw the return of such times, save perhaps

2.65.1, resp.). Without charity no virtue can be purely and simply a virtue. We have to add, or understand, the word "imperfect." Still, however imperfect, a virtue remains a virtue. For a habit to lose its right to this title, its object would have to be a false good, one that only appears to be good. In this case, the habit is no longer a "vera virtus, sed falsa similitudo virtutis" (ibid. 2-2.23.7, resp.).

²⁴Ibid. 1-2.65.1, resp.

²⁵Ibid. 2, resp. An extreme expression that departs from Thomas' usual language. As we have seen, he prefers to say that these are true virtues, though imperfect. He certainly grants that they are "false" as far as supernatural merit is concerned—and that is what Augustine means. When Thomas speaks of them as relatively true, or true in a certain sense or in a certain aspect (*secundum quid*), he maintains—on a plane that does not interest Augustine—that they deserve the name of virtue exactly to the extent that they satisfy the definition of a virtue. Insofar as each of them does this, it is a virtue.

just before the final catastrophe. Whatever the case, he wrote his *Summa theologiae* for his own age and was setting forth a moral code for Christians. To ask ourselves what kind of purely natural morality Thomas would propose for our century and to attempt an answer, is to seek to go further than history can properly take us. It seems rather likely, judging from what he has to say about it, that his moral teaching would be confined within much stricter limits than those sometimes set up for it.

Without grace, a purely natural code of ethics would have to assign as man's final end what is in fact the highest human end, namely, the common good of the city. It would have the right to exact of everyone all that the common good demands, and nothing more. A primary order of moral law would then become strictly necessary. This means that there would be civil laws, promulgated by the head of the state, (whatever the political government in force might be), and that they would insure the submission of individuals to their common end. Thus moral doctrine would be a kind of social eudaemonism, with rules that fall into line with civil law. Now, the state only concerns itself with acts. Occasionally, perhaps, some determination of intention would be necessary to establish the nature of the act, for example, the incapacity of the head of state or treason, accident or murder. But outside of such cases, the order of intention would not fall under a civil moral code. Even the order of acts would be largely outside of the state's control. There are all kinds of morally good acts that it would not prescribe, and many bad acts that it would not forbid. Aquinas remarks several times that laws are made for the people; to ask all to do what can only be expected of a few is to be constantly placing the majority in the wrong. The common good demands that the law should not demand from everyone all the virtues or perfect virtue.

Is there another virtue beyond what the law demands? There is indeed. Even Aristotle said that to be good is different from being a good citizen. This correction, however, does not affect the last end, which is the rule of moral action. Good and evil can still be determined from the point of view of the common good. Those people are virtuous who obey reason spontaneously and simply, behaving as the common good demands and as their moral conscience prescribes. Friendship will ease the rigors of justice, and the long list of personal virtues will complement bare respect for law. The common good will also be served, because—if such a thing were possible—nothing would be of greater advantage to the city than to be able to count among its members only virtuous citizens. All of us are so aware of this, that in the conduct of our lives we do all we can to regulate our acts by the moral laws. We live under the law better than the letter of the law demands, because our will accepts, beyond the law, the very principle of law.

We are still faced with the question: of all the things a virtuous person wants to do, what *could he do*; and then to what extent *would he know* what virtue demands of him? Thomas has already answered the first question: in the

state of fallen nature people are no longer able to accomplish all the good they would want to do. They will be relatively virtuous as they gradually become accustomed to perform naturally good acts. From time to time, inspired by a great love of the common good, and not without the help of God (for divine providence as well as grace affects nature), one of them will rise to an heroic act. But a defect shows that even these heroes do not perfectly possess the virtue that inspires them. They may be heroic in one respect, moved perhaps by passion as much as by virtue, but they will be weak in other respects. The courageous person will not be temperate, the prudent person will not be just. Charity directs every virtue to the final end, and makes every virtuous act, whatever its nature, a desire of the absolute good. Lacking charity, all the relative virtues will be so unconnected that the presence of one will not guarantee the presence of the others. The moral philosopher knows very well what perfect virtue is in the order of pure natural morality or in the actual state of human nature. Aristotle has defined it very well, but no one fully possesses it. The moral philosopher also knows that perfect virtues are "connected" and so closely tied together that any one of them requires all the others. Aristotle conclusively established the fact, but the virtues are not linked together in this way in anyone. In short, the pure natural order of morality is such that the best of people are only relatively virtuous. Moreover, they are relatively virtuous only insofar as they know about virtue, and what do they know of it? No one knows that the love of man for God is the basis, form, and bond without which no virtue is perfect. If they hear it said, they deny it. None of their good acts are done for the right reason. In a situation in which intention determines the value of an act, as they themselves avow, no act will be done with the right intention.

Hence this conclusion: There is no sense in pretending to arrive at natural virtues by separating them from grace, in a doctrine in which grace, by healing nature, actually makes nature capable of having virtues. Once again, in dealing with the concrete, we must cast out the phantoms of pure essences. Thomism does not ask us to choose between nature and grace, but to perfect nature through grace. We do not have to choose between natural and theological virtues, nor are we invited simply to add the theological virtues to natural virtues. We have only to ask the theological virtues to help the natural virtues to realize fully their proper perfection as virtues.²⁶

²⁶We often see Thomists who hold for a purely natural moral philosophy, showing a tendency not to cut the bridges linking them with those who hold a moral philosophy without religion. They wish—and their motive is a very high one—to salvage at least morality from the shipwreck that religion has suffered among certain societies and social groups. Perhaps there is a failure to see exactly what is at stake. First, there is the danger of making Christian virtues detestable by transferring their name to acts that imitate them exteriorly but lack their Christian vitality. It is impossible to "practice charity" without having it. Second, to require people to have the Christian virtues in the name of morality alone is to impose obligations for

Some concrete examples will help us to understand this problem. Let us take again the virtue of humility. We have already noted with Thomas that Aristotle said nothing, nor needed to say anything, about it, because his morality was essentially a morality of the city. But we should now underline another side to the problem. Whether Aristotle knew about humility or not, it is nonetheless a moral and not a theological virtue. So long as Christians live in a city and are able to modify their ambition by showing constant respect for the grandeur of God, there will be humble men residing in that city. We might have suspected this, since Thomas classifies humility among the moral virtues even while recognizing that a good citizen does not have to be humble, and that he does not owe the city any more than to keep his proper place and obey its laws.²⁷ But there is no need for conjecture on this point, because this very objection is raised in the *Summa theologiae*, and Thomas' reply is as formal as it can be:

Humility, it seems, is not a part of moderation or temperance. Indeed, it deals primarily with man's submissiveness to God. And to have God for their object is characteristic of theological virtues. Humility, accordingly, should be placed among the theological virtues rather than made a part of temperance or moderation. The answer to this is that the theological virtues deal with the last end, that is, with the first principle in the appetitive order, and accordingly they are the causes of all the other virtues (*sunt causae omnium aliarum virtutum*). Nevertheless, the fact that humility is caused by reverence for God does not prevent its being a part of moderation or temperance.²⁸

This is a perfectly clear case in which a moral virtue owes its existence to a theological virtue.

which there is no basis. This will ultimately be discovered, with the result that these false natural virtues will break down under a criticism from which the authentic Christian virtues themselves will suffer. The more our duty to God is made to deviate from its first objective and exploited for other purposes the graver the consequences for religion. When Christian morality is maintained for some other end than Christ, it serves the interest of that other end. Then we see the opponents of the Christian virtues reproach them as "the opium of the people." To be sure, so long as they are Christian, they are no such thing. But when they cease to be Christian, they can hardly be regarded otherwise. From every point of view, even that of apologetics, the teaching of Thomas does not seem to countenance such an attitude. There is in it, quite contrary to the intention of those who adopt it, a distortion of good. It is unfortunate that Christianity should be made a victim in any case, but tragic that it should appear as an accomplice. To have the right to challenge this charge, we must continually remind people that if they still want the natural virtues of Christian morality, they must continue to want Christ.

²⁷Ibid. 2-2.161.1, ad 5.

²⁸Ibid. 4, ad 1. It might be objected that Thomas is here considering humility as an infused moral virtue. This is possible, but it would follow that humility should be struck from the catalogue of the natural virtues and excluded from morality. Either it is a Christian virtue or it ceases to exist.

An analogous, though not identical case, is that of the virtue of patience. We are apt to think this virtue very common, since the occasions on which we are forced to exercise it are far from rare. But if we have any such notion, then we have a poor understanding of what patience is, because (unless I am mistaken) it is the only moral virtue of which Thomas asked, in an article of the *Summa* especially devoted to the question, whether it is possible to possess it without grace. Once again, we are dealing with a moral virtue properly speaking. Thomas could show less hesitation over it, since he had already connected it to the cardinal virtue of fortitude, citing Cicero's *De inventione rhetorica*, c. 54: "Tully takes it as a part of fortitude."²⁹ Cicero knew nothing about the Incarnation nor the theological virtues. When he spoke about patience, he certainly had in mind a natural virtue. Aquinas was so conscious of this that he himself brought up the same objection: "Among those not in the state of grace, there are some who have a greater horror of the evils of vice than of bodily evils. Hence we read that there were pagans who put up with many evils so as not to betray their country nor be guilty of any other shameful deed. Now, this is truly to be patient. It would seem, therefore, that there can be patience without the help of grace."

It is clear that Aquinas knew the story of Horatius Cocles.* However, if such fortitude of soul is what is meant by patience, it is necessary to start much lower. A man can submit to a surgical operation in order to save his life. In a more rugged age, when amputations were carried out without anesthetic, it took considerable fortitude of will to undergo such an operation. But was this patience? To put up with pain in order to get well is but loving one's body well enough to submit to suffering in order to save it. We might better call this endurance (*tolerantia malorum*). It is a good thing to have, but it is a specifically distinct virtue from that of the hero who accepts torture in order to save, not his body, but his country. To undergo death for one's country is quite different from undergoing suffering in order to avoid death. The ancients called this "patience," and not without reason, for, humanly speaking, to die for one's country is the hardest and noblest sacrifice a person can make. However, even here it is not a question of a supernatural virtue. When God created man to live in society, he made him capable of the natural virtues necessary for the maintenance of that society: "The good of a political virtue is commensurate with human nature." There must be persons, then, who are naturally capable of such sacrifices. Their will can make such an endeavor, though not (for Thomas does not confuse heroes with ordinary people) "without the help of God." This divine assistance, which takes human nature to its very limit, is still not the same

²⁹Ibid. 136.4, *sed contra*.

* [The legendary Roman hero (sixth century BC) who defended the Sublician bridge in Rome against Porsenna's Etruscan army.]

as grace, which takes nature beyond its limits. Supernatural grace, however, must be present if one is to endure all evils and sufferings rather than lose grace itself. To prefer this supernatural good to all natural goods is to love God above all things, and in this charity consists, an entirely different matter. Therefore it is no longer the same thing at all: "It is impossible to have patience without the help of grace,"³⁰ and here he is talking about true patience.

In Thomism, then, it seems difficult to isolate supernatural charity from the virtues of the personal and social life. Natural religion, which is only one natural moral virtue among many, is unable to perfect them as virtues. Accordingly, the supernatural religious life is the practical, necessary condition of any personal or social life built upon natural virtues fully deserving of the name. This religious life is the work of grace within us. This participation in the divine life is the germ of a new life for us. From the moment that we, as natural beings, receive this free gift, we have something supernatural in us that comes from God. This something is very much ours. We truly possess it, so that henceforth we will be able to attain *of ourselves* the natural good that is our ultimate end. Henceforth we are leading a life of participation in the divine life through the presence and life of this principle within us. This is what is called the supernatural life. Grace, which is the seed of this life, affects us in our deepest self, the very essence of our soul, regenerating and, as it were, re-creating it.

The essence of the soul thus affected is still that of a soul endowed with reason and intelligence. It is because the human soul is capable of intellectual knowledge and therefore of friendship with God, that it is able to receive this divine, supernatural gift. Thus it can be seen that when grace spreads out from the essence of the human soul into its various powers, it first affects the highest of all, namely, its knowing power or intellect, along with reason, which is nothing else than its activity. What makes human nature an intelligent nature, or, if you wish, human nature insofar as it is intelligent, is designated by the term "mind" (*mens*). It is because of this that we, unlike creatures lacking reason, are created in the image and likeness of God. This quality of being the image of God is co-essential to us because it is one with the rationality of our nature. To be a mind is to be naturally capable of knowing and loving God. To be able to do this is one with the very nature of thinking. It is as natural for us to be the image of God as to be a rational animal, that is, to be human. The first effect of grace, therefore, is to perfect our resemblance to God by divinizing our soul, our mind, and consequently our whole nature.³¹ From the moment

³⁰ST 2-6.161.3, resp. and ad 2. This article was written under the direct influence of a work of Augustine. Thomas refers expressly to his *De patientia* (PL 40: 611-626). See particularly 15, n. 12 (617-618) and 16, nn. 13-14 (618-619).

³¹For all these theological problems see Ambroise Gardeil, *La structure de l'âme et l'expérience mystique*, 2 vols. (Paris: Gabalda, 1927).

we have grace, we can love God with a love worthy of him, since this love is divine in its origin. God can accordingly accept it. By the grace of God we become holy and just in his eyes. The life of grace consists accordingly in the knowledge and love of God by a rational soul that has been made a sharer in the divine nature and, thanks to God, capable of living in society with him.³²

Socrates' precept, taken over and given a deeper meaning by Christian thought, at last comes fully into its own. It is our duty to know ourselves, not to be mistaken about our nature, and to discern what in our nature confers on it its eminent dignity.³³ Not everyone does this. We are a substantial unity of an intellect and a body, on the borderline of two worlds: the intelligible that we reach through our mind and the material that we perceive through our senses. So we have only one natural life but two ways of using it, depending upon whether we choose to turn toward intelligible objects or bodies. In fact, nature demands that we move in both worlds. We have already seen that human knowledge can only have access to the intelligible world by way of the senses. Thus the natural movement of reason necessarily begins by directing us toward the world of bodies, whose existence and qualities we perceive by our senses. Gradually we can construct a science of material bodies, determining with increasing accuracy their nature and laws. Thus step by step we acquire a habitus, an intellectual virtue already designated in its proper place as a science. No matter how high or perfect they are, all sciences have this in common, that they deal with the intelligible enclosed in something sensible. Even mathematics is tied to the sensible by its object, which is quantity. Since matter endures in time, we can say that all sciences of nature deal with temporal things.

To the extent that human reason, which always remains one and the same, is at work in acquiring science, it is called "inferior reason," a term designating reason itself in the use (*officium*) which has just been defined.³⁴ On the other hand, reason can be directed toward the world of such supra-sensible realities as God, being as being, the good, the true, and the beautiful. This is the realm of the incorporeal, the non-temporal, the eternal. Since its object is specifically distinct from that of the sciences, we must regard the knowledge we can acquire of it as specifically distinct from scientific knowledge. It is called wisdom. The

³²On Thomas' notion of the spiritual life see Ambroise Gardeil, *La vraie vie chrétienne* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1935).

³³See my *Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy*, pp. 209-228.

³⁴On the Augustinian origin of the distinction between *ratio inferior* and *ratio superior* see my *The Christian Philosophy of St. Bonaventure*, trans. Lawrence E.M. Lynch (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1960), pp. 117; 302, n. 8. Thomas refers to Augustine and interprets him very exactly in *ST* 1.79.9, resp. and ad 3. The importance of the role this distinction plays in Thomism has been pointed out by Maritain, *Science and Wisdom*, pp. 155-161, and by M.-D. Chenu, "Ratio superior et inferior. Un cas de philosophie chrétienne," *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 29 (1940): 84-89.

use we make of our reason in striving to acquire wisdom, whether the wisdom of metaphysics, or still more, that of theology, is called "superior reason." If it is by our intellect that we are specifically placed in our high rank, in the image of God and above the beast, it can be seen that we ought to move, as though by a natural inclination, toward the noblest objects our intellect can know. By rights this is how it should be. That in fact it is otherwise is only a further indication of the lack of balance human nature seems to suffer, which raises a problem for the philosopher that only the theologian can answer.

This is not the most serious problem. Not content with preferring science to wisdom, we even go so far as to believe that we can always better understand the higher when we can reduce it to the lower. We find that even science is far too lofty for most of us. Held down by the fearful weight of an uncontrolled sensibility, many are only with difficulty aware of the call of the intellect and reason. Their soul has sunk into their belly. In this sense Platonism is so profoundly right. When a man has buried his mind in the tomb of his body, he can no longer truly be said to know himself. To be sure, he knows that he is made up of soul and body, but he has so completely abdicated his royal dignity that he even seems to have lost its memory. Forgetting it, he forgets himself, because when a man does anything it is his "head" or his rational mind (*mens rationalis*) that does it. He cannot ignore the existence of that mind and still know what he is.³⁵

When grace divinizes the human soul, it not only re-establishes for the benefit of the eternal the balance that had once been severely broken in favor of the temporal, but it makes a new life spring up, a life freely given to nature. Because this life participates in the divine life, by reason of its birth it will open out spontaneously into the realm of the eternal. It is called the "spiritual life," a term that in its strong sense implies that absolute transcendence with regard to the body and time that is characteristic of divine things. Since it is by charity that our participation in the divine is brought about, the spiritual life is the supernatural life of a soul divinized by charity.³⁶

This seems to be the place to understand how the natural moral virtues dovetail into the infused moral virtues and the theological virtues, as the author of the *Summa theologiae* clearly taught. To disentangle the virtues in this theological synthesis so as to arrive at purely natural virtues is dangerous indeed, at least if the objective is to discover a moral doctrine that can still be called Thomistic. To dissociate the virtues from grace is not to bring them to the state

³⁵ST 2-2.25.7, resp.

³⁶Hence the supernatural life develops in the mind. The fact that it is the will that is the subject of charity (ST 1-2.24.1, resp.) is in no way opposed to this. The will is an *appetitus intellectivus* and belongs by full right to the order of thought. The doctrine of the image of the Trinity in the soul of man clearly implies this.

of nature, but to the state of fallen nature; it is to transfer them from one theological state to another. To be precise, it is to bring them to that state in which, among all its possible states, nature is least itself, wounded as it is in its power to act for the good and to fortify itself with genuine virtues, which alone make it capable of fulfilling its end. This is why the natural morality Aquinas describes belongs to a nature healed by grace, a nature that at last recovers a kind of fullness by reason of the divine life that dwells in its very depths.

It is impossible to consider natural morality from a truly Thomistic point of view without binding it to the spiritual life, whose fruit is the perfection of that morality. Those who would attempt such a study should be on their guard against the fundamental error of considering each moral virtue to be crowned with a theological double, whose function is to do the same thing better and in the same way. The natural virtues remain what they were; it is the one who possesses them who has changed. Natural superior reason acquires, after a long and patient effort, the virtue of wisdom, the summit of the intellectual and the moral life. The one who possesses it is called wise. Thanks to this intellectual virtue, the wise person has become capable of knowing divine and eternal things as correctly judged by a well-informed reason. The supernatural gift of wisdom acts in an entirely different way in the soul reborn through grace. It relates the wise person's soul to divine things themselves, while at the same time making it divine. The gift of wisdom, then, does not add a superior reason to the natural superior reason, but it causes reason, in its investigation of the divine, to feel as it were at home therein, instinctively sensing what is true, long before grasping its demonstration. The gift of wisdom makes reason capable of guiding the soul toward truth if we are seeking it, and in many cases it is sufficient to excuse us from doing so. Natural theology for a Christian is the work of a superior reason essentially identical with that of any other metaphysician, but of a reason penetrated with a deep spiritual life that gives it a connaturality with the realities of which it speaks. That is why it speaks of them better.³⁷

All wisdom is a knowledge of divine things making possible a sound judgment about them. The gift of wisdom dwells in the understanding, making it connatural with divine things and causing it to share in the light and stability of God's ideas. The wise man not only contemplates in the light of what Augustine loved to call the "eternal" rules in order to know, but he also consults them in

³⁷ST 2-2.45.2, resp. In this text, Thomas uses a classic illustration to which he returns again and again. There are two ways of speaking about chastity: that of the professor of ethics who knows and teaches this virtue because he possesses the science of ethics; and that of the chaste man who, even though he knows no science of morals, instinctively judges correctly between what is chaste and what is unchaste. He judges it "per quamdam connaturalitatem." Thus it is that the gift of wisdom enriches higher reason by linking it to its own object, the divine. Note that this gift belongs to every person in the state of grace and free from mortal sin (ibid. 5, resp.).

order to act. In a soul whose spiritual life is united to the divine, the gift of wisdom has not only a speculative but a practical efficacy. It not only directs contemplation but action as well.³⁸

Nothing better illustrates the "vital" character of spirituality than this claim of supernatural wisdom to a practical function. Considered as an acquired natural virtue, wisdom is one of those purely speculative intellectual habits of which Thomas states that "they do not perfect the appetitive part [of the soul], nor affect it in any way, but only the intellectual part."³⁹ Cognitive in origin, its function is to regulate all other knowledge as such, that is, to enable us to see what is true, not to do what is good. Natural wisdom is accordingly a virtue of which the intellect is not only the seat but the cause. This is not the case with infused wisdom, the gift of the Holy Spirit. Its proper function is not to make us see in God the first principles of knowledge, but to make us share in them insofar as they are divine truth itself. This supernatural virtue does not disclose the Ideas to us—those divine rules by which human reason judges all things. In short, it does not constitute in any way an intellectual view of the highest cause, which is God. But as a living participation in God, it enables us to peer into him, as it were, and handle the first principles of knowledge with an understanding that has been made divine.

The root of this wisdom, then, is less a cognitive intuition than a communion of an intellectual nature with the divine. Its effect, which is "rightness of a judgment made according to divine reasons," is not in this case produced by the metaphysician's habit of using his reason correctly in such matters. Its rectitude of judgment comes from a more distant source, from that supernatural affinity which makes it a member of the family of divine things. Now, it is only charity that can give us kinship with God. To be "in sympathy with" the divine, as Dionysius said, to *see* it from within rather than from without, to be impregnated with it, to absorb its substance into one's own substance, it must be loved with a love of friendship: "Sympathy with, or connaturality with, divine things is brought about by charity that unites us with God" (*compassio sive connaturalitas ad res divinas fit per caritatem, quae quidem nos unit Deo*). This is why supernatural wisdom, whose essence has its seat in the understanding, has its cause in the will. This cause is love or charity.⁴⁰

Born of supernatural love, which firmly establishes the soul in our last end, wisdom not only has a particular practical function, legitimate only in certain definite cases; it is by wisdom that charity reaches, penetrates and directs all our acts by orienting them toward the supreme good, which they must attain if they are not to be wasted acts. This is not simply a general transfer-

³⁸Ibid. 3, resp. See ibid. 1.64.1, resp.

³⁹Ibid. 1-2.57.1, resp.

⁴⁰Ibid. 2-2.45.2, resp.

ence of intention. Natural morality cannot be taken as such and included in Christian morality. Charity does not leave a single moral virtue as it finds it. There is not one moral act that it does not make *a different act*, as can be seen by a simple glance at the transformation to which charity subjects it.⁴¹

In the last analysis, this virtue depends upon the humanly unforeseeable and impossible fact that we are one day to share eternal beatitude with God. We have friendship with our parents because we live with them. We can have friendships with fellow citizens because we share the same political life. By the grace of the Incarnation, which made human nature divine, we can have friendship with God because we can live with him. To have a part in God's life, to be of value in his eyes, to count for something in his life, and to know him, this is the source of our friendship with him.⁴² No other virtue, even among those freely given, can be compared with this one, because no other touches God so intimately. By faith and hope we attain to God as cause of the truth that he reveals and of the good he promises. Through them we only approach him as the cause of his gifts to us. Charity, however, brings us to God himself. We believe in God's truth; we hope for his beatitude; we believe and hope in God as the cause and substance of revealed truth and promised beatitude. But we love God for himself and because he is God.⁴³ Charity attains God and comes to rest in him. It has nothing further to attain since in him it has all things.

A soul living by supernatural love; then, is no longer able to will anything but God himself, or if it wants anything else it can only be in union with his will. To love what God loves as he loves it, is indeed "to will the same things, to not will the same things" (*eadem velle, eadem nolle*) in which friendship consists. As we have just said, this friendship depends upon the fact that God shares with us a very definite good, namely, his beatitude, which is himself. This is why we must love God above everything, as the cause and substance of our friendship with him.

Thus supernatural charity brings to its conclusion the profoundest and most universal yearning of nature. Every natural movement is the action of a body

⁴¹For the light this theological doctrine throws on the deep unity of Thomism, perhaps the reader will be interested in the position Thomas takes on the key problem running through the whole history of Christianity, including the Reformation. Is the charity in man God himself or is it a supernatural gift created by God? The former seems to exalt charity to the highest degree, but in fact its effect is to prevent the act of charity from being performed by man himself. Charity, then, is no longer the principle, within man himself, of the movements of charity that direct the will. In brief, the will would move not by *its own* charity but only be moved by God's charity. Hence Thomas regards charity as "aliquid creatum in anima" (*ST* 2-2.23.2, resp.). For the historical context of these problems see Paul Vignaux, *Luther commentateur des Sentences* (Paris: Vrin, 1935).

⁴²*ST* 2-2.23.5, resp.

⁴³*Ibid.*

that, whether it knows it or not, is moving in view of some end. Each natural action is, accordingly, the realization of a desire. Whatever moves or is moved, loves. The stone that falls, the flame that rises, the tree that grows, the animal in search of its prey; living or not, every being is moved by a love—natural love in the case of a being lacking knowledge, animate love in the case of a knowing being.*

Endowed with intelligence and reason, we are able to know that God exists, that he has created us and invited us to share these goods in communion with him. So we have a natural love for God, a sort of first natural friendship, by which we naturally love God above all things. Rather, we ought to say, *should* love him, because our nature is no longer sound.⁴⁴ The first effect of grace is to restore this natural love of God above all things. Grace will not destroy it but integrate it with our supernatural love of God. Supernatural friendship, based on the sharing of divine beatitude, first restores to the human race the natural friendship it originally had with God. Then the whole natural morality is reborn with its order and hierarchy of virtues. But it cannot last if deprived of the conditions that brought about its rebirth. For man in his fallen state of nature, grace alone makes possible that firm willing of the good which, even in nature itself, clings only to the will of God.

* [Gilson here abbreviates the *responsio* of *ST* 2-2.26.3. In the following paragraph he, like Aquinas, extends the notion of natural love to cognitive beings.—A.M.]

⁴⁴Ibid. 26.3, resp.

PART III. Chapter Six

The Last End

All creatures come from one cause and move toward one end. We can expect, accordingly, that the same principle will regulate both moral actions and physical laws. It is the same deep cause that makes the stone fall, the flame rise, the heavens turn, and human beings will. Each of these beings is seeking by its action to achieve its own perfection and at the same time to realize its end, which is to represent God: "Everything tending to its own perfection tends to be like God" (*unumquodque tendens in suam perfectionem, tendit in divinam similitudinem*).¹

We must add, however, that since each has a definite essence, it will have its own way of realizing this common end. Because all creatures, even those devoid of intellect, are directed to God as to their last end, and since all things reach their last end to the measure that they share in his likeness, intelligent creatures must reach their end in a manner proper to them, that is, by the activity specific to them as intelligent creatures, namely, knowledge. It is immediately evident, then, that the last end of an intelligent creature is to know God.² This conclusion is inevitable, and other arguments equally direct could be found to convince us of its necessity. To be completely convinced, however, we shall have to see how this last end gathers together all intermediate ends and directs them to itself, and how each particular happiness is but a foretaste of this beatitude.

We are voluntary and free beings. As has been said, we always act in view of an end, and our acts are specified by this end. Our acts are arranged into various species according to the ends that are both their starting point and termination.³ Now, it cannot be doubted that, over and above the host of particular ends, there is a last end of human life taken as a whole. One end is in fact willed and ordained because of another, and if there were no last end the series of ends would stretch to infinity. It would be the same as if the series of movers and of things moved were infinite. Nothing would ever be desired and no action would ever be brought to an end. Every act starts from an end and comes to rest in it. We have to conclude, accordingly, that there is a last end.⁴

At the same time it can be seen that whatever we will, it is willed with a view to this last end. The last end moves the appetite in the same way as the

¹See above p. 217.

²SCG 3.25.

³*De virtutibus* 1.2, ad 3 and 2.3, resp.

⁴ST 1-2.1.4, resp.

first mover moves all other movable things. Now, it is clear that while the second cause transmits movement, it can only do so inasmuch as it is itself moved by the first mover. In the same way, secondary ends are only desirable and only move the appetite inasmuch as they are directed to the last end, which is the first of all desirable objects.⁵ Let us see in what this end consists.

If we examine various opinions about it, we will find them very different and rather strange. Riches, health, power, in a word all imaginable bodily goods, have been taken for the highest good and the last end. But all of these are clearly wrong. We are not the last end of the universe. We are but particular beings ordered, like all the rest, in view of a higher end. Hence neither the satisfying of our body nor its preservation can be made our sovereign good or our last end. Even if we were to grant that the end of human reason and will is to conserve our human being, it still would not follow that our last end consists in some bodily good. A human being is, indeed, composed of soul and body. While it is true that the being of the body depends upon the soul, it is not true that the being of the soul depends upon the body. On the contrary, the body is ordered to the soul as matter to form. In no case could our last end, which is beatitude, be considered as residing in a bodily good.⁶

Does our beatitude reside in pleasure or in some other good of the soul? If by *beatitudo* we do not mean the acquiring of beatitude nor its possession (for these, of course, do depend upon the soul), but that very thing in which beatitude consists, then beatitude is not a good belonging to the soul but exists outside the soul and infinitely above it. "Beatitudo pertains to the soul, but consists in something outside the soul" (*Beatitudo est aliquid animae; sed id in quo consistit beatitudo est aliquid extra animam*).⁷

It is in fact impossible that our last end be the human soul or anything belonging to it. If we consider the soul in itself, it is only in potency. Its knowledge or virtue has to be brought from potency to act. Now, what is in potency is related to its act as the incomplete to the complete, for potency only exists with a view to act. Thus it is clear that the human soul exists with a view to something else, and consequently it is not its own last end. It is even clearer that no good of the soul constitutes its sovereign good. The good that constitutes its last end can only be the perfect good, namely, the good that fully satisfies the appetite. Now, as we have shown, the human appetite or will tends toward the universal good. On the other hand, it is clear that every good residing in a finite human soul like ours is by that very fact a finite and participated good. Hence no such good can be our sovereign good nor become our last end.

⁵*In Sent.* 4.49.1.3 [sol. 1, Vivès ed. 11: 472–473]; *ST* 1-2.1.6, resp.

⁶*SCG* 3.32; *Comp. theol.* 2.9 [Leonine ed. 42: 200–201.52–98]; *ST* 1-2.2.5, resp.

⁷*ST* 1-2.2.7, resp.

In sum, then, our beatitude cannot consist in any created good. It can only reside in a perfect good, one fully satisfying the appetite, for it could not be the last end if, once acquired, it still left something further to be desired. Since nothing can fully satisfy the human will except the universal good, which is its proper object, no created and participated good can constitute the sovereign good and last end. Consequently, we find our beatitude in God alone,⁸ who is the first and universal good and the source of all other goods.

We know, then, where beatitude resides; but what is its essence? Let us consider the precise meaning of this question. The term "end" can have two meanings. It can refer first of all to the very thing we wish to obtain. In this sense money is the end the miser seeks. The term can also refer to the acquisition, possession, use and enjoyment of what is desired. In this latter sense it is the possession of money that the miser is seeking. These two senses of "end" must also be distinguished in a discussion of beatitude. We know well enough what beatitude is in the first sense: it is the uncreated good we call God, who alone by his infinite goodness can perfectly satisfy our will. In what does beatitude consist in the second sense? This is the question we must now consider.

From this point of view, beatitude appears to be a created good. As we have shown, the cause or object of beatitude is certainly uncreated. But the very essence of beatitude, that is, our achieving and enjoying the last end, is necessarily something human and consequently something created.⁹ We can add that this something is an activity or act, since beatitude constitutes our highest perfection, and perfection implies act, as potency implies imperfection.¹⁰ Finally, this activity is the act of the human intellect, excluding all other powers of the soul. We cannot claim that beatitude is reducible to an activity of the sensory soul. We have established that the very object of beatitude does not reside in goods of the body, and these goods are the only ones that the sensory acts of the soul can attain. Hence they are radically unable to give us beatitude.¹¹ It appears, on the other hand, that between the intellect and will, which together form the rational part of the soul, only the intellect is able to grasp immediately the object of our beatitude and our last end. We also have to distinguish between the very essence of beatitude and the enjoyment that always accompanies it, which, compared with beatitude considered essentially, is in the last analysis an accident.¹² Once this is granted, it becomes clear that beatitude cannot consist essentially in an act of the will. We all desire our last end, whose possession

⁸SCG 4.54; ST 1-2.2.8, resp.; *Comp. theol.* 1.108 [Leonine ed. 42: 122].

⁹ST 1.26.3, resp.; *ibid.* 1-2.3.1, resp.

¹⁰*Ibid.* 2, resp.

¹¹SCG 3.33; ST 1-2.3.3, resp.; *Comp. theol.* 2.9 [Leonine ed. 42: 201.98-111].

¹²Note, however, that although beatitude does not consist in the enjoyment that accompanies it, enjoyment is necessarily joined to beatitude (ST 1-2.4.1, resp.).

represents for us the highest degree of perfection and consequently beatitude. However, it does not belong to the will to apprehend an end. The will moves toward absent ends when it desires them, and toward present ends when it rests complacently and pleasurably in them. Now, it appears that to desire an end is not to lay hold of it, but only to move toward it. As for the enjoyment involved, it only arises in the will because of the presence of the object sought. In other words, the will takes pleasure in an object only because it is present, and it is wrong to reason as though the object became present because the will enjoys it. The very essence of beatitude, then, consists in an act of the intellect; only the delight accompanying it can be considered as an act of the will.¹³

All the preceding arguments presuppose the principle that if beatitude can be acquired by our actions, it can only be by the most perfect and highest of them. Using the same principle, we can hold further that beatitude must consist in an activity of the speculative rather than of the practical intellect. The most perfect power of the intellect is the one whose object is the most perfect, namely, the essence of God. Now, this essence is the object of the speculative intellect and not of the practical intellect. The act constituting beatitude must accordingly be of a speculative nature, and this amounts to saying that it must be an act of contemplation,¹⁴ although we still have to be more precise about its object.

Would the contemplation that is the source of beatitude consist in the study and pursuit of the speculative sciences? To answer this question, we have to make a distinction between two kinds of beatitude accessible to us, one of which is perfect and the other imperfect. Perfect beatitude is that which attains the true essence of beatitude; imperfect beatitude does not attain it but shares in certain respects in some of the characteristics defining true beatitude. It is certain that the very essence of true beatitude cannot be reduced to knowledge of the speculative sciences. Our knowledge cannot extend further than the first principles of these sciences, for a whole science is contained virtually in the principles from which it is deduced. Now, the first principles of the speculative sciences are known only through sense knowledge. Accordingly, our consideration of speculative sciences as a whole cannot take our intellect beyond the point to which knowledge of sensible things can bring it.

It remains to inquire whether knowledge of sensible things can constitute our higher beatitude, that is, our greatest perfection. It is at once apparent that it cannot. The perfection of the superior is not found in what is inferior to it as such. The inferior can only contribute to the perfection of what is superior to it in the degree to which it participates, however poorly, in a reality that is beyond itself, and equally beyond that to which it brings some perfection. Now,

¹³SCG 3.26; ST 1.26.2, ad 2 and 1-2.3.4, resp.; *Quodl.* 8.9.19 [ed. Spiazzi, pp. 179-180].

¹⁴ST 1-2.3.5, resp.

it is clear that the form of a stone, or of any sensible thing, is inferior to a human being. If in sense knowledge, then, the form of the stone confers some perfection on the human intellect, it is not inasmuch as it is merely the form of the stone, but inasmuch as this form participates in a reality of an order higher than the human intellect, for example, intelligible light or something of the kind. Hence all knowledge capable of conferring some perfection on the human intellect presupposes an object above this intellect, which is especially true of the absolutely perfect human knowledge that would confer on it beatific contemplation.

Here we reap the fruits of the conclusion we reached about the value and import of human knowledge. Its proper object is sensible things. Accordingly, the human intellect cannot find its beatitude and highest perfection in the study of the sensible world, to which the speculative sciences are limited.¹⁵ But it can find in it its imperfect happiness, which is the only happiness we achieve here below. Just as sensible forms participate in some resemblance of higher substances, so the knowledge of the speculative sciences is a sort of participation in true and perfect beatitude.¹⁶ Through them our intellect is brought from potency to act, but they do not bring it to its complete and ultimate actuality.

This means that true and essential beatitude is not of this world; it can only be found in the clear sight of God's essence. To grasp the truth of this conclusion, the following two principles must be taken into account. First, that we are not perfectly happy as long as we have something to wish for and to seek; second, that the perfection of the powers of the soul is measured by the nature of their objects. Now, the proper object of the intellect is *quod quid est*, that is, the quiddity or essence of a thing. Thus the perfection of the intellect is measured by the depth of its knowledge of the essence of its object. If, for example, an intellect knows the essence of some effect without this knowledge enabling it to know the essence of its cause, then it could be said to know that the cause exists, but it could not be said to know the nature of that cause. It knows the *an sit*, but not the *quid est*. In a word, it could not be said that it knows this cause purely and simply. There is present, then, in the one who recognizes and knows that an effect has a cause, a natural desire to know what the cause is. This is the source of the curiosity and wonder that, according to the Philosopher, are at the origin of all inquiry.

When someone sees an eclipse of the sun, he immediately judges that this event has a cause, but he does not know what the cause is. He wonders about it, and because he wonders he tries to discover it. The inquiry will not end until he finds the essential cause of the phenomenon. Let us recall now what the

¹⁵SCG 3.48; ST 1-2.3.6, resp.

¹⁶ST 1-2.3.5, resp. and 6.3, resp. "Et ideo quidam philosophi attendentes naturalem perfectionem hominis, dixerunt ultimam felicitatem hominis in hoc consistere quod in anima hominis describatur ordo totius universi" (*De ver.* 20.3, resp.).

human intellect knows about its creator. We have seen that, properly speaking, it knows no other essences than those of certain sensible, created things. From them it rises to a knowledge that God exists, yet it never reaches perfectly the essence of the first cause. Therefore we feel the natural desire to know fully and to see directly the essence of this cause.¹⁷ But if we naturally desire to see God, we are unable of ourselves to rise to this vision. The final end of man is a natural end, which grace alone enables us to know distinctly and to reach. In freely created intelligent beings, God could not have any other purpose than to elevate them to the beatific vision, which is alone capable of satisfying their natural desire to see Being, which is their object.¹⁸

This notion of beatitude, transcending humankind and nature, has not been trumped up to harmonize morality with religion. There is an intimate agreement and continuity of order between the earthly happiness accessible here below and the heavenly beatitude to which we are called.¹⁹ The last end is not the negation of our human ends; on the contrary, it gathers them together by sublimating them. Human ends are in their turn but partial imitations of our last end and imperfect substitutes for it.

There is not a single thing we desire that, when interpreted and controlled by reason, cannot be given a legitimate value. Here below we desire health and bodily goods; these are favorable conditions for cognitive activities, through which the most perfect human happiness is attained. In this life we desire exterior goods, such as the goods of fortune; we desire them because they enable us to live and to perform the works of contemplative and active virtue. They may not be essential for beatitude, but they are at least its instruments. Here below we also desire the society of our friends, and rightly so, because if we are to be happy in this world we must have friends. We do not need them because they are useful to us (the wise man is sufficient to himself), nor because they are a source of pleasure (the wise man finds perfect pleasure in the exercise of virtue), but because he has to have material on which to practice virtue. Our

¹⁷*ST* 1.12.1; *ibid.* 1-2.3.8, resp. See *De ver.* 8.1; *Quodl.* 10.8.17, resp. [ed. Spiazzi, p. 217]; *SCG* 3.37.

¹⁸This proves the natural *possibility* of the beatific vision, although the fulfillment of this natural possibility (tied to the nature of the intellect) can only be realized by grace: "Omnis intellectus *naturaliter desiderat divinae substantiae visionem*. Naturale autem desiderium non potest esse inane. Quilibet igitur intellectus creatus [angelic or human] potest pervenire ad divinae substantiae visionem, non impediante inferioritate naturae" (*SCG* 3.57 [4]). Once again, grace perfects nature (and faith perfects reason), it does not do away with it.

¹⁹See the whole chapter of *SCG* 3.25, whose title suffices to define Thomas' position: "Quod intelligere Deum est finis omnium intellectualis substantiae." The chapter concludes: "Est igitur ultimus finis *totius hominis*, et omnium operationum et desideriorum eius, cognoscere primum verum, quod est Deus" (*ibid.* [10]).

friends are there to receive our good deeds; they provide us with opportunities to acquire virtue or to perfect it.

Conversely, we have said that all goods come together, sublimated and put in order in heavenly beatitude. When we see God face to face in the beatific vision, even when the soul has come to resemble a separate intelligence, our beatitude is not that of a soul completely separated from its body. We shall meet again the composite of soul and body even in the glory of heaven itself: "For since it is natural for the soul to be united to a body, the natural perfection of the soul cannot exclude the perfection of the body" (*cum enim naturale sit animae corpori uniri, non potest esse quod perfectio animae naturalem ejus perfectionem excludat*). Before beatitude, the body is the soul's servant and the instrument of the lesser activities that facilitate its approach to it. During beatitude, on the contrary, the soul rewards its servant by conferring incorruptibility on it and letting it share in its own immortal perfection. "The soul's beatitude redounds to the body so that it too may taste of its perfection" (*ex beatitudine animae fiet redundantia ad corpus, ut et ipsum suam perfectionem potiatur*).²⁰ The soul, which is united to the body that once belonged to the animal kingdom but is now spiritualized in the soul's glory, has no longer to pursue the material goods that are directed on earth to animal life. She no longer needs any other friend than her God, who comforts her with his eternity, truth and love. Perhaps it is not forbidden to us to believe that the joy of heaven is not solitary, and that heavenly beatitude is accompanied by the vision that the blessed have of one another's joy, and that it is embellished by eternal friendships.²¹

Thus Thomism continues nature into supernature. When it has described the total human being, and not merely the human soul, as the immediate object of philosophy, it goes on to deal with the destiny not only of the human soul but of the total human being. For Aquinas, the Christian's beatitude is the beatitude of the whole person.

²⁰ST 1-2.4.6, resp.

²¹Ibid. 8, resp.

PART III. Chapter Seven

The Spirit of Thomism

Thus far we have been examining some of the more important problems dealt with by Thomistic philosophy. In discussing them we have attempted to show the bond tying them together and giving continuity to their solutions. Perhaps it will be useful at the end of this study to take a comprehensive glance back over the course we have covered and to pick out, as precisely as possible, what is constant in Thomas' philosophical outlook.

The reader has no doubt noted, or at least felt, the strongly unified character of Aquinas' doctrine; it provides a complete explanation of the universe from the point of view of human reason. This characteristic is due above all to the fact that the texture of Thomism is entirely woven from a small number of constantly intersecting principles. Perhaps at bottom it is also due to the fact that it is entirely derived from various aspects of one central notion, namely, the notion of being. Human thought is only satisfied when it grasps something existing. Now, our understanding of a being is never limited to the bare apprehension of a fact. A being invites our intellect to explore it and calls for our intellectual activity by the multiple facets it reveals. Inasmuch as this being is not distinguished from itself, it is one; and in this sense we can say that being and one are the same, for no essence is divided without at the same time losing its being and its unity. But since a being is by definition inseparable from itself, it lays the basis of the truth that can be affirmed about it. To say what is true will be to say what is, and to attribute to each thing the very being that defines it. Thus it is the being of a thing that determines its truth, and it is the truth of a thing that grounds the truth of thought.

We think the truth of a thing when we attribute to it the being that it is. Thus an accord is established between our thought and the thing's essence; and it is this accord that provides the basis for what is true in our knowledge, just as the intimate accord between God's eternal thought and a thing's essence establishes the truth of the thing outside our mind. The line of the relations of truth is therefore only one aspect of the line of the relations of being.

We find exactly the same thing in the case of the good. Every being, insofar as it is knowable, is the basis of truth. Insofar as it is defined by a certain amount of perfection, and consequently insofar as it is, it is desirable and presents itself to us as a good. Whence the movement to take possession of it that arises in us when we find ourselves in its presence. Thus being itself, without the addition of anything from outside, displays before us its unity, its truth and its goodness. Whatever the relation of identity that our thought can affirm in any one of the moments of the doctrinal synthesis, whatever the truth we might set

forth or the good we might desire, our thought always refers to being in order to establish its accord with itself, in order to assimilate its nature by way of knowledge or to enjoy its perfection through the will.

But Thomism is not a system, if by this is meant a global explanation of the world deduced or constructed in an idealistic manner from a priori principles. The content of the notion of being is not such that it can be defined once and for all and posited a priori. There are many ways of being, and these ways must be examined. The one most immediately given to us is our own and that of bodies among which we live. Each one of us *is*, but in an incomplete and deficient manner. In the field of experience directly accessible to us we only meet composite substances similar to ourselves, forms embodied in matters by so indissoluble a bond that their very embodiment defines these beings. God's creative action, when it brings them into existence, directly results in the union of matter and form that constitutes their beings. However imperfect such a being may be, it does possess perfection to the extent that it possesses being. We already find in it the transcendental relations of unity, truth, goodness and beauty, which are inseparable from it and which we have defined. We note at the same time that, for some deep reason that is still to be determined, these relations are not fixed, closed, and definite. Everything takes place—and experience verifies this—as though we had to struggle in order to establish these relations instead of enjoying them peacefully as a given fact. *We are*, and we are identical with ourselves, but not completely so. A sort of margin keeps us a little short of what we are defined to be. We do not fully achieve the human essence nor even the complete notion of our own individuality. Hence, it is not simply a matter of being, but of a permanent effort to maintain ourselves in being, to conserve ourselves, to realize ourselves. It is just the same with all other sensible beings that we find around us. There are always forces at work and the world is perpetually agitated by movements. It is in a continual state of becoming, like humankind itself, ceaselessly passing from one state to another.

This universal becoming is expressed in terms of the distinction of potency and act, which extends to all beings within our experience, and which makes no other claim than to formulate that experience. Like Aristotle, who established the universal extension of this distinction and the impossibility of defining it, Thomas uses it more often than he explains it. It is a kind of postulate, a formula inscribing a fact, the meaning of a property, not now of being as being, but of a limited mode of being given to us in experience. Any essence that does not completely realize its definition is actual to the extent that it does realize it, potential to the extent that it does not, and deprived to the extent that it suffers from not realizing it. Insofar as it is in act, it is the active principle that will begin the movement of realization. It is from the actuality of form that all endeavors of this kind proceed; it is the source of motion, the reason and cause of becoming. To repeat, it is the being of things that is the ultimate reason of all the natural processes we observe. It is being as such that communicates

its form as an efficient cause, that produces change as a moving cause, and assigns a reason for something's being produced as a final cause. What confronts us are beings that are ceaselessly moved by a fundamental need to save and complete themselves.

Now, we cannot reflect upon an experience like this without becoming aware that it does not adequately explain the facts it places before us. This world of becoming that is in constant motion in order to realize itself, these heavenly spheres perpetually seeking themselves in the successive points of their orbits, these human souls that capture and assimilate being by their intellects, these substantial forms forever in search of new matters in which to realize themselves, do not contain in themselves the explanation of what they are. If such beings were self-explaining, they would be lacking nothing; or conversely, they would have to be lacking nothing before they could be self-explaining. But then they would no longer move in search of themselves. They would repose in the integrity of their own essence realized at last. They would cease to be what they are.

It is accordingly outside the world of potency and act, above becoming, and in a being that is what it is totally, that we must look for the sufficient cause of the universe. But this being that thought can reach is obviously of a different nature than the being we have been talking about, for if it were not different from the being given in experience there would be no point in positing it. Thus the world of becoming demands a principle removed from becoming and situated entirely outside it.

At this point a new problem arises. If the being postulated by experience is radically different from the one we observe, how could we know it through this experience, and how could this experience even help us to explain it? Nothing can be deduced or inferred about a being by some other being that does not exist in the same sense as the first one. Our thought would be quite inadequate to proceed to such a conclusion unless by its hierarchical and analogical structure the reality in which we are involved formed a sort of ladder leading toward God.

It is precisely because every activity is the realization of an essence, and because every essence is a certain quantity of being and perfection, that the universe reveals itself to us as a community made up of superiors and inferiors. The very definition of each essence situates it immediately in its proper place in the gradations of this hierarchy. To explain the activity of an individual thing, not only must we have the notion of the individual, but we must also have the definition of the essence that it embodies in a deficient manner. The species itself is not enough, because the individuals that go to make up the species are ceaselessly striving to realize themselves. So it becomes necessary either to renounce trying to account for this activity, or else to seek an adequate explanation for it at a higher level in a superior grade of perfection.

From here on, the universe appears essentially as a hierarchy, and the philosophical problem will be to indicate its exact arrangement and to situate each class of beings in its proper degree. To do this, a principle of universal value must always be kept in mind: that the greater or less can only be appraised and located in relation to the maximum, the relative in relation to the absolute. Between God, who is Being pure and simple, and complete nothingness, there come intelligences known as angels, who are close to God, and material forms that are close to nothingness. Between angels and material nature come human creatures on the borderline between spirits and bodies. In this way angels reduce the infinite gap separating man from God, and man fills in the gap between angels and matter.

Each of these degrees has its own mode of operation, since each being operates according as it is in act and as its degree of actuality merges with its degree of perfection. The orderly and arranged hierarchy of beings is thus made complete by the orderly and arranged hierarchy of their activities, and in such a way that the bottom of the higher degree invariably borders on the top of the lower. Thus the principle of continuity gives precision and determination to the principle of perfection. Both of these principles express the higher law governing the communication of being. There is no being except the divine being in which all creatures participate; while creatures only differ from one another by their greater or lesser degree of participation in the divine being.¹ Their perfection must accordingly be measured by the distance separating them from God, and by differentiating themselves from one another they must arrange themselves in a hierarchy.

If this is true, it is analogy alone that will enable our mind to arrive at a transcendent God beginning with sensible things. It is analogy, too, that alone will explain that the universe has its existence from a transcendental principle and yet is neither confused with it nor added to it. The similarity of the analogue has, of course, to be explained, and it can only be explained by means of what the analogue imitates: "For being is not said of many equivocally, but analogically, and thus must be reduced to unity" (*non enim ens de multis aequivocè dicitur, sed per analogiam, et sic oportet fieri reductionem in unum*).² But while the analogue possesses enough of its model's being to require that being as its cause, it possesses its being in such a way that the being of this cause is not involved in its own. And because the word "being" signifies two different modes of existence when applied to God and to creatures, no problem of addition or subtraction can arise. The being of creatures is only an image, an imi-

¹"Necesse est igitur omnia quae diversificantur secundum diversam participationem essendi, ut sint perfectius vel minus perfecte, causari ab uno primo ente quod perfectissime est" (*ST* 1.44.1, resp.).

²*SCG* 2.15 [2].

tation of the divine being. Even as reflections appear about a flame, increasing, decreasing and disappearing, without the substance of the flame being affected, so the likenesses freely created by the divine substance owe all their being to this substance. They subsist only through it, yet borrow nothing from its *per se* mode of being, a mode very different from their own. They neither add to it nor subtract from it in the least degree.

The two principles of analogy and hierarchy enable us to explain the creature through a transcendent creator. They also enable us to maintain relations between them and to extend bonds between them that will become the constitutive principles of created essences and the laws that serve to explain them. Whatever physics might ultimately discover about the world, it necessarily remains subordinate to a metaphysics of essences and quality. If creatures are likenesses by their basic origin, then it is to be expected that analogy will serve to explain the structure of the universe, just as it explains its creation. To account for the activity of a being, we shall always have to show that its activity is based on its essence, and to give an adequate account of this essence will always be to show that a definite likeness of pure act, corresponding exactly to what this essence is, ought to have a place in our universe. But why was such a definite likeness required by a universe like ours? It is because the likenesses of any model can only be essentially different if they are more or less perfect. A finite system of images of an infinite being must have all the degrees of likeness that can appear within the bounds assigned to the system by the free choice of the creator. The metaphysical explanation of a physical phenomenon must always be concerned with putting an essence in its place in a hierarchy.

This sense of hierarchy shows the profound influence of the Pseudo-Dionysius on the thought of Thomas Aquinas. There is no denying this influence; and it explains to some extent why some have wished to place the author of the *Summa theologiae* among the disciples of Plotinus; but only when we strictly limit its range does this thesis become acceptable. The Areopagite furnishes the framework of the hierarchy. He firmly instills in the mind the need for a hierarchy, and he makes it impossible not to consider the universe as a hierarchy. But he left Thomas the task of filling it out; and even though Dionysius assigns the various grades in the hierarchy, he did not know the law governing their arrangement and distribution.

Is it true to say that Thomas thought of the content of this universal hierarchy in a Neoplatonic spirit? If we accept with numerous reservations the case of pure spirits, it is readily apparent that the answer is no. The God of Thomas the theologian is the same as Augustine's. That Augustine was under the Neoplatonic influence does not mean that his God could be confused with the God of Plotinus. Between Plotinian speculation and the theology of the Fathers of the Church there stands Jehovah, the personal God, who acts by intelligence and will, and who freely places outside himself the real universe that his wisdom chose from an infinity of possible universes. Between this freely created uni-

verse and God the creator, there is an impassable abyss and no other continuity than the continuity of order. Properly speaking, the world is an ordered discontinuity. How can we fail to see that we are here far removed from Neoplatonic philosophy? To make of Aquinas a Plotinian, or even a Neoplatonizer, is to confuse him with the disciples of Avicenna and Averroes, that is, with the adversaries he opposed so energetically.

The distance between the two philosophers is no less noticeable when we move from God to man. We said that Thomas' God was not the God of Plotinus but the Christian God of Augustine. Neither is Thomas' man the man of Plotinus but the man of Aristotle. The opposition is particularly sharp right at the heart of the problem: in the relation between soul and body, and in the doctrine of knowledge that results from it. Platonism affirms the extreme independence and almost complete aseity of the soul, allowing for Platonic reminiscence and even for the momentary return to the One through an ecstatic union. Thomism strongly affirms the physical nature of the soul and takes care to close all paths that might lead to a direct intuition of intelligible reality in order to leave open no other road than that of sense knowledge. Platonism locates mystical knowledge in the natural prolongation of human knowledge; in Thomism, mystical knowledge is added to and co-ordinated with natural knowledge, but is not a continuation of it. All we know about God is what our reason teaches us about him after reflecting upon the evidence of the senses. If we want to find a Neoplatonic doctrine of knowledge in the Middle Ages, we will have to look elsewhere than in the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas.

Perhaps this becomes clearer if we put aside the consideration of this particular problem and examine directly and in itself the Thomistic hierarchy of the universe. We have said a great deal about God and his creative power, about the angels and their functions, about human beings and their activities. We have considered, one after the other, all creatures endowed with intellect, and the First Intelligence itself. What we have seen is that the nature and compass of the many kinds of knowledge it has been given to us to acquire have varied very considerably according to the greater or less perfection of the reality that was its object. If we wish to disengage clearly the spirit of Thomistic philosophy, we must first survey the ladder of being, and then examine the values that locate each order of knowledge in its proper degree.

What is knowing? It is apprehending that which is. There is no other perfect knowledge. It is immediately apparent that, properly speaking, all knowledge in the higher degrees in the universal hierarchy is naturally beyond our reach. We know that God and pure intelligences exist, but we do not know what they are. There is no doubt, however, that the awareness of a deficiency in our knowledge of God leaves us with a burning desire for higher and more complete knowledge. Nor can it be doubted that, if knowing consists in grasping the essence of the object known, God, angels and, generally speaking, anything of the purely intelligible order is by definition beyond the grasp of our intellect. This

is why, instead of having an intuition of the divine essence, we have only a vast number of concepts that, taken together, are a confused sort of imitation of what would have been a true notion of the divine being. When all that we have been able to say about such a subject is put together, the result is a collection of negations or analogies and nothing more.

Where, then, does human knowledge find itself truly at home? When is it in the presence of its own object? Only at the point where it comes into contact with the sensible world. Although it does not totally penetrate this reality, because the individual as such implies or presupposes matter and is therefore beyond expression, still reason is in control of the field in which it is working. In order to describe the human person, that is, the human composite, to describe animals and their activities, the heavenly bodies and their powers, mixed bodies or the elements, rational knowledge remains proportioned to the order or rank of the objects it is exploring. Although its content is incomplete, it is nevertheless positive. What is original and truly profound in Thomism is not an attempt either to establish science more solidly nor to extend it. Thomas places the proper object of the human intellect in the sensible order, but he does not consider the study of this order to be the highest function of the knowing faculty. The proper object of the intellect is the quiddity of sensible things, but its proper function is to make the sensible intelligible.³ From the particular object on which its light falls it draws something universal. It can do this because this particular object carries the divine image naturally impressed upon it as a mark of its origin. In the proper and strong sense of the term, the intellect is born and made for the universal. Hence its straining toward that object which is by definition strictly inaccessible, namely, the divine being. Here reason knows very little, yet the little it knows surpasses in dignity and value any other kind of certitude.⁴

All great philosophies—and Thomas' is no exception—present different perspectives according to the particular needs of the age that turns to them. It is hardly surprising, then, in a time like ours, when so many minds are seeking to re-establish bonds between philosophy and concrete reality that the idealist experience has broken, that different interpreters of Thomism should insist upon the role played by the notion of the act of being in his doctrine. The fact that they have reached similar conclusions by independent approaches makes their convergence still more significant. Citing but one example of recent statements, we will recall that Jacques Maritain, after specifying that the proper object of

³“Contemplatio humana secundum statum praesentis vitae non potest esse absque phantasmatis ... sed tamen intellectualis cognitio non consistit in ipsis phantasmatis, sed in eis contemplatur puritatem intelligibilis veritatis” (*ST* 2-2.180.5, ad 1). See *De ver.* 13.3: “... intellectus qui summum cognitionis tenet, proprie immaterialium est.”

⁴SCG 1.5 [5].

the intellect is being, "not only *essential* or quidditative but existential," and that consequently the entire thought of Aquinas "seeks existence itself (though not to produce it, as is the case with practical knowledge, but to know it)";⁵ the same author adds that "Thomist philosophy is an existential philosophy." What Maritain means by this is explained in a special section of his *Preface to Metaphysics* entitled "A Digression in Existential Philosophy." When Maritain speaks in this way about Thomism, he is trying above all to make us understand that all human knowledge, including the metaphysician's, begins from sense knowledge and ultimately returns to it, "no longer to know [the] essence [of things] but to know how they exist (for this also metaphysics should know), to attain their mode of existence, and then to conceive by analogy the existence of that which exists immaterially, which is purely spiritual."⁶

This is a lesson of the greatest importance. The only trouble is that the various statements of it are so compressed that they tend to obscure its significance. To insist on the "existential" character of Thomism in the above sense is to resist the very natural tendency of the human mind to remain on the level of abstraction. The very art of teaching fosters this tendency. How is anyone to teach without explaining, simplifying, abstracting? There is a real danger of keeping both ourselves and others on the level of conceptual abstraction, which is so satisfying to the mind. Having disentangled essences from the web of concrete reality, we hold back the moment when we must again blend these essences into the unity of the concrete. We are afraid of falling back into the confusion from which we set out and which it is the very object of analysis to remove. Some hold back this moment so long that they never allow it to arrive. In this case, philosophy is reduced to making a series of cuts into reality, following the line of cleavage of essences, as if knowing what essences reality is composed of were the equivalent to knowing existing reality. Reality is only directly apprehended by us in and through sensible knowledge, and this is why our judgments only attain their object when, directly or indirectly, they are resolved into it: "The visible object of sense (*res sensibilis visibilis*) is the touchstone of every judgment, by which we must judge of everything else (*ex qua debemus de aliis judicare*), because it is the touchstone of existence."⁷

Lest the metaphysician forget this principle, or rather the position it imposes on him, it is recommended that he should immerse himself in existence, enter ever more deeply into it "by means of as keen a sensitive (and aesthetic) perception as possible, and also by experiencing suffering and existential conflicts, so that, aloft in the third heaven of natural knowledge, he may feed upon the intel-

⁵Jacques Maritain, *A Preface to Metaphysics* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1943), pp. 21, 24. The lectures published in this volume date from 1932 to 1933.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁷*Ibid.*

ligible substance of things.” After this comes the almost inevitable remark: “Need we add that the position of the professor who would be only a professor, who is withdrawn from existence and has become insensible to this third degree of abstraction, is directly opposed to the position of the true metaphysician? Thomistic metaphysics is called *scholastic* from the name of its soreset trial. School teaching is its special enemy. It must ceaselessly triumph over the professorial adversary attacking from within.”⁸

It could hardly be better expressed. Let us see what happens when we neglect to push judgments beyond abstract essences to actually existing concrete reality. Thomas himself has noted that the properties of the essence are not the same when it is taken abstractly in itself as when taken in the state of concrete actualization in a really existing being. In fact, he has expressed himself so clearly on this subject that we can do no better than let him speak for himself:

[W]ith respect to whatever is signified abstractly, we can truly say that it contains nothing extraneous in it, namely, what is outside its own essence, for instance, “humanity,” “whiteness,” and whatever things are said in this way. The reason for this is that “humanity” is signified as that by which something is a human being, and “whiteness” as that by which something is white. Now, something is not human, formally speaking, except through that which pertains to the formal nature of a human being, and similarly, nothing is formally white except through that which pertains to the formal nature of something white. Therefore abstract things of this sort can have in themselves nothing alien. The situation is different, however, in items that are signified in the concrete; for “a human being” is signified as one who possesses humanity, and “something white” as what possesses whiteness. However, the fact that a human being possesses humanity, or a white thing whiteness, does not prevent their possessing something else that does not pertain to their formal nature as long as it is not opposed to it. Therefore a human being and a white item can possess something other than humanity or whiteness. And this is the reason why whiteness and humanity are signified in the manner of a part, and are not predicated of concrete items, just as a part is not predicated of the whole of which it is a part. [Trans. Schultz-Synan, slightly modified.]⁹

⁸Ibid., p. 24.

⁹“Tertiam differenciam ponit ibi: *Id quod est habere* etc. Et sumitur ista differencia per admixtionem alicuius extranei. Circa quod considerandum est quod circa quodcumque abstracte significatum hoc habet veritatem quod non habet in se aliquid extraneum, quod scilicet sit preter essenciam suam, sicut humanitas, albedo et quecumque hoc modo dicuntur, cuius ratio est quia humanitas significatur ut quo aliquid est homo, et albedo ut quo aliquid est album; non est autem aliquid homo formaliter loquendo nisi per id quod ad rationem hominis pertinet, et similiter non est aliquid album formaliter nisi per id quod pertinet ad rationem albi; et ideo huiusmodi abstracta nichil alienum in se habere possunt. Aliter autem se habet in hiis que significantur in concreto, nam homo significatur ut qui habet humanitatem, et album ut quod habet albedinem. Ex hoc autem quod homo habet humanitatem uel album albedinem, non prohibetur habere aliquid aliud quod non pertinet ad rationem horum, nisi solum quod est opposi-

We have only to apply these observations to philosophy itself, to see how our perspectives on problems changes depending on whether we avoid them or face them. Philosophers begin with the experience common to everyone, and in the end they should return to the same common experience, because this is what they set out to explain. The only way to succeed is to begin with an analysis, as complete as possible, of the various elements included in the factual data that go to make up the experience. Our first task here is to break up the concrete object into its intelligible elements. We must distinguish and separate the elements that are given to us as an integral whole. This can only be done by means of a distinct concept representing each element. Now, a necessary condition in singling out any concept is that it contains everything its definition includes and nothing else. This is why abstract essences, each of which is distinguished from the others as its concept is from theirs, are only distinguished from them because it excludes them. *Humanity* is that by which a man is a man, and it is that exclusively. *Humanity* does not include *whiteness*: there are men who are not white. Conversely, *whiteness* is that by which what is white is white, and this does not include *humanity*. There can be a great variety of white things which are not men. Thus our inquiry into reality first of all leads us to break down the complexity of the concrete object into a number of intelligible essences, each of which is distinct in itself insofar as it is irreducible to the others.

A problem then arises: does philosophy consist in these abstract essences taken in the state of abstraction in which we are now considering them? To say yes is to become involved in a philosophy of the concept. We mean by this not simply a philosophy that calls upon concepts, for this is essential to all human knowledge, but a philosophy for which reality can be adequately grasped in and through concepts. History shows us many such philosophies—one could even say that there is an innumerable variety of them—but there is no need to classify them here. This position concerns us primarily in that it expresses a natural tendency of reason to think by means of “clear and distinct ideas,” and consequently to reject as obscure and confused whatever does not allow itself to be included within the limits of precisely defined notions. From this point of view, the “simple natures” on which Descartes worked are no different from the essences of the tree of Porphyry that he denounced as sterile.

Let us go further. When we fail to carry our inquiry beyond essences, no matter what method we use, and even if we begin by admitting that the concept

tum hiis: et ideo homo et album possunt aliquid aliud habere quam humanitatem uel albedinem; et hec est ratio quare albedo vel humanitas significantur per modum partis et non praedicantur de concretis sicut nec aliqua pars de suo toto. Quia igitur, sicut dictum est, ipsum esse significatur ut abstractum, id quod est ut concretum, consequens est verum esse quod hic dicitur quod id *quod est, potest aliquid habere preter quam quod ipsum est*, id est preter suam essenciam, sed *ipsum esse nichil aliud habet ammixtum preter suam essenciam.*” *Expositio libri Boetii De ebdomadibus* 2 [Leonine ed. 50.271.114—272.146].

could not be the ultimate object of philosophy, we end up in fact with a philosophy of concepts. If it is a matter of the simple historical interpretation of philosophies, the problem is the same. Limiting ourselves to the problem raised by the interpretation of Thomism, we have to choose between locating its ultimate object in grasping the essences of which concrete reality is composed, in which case our highest mode of knowing would be a sort of intellectual intuition of pure essences, or assigning to Thomistic philosophy, as its ultimate goal, rational knowledge of concrete reality through the essences involved in the metaphysical texture of that reality.

Whatever we may think, there can be no doubt that the primary thrust of the whole thought of Thomas Aquinas is toward knowledge of the existing concrete thing given in sensible experience, and of the first causes of this existing thing, whether they be sensible or not. The whole philosophy we have been studying, from metaphysics to moral philosophy, bears testimony to this. This is why it is and remains a philosophy in the proper sense and not, in the widely pejorative sense of the term, a "scholasticism." Every philosophy engenders its own scholasticism, but the terms "philosophy" and "scholasticism" designate two specifically distinct things. Every philosophy worthy of the name starts out from reality and returns to it; every scholasticism starts from a philosophy and returns to it. Philosophy degenerates into scholasticism the moment when, instead of taking existing concrete reality as the object of its reflection in order to study it deeply, penetrate it, and throw more and more light on it, philosophy applies itself rather to the propositions it is supposed to explain, as if those propositions themselves, and not what they shed light upon, were the reality itself.

To fall into this error is to become incapable of understanding even the history of philosophy, because understanding a philosophy does not mean reading what it says in one place in terms of what it says in another; it is reading it at each moment in terms of what it is speaking about. This mistake is far more harmful to philosophy itself than to the history of philosophy. Thomas' teaching degenerated into scholasticism whenever it has been cut off from reality, which is the only object it sets out to explain. This is not a reason for believing that Thomism is a scholasticism, for its object is not Thomism but the world, man, and God, viewed as existing beings in their very existence. It is therefore true to say that in this first sense the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas is existential in the fullest meaning of the word.

There is another even more radical meaning of the term "existential philosophy" that perhaps no less urgently commands our attention. In this case the very expression, which itself is so inviting, lends itself to so many misunderstandings that we should fear the blossoming and spreading of new "scholastic" controversies if it is used without taking necessary precautions. It is a modern expression, and although it has arisen out of problems as old as Western thought, it can hardly be applied to the doctrine of Aquinas without giving the impression of

trying to rejuvenate it from without by fitting it up in modern dress. To attempt something like this is hardly wise or even smart. It has the effect of aligning Thomism with some philosophies that in certain fundamental respects are its direct opposite. To speak of "existential philosophy" today immediately brings to mind names like Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Jaspers, and others, whose philosophical opinions are not always the same, and to which no Thomism, conscious of its own nature, could under any circumstances fully align itself. To do so would lay it open to the charge of seeking artificial rejuvenation, of postponing its threatening dissolution by laying claim to a title generally given to recent philosophies still full of vitality. The whole undertaking would be undignified and profitless to all parties concerned and could only lead to misunderstandings whose effects would be felt for a long time.

The first and most serious of these misunderstandings would be to give the impression that Thomism was just another existential philosophy; whereas the real question would be whether these philosophies to which Thomism is being compared have really any right to be called existential philosophies at all. Assuredly they are philosophies very much concerned with existence. However, they hardly deal with it except as an object of a possible phenomenology of human existence, as though the primacy of existence meant chiefly for them that primacy of "ethics" that Kierkegaard so strongly insisted upon. If we look in this group for a philosophy that goes beyond the phenomenological point of view and establishes the act of existing as the keystone of the whole of metaphysics, it seems to me we shall have trouble finding it there. But this is clearly what Thomas Aquinas has done. As a metaphysics of the act of existing, Thomism is not *another* existential philosophy, it is *the only one*. All those phenomenologies on the hunt for an ontology seem unconsciously to be moving in its direction as though driven on by the natural desire for their own ultimate justification.

What characterizes Thomism is the decision to locate existence in the heart of reality as an act transcending any concept, while at the same time to avoid the twofold error of remaining silent before the transcendence of existence or of denaturing existence by objectifying it. The only way of speaking about the act of existing is to grasp it in a concept, and the concept that directly expresses it is the concept of being. Being is *that which is*, that is to say, *that which has the act of existing*. It is impossible to reach the act of existing by an intellectual intuition that would grasp it directly and by itself. To think is first of all to conceive. Now, the object of a concept is always an essence, or something presenting itself to thought as an essence; in brief, an object. The act of existing is itself an act. Hence it can only be grasped by or in the essence of which it is the act. A pure *est* is unthinkable; but an *id quod est* can be thought. Every *id quod est* is first of all a being, and because there is no other concept prior to this, being is the first principle of knowledge. It is so in itself, and it is so in the doctrine of Thomas Aquinas. That is why his philosophy has every claim to be

called a "philosophy of being," provided that we understand by this *ens*, a being (*étant*), with the act of existing (*esse*) that it includes.

If it is true that the very possibility of philosophy is tied up with the use of the concept, the name that correctly designates a philosophy is drawn from the concept on which its first principle is based. This cannot be *esse*, because taken in itself *esse* is not the object of a quidditative concept. So it must inevitably be being. Accordingly, to call Thomism an existential philosophy could not call into question the legitimacy of its traditional title but only confirm it. Since the act of existing can only be conceived in the concept of being (*étant*), Thomism is always a philosophy of being, even though it should be called existential.

It seems useful to add this precision, because the abstract notion of being is ambivalent by its very definition. In a "that which is" (*id quod est*), or a "having being" (*esse habens*), we can naturally emphasize either the *id quod* and the *habens* or the *esse* and the *est*. Not only can this be done, but it actually is done, and usually it is the "that which" (*id quod*) and the "having" (*habens*) that is emphasized, because they represent the "thing" (*res*) that exists, in short, being as the object of the concept.

The natural tendency to conceptualize and to confine ourselves to the concept is so strong that it has been responsible for the appearance of several interpretations of Thomism in which *esse*, that is, the very act of existing, seems to have no effective role to play. By yielding completely to this natural tendency, we end up by making Thomism a philosophy of the *id quod*, abstracting from its *esse*. In order to rectify this situation, it can be useful to qualify Thomism as an "existential philosophy." To recall in this way the full meaning of the term *ens* in Thomas' language, is to guard against the impoverishment it has been made to undergo, along with the doctrine whose first principle it is. It is not to forget that the concept signified by *ens* implies a direct reference to existence (*nam ens dicitur quasi esse habens*).¹⁰

It might be objected that a new expression like this is superfluous, because everyone is quite aware of what it is meant to express. This may be so, but it is not enough that everyone knows it. Everyone must think it as well, and it is perhaps harder to do this than might be suspected. The history of the distinction between essence and existence, and the endless controversies to which it is giving rise in our own day, shows where the difficulty lies. The very name of the controversy is revealing; it substitutes the abstract concept of existence for the concrete notion of the act of existing. Hence it "essentializes" the act of existing by making an act into the object of a simple concept. The temptation to do this is so strong that philosophers began to succumb to it in the first generation after Aquinas. In the present state of historical research, Giles of Rome was the starting point of the controversies over essence and existence. It has often been

¹⁰In *Metaph.* 10.1 [ed. Cathala-Spiazzi, p. 567, n. 2419].

noted that this resolute defender of the distinction expressed himself as though essence were one thing and existence another. Whether he consciously went so far as to reify the act of existing would require a closer examination. For our purpose it is enough to observe that his language betrays a marked tendency to conceive of *esse* as though it were a thing, and consequently to conceive the distinction between essence and existence as between two things. Giles said: *Esse et essentia sunt duae res*.¹¹ Many other professed Thomists since his time have expressed themselves in similar terms. But little is to be gained by making this distinction if existence itself is conceived as an essence. To call Thomism an "existential philosophy" serves to focus attention on this point.

However, we have not yet reached the final justification of the expression "existential" as applied to Thomistic philosophy. It is not enough to say of every being that its concept connotes *esse*, and that this *esse* must be taken as an act. We must add that this *esse* is the act of the same being whose concept connotes it. In every *esse habens* the *esse* is the act of the *habens* that possesses it, and the effect of this act upon what receives it is precisely to make it a being.

If we accept this doctrine in all its force and with all its ontological implications, we come at once to that well-known Thomistic proposition: *nomen ens imponitur ab ipso esse*.¹² This is as much as to say that the act of existing is the very core of being, since being draws everything, even its name, from *esse*. What characterizes Thomistic ontology thus understood, is not so much the distinction between essence and existence as the primacy of the act of existing, not over and above being, but within it. To say that Thomistic philosophy is "existential," then, is to stress a little more forcibly than usual that a philosophy of being thus conceived is first of all a philosophy of the act of existing.

There would be no advantage in making a great to-do about the act of existing to the point of forgetting about the reality of essence, or even to thinking that this justifies us to belittle its importance. Essences are the intelligible stuff of the world. That is why ever since Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, philosophy has been a hunt for essences. The great question is whether we will try to take them alive, or if our philosophy will be only a herbarium of dead essences. An essence is dead when the residue it leaves is deposited in the mind as a concept, without preserving its contact with its act of existing. It is certainly a lot easier to handle dead essences. Reason looks at them from all sides through the definitions she gives them. Knowing what each of them contains, the mind is assured

¹¹Giles of Rome, *Theoremata de esse et essentia*, ed. Edgar Hocedez (Louvain: Institut Supérieur de Philosophie, 1930), p. 127, l. 12. On the interpretation of this expression see the introduction to this work, pp. 54–56. As Hocedez puts it (p. 55), the distinction *inter rem et rem*, taken literally, would amount to making the distinction between essence and existence a distinction between essence and essence.

¹²In *Metaph.* 4.2 [ed. Cathala-Spiazzi, p. 155, n. 558].

that none of them either is or can be anything other than it is, and it is secure against surprise from any quarter. Accordingly, it can without fear deduce a priori the properties of each of them and even calculate beforehand all their possible combinations.

A philosophy of the act of existing, however, cannot be satisfied with such methods. It will first of all want to know which, among all the possible combinations of these essences, are actually realized. This will probably lead it to observe quite quickly that many real combinations of essences are the very ones that would have been regarded as least likely, or even judged a priori to be impossible. But perhaps living essences find in their own acts of existing sources of fecundity and invention that the bare definitions of their concepts fail to formulate. Neither essence nor existence has any meaning apart from the other. Taken separately they are but two abstractions. The only finite reality the mind can fruitfully explore is that of the concrete being itself, the original, unique, and in the case of man, unpredictable and free actualization of an inexhaustible essence by its own act of existing.

It would be difficult to find in the works of Thomas Aquinas a single concrete problem whose solution does not ultimately depend on this principle. He is primarily a theologian; and it is while constructing his theology with such striking technical originality that he has best proven his fecundity. Wherever his philosophy makes contact with his theology, it is illuminated with the new light that the act of existing throws on everything it touches. Sometimes, when Thomas brings up problems and uses notions that are not central to his personal concerns, he accepts already hardened essences in the margin, so to speak, of his work. He has not always taken the time to rejuvenate them by bringing them into contact with the act of existing, nor does he appear to have felt the need for doing so. But note well that had he undertaken such a work for us, his doctrine would still remain with its face turned to the future. This will always be the case, because the principle to which he appeals is the fertile energy of an act rather than the fixed expression of a concept. A universe like this will never stop surrendering its secret, unless some day it ceases to exist.

This is because the universe is an ordered plurality of real essences perfected by their acts of existing. Such must indeed be the case, since this universe is made up of beings, and a being is "something having an act of existing." Each being has its own act of existing, distinct from that of every other (*Habet enim res unaquaeque in seipsa esse proprium ab omnibus aliis distinctum*).¹³ Let us go further: it is by its act of existing that it is a being, because by this act it exists (*Unumquodque est per suum esse*).¹⁴ If we can say, as is often re-

¹³SCG 1.14 [2].

¹⁴SCG 1.22 [5]. See "Ipsum autem esse est complementum substantiae existentis: unumquodque enim actu est per hoc quod esse habet" (SCG 2.53 [2]).

peated, that a being's acting proceeds from its act of existing (*operatio sequitur esse*), it is not merely in the sense of the action's similarity to the being, but also and especially because the action of a being is only the unfolding in time of the primal act of existing that makes it to be. This gives us a notion of an efficient cause that is in agreement with the immediate certitudes of common sense, and confers on them the metaphysical depth they lack by nature. The strong feeling everyone has that an efficient cause extends to the very existence of its effect is completely justified here (*causa importat influxum quemdam in esse causati*).¹⁵ God is the only being to which this statement, which is valid for others, cannot as such be correctly applied. Of him it cannot be said that he is *by his* act of existing; rather, he is his act of existing. Since we can only think in terms of being, and since we can only grasp a being as an essence, we have to say that God has an essence; but we must hasten to add that what in him serves as an essence is his act of existing (*In Deo non est aliud essentia vel quidditas quam suum esse*).¹⁶ The act of existing is the act of acts; it is the primary energy of a being from which all activities flow (*operatio sequitur esse*). Since God is the very act of existing, the activity proper to him and to him alone is the producing of acts of existing. To produce an act of existing is what we call creating. Creating is, therefore, the action proper to God (*Ergo creatio est propria Dei actio*).¹⁷ And since it is as the Act of Existing that he alone has the power to create, the act of existing is his proper effect (*Esse est ejus proprius effectus*).¹⁸

The linking of these fundamental notions is strictly necessary. As God is by essence the Act of Existing itself, the created act of existing must be his proper effect (*Cum Deus sit ipsum esse per suam essentiam, oportet quod esse creatum sit proprius effectus ejus*).¹⁹ Once we reach this conclusion, it becomes in its turn the starting point of a long line of consequences. Every effect resembles its cause, and that by which the effect most profoundly adheres to its cause is also that by which it most resembles the cause. Accordingly, if being is created, its primary resemblance to God lies in its own act of existing (*omne ens, in quantum habet esse, est Ei simile*).²⁰ From this we know at once that it is the act of existing in each being that is most inward, deepest and metaphysically

¹⁵The connection between all the acts of a substance and its *esse* has been clearly shown in a work that we could not recommend more highly: Joseph de Finance, *Être et agir dans la philosophie de saint Thomas* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1943). For the text quoted see *In Metaph.* 5.1 (ed. Cathala-Spiazzi, p. 208, n. 751).

¹⁶SCG 1.22 [1].

¹⁷Ibid. 2.21 [4].

¹⁸Ibid. 2.22 [3].

¹⁹ST 1.8.1, resp.

²⁰SCG 2.22 [7]. See also: "Assimilatio autem cuiuslibet substantiae creatae ad Deum est per ipsum esse" (ibid. 2.53 [5]).

primary. Hence, the necessity in an ontology that does not stop at the level of abstract essence, of pushing right to the existential root of every being in order to arrive at the very principle of its unity (*Unumquodque secundum idem habet esse et individuationem*).²¹

Such, in particular, is the solution of the problem of the metaphysical structure of the human being. If we take separately the essence of the body and the essence of the soul, we shall never reconstitute the concrete unity of the human being. The unity of a man is first of all the unity of his soul, which is really only the unity of his own *esse*. It is the same act of existing, having come forth from the divine *Esse*, that passes through the soul animating the body, and that penetrates even the tiniest cells of each human body. In the last analysis, this is why, although the soul is a substance, its union with the body is not accidental: "It does not follow that the body is united with it accidentally, because the self-same act of existing that belongs to the soul is conferred on the body" (*Non tamen sequitur quod corpus ei accidentaliter uniatur, quia illud idem esse quod est animae, communicat corpori*).²²

Thus the human person, that knowing being, is bound to God by his deepest ontological ground, and he will not have to look further for the entrance to the paths that will lead him to recognize his cause. If he pursues his metaphysical analysis far enough, any being whatsoever will place him in the presence of God. For God is in every being as its cause, and since his action touches it in its very act of existing, he is actually present at the heart of what it is (*Oportet quod Deus sit in omnibus rebus, et intime*).²³ To prove the existence of God is, in the last analysis, to ascend by reason from any finite act of existing to the pure Act of Existing that causes it. Here human knowledge reaches its ultimate goal. When God has been established as the supreme Act of Existing, philosophy ends and mysticism begins. More simply put, reason affirms that what it knows depends in its very root upon the God it does not know (*cum Deo quasi ignoto conjungimur*).²⁴ To understand Thomas' philosophy in this way would not at all "de-essentialize" it. Rather, it would restore real essence to it and re-establish it in its full right. For essence is something else and much more than

²¹*De anima* 1, ad 2. To avoid possible equivocation, let us make it clear that this notion is not opposed to the fact that, in corporeal substance, matter is the principle of individuation. For matter to individuate, it has to be; now it only *is* by the act of its form, which in its turn only *is* by its act of existing. Causes cause one another though in different respects.

²²*Ibid.*, ad 1. Let us note that for the theologian this solves the much-debated question about the point at which grace is inserted in the soul. See the important statement in *ST* 1-2.110.2, ad 3.

²³*Ibid.* 1.8.1, resp.

²⁴"Et hoc est ultimum et perfectissimum nostrae cognitionis in hac vita, ut Dionysius dicit in libro *De mystica theologia* (ch. 1, 2): *cum Deo quasi ignoto conjungimur: quod quidem contingit dum de eo quid non sit cognoscimus, quid vero sit penitus manet ignotum*" (*SCG* 3.49 [9]).

the quiddity that satisfies abstract reason; it is that by which, and in which, being has existence (*quidditatis nomen sumitur ex hoc quod diffinitionem significat; sed essentia dicitur secundum quod per eam et in ea ens habet esse*).²⁵ There is nothing further to be added. Yet it is worth repeating, because the human mind is so constituted that even one who repeats it will soon forget it.

It has been rightly insisted that we must distinguish between a *problem* and a *mystery*, and upon the need for the metaphysician to pass from the first level in order to reach the second. This is correct, but on condition that neither one is to be sacrificed for the sake of the other. When philosophy abandons problems in order to immerse itself in mystery, it ceases to be philosophy and mysticism begins. Whether we like it or not, problems are the very stuff out of which philosophy is made. To think is to know by concepts. Yet as soon as we begin to interpret reality in terms of concepts we are involved with problems. This is so unavoidable that even those who try most strongly to go beyond the level of problems must recognize it. "Something which cannot be reduced to a problem cannot be looked at or treated as an object, and that by definition."²⁶ If philosophizing is a way of examining reality, it can only deal with reality to the extent that reality can be approached through problems. God is accessible to philosophical reflection only by way of the problem of his existence, which is followed by the problem of his nature, then by the problem of his action and of his government of the world. There are as many problems as there are mysteries, and they are not only met when philosophy talks about God. The philosophy of the human person swarms with mysteries, such as the mysteries of knowledge and liberty.

Mystery does not only dwell in the world of matter. Reason has for centuries been challenged by such obscure facts as efficient causality and the presence of quality. To renounce making problems out of mysteries would be to renounce philosophizing. Accordingly, this is not the way to seek the solution of the crisis confronting philosophy today. But if we must not do away with problems, neither ought we to do away with mysteries. The real danger begins precisely at the point where the problem raised by the mystery and, as it were, included in it, pretends to be sufficient to itself and lay claim to an autonomy that it does not have. The moment a philosopher makes this mistake he is involved with combinations of abstract concepts in a game that will never finish. Then he enters into the realm of the antinomies of pure reason. Kant was not wrong when he said that escape was impossible. We only need add that everything invites philosophical reason not to enter the game, because philosophy ought not to be the discussion of pure problems nor a flight from mystery.

²⁵*De ente et essentia* 1 [Leonine ed. 43: 370.49–52.]

²⁶Gabriel Marcel, *Being and Having*, trans. Katharine Farrer (Westminster: Dacre Press, 1949), p. 126.

Rather, it ought to be a perpetually renewed effort to treat every problem as bound up in a mystery, or to treat the mystery as a problem by examining it with the help of concepts.

There is a mystery that can be called the object par excellence of philosophy, since metaphysics presupposes it, namely, the act of existing. The philosophy of Thomas Aquinas located this mystery in the heart of reality and avoided the risk, so fatal to metaphysical thought, of growing sterile in the very purity of abstraction. To a certain point Aristotle had already preceded him in this respect. His reformation had been to give philosophy an object that was not the ideal essence conceived by thought, but real being such as it is and acts. With Aristotle, reality (*οὐσία*) is no longer an Idea, it is substance that merits this name. In order to measure the scope of this revolution, we have only to compare the solutions to the problem of the first principle of all things proposed by Aristotle and Plato. When Plato takes up the problem, he sets out from an analysis of reality that disengages the intelligible element from it; he then proceeds back from one intelligible form to another until he comes to the first form. This is the Good in itself: an Idea, or in other words an hypostasized abstraction. Aristotle sets out from the concrete substance given in sensible experience, that is, he sets out from the existing thing. Then, contrary to Plato, he begins by revealing the active principle of its being and of its activities. He proceeds back from one ontological form to another until he comes to the first form. This is pure act, which then becomes the highest reality, for it alone fully deserves the name of being. On it everything else depends, because everything else imitates it in an eternally recommenced effort to imitate in time its immovable actuality.

Aquinas' own work has been to push on into the interior of being itself as far as the secret principle that establishes, no longer the actuality of being as substance, but the actuality of being as being. To the age-old question (even Aristotle referred to it as old): What is being? Thomas replied: it is that which has the act of existing. An ontology like this sacrifices nothing of the intelligible reality accessible to us under the form of concepts. Like Aristotle's, it will never grow tired of analyzing, classifying, defining. But it will always remember that, in regard to what is deepest in itself, the real object it defines is incapable of definition. It is not an abstraction; it is not even a thing. It is not even merely the formal act that makes it to be such and such a thing. It is the act that posits it as a real existing being by actualizing the very form that makes it intelligible. A philosophy like this is at grips with the secret energy that causes its object. It finds in the awareness of its limitations the principle of its very fecundity. It will never believe that it has come to the end of its inquiry, because its end is beyond what it can enclose within the bounds of a concept.

We are not dealing now with a philosophy that *turns its back on existence* and consequently is doomed to lose sight of it. Rather, we have to do with a philosophy that confronts it and never stops looking at it. We cannot see existence, yet we know it is there, and we can at least affirm it by an act of judg-

ment as the hidden ground of what we can see and of what we try to define. This is also why Thomistic metaphysics refuses to be limited to what the human mind knew about being in the thirteenth century. It even refuses to allow itself to be halted by what we know about it in the twentieth. It invites us to look beyond present-day science toward that primitive energy from which arise both every knowing subject and every known object.

If all things "are" in virtue of their own act of being, each one of them breaks through the enclosing frame of its own definition. Better, perhaps, it has no proper definition (*Individuum est ineffabile*). Yes, the individual is ineffable, not because it is too little but because it is too great. Thomas' universe is peopled with living essences sprung from a source as secret and rich as their very life. By a relationship more profound than so many superficial dissimilarities might lead us to think otherwise, his world is continuous with the scientific world of Pascal rather than that of Descartes. In Pascal's world, the imagination will more likely grow weary of producing concepts than nature will tire of providing them. There, "All things hide some mystery; all things are veils which hide God."²⁷ Is this not what Thomas had already said with simplicity no less striking than Pascal's eloquence: God is in all things and in their very depths: (*Deus est in omnibus rebus et intime*)? For this can be truly said of each act of existing distinct from every other, and still at the center of all of them there is hidden the same supreme Act of Existing, who is God.

If we want to recapture the true meaning of Thomism, we have to go beyond the tightly-woven fabric of its philosophical theses into its soul or spirit. What lies at the origin of that powerful structure of ideas is a deep religious life, the interior warmth of a soul in search of God. There have been, in the recent past, prolonged and subtle disputes as to whether, according to Thomas, we experience a natural desire for our supernatural end. Theologians must ultimately decide such questions. They have to reach some kind of agreement about expressions and formulas that concern God's transcendence and still do not allow us to be separated from him. The historian can at least say that Aquinas leaves such questions only partially settled; the many gaps he left in his doctrines show what nature awaits to be completed by grace.

At the basis of this philosophy, as at the basis of all Christian philosophy, there is the awareness of a deep unhappiness and need for a comforter who can only be God: "Natural reason tells man that he is subject to a higher being because of the defects he discerns in himself, defects for which he requires help and direction from a higher being. Whatever this being may be, it is commonly

²⁷Blaise Pascal ["Excerpt from a Letter by Blaise Pascal to Monsieur and Mlle de Romanne," *Great Shorter Works of Pascal*, trans. Enide Caillet and John C. Blankenagel (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1948), p. 147].

spoken of as God."²⁸ This is the natural feeling that grace inflames in the Christian soul, and that the perfection of love brings to fulfillment when the soul is the soul of a saint. The burning desire of God that in John of the Cross overflows into lyric poetry is here transcribed into the language of pure ideas. Their impersonal formulations must not make us forget that they are nourished on the desire for God, and that in their own way they aim to satisfy this desire.

There is no point in requiring, as some appear to do, an interior life underlying Thomism, whose essence would be specifically different from Thomism itself. We ought not to think that the learned arrangement of the *Summa theologiae*, and the persistent advance of reason constructing this mighty edifice stone by stone, were for Thomas but the fruit of a superficial activity beneath which there moved deeper, richer and more religious thinking. The interior life of Aquinas, insofar as the hidden stirrings of so powerful a personality can be known, seems to have been just what it should have been to produce such a doctrine. It would be hard to imagine something more perfectly and lovingly devised than his demonstrations fashioned from clearly defined ideas, presented in perfectly precise statements, and placed in a carefully balanced order. Only a complete giving of himself can explain his mastery of expression and organization of philosophical ideas. His *Summa theologiae*, with its abstract clarity, its impersonal transparency, crystallizes his interior life before our eyes and for eternity. If we would recapture the deep and intense spirit of this interior life, there is nothing more useful than to reassemble for ourselves, but according to the order he gave them, the many diverse elements that go to make up this immense edifice. We should study its internal structure and strive to arouse in ourselves the conviction of its necessity. Only such a will to understand, awakened in us by the philosopher's own will, enables us to see that this light is but the outward glow of an invisible fire, and to find behind the order of its ideas the powerful impulse that brought them together.

Only thus does Thomism appear in all its beauty. It is a philosophy that creates excitement by means of pure ideas, and does so by sheer faith in the value of proofs and submission to the demands of reason. Perhaps this aspect of his doctrine will become clearer to those who are disturbed by the very real difficulties encountered in the beginning, if they considered what Thomas' spirituality really was. If it were true that Thomism were inspired by a spirit different from the one that quickened his religious life, the difference would become apparent by comparing his manner of thinking with his manner of praying. A study of the prayers of Aquinas that have been preserved, and whose religious value is so great that the Church has placed them in the Roman breviary, shows clearly that their fervor is not characterized by the note of rapture or emotion or spiritual relish common enough in many forms of prayer. His fervor is com-

²⁸ST 2-2.85.1, resp.

pletely expressed in the loving petitioning of God for everything he should ask of him, and in a becoming manner. His phrases tend to be rather rigid because the rhythms are so balanced and regular. But his fervor is genuine, deep and readily recognizable, reflecting the careful rhythms of his thought:

I pray Thee that this Holy Communion may be to me, not guilt or punishment, but a saving intercession for pardon. Let it be to me an armor of faith and a shield of good-will. Let it be to me a casting out of vices; a driving away of all evil desires and fleshly lusts; an increase of charity, patience, humility, obedience, and all virtues; a firm defense against the plots of all my enemies, both seen and unseen; a perfect quieting of all motions of sin, both in my flesh and in my spirit; a firm cleaving unto Thee, the only and true God, and a happy ending of my life.²⁹

Spirituality like this is more eager for light than for taste. The rhythm of Thomas' phrases and the resonance of his words never interfere with the order of his ideas. Nevertheless, what discriminating taste does not perceive, beneath the balanced cadence of his expression, a religious emotion that is almost poetic?

Indeed, by the excellence of that reason which he serves so lovingly, Thomas actually became a poet and even, if we believe a disinterested judge, the greatest Latin poet of the whole Middle Ages. It is remarkable that the lofty beauty of the works attributed to this poet of the Eucharist depends almost entirely on the rigorous precision and the richness of his expressions. Poems like the *Ecce panis angelorum* or the *Oro te devote* are veritable condensed theological treatises, and they have supplied generations of faithful Christians with inspiration and devotion. Perhaps the most distinctive of all his poems is the *Pange lingua*, which inspired Rémy de Gourmont to say, in words matching the flawless beauty of the style he was attempting to describe: "The inspiration of St. Thomas is fired by an unwavering genius, a genius at once strong, sure, confident and exact. What he wants to say, he speaks out boldly, and in words so lovely that even doubt grows fearful and takes to flight."³⁰

²⁹It is interesting to compare this prayer of Thomas to the one attributed to Bonaventure which immediately follows it in the Breviary. The contrast is striking because of Bonaventure's intense affectivity. [Their prayers are in the *Breviarium Romanum* (Rome, Vatican, 1925), pp. 16*-18*. St. Thomas' complete prayer after Communion is in Mary T. Clark, *An Aquinas Reader*, rev. ed. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), p. 436.]

³⁰Rémy de Gourmont, *Le latin mystique* (Paris: Crès, 1913), pp. 274-275. All texts dealing with Thomas' spirituality are brought together by A.-D. Sertillanges in his *Prières de saint Thomas d'Aquin*, in *Art Catholique* (Paris, 1920). [See also *Devoutly I Adore Thee. The Prayers and Hymns of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. and ed. Robert Anderson and Johann Moser (Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, c1993). *An Aquinas Reader*, pp. 435-441.]

Pange lingua gloriosi corporis mysterium
Sanguinisque pretiosi quem in mundi pretium
Fructus ventris generosi Rex effudit gentium.

Nobis datus, nobis natus ex intacta Virgine,
Et in mundo conversatus, sparso verbi semine
Sui moras incolatus miro clausit ordine. ...

We pass from Thomas' philosophy to his prayer, and from his prayer to his poetry, without becoming aware of any change of spirit. Indeed there is no change! His philosophy is as rich in beauty as his poetry is laden with thought. Of both the *Summa theologiae* and *Pange lingua* we can say that his is an unwavering genius, strong, sure, confident and exact. What he wants to say, he speaks out boldly and with such firmness of thought that doubt grows fearful and takes to flight.

Nowhere else, perhaps, does so demanding a reason respond to the call of so religious a heart. Thomas regards the human person as eminently equipped for the knowledge of phenomena; but he does not think that the most adequate human knowledge is also the most useful and most beautiful to which we can aspire. He sets up human reason in the sensible world as in its own kingdom, but while preparing it to explore and conquer this kingdom, he invites it to prefer to turn its gaze to another that is not merely the kingdom of man but the kingdom of the children of God. Such is the thinking of Thomas Aquinas. If we grant that a philosophy is not to be defined by the elements it borrows but by the spirit that quickens it, we shall see in this doctrine neither Platonism nor Aristotelianism but, above all, Christianity. It intended to express in the language of reason the total destiny of the Christian man; but, while constantly reminding him that on earth he must travel paths of exile where there is no light and no horizon, it never ceased to guide his steps toward the height from which can be seen, far off in the mist, the borders of the Promised Land.

Appendix 1

Translator's Note on Gilson's Revised Interpretation of Boethius' Notion of *Esse*

[What follows is a translation of the two paragraphs on Boethius' notion of being as they appear in the French versions of both the fifth (pp. 131–132) and the sixth (pp. *106–107) editions of *Le Thomisme*. As mentioned above, p. 91, n. 14, Fr. Laurence Shook altered these paragraphs, undoubtedly on the instruction of Gilson himself, in his translation of the fifth edition (*The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, pp. 90–91). In the present translation we have maintained that change in the interpretation of the Boethian notion of being from “existence” to “form,” in order to bring it into line with Gilson's revised interpretation in his *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, pp. 104–105.

On a personal note, I remember Anton Pegis in the early 1950's showing Gilson, surrounded by his students in the Toronto Institute, the passage in Boethius' second commentary on the *Isagoge* of Porphyry in which Boethius identifies *esse* with the definition of a thing, that is, with its form or essence: “... quid est autem esse rei? Nihil est aliud nisi definitio, uni cuique enim rei interrogatae ‘quid est?’ si quis quod est esse monstrare voluerit, definitionem dicit.” Boethius, *In Eisagogen Porphyrii in Praedicamenta*, ed. secunda 4.14; CSEL 48, ed. G. Schepss and S. Brandt (Vienna/Leipzig, 1906), p. 273.12–15. Gilson was ecstatic and exclaimed: “Now we know what Boethius means by *esse!*”—A.M.]

When in his turn Boethius took up the problem, he raised it to the level of metaphysics. The obscurity of his pithy formulas must have had no small role in drawing the attention of his commentators to them. Boethius distinguishes between being and that which is: *diversum est esse et id quod est*. By *esse* here he undoubtedly means existence, but his distinction of *esse* and *id quod est* does not mean a distinction between essence and existence within being, as Thomas Aquinas will hold. On the contrary, it expresses the distinction between God and created substances. God is *esse, ipsum esse*, who participates in nothing, but in whom every existing thing participates insofar as it exists. Thus understood, being is pure by full right and by definition: *ipsum esse nihil aliud praeter se habet admixtum*. On the other hand, *quod est* only exists insofar as it is informed by *ipsum esse*. In this way the pure being that is God can be considered as the form to which everything real owes its existence: ‘*quod est*’ *accepta essendi forma est atque consistit*.

To say that the *ipsum esse* that is God confers on things the form of being was to link up by another route with a theology akin to Augustine's. Assuredly, we are here dealing with two distinct doctrines, each of which is alone respon-

sible for its own method, but both have sprung from the common ground of the same Platonic ontology of essence. Augustine did not have in mind the existential elements that constitute concrete existing beings, but rather the essential factors of the intelligibility of beings. Hence he could say of the Word of God that it is the form of everything that exists. The Word is indeed the supreme likeness of the first Principle; thus it is the absolute Truth, self-identical without any admixture of otherness. In this sense it is the form of all existing things: *forma est omnium quae sunt*. By the law of "communicating Platonisms" every commentator on Boethius must be tempted to understand it in this sense. This is what Gilbert of Poitiers seems to have done in the twelfth century. To comment on Boethius through Gilbert of Poitiers is certainly explaining the obscure by the more obscure. The present state of Gilbert's text may explain this in part; his language certainly has much to do with it. But the most serious cause of the obscurity may not be Gilbert's fault, for he seems to have our habit of thinking about problems of existence in terms of essence. Where this happens, levels [of meaning] become confused and pseudo-problems are multiplied to infinity.

Appendix 2

The Life of Thomas Aquinas

[Gilson's sketch of Thomas' life, written prior to the appearance of James A. Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas d'Aquino, His Life, Thought and Works* (Garden City NY: Doubleday, 1974; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975; 2nd rev. ed. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1983), differs in some respects from it and from the most recent biography by Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas I: The Person and His Work*, trans. Robert Royal (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1996). According to Torrell, Thomas was born in 1224 or 1225; his father had the modest title of *miles* (knight). His parents offered him as an oblate to the monastery of Monte Cassino. His first studies in Paris (1245–1248) were in the liberal arts and theology, the latter under Albert the Great. In Cologne, from 1248 to 1252, he continued his studies in theology under Albert, and also taught the Bible cursorily, as a biblical Bachelor. Returning to Paris, he taught the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard as a Bachelor of the *Sentences* (1252–1256), completing the work when he became a Master of Theology (1256).—A.M.]

The following notes make no pretension to originality. There is much that is uncertain in the biography of Thomas Aquinas; here we shall only sketch, without vouching for their accuracy, the broad lines of a career whose details often escape us.

Thomas was born toward the beginning of the year 1225 in the château of Roccasecca, not far from the small town of Aquino, of which his father was the count. In 1230, at the age of five, his parents offered him as an oblate to the Benedictine abbey close to Monte Cassino; later he would have to give his full approval of his parents' decision (see *Quodl.* 3.2 and 4.23).

The boy remained under the Benedictine Rule from the age of five to fourteen. This first monastic formation left indelible traces on him; he would never stop being first and foremost a monk. In 1239, when Frederick II expelled the religious from Monte Cassino, the boy returned to his family until the autumn when he became a student at the University of Naples, recently founded by the same Frederick.

Thomas' father died on December 24, 1243. Freer to make his own decisions, the young man decided to enter the Order of Friars Preachers, founded by St. Dominic. Foreseeing resistance from young Thomas' brothers, John the Teuton, Master General of the Order, decided to send him to Bologna, where he himself was going, and then to send Thomas on to the University of Paris. His brothers, however, seized him while on this journey and held him captive for almost a year. Regaining his freedom in the fall of 1245, he immediately made

his way to Paris, where he studied until the summer of 1248 under Albert the Great. When Albert left Paris to set up a *Studium Generale* in Cologne, he took his young pupil with him. There he studied four more years under the direction of Albert the Great.

In 1252 Thomas returned to Paris where he lectured publicly on sacred scripture (1252–1254), then on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard (1254–1256). He received the *Licentia docendi*, or license in theology, in the spring of 1256. The letter of Pope Alexander IV, which praised the chancellor, Aimeric, for having conferred on him the license in theology, is dated 3 March 1256: “We are happy to learn ... that even before receiving our letter to this effect, you have conferred the license to teach in the faculty of theology on our young master Thomas Aquinas of the Order of Preachers, a person outstanding for the nobility of his family, his irreproachable moral character, as well as for the treasure of the science of letters that he stored up by the grace of God.” Even taking into account the possible conventional language of official communications, the personal intervention of a pope and the expressions he uses suggest that the young Thomas was already recognized as an exceptionally bright pupil. Thomas gave the inaugural lecture of his course in theology in 1256 and extended the course without interruption to the summer vacation of 1259.

In possession of his complete title of Master of Theology of the University of Paris, Thomas was called to the papal court in Italy, where he taught almost without interruption from 1259 to 1268 under Popes Alexander IV, Urban IV, and Clement IV. From the autumn of 1268 to November 1272 he lived again in Paris—a doctrinal battlefield where the Averroists and the defenders of the traditional theology opposed each other. In the month of November 1272 Thomas was recalled from Paris and resumed his teaching of theology in Naples. At the invitation of Pope Gregory X, Thomas left this city for the last time and set out for Lyons, where he was to assist at the General Council. He fell ill on the way and died 7 March 1274 in the Cistercian monastery of Fossanova, near Terracina. He was forty-nine years old.

Appendix 3

Chronology of Selected Works of Thomas Aquinas

[This chronological list, sub-divided into seven groupings, is limited to the works of Aquinas that are cited in Gilson's *Le Thomisme*. For complete, general catalogues of Aquinas' works see Ignatius Theodore Eschmann, "A Catalogue of St. Thomas's Works," in Etienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, pp. 381-437; James A. Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas d'Aquino: His Life, Thought, and Work*; and Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas, 1: The Person and His Work*, pp. 330-361. The three historians usually agree on the period of Aquinas' life in which a given work was written, but there is less consensus on the exact date of its composition. I have generally followed Torrell, who is the most recent and well-informed. The dates assigned by Weisheipl are indicated in square brackets.

Gilson expressed his gratitude to the great scholars on whose research he depended, especially Pierre Mandonnet, Martin Grabmann, and more recently Ignatius Theodore Eschmann. He was lavish in his praise of their scholarship and prudence, noting that in the main they were in agreement while differing in details. Commenting on the many works the historians attribute to Thomas between the years 1268 and 1271, Gilson wrote the passage that follows.—A.M.]

If I may be allowed to make a personal contribution to this collective inquiry, it would only consist in a bit of skepticism. This skepticism is justified. In the first place, few historians have the experience of what it means to write a doctrinal work, either philosophical or theological. To a certain extent the psychology of literary production is beyond them and their calculations can hardly take it into account. In the second place, I must confess some surprise at certain dates proposed. Each historian follows his own line of research; the points where these lines intersect are sometimes disturbing.

Only four years passed between 1268 and 1271, but if you look at the conclusions generally agreed on by the historians, you note that St. Thomas must have written in four years, besides an undetermined part of the *Summa theologiae* 2-2, the commentaries on Aristotle's *Physics*, *Metaphysics*, *Nicomachean Ethics* and *De anima*, the treatises *De unitate intellectus*, *De substantiis separatis*, the *Quaestiones de Quodlibet* 1-6; finally, the *Quaestiones disputatae de spiritualibus creaturis*, *De anima*, *De unione Verbi incarnati*, *De malo*, and perhaps even *De virtutibus*. Is this impossible? Not if you take into account the remarkable productive power we must recognize in Thomas Aquinas. Still, we must admit that these were four extraordinarily busy years, and that it is excusable to lack the temerity to distinguish dates within this short period. — *Le Thomisme* (6th ed.), p. 462.

THEOLOGICAL SYNTHESSES

<i>Scriptum In IV libros Sententiarum</i>	1252-1254, 1256	[1252-1256]
<i>Summa contra Gentiles</i>	1259-1265	[1259-1264]
<i>Summa theologiae, Prima pars</i>	1265-1268	[1266-1268]
<i>Summa theologiae, Prima secundae</i>	1268-1271	[1269-1270]
<i>Summa theologiae, Secunda secundae</i>	1271-1272	[1271-1272]
<i>Summa theologiae, Tertia pars</i>	1271-1273	[1272-1273]
<i>Compendium theologiae</i>	betw. 1256-67, 1272	[1269-1273]

DISPUTED QUESTIONS

<i>De veritate</i>	1256-1259	[1256-1259]
<i>De potentia</i>	1265-1266	[1265-1266]
<i>De anima</i>	1265-1266	[1269]
<i>De spiritualibus creaturis</i>	1267-1268	[1267-1268]
<i>De malo</i>	1269-1271	[1266-1267]
<i>De virtutibus</i>	1271-1272	[1268-1272]
<i>Quaestiones de Quodlibet</i>	1268-1272	[1256-1269, 1269-1272]

BIBLICAL COMMENTARIES

<i>Super Isaiam</i>	before 1252	[after 1252]
<i>Super Job</i>	1261-1265	[1261-1264]
<i>Super Matthaem</i>	1269-1270	[1256-1259]
<i>Super Joannem</i>	1270-1272	[1269-1272]
<i>Super Epistolas Pauli</i>	1265-1258, 1272-1273	[1268-1272]

COMMENTARIES ON ARISTOTLE

<i>In librum De anima</i>	1267-1268	[1269-70]
<i>In libros Physicorum</i>	1268-1269	[1269-70]
<i>In Peryermenias</i>	betw. 1270-1271	?
<i>In libro Posteriorum</i>	1271-1272	[1269-72]
<i>In libro Ethicorum</i>	1271-1272	[1271]
<i>In libros Metaphysicorum</i>	1270-1272	[1269-72]
<i>In librum De caelo et mundo</i>	c1272-1273	[end 1273]
<i>In libros De generatione et corruptione</i>	1272-1273	[1272-3]

OTHER COMMENTARIES

<i>In Boethium De Trinitate</i>	1257-1258	[1258-60]
<i>In Boethium De hebdomadibus</i>	1259	[1256-9]
<i>In librum De divinis nominibus</i>	1261-5 or 1265-8	[1265-7]
<i>In librum De causis</i>	1272	[1271-2]

TREATISES

<i>Contra impugnantes Dei cultum et religionem</i>	1256	[1256]
<i>De aeternitate mundi</i>	1271	[1270]
<i>De ente et essentia</i>	1252-1256	[1252-1256]
<i>De perfectione spiritualis vitae</i>	1269-1270	[1267]
<i>De principiis naturae</i>	1252-1256	[1252-1266]
<i>De regno</i>	1267	[1265-1267]
<i>De substantiis separatis</i>	1271-1273	[1271-1273]

LETTERS

<i>De rationibus fidei contra Saracenos, Graecos et Armenos</i>	little after 1265	[1263]
<i>Contra errores Graecorum</i>	1263 or early 1264	[1263]
<i>Responsio ad Ioannem de Vercellis de 108 articulis</i>	1265-1266/7	[1265-1266]
<i>Responsio ad Ioannem de Vercellis de 43 articulis</i>	1271	[1271]

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[The following bibliography contains the primary sources cited in Gilson's *Le Thomisme*, especially the works of Thomas Aquinas. It does not include the secondary sources. For a list of the modern authors referred to in the notes the reader is directed to the *Index of Proper Names*.

In an Appendix of *Le Thomisme* (pp. 461–463; here Appendix 3, pp. 433–435) Gilson offered his own chronology of Aquinas' works. They reflect the state of research and publication in his own day, but they can be improved upon through the more recent studies on Thomas' writings and their chronology, and the publication of better editions of these works. In the bibliography that follows and in the chronology in Appendix 3 we have tried to take into account the more recent studies on Thomas' writings and their improved editions. More recent and improved editions of other authors have also been cited.]

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