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Gaven Kerr

Collected Articles on the
Existence of God



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Contents

Acknowledgements

<i>Introduction</i>	7
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Part I: Metaphysical Preliminaries

Chapter 1 – Can we demonstrate that God exists?	13
Chapter 2 – Essentially Ordered Series Reconsidered	33
Chapter 3 – Essentially Ordered Series Reconsidered Once Again	53
Chapter 4 – Existential Inertia and the Thomistic Way to God	77

Part II – The Existence of God

II.I Proofs Outside of the Five Ways

Chapter 5 – Aquinas's Argument for the Existence of God in <i>De Ente et Essentia</i> , Cap. IV: An Interpretation and Defence	97
Chapter 6 – The <i>Summa Contra Gentiles</i> and Aquinas's Way to God	139

II.II The Five Ways

Chapter 7 – A Deeper Look at Aquinas's First Way	157
Chapter 8 – The Relevance of Aquinas's Uncaused Cause Argument Today	181
Chapter 9 – Aquinas's Third Way	199
Chapter 10 – A Reconsideration of Aquinas's Fourth Way	221
Chapter 11 – Design Arguments and Aquinas's Fifth Way	243

Epilogue

Chapter 12 – From God's Existence to God's Nature	263
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I here give grateful thanks and acknowledgement for permission to reproduce these articles.

Introduction

This volume of collected articles captures my engagement with Aquinas's thought on the demonstration of God's existence over the last 10 years. This engagement began with my interest in Aquinas's proof for God's existence in the *De Ente et Essentia* and his thinking on *per se* ordered series. At the time of considering these issues, I had not envisaged that they would consume me to the extent that they did. My interest in *per se* ordered series emerged out of my engagement with the metaphysics of causality; and in fact, it was through reading Scotus and Ockham's treatments of the same that I was led to investigate Aquinas's thought on the matter. My interest in the proof of God's existence in the *De Ente* emerged out of my research as a postgraduate student on the distinction between essence and existence in Aquinas's thought. The latter quite naturally leads to the proof of God's existence, and whilst as a student I was never really interested in the existence of God as a philosophically demonstrable truth, engagement with the metaphysics of *esse* led me more and more to considering the primary cause of *esse*.

These dual interests in the metaphysics of *per se* ordered series and the primary cause of *esse* led to numerous articles and of course my 2015 book *Aquinas's Way to God: The Proof in De Ente et Essentia*. What I only came to see after writing *Aquinas's Way to God* is that there is a way to God in Aquinas's writings that captures the heart of his philosophical thinking on demonstrating God's existence. This way to God is to isolate some feature of creatures relevant to their very being, establish that such a feature is possessed *per aliud*, and from there arrive at a primary cause that is *per se*. Insofar as the *per aliud* feature under consideration pertains to the very being of creatures, the *per se* source of that is *per se* with respect to being and is therefore the source of all being. Accordingly, I have come to speak more and more of Aquinas's *way* to God.

It was not the consideration of the different proofs or the metaphysics of *esse* that convinced me there is such a *way* to God in Aquinas's thought.

Rather, it was through engagement with the metaphysics of *per se* ordered series (and a profound comment from a student) that led me to this view. This one (anonymous) student expressed to me the following thought: once you 'get' the *per se* ordered series stuff, everything falls in to place. In reflecting on this, the student was correct. The significance of *per se* ordered series is that the members of such have some actuality that they do not possess essentially so that unless there is a primary cause of that actuality, they would be without the actuality in question.

Not only did reflection on *per se* ordered series help to fix in my mind Aquinas's way to God, but it also helped to situate Aquinas's metaphysics more within its Platonic (or better: Neoplatonic) dimension. This is because, in *per se* ordered series, the actuality that the members have is a participated actuality. It is not something that is conjoined to them and with which they remain. Rather, it is something that saturates them and illuminates them but is fundamentally distinct from them. Whilst we are not far from an Aristotelian view of act and potency here, we are in thoroughly Platonic territory; though of course, in Thomas's mind there is no inconsistency between this reading of Platonism and Aristotle's metaphysics of act and potency. With this understanding of Aquinas's way to God and *per se* ordered series in place, I undertook to explore what are ostensibly other *viae* in Aquinas's thought. In all of them I found a common pattern, or at least the striving after this common pattern. The articles in this volume represent the fruit of such contemplation.

In presenting the articles, I have chosen to adopt a systematic rather than a chronological ordering. Given that Aquinas's proofs of God emerge out of a metaphysical context, we begin with articles devoted to metaphysical preliminaries, such as the nature of demonstration, *per se* ordered series, the act of existence etc. Having done that, we move on to articles that deal with proofs of God proper. These articles are divided into two groups: (i) proofs outside of the five ways and (ii) the five ways themselves. Finally, as an epilogue I address the issue of how we move from the existence to the nature of God in Aquinas's thought.

I have chosen to present the articles in a systematic as opposed to chronological ordering. Accordingly, each article can be read as a stand-alone article, yet they altogether present a broad account of Aquinas's way to God. The only changes made to the articles themselves have been very minor and of an editorial nature. Firstly, I have added cross references to other articles in this volume that did not appear in the original articles. These additions are to be found within the footnotes in square brackets. Secondly, I have kept Aquinas's Latin when the journal in question preferred a translation. Thirdly, I have standardised the referencing style. Finally, I have removed personal acknowledgements, provided Arabic numerals in place of roman numerals (though not when roman numerals were in the title of an article), capitalised references to God and His personal pronouns, and I have kept UK as opposed to American spelling and grammatical conventions.

I have chosen not to update the substantial treatments of various issues dealt with in these articles and so to leave them as they first appeared; any criticism of my work that has appeared subsequent to these articles has either been addressed by me elsewhere or will be addressed in forthcoming work. Suffice to say I stand by the thinking defended in these articles, and I maintain that the thought therein is robust enough to withstand criticism.

It gives me great pleasure to present this volume of collected articles. Aquinas is one of those few philosophers in the perennial tradition with whom engagement is always worthwhile. Like Plato, Aristotle, or Kant, one can read Aquinas and be drawn into his way of thinking, so that after enough engagement one is thinking like Aquinas (though perhaps not with the mind of Aquinas). To do this with a historical philosopher is not simply to do the history of philosophy, but to philosophise with a great philosopher of the past. Aquinas has been a significant influence in my philosophical formation, and it is my hope that these articles will encourage others to read his words and to dwell on the existence of God with him.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank several individuals.

First of all, I would like to thank Dr Rafael Huntelmann. I originally pitched the idea of a volume of collected articles to him, and he was highly

supportive and encouraging. Without him, this volume would not have come to pass.

Secondly, I want to thank my colleagues and students at St Patrick's Pontifical University Maynooth. By no means are they all Thomists, but they have always provided me with an open and dynamic place within which to work and to present my thought. The fact that they are not all Thomists has always challenged me in my Thomism to structure things in such a way as to be intelligible to non-Thomists.

Thirdly, I want to thank my wife Collette, and my three children, Evelyn, Dominic, and Joseph. The pursuit of wisdom ends with a person Who draws us into relationship with Himself. Daily they reveal to me the gratuitous goodness of God.

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Part I:
Metaphysical Preliminaries

Chapter 1 – Can we Demonstrate that God Exists?

On numerous occasions, Aquinas speaks of demonstrating or proving God's existence. Indeed, the project of demonstrating God's existence is something for which Aquinas is quite well known, and in fact is a feature of classical theism more generally. In this paper, I wish to consider the general project of demonstrating God's existence, in what scientific context Aquinas believes that it can be achieved, and what general conditions are attached to such demonstration.

1. The Project of Establishing God's existence

In several places Aquinas discusses the subject matter of the individual sciences and how the sciences are divided according to their formal objects; Thomas's commentary on the *De Trinitate* of Boethius, questions 5 – 6, offers arguably his most in-depth treatment in this regard. Therein, Aquinas argues that sciences are divided based on their formal objects, and the formal objects of the sciences are distinguished based on the intellectual operations used to consider those objects.¹

In the *De Trinitate* commentary, Thomas argues that we engage intelligently with things either to consider their truth or to put such truth to some practical use; correspondingly there are speculative and practical sciences.² The speculative sciences themselves are divided based on the formal object

¹ Aquinas, *Super Boethium De Trinitate et Expositio Libri De Ebdomadibus* (Rome: Commissione Leonina, 1992), and Maurer's translation of questions 5 – 6, *The Division and Methods of the Sciences* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1986); see also, *Summa Theologiae* (Turin: Marietti, 1926), Ia, qu. 1, art. 1, ad. 2: '...[D]iversa ratio cognoscibilis diversitatem scientiarum inducit'. For general discussion see Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2000), pp. 3 – 10. For in-depth treatment of the intellectual operation (*separatio*) by which the subject matter of metaphysics is distinguished see Wippel, *Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1984), Chapter 4 and Rudi TeVelde *Metaphysics between Experience and Transcendence: Thomas Aquinas on Metaphysics as a Science* (Münster: Aschendorff Verlag, 2021), Chapter 2.

² Aquinas, *Super Boethium De Trinitate*, qu. 5, art. 1, p. 137:92 — 96.

considered in each. In accord with Aristotle, Thomas argues that objects are knowable according to the degree to which they are universal and necessary, and the degree to which an object is such is the degree to which it is dependent (or not) on matter. Hence things dependent on matter to a high degree are least knowable, whereas things dependent on matter to very little or no degree are most knowable.³ Accordingly, Thomas divides the speculative sciences in the following manner.

Some things we can investigate that depend on matter both for their being and for their being understood. Such things can neither exist nor be understood without matter; these are studied by the natural sciences or what Thomas calls physics.⁴

Other things depend on matter for their being but not for their being understood. These things cannot be without matter, but they can be understood without matter; these objects are studied in mathematics.⁵

Finally, there are things we can investigate that depend on matter neither for their being nor for their being understood. Hence, they do not need to be material to exist and matter does not enter into their intelligible content; these are the objects of theology. In his consideration of theology and its formal object, Aquinas makes a sub-division between: (i) objects that are immaterial such that they can never be found to be in matter, e.g. God and angels (what John Wippel calls positively immaterial) and (ii) objects that are immaterial such that they need not be found in matter even though sometimes they are found that way, e.g. substance, quality, being, potency, act etc (what Wippel calls neutrally immaterial). Revealed theology deals with (i) as its subject matter, whereas the theology of the philosophers, i.e.

³ *Ibid*, p. 138:123 — 131. For Aristotle see *Posterior Analytics*, Bk. I, Chapter 6, 74b5 — 75a37, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle* edited by Jonathan Barnes, 2 Vols. (USA: Princeton University Press, 1984), and Thomas's commentary on the same, *In Aristotelis Libros Peri Hermeneias et Posteriorum Analyticorum Expositio* (Turin: Marietti, 1955), Lib. I, Lect. 13.

⁴ Aquinas, *Super Boethium De Trinitate*, p. 138:141 — 149. Included in Thomas's understanding of physics is what we today would call philosophy of nature, which is the study of mobile being and involves a consideration of the ontology involved therein e.g. potency, form, act etc. For further discussion see Edward Feser, *Aristotle's Revenge: The Metaphysical Foundations of Physical and Biological Science* (Neukirchen-Seelscheid: Editiones Scholasticae, 2019), Chapter 1.

⁵ Aquinas, *Super Boethium De Trinitate*, p. 138:149 — 154.

metaphysics or first philosophy, deals with (ii) as its subject matter, and (i) as the principles thereof.⁶

Metaphysics then is first philosophy insofar as it studies certain realities (substance, quality, being, potency, act) that are equally applicable to both material and immaterial beings, in which case a study of them will not be limited to a single domain of being but will embrace a study of being as being. By contrast, theology proper, which has access to revelation, deals with substances that are themselves immaterial, God and angels. Aquinas later makes an important observation to the effect that owing to the supreme intelligibility of divine things, our intellect relates to them as the eye of an owl to the sun. We cannot think about such things using natural reason unless we are led to do so by means of their effects.⁷ Consequently, in dealing with being *qua* being, metaphysics deals with objects that are positively immaterial insofar as they are causes of being, but not in themselves; whereas owing to divine revelation, revealed theology can consider divine things as they are in themselves.⁸

Turning to the later commentary on the *Metaphysics*, Aquinas offers a position like the one from the *De Trinitate*. In the prologue to the *Metaphysics* commentary, Thomas argues that there must be a science that is regulative for all other sciences and this we call wisdom. This science studies what are maximally intelligible, and, in accord with the *De Trinitate*, Aquinas reasons that what are maximally intelligible are the highest beings that are both free from matter and motion as well as the cause of being for all else. Accordingly, this single science considers common being (*ens commune*) and its causes. The causes of *ens commune* are not dealt with as the

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 138:154 — 167. Note in particular the division of what is positively immaterial from what is neutrally immaterial: ‘Quedam uero speculabilia sunt que non dependent a materia secundum esse, quia sine materia esse possunt, sive numquam sint in materia, sicut Deus et angelus, sive in quibusdam sint in materia et in quibusdam non, ut substantia, qualitas, ens, potentia, actus, unum et multa, et huiusmodi’.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 154:149 — 154. See Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Bk. II, Chapter 1, 993b10-11, for the comparison of the eye of the owl looking at the sun.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 154:175 — 182: ‘Sic ergo theologia sive scientia diuina est duplex: una in qua considerantur res diuine non tamquam subiectum scientie, sed tamquam principia subiecti, et talis est theologia quam philosophi prosequuntur, que alio nomine metaphysica dicitur; alia uero que ipsas res diuinas considerat propter se ipsas ut subiectum scientie, et hec est theologia que in sacra Scriptura traditur’. Aristotle himself makes the same threefold division of the speculative sciences, but he does not sub-divide theology, see *Metaphysics*, Bk. 6, Chapter 1, 1026a13 — 1026a20.

subject matter of this science; rather, the subject matter is *ens commune*, and the causes of that subject matter are considered as the goal of this science. Consideration of God as the cause of being in metaphysics is not taken for granted from the outset but is arrived at as a conclusion.⁹

The subject matter of metaphysics, *ens commune*, is the being common to both material and immaterial things, and it comprises such realities as substance, quality, potency, act etc; these we have already seen Thomas attribute to the subject matter of metaphysics in his commentary on the *De Trinitate*.¹⁰ Once again, Thomas denies that God and angels, i.e. substances that are separated from matter, are dealt with in metaphysics as its proper subject matter; such things are considered properly in revealed theology.¹¹ We can obtain philosophical knowledge of these beings by considering them as causes of the common being considered in metaphysics. Accordingly, the consideration of the cause of being is not something undertaken at the outset of metaphysics, but is arrived at as a conclusion within metaphysics. Metaphysics, therefore, cannot begin with God, but it can surely end with Him.¹²

In engaging with the objects of metaphysics, Aquinas argues that we make use of a special intellectual operation that he calls *separatio*. This is a

⁹ Aquinas, *In Duodecim Libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis Expositio* (Turin: Marietti, 1950), Proemium: ‘Unde oportet quod ad eamdem scientiam pertineat considerare substantias separatas, et ens commune, quod est genus, cuius sunt praedictae substantiae communes et universales causae. Ex quo apparet, quod quamvis ista scientia praedicta tria consideret, non tamen considerat quolibet eorum ut subiectum, sed ipsum solum ens commune. Hoc enim est subiectum in scientia, cuius causas et passiones quaerimus, non autem ipsae causae alicuius generis quae sunt. Nam cognitionis causarum alicuius generis, est finis ad quem consideratio scientiarum pertinet. Quamvis autem subiectum huius scientiae sit ens commune, dicitur tamen tota de his quae sunt separata a materia secundum esse et rationem. Quia secundum esse et rationem separari dicuntur, non solum illa quae nunquam in materia esse possunt, sicut Deus et intellectuales substantiae, sed etiam illa quae possunt sine materia esse, sicut ens commune’.

¹⁰ For further details see Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, pp. 20 – 21, and my article ‘The Meaning of *Ens Commune* in the Thought of Thomas Aquinas’, *Yearbook of the Irish Philosophical Society* (2008), pp. 32 – 60.

¹¹ However see Gregory Doolan, ‘Aquinas on Separate Substances as the Subject Matter of Metaphysics’, *Documenti E Studi Sulla Tradizione Filosofica Medievale* (2011), 22, pp. 347–382 for treatment of the issue over whether separate substance, as subject to potency, form, act etc fall under the subject matter of metaphysics.

¹² *Summa Contra Gentiles* (Turin: Marietti, 1961), Lib. 3, Cap. 25: ‘...[I]psaque prima philosophia tota ordinatur ad Dei cognitionem sicut ad ultimum finem, unde et scientia divina nominatur’.

kind of abstraction or thinking about things in a way distinct from how we would think about things in physics or mathematics. In the latter disciplines we consider their subject matters by means of abstraction proper whereby we consider features of things which features are not divorced from the things themselves, but abstracted by us. This is because the formal objects of those sciences are dependent on matter in some way, in which case to understand those objects we must abstract from matter. On the contrary, in metaphysics, we consider features of things that are properly separate from the material conditions of things, such as being, unity, potency, act etc, though as noted these metaphysical features may be found in material things. Given that the subject matter of metaphysics comprises things that are not dependent on matter, it is not through abstraction *from* matter that we consider them. Nevertheless, material objects are the objects proportionate to our experience, so that to engage with the subject matter of metaphysics we do need to perform *some* intellectual operation whereby we separate those metaphysical features already mentioned from the material beings in which they are found. And this is the act of *separatio*. None of this is to say that such metaphysical features of things exist in a Platonic domain independent of the things subject to potency, form, act etc. The components of the subject matter of metaphysics are not separate from matter and motion because it is of their nature to be without them; rather, they are taken to be separate because it is not within their nature to be in matter and motion. By contrast, it is in the nature of the objects of natural science and mathematics to be in matter and motion.¹³

The import of these considerations on *separatio* is that whilst it takes a metaphysical way of thinking to do metaphysics, *ens commune* is not a specifically metaphysical domain existing separately from the things around us (though of course Aquinas believes that there is a spiritual reality). The domain of metaphysics is the domain of being, and so to engage with it we engage with beings. So just as with the other sciences, we are engaged with physical beings and in turn abstract the formal objects of those sciences, so too we are engaged with the same in metaphysics. Nevertheless, our engagement with physical things is a metaphysical engagement whereby we

¹³ *Super Boethium De Trinitate*, qu. 5, art. 4, ad. 5. For discussion see Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, Chapter 2, ‘Metaphysics and Separatio in Thomas Aquinas’, in *Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas*, pp. 69 – 107; Rudi te Velde, *Metaphysics between Experience and Transcendence*, Chapter 2.

abstract from them by means of *separatio* those features about them that need not be found in matter and motion.

As noted, God enters into metaphysics as the cause of its subject matter, i.e. as the cause of the being of things, and so we arrive at knowledge of God in metaphysics precisely as such a cause. Hence, whilst the metaphysician *qua* metaphysician may not know God as He is in Himself given the unavailability of revelation, he can certainly rise to a knowledge of God as the cause of all things. Not only that, but given that the subject matter of metaphysics is grasped through *separatio* focussing on physical things, we can mount a proof for God's existence, not from a consideration of non-physical entities (for we have no direct access to them), nor from features of physical things abstracted in physics or mathematics, but from physical things considered in their metaphysical constitution. Thus, a proof for God's existence begins with physical things considered in terms of those aspects of their being not dependent on matter and motion. In other words, a proof for God's existence begins by considering physical things in their very being.

What all of this goes to show is that for Thomas God's existence is established in metaphysics and only in metaphysics, and this is for four reasons.

Firstly, metaphysics is the last of the speculative sciences that do not depend on revelation; for whilst physics and mathematics consider being to this or that degree, the metaphysician considers being in itself or *ens commune*. Accordingly, any proof of God offered in physics or mathematics would only be a proof of a first cause relative to the proper subject matter of those sciences, but such would not be a proof of a primary cause of all that is. Hence, we only arrive at a proof of God proper in that science whose subject matter is being itself, which is metaphysics.¹⁴

Secondly, Thomas is explicit that knowledge of God is not obtained at the outset of metaphysics, but as its goal. If that is the case, then systematically speaking, physics and mathematics cannot give us knowledge of

¹⁴ In a similar vein, Aristotle argues that if there is something everlasting, changeless, and separate it cannot be known in physics or mathematics but requires to be known in a science prior to both, which he calls theology. See *Metaphysics*, Bk. 6, Chapter 1, 1026a10. In commenting on this passage Aquinas affirms that it is in metaphysics that the causes of the being of things are studied and not in physics or mathematics, see *In VI Met.*, Lect. 1, n. 1164.

God, otherwise we would have knowledge of God prior to embarking on metaphysics, and not as its goal.

Thirdly, insofar as *separatio* permits consideration of the features of being not dependent on matter and motion, there is disclosed to us through this intellectual act the (neutrally) immaterial features of being. In considering these immaterial features of the being of things and in turn affirming a primary cause for such being, the metaphysician can arrive at a primary cause that is itself not subject to matter and motion but is immaterial. By contrast, the intellectual abstraction used in the investigations of physics and mathematics discloses only features of things that are tied to their physicality. A proof of a first cause that departs from the features of things still tied to their physicality cannot in itself demonstrate an immaterial first cause unless buttressed by more metaphysical considerations, thereby transforming the proof from a physical proof to a metaphysical one.¹⁵

Finally, both Aristotle and Aquinas affirm that if there were no immaterial beings but only the material beings dealt with in physics, then physics would be the primary science. But if there are immaterial beings, then metaphysics and not physics would be the primary science.¹⁶ That being the case, the investigation of immaterial beings, and of God as the cause of all being, is an investigation proper to metaphysics; for if God exists, then there is required a science more fundamental than physics to consider Him, in which case physics is not sufficient to consider God as the cause of being.

¹⁵ This is in fact what Aquinas does with the proof from motion in the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Lib. I, Cap. 13 where he writes: ‘Sed quia Deus non est pars alicuius moventis seipsum, ulterius Aristoteles, in sua metaphysica, investigat ex hoc motore qui est pars moventis seipsum, alium motorem separatum omnino, qui est Deus. Cum enim omne movens seipsum moveatur per appetitum, oportet quod motor qui est pars moventis scipsum, moveat propter appetitum alicuius appetibilis. Quod est eo superius in movendo: nam appetens est quodammodo movens motum; appetibile autem est movens omnino non motum. Oportet igitur esse primum motorem separatum omnino immobilem, qui Deus est’. Both Joseph Owens and John Knasas have pointed out that the proof from motion in Aristotle’s *Physics*, Bk. VIII needs to be augmented by the proof from the *Metaphysics*, BK. XII, otherwise we are left with nothing more than a world soul that moves the outermost sphere. See Joseph Owens, ‘Aquinas and the Proof from the “Physics”’, *Mediaeval Studies*, 1 (1996), pp. 119 – 150, and Knasas, *Thomistic Existentialism and Cosmological Reasoning* (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2019), pp. 176 – 177.

¹⁶ In *VI Met.*, Lect. 1, n. 1170.

With these considerations in mind, Aquinas clearly seeks to offer proof of God from within metaphysics itself. That being the case, the buttressing of his argumentation for God's existence will come from the metaphysics that it presupposes. Not only that, our understanding of what it means for God to exist will also be informed by the metaphysics that is used to arrive at that conclusion. These will be our considerations in the following sections. The next section will consider how demonstration proper occurs in metaphysics, and the final section will consider what we have demonstrated when we demonstrate that God exists.

2. What does it mean to establish God's existence?

Concerning demonstration in general, Aquinas follows Aristotle in holding that a demonstration is a special kind of syllogism that produces scientific knowledge. Now scientific knowledge is here taken to be knowledge of the cause of something. Accordingly, there are two types of demonstrative syllogism: (i) a demonstration that knows the cause as cause of the effect, and this is referred to as a *propter quid* syllogism, (ii) a demonstration that simply knows the cause from some fact, and this is referred to as a *quia* demonstration. The first demonstration brings about knowledge of why something is the case, whereas the second simply demonstrates that something is the case because [*quia*] of some known fact. Hence, *propter quid* demonstrations proceed from cause to effect, whereas *quia* demonstrations proceed from effect to cause.

As with any syllogism, a demonstration requires three terms, two of which are united in the conclusion by means of the middle. The demonstrative syllogism affirms the major of the middle term and the middle of the minor, thereby bringing the minor under the major. Clearly then the middle term seeks to tell us something about the subject of the conclusion, the minor term, and here we come upon a problem when it comes to God's existence. For God to be the subject of a demonstration, we need a middle term that tells us something about Him. But as we have seen in the previous section, only revealed theology tells us something about God as He is in Himself, in which case metaphysics is without a middle term with which to form a demonstration of God's existence.

At this point the importance of the distinction between *propter quid* and *quia* demonstrations becomes important. This is because, whilst a

propter quid demonstration requires a middle that tells us something of the essence of the subject of demonstration, the *quia* demonstration does not; for in the *quia* demonstration we take some effect for the middle term and reason to the cause of that effect.

Let us take an example on which Thomas comments from Aristotle.¹⁷

We can infer the closeness of the planets given their lack of twinkle. This is because if we assume that whatever is lacking in twinkle is close and we observe that the planets are lacking in twinkle, we can in turn infer that the planets are close. Formally this goes as follows:

Every non-twinkling thing is near

Every planet is non-twinkling

Therefore, every planet is near

The middle term ‘non-twinkling’ is some effect pertaining to the planets, and it serves to unite major and minor in the conclusion. We would have a *propter quid* syllogism if we were to reason from something known about the planets themselves, such as their nearness, to their lack of twinkle; and in fact we can do this with the above demonstration if we simply converted the major premise and substituted the minor premise for the conclusion, hence:

Everything near is non-twinkling

Every planet is near

Therefore, every planet is non-twinkling

When it comes to God’s existence then, we cannot utilise any *propter quid* demonstration, for we have no middle term that tells us about the nature of God. However, we can indeed offer a *quia* demonstration, since such a demonstration reasons from some effect to the cause of such an effect. And Aquinas in fact affirms this to the effect that when the effect is better known to us than the cause, we can reason from the effect to the cause. When it comes to God then, His effects are better known to us, in which case we reason to God’s existence from His effects.¹⁸

¹⁷ In I Post. An., lect. 23.

¹⁸ Summa Theologiae, Ia, qu. 2, art. 2: ‘Duplex est demonstratio. Una quae est per causam, et dicitur propter quid, et haec est per priora simpliciter. Alia est per effectum, et

Aquinas goes on to clarify that in *quia* demonstrations, the effect takes the place of the definition of the cause, and this is because it is the effect standing as middle term. So, when Aquinas argues that there is an unmoved mover/uncaused cause/absolutely necessary being etc such are taken to be nominal definitions of God, i.e. they are what the name 'God' signifies.¹⁹ Hence, if we can show that such a mover/cause etc exists, and this is what God is, then we can show that God exists. Formally the reasoning goes as follows:

A prime mover/uncaused cause/absolutely necessary being etc causes all things to exist.

God is a prime mover/uncaused cause etc

Therefore, God causes all things to exist [implicit: God exists]

When Aquinas explains that we can demonstrate the existence of the cause from the effect, he states that from some effect we can demonstrate the existence of its *proper* cause (*Summa Theologiae*, Ia, qu. 2, art. 2: 'Ex quolibet autem effectu potest demonstrari propriam causam eius esse'). This gives us a clue as to the nominal definition of 'God' that we must take as our middle to demonstrate the existence of God. It cannot be just any effect that gets us to God, since the proper cause of this or that effect may not be the cause of all things simpliciter. So, what effect must we consider in forming a nominal definition of God for a *quia* demonstration?

In the five ways and elsewhere Aquinas considers motion, causality, necessity etc as effects and forms from them a nominal definition of God as unmoved mover/uncaused cause/absolutely necessary being etc. Given the

dicitur demonstratio quia, et haec est per ea quae sunt priora quoad nos, cum enim effectus aliquis nobis est manifestior quam sua causa, per effectum procedimus ad cognitionem causae. Ex quolibet autem effectu potest demonstrari propriam causam eius esse (si tamen eius effectus sint magis noti quoad nos), quia, cum effectus dependant a causa, posito effectu necesse est causam praeesistere. Unde Deum esse, secundum quod non est per se notum quoad nos, demonstrabile est per effectus nobis notos'.

¹⁹ *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, qu. 2, art. 2, ad. 2: 'Cum demonstratur causa per effectum, necesse est uti effectu loco definitionis causae, ad probandum causam esse, et hoc maxime contingit in Deo. Quia ad probandum aliiquid esse, necesse est accipere pro medio quid significet nomen non autem quod quid est, quia quaestio quid est, sequitur ad quaestionem an est. Nomina autem Dei imponuntur ab effectibus, ut postea ostendetur, unde, demonstrando Deum esse per effectum, accipere possumus pro medio quid significet hoc nomen Deus', see also qu. 1, art. 7, ad. 1.

demonstration of an unmoved mover/uncaused cause/absolutely necessary being etc and that this is what God is, God is known to exist. But why does Thomas pick out these effects and not other ones? I suggest that the clue to understanding the effects whose proper cause is God lies in what we have already considered about the proper science within which God's existence is demonstrated.

It was noted above that God's existence is demonstrated in metaphysics. This is because metaphysics considers the very being of things and does not isolate some domain of being. So, when the metaphysician considers the cause of being, he is not considering the cause of some specified domain of being, he is considering the cause of being itself. Therefore, the effects that we consider and on the basis of which we form a nominal definition of God as a middle term must be effects that pertain to the very being of things.²⁰ In the five ways and elsewhere, all such effects pertain to the being of things, so that were there no unmoved mover/uncaused cause/absolutely necessary being etc, things simply would not be. It is the being of creatures that is up for grabs in Thomas's various proofs, and so it is something about their being e.g. their being moved, caused, dependent for necessity etc, that points to a primary cause without which they would not be.²¹

Not only that, this procedure accords with what Aquinas argues elsewhere when it comes to naming God; for Thomas holds that insofar as we cannot know the essence of God, we must name Him from creatures. Now, God is known from creatures not only as a principle, but also by way of excellence and remotion.²² This is something that Aquinas repeats on several occasions, and a number of authors have noted the Dionysian paternity

²⁰ Te Velde, *Metaphysics between Experience and Transcendence*, p. 15: '...[T]he world shows an essential reference to God when seen in the light of the notion of being'.

²¹ How the effects taken in each of the five ways pertain to the being of things and thereby get us to a cause of being will be dealt with in the later essays in this volume.

²² *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, qu. 13, art. 1: 'Ostensum est autem supra quod Deus in hac vita non potest a nobis videri per suam essentiam; sed cognoscitur a nobis ex creaturis, secundum habitudinem principii, et per modum excellentiae et remotionis', see also in the same question art. 8, ad. 2: 'Sed ex effectibus divinis divinam naturam non possumus cognoscere secundum quod in se est, ut sciamus de ea quid est; sed per modum eminentiae et causalitatis et negationis, ut supra dictum est. Et sic hoc nomen Deus significat naturam divinam. Impositum est enim nomen hoc ad aliquid significandum supra omnia existens, quod est principium omnium, et remotum ab omnibus. Hoc enim intendunt significare nominantes Deum'.

of this approach to God, viz. by way of eminence, causality, and negation.²³ By considering God as that without which creatures would not be, not only do we remain within the metaphysical context in which Thomas believes a proof of God must occur, but we also are in accord with how God is named by us. This is because if God is taken to be the cause of the being of things without which nothing would be, then (i) He is evidently envisaged as a principle and cause, (ii) He is considered in terms of eminence – for all things are effects of Him and nothing is His equal, and (iii) He is considered in terms of negation – for nothing is equal to Him, so He is not like anything created. Consequently, the nominal definition of God used in our *quia* demonstration for His existence will seek out some effects that pertain to the being of things. In establishing that there is a primary cause for these effects, we establish that God exists.

3. The Existence of ‘God’

In light of the above, we need to consider the issue of ‘which’ God is established by such a demonstration of God’s existence. On many occasions, Aquinas simply speaks of establishing God’s existence, and in his demonstrations he gives no indication that it is not the true God at which he arrives in his proofs. However, it has been argued that whilst Aquinas establishes that something with divinity exists, he has not established that God exists; for it has been variously argued that further steps need to be taken in characterising what this thing with divinity is. Thomas only does the latter in subsequent discussions wherein God’s simplicity, goodness, immutability, eternity etc are demonstrated. Accordingly, Aquinas has only established that *a* God exists, not that God exists.²⁴

²³ For details see David Twetten, ‘To which “God” Must a Proof of God’s Existence Conclude for Aquinas’, in *Laudemus viros gloriosos: Essays in Honor of Armand Maurer*, CSB ed. R.E. Houser (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), §. III, pp. 151 – 153.

²⁴ For details on the general problem of what is established by proof of God’s existence, see Twetten, ‘To Which “God” Must a Proof of God’s Existence Conclude for Aquinas’, §. 1. For an in-depth articulation and defence of the view that Thomas only establishes that something with divinity exists, and that this something is one, but not that God (or the true God) exists, see John O’Callaghan, ‘Can We Demonstrate that “God Exists”?’ *Nova et Vetera* (2016), 14:2, pp. 619 – 644.

According to O'Callaghan, a proper name latches onto some individual being, and that individual is the same for all who use that proper name. That being the case, if the faithful use the name 'God' to refer to that personal being Who has revealed Himself and draws us to Himself, whereas the non-faithful, such as Aristotle, use the name 'God' to refer not to He Who has revealed Himself, but to some primary cause of all things, then the name 'God' as a grammatical string is being used to refer to two different individuals. And since the non-faithful such as Aristotle can offer demonstrations of a primary cause and refer to it as God, it follows that what is demonstrated by the non-faithful is not what the faithful refer to in their use of 'God'.²⁵

O'Callaghan makes this point within the context of what Aquinas says about the belief involved in faith, particularly the belief involved in *credere Deum*, which O'Callaghan plausibly takes to be belief that God is such and such.²⁶ Aquinas considers an objection that belief in God's existence can be applied to the non-faithful, and that being the case, belief in God as *credere Deum* cannot pertain to the act of faith.²⁷ In reply, Aquinas argues that the non-faithful do not believe in the existence of God under the conditions that faith determines [sub his conditionibus quas fides determinat]; he then refers to Aristotle and affirms that when it comes to simple things, if we know them defectively, we do not know them at all.²⁸

Now, for O'Callaghan, not believing in the existence of God under the conditions determined by faith does not mean that one's belief in God is a matter of demonstration as opposed to faith. This is because Aquinas associates the lack of belief of the non-faithful with failure, whereas

²⁵ O'Callaghan, 'Can We Demonstrate That "God Exists"?' pp. 624 – 628.

²⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 621 – 623. See *Summa Theologiae*, IIaIae, qu. 2, art. 2 wherein Aquinas distinguishes between: (i) belief in God as the material object of faith – *credere Deum*, (ii) to believe God as the formal ratio by means of which assent is given to some particular point of faith – *credere Deo*, (iii) to believe in God as the final end towards which we are drawn – *credere in Deum*.

²⁷ *Ibid*, obj. 3: '...[I]llud quod convenit etiam non fidelibus non potest poni fidei actus. Sed credere Deum esse convenit etiam infidelibus. Ergo non debet poni inter actus fidei'.

²⁸ *Ibid*, ad. 3: 'Credere Deum non convenit infidelibus sub ea ratione qua ponitur actus fidei. Non enim credunt Deum esse sub his conditionibus quas fides determinat. Et ideo nec vere Deum credunt, quia, ut philosophus dicit, LX Metaphys., in simplicibus defectus cognitionis est solum in non attingendo totaliter'.

demonstration is certainly not a failure.²⁹ So, a pagan like Aristotle who for argument's sake has a proof of God's existence cannot be in a state of belief about God in the way that the faithful are. Hence, whatever being a philosophical demonstration of God's existence latches onto, that will be different from what faith latches onto. So, the God of philosophical demonstration is different from the God of biblical belief. What the philosopher demonstrates and what the faithful believe in are not the same thing, in which case whilst the philosopher can demonstrate that a God exists and that there is only one God, the philosopher cannot demonstrate that God exists; or to make it more emphatic, the philosopher cannot demonstrate that the true God exists, for then what the philosopher latches onto with his demonstration of God would be the same as what the faithful latch onto, but we have just seen that Aquinas denies this (on O'Callaghan's reading).

I am hesitant to accept O'Callaghan's position in this case. Such hesitancy initially arises from the fact that on a number of occasions, Aquinas simply speaks of demonstrating God's existence, and indeed attributes proofs of God's existence to non-believers. In these instances he makes no differentiation that such non-believers, Aristotle included, only demonstrate that some deity exist. In fact, Aquinas frequently attributes to non-believers demonstrations about God that are in accord with the Catholic faith (but of course not demonstrations of the Catholic faith).³⁰ Not only that, in other contexts Thomas speaks highly of non-Christian thinkers and what they were able to demonstrate about God, and how what they demonstrated is in accord with the Catholic faith.³¹ If Thomas is to be taken at his word here,

²⁹ O'Callaghan, 'Can We Demonstrate That "God Exists"?' p. 626.

³⁰ See for instance *De Potentia Dei*, qu. 3, art. 5 wherein Aquinas attributes a doctrine of creation in accord with the Catholic faith to Plato and Aristotle, and then proceeds to outline three proofs for the existence of a creator God in accord with the Catholic faith, proofs that he attributes to Plato, Aristotle, and Avicenna.

³¹ See for instance, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, qu. 13, art. 5: 'Sed nec etiam pure aequivoce, ut aliqui dixerunt. Quia secundum hoc, ex creaturis nihil posset cognosci de Deo, nec demonstrari; sed semper incideret fallacia aequivocationis. Et hoc est tam contra philosophos, qui multa demonstrative de Deo probant, quam etiam contra apostolum dicentem, Rom. I, *invisibilia Dei per ea quae facta sunt, intellecta, conspiciuntur*'. What is striking about the latter text is that in the same sentence Thomas speaks of both the philosophers and St Paul in the context of proving things about God from creatures, thereby implying that both the philosophers and St Paul have the same God in mind. In addition to the proofs of a creator God in accord with the Catholic faith offered by non-believers in the previous note, Aquinas also attributes to Aristotle a proof of a primary

it would seem that he attributes to non-believers a knowledge of the same being in which Catholics have faith; though of course, he does not attribute faith to such non-believers. With that in mind, I think we should tread carefully in attributing to Aquinas the view that philosophy cannot demonstrate that God exists, but only that some divinity exists and there is only one such divinity; for evidently he believes that non-believers have the God of Christian faith in sight when they makes such demonstrations.

I think O'Callaghan's position is problematic. The difference between the faithful and the non-faithful, between Aquinas and Aristotle, is not that Aquinas, illuminated by faith, is referring to something else by the name 'God', he simply has a privileged access (as do all the faithful) to God's divine essence that a pagan like Aristotle does not. Thus, minimally one can know that God exists as the primary cause of all, but that is not all that one can know about God. One can know more about the primary cause of all that exists without thereby changing the referent of the name 'God'. Further probing of naming and reference will help to reinforce this point.

On O'Callaghan's account, the various descriptions that we use for God are taken to be synonymous with the name God, e.g. unmoved mover, primary cause etc.³² That being the case, the faithful will have descriptions that the non-faithful do not have, in which case the descriptions of God adopted by the faithful will not be that of the non-faithful. So, if the non-faithful can offer a demonstration of God's existence, what matches that description is not what matches the description deployed by the faithful. Hence, per O'Callaghan, there cannot be a demonstration that God exists, but only a demonstration that divinity exists and only one divinity.

cause Who is God blessed forever, see *In VIII Phys.*, Lect. 23: 'Et sic terminat philosophus considerationem communem de rebus naturalibus, in primo principio totius naturae, qui est super omnia Deus benedictus in saecula', and *In XII Met.*, Lect. 12: 'Et hoc est quod concludit, quod est unus princeps totius universi, scilicet primum movens, et primum intelligibile, et primum bonum, quod supra dixit Deum, qui est benedictus in saecula saeculorum'. Not only that, note what Aquinas says about the Platonists and their knowledge of God in *In Librum Beati Dionysii De Divinis Nominibus Expositio* (Turin: Marietti, 1950), Proemium: 'Haec igitur Platonicorum ratio fidei non consonat nec veritati, quantum ad hoc quod continet de speciebus naturalibus separatis, sed quantum ad id quod dicebant de primo rerum principio, verissima est eorum opinio et fidei Christianae consona'. For discussion of Aquinas's attitude to Plato and Aristotle on God as creator, see my *Aquinas and the Metaphysics of Creation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), Chapter 1.

³² O'Callaghan, 'Can We Demonstrate That "God Exists"?' p. 629.

In reaction to this I want to recall a distinction that Kripke makes between descriptions used as synonymous with a name and descriptions used to fix a reference.³³ On the former account, when we make use of descriptions, we do not have some entity in our sights that we seek to name; rather, we simply give the meaning of the name. By contrast, when we use descriptions to fix a reference, we get some entity in our sights to which we refer, but we do not thereby hold that those descriptions are synonymous with the name that we give to that entity. Let us take various descriptions of Aristotle as the greatest student of Plato and teacher of Alexander the great; if these are synonymous with the name, then everyone who refers to Aristotle is referring to Plato's greatest student and teacher of Alexander the great. However, someone could be referring to Aristotle and not be referring to the greatest student of Plato and teacher of Alexander the great. Kripke's point is that when we use descriptions to fix a reference, we refer to some individual, so that we can still refer to that same individual even in some counterfactual situation where the descriptions that helped us to fix our reference do not apply; such would be impossible if descriptions were taken to be synonymous with the name.³⁴

O'Callaghan's position has some plausibility to it if the various descriptions we use of God whether from effects (unmoved mover, uncaused cause etc) or from scripture are taken to give the meaning of the name. That being the case, when a non-believer refers to God he is referring to something different from a believer, since they do not mean the same by the name.

On the other hand, if the descriptions are merely used to fix the reference, then there need not be identity in description in every context to refer to the same thing. So, Aristotle and other philosophers can refer to God as

³³ Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1972), pp. 53 – 62.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 57: ' ...[S]uppose we say, "Aristotle is the greatest man who studied with Plato". If we used that as a *definition*, the name "Aristotle" is to mean "the greatest man who studied with Plato". Then of course in some other possible world that man might not have studied with Plato and so other man would have been Aristotle. If, on the other hand, we merely use the description to *fix the referent* then that man will be the referent of "Aristotle" in all possible worlds. The only use of the description will have been to pick out to which man we mean to refer. But then, when we say counterfactually "suppose Aristotle had never gone into philosophy at all", we need not mean "suppose a man who studied with Plato, and taught Alexander the Great, and wrote this and that, and so on, had never gone into philosophy at all", which might seem like a contradiction. We only mean, "suppose that *that man* had never gone into philosophy at all"'.

an unmoved mover, uncaused cause etc, where the faithful can refer to God by means of different descriptions. Nevertheless, so long as it is the same individual that they have in their sights they are referring to the same thing.

A similar distinction can be found in Thomas's treatment of whether 'God' names a nature. Aquinas distinguishes between whence a name is imposed and what it signifies. So, in Aquinas's own example, we name a stone by means of the description *laedit pedem* – something that hurts the foot. But what we name by the term stone is the stone itself. Hence, the description *laedit pedem* serves to fix the reference, but that to which we refer is the thing itself, even when it does not hurt our feet. Similarly, God is made known to us from His effects and hence a name is imposed from those effects, but the name itself is imposed to signify the divine nature itself.³⁵

Now, given that descriptions of a common name can be used to fix the reference of the name but need not be synonymous with the name, it is entirely plausible that both the faithful and the non-faithful have their reference fixed on the same 'thing' by the term 'God' yet deploy different descriptions in fixing the reference. It is not likely the case that the faithful who believe in the articles of the creed would dispute the description of God as unmoved mover, uncaused cause etc. Indeed, a believer in the articles of the creed believes in a primary cause of all things; for God almighty, creator of heaven and earth is the primary cause of all things. But the non-faithful philosopher, such as Aristotle, also applies the term 'God' to the primary cause of all things (indeed in Aquinas's estimation of him, Aristotle believed in a creator God).³⁶ So one whose reference is fixed by that description of

³⁵ *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, qu. 13, art. 8: '...[N]on est semper idem id a quo imponitur nomen ad significandum, et id ad quod significandum nomen imponitur. Sicut enim substantiam rei ex proprietatibus vel operationibus eius cognoscimus, ita substantiam rei denominamus quandoque ab aliqua eius operatione vel proprietate, sicut substantiam lapidis denominamus ab aliqua actione eius, quia laedit pedem; non tamen hoc nomen impositum est ad significandum hanc actionem, sed substantiam lapidis...Quia igitur Deus non est notus nobis in sui natura, sed innotescit nobis ex operationibus vel effectibus eius, ex his possumus eum nominare...Unde hoc nomen Deus est nomen operationis, quantum ad id a quo imponitur ad significandum...Ex hac autem operatione hoc nomen Deus assumptum, impositum est ad significandum divinam naturam'.

³⁶ *Quaestiones Disputatae De Potentia Dei* (Turin: Marietti, 1927), qu. 3, art. 5: 'Postiores vero philosophi, ut Plato, Aristoteles et eorum sequaces, pervenerunt ad considerationem ipsius esse universalis; et ideo ipsi soli posuerunt aliquam universalem causam

God has his reference fixed on the same being in which the faithful believe, in which case both the non-faithful and the faithful believe in the same God in Aquinas's view.

What then are we to make of Thomas's statement that non-believers do not believe in God under the conditions determined by faith?

If we take the conditions determined by faith to be the articles of the creed, then this amounts to saying that non-believers do not believe in God under the same descriptions as believers. But this is not to say that the individual Who is the object of a non-believer's belief is any different from the individual Who is the object of the faithful's belief; since as we have seen, in being used merely to fix a reference, descriptions can be plurivocal across different contexts, and yet permit us to refer to the same individual. Hence, the conditions of faith under which the faithful believe in God are those descriptions that fix the faithful's reference to God drawn from revelation. By contrast, the philosopher *qua* philosopher has no access to these conditions since they are drawn from revelation, but that does not mean that the individual to which the philosopher refers is any different from the One in Whom the faithful believe. At least within the context of God's being the primary cause, both the faithful and the non-faithful have the same individual in their sights. With that in mind then and given that Thomas holds that we can have philosophical demonstration of God's existence, I submit that we can demonstrate that God exists, and not just that divinity exists and that there is only one instance of it.

What about Thomas's reference to *Metaphysics*, Bk. 9 to the effect that defectivity in belief about simple things constitutes lack of knowledge? The first thing to be noted in this regard is that defectivity is not the same as lack of comprehension. Thomas himself argues that the finite intellect can only understand God partially, not comprehensively.³⁷ Given that Thomas affirms that our knowledge of God is non-comprehensive, it cannot be that the non-believer's less than comprehensive knowledge of God is a defective knowledge; for even the faithful have such non-comprehensive knowledge. Defectivity then must signify something stronger than simple lack of comprehension. I submit that defectivity in knowledge of simple things is when one's supposed knowledge is simply false or misses the mark. In that case,

rerum, a qua omnia alia in esse prodirent, ut patet per Augustinum. Cui quidem sententiae etiam Catholica fides consentit'.

³⁷ *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, qu. 12, art. 7.

defectivity would be a lack of knowledge. But this is not the case with the non-faithful such as Aristotle or the Platonists. They don't miss the mark when it comes to demonstrating God's existence (or a number of other things about God), since in Thomas's eyes they do establish a primary cause creator of all that is and that is enough to fix their reference on the same individual on Whom the faithful's gaze is fixed.

We can consider a final objection to this mode of procedure. Aquinas intends to offer a *quia* demonstration for God's existence by making use of some nominal definition of God, but in the actual argumentation he does not do this. So for instance in the five ways, he shows that an unmoved mover/uncaused cause/ absolutely necessary being exists. But he does not show that this is what God is. So the minor: God is an unmoved mover/uncaused cause/absolutely necessary being etc is missing.³⁸

Given what we have seen, this objection need not detain us for too long. In the article immediately preceding the five ways, Thomas makes clear that to make a *quia* demonstration for the existence of something whose essence we do not know, we make use of effects and draw the nominal definition of the cause from such effects. In the five ways themselves Aquinas is clearly taking motion, causality, modality etc as effects and drawing the nominal definition of God as unmoved mover, uncaused cause, absolutely necessary being etc. It is difficult to see how it could not be clear that this is what is signified by the name God since in the conclusion of each of the ways Thomas explicitly states that this is what all take or understand God to be. Hence, the signification of the name is that of unmoved mover, uncaused cause, absolutely necessary being etc, and since this has been shown to exist, God has been shown to exist.

In concluding, I would like to return to a point raised at the beginning of this essay. Aquinas's project of demonstrating God's existence is not one divorced from his wider philosophical views. God's existence is demonstrated from within metaphysics and so cannot be understood without that metaphysics. As we have seen, Thomas has quite a tight conception of what such demonstration both involves and entails. So the final point I would like to make is that if one engages with Aquinas's proofs of God's existence assuming some kind of metaphysical neutrality, one will be dismayed. One

³⁸ Fernand Van Steenberghen raises this objection in *Le problème de l'existence de Dieu dans les écrits de s. Thomas d'Aquin* (Louvain-la-Neuve: Éditions de l'institut supérieur de philosophie, 1980). pp. 287 – 296.

cannot understand Aquinas's proofs of God without understanding his metaphysics; to consider the proofs independent of the metaphysics is not to consider the proofs. As we shall see in the following essays, there is a metaphysical bedrock out of which Aquinas's way to God is drawn, and the proofs of God stand or fall on that bedrock.

Chapter 2 - Essentially Ordered Series Reconsidered

1. Introduction

Traditionally, cosmological arguments for God's existence have focused on the denial of an infinite regress of causes, thereby arriving at a first cause that is understood to be God; this at least is the general picture. In the middle ages a distinction was made between causal series that are essentially ordered and those that are accidentally ordered. In an essentially ordered series there is some prior cause that ensures in itself the causal efficacy of the series as a whole, whereas in an accidental series, there is no need for such a cause. Thus, in an essentially ordered series the causal efficacy of the series is derived from the primary cause such that the primary cause's causality is transitive and allows for further members of the series to act as causes in the series; on this account then, x can cause y and y can go on to cause z in virtue of the causal efficacy granted to it (y) by x . On the other hand, in an accidentally ordered series there is no causal transitivity from a primary cause to various posterior causes, rather a single cause produces a single effect; on this account then, x causes y , and y could go on to cause z , but it is not in virtue of any causal efficacy granted to it (y) by x that y produces z .¹ On the back of this distinction, it was often argued that there could not be an infinity of essentially ordered causes, since if there were there would be no cause that itself guarantees the causal efficacy of the series in which case the latter, *qua* causal series, would be inexplicable. On the other hand, it was generally held that the accidentally ordered series could possibly go to infinity since there was no need for a primary cause therein guaranteeing the causal efficacy of the series. Medieval

¹ Commenting on John Duns Scotus, Richard Cross claims that the transitivity of causality in the essentially ordered series is a key feature thereof distinguishing the latter from an accidentally ordered series, see *Duns Scotus on God* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), p. 22.

philosophers, such as Aquinas and Scotus, seized on the nature of essentially ordered series and held that a denial of an infinite regress in such a series was capable of bringing one to a first cause that we understand to be God. However, this has met with some criticism.²

Paul Edwards has argued that distinguishing between essentially ordered and accidentally ordered series is not enough to obviate a fundamental weakness in first cause cosmological arguments.³ Insofar as such arguments seek to deny the possibility of an infinite regress, they hold that the believer in an infinite series of causes denies the existence of a first cause of that series. So, suitably applied to essentially ordered causal series, a believer in an infinite regress denies a first cause in an essentially ordered series and thereby denies a cause of the efficacy of that series itself; this is typically seen as an absurd entailment and thereby the possibility of an infinite essentially ordered series is denied.⁴ However, Edwards argues that such a position equivocates between

² See Aquinas, *Quaestiones Disputate De Veritate* (Turin: Marietti, 1927), qu. 2, art. 10, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, qu. 46, art. 2, ad. 7, *Quaestiones Quodlibetales* (Turin: Marietti, 1927), Quodlibet 9, qu. 1. Aquinas holds that the essentially ordered series is such that the causal transitivity of the primary cause extends to a multitude of effects, whereas in an accidentally ordered series, the causality is operative between a single cause and a single effect. Scotus, *Opera Omnia* Vol. II (Civitas Vaticana: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1950), *Ordinatio* I, dist. 2, pars. 1, qu. 2, nn. 48–54. Scotus notes three characteristics of the essentially ordered series that serve to distinguish it from the accidentally ordered series: in the essentially ordered series, (i) posterior causes depend on the primary cause for their causality, (ii) posterior causes are less perfect than prior causes, (iii) the causes in the series act simultaneously to produce the final effect. William of Ockham also dealt with this issue, but, against Scotus, he denied that an infinity of essentially ordered efficient causes would lead to an actual infinity, and held that only an infinity of conserving causes would do so, see *Opera Theologica* Vol. II (New York: St Bonaventure, 1970), *In I Sent.*, dist. 2, qu. 10, pp. 342:17–354:14 [Contra Opinonem Scoti], and pp. 354:15–357:9 [Responsio Auctoris]; it is in the 'Responsio Auctoris' that Ockham argues that an infinite series of conserving causes leads to an actual infinity.

³ Paul Edwards, 'The Cosmological Argument', in *Philosophy of Religion: A Guide and Anthology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), ed. Brian Davies, pp. 202–13, note in particular p. 203 *et seq* for this particular objection.

⁴ For the view that a denial of a primary cause in a causal series is a denial of the subsequent causal efficacy of that series, see Aquinas's argumentation against an infinite regress in the

(i) a denial of the existence of a first cause and (ii) a denial that the first cause is uncaused. Edwards argues that one can deny the uncaused nature of the first cause without thereby denying its existence, in which case the believer in an infinite series is not committed to the denial of the existence of a first cause, in which case there presumably can exist a first cause in a series of essentially ordered causes that (i) accounts for the causal efficacy of the series, but (ii) is not uncaused.⁵

The question then for the contemporary theist is whether or not a model can be found for thinking of essentially and accidentally ordered series such that Edwards's criticism can be avoided. In this article I seek to offer just such a model. In §. 2, I offer two models of causality, the first tracing the metaphysics of the accidentally ordered series and the second that of the essentially ordered series. In §. 3, I argue that so construed the second type of causal series could not possibly go to infinity, and that Edwards's criticism is avoided. In §. 4, I draw some summary conclusions as to the putative nature of a first cause in an essentially ordered series.

2. Causal Series

I take causality to be a one way dependence relation such that there is an asymmetrical relation of dependency between cause and effect; an effect just depends on its cause in the required sense and not vice versa. I am aware that this commits me to a certain view about the nature of the causal relation; indeed, and unsurprisingly, I am committed to a medieval view about causality to the

first and second ways of *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, qu. 2, art. 3, and also the argumentation in *Compendium Theologiae* (Turin: Marietti, 1954), Cap. 3.

⁵ Paul Edwards, 'The Cosmological Argument', p. 203: 'Aquinas has failed to distinguish between the two statements: (1) A did not exist, and (2) A is not uncaused. To say that the series is infinite implies (2), but it does not imply (1)... [T]he believer in the infinite series is not "taking A away". He is taking away the privileged status of A; he is taking away its "first causeness". He does not deny the existence of A or of any particular member of the series. He denies that A or anything else is the first member of the series. Since he is not taking A away, he is not taking B away, and thus he is also not taking X, Y, or Z away. His view, then, does not commit him to the absurdity that nothing exists now...'.

effect that it is a relation such that one thing (the cause) has in itself the power (or the actuality) to bring about either (i) an effect whole and complete (and this would be creation) or (ii) a change in a thing that is sufficiently capable of undergoing such change; in both cases the effect depends on and is derived from the cause in the required respect. I thus conceive of causality as primarily involving things (using 'thing' here in a loose sense so as to be in principle applicable to immaterial entities). I see as misguided, though often insightful, contemporary discussions of causality which almost exclusively focus on the causal relation as one obtaining between events. It seems to me that construing causality in terms of a relation between events undermines the very real relationship and connection between cause and effect that is at the heart of the causal relation. Furthermore, it follows from this view that the explanatory force that goes along with positing the causal relation is based upon the fact that there is a real connection between two things, cause and effect, such that one cannot understand the existence of the latter without the former. Consequently, each thing within the causal relation is an explanatory step the absence of which would render the causal relation inexplicable. So, in sum, I believe that analyses of causality in terms of events lose the very explanatory force that one often feels is captured by positing the causal relation in the first place.⁶

With that confession made, what I shall focus on in this article is the nature of the causal dependency and how it differs for the different types of causal relation to be outlined. For reasons that I will come to elucidate, if the dependency is a one-one relation, then the causal series can potentially stretch to infinity; if the dependency is a one-many relation, then the series cannot

⁶ For a helpful volume that gathers together many contemporary discussions of causality see, *Causation*, E. Sosa and M. Tooley eds., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993). See also E.J. Lowe, *A Survey of Metaphysics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), Chapters 8, 9, 10, 11, for a helpful introductory discussion of the issues involved in the metaphysics of causation. Note how in Chapter 11, pp. 206–13, he argues for both the conceptual and the ontological priority of agent causation over event causation, taking the notion of an agent in a sense liberal enough to encompass inanimate objects, thereby bringing him closer than many contemporary non-scholastic metaphysicians to the scholastic view that causality is a relation that obtains primarily between things.

possibly go to infinity.⁷ What I intend in the current section is to show that the metaphysical characteristics of each causal series and their distinction – one-onc and onc-many – map onto the medieval distinction between an accidentally ordered series and an essentially ordered series. We turn then to the causal series.

A one-one causal relation is one whereby some effect, y , is dependent on some cause x , and this causal relation is an isolatable unit. Hence, in a one-one relation we can isolate and understand the causal relation ($x \rightarrow y$), even though ($x \rightarrow y$) may depend on the causal activity of some previous cause, w , itself dependent on a cause v , and so on. Consequently, in a series of one-one causal relations we get the following: (...) → ($v \rightarrow w$) → ($w \rightarrow x$) → ($x \rightarrow y$) → (...). What is significant here is that each causal unit can be isolated and understood in itself without necessarily appealing to antecedent further causes. Furthermore,

⁷ Note the phraseology: ‘potentially stretch to infinity’, ‘cannot possibly go to infinity’. The adverbs matter because the denial of an infinite regress in medieval metaphysics, especially as it featured in the thought of Aquinas, Scotus, and Ockham, came quite close to the issue of whether or not there could be an actual as opposed to a potential infinity. Most thinkers, including the three already mentioned, denied in some sense the possibility of an actual infinity, and with that denial in place, if they could show that a causal series in virtue of being infinite was an actual infinite, then such a series would be impossible. This was precisely the strategy of Scotus and Ockham in showing the impossibility of an infinite regress of a certain type of causal series, though, oddly, the same strategy does not figure prominently in Aquinas’s discussions. Regarding his rejection of the possibility of an infinite regress of causes in an essentially ordered series, he rejects such a series not through appeal to the impossibility of an actual infinity, but through the absurdity in the notion that a series whose posterior causal members depend on a first cause for their own causal efficacy should be without a first cause, i.e. that the series in question should be infinite. Note in particular the following evaluation by Lawrence Dewan, ‘St Thomas and Infinite Causal Regress’, in *Idealism, Metaphysics and Community* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), ed. William Sweet, pp. 119–31, at p. 125: ‘If the causal hierarchy is truly causal, positing an infinity of members negates the very causal structure. One might envisage a hierarchy of created pure spirits, and it might be posited to stretch to infinity, but it could not be an efficient causal hierarchy, even as regards some added perfection such as illumination. The structure of an infinite series cannot have a causal nature’. For Aquinas’s more prominent discussions of actual and potential infinities as related to essentially and accidentally ordered causal series, see: *De Veritate*, qu. 2, art. 10, *Quodlibet 9*, qu. 1, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, qu. 7, art. 4, *Quodlibet 12*, qu. 2, art. 2.

notice that the series of w, w, x, y, z , is constructed out of individual causal units displaying the one-one relation.

A one-many relation is one whereby some cause, x , on which a given effect, y , depends is not only itself dependent on some antecedent cause, w , but cannot be understood to be a cause of y without the causal activity of w . Hence we derive the following one-many series ($w \rightarrow (x \rightarrow y)$). Notice that the series of w, x, y , is not one constructed out of isolatable causal units, as with the one-one series, but that the series itself is an overall one-many relation. Furthermore, notice the brackets of the one-many causal relation, they are such that the causal relation of $(x \rightarrow y)$ is itself contained within the scope of the causal activity of w . Effectively a one-many causal relation is one wherein the absence of some prior cause renders the succeeding causes and effects causally ineffectual. Given the latter, one cannot isolate $(x \rightarrow y)$ in the one-many relation as one can in the one-one relation, since, as falling within the scope of the causal activity of w , x cannot exercise its causal activity over y without presupposing that of w .

In order to elucidate these remarks further, let us take an example of each causal relation.⁸

(i) One-one: a son, z , is begotten by his father, y , who is begotten by his father, x , who is begotten by his father, w , and so on. Hence: (...) $\rightarrow (w \rightarrow x) \rightarrow (x \rightarrow y) \rightarrow (y \rightarrow z)$.

⁸ I borrow these examples from Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, qu. 46, art. 2, ad. 7; one could also consult *De Veritate*, qu. 2, art. 10, where the mind-hand-stick-stone example appears as illustrative of the essentially ordered series, but for the accidentally ordered series Thomas provides the example of a builder successively using saws to build a house; whilst the builder example does conform to the metaphysics of the one-one relationship as I describe it in this paper, the fathers begetting sons example is, to my mind, a better example.

(ii) One-many: a stone (z) is moved by a stick (y) which is moved by a hand (x) which is moved by the mind (w). Hence: $(w \rightarrow (x \rightarrow (y \rightarrow z)))$.⁹

Notice that in (i) each father-son relationship is a closed causal unit, capable of generating the prior member of the succeeding causal unit, but nevertheless a unit enclosed within itself. Take for instance w ; w is the father of x and thus his immediate causal activity as father of x is discharged in relation to x ; w is also the grandfather of y , but not the cause of y , since x , as y 's father, is the cause of y . Thus, the causal activity of w is related immediately to x and only mediately or derivatively to y , in which case w and x (as father and son) can be understood in isolation from y . In simpler terms, w can father x , and having done so cease to exist without thereby impugning the ability of x to go on to father y . In the latter sense, the causal duty of w does not interfere with the causal duty of x in relation to y , in which case the causal relationship of w and x as father and son is captured in a one-one causal relation.

⁹ However one wants to construe the nature of the mind or being minded, I think that it is uncontroversial to say that the agent has intentional control over his or her members, and it is simply the latter that I mean when I say that the mind moves the hand. This of course goes hand in hand with my medieval views on causality, to the effect that a cause is a thing with the ability to bring about some effect; the cause in this case is the human substance and the ability is the intentional control that the latter has over its limbs. However, if the scepter of agent causation lingers, then substitute for the following: the fire heats the pot which heats the stew which causes the stew to boil; this example is taken from Patterson Brown, 'Infinite Causal Regression', *The Philosophical Review* 75:4 (1966), pp. 510–25, at p. 517. Whilst I recognize that, in the case of Aquinas at least, the main example of an essentially ordered series often involves him in a commitment to agent causation (the mind moving the hand), I don't think that one's acceptance or lack thereof of such causation should prevent one from appreciating the underlying metaphysical nature of the essentially ordered causal series. For some details on agent causation, see Richard Taylor, *Action and Purpose* (NJ: Prentice Hall, 1966), Chapters 8–9; Roderick Chisholm, 'The Agent as Cause', in *Action Theory* ed. M. Brand and D. Walton (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1976), pp. 199–213; Jennifer Hornsby, *Actions* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980), Chapter 7. For an interesting discussion of the position of one prominent twentieth century Thomist on agent causation see Steven Bayne, *Elizabeth Anscombe's Intention* (USA: BookSurge Publishing, 2010), pp. 233–55.

In (ii) the case is a little different. The causal activity of y with regard to z cannot be isolated from the more encompassing causal activity of x , which in turn cannot be isolated from the even more encompassing causal activity of w . Thus, in the example, we cannot isolate the stick's moving the stone from the movement of the hand, which in turn we cannot understand in isolation from the mind. The series of causes that go to produce the overall effect, z , act as one so as to produce z . What is fundamental then to the one-many relationship is that there is some prior cause that accounts for the causal activity of the posterior causes in question and naturally terminates the series. So, in our example, the stone does not move without the movement of the stick, which in turn does not move without that of the hand, which in turn does not move without the urging of the mind. But here we come to a natural stop; for assuming the absence of psychological coercion, the mind is capable of inducing motion to its members without thereby being induced itself.

Let's modify our example somewhat to the case of Dr Smith on the golf course. Dr Smith induces motion to his arms which swing the club which moves the ball, and all this for no other reason than sheer indulgence. It seems that in this scenario we come to a natural stop: 'Why did you go to the golf course Dr Smith? Because I just wanted to knock balls about'. Now, of course, we could inquire after Dr Smith's desire to knock balls about. Perhaps he wanted to improve his swing because he works in a department whose dean is an avid golfer whom he wants to impress. Such considerations would be inquiries into Dr Smith's desires, and whilst relevant to why he chose to start knocking balls about the golf course, the knocking of the balls about the course can be explained without recourse to Dr Smith's motivating desire to impress the dean, but they cannot be explained without Dr Smith himself and his swinging of the clubs.

Given the dependence of posterior causes on some prior cause in a one-many relation, the causal transitivity in such a series moves down a descending scale (or conversely: up an ascending scale) of generality. Thus, the mind can move more than just the hand, the hand can move more than just the stick, and

the stick can move more than just the stone.¹⁰ Given the latter, one cannot remove any of the prior causes of the particular series and yet hope to sustain the effect. Thus, in the series in question, the stone cannot move without the stick, which itself cannot move without the hand, which itself cannot move without the mind.

I submit that the one-many causal relation cannot be cashed out in terms of isolatable causal units interacting with each other, as in the one-one relation; for one cannot understand the motion of the stone without that of the stick, nor the motion of the stick without that of the hand, and so forth. But one can understand the father-son relation between y and z without appealing to the relation of x to y and in turn w to x . Whilst the previous members of the series may be relevant to the presence of y and thereby z in the series (like Dr Smith's desires in the above example), the causal relation between y and z can be understood without appeal to the previous members (just like Dr Smith's desires), whereas the same cannot be said for the stick's moving the stone; for in order to understand the stick's moving a stone, we ask what moved the stick, whereas in order to understand a father begetting a son, we need not necessarily understand the grandfather begetting the father. Furthermore, in the one-one relation, it was noted that a prior cause in some distinct causal unit can discharge its causal duty and thence cease to exist, without thereby its effect ceasing to exist. So, w can father x and thence cease to exist without x 's ceasing to exist, and also without preventing x 's going on to father y . In the one-many relation the case is wholly different. Should the stick begin to move and then all of a sudden cease to move, say just before hitting the stone, then the stone would not move.

¹⁰ We can find the same sentiment expressed in Aquinas when discussing the priority of efficient causes, amongst which, as we know from the second way, there is an order; so he writes *In Librum de Causis Expositio* (Turin: Marietti, 1972), prop. 1, n. 34: 'Manifestum est enim quod, quanto aliqua causa efficiens est prior, tanto eius virtus ad plura se extendit; unde oportet ut proprius effectus eius communior sit. Causae vero secundae proprius effectus in paucioribus invenitur; unde et particularior est. Ipsa enim causa prima producit vel movet causam secundo agentem, et sic fit ei causa ut agat'. We also see the same alluded to in Scotus, who holds that in the essentially ordered series there is a scale of perfection with the higher (prior) cause being more perfect than the lower (posterior) cause(s), see *Ord. I*, dist. 2, pars. 1, qu. 2, n. 50.

Similarly, should the mind urge the hand to move the stick, and in the act of doing so suffer some irreparable damage such that it can no longer urge the hand to move, then the motion of the series would be lost. In other words, in a one-many relation, not only do the posterior causes depend on some prior cause for some causal characteristic (motion in this example), that causal characteristic is itself sustained in the series by the presence thereto of the prior cause.

The medieval distinction between an essentially ordered series and an accidentally ordered series was motivated out of the awareness that in the former series the causal transitivity of the series is initiated and preserved therein by some cause that in itself possesses the causal efficacy of the series (the mind in Aquinas's example); whereas in the accidentally ordered series, the causes act successively in interaction with one another, one cause bringing about one effect and so on without any need for some prior cause that in itself guarantees the causal efficacy of the series. I submit that my characterization of the one-many and the one-one causal series maps onto the medieval characterization of the essentially ordered and the accidentally ordered series.

As I indicated in the introduction, the distinction of these types of causal series was often put to use in arguments for the existence of God that typically reject the possibility of an infinite regress of causes. So it was argued that there could possibly be an infinite series of accidentally ordered causes, but that there could be no such series of essentially ordered causes, in which case we can construct a suitable argument for the existence of God. We have seen that this line of reasoning has been challenged by Edwards, so let us now turn to the issue of whether or not the different types of causal series, as I have construed them, can proceed to infinity and whether or not Edwards's objection can be obviated.

3. Infinity

The one-one causal relation is cashed out in terms of a cause and an effect as a basic unit of the causal series, a unit within which the causal duty of the cause is exercised in respect of its immediate effect; in this respect it is not impossible

that a series built up of such causal relations should go to infinity (though it may be a fact that no such series does go to infinity). For insofar as each unit that comprises a one-one causal relation is isolatable, the effect in such a relation is adequately explained by its cause and seeks no further cause down the line. I believe that the foregoing captures Hume's reasoning when he says the following:

Did I show you the particular causes of each individual in a collection of twenty particles of matter, I should think it very unreasonable should you afterwards ask me what was the cause of the whole twenty. This is sufficiently explained in explaining the cause of the parts.¹¹

What Hume is alluding to here is that in a certain causal series made up of certain causal relations (one-one relations), if we can have a cause for an immediately succeeding effect, we can go to infinity in such a series and yet every effect will have a cause, in which case there is nothing left to be explained and no violation of the principle of sufficient reason. As applied to relations of the one-one variety, Hume's reasoning is sound. x is fathered by w and in that father-son relation we need not seek out a cause of w in order to explain the fathering of x ; we have an explanation of the father of x in the form of his father, w . No doubt w himself depends (i) on his own father, say v , and (ii) on various environmental factors, but (i) x himself does not depend on v in the relation of fatherhood and (ii) the environmental factors that generate and sustain w also sustain x and any other element in the father-son series, such that in the absence of these environmental factors no member of the series could exist. Given the latter, the environmental factors are not properly located within the one-one causal relation, but they provide the conditions for the possibility of the one-one relation and are thereby causes without which there would not be the relation in question. Given the latter, such environmental factors must be

¹¹ Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, ed. R. Popkin (Cambridge: Hackett, 1985), Part IX, p. 56.

seen as part and parcel of a more encompassing one-many causal relation that includes as one of its *relata* some set of one-one causal relations (say fathers and sons). But in terms of the one-one relation itself, a son can be understood to be begotten by his father, and we need not look further down the causal line for the cause of the son; in that case, if we have an infinity of one-one relations, every effect will have a cause and there can be no charge of conceptual absurdity therin. Let us now consider the one-many series.

In the one-many relation, the posterior causal *relata* depend on some prior cause for their ability to act. Thus, in (ii), the hand, stick, and stone all depend on the causal efficacy originated and preserved in the series by the mind; remove the mind's causal activity and you remove the efficacy of the series. Now let us explore a causal regress of such a series and ascertain whether or not it can go to infinity. It is not difficult to add to the symbolic formulation of the one-many series and cash it out accordingly; we can add any number of further antecedent causes and suitably interpret them as applying to real causal processes. Thus, the symbolic formulation of the series will be $(n \dots \rightarrow (w \rightarrow (x \rightarrow (y \rightarrow z)))) \dots$, where n stands for however many previous causes it takes to get to w . The question then is whether or not n is finite or infinite.

One peculiar aspect of the one-many relation was that, unlike the one-one relation, it cannot be broken up into basic units of causal relation; $y \rightarrow z$ (the stick's moving the stone) cannot be understood in isolation from $x \rightarrow (y \rightarrow z)$ (the hand's moving the stick which thereby moves the stone), and so on. The bracketing in the symbolic formulation captures this aspect. Thus, as we noted, in the one-many series there is a cause on whose causal activity depends the activity of the subsequent causes; remove that cause, and you remove the activity of the posterior causes. Now, in an infinite series of causes there is no primary cause, since if there were, it would *ipso facto* be a finite series; this is because a finite series is necessarily a series that has an origin out of which (*ex quo*) it proceeds, in which case an infinite series is precisely a series without such an

origin.¹² Hence, an infinite series has no primary cause. So if we consider a supposed infinite one-many series, there will be no primary cause in such a series. But if this is so, then the causes in the series will have no causal efficacy, since, as has been noted, causal efficacy in the one-many series is originated and preserved therein by a primary cause. Therefore, to deny a primary cause to the one-many series, i.e. to affirm the possibility of an infinite series, is precisely to remove the causal efficacy of the causes within the series, which is in effect to deny the causal series itself. So the believer in an infinite one-many series has to face the following contradiction: (i) in a one-many series the causes are causally inefficacious without some primary cause on which the causal efficacy of the series depends and which naturally terminates the series, and (ii) in an infinite series there is no primary, naturally terminating, cause, in which case there is no cause for the causal efficacy of the series. Thus, a believer in an infinite series of one-many causal relations denies any causal efficacy to that series, in which case he or she denies the possibility of that series precisely as a causal series.

Now, in reaction to such argumentation and its use in proofs for God, Edwards, granting the distinction between the causal series, argued that one can coherently entertain the possibility of an infinite regress of essentially ordered causes, i.e. an infinite one-many series. He claimed that in affirming an infinite regress, one does not deny the existence of a primary cause; one simply denies its special nature as uncaused. That is to say, the above argumentation against an infinite regress assumes that the believer in an infinite regress denies the existence of a first cause of the series. But Edwards claims that this is false, and he holds that in such argumentation there is an equivocation between (i) a denial of the existence of a first cause and (ii) a denial that the first cause is uncaused. Thus, for Edwards there could presumably be a first cause in an infinite series of causes, but such a cause is no longer the special type of uncaused cause that classical theists like Aquinas and Scotus thought it to be. Edwards thus maintains that he can consistently believe in an infinite regress of causes

¹² This does not entail that finite series cannot go indefinitely forward, only that there is a terminus *ex quo*, that is, a point from which the causal activity of the series originates.

without denying the existence of a first cause and if the series is of the one-many variety, by extension the causal activity of all other causes in that series.

Such an objection, suitably formulated, might be able to hobble certain historical presentations of a denial of an infinite series of causes, but I don't think it applies to my presentation here.¹³ Here I have maintained that what is distinctive about the one-many relation is that the posterior members depend on some primary cause for their causal efficacy; such a cause is first precisely because it is that on which the posterior members depend for the causal property of the series in question. Thus, in the mind/hand/stick/stone example, the first cause (the mind) is that without which there would be no motion in the series in question. The mind is not simply another cause tacked onto the series, to conceive of it as such would be to conceive of it as a cause in a one-one series wherein there are isolatable causal units and there is no end to how many units we tack on. Hence the first cause in a one-many series is first precisely because it is that without which there would be no causal efficacy in the series. It is thus uncaused in the required sense insofar as it is in itself capable of inducing causal efficacy to the series itself. Thus, against Edwards, the first cause in the one-many series is both first and uncaused.

Now, one could object here and say that an individual one-many causal series, such as the mind/hand/stick/stone is indeed finite, and that the first cause of that series is uncaused with respect to motion. Nevertheless, such a first cause can be caused in other respects, as with Dr Smith's motivations for knocking balls about the golf course. What this objection entails is that there can be any number of finite one-many causal series, but that the first cause in any such series, whilst uncaused with respect to the series of which it is the first, is itself caused in some other respect within a series of which it is not the first; and this I suspect is the force of Edwards's objection to the use of essentially ordered causal series in proofs of God. Thus, what is envisaged is that there are any number (perhaps an infinite number) of intersecting causal series, with any number of first causes that are first relative to their own series but not

¹³ Brown, 'Infinite Causal Regression', pp. 510–25, at pp. 513–4 believes that this objection fundamentally misconstrues Aquinas's argumentation.

to another.¹⁴ The question then is whether or not we can ever come to a first cause that is absolutely first and not only first relative to its own series. I think that if it can be shown that there is some property possessed by every member of *any* one-many series such that the members of every such intersecting series, whether finite or infinite in number, must depend on another for the particular causal property in question, and that if we can invoke a first cause for *that* property, then we will have a first cause that is absolutely first, in which case its presence will be required for the causal efficacy of any causal series and it itself will be uncaused.

I submit that 'existence' is just such a causal property, that is to say existence is a characteristic possessed by members of all and any causal series, a property that demands a cause for its presence in the series. My submission or perhaps assumption that existence is a property of things might go against the grain of post-Kantian and post-Fregean thinking, which would characteristically hold that existence cannot be a property of things in the way that color, shape, or size can be; rather, existence can only be a second order property attributable to first order properties that are themselves attributable to things. To be then on this account is to be the value of a bound variable.¹⁵ I reject this view, or more properly, I reject it if it is put forth as the only possible account of existence. In what follows, I do not propose a full defense of a non-quantificational account of existence, though I am of the opinion that a full defense of such a position should be attempted, especially by Thomists. What I shall offer here are some considerations motivating a non-quantificational view.

¹⁴ It is interesting to note that Aquinas himself recognizes the principle behind Edwards's objection: that within some domain there can be a first cause without its being absolutely first, i.e. uncaused in itself, see *Summa Theologiae*, IaIa, qu. 6, art. 1, ad. 1: 'Sed tamen sciendum quod contingit aliquod principium motus esse primum in genere, quod tamen non est primum simpliciter sicut in genere alterabilium primum alterans est corpus caelestis, quod tamen non est primum movens simpliciter, sed movetur motu locali a superiori movente'.

¹⁵ W.V.O Quine, 'On What There Is', in *From a Logical Point of View* (NY: Harper and Row, 1961), pp. 1–20, at p. 13. The most in-depth defense of this interpretation of existence is Christopher Williams, *What is Existence?* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981).

As I see it, the quantificational view, in taking existence to be a second order predicate, seems to take for granted the existence of some 'thing' to which the first order predicates are attributed; for on this account, there is already presupposed something to which first order predicates are attributable, and it is to the latter such predicates that existence, as a second order predicate, is attributed. However, it is the ontological value of this something to which the first order predicates are attributable that needs to be accounted for; it cannot be accounted for on the quantificational view, since the quantificational view presupposes it. So, the 'is' of this something that is there supporting these first order predicates remains a mystery. This then leaves open the possibility for a defense of the view that the something that is there supporting the first order predicates is an existing thing in its own right, and that whilst there can be attributed to it predicates that would characterize it as the type of thing that it is, this something is nothing unless it has a property of a radically different kind than those signifying of what type of thing it is. I submit that this property is existence (or more Thomistically: the act of existence – *esse*), and if we take the other properties whereby we signify the thing as the type of thing that it is as being significative of the essence of the thing, this essence is precisely nothing, or non-existing, unless it is actualized by a distinct act of existence. This act of existence thus actuates the essence of the thing, but is not a property predicated only of the predicates that signify the thing's essence, since if it were not a real property of the thing, the thing would not really exist.¹⁶

If the foregoing is correct and there is scope for a defense of the view that existence is a real property of things, then we can initiate a causal investigation into the existence that each and every individual thing possesses non-

¹⁶ For a traditional presentation of the metaphysics behind this view, see Aquinas, *De Ente et Essentia* (Rome: Editori di San Tommaso, 1976), Cap. 4. For detailed discussion of the distinction and composition of essence and existence in Aquinas's metaphysical thought see Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, Chapter 5. [For more in depth defence of the Thomistic view of *esse* in contrast to non-Thomistic accounts see Aquinas's *Way to God: The Proof in De Ente et Essentia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), Chapter 3, and 'Thomist Esse and Analytical Philosophy', *International Philosophical Quarterly* (2015), 55:1, pp. 25 – 48.]

essentially as a real property.¹⁷ Assuming that we arrive at a first cause of existence through a denial of an infinite regress of essentially ordered causes, or what I have called a one-many causal series, the question now is whether or not such a first cause can be both first and caused. According to Edwards, such a cause could be first insofar as it would be the first cause of existence, but, following the logic of his argument, this cause would not necessarily be uncaused, since even though it may be the first cause of existence and thereby uncaused with respect to existence, it may be caused in some other respect, in which case distinguishing between the causal series as I have done is of no help to the philosophically minded theist. But I should like to confront Edwards or those of like mind with the following question: in what respect does Edwards think the first cause of existence could be caused? If we successfully arrive a first cause of existence, then it is the cause of everything other than itself that in anyway exists, i.e. all things that exist are derived from it. To suggest that such a first cause of existence could be caused in some respect would be to suggest that it is caused by what it itself causes; for insofar as it is the first cause of existence, anything that in any way exists other than itself is an effect of it, in which case any candidate for the role of the cause of the first cause of existence (whatever role that might be) will itself be an effect of the first cause of existence. But no cause is caused by its effect, in which case a first cause of existence cannot be caused by anything that itself has been caused to exist; but what has not been caused to exist is either uncaused or nothing. Assuming that the proof for God is successful and we do arrive at a first cause of existence, the first cause of existence is not nothing, in which case it is an uncaused first cause of existence. What we have here then is a counter example to Edwards's proposal that we can consistently think of a first cause yet deny that it is uncaused. In the order of existence at least, a first cause of existence is, as a first cause of existence, absolutely uncaused, otherwise it would not be the first cause of existence, it would depend on another for its existence. Thus appeal to the distinction between the causal series in proofs for the existence

¹⁷ This is effectively Aquinas's strategy for his proof of God in *De Ente*, Cap. 4.

of God does have some value, assuming of course that we can discern some causal property, such as existence, that is capable of leading us to an absolutely first cause.

4. Different Causal Contexts

My purpose here is not to defend theism, but to point out a way of thinking about certain traditional conceptions of causality by considering the relations between cause and effect thought to be at work within those conceptions. As we have seen, in the one-one causal relation, we have isolatable units of causal interaction, whereas in the one-many relation, we have a causal nexus whose transitivity moves on a descending scale of generality. I do not submit that these are the only causal relations, but I believe that the lesson to be learned here is that we cannot think about causality exclusively in mechanistic terms of one thing striking another and that another, and so on; rather, causality is a much richer relation that seems to have at its core notions of dependency and derivability. What we learn from the one-many causal relation is that there is a type of causal interaction at work that encompasses scales of causal dependency. Thus, in the latter type of relation, the prior causes have a wider scope of activity than the posterior.¹⁸

I indicated that a denial of an infinite essentially ordered series, what I have called a one-many causal series, usually figures in traditional proofs for the existence of God. If I were to defend theism here I would have to show: (i) that there is at least one one-many causal series capable of leading to a cause

¹⁸ John Haldane has recently suggested that over and above the four traditional Aristotelian causes there might be as many types of cause as there are uses of 'because', see John Haldane, 'Primitve Causality', *Analysis* 67:3 (2007), pp. 180–6. I myself would hold that there are as many types of cause as there are types of dependency, and in a more detailed investigation of these issues, I would be inclined to argue that there is a kind of participative causality that obtains between causes and their effects and that this is especially so when the causal property is that of existence. The most in-depth treatment of this issue, at least in the thought of Aquinas, remains Cornelio Fabro's, *Participation et causalité selon s. Thomas d'Aquin* (Louvain-Paris: Publications Universitaires de Louvain & Éditions Béatrice-Nauwelaerts, 1961).

of all existing things; (ii) that the primary cause in such a series cannot be better thought of in terms of a natural entity; (iii) that such metaphysical speculation has some probative force. If all of these conditions can be met and one arrives at God on the basis of a denial of an infinite one-many series, then, for good or ill, the fundamental cause arrived at will not be what is *popularly* conceived of as God. Firstly, this fundamental cause will be the cause out of which all being flows, and not, as is popularly thought, some cosmic finger that pushes a row of cosmic dominoes; to think of God in these terms – as a cosmic finger – would be to think of Him as just another entity tacked onto the front of a one-one series. Secondly, considerations as to the boundary conditions of the universe will be irrelevant in the proof of God, since the one-many series is concerned with causes that are related more or less generally with each other, and thus conceives of the relation of the primary cause to the universe as one wherein the latter is a participation in the power of the former, and not set-off or given its first nudge by the primary cause. Thirdly, all existing things will participate in the causal activity of the primary cause, whether or not such things are past, present or future, and also whether or not such things can, temporally speaking, stretch to infinity. Finally, the creative act will have to be interpreted in terms of an ontological descent (or fall) from the primary cause to causes of lesser and lesser generality, in which case creation will be cashed out in terms of participation.¹⁹ This takes us not only into the realm of philosophical theology, but into theology itself wherein the falling away of creatures from the all encompassing generality of the being and goodness of the primary cause is given spiritual significance, and on that point I shall end so as not to rush in where angels fear to tread.

¹⁹ In a related paper I have argued that given the metaphysics of the matter, the popular notion of creation as an event wherein God ‘gets the ball rolling’ is rather simplistic and cannot do full justice to the idea of creation *ex nihilo*, and in the final two sections of the article I elaborate on some of the points noted above, viz. the conception of God and His relation to creatures that is entailed when a Thomistic metaphysical outlook is adopted, see, Kerr, ‘A Thomistic Metaphysics of Creation’, *Religious Studies* 48:3 (2012), pp. 337 – 356. [For a fuller treatment of these issues see *Aquinas and the Metaphysics of Creation*.]

Chapter 3 - Essentially Ordered Series Reconsidered Once Again

1. Introduction

It is well known that medieval philosophers, Aquinas, Scotus, and Ockham in particular, sought to establish the existence of God on the basis of a consideration of the metaphysics of causality. In undertaking such a project they distinguished between *per se* and *per accidens* causal series.¹ It was generally conceded, though not for the same reasons, that *per se* causal series are necessarily finite, whereas *per accidens* series, whilst they may be *de facto* finite, are not necessarily so. Hence appeal was often made to the necessary finitude of *per se* causal series in order to establish the existence of some primary cause which we call God.²

Often the consideration of causal series is undertaken with a view to efficient causality, so that the primary cause in *per se* causal series is a primary efficient cause. This is explicit in Thomas's second way and implicit in the first (efficient causality is also the concern of Scotus in his proofs of God in the *De Primo Principio* and the *Ordinatio*). Often little or no consideration is offered of other forms of causality and how they are located within ordered causal series.³ In this article I wish to consider final causality as

¹ Following Scotus, these series are often referred to as essentially ordered (as in the title of this paper) and accidentally ordered, whereas the terminology of *per se* and *per accidens* is that favoured by Aquinas; nothing of philosophical significance turns on this terminological issue other than the fact that it could generate confusion for those not already acquainted with this area of medieval thought.

² Aquinas, Scotus, and Ockham all adopt this procedure; see for instance Aquinas, *Sunima Theologiae* I, q. 2, a. 3, first and second ways; Scotus, *Opera Omnia* Vol. II. *Ordinatio* I, dist. 2, pars. 1, q. 2, nn. 48–54; Ockham, *Opera Theologica* Vol. II, *In I Sent.*, dist. 2, q. 10, 342:17–354:14 [Contra Opinonem Scotti], and 354:15–357:9 [Responsio Auctoris].

³ An exception to this is to be found in Ockham's consideration of conserving causality. In reaction to Scotus, Ockham holds that whilst we must reject an actual infinite, an infinite series of essentially ordered efficient causes will not lead to an actual infinity; rather only such a series of conserving causes will do so, and it is on the basis of the latter kind of causal series that Ockham endeavours to establish the existence of God. See Ockham, *In I Sent.*, dist. 2, q. 10, 354:15–357:9.

located in ordered series. My focus will be on Aquinas, so that whilst thinkers like Scotus and Ockham did indeed discuss *per se* ordered series, I am limiting my scope here to Aquinas's thought.

I shall begin by considering some of my previous work on *per se* and *per accidens* causal series, and in particular a model for understanding the metaphysics involved in these series that I have put forward in the past.⁴ Having done that, I shall then locate final causality within the model of ordered series that I adopt and proceed to argue that final causal series are finite and that there is some ultimate final cause. Having done that, I shall then consider how God can be viewed not only as the primary cause of all things but also as the ultimate final cause.

2. Causal Series

Aquinas adopts the distinction between *per se* and *per accidens* series throughout his work;⁵ and the most useful examples for illuminating the metaphysics of these series are:

- (i) *Per se*: a stone (*z*) is moved by a stick (*y*) which is moved by a hand (*x*) which is moved by the mind (*w*): $w \rightarrow (x \rightarrow (y \rightarrow z))$.
- (ii) *Per accidens*: a son (*z*) is begotten by his father (*y*) who is begotten by his father (*x*) who is begotten by his father (*w*) and so on: $(w \rightarrow x) \rightarrow (x \rightarrow y) \rightarrow (y \rightarrow z)$.⁶

In the *per se* series there is what I have labelled in the past a one-many relation such that some cause is the cause of the causality of the series. Hence, the hand, stick, and stone are essentially immobile without the

⁴ The model I adopt for these series was first put forth in 'Essentially Ordered Series Reconsidered', [Chapter 2 in the current volume], and *Aquinas's Way to God*, Chapter 5. For a more general discussion of Thomas's denial of infinite regress with which I am in substantial agreement, see Caleb Cohoe, 'There Must be a First: Why Thomas Aquinas Rejects Infinite, Essentially Ordered, Causal Series', *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 21:5 (2013), pp. 838 – 856. One difference between Cohoe's account and my own (adverted to by Cohoe) is that I take an infinite series to be without a primary cause, in which case I reject that *per se* series could be infinite, whereas Cohoe holds that an infinite series is simply a series with an infinite number of members in which case he holds that a *per se* series can have infinitely many members so long as some member is primary and underived, see 'There Must be a First', p. 845, n. 21.

⁵ See for instance: *De Veritate*, q. 2, a. 10, *Quodlibet 9*, q. 1, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 7, a. 4, *Quodlibet 12*, q. 2, a. 2.

⁶ These examples are taken from *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 46, a. 2, ad 7.

motion introduced to the series by the mind.⁷ Moreover, insofar as the mind is the cause of the causality of the series, all posterior causal relata in the series depend on the mind's causal activity for their causality, and this is captured by the bracketing in the symbolic formulation of the *per se* series. In the latter series, *x*, *y*, and *z* all come under the scope of *w* for their causality; and not only that, as we move through the series, the causal scope of each secondary cause is limited in its scope (this is again captured by the bracketing in the above formulation). It follows then that without *w* the other members in the series would be causally inefficacious, in which case a *per se* causal series lacking a primary cause is lacking in causality and hence fails as a causal series. The latter was a central feature in Thomas's argumentation against an infinite regress of causes in a *per se* series.⁸

The *per accidens* series is a series made up of one-one relations, since in that series there is no dependence of the effect on the cause for causality; rather, a single cause brings about a single effect, but it is not in virtue of the cause that the effect can itself be a cause in the same respect. Hence a father (*w*) causes his son (*x*) but in so causing his son, the father is not responsible for the son's ability to produce his own son. Rather, the son's ability to provide the father with a grandson is independent of the father's causality and can be exercised without the father, for the son is a man with the ability to procreate without the assistance of his father. This is captured in the symbolic formulation above whereby the fathers-sons series is simply a chain of one-one relations, with no single cause in the chain exercising its causality over every member of the chain.

So, the causality of *w* terminates in *x*, hence (*w* → *x*). When *x* goes on to cause his own son (*y*), it is not in virtue of *w* that he does so, in which case

⁷ I here do not commit myself to any position on the nature of mentality and what it takes for there to be a minded agent. Whatever one's view of mentality, the account of the metaphysics of causation here offered can accommodate it.

⁸ See for instance the following argument from the second way, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 2, a. 3: 'Non autem est possibile quod in causis efficientibus procedatur in infinitum, quia in omnibus causis efficientibus ordinatis, primum est causa medii, et medium est causa ultimi; sive media sint plura sive unum tantum. Remota autem causa, removetur effectus. Ergo, si non fuerit primum in causis efficientibus, non erit ultimum nec medium. Sed si procedatur in infinitum in causis efficientibus, non erit prima causa efficientis; et sic non erit nec effectus ultimus, nec causae efficientes mediae; quod patet esse falsum'. For a discussion of the second way and in particular an analysis of the metaphysics of ordered series employed therein see my article 'The Relevance of Aquinas's Uncause Argument' [Chapter 8 in the current volume].

in representing the causality of x in respect of y , we must bracket it off from the causality of w , hence $(w \rightarrow x) \rightarrow (x \rightarrow y)$ and so on. If we were to represent this series without the brackets, say as $w \rightarrow x \rightarrow y \rightarrow$, the causality of w as cause of x would not suitably be divorced from the causality of x as the cause of y . It follows from all this that such a chain need not have a primary cause, since the causality of the series is not something independent of the members of the series, in which case there is no need for a cause of that causality independent of the members themselves. Therefore, in the absence of a primary cause of the series, there is nothing that is uncaused (in respect of paternity), whereas in the *per se* series, in the absence of a primary cause the causality of the series itself remains uncaused.

In my earlier work and in more general discussions of this issue, the focus tended towards efficient causality; this is not surprising since many of Thomas's proofs of God's existence envisage some kind of efficient causality the causal series of which must terminate in some primary cause. However, the distinction between *per se* and *per accidens* causal series is not exclusively applicable to efficient causal series; rather, in any causal series (material, formal, efficient, or final), if the appropriate relation can be found amongst the members, then we can characterise the series as *per se* or *per accidens* accordingly. Here I want to consider the distinction as applied to final causality and in particular how a final *per se* causal series can be construed.

3. Final Causal Series

In considering final causality, I wish to step outside of considerations of whether or not finality exists in nature, and if so, what the proper metaphysical context of that would be given contemporary advances in biology and physics.⁹ Rather, insofar as my concern is with ordered series within which

⁹ For a classic defence of Aristotelian teleology against rejections thereof motivated by advances in biological science, see Étienne Gilson, *D'Aristote à Darwin et retour* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1971); especially chapter 3, 'Finalité et évolution'. For a more contemporary discussion not focussed solely on biology but also on contemporary physics as well as analytical readings of teleology, see Edward Feser, *Scholastic Metaphysics: A Contemporary Introduction* (Neunkirchen-Seelscheid, Germany: Editiones Scholasticae, 2014), pp. 88–92, and the relevant bibliographical citations therein. I should also point out that Feser's work serves as a good introduction to those interested but not specialising in scholastic views of causality.

final causality is operative, I wish to take the existence of finality and hence final causality for granted, and from that consider how it could be located within ordered causal series. To that end I will offer a brief account of Aquinas's analysis of causality and where finality fits into this analysis: having done that, I shall tease out several issues pertinent to this analysis which will permit me to clarify the nature of these series in later sections of this paper.

Causality for Thomas is a dependency relation analysed in terms of act and potency. An effect is in potency in some respect and the cause actualises the potency of the effect in the same respect. The cause then is a principle of act with respect to the effect that stands in potency to it.¹⁰ This allows Thomas a very generous notion of causality which he can then apply to different contexts in which there is an act/potency dependency. These contexts have traditionally been fourfold: efficient, formal, material, final.¹¹

Thomas's notion of final causality is derived from adherence to the goal-directed activity or finality (or teleology) of things. This goal-directed activity is parsed in terms of the 'in order to' or 'that for the sake of which' (*cuius causa fit*), where that for the sake of which something acts is its end.¹² Given that the end is that for the sake of which a thing acts, Aquinas thinks of the end in causal terms. So, in the case of finality, given that the end is that for the sake of which the thing acts, it is the end that actualises the causality of the thing acting towards that end, in which case the end is a final cause of the thing acting.

¹⁰ Aquinas, *De Potentia Dei*, q. 5, a. 1: 'Effectum enim a sua causa dependere oportet. Hoc enim est de ratione effectus et causae'; *In V Met.*, lect. 1, n. 751: 'Hoc nomen causa, importat influxum quemdam ad esse causati', and lect. 3, n. 794: 'Potentia et actus diversificant habitudinem causae ad effectum'; *In Octo Libros Physicorum Aristotelis Expositio* (Turin: Marietti, 1954), Lib. 2, lect. 5, n. 183: 'Omnia ista habent unam rationem causae, prout dicitur causa id ex quo fit aliquid'. Needless to say, it is substances that stand in causal relations to each other; some of these substances are intentional agents, whereas others are not. It is not my purpose here to habilitate Thomas's account of causality to contemporary concerns as to whether or not causes are events, acts, a combination, etc. Thus throughout this paper I am presupposing that causes are substances.

¹¹ I delve into this at greater length in *Aquinas's Way to God*, ch. 4.

¹² Aquinas, *In II Phy.*, lect. 4, n. 173: 'De ratione finis est quod sit cuius causa fit'; *In I Met.*, lect. 4, n. 70: 'Nam motus incipit a causa efficiente, et terminatur ad causam finaliem. Et hoc est etiam cuius causa fit aliquid, et quae est bonum uniuscuiusque naturae'. *In III Met.*, lect. 4, n. 374: 'Finis autem, et cuius causa fit aliquid, videtur esse terminus alicuius actus', *In V Met.*, lect. 18, n. 1039: 'Sed finis non solum habet quod sit ultimum, sed etiam quod sit cuius causa fit aliquid'.

Now the thing acting for the end is the efficient cause—the principle of motion. But the very motion of the efficient cause, its causality, is for some end such that the end is the terminus of the motion induced by the efficient cause. In other words, the end is that for which the efficient cause induces motion; hence, the causality of the efficient cause is for the sake of that end. There is thus a correspondence between the efficient cause and its end, such that the one is the principle of motion and the other its termination.¹³

Given that for Thomas causality is analysed in terms of act and potency, and that the final cause slots in here as that which exercises the causality of the efficient cause such that the latter would be causally ineffectual without the former, it follows that whilst the end towards which the efficient cause acts may be independent of the efficient cause, the causality of that end, i.e., its final causality, is not extrinsic to the efficient cause but present and immanent thereto actualising its efficiency. Final causality is thus immanent in things whilst the end to which those things aim on the basis of that causality may be extrinsic to things. We can appreciate this further when we consider final causality in respect of its conscious and unconscious manifestations.

Consciously I may decide to devote the rest of my life to, among other things, making a daily attempt to come to an understanding of the thought of St. Thomas Aquinas by reading his works, the works of his commentators, the authoritative journals, by engaging in debate in Thomism discussion groups, etc. My goal here is to understand the thought of St Thomas because for some reason I think that would be a good thing to achieve; I thus take steps to attain that goal, and those steps are themselves a number of smaller goals which will hopefully (someday, if ever) bring me to the overall goal of understanding St. Thomas. What occurs here is that some end or goal is grasped by me as good and presented to my will as desirable. I thereby will that goal and hence undertake measures to achieve it. In doing so I act as the efficient cause, the first source of motion that will get me to that goal, but I cannot do so unless I have grasped that goal and formed the intention to achieve it. The end is independent of me, but the causality that the end exercises is not independent of me, the final causality of the end

¹³ Aquinas, *In V Met.*, lect. 2, n. 775: ‘Efficiens et finis sibi correspondent invicem, quia efficiens est principum motus, finis autem terminus’.

operates by motivating me in the form of desire for the end to take measures to achieve it.¹⁴

On the other hand, a flame is such that it generates heat, so that the end of the flame is the generation of heat. The flame as an efficient cause is the principle by which heat is generated, but the flame would not be a cause unless it caused something: heat. The end (heat) and the efficient cause (the flame) are not independent in this case; nevertheless, the causing of heat is the goal of the flame, and the flame exists in order to cause it, for that is what a flame does. In this case, the final causality which motivates the efficient cause is not some conscious intention formed to attain an end—the flame is unconscious—nevertheless, the flame has a natural inclination to produce the end which is in accord with its nature as a flame. Hence, in unconscious things incapable of forming intentions, finality is operative in the form of natural dispositions that a thing has in virtue of what it is.¹⁵ In both cases, conscious and unconscious, the end is the cause of the causality of the efficient cause.¹⁶ Now let us probe this a little deeper.

In the conscious example given above, I ascertain some ultimate goal and in order to achieve it I take various steps that will get me to that goal. These intermediate steps are themselves ends, but they are ends for the sake of some further end; they are not intended for their own sake but for the sake of the ultimate goal I desire. Thus, I do not read the works of Aquinas just

¹⁴ For Aquinas's thought on intentional action, see *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 12; for a summary see Eleonore Stump, *Aquinas* (London/New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 277–84.

¹⁵ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, IaIIae, q. 1, a. 1: 'Agens autem non movet nisi ex intentione finis: si enim agens non esset determinatum ad aliquem effectum, non magis ageret hoc quam illud. Ad hoc ergo quod determinatum effectum producat, necesse est quod determinetur ad aliquid certum, quod habet rationem finis. Hac autem determinatio sicut in rationali natura per rationalem fit appetitum, qui dicitur voluntas; ita in aliis fit per inclinationem naturalem, quae dicitur appetitus naturalis'; *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Bk. 4, Cap. 19: 'Res naturalis per formam qua perficitur in sua specie, habet inclinationem in proprias operationes et proprium finem, quem per operationes consequitur; quale est enim unumquodque, talia operatur et in sibi convenientia tendit'.

¹⁶ Aquinas, *In V Met.*, lect. 2, n. 775: 'Efficiens est causa finis quantum ad esse quidem, quia movendo perducit efficiens ad hoc, quod sit finis. Finis autem est causa efficiens non quantum ad esse, sed quantum ad rationem causalitatis. Nam efficiens est causa in quantum agit: non agit nisi causa finis. Unde ex fine habet suam causalitatem efficiens'; *De Principiis Naturae* (Rome: Leonine, 1976), Cap. 4, p. 43:16–19: 'Efficiens enim dicitur causa respectu finis, cum finis non sit in actu nisi per operationem agentis: sed finis dicitur causa efficiens, cum non operetur nisi per intentionem finis'.

for the sake of reading, but for the sake of coming to an understanding of his thought. We distinguish then between ultimate ends and intermediate or subordinate ends insofar as the former are willed for their own sake and the latter for the sake of something else.¹⁷¹⁷

Of course, whether or not there is a single ultimate end for all things is an open question at this point. Given that causality is analysed in terms of act and potency, the end can be the principle of the activity of the efficient cause in one respect, but it can itself be subject (and hence in potency) to the activity of some other end in another respect. Hence, the end of mastering the thought of Aquinas, willed for its own sake above, can be for the sake of a further end, say that of confuting heretics. On the other hand, what was the subordinate end of reading the works of Aquinas, willed so as to understand his thought, can also be willed for no further end than simply the joy of reading the words of the Angelic Doctor. In conscious situations, it is that for the sake of which the agent intends the act which is the act's ultimate end, yet that does not rule out the agent's also intending the various steps as genuine, albeit intermediate, ends by which that end is achieved. In other situations, one of those intermediate ends may be willed as the ultimate end of some action.

Turning to unconscious situations, we can observe too that there are ultimate ends and subordinate ends. Take the example of the flame whose end is the production of heat. In this situation, in order to produce heat, various physical processes must occur, and these are necessary for the production of heat. Should these processes not occur, heat would not be produced. Thus, just as in conscious situations various steps have to be taken in order to reach one's goal, so too in unconscious situations various stages have to be passed through in order for a thing to reach its natural end. The difference is that ultimate ends and subordinate ends are much stricter in unconscious as opposed to conscious situations. We said that in conscious situations the ultimate end is that for which the agent intends the action, and that entails that what was merely a subordinate end in one case could be an ultimate end in

¹⁷ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, IaIiae, q. 12, a. 2: 'In motu autem potest accipi terminus dupliciter. Uno modo ipse terminus ultimus, in quo quiescitur, qui est terminus totius motus. Alio modo aliquod medium, quod est principium unius partis motus, et finis vel terminus alterius; sicut in motu quo itur de A in C per B, C est terminus ultimus, B autem terminus, sed non ultimus: et utriusque potest esse intentio'; a. 3: 'Est enim intentio non solum finis ultimi . . . sed etiam finis medii'.

another. But in the unconscious situation, this cannot be the case, for those stages which were necessary for the attainment of the thing's end, say the production of heat, can hardly obtain as ends in themselves without the production of that end, i.e. heat.

The reason for the necessity in the unconscious situation but not in the conscious situation lies in the fact that, in the former, things act for their ends owing to the natural dispositions that they have; these dispositions will only change when the thing itself changes, thereby acquiring new dispositions and hence a different end. On the other hand, in conscious situations, ends are not determined by natural dispositions, but by the will of the agent, and can thus change without the agent himself essentially changing.

Given these considerations of the metaphysics of final causality, let us now consider how the final cause can fit into our framework of ordered causal series.

3.1. *Per se Final Causal Series*

There is a necessary connection between an efficient cause and its end, since the end of an efficient cause is what it produces, so that if the efficient cause were not so connected to its end—i.e., if it did not bring about the end—it would fail precisely as an efficient cause. Efficient causes are thus necessarily ordered to their ends; the final cause cannot be divorced from the efficient cause without removing the causality of the efficient cause. In that case, the causality of the efficient cause is necessarily caused by the final cause, since without the final cause the efficient cause would not act for the production of some effect and hence would be without its causality.

Now in considering causal series, we distinguish between *per se* series and *per accidens* series insofar as in the *per se* series the posterior causal relata do not have the causal efficacy of that series in themselves but depend on another for such efficacy. Thus, in the mind-hand-stick-stone example, the hand, stick, and stone do not possess motion of themselves but depend on something other than themselves for their causality: the mind in this case. This distinguishes *per se* series from *per accidens* series insofar as in *per accidens* series each causal member can possess causal efficacy of itself. So in the fathers-sons series, each member of the series is capable of being a father given what it is (i.e., a man), and this is in stark contrast to the mind-hand-stick-stone series, since in the latter only the mind has in itself causal

efficacy, whereas in the rest causal efficacy is derived and participated in through the primary cause.

We have pointed out that there is a necessary connection between efficient and final causes such that the final cause is the cause of the causality of the efficient cause; the efficient cause is without its causality unless for the final cause bringing it into operation. It follows then that efficient causes are *per se* ordered to final causes, for efficient causes are without their causality if not for the final cause. Any causal series then wherein final causality is operative is a *per se* causal series with respect to the finality that is operative therein. The finality of that series is not possessed intrinsically by any member of the series, but is ordered to the end of the series which end motivates the causality of the primary cause. In other words, no causal series in which finality is operative is a *per accidens* series. Hence in the fathers-sons series, finality is not operative in the causal relationship between fathers and sons. This is not to say that finality does not operate *per se* in reproductive acts, but rather that the *per accidens* series considered precisely as a chain of fathers producing sons does not exhibit finality; in order for it to do so it would have to be integrated into a *per se* ordered series wherein the production of a son (or the biological finality that obtains amongst the sexual organs involved in reproduction) is for the sake of some further end such as to have a family in order to contribute to society for the greater glory of God, etc; and the latter causal series is quite distinct from that of a chain of fathers producing sons.

Given all of this, let us return to our paradigm example of the *per se* series and assess the finality thereof: the mind moves the hand to move the stick to move the stone. Finality is evidently operative in this series such that the minded agent moves the hand *in order to* move the stick *in order to* move the stone. It is for some goal that the agent moves the hand, stick, and stone (below we will modify this example to consider just exactly what kinds of goals would motivate such action). If finality is operative in the series, there has to be some final cause which motivates the finality of the series. But above when discussing finality and final causality, it was the action of conscious agents or unconscious substances that exhibited finality and acted towards an end. Here we are discussing the finality of an ordered causal series, something made up of distinct yet connected causal relata; have we switched from discussing the finality of a single entity, conscious or unconscious, to a number of entities, and if so is that switch acceptable?

To address these questions we must consider where in fact the finality lies in the ordered series. The mind moves the hand to move the stick to move the stone. The mind induces causality to the series and the posterior causal relata would not have their causality unless they participated in that of the mind; their causality is secondary to that of the mind. Now it is the mind (or the mindful agent) that is motivated to move the hand to move the stick to move the stone; that is to say, the agent grasps some end he wishes to attain and acts accordingly (the same series can be erected for an unconscious cause which acts towards an end out of natural disposition). Hence it is the mind's efficient causality that is brought into operation by the final cause. Just as the mind's efficient causality is participated in by the posterior or secondary causes in the series, so too is the finality by which the primary cause (the mind) acts towards the end. But just as the mind's efficient causality is not possessed essentially by any of the posterior causes, neither is the finality ordered towards the end possessed essentially by any of the members.

So here we are saying not that the series has a final cause but that the primary cause of the series has a final cause, and just as the posterior causes of *per se* series participate in the causality of the primary cause, so too do they participate in the finality of the primary cause's acting towards its end. Hence, we have not shifted our discussion away from single substances acting for an end, in which case the legitimacy of such a shift is not an issue for us.

Now let us modify our causal series to the case of Dr. Smith at the golf course. Dr. Smith can go to the golf course to knock balls about, and the knocking of balls about can fit the model of the mind-hand-stick-stone series. So, Dr. Smith (*w*) moves his hands (*x*) to move the club (*y*) to move the ball (*z*), hence: $w \rightarrow (x \rightarrow (y \rightarrow z))$.

Now consider that Dr. Smith works in a department whose dean is an avid golfer, and the opportunity for promotion is coming up and Dr. Smith wants to impress the dean in some way. So he decides to go to the golf course to practice his swing. Thus, Dr. Smith moves his hands to move the club to move the ball *in order to* practice his swing *in order to* impress the dean with his golfing skill.

Viewed from the production of the ultimate effect, i.e., the movement of the golf ball, the Dr. Smith series can be explained as a *per se* series within which there is some primary cause (Dr. Smith) who is responsible for the

causality of the series and hence of the ultimate effect. However, viewed from the point of view of the overall goal, we must appeal to Dr. Smith's motivating desire to impress the dean; otherwise, Dr. Smith hits the ball for no reason. Whereas we could integrate Dr. Smith's hitting of the ball into our model of *per se* causal series without appeal to final causality, we now need to modify that model in order to take account of Dr. Smith's reasons (the '*in order to*') for hitting the ball.

There are two new causes of which we must take account in modifying the series, and these are both final causes. They are: (i) Dr. Smith's desire to improve his swing in order to (ii) impress the dean. Thus, Dr. Smith (*w*) moves his hands (*x*) to swing the club (*y*) to move the ball (*z*) *in order to* improve his swing (*B*) *in order to* impress the dean (*A*). Impressing the dean is Dr. Smith's overall goal and hence the final cause of the series. But in order to impress the dean, Dr. Smith has to improve his swing. Improving the swing is an instrumental end to the overall goal of impressing the dean, and it is such because whilst undoubtedly an end it is not in this case an end in itself but subordinate to some further end. So whilst improving the swing exercises final causality, it itself is subsidiary to the final causality of impressing the dean.¹⁸ In accordance with our model for representing *per se* series, we represent the Dr. Smith series with the final cause of improving his swing as follows:

$$[w \rightarrow (x \rightarrow (y \rightarrow z))] \leftarrow B.$$

As before, *x*, *y*, and *z* come within the causal scope of *w*, but now that final causality has been taken into consideration, we have to represent *w* and everything that comes within its causal scope (*x*, *y*, *z*) as falling within the

¹⁸ It should also be pointed out that insofar as Dr. Smith is the mindful agent in this case, it is he who grasps the end of impressing the dean as desirable and institutes a course of action so as to attain that end. To that end he practises his swing to impress the dean and the actions in which he engages as primary efficient cause in order to practise his swing to impress the dean, i.e., moving his limbs to swing the club to hit the ball, all participate in the finality of his action geared towards improving his swing to impress the dean. In another context wherein impressing the dean is not Dr. Smith's desire, but there is some other desire for hitting the ball, e.g., relaxation, the same actions wherein Dr. Smith is the primary efficient cause are undertaken (i.e., moving his limbs to swing the club to hit the ball), but their finality is different: they are no longer geared towards improving his swing to impress the dean, but to relaxation.

causal scope of the final cause *B*. Thus, we introduce square brackets to signify final causality with its scope ranging over everything between them. Hence, the scope of *w*, and everything which falls under it (*x*, *y*, *z*), falls under the final causal scope of *B*. But as noted above, *B* is only a subsidiary final cause which itself comes under the final causality of *A*—impressing the dean. Hence, we must introduce the causality of *A* under which the scope of *B* and hence of *w*, *x*, *y*, and *z* fall; we represent it thus:

$$[[w \rightarrow (x \rightarrow (y \rightarrow z))] \leftarrow B] \leftarrow A.$$

As is clear from the symbolism, the causal series of *w*, *x*, *y*, and *z*, along with the final causality of *B*, now falls within the scope of *A*. The primary efficient cause, *w*, induces causality to the series in order to achieve *B*, which itself is in order to achieve *A*. As the bracketing indicates, the initial causal series falls within the scope of *B* as proximate end, which itself falls within the scope of *A* as ultimate end. So the greatest causal scope is attributed to *A*. Thus, the final cause, *A* in this case, is the cause of the causality of everything within the series such that without *A* there would be no causality in the series.

What is the order of causality here? The primary final cause is *A*, and the primary efficient cause is *w*; *w* would not act as primary cause without the causality of *A* as primary final cause. But whilst *A* is the primary final cause, *B* is necessary for arriving at *A* in which case *B* also exercises final causality over *w*. The causality of *B* in this case is not a causality independent of *A*, for in this case it is *A* which is the ultimate (hence primary) final cause and *B* is an end necessary for getting there. So the final causality of *B* is a participation in that of *A* (just as in the efficient series the causality of *x* is a participation in that of *w*). In other contexts, especially conscious ones, *B* may be the primary final cause and so not secondary to *A*, but in this case it is secondary to *A*.¹⁹ Hence, the primary effect of *A* is the movement of *w* towards it, but *w* cannot move towards *A* unless it moves through *B*, in which case *B* participates in the final causality of *A*'s causing *w* to institute an efficient causal process to reach the end which is *A*.

¹⁹ There is a plausible scenario wherein Dr. Smith is new to golf and realises how bad his swing is, so he hits balls about simply to improve his swing. Here the primary end is improving his swing, not impressing the dean.

Before we finish up this sub-section, there is a further consideration we must make. We have already considered the metaphysics of final ordered series and shown how there can be primary and secondary final causes within such series. But we have not considered final causal series which perfectly overlap: that is to say, final causal series whose ends are distinct yet whose means are identical.

Consider that in the Dr. Smith case we can say that Dr. Smith improves his swing in order to impress the dean; but it would sound somewhat odd to subordinate impressing the dean to improving one's swing: Dr. Smith moves his arms to swing the club to hit the ball *in order to* impress the dean *in order to* improve his swing. To my mind there is nothing impossible about the latter scenario, just something odd. But now consider the following example: I ride my bike to work and in doing so I get healthy.²⁰ Do I ride my bike *in order to* get to work or do I ride my bike *in order to* get healthy? In some cases I could say I am riding my bike in order to get to work and the getting healthy is a foreseen but unintended outcome of such action; but in other cases I can say that I ride my bike in order both to get to work and to get healthy (a 'two birds with one stone' scenario). The causal series are identical, yet the ends are distinct. So how do we deal with this situation?

Rather than state that two distinct causal series overlap here, what I want to suggest is that we have a single series with a single yet multiply analysable end. As we have seen above, the unity of the final causal series lies in the primary cause, such that the finality of that series originates in the final cause which motivates the primary cause; the secondary efficient causes participate in the primary cause not only for their efficiency but also for their finality. Now as we shall see in section 4, final causes are always goods: that is to say, they represent choiceworthy ends for conscious agents (or the perfection/completion of the natural dispositions of unconscious objects). The end then of any final causal series will always be something that is good. Now the good for the particular agent which is the primary efficient cause is unitary for that agent—i.e., it is his good; yet the good of some single agent is multiply analysable. So in the case of my travelling to work, both getting to work and getting healthy are for my own good; employment and health contribute to my flourishing. In other circumstances employment and health can be attained by different causal series—e.g., I can take the car

²⁰ I owe this example to an anonymous referee.

to work, and I can go to the gym—different causal series, yet both for my own good. In the case of riding my bike to work, I am attaining what appear to be two different ends, getting to work and getting healthy, by one and the same means; but these two ends are in fact united in the one end which is my good: my flourishing. This does not harm the analysis offered here of *per se* final causal series, since the metaphysics of that series remains the same; the difference lies on the descriptive level. Sometimes I may wish to say that I am riding my bike in order to get to work, sometimes I may wish to say that I am riding it to get fit; in reality I am doing both, and both are unified in the fact that they are for my own good.

The same can be said *mutatis mutandis* for causal series in pursuit of some end, e.g., pleasure, which end is not for the sake of some further end. The end that is pursued is always pursued for the good of the primary efficient cause, so that whilst some end pursued can be divorced from any larger teleological context, that context is always there in the form of the good of the agent. And as we shall see in the next section, in the order of goods there is one ultimate end which is the end of all ends, in which case all final causal series are unified in a single ultimate end.

Clearly my account here presupposes that what appear to be different ends of otherwise identical causal series are in fact unified as descriptions of the good of the primary cause of the series. But it has been suggested to me that there are plausible causal series with quite distinct ends whose means are identical, and such series would undermine the account offered here. As an example, consider a teacher marking end-of-term papers. One end of that series could be so that the teacher finishes his marking so as to be done for the holidays; another distinct end could be that the teacher provides illuminating feedback to the student. In the former case, the good involved is that of the teacher, in the latter it is that of the student. Here we seem to have two distinct goods of perfectly overlapping series which cannot be suitably unified as they were before.

There are two ways to resolve this situation. On the one hand, it could be the case that the teacher cannot both mark papers in a timely fashion *and* provide illuminating feedback. On the other hand, it could be that the teacher is talented enough both to finish his marking quickly and provide illuminating feedback. In the first case, I want to argue that we do not have perfectly overlapping series with distinct goods as ends: i.e., the good of the student and that of the teacher; rather, we have two explicitly distinct causal series.

In the second case, I wish to say that we still have a single good which explains the finality of the series, yet that good is multiply analysable at the descriptive level, in which case the problem is resolved as before.

Firstly, then we take the case where the teacher cannot both mark in a timely fashion and provide illuminating feedback. Where the teacher aims at the student's good by providing illuminating feedback, the teacher aims at the good of teaching. One of the ends involved in this good is that of illuminating one's students, and one way to do this is by taking one's time to provide illuminating feedback. Thus, providing illuminating feedback is an intermediate end willed by the teacher for the further end which is the good of teaching. Where the teacher aims at his own good by finishing his marking in a timely fashion and *not* providing illuminating feedback, the teacher is clearly not acting for the good of his students; but not only that, he is not even aiming at the good of teaching—rather, he is aiming at some other good which he wills, such as getting away early for summer holidays, family time, etc. Providing illuminating feedback is not an end necessary for the latter goods, and so it is not willed by the teacher. In this case, we have two different series with not only different ends (the good of teaching or some other good) but also different means (providing illuminating feedback, marking in a timely fashion without illuminating feedback), hence the series do not perfectly overlap.

Secondly, we take the case where we have a talented teacher who can mark in a timely fashion and provide illuminating feedback; arguably here we have perfectly overlapping series with distinct goods as ends. But what is the finality at work here? Is the teacher working for the good of his students or for his own good? I answer that the good involved here is the good of teaching, which is necessarily a good of the student but also of the teacher. The good of teaching not only involves the illumination of one's students (hence good for the student), but is also a good for the teacher; for when a talented teacher pursues the good of teaching as a vocation (and not just a way of earning money), he himself is perfected and fulfilled. Such perfection of the teacher through pursuing the good of teaching is not simply because it exercises certain dispositions the individual has to be a teacher thereby fulfilling him in some way; rather, many talented teachers will say that the illumination of their students is their own greatest good with respect to teaching. Hence, marking in a timely fashion, i.e., with efficiency, and providing illumination are for a single good: that of teaching. So in the case

of a teacher who does both, he pursues the good of teaching, and this good is itself multiply analysable into various goods which are for both students and teacher. In this case, then, we can say that we have a single causal series with a single end which is multiply analysable.

I believe that the foregoing sufficiently integrates final causality within the model of the *per se* ordered series that I have articulated previously, and that it honours the metaphysics of final causality and its relation to efficient causality as Aquinas has articulated it. Now let us consider the infinity of such *per se* series.

3.2. *Infinite Per se Final Causal Series*

Elsewhere I have argued that in *per se* causal series, given that the causality of the posterior causal relata itself requires a cause, there must be some primary cause in such series, which cause essentially possesses the causality of the series. This is because if there were no such cause, there would be no cause of the causality of the series, in which case the series itself would fail precisely as a causal series. Hence, *per se* causal series are necessarily finite.²¹ The same reasoning applies to *per se* causal series in the order of finality. In order to consider this, let us return to the case of Dr. Smith.

In the Dr. Smith example we stopped at some arbitrary end: impressing the dean. But as is clear from our discussion, especially in conscious situations, we could have added further ends to which impressing the dean is simply proximate. Thus, just as improving one's swing is proximate to impressing the dean, so too impressing the dean is proximate to getting a promotion which may itself be proximate to buying a bigger house and this proximate to some greater goal. Hence, Dr. Smith hits balls *in order to* improve his swing *in order to* impress the dean *in order to* get a promotion *in order to buy a bigger house in order to...* So there are many (proximate) ends and the question is whether they are finite or infinite. That is to say, in

²¹ By finite here I mean having a primary cause, in which case by infinite I mean being without a primary cause (see n. 4 above). In the order of efficient causality, the lack of a primary cause would entail the lack of a terminus post quem—i.e., the lack of a point of origin (not necessarily temporal); in the order of final causality, the lack of a primary cause would be the lack of some primary final cause—i.e., the lack of an ultimate end, in which case that would entail the lack of a terminus ante quem: i.e., the lack of some goal or consummation point (again not necessarily temporal).

the order of final causal series, do such series terminate at some ultimate final cause itself uncaused in respect of the final causality of the series?

This question is a manifestation of a similar one which is considered when focussing on efficient causal series; just as we can project further and consider further efficient causes, can't we project (infinitely) further and consider further final causes? I respond that just as our model of the *per se* efficient series permitted us to hold that in such series there must be some primary cause, so too the same model, suitably construed, will show that there is some ultimate final cause.

Let us take the *per se* series that we have been considering—that is, Dr. Smith impressing the dean: $[[w \rightarrow (x \rightarrow (y \rightarrow z))] \leftarrow B] \leftarrow A$. It is not difficult to extend its scope and adjust the symbolism accordingly. Hence, we write: $[\dots [[w \rightarrow (x \rightarrow (y \rightarrow z))] \leftarrow B] \leftarrow A] \dots \leftarrow n$. As is clear, in this case, *A* now comes within the scope of some indefinite number of final causes (*n*), each of which is proximate to another. The question then is whether *n* is finite or infinite.

Let us draw to mind the argumentation that closed off the infinity of *per se* causal series when considering efficient causality. In *per se* series the posterior causal relata are such that they do not essentially possess the causality of the series in question, in which case their causality is caused. Given the latter, if such a series were without a primary cause—that is, if it were infinite—there would be no cause of the causality of the series, in which case every member of the series would be causally inefficacious. Consequently, an infinite *per se* series would be lacking in causality and thus would not be a causal series. Granting some *per se* series, we must grant its necessary finitude.

The same reasoning applies to *per se* series in which final causality is operative. If such a series goes to infinity—i.e., if there is no ultimate final cause of the series—then there is nothing that causes the causality of the primary efficient cause; for as we saw above, secondary or intermediate final causes have their causality through participating in the causality of some final cause that is ultimate in respect of the given series in question. If there is no ultimate final cause, but just an infinite set of intermediate final causes, then there is no cause for the causality of the intermediate final causes, in which case there is no final causality. But if there is no final causality, then there is no cause for the causality of the primary efficient cause. So granting *per se* causal series with a primary efficient cause whose causality is derived

from some final cause, there must be an ultimate or primary final cause from which the causality of all intermediate final causes and the causality of the efficient cause is derived. *Per se* final causal series are necessarily finite.²²

4. God and Final Causality

The necessary finitude of *per se* final causal series has a number of important repercussions for ethical questions wherein the motivation for action is considered. Indeed in the *Summa Theologiae* and the commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics* of Aristotle, Aquinas holds that there must be some ultimate end of human action, which end is happiness and to be found in God alone.²³ I do not want to pursue that interesting ethical discussion here, though as I say, what I have argued has repercussions for it. Rather, what I want to consider is the relationship between the ultimate final cause and the primary efficient cause.

When I elsewhere argued that there must be some primary cause that terminates the causal regress in *per se* series, I was faced with an objection from Paul Edwards.²⁴ That objection was to the effect that granting there is some primary cause of some *per se* series, whilst that primary cause may be uncaused with respect to the causality of the series in question, it may not be absolutely uncaused. Thus, in the mind-hand-stick-stone example, whilst the mind is uncaused with regard to motion, it itself is caused in some other respect: e.g., in its existence. Hence, arriving at a primary cause in some *per se* causal series does not entail that that primary cause is absolutely uncaused, in which case considerations of *per se* causal series will not aid the theist in establishing that there is a primary uncaused cause of all that is: i.e., God.²⁵

My response to Edwards was to point out that if we can come upon some absolute causal property such that without it there would be nothing, then the cause of that would be absolutely uncaused insofar as anything that exists would be an effect of that cause, in which case there is nothing that could be its cause. That causal property I argued is Thomist *esse*, and it is such

²² Cf. Aquinas, *In II Met.*, lect. 4, n. 318.

²³ See in particular *Summa Theologiae*, IaIIae qq. 1–5.

²⁴ See ‘Essentially Ordered Series Reconsidered’, §. 3.

²⁵ See Paul Edwards, ‘The Cosmological Argument’, p. 203 ff.

that without *esse* nothing would be, so that the primary cause of *esse* is an absolutely uncaused primary cause: i.e., God.

Turning then to final causal series, the same objection from Edwards can be applied and the same resolution offered, yet the resolution highlights something interesting about God as the primary cause of *esse*.

As applied to final causal series, Edwards's objection is as follows. Granted that there is some ultimate final cause of some final causal series, that does not entail that such an ultimate cause is itself uncaused. Thus, the ultimate cause may be uncaused with respect to the series of which it is the ultimate, but it itself may be caused with respect to some other causal series wherein it is not the ultimate cause; this is often the case in conscious situations where sometimes a final cause is the ultimate cause of the series (e.g., reading Aquinas so as to master his thought), and at other times it is an intermediate final cause (e.g., mastering the thought of Aquinas so as to confute heretics).

As with efficient causality, the way out of this is to isolate some causal property without which there would be no causality at all in *any* final causal series—i.e., a final causal property the final cause of which is not for the sake of some further end, but that for the sake of which all proximate final causes are directed: that in which all final causes participate for their causality. Once we have attained such a final causal property, we can say that the primary cause of that is the ultimate final cause.

Now when we consider the final cause of any final causal series, that cause, as the terminus of the causality of the efficient cause, is the perfection of the series. This is because insofar as the activity of the efficient cause is brought into operation by the end, that end itself is the completion of the activity of the efficient cause. The work of the efficient cause, as it were, comes to perfection in the end—it achieves its goal. So in final causal series, the causality of the series is imperfect or incomplete until it comes to rest in the end, the final cause.²⁶

Now we have seen above that final causal series necessarily come to an end in some ultimate final cause, and hence the ultimate final cause of every causal series is the perfection of the series. Given that the ultimate cause of any final causal series is the perfection of the series, every ultimate cause is for the good of that series insofar as it brings it to completion. All

²⁶ Aquinas, *In III Phys.*, lect. 11, n. 385: 'Nullum carens fine est perfectum; quia finis est perfectio uniuscuiusque'.

final causes, then, are final causes precisely because they are good in some way, in which case goodness is at the heart of all finality: the final cause has the nature of the good.²⁷ The cause, then, of goodness will be a final cause that is not for the sake of any further end, but is the end for the sake of which are all other proximate ends. The cause of goodness will be the very essence of end, which is not to be for any other but to be for itself;²⁸ the cause of goodness will be the end of all ends. The cause of goodness is the good itself, and so the good is *the* ultimate final cause, the end of all ends, without which there would be no final causal series; hence, the good ultimately is that which all desire.

Just as in efficient causality, *esse* is the absolute causal property without which there would be no causality in any efficient causal series, so too in final causality goodness is the causal property without which there would be no finality in any final causal series. Hence, just as the primary cause of *esse* (God) will be absolutely primary and hence absolutely uncaused in respect of efficient causality, so too will the cause of goodness (the good) be absolutely uncaused in respect of final causality. So whereas all proximate final causes are always ‘in order to’ something else, that to which they are always “in order to” is something good. Hence, the good is never “in order to” anything further; it is the single ultimate cause in all final causal series.

Now let us consider the case of God. Following Aquinas, God is pure *esse*, the primary cause of the *esse* of things such that there is no *esse* without God.²⁹ Now, as pure *esse*, there is nothing other than God which is not subject to God; but we have argued in this paper that no efficient cause acts unless for some end, and thus the causality of the efficient cause is derived from the final cause, and ultimately from the good. We now have an

²⁷ Aquinas, *In I Met.*, n. 70: ‘Quarta causa est finalis, quae opponitur causae efficienti secundum oppositionem principiae et finis. Nam motus incipit a causa efficiente, et terminatur ad causam finale. Et hoc est etiam cuius causa fit aliquid, et quae est bonum uniuscuiusque naturae’; *In II Met.*, lect. 4, n. 317: ‘Eadem enim ratio boni et finis est’; *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 5. a. 2, ad. 1: ‘Bonum autem, cum habeat rationem appetibilis, importat habitudinem causae finalis, cuius causalitas prima est, quia agens non agit nisi propter finem, et ab agente materia movetur ad formam, unde dicitur quod finis est causa causarum’.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, n. 316: ‘Finis est id quod non est propter alia, sed alia sunt propter ipsum’.

²⁹ For a defence of this conception of God and a proof thereof, see *Aquinas's Way to God*.

absolute primary cause, God as pure *esse*, and an ultimate end—the good. How are these related?

There is nothing independent of God that could be the cause of God, since anything that is independent of God derives its *esse* from God and so cannot be the cause of God. Nevertheless, given the metaphysics of causality, God's causality must be exercised in respect of the good, for the latter is the ultimate final cause. Hence, if there is nothing other than God which can be the cause of God, yet God's causality must be exercised in respect of the good, God must Himself be the good that He wills as end.³⁰ Hence, just as God is *esse* itself from which all beings flow, so too is God the good itself towards which all beings tend. God is thus both primary cause and ultimate end, and this has implications for how we think about the act of creation.³¹

As pure *esse* God brings into existence all things, presupposing nothing.³² But as the good itself, God's action in bringing things into existence is motivated by the goodness that He sees in Himself. Just as there is a sense in which all creation is a participation in and thereby an expression of God's being, since nothing can be unless God grants *esse* to it, so too all creation is a participation in and an expression of God's goodness; indeed more so since creation is brought about with a view to God's goodness, in which case the purpose of creation is an expression of His goodness. Creation then ought not to be thought of primarily as an act of sheer power, but as an act of goodness willed for all creatures.

³⁰ *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 19, a. 2, ad 2: 'Et sic, sicut alia a se intelligit intelligendo essentiam suam, ita alia a se vult, volendo bonitatem suam'; *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Bk. 1, Cap. 86: 'Finis enim est ratio volendi ea quae sunt ad finem. Deus autem vult bonitatem suam tanquam finem, omnia autem alia vult tanquam ea quae sunt ad finem. Sua igitur bonitas est ratio quare vult alia quae sunt diversa ab ipso'; *ibid.*, Cap. 87: 'Quamvis autem aliqua ratio divinae voluntati assignari possit, non tamen sequitur quod voluntatis eius sit aliquid causa. Voluntati enim causa volendi est finis. Finis autem divinae voluntatis est sua bonitas. Ipsa igitur est Deo causa volendi, quae est etiam ipsum velle. Aliorum autem a Deo volitorum nullum est Deo causa volendi'.

³¹ It also has implications for how we interpret the status of the fifth way given that it is based on finality. If the fifth way can be interpreted as involving the metaphysics of causality as I have laid that out here, then it is much closer to the other four ways than is often taken to be the case. It is not my concern here to offer such an interpretation of the fifth way [see Chapter 11 in this volume].

³² For an articulation of the metaphysics of this position, see Gaven Kerr, 'A Thomistic Metaphysics of Creation'; and John Wippel, 'Aquinas on Creation and the Preambles of Faith', *The Thomist* 78 (2014), pp. 1–36.

Now, to will the good for another is to love the other for which that good is willed; to will the good of another which other has done nothing to merit that good is to love the other unconditionally. God in creating wills the good for things that did not even exist prior to His creating them, in which case God's willing of the good for creatures, i.e., His bringing them into being, is an act of unconditional love.

Within Aquinas's metaphysical thought we can thus think of creation as an act of love, an unconditional act of love from the creator to the creature. This should give us pause for thought, since whilst it does not deny the sheer power implicit in the act of creation, to think of it solely in those terms is to belittle it as nothing more than an awesome magic trick. But to think about creation as an act of sheer unconditional love is to render the act of creation meaningful on an entirely new level; for once creation takes on the significance of a loving act, rational creatures, who are themselves capable of love, must realise that in their love they are raised to the nobility of the special mark of the creator, and so the only possible response we can offer the creator is to love Him in return.³³ In Trinitarian terms, the love between Father and Son is so intense that it eternally generates a third person, the Holy Spirit, which is the loving relation subsisting between Father and Son. That intense love amongst the members of the blessed Trinity sees the good of creating others as an expression of their love and so *willingly* creates all that is as an expression of such love. The existence, solidity, durability, the sheer thereness of all that is would be nothing if not for the love of God; indeed, we rational creatures exist precisely because we are loved and our final end is the enjoyment appropriate to the rational nature of the good itself, which is our beatitude in the face to face presence of God.

³³ The same sentiment is expressed in a number of places in scripture and religious authors: 1 Jn 4:7–12, Wis. 11:24, Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*, n. 77. Dante forcefully captures the notion of God as the love from which all things come and to which all they return in, *The Divine Comedy: Paradiso*, Canto 33, 142–5: ‘At this point high imagination failed; but already my desire and my will were being turned like a wheel, all at one speed, by the love which moves the sun and the other stars’.

Chapter 4 - Existential Inertia and the Thomistic Way to God

In a number of demonstrations for God's existence, Aquinas argues that creatures are deficient or dependent in some important respect and we can take that dependency as a springboard for arguing for the existence of God. More specifically, creaturely dependence reveals a kind of causality that when integrated with the metaphysics of *per se* causal series permits us to conclude that God exists. This causal dependency is often cashed out in terms of motion, efficient causality, possibility and necessity etc, but what it reveals is that there is a kind of actuality that creatures do not have of themselves, so that they are caused in that actuality. This mode of argumentation appears in its purest form in Aquinas's proof from the *De Ente et Essentia*, Cap. 4 wherein Thomas argues that composites of essence and *esse* are dependent for their *esse*, so that when we consider that dependency in light of *per se* causal series we find that there is a primary cause for *esse* that is pure *esse* itself.¹

An old objection to Aquinas's way to God has re-emerged in some contemporary literature. Graham Oppy has recently published a short paper in response to Edward Feser's five proofs of God's existence.² In his defence of the

¹ Aquinas, *De Ente et Essentia*, Cap. 4, p. 377:127 – 143: 'Omne autem quod conuenit alicui uel est causatum ex principiis nature sue, sicut risibile in homine; uel aduenit ab aliquo principio extrinseco, sicut lumen in aere ex influentia solis. Non autem potest esse quod ipsum esse sit causatum ab ipsa forma uel quiditate rei, dico sicut a causa efficiente, quia sic aliqua res esset sui ipsius causa et aliqua res se ipsam in esse produceret: quod est impossibile. Ergo oportet quod omnis talis res cuius esse est aliud quam natura sua habeat esse ab alio. Et quia omne quod est per aliud reducitur ad id quod est per se sicut ad causam primam, oportet quod sit aliqua res que sit causa essendi omnibus rebus eo quod ipsa est esse tantum; alias iretur in infinitum in causis, cum omnis res que non est esse tantum habeat causam esse sui, ut dictum est'.

² Graham Oppy, 'On Stage One of Feser's Aristotelian Proof', *Religious Studies* (2021), 57:3, pp. 491 – 502. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412519000568>. For Feser see *Five Proofs of the Existence of God* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2017).

Aristotelian proof, Feser argues that the current actuality of any object depends on some principle of actuality by which it is in act, and given that causal dependency we can reason to some primary cause that is pure act; the Thomistic paternity of this argumentation is obvious. Oppy objects that this mode of reasoning overlooks a neglected alternative for the current actuality of things, and it is this: in the absence of some competing causal influence, the object simply remains in existence. This objection is a reiteration of one made by Mortimer Adler, to the effect that objects do not need some cause of their current existence given that they do exist; rather in the absence of some causal influence knocking those objects out of existence, objects will simply continue to exist. Objects enjoy what has come to be called existential inertia.³

The existential inertia objection goes to the heart of Aquinas's reasoning for God's existence, and this is because if the existential actuality that objects have is not dependent on some cause, but objects have it non-essentially as an inertial property, then there is no need to place such objects in a *per se* causal series the primary cause for which is that in which essence and *esse* are identical. At most one could say that there is a first cause that passes on existence, but that existence once possessed simply remains in the thing until the thing loses it. Existing things then do not participate in existence for any moment that they exist, in which case they are not members of *per se* causal series. If true, this objection is devastating.

In what follows I seek to defend Aquinas's reasoning against the existential inertia objection. To do so I shall lay out Aquinas's reasoning on essence and *esse* and *per se* causal series. Having done that I will consider the objection as it applies to Aquinas's reasoning, and I shall then go on to argue that based on Aquinas's metaphysics of *esse* existential inertia is implausible.

1. Essence and *esse* in *Per Se* Ordered Series

The medievals distinguished between *per se* and *per accidens* causal series. In the thought of Aquinas, the distinction came down to how causality features in the particular series in question: if the causality of some causal series is

³ See Mortimer Adler, *How to Think about God: A Guide for the 20th Century Pagan* (New York: Collier/Macmillan, 1980), Chapter 13.

possessed essentially by the members of the series, then the series is a *per accidens* one; on the other hand, if the causality of the series is not possessed by the members of the series essentially, then it is a *per se* series.⁴ The clarification of the metaphysics of these series was of supreme importance in Aquinas's demonstrations of God.⁵

In a *per accidens* series, the members of the series possess the causality of the series essentially. In that case, whilst posterior causal relata may be derived from and dependent on some immediately preceding cause, there is no need for a cause of the causality of the series. Each member has the causality of the series in virtue of what it is. Hence, so long as there is a member of that series, the causality is preserved in the series.

Aquinas's typical example in this respect is a chain of fathers producing sons.⁶ The causality of this series is that of paternity. So, we have a father who produces a son who produces a son (the father's grandson). Each member of the series has the causality of the series (paternity) in virtue of what he is, i.e. a biologically functioning male. Thus, whilst the subsequent members are dependent on their immediately preceding member for their presence in the series, they are not dependent on their preceding member for the causality of the series. For instance, the father (Peter) produces his son (James), and the son produces his own son (John), the initial father's grandson. But Peter, now a grandfather, did not produce John; it was James (himself now a father) who produced Peter's grandson, i.e. John. This is made even more apparent given the fact that Peter can father James, go off and die, and yet James can himself

⁴ The terminology here is a little off putting since the members of the accidental (*per accidens*) series possess the causality essentially whereas the members of the essential (*per se*) series possess it accidentally. The designation of terms here is not a quirk of language but, as we shall see, a feature of the metaphysics of the series. The idea is that in an accidental series insofar as the members possess the causality essentially, the series is a series in an accidental sense, i.e. other than a cause and its immediate effect, the members just happen to be joined up together. On the other hand, insofar as in the essential series the members possess the causality accidentally, there is an essential dependence of those members on something which possesses the causality essentially.

⁵ I have articulated and defended Aquinas's thinking on *per se* and *per accidens* series in 'Essentially Ordered Series Reconsidered' [Chapter 2 in this volume], and 'Essentially Ordered Series Reconsidered Once Again' [Chapter 3 in this volume].

⁶ *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, qu. 46, art. 2, ad. 7.

become a father to John thereby providing Peter, now dead, with a grandson. Hence the causality of the series (paternity) is possessed by members of the series in virtue of what they are, not in virtue of their dependency on some prior member of the series.

We can represent such a series as follows: ... $(x \rightarrow y) \rightarrow (y \rightarrow z)$... As is clear, the series is made up of links of self-contained causal units whereby an immediately preceding cause (Peter) produces an immediately succeeding effect (James). That effect can go on to establish its own causal unit, independent of the unit of which it is an effect. Hence, what was a cause of an effect in one causal unit is not a cause of some later effect in another causal unit (Peter is not the cause of John in terms of paternity). And all this is because the members of the series possess the causality of the series in themselves; there is no requirement of dependence on earlier members of the series for the causality in question – James does not need his father's help in producing his own son; James is capable of doing that himself.

Given these considerations, it is not necessary that *per accidens* series have a primary cause. Such series may in fact happen to have an initial member, but considered as a series of causes and effects, every member of the series is accounted for by the previous member's causality. So long as there is any member of the series, the causality of the series is accounted for, in which case there is no need for a primary cause independent of the series on which all in the series depend for their causality. Whilst all men have a father, it does not follow that there is a father for all men.

So much for *per accidens* series, let us now look at *per se* series.

If the characteristic feature of *per accidens* series is that the causality of such a series is possessed by the members in virtue of what they are, then the distinguishing feature of *per se* series is that the causality of the series is not so possessed by its members. The classic example in this respect is the mind moves the hand to move the stick to move the stone; this example is also used by Aquinas in the first way (based on motion) to show that there cannot be an infinity of movers.⁷ The hand, stick, and stone do not move in virtue of what they are; such causality is not intrinsic to them, and they are without causality

⁷ *Ibid*, Ia, qu. 2, art. 3. See also the reference in the previous footnote for another instance in which Thomas uses this same example for a *per se* series.

unless it is introduced to them. The mind (or mental agent or whatever one takes to be responsible for intentional activity) is just such a thing that can originate the causality of motion in this case. Hence the agent introduces the motion by which the hand, stick, and stone are moved. However, given that the hand, stick, and stone are essentially immobile and without causal efficacy unless brought into motion by the agent (or some other suitable originator of motion), their own causality is simply a participation in that of the agent. Accordingly, in *per se* series, the causality of the series is not possessed intrinsically by any of the members, and lest the members of the series remain causally inert, there is required some cause which does have the causality of the series intrinsically and which in turn originates that causality in the members.

We can represent such series as follows: $w \rightarrow (x \rightarrow ((y \rightarrow z)))$. Unlike *per accidens* series, the *per se* series is not made up of discrete causal units that happen to be linked together. Rather, the members of the series come together as an interlocking whole. Each member of the series is dependent for its causality, and as one approaches the primary cause of the series, one sees the causal scope of each member widen. Thus, z has least causal scope and is brought to actuality by y , yet y would not bring z to actuality if not for x and x would not bring y to bring z to actuality were it not for w . The stone would not move were it not for the stick which would not move were it not for the hand which would not move were it not for the agent. The regress terminates naturally in the agent who has the causality of the series in virtue of what he is and who communicates such causality to the members of the series who do not have such causality in virtue of what they are. Hence, all members of the series depend on the primary cause for their causality, in which case the primary cause is not only the cause of its immediately succeeding effect, it is the cause by which anything at all in the series (including the final effect) is caused; the mind moves the hand to move the stick to move the stone.

This reasoning on *per se* series was crucial for Aquinas in his demonstrations of God's existence, and this is because, if we can find some absolute causal property operative amongst things and locate that causal property within a *per se* series, then we can reason to some primary cause which originates that property without which nothing would be. Aquinas classically argues that existence or *esse* is just such a causal property that things have distinct from their

essences. This is because given the distinction of essence and *esse*, essence relates to *esse* as potency to act. *Esse* is the principle of act the corelative potency of which is essence, in which case essence would not be, it would literally be nothing, were it not for *esse*.⁸ Given the potency/act relationship that obtains between essence and *esse* and the dependence of essence on *esse*, *esse* has a causal influence over essence.⁹

Unlike our fathers and sons above, things do not have *esse* in virtue of what they are; rather they have it extrinsically, like the motion in the hand-stick-stone. Hence, *esse* is a causal property locatable in some *per se* causal series. Given the latter, Aquinas reasons that there must be some primary cause for *esse* which does not have *esse* distinct from what it is, but in virtue of what it is, i.e. something Whose essence is its *esse*; and this is what originates all other things. As originator of all existence, such a primary cause is not primary in one causal series but secondary in another; rather it is absolutely primary because unless it grants *esse* to something, there would be nothing at all, in

⁸ For some affirmations of this outlook in Aquinas see *Super Libros Sententiarum* (Paris: Lethielleux, 1929), Lib. I, d. 19, qu. 2, art. 2: '...Esse est actus existentis, in quantum ens est'; *ibid.*, d. 23, qu. 1, art. 1: '...Essentia dicitur cuius actus est esse'; *In II Sent.*, d. 3, qu. 1, art. 1, ad. 4: 'Potentia tenet se ex parte quidditatis, et esse est actus ejus'; *De Ente et Essentia*, p. 377: 147 – 152: 'Omne autem quod recipit aliquid ab alio est in potentia respectu illius, et hoc quod receptum est in eo est actus eius; ergo oportet quod ipsa quiditas uel forma que est intelligentia sit in potentia respectu esse quod a Deo recipit, et illud esse receptum est per modum actus'; *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, qu. 76, art. 6: 'Primum autem inter omnes actus est esse'. For further details on the distinction of essence and *esse* in Aquinas's thought, see William Norris Clarke, 'Commentary on Gerald Phelan "The Being of Creatures"', *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* (1957), 31, pp. 128 – 132, 'What Can and Cannot Be Said in St. Thomas' Essence-Existence Doctrine', *New Scholasticism* (1974), 48:1, pp. 19 – 39, *Explorations in Metaphysics: Being – God – Person* (Notre Dame-London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), Chapters 4 – 5; Joseph Owens, *An Interpretation of Existence* (Texas: Center for Thomistic Studies, 1985), *An Elementary Christian Metaphysics* (Texas: Center for Thomistic Studies, 1985), Part I; Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, Chapter 5; Gaven Kerr, *Aquinas's Way to God*, Chapters 1 – 3.

⁹ Aquinas, *De Potentia Dei*, qu. 5, art. 1: 'Effectum enim a sua causa dependere oportet. Hoc enim est de ratione effectus et causae'; *In V Met.*, lect. 1, n. 751: 'Hoc nomen causa, importat influxum quemdam ad esse causati', and lect. 3, n. 794: '...Potentia et actus diversificant habititudinem causae ad effectum'; *In II Phys.*, Lib. 2, lect. 5, n. 183: '...Omnia ista habent unam rationem causae, prout dicitur causa id ex quo fit aliquid'.

which case there is nothing to which it is subject or in which it participates for causality. Hence, the primacy of this cause is not a relative primacy. Aquinas concludes that this is what we understand God to be.¹⁰

Now a key feature of this argumentation is that *esse* is not inertial, that is to say, a thing does not simply obtain *esse* and, in the absence of competing causal influence, retain it. Rather, on this account, a thing has *esse* only insofar as it participates in the causal activity of the one Who grants *esse*, i.e. God. Returning to our mind-hand-stick-stone example, the hand-stick-stone are causally inert without the influence of the primary cause, in this case the mental agent. Should that primary cause cease his causal influence, the motion of the series ceases unless some other suitable primary cause comes in which continues it. Accordingly, on Aquinas's account of causality located within *per se* causal series, the effects of the series participate in the causality of the primary cause, and this because they do not have that causality essentially. So for as long as they have that causality, they are dependent for it. And if they have nothing on which to depend for the causality in question, they are without such causality.

When it comes to *esse* then, creatures are effects in the *per se* causal series the primary cause of which is God. Creatures then have *esse* for as long as they participate in the causality granted to them by God, in which case once they cease to participate in that causality they cease to be. It is not the case then that God grants *esse* to some creatures in the beginning and in the absence of competing causal influences they retain their *esse* and pass it on. For any time that anything at all exists, it depends for its existence on God precisely because it derives its *esse* from Him.

If existential inertia were true, then this reasoning would breakdown, since on the inertialist objection things simply retain the existence that they have in the absence of competing causal factors. So existence once obtained is retained until something comes along to knock that thing out of existence, in which case it is not the case that for any moment that a thing exists it is dependent for its existence. Consequently, we can have a *per se* causal series in which the

¹⁰ This is the general procedure that Aquinas uses to establish the existence of God, seen most perspicuously in the proof from *De Ente*, Cap. 4. For a defence of the latter proof, see *Aquinas's Way to God*.

members are caused in their existence, but which need not terminate in some primary cause on which every member of the series depends for its causality. The causality of the series (*esse* in this case) could simply be originated and passed down the line. This of course does not rule out theism since the question still remains as to what accounts for the initial existence of the series, but it does rule out the strong classical theism to which Thomism commits us; for on the latter account God is not just the initiator of a series, but that on which anything depends at any time in order to be. Hence, we must present and remove the existential inertia objection.

2. Existential Inertia

Existential inertia goes as follows. An object continues in its existence so long as there is no competing causal influence that would knock it out of existence. On this account, an object exists, but it is not dependent on some cause for its existence so long as it exists. It may initially be dependent on a cause which bestows existence on it, but once acquired existence remains in the thing until some other cause comes along and brings an end to its existence.

The notion of existential inertia has not had a lot of treatment in the literature on demonstrations for the existence of God. The general notion can be traced back to Democritean atomism wherein basic irreducible particles are the principles of all that is. Things then are just different aggregates of atoms and they will remain in existence so long as that configuration remains. One can also see a version of existential inertia in Spinoza's notion of *conatus* or striving to remain in being.¹¹ However, to my knowledge the earliest presentation of existential inertia specifically as an objection to an argument for God's existence (and not just part and parcel of a world system that would have no need

¹¹ For details on atomism in ancient Greek thought see C.W. Taylor, 'The Atomists' in *Cambridge Companion to Early Greek Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), ed. A.A. Long; for an engaging presentation of how modern philosophy of nature implemented insights from the early Greek atomists see Ivor Leclerc, *The Philosophy of Nature* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of American Press, 1986); for Spinoza see *Ethics* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1992), trans. Samuel Shirley, edited and introduced by Seymour Feldman, Part III, Prop. 6 and for discussion of Spinoza see Steven Nadler, *Spinoza's Ethics: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 194 – 200, Michael Della Rocca, *Spinoza* (New York: Routledge, 2008), pp. 137 – 153.

for the God of classical theism) is found in Adler; but no systematic account of existential inertia has been developed within the literature.¹² Accordingly, in what follows I will give an outline of what an account of existential inertia could look like, and having done that show how it applies to Aquinas's way to God. Given the lack of a robust account in the literature, this outline is speculative. However, the Thomistic response to existential inertia offered in the next section will work against any development of the inertial objection, since the response gets to the very heart of the inertialist hypothesis.

As I see it, there are three ways in which a proponent of existential inertia could defend the inertial hypothesis: (i) a thing's past existence is responsible for its present existence, so a thing will continue to exist in the absence of competing causal factors, (ii) a thing does not have a tendency to non-existence which tendency must be overcome by a continuous cause of existence, a thing simply exists and continues in its existence absent competing causal factors, (iii) existence is something primitive in the thing and identified with the thing, so that for as long as the thing is the thing that it is it will continue to exist absent competing causal factors.

Concerning (i), the idea here is that a thing's past has an influence on its future. The proponent of existential inertia then holds that a thing's existence in the past has an influence on its present and future existence. If that is the case, then it is not the case that right now there is required some cause of the thing's continuance in existence, but that its past existence suffices for its present existence (so long of course as nothing comes along to knock it out of existence). Hence, whilst there may be an initial cause of a thing's existence, there is no cause by which existence is preserved in the thing.

¹² For discussion see Jonathan Kvanvig & Hugh McCann, (1988). 'Divine conservation and the persistence of the world', in Thomas Morris (Ed.), *Divine and human action* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1988); Alfred Freddoso, 'Medieval Aristotelianism and the Case against Secondary Causation in Nature', in *Divine and Human Action: Essays in the Metaphysics of Theism*, Freddoso, 'God's Concurrence with Secondary Causes: Why Conservation Is Not Enough', *Philosophical Perspectives* (1991), 5, pp. 553–585; John Beaudoin, 'The World's Continuance: Divine Conservation or Existential Inertia?', *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* (2007) 61, pp. 83 – 98; Edward Feser, *Five Proofs*, pp. 232 – 238, and 'Existential Inertia and the Five Ways', *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* (2011), 85, pp. 237 – 267; Paul Audi, 'Existential Inertia', *Philosophical Exchange* (2019), 48:1, pp. 1 – 26.

Concerning (ii), a thing does not tend to non-existence. That being the case, the only reason why a thing would cease to exist is because there are competing causal factors which affect its existence in some way. It is these causal factors then that bring about the thing's demise, not the absence of some cause. But if that is the case, then it is not the case that a thing needs a continuing cause by which it overcomes its tendency to non-existence; rather the natural thing for a thing to do is continue as it is.¹³ As a way of developing this claim, John Beadouin suggests considering some basic physical stuff out of which things are made. It is entirely plausible for Beadouin that such stuff was created by God, in which case it would take God to annihilate such stuff. But such stuff does not have a tendency to non-being, nor, given its primacy, does it degrade into more basic stuff; the continuance in being of things is a result of the annihilating power of God *not* being exercised over them, and not the result of some preserving power of God being acted upon them.¹⁴

Concerning (iii), the existence of the thing is simply the fact that there is a thing of that kind in reality. So, if we take the atomist view, a thing's existence is sufficiently explained by the fact that a thing of that configuration exists. All that is required of such a thing to continue in existence is that it retain its configuration, which it does in the absence of competing causal factors, not because there is some configurer there configuring it. Hence there is no need for

¹³ Beadouin, 'The World's Continuance', p. 86: 'An object enjoying existential inertia will continue to exist, without being sustained in existence by any external agent, until something else comes along and destroys it. Hence, for any object that enjoys existential inertia, the natural thing for it to do is to persist in being, and only a deviation from this condition—i.e. only its annihilation—requires interference by some other being'; Audi, 'Existential Inertia', p. 2: 'Whatever exists is poised to continue to exist if undisturbed and inactive'; Oppy, 'On Stage One of Feser's Aristotelian Proof', pp. 4 – 5: '...[T]hings that have the potential to go on existing go on existing unless there are preventers – internal or external – that cause those things to cease to exist...[T]he chair's existence...is fully explained by the actualization of the potential, possessed by the chair...to continue to exist..., and the absence of anything that intervenes to prevent the realization of this potential'.

¹⁴ Beadouin, 'The World's Continuance', p. 86: 'What matters is that the continuance of these atoms is secured for as long as the only power capable of destroying them goes unexercised, without any need to be actively sustained in existence by God or anything else'.

a continuing cause of a thing's existence in which it participates in order to be.¹⁵

With these understandings in place, we must make a final clarification prompted by a remark from Beaudoin (but also found in Audi). Beaudoin maintains that the inertialist is not suggesting that there is some property or power called 'inertia' by which the thing remains in existence. Rather, when the inertialist posits existential inertia he is simply referring to the tendency of things to remain in existence when left alone.¹⁶ In that case then, we can speak of the inertialist position in either a strong sense or a weak sense (or an active or passive sense, to use Audi's terminology). The strong sense would be that there is some property of the thing called 'inertia' by which it remains in existence, something like a self-sustaining existence engine; the weak claim is that inertia covers a description of the thing's remaining in existence when left alone, but it does not pick out any part of the thing by which it is kept in existence. Each of (i) – (iii) above can be interpreted in either a strong sense or a weak sense.

As already noted, if correct this objection would be devastating to the Thomistic way to God; for if the causal actuality in *per se* series has an inertial quality to it, then there may only be need for a primary cause to get things going; but there is no need for the members of the series to participate in the causality of the primary cause. Not only that, the primary cause itself must be radically reconsidered, since on the Thomist view the primary cause has the causality of the series in virtue of what it is; hence the mental agent in the mind-hand-stick-stone example has the causality of motion in virtue of its being such an agent. But if existential inertia is correct, then the primary cause is just the first source of motion, not that in which the causality of the series is to be found essentially. Transferring the case to *esse*, God as a primary cause would not be that in which essence and *esse* are identical, but just something which kick starts the cosmic chain. Furthermore, insofar as the members of the series need not participate in the causality of the primary cause in order to enjoy the causal

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 96: 'To the inertialist, the persistence of his atoms amounts to their simply *not* changing in a certain respect, specifically in respect to their existential status'.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 88. Audi makes the same clarification in 'Existential Inertia', p. 4: '...[O]n my understanding, to have existential inertia is for the default to be continued existence, so that no special activity is required to maintain existence'.

actuality of the series, the primary cause does not play a conserving role in the series in virtue of its primacy.

3. Defence of Aquinas

In defending Aquinas, I shall argue that given Aquinas's metaphysical commitments leading him to affirm God's existence, existential inertia does not make sense. This defence then takes Aquinas's metaphysics of *esse*, and argues that such metaphysics closes off the possibility of existential inertia. This strategy does not simply define created things in such a way that it is a conceptual truth that they require being conserved in their existence, *pace* Beaudoin.¹⁷ This is because the metaphysics of *esse* was devised in order to account for the act and potency of things. Historically speaking Aquinas was responding to universal hylemorphism in devising his metaphysics of *esse*, such that he did not want to hold that the potency of immaterial creatures is accounted for by incorporeal matter, but by the potency that they have to *esse*. Hence the focus of the metaphysics of *esse* is to discern the fundamental principle of actuality in a thing (and correlatively the fundamental principle of potency). Accordingly, the denial of existential inertia is not the motivation for the metaphysics of *esse*, but a consequence.¹⁸

In what follows I will defend Aquinas against the strong version, whereby existential inertia is taken to be a property in the substance that remains in existence. Having done that, I will proceed to defend Aquinas against the weak version.

To show that existence is not an inertial property, we need to contrast it with other typical examples of inertial properties. Oppy asks us to consider a red chair, and he holds that the redness of the chair is something actualised in the chair, but its being so actualised i.e. its being red, does not require a distinct cause other than the initial cause by which it is red. Hence, once we have the

¹⁷ See 'The World's Continuance', p. 87.

¹⁸ For universal hylemorphism and the distinction and composition of essence and *esse* as a response see Aquinas, *De Ente*, Cap. 4; Aquinas cites Avicenna as the author of this position. For some historical details on the role of this doctrine in the intellectual climate contemporaneous with Aquinas see John Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Godfrey of Fontaines* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1981), pp. 275–277.

red chair, unless we have anything which comes along to disrupt its redness, the chair will remain red. It is plausible in this case to hold that the redness simply subsists in the chair and continues to exist for as long as the chair exists and all this without the chair's participating in some form of redness.¹⁹

Despite the plausibility inherent in this example, the same cannot be said about *esse*. Without *esse*, there would be no subject in which existential inertia could subsist and hold the thing in existence until knocked out of existence. Without the redness of the chair, there would still be a chair, it just wouldn't be red. By contrast with colour properties then, it is not the case that without *esse* an essence would still be; for without *esse* there is simply nothing – it is the act of all acts.²⁰ The redness of the chair is dependent on the subject in which it subsists for its actuality; *esse* on the other hand is not something added to some already existing subject in which it remains or subsists; *esse* is what gives being to the subject whole and complete.²¹ Hence, *esse* is not like the typical inertial properties, like colour, offered in the examples, since those inertial properties require a subject in which to subsist until something causes them to cease to be in the subject.

Furthermore, the ‘inertialness’ of properties which subsist in a subject is not any feature of the properties themselves, but of their subsisting in a subject which subject continues to exist. So even with such properties in question, they themselves are not candidates for existential inertia, since for every moment of their existence they are dependent on the subject in which they subsist. At most one can say that the fact of their being in that subject discloses some kind of inertia, for such a fact is explained in terms of some initial cause of the property in question, and such a property will remain in the absence of some competing cause. Nevertheless, insofar as *esse* is a property wholly different from those

¹⁹ I say that this case is plausible; that doesn't mean I agree with Oppy here, I simply grant the plausibility of his example.

²⁰ *De Potentia Dei*, qu. 7, art. 2, ad. 9: ‘...[P]atet quod hoc quod dico esse est actualitas omnium actuum, et propter hoc est perfectio omnium perfectionum’.

²¹ Beaudoin, ‘The World’s Continuance’, pp. 95 – 96: ‘Any inertialist theory that grounds their inertial tendency in their possession of some physical property the very continuance of which needs explaining should in this way come to grief’. We can widen the scope of the latter and parse Beaudoin’s talk of ‘physical property’ in the quote as metaphysical property like *esse*.

that subsist in some subject, one cannot reason by analogy from the apparently inertial status of the latter to that of the former.

Things in which essence and *esse* are distinct do not have existence in virtue of what they are, since prior to their having existence they are nothing; rather, they have it from without, i.e. extrinsically. But if existing things have existence from without as distinct from their essences, then they derive it from some cause distinct from themselves, in which case existence is caused in them. Now, insofar as the subject of existence would be nothing without this existence that it derives extrinsically, unless there were a cause for the existence of the subject in which the latter participates in order to be, the subject would be literally nothing; for it does not in itself have the wherewithal to exist in itself. Hence, so long as such things have *esse* but are not identical to the *esse* that they have, they are causally dependent for their *esse*. Unlike colour properties, there is no subject in which *esse* can subsist and remain, in which case the existence of any essence/*esse* composite does not subsist in itself, but is caused therein; and without such a cause the composite itself would cease to be. A thing cannot obtain *esse* and retain it by itself (like the chair becoming red and staying red), since a thing is nothing in virtue of itself (whereas the chair is still something even if it isn't red).

Accordingly, Aquinas's understanding of the distinction between essence and *esse* in things and the unique role that *esse* has to play as the act of all acts entails that a thing does not exist inertially but as causally dependent on a source for *esse*. With the metaphysics of *esse* in place, the route to existential inertia is closed off. Hence, the only way to affirm existential inertia against the Thomist is to deny the metaphysics of *esse*. That then entails that any development of the existential inertia objection will always run up against a more general opposition to Aquinas's metaphysics, and so the argument will not so much be over the details of existential inertia, but over the details of the metaphysical world view that makes existential inertia plausible.

In the previous section we presented three possible ways that the existential inertia objection could be developed. These were speculative on our part given the lack of development in the literature. Nevertheless, despite the possibility of future unforeseen developments, such will always run up against the deeper opposition of metaphysical views alluded to in the previous paragraph. And

insofar as it is the metaphysics of *esse* that closes off the possibility of existential inertia, the inertialist must address *that* metaphysics before presenting his objection. In what follows then we will deal with the admittedly speculative developments of the inertialist objection bearing in mind what we have said, viz that the general Thomist response no matter what the development will always be along the lines of the absolute priority of *esse* in the thing.

Considering then the first interpretation, a thing's past existence influences its future so that as long as a thing exists in the past and nothing prevents it from reaching its future, a thing will continue to exist absent competing causal factors. On the contrary, given the distinction of essence and *esse* in things, a thing exists past, present, and future precisely because it has an act of existence by which it is. It is the thing's participation in *esse* which accounts for its being at any time. And, as argued above, insofar as a thing has this act of existence distinct from its essence, there is a cause for this act of existence without which cause the thing would not be. Consequently, at any time that a thing exists it is being caused in its existence.

Considering the second interpretation, a thing does not tend to non-existence which tendency needs to be overcome by a cause of existence; rather the default mode is for the thing to remain in existence until some cause knocks the thing out of existence. On the contrary, given the distinction between essence and *esse*, a thing is nothing without its act of existence. Absent the act of existence, a thing simply is not. It is not natural for an essence/*esse* composite to be, precisely because *esse* is not part of the essence of the thing. The default setting for a composite of essence and *esse* is not to continue in being, but to be nothing. Accordingly, there is indeed 'something' that needs to be overcome for the composite of essence and *esse* to be, and this is the thing's own nothingness; for as long as the essence/*esse* composite exists, its own nothingness is being overcome through its possession of *esse*, which *esse* it does not possess of itself but through another on which it depends.

Considering the third interpretation, a thing's existence is simply the fact that there is a thing of that kind in the world, and so long as no competing causal influence comes along to alter that fact, a thing will remain in existence. So, for instance, a thing's existence could be explicable in terms of some fundamental particles which, suitably arranged, account for the thing; and the

thing will remain until that arrangement changes. On the contrary, given the distinction between essence and *esse*, a thing's existence is not explicable in terms of there being an instance of that kind or some suitably arranged fundamental reality however one wants to parse that reality. Even if we were to accept some form of atomism, this would only be a rejection of Aristotelian hylemorphism; it would not be a rejection of the metaphysics of *esse*. This is because whilst the persistence of the fundamental reality, e.g. atoms, accounts for the continued existence of what is configured out of that reality, that reality itself does not account for its own existence unless its essence is its existence, a consequence which runs up against the metaphysics of *esse*. Accordingly, no matter how one accounts for the essential nature of a substance, whether that be through matter form composition or the configuration of some basic stuff, the Thomist will still ask about the *esse* of the thing, and given the reasoning found throughout Aquinas's work on the distinction between essence and *esse*, no essential component of a composite of essence and *esse* can account for the *esse* of the thing. Hence a composite of essence and *esse* is dependent and thereby caused in its *esse* without which cause it would be nothing.

Thus far we have been considering the strong form of the inertialist objection viz that existential inertia is some property that a thing has like the redness of a chair. We have seen that such a notion of existential inertia is closed off given the metaphysics of *esse*. But what about the weak form?

Recall that the weak inertial objection is simply that a thing continues to exist when left alone to exist, not that there is some inertial property subsisting in the thing. The continued existence of the thing is not what needs an explanation; rather it is the ceasing to exist which requires some causal explanation. Taken as such the weak objection is rather weak. This is because given the distinction of essence and *esse* in things, it is indeed the existence of the thing, its *esse*, which stands in need of a cause. This is because *esse* is possessed by the existing thing from without, and thus derives from an extrinsic principle. Were there no such principle, there would be nothing. Given that the thing does have *esse*, but not of itself, we can consider the source of that *esse*. Hence, we cannot speak of simply leaving things alone to exist until interrupted. If we were to leave things by themselves independent of a cause of their *esse* there would be no things to be left alone! In other words, things cannot be to be left

alone were it not for a cause of *esse*. Without *esse* there is nothing, in which case given that essence/*esse* composites do not have *esse* essentially, there would be nothing without a cause of *esse*. Hence, the presence of *esse* in the existing thing calls for a causal explanation; an existing thing cannot be left to be in order to continue to be in separation from its cause of *esse*.

The weak objection could be made even weaker by holding that existential inertia makes no commitment on the metaphysical constitution of a thing; it simply observes that there doesn't appear to be any reason for the thing to continue in existence, but there are clear reasons for why it goes out of existence. Presented as such the weaker objection is probably weakest of all. This is because it seeks to say something about the being of a thing in terms of its persistence over time, but then refuses commitment on the metaphysical constitution of such things to explain their persistence. Taken as such, the existential inertia objection cannot escape the Thomistic metaphysics of *esse* and its closing off of the inertial hypothesis, since in refusing a metaphysical outlook, the inertialist objection doesn't even enter the discussion.

Before concluding, it is useful to point out an interesting corollary of this discussion. The notion of existential inertia separates the creation of a thing from its conservation. As I have noted, the inertialist objection maintains that the continued existence of the thing does not require a causal explanation; only its ceasing to exist calls for a cause. This is not inconsistent with theism, only with Aquinas's classical theism; for one can still hold that there is a cause for the initial existence of a thing and that thing then can be left to its own devices. Hence, creation on this account is not conservation.

We have seen that the cause of the existence of a thing for Aquinas is the cause of the thing's *esse*; at any point at which an essence/*esse* composite has *esse*, it has it because of its dependence on a cause, and without such a cause the thing would be nothing. The upshot here is that there is no real distinction between the cause of *esse* and the conservation of *esse*. All created being is because it participates in the causal activity of the creator granting *esse* to the things that exist. Hence, like the illumination of the earth by the sun, a thing exists because it participates in the existence granted to it by God. And just as the atmosphere on earth is illuminated for as long as it comes under the illumination of the sun, so too a creature exists for as long as it comes under the

causal influence of God granting *esse* to it. Hence, it is by one and the same act that God both brings things into existence and keeps them in existence; and this is the act of creation. The classical theism of Aquinas in this regard is derivative of his metaphysics of *esse*; and this is indeed the case for several classical theistic tenets that Aquinas endorses when it comes to his views on creation.²²

Returning then to the pressing issue of this article, the existential inertia objection only makes sense on a metaphysics that is inconsistent with the metaphysics of *esse*. Given that Aquinas's way to God is safeguarded by the metaphysics of *esse*, simple presentation of existential inertia as an alternative account for the existence of things is insufficient unless accompanied by a metaphysics which buttresses it. And since defenders of Aquinas's way to God have offered robust defences of the metaphysics on which it is based, the real task for the defender of existential inertia will be to present a metaphysics within which that objection is even plausible and which is capable of undermining the Thomistic metaphysics that it opposes.

²² For further details see Gaven Kerr, *Aquinas and the Metaphysics of Creation*.

Part II.I

The Existence of God

Proofs Outside of the Five Ways

Chapter 5 - Aquinas's Argument for the Existence of God in *De Ente et Essentia* Cap. IV: An Interpretation and Defence

Anybody with even the slightest knowledge of the history of philosophy will know that Thomas Aquinas's is a name practically synonymous with attempts at proving the existence of God. Many authors of introductions to western philosophy or the philosophy of religion will point to Aquinas's argumentation in *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, qu. 2, art. 3, the celebrated five ways, as almost the exemplars of Aquinas's means for establishing the existence of God; just as many, if not more, will reject the veracity of all and any of Aquinas's arguments in the five ways.¹

To my mind, there is too much focus on the five ways. Doubtless we find therein Thomas at the height of his powers, condensing into a single question his many and various thoughts on the means for establishing the existence of God. Such a condensed treatment will always be prone to rejection by casual readers who read only the five ways in a textbook of the history of philosophy or the philosophy of religion. In reading the five ways in abstraction from the *Summa* as a whole, and with no background in Thomistic metaphysics, such readers are automatically confronted by an alien world that is both perplexing and dazzling. The five ways incorporate many years of private philosophical reflection on Thomas's part, and for this reason they include many physical and metaphysical presuppositions that are hinted at in the ways themselves, but defended in various other works. For the latter reason, in defending one of Aquinas's arguments for God's existence, I have chosen in this article the argument from *De Ente et Essentia*. What we are offered in the argument from the *De Ente* is a demonstration for the existence of God that does not presuppose certain metaphysical themes drawn from years of personal philosophical reflection, but is a youthful argument from a youthful mind.² Given the latter, any presuppositions that Aquinas is prepared to make in the argument are spelled out before it begins (though, as we shall see, he

¹ Anthony Kenny, *The Five Ways* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), argues that none of the five ways are successful.

² Thomas wrote the *De Ente* between 1252 — 1256, cf. Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas Vol. I: The Person and His Work*, trans. Robert Royal, (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996), pp. 348 — 349.

does make one presupposition — that what is *per aliud* can be traced back to what is *per se* — that requires a defence through appeal to his thought in later works).

In what follows, I shall offer an interpretation and defence of Aquinas's argument for the existence of God in the *De Ente*. In §. 1, I shall outline the argument and the stages leading up to it; and in one of the sub-sections (1.3) I shall defend the undefended principle that what is *per aliud* can be traced back to what is *per se*. In §. 2, I shall consider criticisms of the argument; in §. 2.1 I shall consider several criticisms of the causal inference to God's existence, and in §. 2.2 I shall consider Kenny's criticism of the argument as a whole. Overall, I shall conclude that this argument for the existence of God shows remarkable resilience to criticisms offered from many quarters, and with regard to the criticisms brought against it in this article, the argument stands.

1. The Argumentation from *De Ente et Essentia*, Cap. 4.

The argument for God's existence in *De Ente* Cap. 4, lays down a form of reasoning for establishing the existence of God that resurfaces in some of Thomas's later works.³ In *De Ente*, Cap. 4, Thomas reasons that given the existence of finite beings (principally, separate substances), characterised beforehand as composites of essence and existence, there must exist a being whose essence and existence are indistinct, and from such a being the being (in this case: the existence) of all creatures is derived. Prior to the actual argument for God's existence, Thomas sets about establishing that although they are not subject to matter/form composition, separate substances are in

³ For the argument itself, see Aquinas, *De Ente et Essentia*, p. 377:127 — 146. For an analysis of the argument, cf. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, pp. 404 — 410. I take Aquinas's argumentation from the *De Ente* Cap. 4 to be a form of argumentation for the existence of God that moves from an awareness of the existence of conditioned beings to an affirmation of an unconditioned necessary being which is the primary cause of such creatures. Therefore, I see this form of argumentation as reappearing in the proof structure of Thomas's argument from efficient causality in *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Cap. 13, and Cap. 15 'Amplius', and in the first three ways of *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, qu. 2, art. 3. This however is not to say that there are not significant differences between the argument from the *De Ente* and the other arguments mentioned; rather, I am saying that in all of the aforementioned arguments, Thomas's procedure is to focus upon some derived characteristic, such as motion, causal efficacy, contingency, and thence mount a causal inference that leads him to affirm the unconditioned necessary existence of some being upon which such derived characteristics depend.

potency in some respect.⁴ In order to establish the latter conclusion, Thomas reasons that in separate substances, essence and existence are distinct; from the distinction between essence and existence in separate substances (and in finite entities more generally), Thomas reasons that there must be a cause for the being that all finite entities possess, a cause that is being itself. Only when he has shown that there is a cause of being that is being itself does Thomas conclude that the essence of any separate substance (and any finite being more generally) stands in potency to an act of existence. Thus, although they are not subject to matter/form composition, separate substances are composites of act and potency. It is the real distinction between essence and existence and its function within Thomas's argumentation for the existence of God that is of immediate interest to us in this paper.

Before proceeding, now would be a good point at which to clear up what is meant by the terms 'essence' and 'existence'. Within the context of the *De Ente*, the meaning of 'essence' is clear. Essence is that which constitutes a thing in its proper genus and species and is signified by the definition of a thing.⁵ On the Aristotelian metaphysics that Thomas adopts, a material thing's essence is constituted by the unity of its matter; so, ontologically speaking, such a thing's essence is signified by the composition of its matter and form.⁶ However, an immaterial thing's essence cannot be signified by the unity of its matter, in which case, ontologically speaking, the essence of an immaterial thing will be signified simply by its form.

The term 'existence' and its verbal counterparts can be used to translate various technical terms in Aquinas's philosophical thought; for the purposes of this paper, when I use the term 'existence' it is as a translation of 'esse', where this is taken to mean the act of being, that is, that whereby a thing actually exists. The philosophical signification of the latter is something peculiar to

⁴ Aquinas, *De Ente et Essentia*, Cap. 4, p. 376:90 — 93: 'Huiusmodi autem substantie, quamvis sint forme tantum sine materia, non tamen in eis est omnimoda simplicitas nature ut sint actus purus, sed habent permixtionem potentie'.

⁵ *Ibid.*, Cap. 1, p. 369: 22 — 29: '...Essentia significet aliquid commune omnibus naturis per quas diuersa entia in diuresis generibus et specibus collocantur, sicut humanitas est essentia hominis.... Et quia id per quod res constituitur in proprio genere uel specie est hoc quod significatur per diffinitionem indicantem quid est res, inde est quod nomen essentie a philosophis in nomen quiditatis mutatur...'.

⁶ *Ibid.*, Cap. 2, p. 370:13 — 16: '...Essentia est id quod per diffinitionem rei significatur. Diffinitio autem substantiarum naturalium non tantum formam continent set etiam materiam...'; p. 370:38 — 40: '...Relinquitur ergo quod nomen essentie in substantiis compositis significat id quod ex materia et forma componitur'.

the metaphysics that Thomas elucidates in the *De Ente* (especially in Cap. 4), and will be outlined in the course of this first section.⁷

Given these definitions, it is not impossible for a thing's essence to be its existence; for all this would entail would be that the thing in question should exist in virtue of what it is. However, if there were such a thing, it would be subsistent existence; for what it is, i.e. its essence, would be existence itself, in which case it would not just have existence, it would be pure existence.

The argumentation for the real distinction between essence and existence and, thereafter, the existence of God involves three stages. For each stage there has been at least one commentator who has held that it was in that particular stage that Thomas both intended and established the real distinction. In what follows, I shall consider each stage under a distinct heading, and address the issue of when in fact the distinction is a real one. The first two stages should be seen as the groundwork for the proof of God's existence, which is itself found in stage three.

1.1. Stage One

In what is generally regarded as the first stage of argumentation for the distinction between essence and existence, Thomas argues to the following effect. Whatever does not enter into the understanding of an essence or quiddity is composed with it from without; since, an understanding of a particular essence must involve an understanding of the parts of that essence. Now, in general, an essence can be understood without our understanding anything about its existence; for instance, I can understand the essence of say a man or a phoenix without thereby understanding anything about its existence in reality (*in rerum natura*). Consequently, existence is distinct from (other than) essence.⁸

⁷ See Roy J. Deferrari, *A Latin-English Dictionary of St. Thomas Aquinas* (U.S.A: St. Paul Editions, 1986), pp. 352 — 358 (*esse*) and pp. 358 — 359 (*essentia/essence*) for the various meanings of these terms in Aquinas's philosophical thought.

⁸ Aquinas, *De Ente et Essentia*, Cap. 4, p. 376:94 — 103. It will be informative to consider Aquinas's actual words at this point, since they bear upon a controversial interpretation of the argument: 'Quicquid enim non est de intellectu essentie uel quiditatis, hoc est adueniens extra et faciens compositionem cum essentia, quia nulla essentia sine his que sunt partes essentie intelligi potest. Omnis autem essentia uel quiditas potest intelligi sine hoc quod aliquid intelligatur de esse suo: possum enim intelligere quid est homo uel fenix et tamen ignorare an esse habeat in rerum natura; ergo patet quod esse est aliud ab essentia uel quiditate'.

This little paragraph has generated considerable controversy. Insofar as the argument begins with a consideration of our understanding of essence (*intellectus essentiae*), is it simply advancing an epistemological conclusion, to the effect that essence and existence are correlated to two distinct cognitional operations? Such would be to repeat a similar distinction made by Aristotle in the *Posterior Analytics*, where he points out that the definition of a thing is distinct from its demonstration; hence, it is one thing to know the definition of a thing, and another thing to have a demonstration of that definition.⁹ On the interpretation that Thomas is repeating Aristotle's distinction, the only metaphysical conclusion we could establish is that the essence of a thing *as known* is distinct from the fact of the thing's existence *as known*, not that existence is really distinct from the finite essence, but nevertheless possessed by every finite essence that actually exists.¹⁰

On the other hand, some interpret this passage as establishing a real distinction between essence and existence. Such authors argue that Thomas is not here making an epistemological observation (as Steven Long puts it, he is not concerned with second intentions); rather, in showing that essence and existence are correlated to two distinct cognitional operations, Thomas intends to show, and in fact succeeds in showing, that essence and existence are distinct *in rerum natura*.¹¹

⁹ Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics* Bk. 2, 91a1: 'Again, proving *what* a thing is and *that* it is are different. So the definition makes clear what it is, and the demonstration that this is or is not true of that'.

¹⁰ Two prominent supporters of this interpretation are Joseph Owens and John Wippel. Both accept that at this stage, essence and existence have only been shown to be conceptually (logically) distinct. See Joseph Owens, 'Quiddity and the Real Distinction in St Thomas Aquinas', *Mediaeval Studies* 27 (1965), 'Stages and Distinction in *De Ente*', *The Thomist* 45 (1981), 'Aquinas's Distinction at *De Ente et Essentia* 4.119 — 123', *Mediaeval Studies* 48 (1986); for Wippel's considered position see *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, Chapter 5. It should be noted that although they both agree that the *intellectus essentiae* stage establishes only a conceptual distinction, Owens and Wippel are in considerable disagreement as to when exactly Thomas intends to establish, and actually does establish, a real distinction. Wippel holds that it is at stage two, Owens that it is at stage three.

¹¹ Prominent supporters of this interpretation include Walter Patt, 'Aquinas's Real Distinction and some Interpretations', *The New Scholasticism* 62:1 (1988); Patt claims (p. 15) that Thomas establishes a fundamental distinction between the essential and the existential, but to my mind it is not exactly clear that such a distinction amounts to a real distinction. In any case, Patt's 'fundamental distinction' appears to be something more than the conceptual distinction advocated by Owens and Wippel. Steven Long, 'On the Natural Knowledge of the Real Distinction', *Nova et Vetera* 1:1 (2003), 'Aquinas on Being and Logicism', *New Blackfriars* 86 (2005), §. C; Anthony Kenny, *Aquinas on Being*

Before addressing the issue of how to interpret this passage, I should point out that I am not here concerned with Thomas's actual intentions. Though the latter question is both an important one and an interesting one, my concern is with what in fact is established by the *intellectus essentiae* argument. The authors mentioned all seem to be concerned both with Thomas's intentions and with the philosophical merit of his argumentation; I am concerned only with the latter. Thus, in what follows, I shall be considering what Thomas actually proves with this argument, and whether the interpretations of those authors mentioned square with what I think Thomas succeeds in proving.

Those who argue that at this stage the distinction is something more than a conceptual one (Patt, Kenny, Long) all seem to share the view that by paying attention to our cognitive operations and their objects we can infer a real distinction between essence and existence.¹² According to Long's interpretation (one that does not diverge in any significant fashion from Patt's or Kenny's in this respect), the argument focuses on first, not second intentions. In other words, this stage applies the distinction primarily to real objects in the world (first intentions), and only secondarily to our concepts of those objects (second intentions).¹³ Long finds it significant that in the aforementioned passage (see n. 8), of the two examples of essence offered, the first is that of a material object, which actually exists (a man), whereas the second, whilst still of a material object (a phoenix), is of something not actually existing; Long takes this to be confirmation of his view that the *intellectus essentiae* stage is concerned with real beings in the world, and only secondarily with our concepts thereof, in which case, on this interpretation, the distinction is a real distinction.¹⁴ As a further indication that the distinction here is more than

(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 34 — 36. In an earlier work, *Aquinas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 53 — 54, Kenny interprets the *intellectus essentiae* stage as establishing only a conceptual distinction; so it seems that between *Aquinas* (1980) and *Aquinas on Being* (2002), Kenny altered his interpretation somewhat. See also Long (2003) for further details of those who take the *intellectus essentiae* stage as establishing a real distinction (p. 75, n. 1) or only a conceptual distinction p. 76, nn. 2 — 3; notice the reference to Kenny, *Aquinas*, in n. 3; in his 2005 article, Long addresses Kenny's thought on this stage as found in *Aquinas on Being*, and Long finds himself in agreement with Kenny's new interpretation of the argument.

¹² See Patt, 'Aquinas's Real Distinction and Some Interpretations', pp. 4, 15, 27; Kenny, *Aquinas on Being*, pp. 34 — 36; Long, 'On the Natural Knowledge of the Real Distinction', §. 1, 'Aquinas on Being and Logicism', §. C.

¹³ Long, 'On the Natural Knowledge of the Real Distinction', pp. 78, 83; 'Aquinas on Being and Logicism', p. 343.

¹⁴ Long, 'On the Natural Knowledge of the Real Distinction', pp. 79, 83; 'Aquinas on Being and Logicism', p. 340. Long also believes that within the framework of the overall argumentation of *De Ente* Cap 4, Aquinas begins with the real distinction in physical

just conceptual, Long appeals to the Thomistic position that the intellect cannot be deceived about its proper object, the essence of the material particular. If the latter is the case, then given that essence and existence are understood to be distinct in material particulars, it follows that they must be really distinct, otherwise the intellect, in understanding its proper object, would be deceived.¹⁵

I shall deal with the latter point first. Irrespective of whether or not Thomas elsewhere takes the essence of the material particular to be the proper object of the intellect about which the intellect cannot be deceived, such argumentation is not to be found as proof of the real distinction at this stage (or any later stage of *De Ente*, Cap. 4). Long must augment his reasoning in this regard by appealing to various other passages in Aquinas's later work. Whilst this is a legitimate practice to show that Thomas might have here intended the real distinction, it does not show that it is in fact established at this stage. Much more promising is Long's suggestion that the *intellectus essentiae* argument is concerned with first, and not second, intentions.

If the *intellectus essentiae* argument is in fact concerned with first intentions (real objects), then it seems clear that it argues for a real distinction between essence and existence. However, I do not think there is enough evidence to say that the passage is concerned with first intentions. Long begins his analysis by noting that this stage begins with a consideration of essence taken as real (first intention) rather than as understood (second intention).¹⁶ Yet, it is not clear that the argument is concerned with essence taken as real as opposed to merely understood, and indeed, when we consider the argument anew, the language suggests a certain ambiguity: 'Whatever does not enter into the understanding of an essence or quiddity is not a part of that essence and is composed with it'. The fact that the argument here begins with a consideration of what does or does not enter our *understanding* (*intellectus*, translated by Long as 'concept') of an essence or quiddity suggests that the argument is in fact concerned with second intentions. Now, Long has argued that

beings (stage one) and then moves to apply that distinction to non-physical beings (stage two), and this is in accord with Aquinas's more general epistemological thought: we must approach the non-physical from the standpoint of the physical.

¹⁵ 'On the Natural Knowledge of the Real Distinction', pp. 83 — 89; 'Aquinas on Being and Logicism', pp. 342 *et seq.*, note especially what he says on p. 343: 'But clearly if existence were part of material essence, and yet when we knew material essence we did not know existence, we would be deceived. It follows that existence is really distinct from material essence'.

¹⁶ Long, 'On the Natural Knowledge of the Real Distinction', p. 78 and 'Aquinas on Being and Logicism', p. 341.

the use of the examples 'man' and 'phoenix' to illustrate this point indicates that the argument is concerned with, primarily, real objects (men), and secondarily, fictional objects (phoenixes), in which case the argument is concerned primarily with first not second intentions. However, if we again turn to the actual text of the argument, the language points to a certain ambiguity: 'I am able to understand what a man or a phoenix is and still not know that it exists in reality (*in rerum natura*)'. It seems clear to me that here the primary concern is with our understanding of a man or a phoenix and therefore with second intentions. The presence of the phrase '*in rerum natura*' will perhaps suggest connotations with real objects, but again, the reading is ambiguous. On the one hand, one could say, with Long, that the primary concern is with essence as found in reality (first intentions), and the presence of the phrase '*in rerum natura*' naturally confirms this fact. On the other hand, one could say that the passage is concerned with second intentions (concepts) and the phrase '*in rerum natura*' indicates that we can understand what a man or a phoenix is whilst at the same time be ignorant of their existence '*in rerum natura*'. Both readings seem plausible, in which case the choice for one over the other will depend on some further philosophical consideration.

The further consideration comes for Long when he suggests that if the real distinction is not established at this stage, then it cannot be established at any further stage.¹⁷ Given the necessity for establishing the distinction as real at stage one, the argument *must* be concerned with first intentions, otherwise the distinction at this or any other stage could not be real. I shall postpone consideration of this view until I have considered stage two of the argumentation. However, there is another philosophical consideration, stressed by Kenny, that would suggest we take the *intellectus essentiae* argument as being concerned with first rather than second intentions. Kenny's view is to the effect that there is a definite (real) distinction between the cognitional operation that understands the essence of a thing, and the operation that grasps the actual existence of a thing. Given this distinction between cognitional operations, essence and existence must themselves be distinct, otherwise there would be no need for two distinct cognitional operations.¹⁸ However, such a view confuses the object of thought with the act of thought, and reasons that insofar as there is a differentiation in the act of thought, there must be a similar differentiation in the object of thought. Now, it is true that Aquinas's epistemological thought does in fact correlate essence and existence with two distinct cognitional operations, but it is unclear from the *intellectus essentiae* argument, firstly, whether that epistemological thought is informing Thomas's

¹⁷ 'On the Natural Knowledge of the Real Distinction', p. 82 — 83.

¹⁸ Kenny, *Aquinas on Being*, p. 36.

metaphysical thought, and secondly, whether the epistemological thought takes precedence over the metaphysical thereby permitting us to draw strong metaphysical conclusions from epistemological ones.¹⁹ The issue of deriving metaphysical conclusions from epistemological ones is a live philosophical issue, and one that cannot be taken for granted, as Kenny does. From what we have seen of the *De Ente*, there is no clear indication that we can pass freely from a distinction in the order of cognitional operations to the same in reality. If we can, all we can derive is what Patt calls a fundamental distinction between the essential/conceptual and the existential (see n. 11), and this, to my mind, is nothing more than a distinction between the epistemological and the metaphysical. Such a distinction will not support the conclusion that diversity of cognitional operations points to diversity of metaphysical principles without some further philosophical considerations (such as those developed by Lonergan in *Insight* or advocated by Long), considerations not present in the actual *intellectus essentiae* argument itself.

Given the above, I hold that the most uncontroversial interpretation of the *intellectus essentiae* argument is that it distinguishes between our understanding of a thing's essence and its actual existence. At the most this points to what Patt calls a fundamental distinction between the essential and the existential, but I see no reason to infer from the latter a real distinction between essence and existence unless the *intellectus essentiae* argument is augmented with some further philosophical consideration not present in the argument itself. As noted, Long provides us with just such a consideration to the effect that unless stage one concludes to a real distinction, stage two cannot. Thus, now would be a good point at which to turn to stage two.

1.2. Stage Two

In the second stage of the argumentation, we are asked to consider the *hypothesis* of a being in which essence and existence are identical. As already noted, such a being would be subsistent existence, since it would be defined as existence itself and would thereby not merely have existence, but would be pure existence. On Thomas's view, such a being could not be multiplied in

¹⁹ Bernard Lonergan, admired by Kenny in the introduction to *Aquinas on Being* (p. v), is, amongst Thomists, the foremost defender of this view, see *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), Chapter 15, yet even Lonergan admitted that he inverts the procedure of Aquinas in this respect, see Lonergan, *Collection* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 'Insight: Preface to a Discussion', p. 142: 'If Aquinas had things right side up — and that is difficult to deny — then I have turned everything upside down'.

any way; for in order to be multiplied, such a being either would have to receive some sort of addition, as a genus is multiplied into its species through the addition of various differentia, or it would have to be composed with matter, as a species is multiplied into individuals. Now, subsistent existence could not be multiplied through the addition of some difference; for then its essence would not be its existence, but its existence plus some difference. Similarly, subsistent existence could not be multiplied through being composed with matter; for then it would not be subsistent, but it must be subsistent if it exists in virtue of what it is.²⁰ Thomas does not here deal with a third possible form of multiplication whereby something universal is multiplied through being received (or participated in) by many individuals.²¹ Presumably, he does not reject this type of multiplication because in this case the thing that is received or participated in is not itself multiplied; the individuals are multiplied and they simply share in some single absolute reality.

So, if there is a being in which essence and existence are identical (subsistent existence), then there could only be one such being.²² A notable consequence follows from this conclusion: if there can only be one being in which essence and existence are identical, then in all else there is a distinction between essence and existence. In other words, in multiple beings, essence and existence are distinct.²³

Stage two then establishes two important conclusions. Firstly, if there is a being that is pure *esse*, not subject to essence/existence composition, then it could not be material and there could only be one such being. Secondly, given that there could only be one being in which essence and existence are indistinct, in all else essence and existence are distinct. The first conclusion is significant because at stage three of the argumentation, Thomas goes on to establish (to my mind successfully) that there is in fact a being that is pure *esse*. Given that he has established at stage two that if such a being exists, it

²⁰ Aquinas, *De Ente et Essentia*, p. 377:113 — 119.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 376:110 — 377:113.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 377:119 — 121.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 377: 121 — 123: '...Oportet quod in qualibet alia re preter eam aliud sit esse suum et aliud quiditas vel natura seu forma sua'. Wippel comments on this stage as follows, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, pp. 145 — 146: 'On my reading, until this point in the argumentation, God's existence has entered in only as an hypothesis. At most there can be one being in which essence and *esse* are identical. In all other beings they must differ. But if God's existence enters in at this point only as a working hypothesis, this does not mean that the conclusion itself is only hypothetical. On the contrary, Thomas's point is to show that it is impossible for there to be more than one being in which essence and existence are identical. If we grant the fact of multiplicity, then in all existing things, with this single possible exception, essence and *esse* must differ'.

would be one and immaterial, Thomas need not adduce any further argumentation after stage three (the demonstration of God's existence) to show that God is one and immaterial. Given what we have seen from stage one of the argumentation, the second conclusion (the distinction between essence and existence) will come across as controversial.

What kind of distinction is envisaged at this point? Principally, is it a conceptual distinction or a real distinction? Long has stressed that if the distinction at stage one is only a conceptual one, then the distinction at stage two could be nothing more than conceptual.²⁴ On the other hand, Wippel has argued that given the impossibility of there being more than one being whose essence is its existence, in all else there is a distinction between essence and existence. If we grant that there are multiple beings *in rerum natura*, then we must also grant a distinction between essence and existence in such beings. Thus, Wippel envisages this stage as establishing a real distinction (a distinction *in rerum natura*) between essence and existence.

Long's interpretation is an interesting one; on his account, the inference made at stage two from the impossibility of multiplying subsistent existence to the distinction of essence and existence in multiple beings can only result in a real distinction if essence and existence are already envisaged as real principles of things. Now, as we know, Long envisages the distinction at stage one as real, in which case, prior to stage two, essence and existence have been established as real principles of things for him. Thus, stage two does indeed conclude to the real distinction for Long, but only because the principles under consideration have already been taken to be real principles at stage one. Long writes:

...If we do not know these principles as real principles in the beings that are proportionate to our knowing powers, any conclusion we draw about them may be merely logical, and these principles themselves may then be chimeric rather than real.²⁵

Long's more general philosophical point hinges on the view that unless we establish something about essence and existence as they are in themselves, not just in our definitions of them, any conclusion we wish to draw with regard to their distinction or identification will remain only conceptual; this tracks a position defended by Owens. Owens argued that unless we know existence as a real nature, we cannot make any strong claims about its identification or

²⁴ Long, 'On the Natural Knowledge of the Real Distinction', pp. 82 — 83.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

otherwise with essence.²⁶ Of course, for Owens we only know existence as a real nature once we prove that God exists, whereas for Long, existence is known as a real nature, distinct from the essence of the thing, with the *intellectus essentiae* argument. Owens could not have followed Long down this path since Owens rejected the reality of the distinction at the *intellectus essentiae* stage. Nevertheless, these differences aside, both Owens and Long agree that existence has to be known as a real nature in order to know it as distinct or otherwise from essence.

In addressing Long's interpretation, I would like to emphasise that two conclusions are drawn at stage two: (i) that subsistent existence is unique; (ii) that in all else essence and existence are distinct; and it seems to me that (i) can be purely logical, whilst (ii) can obtain *in rerum natura*. Thus, as I shall argue, we can enter stage two with merely logical notions of essence and existence, and yet conclude to real distinction.

The first conclusion affirms the impossibility of multiplying subsistent existence. The second conclusion is nothing more than an application of the first to reality. The reasoning is that what is impossible is precisely nothing, in which case what is impossible is never actual (real); for possibility is a necessary, though not sufficient, condition for actuality. So, if we can show that some state of affairs is conceptually impossible, then we can conclude to its real impossibility. As Patt points out in the same context:

If something has been proved to be impossible, no further existential condition is needed in order to apply that proof to the existential realm. To say that something is impossible just means that it cannot occur in reality.²⁷

On the more general philosophical point that unless we know existence as a real nature we cannot know it as distinct or otherwise from essence, I would say that that whose essence is identical with its existence must be subsistent existence, irrespective of its actually existing in reality; for such a being is defined as existence itself, and not something merely having existence. Now, given that we know this hypothesised being to be subsistent existence, we know that it must be unique, as the argumentation in stage two shows. But if subsistent existence is unique, then whatever is multiple is *not* subsistent existence. But if the latter is the case, then in multiple beings, essence and existence are distinct. And if we are prepared to grant that there are multiple beings *in rerum natura*, then we must also be prepared to grant that essence

²⁶ See the articles referred to in n. 10 for details of Owens's position.

²⁷ Patt, 'Aquinas's Real Distinction and Some Interpretations', p. 23.

and existence are distinct in such beings, irrespective of the actual existence of subsistent existence.

Stage two begins with the hypothesis of a being whose essence is its existence, and concludes, primarily, that there could only be one such being; this is a purely logical conclusion. However, we can make the further inference that there could never, in reality, be more than one being whose essence is its existence. If it is impossible that there be more than one being whose essence is its existence, then in all else, essence and existence are distinct (in reality!).²⁸ So, in partial agreement with Long, I would suggest that if the distinction is only conceptual at the end of stage one, then at the beginning of stage two it is also only conceptual. But at the end of stage two, through considering the impossibility of multiplying subsistent existence and granting the fact of multiplicity, the distinction can be taken to be a real distinction. I thus conclude that at stage two, the distinction has been established as real. And it is this latter conclusion that propels Thomas into an argument for God's existence.²⁹

1.3. Stage Three: The Argument for God's Existence

Stage two presented us with the hypothesis of a being whose essence is its existence, it offered no argumentation for the actual existence of such a being.

²⁸ *Ibid.*: 'To say that a plurality of entities in which essence and *esse* are identical is impossible, is to make an immediate application to the existential realm; it just means that there cannot be more than one entity of that kind, whether or not that unique entity which is possible exists'.

²⁹ In his rejection of the argument for the existence of God in the *De Ente*, Fernand Van Steenberghen accuses Thomas of surreptitiously moving from a logical concept of existence, as evidenced in stage one, to existence as a real principle of the finite entity at stage three. According to Van Steenberghen, Thomas begins the argument for the existence of God with a logical distinction between essence and existence, but concludes to God as the cause of existence where the latter is understood as a real principle of a finite thing. Accordingly, Van Steenberghen charges Thomas with illegitimately moving from one concept of existence in the premises of the argument for the existence of God to another concept of existence in the conclusion; see Van Steenberghen, *Le problème de l'existence de Dieu dans les écrits de s. Thomas d'Aquin*, pp. 34 — 42. However, Van Steenberghen at no point considers the material of stage two of the argumentation, where (on my account) existence is established as really distinct from the essence of the finite entity. Given that the latter is established prior to the argument for the existence of God (stage three), the latter argument can begin with a notion of existence as a real principle of the finite entity and conclude to God as the cause of such existence. I submit that insofar as Van Steenberghen overlooks stage two of the argumentation for the real distinction, he seriously misinterprets the argument for the existence of God at stage three.

Stage three offers us such argumentation, and it is comprised of two premises and a conclusion.

The first premise goes as follows. Whatever belongs to a thing belongs to it either as a result of its intrinsic nature or as the result of the activity of some external principle. For instance, the ability to laugh belongs to man as a result of his intrinsic nature; on the other hand, the presence of light in the air is a result of the influence of some principle that is itself extrinsic to the air, i.e. the sun. No finite entity can be the efficient cause of itself; for then that being would have to precede itself in existence, which is absurd. Thus, everything whose essence is distinct from its existence has a cause for its existence from another (*ab alio*).³⁰

Within the context of what we have already seen in the *De Ente*, this stage of the argument is quite straightforward. If a thing possesses some characteristic not of its own intrinsic nature, then such a characteristic demands an extrinsic cause for its inhering in that thing. Now, it has been shown that essence and existence are distinct in separate entities, in which case the existence of any one separate entity is not a result of its intrinsic nature but is caused to reside therein by some extrinsic principle, just as light is caused to be in the air by the influence of the sun. Consequently, insofar as no finite entity possesses its existence essentially, every finite being demands a cause for its existence, a cause which itself must exist.³¹

³⁰ Aquinas, *De Ente et Essentia*, p. 377:127 — 137: ‘Omne autem quod conuenit alicui uel est causatum ex principiis nature sue, sicut risibile in homine; uel aduenit ab aliquo principio extrinseco, sicut lumen in aere ex influenti solis. Non autem potest esse quod ipsum esse sit causatum ab ipsa forma uel quiditate rei, dico sicut a causa efficiente, quia sic aliqua res esset sui ipsis causa et aliqua res se ipsam in esse produceret: quod est impossibile. Ergo oportet quod omnis talis res cuius est aliud quam natura sua habet esse ab alio’.

³¹ Thomas began this whole section of Cap. 4 with a consideration of separate substances, and by the time that he has reached the argumentation for God’s existence, he has not indicated that he is no longer thinking of separate substances rather than finite beings in general. On my interpretation, since Thomas has established that there is a real distinction between essence and existence in all beings capable of multiplication, he has established that all finite beings (whether material or immaterial) are subject to such a distinction; in which case, when outlining Thomas’s argumentation for God’s existence, I shall refer to finite beings as those in which there is a real distinction between essence and existence, whether such beings are material or immaterial. As an aside, one might wonder whether or not separate substances (angels) can be multiplied in the way that material entities can be. For Thomas, angels are multiplied through the first mode of multiplication, i.e. as a genus is multiplied into its species. Thus, every angel (Michael, Gabriel, Raphael) is its own species, and specifically distinct from every other angel. Note what Aquinas says earlier in *De Ente*, p. 376:83 — 89: ‘Set cum essentia simplicis non sit recepta in materia

Now, it should be noted that unless it has been shown that essence and existence are really distinct, this first stage of the argument for God's existence would make no sense. Aquinas clearly distinguishes between what belongs to a thing as a result of an extrinsic principle and what belongs to it as a result of an intrinsic principle. If essence and existence have not been shown to be really distinct, but only conceptually so, then the essence of a thing would somehow involve its existence, in which case a thing can possess existence from some intrinsic principle (its essence), and not from some extrinsic principle. But if a thing need not possess existence from some extrinsic principle, then not only would it be the cause of its own existence, but also there could be no causal investigation inaugurated into the extrinsic principle whence existence is caused in the thing; but if this is so, then the argument cannot get off the ground, since we need not look for a cause for the existence of things other than their own essences! Thus, the real distinction figures prominently in this opening stage of the argument for God's existence.³²

The second premise goes as follows. Everything that exists through another (*per aliud*) can be traced back to that which exists *per se*, as to its first cause. This premise is crucial, for it connects the existence of essence/existence composites to the existence of what is *per se*; for all finite beings (essence/existence composites) exist *per aliud*, since they all receive their existence from another. Thus, given the existence of essence/existence composites, we are led to the existence of what exists *per se*. However, whether this premise is true or not remains to be seen. We thus move to the conclusion.

There is something that is the cause of existence for all things and this because it is pure being (*esse tantum*); otherwise there would be an infinite regress of causes, since every being that is not pure being has a cause of its existence.³³

Here Thomas believes he has shown there to be a cause (*esse tantum*) of existence for all things. However, two particular problems immediately

non potest ibi esse talis multiplicatio. Et ideo oportet ut non inueniantur in illis substantiis plura individua eiusdem specie, set quotquot sunt ibi individua tot sunt species...’.

³² I hold that this reasoning undermines Owens's interpretation of the real distinction, to the effect that the real distinction is only established after the demonstration of God's existence. Given that the real distinction figures prominently in the opening stage of the argument for God's existence, it (the real distinction) could not be established only after the demonstration of God's existence.

³³ Aquinas, *De Ente et Essentia*, p. 377:137 — 143: ‘[Premise two]...Omnne quod est per aliud reducitur ad id quod est per se sicut ad causam primam, [conclusion] oportet quod sit aliqua res que sit causa essendi omnibus rebus eo quod ipsa est esse tantum; alias iretur in infinitum in causis, cum omnis res que non est esse tantum habeat causam sui esse, ut dictum est’.

present themselves. Firstly, a hermeneutical problem, what is the relationship between the principle that what is *per aliud* can be traced back to what is *per se* (call this the *per aliud* principle) and the assertion that an infinite regress of causes would result if the foregoing principle did not obtain? Surely if what is *per aliud* can be traced back to what is *per se*, an infinite series of causes is automatically ruled out. Related to the first problem is a second problem concerning how in fact to establish the *per aliud* principle. This principle does not seem to be as innocuous as Thomas takes it to be, and it does seem to require a defence insofar as it plays a significant role in establishing the existence of something that is in fact *per se*.

To begin with the relation of the *per aliud* principle to the undesirability of an infinite regress, two separate interpretations can be offered. One is that the *per aliud* principle is analytic and distinct from the assertion of the undesirability of an infinite regress; such is Joseph Bobik's interpretation. He holds that if we can prove God's existence on the basis of the *per aliud* principle alone, then appeal to the undesirability of an infinite regress is irrelevant to the proof; whereas if we can prove God's existence on the basis of the undesirability of an infinite regress, then, in the context of the *De Ente*, God's existence has not yet been established.³⁴ What is clear is that Bobik takes the *per aliud* principle to be something distinct from the undesirability of an infinite regress, so much so that to focus on one is to interpret the argument differently than one would by focussing on the other. On this view, the *per aliud* principle can be established analytically, without recourse to the impossibility of an infinite regress. On the other hand, Wippel believes that the critical step is the elimination of the possibility of an infinite regress, and he contends that Bobik's attempt at establishing the *per aliud* principle analytically is unsuccessful.³⁵

As I see things, the *per aliud* principle can only be independent of the elimination of the possibility of an infinite regress if the truth of the latter is

³⁴ Joseph Bobik, *Aquinas on Being and Essence: A Translation and Interpretation* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1965), p. 175: "...Does the argument...conclude that God exists because an infinite regress of causes is impossible?...Or, does the argument...conclude that an infinite regress of caused causes is impossible because God exists [as inferred from the *per aliud* principle]? If the latter alternative is the case, then this concern with an infinite regress appears to be irrelevant to the proof of God's existence. If the former alternative is the case, then it appears that the existence of God has not been established here".

³⁵ Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, p. 408: 'The most critical phase in this step in Thomas's argument is his elimination of the possibility of one's appealing to an infinite regress of caused causes of *esse*'. See p. 409, n. 25 for his rejection of Bobik's attempted defence of the *per aliud* principle.

independent of the truth of the former. That is to say, only if we can establish the *per aliud* principle without appeal to the impossibility of an infinite regress is the *per aliud* principle analytic and distinct from the denial of an infinite regress, as Bobik would have it. But this interpretation would seem to be undermined by Thomas's use of the term 'otherwise' [alias] in connecting the *per aliud* principle with the undesirability of an infinite regress (see n. 33 for the Latin text). The most straightforward interpretation is that if what is *per aliud* is not traced back to what is *per se* and there is not a being that is being itself from which all being flows, then there would be an infinite regress of causes; and the latter reading seems to me to be a clear case of material implication: if the *per aliud* principle does not obtain, then an infinite regress of causes does obtain.

Now, it could be suggested that, in accord with Bobik, the *per aliud* principle can be established analytically, and yet lead to and thereby be connected with a denial of an infinite regress, in which case they would be mutually entailing. However, in that case the onus is on the defender of the *per aliud* principle as analytic to show not only that it is analytic, but that it can be shown to be so irrespective of a consideration of the impossibility of an infinite regress. Bobik defends the analyticity of the principle by arguing that the extrinsic cause of what is *per aliud* is *all* on which it (i.e. what is *per aliud*) depends for its existence, thereby ruling out any essence/existence composite as the cause of the *per aliud*, since such a composite would itself depend on another, in which case it would not be all on which the *per aliud* depends for its existence.³⁶ However, this reasoning seems, implicitly, to presuppose the impossibility of an infinite regress, since it holds that insofar as no essence/existence composite can be the cause of existence of the *per aliud* there has to be a cause of the *per aliud* that is not itself *per aliud*, but is primary and therefore *per se* in some causal series. But if the impossibility of an infinite regress is implicit in an analytic defence of the *per aliud* principle, then surely that principle is not analytic, but its truth depends on the impossibility of an infinite regress, in which case the one does not just lead to the other, rather the two are intimately bound up with each other.

In order to untangle the philosophical nature of the *per aliud* principle and its relationship to the undesirability of an infinite regress, we can put the principle and its connection with an infinite regress into symbolic form. Consider the following bi-conditional: $P \leftrightarrow \neg Q$, where 'P' stands for the *per aliud* principle and 'Q' stands for an infinite regress of causes. Let us take one half of the bi-conditional: $P \rightarrow \neg Q$, further, let us negate the consequent and

³⁶ Bobik, *Aquinas on Being and Essence*, pp. 177 — 178.

assume that an infinite regress does obtain. Through affirming an infinite series of causes and thereby negating the consequent we can derive the negation of the antecedent, in which case we get the negation of the *per aliud* principle ($\neg P$). Thus, if an infinite regress does indeed obtain, then the *per aliud* principle does not obtain. But if the *per aliud* principle does not obtain, then Thomas has no means for establishing the existence of God, since the *per aliud* principle was instrumental in establishing God's existence. Thus, it would seem that the truth of the *per aliud* principle is bound up with the truth of the impossibility of an infinite regress, as the bi-conditional shows. If an infinite regress of causes can be shown to be a real impossibility, then the *per aliud* principle can be seen to be established. Thus, I take it that the real impossibility of an infinite regress of causes brings about an affirmation of the principle that what is *per aliud* can be traced back to what is *per se*. Given that he does not actually argue against the possibility of an infinite regress in the *De Ente*, but such an impossibility is itself bound up with the truth of the *per aliud* principle, I see it as valid to read into Aquinas's thinking in the *De Ente* his later argumentation against the possibility of an infinite causal series.

Before going on to consider how Thomas later argued against the possibility of an infinite regress of causes, it will be helpful to bear in mind what the *per aliud* principle actually states. With regard to this principle, Thomas's thought will become clear if we recall his distinction between a thing's intrinsic nature and the influence of some extrinsic principle. As will be recalled, something can belong to a thing either as a result of the thing's intrinsic nature or as a result of the influence of an extrinsic principle. No finite being exists in virtue of its intrinsic nature, that is, no finite being exists in virtue of what it is, in which case it depends on some extrinsic principle for its existence, that is, it exists *per aliud*. Now, Thomas's reasoning in stating the *per aliud* principle is that no being whose existence is the result of some extrinsic principle, that is, no being that is *per aliud*, can sufficiently account for the existence of another being of which it is the cause. If essence/existence composites were solely to account for other essence/existence composites, then no real account of existence would be offered. What is at issue here is the origination of existence. To cling to a closed chain (finite or infinite) of essence/existence composites causing other essence/existence composites is to envisage existence as something to be passed amongst finite entities, with no real explanation for the actual origination of existence within that closed chain. Thus, unless there exists some being that exists *per se*, the origination of existence in a chain of essence/existence composites itself remains unexplained and quite

mysterious.³⁷ And we are led to the affirmation of a being that exists *per se* through a denial of an infinite regress of essence/existence composites causing other such composites.

Thomas holds that there are two classes of causal series. Firstly, causes and effects may be essentially related to one another. Thomas's example in this latter respect is the following causal order: the soul animates the body, which moves the hand, which moves the stick, which moves the stone. Each cause in the foregoing series — the soul, the body, the hand, and the stick — are so related that to remove one of them would be to remove the causal efficacy of the series as a whole and its ability to produce the desired effect, the movement of the stone; for if the soul were removed, then the body would not be animated, if the body were not animated, then the hand would not move, if the hand did not move, then the stick would not be moved, if the stick were not moved, then the stone would not be moved.³⁸

Notice that in a series of essentially ordered causes and effects, the first cause possesses in itself the causal efficacy of the series as a whole. Notice also that in an essentially ordered series, all causes must act simultaneously in order to produce the desired effect; unless all of the causes in the above mentioned example acted at once (or as one), the desired result (the movement of the stone) would not come about.

The second type of causal series is an accidentally ordered series. Thomas's example in this respect is the following, a builder may use a saw when building a house, but that saw may wear out, in which case he finds a replacement, which wears out, in which case he finds another replacement, and so on; whether there are several replacement saws or only one is only incidental to the building of the house. What is essential is the house builder; the tools that he uses are only accidental to the actual building work. Thus, the saws, as causes, are only accidental causes; for it is not within the essence of a saw that it goes to construct a house only, but it is indeed within the

³⁷ I see here an implicit recognition by Thomas of the need to account for the being of beings as beings; see Lawrence Dewan's discussion of Thomas's recognition of such in his (Thomas's) argumentation against infinite causal regression and for further references to the same in the writings of Aquinas in, 'St. Thomas and Infinite Causal Regress', p. 122 (p. 127, n. 28 for references to Aquinas).

³⁸ Aquinas, *De Veritate*, qu. 2, art. 10: 'Per se quidem multitudo requiritur, ut patet in causis ordinatis et effectibus, quorum unum habet dependentiam essentiale ad aliud; sicut anima movet calorem naturalem, quo moventur nervi et musculi, quibus moventur manus, quae movent baculum, quo moventur lapis; in his enim quodlibet posteriorum per se dependet a quolibet praecedentium'.

essence of a builder that he goes to construct a building.³⁹ Notice that in an accidentally ordered series, it is not necessary that the causes act simultaneously for the production of the effect; so in the example, the replacement of one saw by another need not be simultaneous, whereas the activity of the builder and the use of his tools must be simultaneous for the production of the effect — the building of a house.

Thomas admits that an infinity of accidentally ordered causes is possible; for the causes in an accidentally ordered series need not function simultaneously, in which case a cause can come into existence, cause another thing, and pass out of existence, and so on to infinity. However, Thomas does not admit the possibility of an infinity of essentially ordered causes. He reasons that such an infinity would not itself explain the causal efficacy possessed by any member of that series; it would simply posit a further previous member of the series, which itself stands to have its causal efficacy explained. But in a series of essentially ordered causes, a prior cause is taken to explain some property of the posterior causes, a property that such posterior causes lack; for instance, the stick is itself immobile without the movement of the hand, but the hand is itself immobile unless attached to an animate body, and the body is itself inanimate without the causal efficacy of the animating soul, whereas the animating soul is itself animate, it does not require a cause specifically for its animation (though it may require a cause in some other respect, e.g. for its existence). However, with regard to the motion induced to the hand/stick/stone, the causal regress ends with the animating soul). Given that within a series of essentially ordered causes a prior cause is taken to explain the existence of some particular aspect of the posterior causes, an aspect that the posterior causes lack, it follows that in a series of essentially ordered causes, there must be some cause that explains the causal efficacy of the series of causes as a whole; for just as in the above example of soul/hand/stick/stone, a particular feature was possessed by a prior cause (the soul) that the posterior causes themselves lacked, so too is causal efficacy a feature of causes, a feature that posterior causes lack and which must be explained by some prior, more fundamental cause. Thus, there cannot be an infinite regress of essentially ordered causes; for then there would be no cause to explain the causal

³⁹ *Ibid.* 'Sed per accidens multitudo invenitur, quando omnia quae in multitudine continentur, quasi loco unius ponuntur, et indifferenter se habent sive sint unum, sive multa, vel pauciora vel plura; sicut si aedificator facit domum, in cuius factione plures serras consumit successive, multitudo serrarum non requiritur ad factioem domus nisi per accidens ex hoc quod una non potest semper durare; nec differt aliquid ad domum, quotcumque ponantur; unde nec una carum habet dependentiam ad aliam, sicut erat quando multitudo requirebatur per se'.

efficacy of the causes themselves; rather, causal efficacy in an infinite series of such causes would be simply presupposed. But if there is no infinite series of essentially ordered causes, then there is some first cause that possesses itself the causal efficacy of the series of causes as a whole (just as the motion of the hand/stick/stone was fundamentally derived from the animating soul), and this entails that what is *per aliud* (effects in an essentially ordered series) can be traced back to what is *per se* (the first cause possessing essentially the causal efficacy of the series).

A consideration of Thomas's rejection of an infinite regress in some of his later arguments for the existence of God will help us to understand further the thinking behind the *De Ente* argumentation. In later arguments, Thomas typically rejects the possibility of an infinite regress because such a regress could not explain the movement or causal efficacy of its members as a whole.⁴⁰ If we consider a finite causal relationship, the first cause is the cause of the intermediate cause, and the intermediate cause is the cause of the ultimate effect. As an aside, there may be one or several intermediate causes, but the point is that in a finite series a first cause and a final effect can be isolated, and everything in between, whether one or several, is taken to be intermediate. Now, consider an infinite causal series, in such a series there would be no first cause, that is, there would be no cause that infuses the causal series with its efficacy. If there were no first cause, then all the causes in the series would be intermediate causes. But an intermediate cause is moved or receives its causal efficacy from a cause prior to it, and if there were no first cause to give causal efficacy to the intermediate causes, then no intermediate cause in the series of causes could move or have causal efficacy. Consequently, if there were no first cause, that is, if there were an infinite regress of intermediate causes, then the intermediate causes themselves would be immobile, that is, lacking in causal efficacy.⁴¹

Thomas's point in rejecting an infinite regress of causes essentially related to one another is that such a regress does not explain that which it sets out to explain. In an infinite regress of essentially ordered causes, the regress is intended to explain the causal efficacy of every posterior cause by means of a causal series stretching to infinity. But if there is no primary cause which

⁴⁰ It should be noted that in the following instances, Thomas does not appear to take the causal series as a whole over and above its members. Rather, he asks about the causal efficacy at work within the causal series and argues that such causal efficacy requires some primary cause that infuses the series of causes with its efficacy.

⁴¹ This form of argument is pursued by Thomas in various places in which he denies an infinite regress of moved movers or caused causes, see *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Cap. 13, p. 31:103 — 112; *Summa Theologicae*, Ia, qu. 2, art. 3, Prima Via and Secunda Via.

itself accounts for the causal efficacy of every subsequent cause, then the causal efficacy of the infinite chain of causes as a whole remains unexplained. To put it another way, if there is no primary mover which itself accounts for the movement that the intermediate causes possess, then the movement of the intermediate causes themselves remains unexplained. Finally, to put it in the terminology of the *De Ente*, if there is no primary being from which all being flows, then the presence of existence in an infinite series of essence/existence composites remains to be explained and is simply presupposed – it is just there! In all of the foregoing situations, one may imagine as many previous moved movers, intermediate causes, or essence/existence composites as one would like, but such an imagined series of previous causes does not itself explain the movement, causal efficacy, or existence present in the series. What is required to account for the movement of the secondary movers, for the causal efficacy of intermediate causes, for the existence of essence/existence composites, is something that itself is not a secondary mover, that itself is not an intermediate cause, that itself is not an essence/existence composite, but a primary mover, first cause, and a being whose essence and existence are identical.

The foregoing considerations, to my mind, offer a sound justification of Thomas's reasoning in the *De Ente* concerning the *per aliud* principle and the undesirability of an infinite regress. It should be clear that Thomas is not arguing for a first cause where 'first' is understood in a mathematical sense, but for a primary or fundamental cause. This differs from a first cause (in the mathematical sense) insofar as a primary cause is that from which all causal efficacy is derived, whereas a first cause (in the mathematical sense) is that which merely gives the first nudge to the series. The latter is most certainly not Thomas's position, since Thomas aims to establish the existence of some cause that itself accounts for the causal efficacy present in the series; such a cause does not just give the first nudge to the series, such a cause animates the entire series.

The cause of existence of essence/existence composites is not another essence/existence composite; for an essence/existence composite cannot genuinely cause existence, rather, it can only pass on the existence that it possesses as distinct from its essence. Properly speaking, to be a cause of existence is to originate existence, but what merely has existence does not originate existence, in which case essence/existence composites, which merely have existence, cannot originate existence. Thus, even if we can have an infinite series of essence/existence composites causing other essence/existence composites, such a series does not explain the origination of existence in the first place; rather, existence is something possessed and passed along the infinite

chain. For the origination of existence, we need something distinct from the chain of essence/existence composites itself. Furthermore, a free floating essence/existence composite (or perhaps plural: composites), no matter how powerful or how profound, cannot be the cause of existence, since if it is composed of essence and existence, then it possesses existence from some extrinsic principle, in which case it does not originate existence, but merely passes on the existence that it distinctly possesses. Moreover, one cannot postulate the notion of some uncaused essence/existence composite distinct from the infinite chain, for, from what we have seen of the *De Ente*, if it is composed of essence and existence, then its existence is derived from some extrinsic principle, in which case it is not uncaused. Thus, either we have an unexplained series of essence/existence composites, or we have uncaused existence itself; the former cannot originate existence, the latter *is* existence and is thereby capable of originating existence in the causal chain.

Given that an essentially ordered series of causes cannot lead to infinity, in which case one must come upon some cause that possesses in itself the causal efficacy of the series as a whole, I see Thomas's argument for the existence of God in the *De Ente*, when augmented with his later thinking on infinite causal regression, as both logically coherent and philosophically sound. He begins with the real distinction between essence and existence in finite entities. From there he infers that insofar as essence and existence are distinct in such beings, there must be a cause for the existence that each and every being distinctly possesses. But this causal reasoning cannot lead to infinity (as we have seen through a consideration of later argumentation), thus it must be the case that what does not possess existence essentially, i.e. what exists *per aliud*, can be traced back to what exists *per se*; in which case there exists a being whose essence is identical with its existence, which is God. Although Thomas's appeal to the *per aliud* principle had to be augmented with his later argumentation against an infinite causal series, I see such augmentation as being in accord with the underlying principles of the argumentation in the *De Ente*, and I thus hold that there is a *prima facie* plausibility to Thomas's proof for the existence of God in the *De Ente*.

2. Criticisms

In presenting criticisms of the foregoing argument, I shall only consider criticisms of the details of Thomas's argumentation. Beyond criticisms of such details, one could question Thomas's entire epistemological framework within which the argument is found. Thomas presupposes that we can have

knowledge of the world as it is in itself, and that such knowledge can lead to a metaphysics which is capable of drawing conclusions about the world. These are questionable presuppositions the addressing of which would lead me far beyond a demonstration of God's existence. I here presuppose epistemological realism and the validity of speculative metaphysics in drawing conclusions about the world. Criticisms adduced against the latter two presuppositions are more than just criticisms of some particular argument for the existence of God, they are criticisms of an entire philosophical framework, and they can only be rebuffed through the careful exploration of their own presuppositions, reasoning, and conclusions and the erection of an opposing philosophical system; I do not attempt such a task in this article. What I propose is that if one accepts that we can know the world as it is in itself and if one accepts that speculative metaphysics can bring us to true conclusions about the world, then one must also accept the argument for the existence of God in *De Ente* Cap. IV. Thus, we move on to consider criticisms of the argument.

2.1. The Causal Inference to God's Existence.

It will be recalled that Thomas employs as a principle that what is *per aliud* can be causally reduced to what is *per se*, and that this principle is established by an appeal to the impossibility of an infinite regress of essentially ordered causes. It follows that any objection to the impossibility of an infinite regress of such causes will be an objection to the *per aliud* principle, and if such an objection holds, then the argumentation in the *De Ente* breaks down.

In what follows, I shall focus on objections to the idea that an infinite regress of causes is impossible. Given the proliferation of many and various cosmological arguments most of which depend on a denial of an infinite regress, there are just as many and just as various refutations of the denial of an infinite regress. Discussion of infinite causal regression tends to be conducted within the framework of the principle of sufficient reason (PSR): everything that is the case must have a reason for its being the case.⁴² Thomas in general accepts PSR; indeed the opening stage of the argument for God's existence affirms it: a thing possesses some characteristic either as a result of its intrinsic principles (its essence) or as a result of some extrinsic principle (an external cause). However, the argument for God in the *De Ente* is not based on a full acceptance of PSR, but only on a species thereof (the causal principle). Thus, not all objections to PSR are objections to the argumentation in the *De Ente*;

⁴² Alexander Pruss, *The Principle of Sufficient Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) p. 3. Pruss's work provides a valuable assessment of this principle and touches on many of the issues dealt with in this article.

only those objections to PSR as applied to the causal principle can be construed as objections to the argumentation in the *De Ente*. Thus, in what follows, I shall only consider objections to a causal PSR.

I have been unable to locate specific refutations of the *per aliud* principle as it functions in the argument in the *De Ente*; and so, I have gathered together denials of the impossibility of an infinite regress that, I believe, touch upon the *per aliud* principle as it is found in the *De Ente*.

2.1.1. Paul Edwards.

Edwards's thinking on infinite causal regression and explanation is presented in his classic article 'The Cosmological Argument'.⁴³ The central thrust of Edwards's position is that infinite causal regression explains the present existence of the universe better than any appeal to a necessary or self-existing being (whether that being is the universe itself or God).

Edwards begins in his first section by focussing on Aquinas's general argumentation against an infinite regress; this argumentation focuses on the nature of causality and holds that to remove the first cause would be to render all other causes causally inefficacious, so much so that there would be no final effect to any such series of causes (see n. 41 above for instances in which Thomas employs this argumentation). As is clear, for Thomas the believer in an infinite regress denies the existence of a first member of a causal series, in which case he or she denies the existence of any subsequent member in that series. Edwards points out a basic flaw in this reasoning. He claims that it fails to distinguish between the statements: (i) *A* did not exist, and (ii) *A* is not uncaused. The believer in an infinite regress is committed to (ii) but not to (i). In other words, the believer in an infinite causal series is not denying that *A* exists, he or she is denying that *A* is the first in any causal series. He or she is not taking away *A*, rather, he or she is taking away the privileged status of *A* as the first member of the series. Thus, insofar as the believer in an infinite regress is not taking *A* away, he or she is not removing whatever follows from *A*, such as *B*, or *C*, or *D* etc, in which case he or she is not denying the present existence of whatever follows from *A*.⁴⁴

⁴³ This was originally published in *The Rationalist Annual* (1959), now reprinted in *Philosophy of Religion: A Guide and Anthology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), ed. Brian Davies, Chapter 18, from which I here cite.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 203: "...The believer in the infinite series is not "taking A away". He is taking away the privileged status of A; he is taking away its "first causeness". He does not deny the existence of A or of any particular member of the series. He denies that A or anything else is the first member of the series. Since he is not taking A away, he is not taking B

This reasoning is hardly effective against Aquinas; Edwards himself recognises this and moves immediately onto section two wherein he clarifies his refutation. Before moving on, it will be helpful to point out why this reasoning is ineffective against Aquinas. Edwards is here thinking of a first cause as something mathematically first in a series of causes. Thus, he points out that the believer in an infinite regress merely removes the firstness of *A*, but he or she does not remove *A*. Aquinas, as noted, when denying the possibility of an infinite regress, is not thinking of a first cause as the first in a mathematical series; rather, he takes a first cause to be that upon which some derived causal characteristic depends. Thus, in the *De Ente*, the first cause in the series is existence itself, on which the existence of all essence/existence composites depends. To deny this type of cause is not to deny its firstness, but to deny its actual presence in the causal series as originating existence in that series; and to deny the presence of the first cause in the causal series is precisely to remove the first cause from the series and thereby the causal efficacy (the existence) of the series. Furthermore, Edwards does not distinguish between an accidentally ordered series and an essentially ordered series. Indeed, he provides an example of a causal chain of fathers producing sons,⁴⁵ and this suggests that he is thinking of an accidentally ordered causal series, since the fathers in such a series need not act simultaneously in order to produce the final effect: the present existence of the son.⁴⁶ It is not the latter type of series that Thomas denies but a regress of essentially ordered causes. And given the dependency of all causes on a first cause in an essentially ordered series, to remove the first cause from the series of causes is not to remove the firstness of the cause, but precisely to remove the causal efficacy (the existence) of the series of causes as a whole.

In section two, Edwards restates the Thomist case with a little more clarity. Herein he discusses different types of causes and recognises that for the Thomist there can be an infinite regress of one type but not of another. The two types of causes that Edwards distinguishes are the following: causes *in fieri* and causes *in esse*. A cause *in fieri* is simply a factor that helped to bring an effect into existence, whereas a cause *in esse* is a factor that sustains or helps to sustain the effect in being.⁴⁷ Clearly Edwards is here distinguishing between causes in an accidentally ordered series and those in an essentially

away, and thus he is also not taking X, Y, or Z away. His view, then, does not commit him to the absurdity that nothing exists now...'.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 202 — 203.

⁴⁶ Thomas himself considers such a chain of causes an accidentally ordered series, cf. *Summa Theologie*, Ia, qu. 46, art. 2, ad. 7.

⁴⁷ Edwards, 'The Cosmological Argument', p. 204.

ordered series. In an accidentally ordered series, a cause need not sustain its effect in being; so a father brings his son into being, but his act of bringing his son into being does not sustain his son in being. In an essentially ordered series, a cause sustains its effect in being; so the soul moves the hand, the hand the stick, and the stick the stone, each cause in the preceding series sustains its effect in being. Edwards does not state it, but it appears that he is articulating the fact that in an essentially ordered series, causes act simultaneously.⁴⁸

Edwards concedes that the Thomist need not be committed to the impossibility of an infinity of causes *in fieri*; rather, the Thomist is committed to the impossibility of an infinity of causes *in esse*. However, Edwards contends that it is quite implausible to hold that all natural objects require a cause *in esse*, that is to say, it is implausible to suggest that all natural objects are properly located within an essentially ordered causal series. He concedes that human life is sustained by air, and that air is sustained in its place by gravitational forces. But beyond gravitational forces, at the level of particles and atoms, it is difficult to determine what these are sustained by; and given the difficulty of the latter, it is difficult to determine the causes *in esse* of things like particles and atoms.⁴⁹ Edwards contends that unless one is already convinced of the need for a primary cause, we should not suppose that there is a cause *in esse* for things like particles and atoms; since, according to Edwards, it is not at all evident that things of the latter sort cannot be uncaused.

In response, I would begin by pointing out that Edwards has not shown that there cannot be a cause *in esse* of particles and atoms; he has simply pointed out that it is difficult to state what such a cause would be. But difficulty in accounting for the nature of the cause does not exclude the need for positing such a cause. Only if such things as particles and atoms were uncaused could we deny the need for a cause *in esse* of such things. Edwards's suggestion is that 'it is not at all evident...that these particles cannot be

⁴⁸ He provides the example of holding a book in one's hand as an instance of a cause *in esse* and this example appears to concede the simultaneity condition of an essentially ordered series; the book's being propped up is simultaneous with the activity of the hand holding it, see 'The Cosmological Argument', p. 204.

⁴⁹ Edwards, 'The Cosmological Argument', pp. 205 — 206: 'It is far from plausible...to claim that all natural objects require a cause *in esse*. It may be granted that the air around us is a cause *in esse* of human life and further that certain gravitational forces are among the causes *in esse* of the air being where it is. But when we come to gravitational forces or, at any rate, to material particles like atoms or electrons it is difficult to see what cause *in esse* they require'.

uncaused'.⁵⁰ However, given what we have seen from the *De Ente*, I contend that it is very evident that such things cannot be uncaused.

As we have seen in the *De Ente*, whatever is composed of essence and existence depends on another for its existence; this is because no essence/existence composite possesses existence as a result of its intrinsic nature, otherwise it would not be an essence/existence composite. Now, we know that things are essence/existence composites insofar as they are multiple; for nothing whose essence is its existence could be multiple. If we grant the multiplicity of particles and atoms, then we must grant that whatever intrinsic nature a particle or atom may have, it is not its own existence, in which case such things are composites of essence and existence. But if they are composites of essence and existence, then they do not possess existence as a result of their intrinsic principles, but from some extrinsic principle, some cause. Consequently, it is evident that such things as particles and atoms are not uncaused. Thus, against Edwards, there is a cause *in esse* for particles and atoms, whatever that cause might be.

There might yet however be something to the objection with which Edwards began. He claims that if all else fails, reconstructing the denial of an infinite regress in terms of causes *in fieri* and causes *in esse*, does not remove the original objection, that the believer in the infinite series is not removing the first cause *in esse*, rather he or she is removing its firstness; that is to say, the believer in an infinite series is denying a privileged place to any one cause in a series of causes *in esse*. And so, the same conclusion as before, Thomas and his followers have confused the removal of a first cause with the denial of its being uncaused, and such is to render the argumentation against an infinite causal regress fallacious.

I respond thus. To say that there is no first cause in an essentially ordered series is not simply to deny its firstness, it is to deny its role as that on which the members of that series depend for some derived causal characteristic. In the language of the *De Ente*, to deny a first cause of existence is not simply to deny the firstness of the cause, it is to deny the presence of a cause of existence in the chain of essence/existence composites, in which case existence has no originating cause in that chain. But if existence has no originating cause in the chain of essence/existence composites, then none of the members of that chain will exist. To accept Edwards's proposal that we can consistently deny a first cause in an essentially ordered series of causes and thereby affirm an infinite chain of such causes is to deny that we have a cause of existence for the members of that chain, and this is to deny the very

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 206.

existence of the members of the chain. Thus, in affirming an infinite chain of essentially ordered causes, Edwards would have us deny the existence of that chain. And so, in the end, both Aquinas (explicitly) and Edwards (implicitly) deny the existence of an infinite chain of essentially ordered causes.

We now turn to section three of Edwards's article. Herein he deals with an objection to an infinite series of causes to the effect that such a series leaves something unexplained, that is, even if we have an infinite series of caused causes, there remains something that has not been explained: the series itself. Edwards points out that this is to presuppose that the series itself is something over and above the members of which it is composed. The standard objection to this presupposition is the Humean one and it goes as follows.⁵¹ Take any causal series, if we can offer a causal explanation of each member of that series, there is nothing additional left to be explained about the series, we in fact have an explanation of the series and do not need to postulate the cause of the series as a whole.⁵² Thus, in any infinite causal series, the prior cause is taken to offer an explanation of the posterior cause; insofar as the series goes to infinity, there are an infinite number of prior causes themselves offering explanations of an infinite number of posterior causes. Every member of the causal series is explained in such a scenario, in which case nothing further is required to be explained. As Campbell points out, in this regard, an infinite series of causes does not conflict with PSR, since every member of the series has an explanation.⁵³

In considering this objection, we must be careful not to assume that the causal series is itself something distinct from the individuals that compose it. Those who argue that just as the members of any causal series require a cause, so too does the series itself, seem to make the following (undefended) presupposition: that a series, taken to be over and above its members, will display the same characteristics as its members. However, one could object that just because the members of the series require a cause does not imply that the series itself will require a cause. From what we have seen of the argument for God in the *De Ente*, I do not believe that we need to hold that the series of

⁵¹ Joseph Campbell offers a robust defence of this objection in 'Hume's Refutation of the Cosmological Argument', *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 40:3 (1996), §. 4, pp. 164 — 167.

⁵² Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, Part IX, p. 56: 'Did I show you the particular causes of each individual in a collection of twenty particles of matter, I should think it very unreasonable should you afterwards ask me what was the cause of the whole twenty. This is sufficiently explained in explaining the cause of the parts'.

⁵³ Campbell, 'Hume's Refutation of the Cosmological Argument', p. 164. See Alexander Pruss, *The Principle of Sufficient Reason*, pp. 41 — 50 for a presentation of this objection (what he calls the Hume-Edwards-Campbell principle) and refutation.

causes is itself something over and above its members. This is not to suggest that the series is *not* something over and above its members; only that the argumentation in the *De Ente* as I have interpreted it need not make that pre-supposition in order to succeed. It does not appear to be the case that in any series of essence/existence composites the series itself is an essence/existence composite requiring a cause of its existence. So, with Hume, Edwards, and Campbell, we can grant that the series of causes is nothing more than a series of individuals. We are then left with the objection that if the series itself is not something that requires a cause for its existence, then why is not an explanation of each member in an infinite series a sufficient explanation?

Let us again consider an infinite series of essence/existence composites and ask ourselves whether such a series leaves nothing unexplained. In such a series, each essence/existence composite is the cause of another essence/existence composite, and this is true for every member of the infinite series. On Hume's account (adopted by Edwards and Campbell), in this case, we have a sufficient explanation of every member of the series; and lest we revert to thinking of the series as something over and above its members, we should not look for a cause distinct from the series. However, in an infinite series of essence/existence composites, existence has not been explained. Existence has been merely *presupposed* as something that the members of that series possess and pass on to every other member of the series. But the origin of existence has not been dealt with. Either existence originated in the series or it did not; if the former, then what is the cause of existence? If the latter, then none of the members of the series exists. The proposal of an infinite series of essence/existence composites causing the existence of other essence/existence composites does not account for the reality of existence in that series. No essence/existence composite can originate existence, since whatever such a composite is it is surely not its existence, in which case it is dependent on another for its existence. Therefore, essence/existence composites merely pass on the existence that they receive from another. But if such a series goes to infinity, we have an infinite series of essence/existence composites passing on the existence that they receive from another; and on this account, the reality of existence is merely presupposed and not accounted for, in which case one cannot honour PSR with an infinite series of essence/existence composites.⁵⁴ Every effect in an infinite series of essence/existence composites is *not* fully

⁵⁴ One could of course reject PSR, but Hume, Edwards, and Campbell all believe that one can honour PSR with an infinite series of caused causes. On my account, if the caused causes are essence/existence composites, then the reality of existence in such as series is presupposed and never explained, in which case PSR is violated.

accounted for by postulating a previous cause of its existence, since existence has nowhere been accounted for but everywhere presupposed.

The same reasoning is applicable to infinite sets of causal series. Say we have one set *A*, which comprises a series (finite or infinite) of caused causes, and set *B* which as well as comprising its own series of causes (finite or infinite) also acts as the cause of existence for set *A*; say we have set *C* standing in the same relationship to *B* as *B* does to *A*, and *D* standing in the same relationship to *C* as *C* does to *B* and so on to infinity.⁵⁵ One might suggest that we have given an adequate explanation of the existence possessed by every member (every set) of the series, but on this model, at no point do we have the origination of existence, but the presupposition and the passing on of existence. The origination of existence has yet to be explained. What accounts for the origination of existence? Either it is eternal and presupposed by every causal series, which is Aquinas's conclusion, or it is nothing, in which case none of the causal series exist. Now, I suspect that Hume, Edwards, and Campbell are not prepared to accept the latter, in which case we are led to the former, Aquinas's conclusion.

2.1.2 Christopher Williams.

In a very short article, Christopher Williams contends that Aquinas's argumentation against an infinite regress of moved movers in the *prima via*, itself presupposes what it seeks to prove, i.e. that there is in fact a first cause.⁵⁶ The argumentation that Williams considers is the following:

This cannot proceed to infinity; for then there would be no first mover, and consequently there would be no other mover, since secondary movers (*moventia secunda*) do not move unless they are moved by a first mover.⁵⁷

Thomas's reasoning in this regard has already been analysed in §. 1.3, and it is to the effect that unless there were some first mover that imparts motion to others, nothing else would be moved, there would be no secondary movers.

⁵⁵ On p. 166, Campbell advances this kind of model as an objection against Rowe.

⁵⁶ C.J.F Williams, “*Hic autem non est procedure in infinitum...*”, *Mind*, 69 (1960), pp. 403 — 405. Anthony Kenny makes the same objection to Thomas's arguments against an infinite regress in both the first and second ways of *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, qu. 2, art. 3. See Kenny, *The Five Ways*, pp. 26 — 27 (for the first way), and p. 44 (for the second way).

⁵⁷ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, qu. 2, art. 3.

Williams contends that in speaking of primary and secondary movers, Thomas already presupposes the impossibility of an infinite series; for we can only describe movers as primary or secondary if we know that there is a finite series of movers in which there is a primary mover and differentiated from this are secondary movers, and this is to presuppose the impossibility of an infinite regress.⁵⁸ Williams argues that the equation of 'second movers' with 'movers other than the first mover' is a failure to recognise a third type of mover, proper to an infinite series of moved movers. Thus, Thomas's argumentation for the impossibility of an infinite series presupposes that very impossibility before it even begins, in which case it begs the question.⁵⁹ Williams thus makes two important criticisms: (i) one cannot even speak of secondary movers without thereby presupposing the existence of a primary mover from which to differentiate them, and this is to presuppose the impossibility of an infinite regress; (ii) Thomas has not taken into consideration a third type of causality, distinct from the primary and the secondary, a type of causality proper to an infinite series.

With regard to the first charge, that in even speaking of primary and secondary causes, Thomas has presupposed the impossibility of an infinite series, Williams claims that it is a necessary condition for understanding secondary movers to be secondary that one presupposes a primary mover from which to differentiate them, and this is to presuppose the impossibility of an infinite regress of movers. In my interpretation of Thomas's argumentation in the *De Ente*, I applied Thomas's reasoning with regard to the impossibility of an infinite regress of causes to the principle that what is *per aliud* is reducible to what is *per se*. So, as applied, one could modify Williams's first criticism and hold, against Thomas, that even to talk of a *per aliud* presupposes a *per se* from which to differentiate it, and this presupposes a denial of an infinite series of causes. Thus, Thomas presumes what he seeks to prove, that an infinite series of things that are *per aliud* is impossible. It is imperative then that the *per aliud* can be characterised in isolation from the *per se*, otherwise Thomas would be equating things that are other than the *per se* with the *per aliud*, as Williams puts it: 'It equates "movers other than a first mover" and "second movers"'; and this would be to presuppose the impossibility of an

⁵⁸ Williams, "*Hic autem non est procedure in infinitum...*", p. 403: 'For not until we know that such a series is impossible can we know that all movers are properly described either as "a first mover" or as "second movers". This, however, is precisely what the argument assumes. It equates "movers other than the first mover" and "second movers"'.

⁵⁹ Ibid: 'It fails to recognise the possibility of a third class of movers, those, namely, which belong to an infinite series of moved movers. Thus, to presuppose the impossibility of the infinite series in the premises of the argument is to commit *petitio principii*'.

infinite regress, since, in the context of the *De Ente* the *per se* (the primary mover) would seem to be a necessary condition for characterising the *per aliud* (the secondary mover).

Irrespective of whether or not *moventia secunda* in the *prima via* can be understood without presupposing some *primum movens*, it is quite clear that Thomas, in the *De Ente*, is able to characterise what is *per aliud* (the *De Ente*'s *secunda moventia*) without presupposing the existence of what is *per se* (the *De Ente*'s *primum movens*).⁶⁰ What is *per aliud* is that in which there is a distinction between essence and existence, what is *per se* is that in which there is no such distinction. As we have seen in §. 1.2, owing to the impossibility of multiplying a being in which essence and existence are identical, there must be a real distinction in beings that are multiple. In order to argue for the latter, Thomas certainly does consider the hypothesis of a being in which essence and existence are identical, but crucially that presupposition enters in only as a hypothesis; *irrespective* of the existence of a being in which essence and existence are identical, there is a real distinction between essence and existence in multiple beings.

Now, the foregoing stage of the *De Ente* precedes the argument for God's existence. Thus, by the time that we reach the argument for God's existence, it has been established, without presupposing the existence of God, that there are beings that are *per aliud*, i.e. things in which essence and existence are distinct. Thus, at the opening of the argument for God's existence, the nature of the *per aliud* has been established without presupposing the existence of the *per se* from which to differentiate it. But if the latter is the case, then the modified charge of Williams, that the existence of the *per se* must be presupposed in order even to speak of the *per aliud* and this as presupposing the impossibility of an infinite regress, does not touch the argumentation in the *De Ente*. Given Thomas's strong notion of what is *per aliud*, and this without any presupposition of the existence of the *per se* nor of the impossibility of an infinite regress, I submit that one can coherently apply Thomas's thought on essentially ordered causes to the causal relationship that obtains amongst beings that are *per aliud* and arrive at the existence of a being that is

⁶⁰ Wippel argues (*The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, p. 423) that in their consideration of Thomas's treatment of primary and secondary movers, Williams and Kenny have missed the point; for Thomas takes a first mover to be, not something numerically first in a series of movers, but something that does not depend on anything else for its motion. On the other hand, a secondary mover is taken to be something that does depend on something else for its motion, and this can be conceived without recourse to a first mover. Thus, in Wippel's view, the objection of Williams and Kenny does not touch Thomas's reasoning concerning an infinite series of moved movers.

per se. Consequently, Thomas's argumentation in the *De Ente* withstands the modified version of Williams's critique.

Now, insofar as Williams's first criticism fails, and an infinite regress of causes that receive their existence from another can be shown to be impossible without begging the question, Thomas need not concern himself with a type of causality proper to an infinite causal series; for such a series has been shown to be an impossibility, in which case there is no type of causality proper to that series. Thus, Williams's second objection, that Thomas has not considered a form of causality proper to an infinite causal series, need not bother the Thomist, since it can be successfully shown, without begging the question, that an infinite causal series of the appropriate kind is a *per se* impossibility, in which case one need not consider a type of cause proper to that series.

We have dealt in some depth with several challenges to Aquinas's rejection of an infinite causal regress. These objections are significant insofar as they have pushed and prodded Aquinas's reasoning from many different angles. In all cases it was shown that Aquinas's argumentation is resilient enough to withstand such attacks. Overall, the objections did not take into consideration Aquinas's main contention that no essence/existence composite can originate existence, since if it could it would not be composed of essence and existence; for all such composites receive and thereby do not originate existence. We must now deal with one final objection and this is to the effect that whatever can be said about the cogency of Aquinas's argumentation, it leads us to postulate an absurd conclusion: a being that is being itself.

2.2. Kenny

In his little book, *Aquinas on Being*, Kenny subjects Aquinas's metaphysical thought to a devastating critique. I shall not enter into the debate over Kenny's interpretation of Aquinas's thought in this regard; rather, I shall focus on Kenny's treatment of the argument for the existence of God in the *De Ente*.⁶¹

Kenny begins with a cursory and somewhat haphazard presentation of the argument. He recognises that Thomas opens with the affirmation that whatever belongs to a thing is a result of (Kenny, p. 40: 'caused by') its intrinsic principles (Kenny: 'the constituents of its nature') or a result of some external principle (Kenny: 'element'). Kenny then claims that Thomas holds that *esse* cannot be an effect of a thing's nature, since that would mean that a

⁶¹ For treatments of Kenny's critique of Aquinas, see Long, 'Aquinas on Being and Logicism', and Gyula Klima, 'On Kenny on Aquinas on Being: A Critical Review of *Aquinas on Being* by Anthony Kenny', *International Philosophical Quarterly* 44:4 (2004). Kenny's treatment of the argument for God in the *De Ente* is on pp. 40 — 45.

thing is its own cause. Thus, *esse* is derived from something else. Omitting any mention of Thomas's appeal to the *per aliud* principle, Kenny immediately moves onto Thomas's conclusion that there must be a being that is the cause of *esse* for all things, since it is *esse* itself; otherwise there would be an infinite regress of causes.

Immediately, I would point out that in omitting any mention of the *per aliud* principle, Kenny has fundamentally weakened Thomas's argument. As Kenny presents it, Thomas employs a premise to the effect that things in which essence and existence are composed cannot cause their own existence. He then presents Thomas as moving immediately to the conclusion that the existence of such things is derived from a being that is being itself; otherwise an infinite regress of causes would ensue. By removing any reference to the *per aliud* principle, but retaining Thomas's appeal to the impossibility of an infinite regress *after* the conclusion to a being that is being itself, Kenny fundamentally misrepresents Aquinas's argument. Thomas's appeal to the *per aliud* principle is central in his inference from essence/existence composites to the existence of a being that is being itself. Only if what is *per aliud* can be traced back to what is *per se* can Thomas conclude to the actual existence of the latter. Granted, Kenny does retain the appeal to the impossibility of an infinite regress, but he does not connect it to the *per aliud* principle, which is central in leading Thomas to the conclusion that there exists a being that is being itself. Kenny's presentation of the argument therefore removes the central plank of Thomas's reasoning; for without the appeal to the *per aliud* principle, Thomas has no means for moving from essence/existence composites to *esse tantum*. This is a major interpretative oversight on Kenny's behalf, and one that enters into his criticism of the argument.

Kenny's central criticism is that we cannot make sense of Aquinas's notion of *esse tantum*, or as Kenny refers to it, subsistent existence. He takes the term 'existence' and inquires into what it could mean in this instance. He begins by suggesting that it might mean what we would call in a post-Fregean climate specific existence, i.e. that which instantiates a certain description and thereby permits us to say: 'There is a...' or 'There are...'. The latter notion of existence can only be applied to some universal description or species, since it implies that the universal or species is instantiated; it cannot be applied to an individual, such as Julius Caesar, since, even though Caesar is an instantiation of some species, his existence is not the existence of the species but of an individual of that species. Thus, Caesar has (or more properly had) individual existence.

Kenny here is referring to the doctrine of first and second order predicates, a doctrine familiar in a post-Fregean philosophical climate. Specific

existence is a second order predicate, not properly attributable to any individual, but is what instantiates some description. Individual existence is a first order predicate, since it is something genuinely predicable of some subject (such as Caesar) and is not just what instantiates that subject.⁶²

Kenny then inquires as to what Aquinas could mean when he states that God's essence is His existence. Is God's essential existence specific existence or individual existence?

Kenny says that the 'fact' that the argument for God is supported by the *intellectus essentiae* argument suggests that Aquinas had specific existence in mind.⁶³ If we recall, the *intellectus essentiae* argument distinguished between our understanding of a man or a phoenix and the actual existence of such. Thus, the *intellectus essentiae* argument, on Kenny's reading, is concerned with the distinction between some species (man, phoenix) and its instantiation. Let us also recall that Kenny believes that the real distinction is established at the *intellectus essentiae* stage, and it is such a distinction that enters in at the first stage of Aquinas's argument for God. Now, if the conclusion that God's essence is His existence is taken to be referring to specific existence, then we shall have an ill-formed formula; for we shall have specific existence, what is meant to instantiate a species, with no species to be instantiated. On this interpretation, what Thomas proposes is free floating specific existence instantiating nothing. And this is absurd.

Perhaps we could weaken the claim and hold not that God's essence is His existence, but that His essence entails His existence. But this would lead to the ontological argument, since it would suggest that God's existence can be deduced from an understanding of His essence. And Aquinas certainly does not defend an ontological argument in the *De Ente*.

Failing any intelligible formulation of the conclusion on the basis of specific existence, perhaps we could say that Thomas is referring to individual existence. This claim is certainly intelligible, since we can say that God's existence is something that He possesses as an essential attribute, whereas other things do not, they come into existence and cease to exist. However, if Thomas here means that God's existence is something that God essentially possesses, an atheist could support this conclusion and still claim that there is no God. The atheist can grant that when we consider the concept of God, if there is such a being, then its existence is essential to it. But the atheist claims

⁶² Kenny, *Aquinas on Being*, p. 43: 'It is correct to say that statements of specific existence are not to be regarded as predications about any individual. Statements of individual existence, on the other hand, are genuine predications about what their subject-term stands for...'.

⁶³ Ibid.

precisely that the antecedent of this conditional remains to be proved; for the question remains: is there such a being? Furthermore, the notion that God's essence is His existence, whereby the latter is understood to be individual existence, states nothing more than that for God to exist is for God to be God.⁶⁴ Again, the atheist will have no problem with such a statement, but will hold that God has not yet been demonstrated as existing; for we can say that for a dog to exist is for a dog to be a dog, or for a unicorn to exist is for a unicorn to be a unicorn, but this does not entail the actual existence of dogs or unicorns, no more than God's essential existence entails His actual existence.

Overall then, Kenny argues that in holding that God's essence is His existence, Thomas must mean either specific existence or individual existence. If he means the former, then the doctrine of God's essential existence is an ill-formed formula and must be rejected. If he means individual existence, then Thomas has no more demonstrated the existence of God than one has demonstrated the existence of a unicorn by stating that for a unicorn to exist is for it to be a unicorn.

In response I shall address the issue of individual existence first. As I have already noted, in omitting any reference to the *per aliud* principle, Kenny misrepresents (and fundamentally weakens) Aquinas's argument. Without the *per aliud* principle, Aquinas's argument reads like an immediate inference from creatures to God; a kind of argument to the best explanation. However, if we include the *per aliud* principle, Aquinas's argument is a deductive proof for the existence of God and not just some intuitive inference. If we grant the cogency of the *per aliud* principle (which Kenny does not deny), then we must grant that Thomas validly reasons to the actual existence of a being in which essence and existence are identical. Thus, any interpretation of what existence could be for such a being must not render the existence of such a being doubtful. But interpreting God's existence as individual existence does indeed render God's existence doubtful, since, as Kenny demonstrates, it leaves us with the following proposition: *if God exists, then His existence is identical to His essence*. But, assuming the cogency of the *per aliud* principle, Thomas has arrived at the actual existence of God, in which case we are in no doubt as to whether or not God exists; rather, we know in fact that God exists. Thus, Thomas cannot here be taken to be referring to individual existence.⁶⁵

We now move on to consider specific existence. On Kenny's interpretation of it, the argument for God's existence seems to take existence to be

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 45.

⁶⁵ It should also be clear that, insofar as it is a deductive demonstration appealing to the notion of causality, the argument in *De Ente* Cap. 4 does not proceed on the ontological basis that God's essence entails His existence.

specific existence; since, for Kenny, it is based on the real distinction, which is in turn based on the *intellectus essentiae* argument. Thus, the argument for God's existence is based on the distinction between a species and the instantiation of that species. And the charge then is that the conclusion, *esse tantum*, is an ill-formed formed formula. However, as I have noted in some detail, the *intellectus essentiae* argument is not the only argument advanced for the real distinction. On my interpretation, we conclude to the real distinction at stage two of the argumentation in the *De Ente*, through considering the impossibility of multiplying subsistent existence; and it is on such a distinction that the argument for God (stage three) is based. Now, the latter type of distinction does not appear to be a distinction between a species and what instantiates the species, since the distinction established at stage two distinguishes between essence and existence as two real principles of the finite entity, whereas specific existence, what instantiates a species, does not appear to refer to a principle of a finite entity, but to the mere 'fact' of a thing's being a member of some species. Given that the argument for God is based on the real distinction of essence and existence where these are two distinct principles of a finite thing, I do not think it is fair to argue, as Kenny does, that the existence being discussed in the argument is specific existence. Consequently, when Thomas holds that God's essence is His existence, Thomas is not holding that God is specific existence.

So, when claiming that God's essence is His existence, Aquinas is referring neither to specific existence nor to individual existence, in which case Kenny's arguments are misguided. Perhaps, influenced by Kenny, one might ask: well then, what sort of existence is Thomas referring to? This brings up a methodological feature of Kenny's book that has not gone unnoticed by commentators. In *Aquinas on Being*, Kenny seems to wish to straightjacket Aquinas's metaphysical thought into a post-Fregean framework; if Aquinas's thought cannot be fitted into such a straightjacket, then the conclusion that Kenny draws is that Thomas's thought is confused and absurd. One problem with Kenny's methodological procedure makes itself felt, and it is that, convinced that the meaning of existence must be squeezed into the Fregean categories that he lays out for Aquinas, Kenny fails to treat of Thomas's notion of the analogy of being.⁶⁶ According to Aquinas, being is proportioned to the entity of which it is predicated; whatever the entity might be, its being is proper to the kind of entity it is. Should the analogy of being turn up types of existence that are neither specific nor individual, then, rather than assume that Aquinas is confused or making absurd conclusions, we should draw the

⁶⁶ Long is quite forceful in this respect in 'Aquinas on Being and Logicism'.

striking conclusion that Thomas's metaphysical thought cannot be squeezed into the categories that Kenny lays out for him.

Nevertheless, all of this does not answer the question as to what existence could mean when said of a being that is being itself. The analogy of being does raise a thorny issue for the Thomist. Given that being is proportioned to the essence of which it is the being, we can differentiate different instances of being as we can distinguish different essences possessing being. This presupposes a knowledge of the essence of the entity of which being is predicated. With regard to God, we have no knowledge of His essence. Therefore, we cannot state the type of existence He enjoys. The charge then is that if we cannot state the type of existence that God enjoys, we cannot say anything intelligible about God. And so Thomas's conclusion viz. a being that is being itself is unintelligible.

In response, I would point out that before we know *what* something is we can indeed know *that* it is. In other words, we can know that some given entity exists, without knowing what it is. To my mind, Thomas's argument for the existence of God in the *De Ente* arrives at the conclusion that a being exists from which all being flows. All we can say about this being is that it is existence itself (otherwise the infinite regress of causes would not be terminated). Thomas is not here saying anything fundamental about the essence of God (indeed, he denies in later works direct essential knowledge of God), he is merely pointing out that there *is* such a being. And so, even though we cannot say what it is to exist for a being that is being itself, we can at least say that such a being actually exists, otherwise the infinite regress of causes would not be terminated.

All of the foregoing raises one final point concerning Kenny's criticisms. He did not criticise Thomas's actual argument, but the conclusion. Kenny argued that insofar as the conclusion does not fit into any of the categories that he (Kenny) determined for it, the conclusion is absurd; but this, to my mind, is a flawed methodological procedure. Before embarking on a demonstration, one does not (or should not) begin with a categorical framework within which that conclusion must be squeezed. To do so is to remove the possibility that a future conclusion could be used to provide a new and original categorical framework than the one employed to reach that conclusion. What Kenny does is argue that Thomas's conclusion does not fit into his (Kenny's) post-Fregean (non-Thomistic) categorical framework, and on that basis he excludes the conclusion of the argument accordingly. Such is to assume from the outset the impossibility of any success in Thomas's argument for God's existence, and this in itself seems to me a rather strong and unwarranted assumption.

3. Conclusion

We have come some way from an initial presentation of Aquinas's argumentation in the *De Ente*. As will be recalled, that argumentation began with the real distinction between essence and existence. It focussed on the existence that every finite being distinctly possesses and thence proceeded to infer the existence of a being that is being itself. The inference was made by an appeal to the principle that what is *per aliud* is reducible to what is *per se*, and the latter principle was established through a consideration of the impossibility of infinite causal regression. Initially, it was seen that Thomas's argumentation had a certain degree of plausibility to it. Nevertheless, several objections were considered. As is clear, none of the objections are decisive against the argument in the *De Ente*, in which case I hold that it successfully establishes the existence of a being that is being itself, and this is what we call God.

I find it remarkable that in this treatise, written quite early in Thomas's career (1252 — 1256), Thomas was able to elucidate what is, to my mind, perhaps the strongest and most convincing argument for the existence of God. As a metaphysical argument, it does not track developments in natural scientific thought. And as it is based on a principle the rejection of which would be self-immolative for the natural scientist (the real distinction), I can envisage no future scientific discovery that would invalidate the argument; since, unless natural science reasons to or provides good grounds for the existence of a being that is being itself, all of the entities with which natural science is concerned are composites of essence and existence, and therefore point to a cause of existence, and this is the first stage of Thomas's argument. Thomas's argument then focuses not on what the natural scientist studies, but on what the latter study presupposes, and that is existence.

One possible objection, not dealt with in this article, is the Humean one (brought to completion by Kant) to the effect that speculative metaphysics cannot provide us with conclusions about matters of fact, only about the relations that obtain amongst our ideas. An adequate response to this objection would be an article in itself, and would go beyond a defence of an argument for the existence of God. Indeed a defence of speculative metaphysics is likely to unite both atheist and theist to some degree. Nevertheless, my initial reaction to such an objection would be that the denial of the validity of speculative metaphysics is itself a claim of speculative metaphysics; since the claim is not that of any empirical observation (it is not a claim of natural science) but an interpretation of empirical observation. Such an interpretation makes a claim not about one particular domain of being, but about being as whole, and

this is to the effect that a science of being *qua* being, that is, a science of speculative metaphysics is impossible. But as this is a claim about being as a whole, i.e. a claim about being *qua* being, it is a claim of speculative metaphysics and is thereby self-defeating. As noted, I do not here offer a full defence of speculative metaphysics, the foregoing is merely my initial reaction to the Humean-Kantian objection, a reaction that requires further elucidation.⁶⁷

Setting aside for now the Humean-Kantian objection, we must consider the implications of the proof of God in the *De Ente*. What Thomas has in fact established might have gone unnoticed to the long suffering reader. Thomas has established that there is a single, immaterial, self-subsisting act of being. It is single insofar as a being whose essence is its existence could not be multiplied in any manner; it is immaterial insofar as the addition of matter to its essence would render it both multiplied and subject to generation and corruption; further to the latter point, it is self-subsisting insofar as it exists in virtue of what it is, not in virtue of anything outside of it. And if God is understood to be anything at all within the western tradition of philosophical theology, He is understood to be a single, immaterial, self-subsisting being.

⁶⁷ In 'Kant's Transcendental Idealism: A Hypothesis?', *International Philosophical Quarterly* 51:2 (2011), I argue that in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant's defence of transcendental idealism adopts certain metaphysical presuppositions embedded in the Copernican hypothesis, and this is to render his entire transcendental idealism hypothetical. I do not argue in that article for the validity of speculative metaphysics, but I do argue that Kant's transcendental idealism is incoherent, in which case I remove a major obstacle to a defence of speculative metaphysics.

Chapter 6 - The *Summa Contra Gentiles* and Aquinas's Way to God

There is to be found in Aquinas's writings a way to God which is his own and most personal. This way to God is the way from existence (*esse*) and arrives at God as pure existence itself, the fount of all being, without which nothing would be. It is deployed in several contexts ranging from the *De ente et essentia* to the *Summa theologiae* [ST]. Yet, in the *Summa contra gentiles* [SCG], it is peculiarly absent. The proofs of God's existence which Aquinas offers in the latter are almost exclusively drawn from Aristotle, and they do not exhibit any of the refined metaphysical thinking about *esse* that characterises Thomas's thinking about God in other works.¹ For a work that is intended to be both apologetical in nature and explicitly philosophical from the outset, this is strange. Thomas is always at home in his own metaphysics of *esse*, and he deploys it with ease and finesse especially when demonstrating God's existence and discussing the divine nature. But in the SCG his proofs of God's existence and the subsequent reasoning about the divine nature are awkward and, one could even say, clumsy. Why did he not just dispense with the Aristotelian thinking on motion and movers and all the clarifications that involves? Why not simply stick with his own favored account of act and potency interpreted in terms of the metaphysics of *esse*?

In the current paper I wish to address these issues. I shall begin with an account of what I take to be Aquinas's way to God and why I think it is his way to God. Having done that, I will then address the issue as to why this way to God does not appear in the SCG reasoning, but slowly emerges only after God's existence has been demonstrated. I shall conclude that the apologetical and consciously philosophical nature of the SCG offer us an insight into why Thomas did not lean on his metaphysics of *esse* in his (initial) discussions of God there.

¹ For the purposes of this article I will narrow my focus to the proofs of God offered in *Summa contra gentiles* [SCG] Lib. I, Cap. 13. I grant that a further proof of God is offered in Cap. 15 on the basis of necessity and contingency, and which anticipates the third way of *Summa theologiae* [ST] Ia, qu. 2, art. 3.

1. Aquinas's Way to God

Aquinas famously argues that there is a distinction between essence and *esse* in things. The context of this distinction is that of universal hylemorphism, which holds that in all composite things there are two principles: a principle of potency and a principle of actuality. In traditional Aristotelian fashion, defenders of universal hylemorphism held that the principle of actuality in a thing is its form, whereas the principle of potency is its matter.² All things other than God are composed of matter and form, since all things other than God have some element of potency. But to locate the potentiality of anything other than God in the matter of the thing creates a problem when it comes to separated substances (angels) and the immaterial rational soul. Such substances (or components of substances in the case of the rational soul) are taken to be separated from matter and all material conditions. Nonetheless they are created and thereby dependent on God, so they must have some potentiality.

So how do we attribute matter—that is, potency—to separate substances?

According to defenders of universal hylemorphism, the answer is to distinguish between corporeal matter and incorporeal matter. The former is the kind of physical matter that we typically take to be the matter of things, whereas the latter is a kind of non-physical matter which the separate substances possess. Thus, it is not proper to say that such substances are immaterial, but rather that whilst material they are incorporeal. Universal hylemorphism has the advantage that it neatly distinguishes all things from God by isolating a principle of potency (matter) which all things other than God have. Nevertheless, universal hylemorphism presents problems of its own, not least the thorny one of making intelligible just what exactly a real (as opposed to conceptual) kind of matter is that is incorporeal.

² The representative defender of universal hylemorphism is Solomon Ibn Gabriol, known to Aquinas as Avicenron. Aquinas cites Avicenron's *Fons Vitae* as the origin of this view, see *De Ente et Essentia*, Cap. 4. See also: *In II sent.*, d. 3, qu. 1, a. 1; *ST* Ia, qu. 50, art. 2; *Quaestio Disputata De Anima* (Turin: Marietti, 1927), art. 6; *Quaestio Disputata De Spiritualibus Creaturis* (Turin: Marietti, 1927), art. 3; *Tractatus De Substantiis Separatis* (West Hartford: St Joseph College, 1962), Cap. 5–8. For a discussion of Avicenron's universal hylemorphism, see Idit Dobbs-Weinstein, 'Jewish Philosophy', in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Philosophy*, ed. A. S. McGrade (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 121–46, at pp. 126–28 (on Ibn Gabriol and universal hylemorphism). For a more general discussion of its presence and influence in theology in the thirteenth century, see Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Godfrey of Fontaines*, pp. 275–77.

Aquinas for his part rejected universal hylemorphism from his earliest writings.³ He holds that it is precisely because separated substances are separated from all material conditions that they are taken to be separated. Regardless of the cogency of such a response, Thomas is left with the challenge of accounting for the potency of creatures without appeal to the traditional Aristotelian dichotomy of matter and form. Aquinas cannot affirm that separate substances are pure actuality, for then they would be no different from God; so there must be an element of potency in them (and all creatures), and this is the potency that they have for *esse*.⁴

Accordingly, anything that in any way exists other than God does so because it has *esse*. Creatures are then characterized precisely as creatures because they have *esse* not in virtue of what they are but because of a distinct cause from which they derive *esse*. So it is not in virtue of being composites of matter and form that creatures are beings at all; rather it is in virtue of their *esse*.⁵

This dependence on *esse* as the mark of creaturhood is something that Thomas adverts to in his interpretation of philosophical engagement with the doctrine of creation. In two texts, one from the *De Potentia Dei* and the other from the *ST*, Aquinas looks at the history of philosophical reflection on creation and observes that there was an upward trajectory from consideration of things in terms of their matter, to the distinction of matter and form, to the recognition of beings in terms of their very being without which they would be nothing—in terms of their *esse*. Aquinas concludes that it is only when we arrive at a consideration of creatures in terms of their *esse* that we

³ See for instance *De Ente et Essentia*, Cap 4. For a historical overview of the different accounts of matter which played a role in the formation of Aquinas's thought, see M.-D. Roland-Gosselin, *Le De Ente et Essentia de s. Thomas d'Aquin* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1948), pp. 6–103; see also pp. 120–21 (on Thomas's rejection of universal hylemorphism).

⁴ *De Ente et Essentia*, Cap. 4. Here follows immediately Aquinas's argumentation for distinction of essence and *esse*. I shall not on this occasion endeavour to unpack this central theme of Aquinas's metaphysical thought. For a good historical presentation, see Chapter 5 of Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*; for my own contributions to this area of Thomist scholarship, see Chapters 1–3 of *Aquinas's Way to God*.

⁵ Aquinas, *In II sent.*, d. 1, qu. 1, art. 2. The same definition can be found in: SCG Lib. II, Cap. 17: *De Potentia Dei*, qu. 3, art. 1; *ST* Ia, qu. 45, art. 1; *De Substanti Separatis*, Chapter 10, n. 56.

in turn can think about a primary cause of such, without which there would be nothing, and hence no creator.⁶

The point to bear in mind in all of this is that, for Aquinas, dependence for *esse* is the distinctive mark of being created, such that a thing is a creature insofar as it is dependent for its *esse*. Now, this does not yet indicate that there is a creator from which *esse* is derived; rather, it establishes only that a thing is a creature; systematically speaking we can affirm the latter whilst remaining uncommitted on the existence or otherwise of a creator.⁷

What all of this is intended to establish is that we have a robust characterization of creatures precisely as creatures in terms of their dependence for *esse*. This then will give us a clue as to Aquinas's way to God; for when we turn to Aquinas's logic of demonstration, what he says there connects with what he says about the creaturehood of creatures, such that the only logically demonstrative proof of God is one that involves existential act as its starting point.

In several places Aquinas discusses the logic of demonstration and applies it to God.⁸ This logic is based on the traditional Aristotelian demonstrative syllogism, and when considering God's existence, Thomas notes a problem. The demonstrative syllogism involves a middle term which serves to connect the major and minor terms in the conclusion. The middle term itself is taken to tell us something about the essence of the minor term and its subjectivity to the major term. Accordingly, to conclude a demonstrative syllogism, something must be known about the essence of the subject of the conclusion.⁹

So for example, in the classic Socrates syllogism: All men are mortal, Socrates is a man, therefore Socrates is mortal. The middle (man/men) tells us something about the essence of Socrates, and since from the first premise we know something about men, which is what Socrates is, we in turn are led

⁶ See *De Potentia Dei*, qu. 3, art. 5, and *ST*, Ia, qu. 44, art. 2. I discuss these passages in greater depth in chapter 1 of *Aquinas and the Metaphysics of Creation*.

⁷ It is true that in *ST* Thomas reasons this way about creatures *after* he has established the existence of God as a primary cause. On the other hand, in *De Potentia Dei* he offers three proofs of the existence of God, proofs that he attributes to Plato, Aristotle, and Avicenna (all involving *esse*), *after* he has reasoned as such about the metaphysical constitution of creatures. Thus, systematically speaking we can characterize a creature as dependent for its *esse* without being committed to there being a primary cause of *esse*. Of course, such a characterization of creatures raises the question of whether or not there is such a primary cause.

⁸ *ST*, Ia qu. 2, art. 2, and *SCG* Lib 1, Cap. 12.

⁹ *ST*, Ia qu. 2, art. 2, obj. 2. For more on the middle term of a demonstration see *In II An. Post.*, lec. 1.

to know the same thing about Socrates: he is mortal. The problem when it comes to demonstrating God's existence is that we do not know and cannot know God's essence; indeed, systematically speaking, at this point we do not know even that God exists. Thus, we are without a middle term. So how can we demonstrate God's existence?

Aquinas's solution is to distinguish between a demonstration *propter quid* and a demonstration *quia*. The former reasons from something known about the nature of a cause to its effect, and so reasons to something about the cause in the conclusion. This was the nature of the Socrates syllogism. However, a *quia* demonstration reasons from something known about the nature of the effect to something in turn known about the cause. And this is a *quia* demonstration; it is *quia* insofar as the effect is such *because* of its cause.¹⁰ In this respect, Aquinas uses the example of the twinkling of the heavenly bodies, and he holds that we can reason from the lack of twinkle of the heavenly bodies to their nearness to us. The heavenly bodies are known to be near *because* of their lack of twinkle. On the other hand, if we already knew that the heavenly bodies are near, we could reason from their nearness to us to their lack of twinkle, in which case we would be holding that the heavenly bodies do not twinkle on account of (*propter quid*) their nearness to us.¹¹

When it comes to God then, we cannot have a *propter quid* demonstration of His existence, since we cannot know His essence as a middle for demonstration. However, we can have a *quia* demonstration, since we can know something about creatures which will serve as a middle, permitting us to infer that creatures are such *because* there is some primary cause. Aquinas then is clear that we can engage in causal reasoning for God's existence beginning with something known about creatures to an affirmation of a primary cause.

Given all of this, in order to demonstrate God's existence, we must isolate some feature of creatures by which they are the very creatures that

¹⁰ ST Ia, qu. 2, art. 2. For the division of demonstrations *quia* and *propter quid* see *In I An., post.*, lec. 23–25, particularly n. 195 in lec. 23. For discussion, see: Rudi te Velde, *Aquinas on God: The "Divine Science" of the Summa Theologiae* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2006), 42–47; Joseph Owens, 'The "Analytics" and Thomistic Metaphysical Procedure', *Mediaeval Studies* 26:1 (1964), pp. 83–108, at secs. 3–4; David Twetten, 'Clearing a Way for Aquinas: How the Proof from Motion Concludes to God', *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 70 (1996), pp. 259–78, at sec. 3; Twetten, 'To Which "God" Must a Proof of God's Existence Conclude For Aquinas?', pp. 146–84, at sec. 4.

¹¹ See *In I An. Post.*, lec. 23, nn. 197–98, for this particular example.

they are and explore whether or not that will justify an affirmation of a primary cause. We have already seen that creatures are characterized as creatures (and independently of any question of a creator) from their dependence for *esse*. A creature is something rather than nothing precisely because it has *esse*. Its having and being thereby dependent for *esse* is knowable independently of knowing anything about God's existence. Consequently, the dependent characteristic by means of which we will mount a *quia* demonstration of God's existence will be the dependent character of *esse* in any creature.¹²

From the dependent character of *esse* in a thing, then, Aquinas can reason from such to a primary cause. This reasoning generally involves a consideration of *per se* ordered series such that members of such series do not have the causality of the series in virtue of what they are. Accordingly, unless there is a cause for the causality that the members of the series possess, there will be no causal series in question.¹³ The key point here is that the members of *per se* ordered series participate in the causality granted to them by the primary cause, which primary cause is primary precisely because it can originate the causality in the series in virtue of what it is. Accordingly, given that composites of essence and *esse* do not possess *esse* in virtue of what they are, unless there is some primary cause for such *esse*, such things will not have *esse*, and thereby will be nothing. But, given that we do have composites of essence and *esse*, there must be some primary-cause participation in which grants the *esse* of such essence-*esse* composites and which itself does not merely have *esse*, but insofar as it is capable of originating *esse* in such a *per se* causal series its essence is its *esse*—it is pure *esse* itself.

Furthermore, this primary cause is not only primary relative to the causal property of that one *per se* series; it is absolutely primary insofar as the causality of which it is the primary cause is an absolute causality. This is because *esse* is the condition for any other causality; for *esse* is the act of all acts, the perfection of all perfections. Any actuality that can be found in anything is ultimately derivable from *esse*, in which case there is no actuality which escapes the causality of *esse*. Therefore, there is nothing which escapes the causal influence of the primary cause. But if that is the case, then

¹² See *In I Sent.*, d. 3.

¹³ For an account of the metaphysics of *per se* ordered series, see my articles 'Essentially Ordered Series Reconsidered', and 'Essentially Ordered Series Reconsidered Once Again' [Chapters 2–3 in the current volume].

there is nothing that does not have its being from this primary cause, in which case it is the absolute primary cause of all that is.¹⁴

From this standpoint, Aquinas has a very robust conception of the primary cause as pure *esse* itself; in being such, the primary cause is without any passive potency, in which case there is no distinction of components (no composition) therin. This is because whatever is composed is composed of act and potency, but given that the primary cause is pure act, it cannot be so composed. This means that the primary cause is utterly simple. Not only that, but the primary cause is also utterly unique, since insofar as it is utterly simple, there is no distinction between the individual that the primary cause is and the nature that it has. Rather, it is identical with its nature. Accordingly, there is nothing that it is like to be the primary cause except being the primary cause, in which case it does not have a nature that is shared. Anything other than it is caused to be by it. Hence, the primary cause is an absolutely simple, unique creator of all that is.

Armed with this conception of the primary cause, Aquinas is in a position to deduce the traditional attributes of classical theism: eternity, immutability, goodness, omniscience, omnipotence, and so on. I shall not go through his demonstrations of these attributes, but I will point out that the attributes are derived from an appreciation of what the primary cause must be like in virtue of being the primary cause that it is, pure *esse* itself. Hence, the divine attributes are not features that are applied to the primary cause from outside as it were; they do not signify accidents that the primary cause has. Rather, each divine attribute is revelatory of the being of God as primary cause, and whilst distinct for us in signification, they all refer to the same thing, which is God as pure *esse* itself.

Aquinas's case for classical theism depends on his way to God as beginning from the caused nature of *esse* in creatures to the affirmation of a primary cause that is pure *esse* itself. Accordingly, Aquinas's classical theism stems from his metaphysics of *esse* and proceeds naturally from that metaphysics. Many of the arguments for the existence of God found throughout his works deploy the metaphysics of *esse* and *per se* ordered series in one form or another, so that for example even if we begin with a consideration of motion, causality, modality and so on, such are taken to be revelatory of dependence for *esse* and lead us to infer a primary cause which

¹⁴ For a systematic defence of this way to God, see my book *Aquinas's Way to God*.

in being pure *esse* itself is the primary cause of motion, causality, modality and so on.¹⁵

One could painstakingly go through each of Aquinas's arguments for God's existence to see how they can be subject to the existential interpretation that I am here advocating. I do not deny that in some cases this would be a worthy and worthwhile enterprise, such as a study of the metaphysical backdrop of the five ways as yielding an existential interpretation. However, what I want to address in this paper is an obvious and immediate counterexample to the thesis I propose: the proofs in the *SCG*. This work is one of Aquinas's major theological syntheses. It is not a short treatise, a set of disputed questions, or a commentary. Therein he is not constrained by space, subject matter, or the text on which he is commenting; rather in the *SCG*, as with the *ST*, Thomas is free to develop his argumentation as he personally sees things. But the metaphysics of *esse* is strikingly absent from his proofs of God in chapter 13 of *SCG* I. Indeed, the proofs of God in the *SCG* are peculiarly divorced from any metaphysical context, despite Thomas's insistence elsewhere that God's existence is demonstrable only in first philosophy or metaphysics.¹⁶

¹⁵ One can see this way to God appear in the demonstrations from *De Ente et Essentia*, Cap. 4, *In I Sent.*, d. 3, *De Potentia Dei*, qu. 3, art. 5 (the ways from *esse* attributed to Plato, Aristotle, and Avicenna), and, on my reading of them, the five ways. To date I have argued that the second and the fifth ways deploy Aquinas's metaphysics of *esse* and reasoning pertaining to *per se* ordered series; see my 'The Relevance of Aquinas's Uncaused Cause Argument Today', and 'Design Arguments and Aquinas's Fifth Way' [Chapters 8 & 11 in the current volume]. Joseph Owens has argued that *esse* is the metaphysical backdrop to all of the five ways, and he has argued that, with regard to the argument from motion, unless motion is interpreted in terms of existential act, the argument fails to arrive at an absolute primary cause; see his essays 'Aquinas and the Five Ways', 'Immobility and Existence for Aquinas', 'Actuality in the *Prima Via*', and 'The Conclusion of the *Prima Via*', all in *St. Thomas Aquinas on the Existence of God: The Collected Papers of Joseph Owens*, ed. John R. Catan (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1980), and his 'Aquinas and the Proof from the "Physics"', *Mediaeval Studies* 28 (1966), pp. 119–50. Recently John Knasas has argued in a manner similar to myself that Aquinas's way to God is based on his metaphysics of *esse*, and whilst he and I are in agreement that that metaphysics is visible in the five ways, he and I disagree that it is to be found in the proofs from the *SCG*. See John Knasas, *Thomistic Existentialism and Cosmological Reasoning*, and 'Thomistic Existentialism and the Proofs *Ex Motu at Contra Gentiles* I, C. 13', *The Thomist* 59:4 (1995), pp. 591–615.

¹⁶ For details see *In III Boetium de Trinitate*, qu. 5, aa. 1 and 4; for translation see *The Division and Methods of the Sciences*, trans. Armand Maurer. Note in particular art. 4. See also *In Met.*, Proem. See also *In I Phys.*, lec. 1, nn. 1–3. Thomas's position here is contrary to that of Averroës, who believed that God's existence could be established in physics; see Wippel, *Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, pp. 13–14.

Are we constrained then to say that Thomas was an eclectic thinker who churned out as many arguments as he could find with no systematic constraint? Or can we affirm a systematic approach to the demonstration of God's existence (as I have suggested we can) and explain away the anomalous nature of the demonstrations in the *SCG*? In the remainder of this paper, I will argue for the second disjunct.¹⁷

2. The *Summa Contra Gentiles*.

Just like he does in the *ST*, Aquinas offers a quintet of arguments for demonstration of the existence of God in the *SCG*. However, unlike the *ST* (which is later), the *SCG* does not offer neat and efficient demonstrations for each argument. Rather, the *Summa Contra Gentiles* offers Aquinas's lengthiest and most sustained presentation of demonstrations for God's existence to be found in his entire corpus. The arguments offered therein are by far the most complex and drawn out that can be found in the writings of Aquinas on God's existence. According to Thomas, these are the proofs by which the philosophers and Catholic doctors have established the existence of God.¹⁸ In chapter 13 of the first book, we are offered two arguments from motion taken from Aristotle's *Physics*, one argument on the order of efficient causes, one argument on the convertibility of being and truth, and a final argument drawn from John Damascene and based on finality.

Thomas's attention in this chapter is focussed primarily on the first two ways which defend the proof of motion from Aristotle.¹⁹ The text of the first two ways from motion takes up most of chapter 13. Therein Thomas sets himself the task of presenting the Aristotelian proofs and either (1)

¹⁷ My procedure here stands in contrast to that of Knasas. Whilst he recognizes that Thomas does not appear to conduct the arguments in the *SCG* in a metaphysical fashion, he argues that that is merely an appearance and that the metaphysics is under the surface. This is because elsewhere Thomas holds that even matter and motion can be considered under the *communem rationem entis*. In my view, Knasas's reading forces the arguments into an unfitting mold, since nowhere does the *SCG* deploy explicitly metaphysical reasoning; hence Knasas is reading into the text. By contrast, his suggested mould would be more fitting for the first way of *ST*, since this argument does deploy explicitly metaphysical reasoning, in which case it can be read metaphysically.

¹⁸ Aquinas, *SCG*, Lib. I, Cap. 13.

¹⁹ Owens presents a survey of the argument from motion and its appearance in Aquinas's thought in 'Conclusion of the *Prima Via*', sec. 4. For Aquinas's commentary on the proof as it appears in Aristotle's *Physics* see *In VII Phys.*, lec. 2, and *In VIII Phys.*, lec. 9.

justifying the premises (first way) or (2) justifying the conclusion that the prime mover is wholly immobile (second way). These first two ways run to just over 2,200 Latin words, whereas the last three ways run to just over 260 words.²⁰ Given the disproportionate amount of space he devotes to them, Thomas clearly took it to be of some importance to defend these first two ways.

When we look at his defence, we notice that the Aristotelian proofs from motion are not straightforward. This is either because the premises are disputed, as in the first way, or because the conclusion requires some finessing to get us to a wholly immobile first mover, as in the second way. Either way, the proofs require a lot of work to be deployed for the business that Thomas wants to them to do. This contrasts with all of the other proofs of God offered in Aquinas's works, especially the first way from motion of the *ST*.

Furthermore, one striking feature of the proofs of God from the *SCG*, not just the proofs from motion, is that they are not metaphysical proofs, nor does metaphysical reasoning play a significant role. Rather, they are physical proofs wherein the operative characteristics leading to a conclusion are those drawn from physics or what we today would call philosophy of nature. By contrast, the reasoning of the later five ways in *ST* (and many of his other proofs besides) is carried by metaphysical considerations pertaining to act and potency in motion, causality, modality, and so on. Aside from one out of three defences of Aristotle's motion principle, and perhaps one out of three defences of a denial of an infinite series of ordered movers, metaphysical considerations are strikingly absent from the proofs in the *SCG*.²¹

²⁰ Based on the electronic text of the Index Thomisticus, the word count for the first two ways is 2,281, whereas the word count for the following three ways is 268. And for a further comparison, the five ways of the *ST* come in at 773 words altogether. That means that the space Thomas devotes to just the first two ways of the *SCG* is about 8.5 times the space devoted to the remaining three ways, and almost three times the space given over to the five ways as a whole in the *ST*.

²¹ The two metaphysical proofs from *SCG*, Lib. I, Cap. 13: '[Motion principle] Nihil idem est simul actu et potentia respectu eiusdem. Sed omne quod movetur, in quantum huiusmodi, est in potentia: quia *motus est actus existentis in potentia secundum quod huiusmodi*. Omne autem quod movet est in actu, in quantum huiusmodi: quia nihil agit nisi secundum quod est in actu. Ergo nihil est respectu eiusdem motus movens et motum. Et sic nihil movet seipsum'. '[Denial of infinite regress of ordered movers] nisi quod est ordine transmutato, incipiendo scilicet a superiori. Et est talis. Id quod movet instrumentaliter, non potest movere nisi sit aliquid quod principaliter moveat. Sed si in infinitum procedatur in moventibus et motis, omnia erunt quasi instrumentaliter moventia, quia ponentur sicut moventia mota, nihil autem erit sicut principale movens. Ergo nihil movebitur'.

The pivotal realities by means of which Thomas seeks to demonstrate God as the primary cause of all things are physical realities in the sense of realities whose study pertains to that of physics or philosophy of nature. Accordingly, such realities are within the genus of *ens mobile*. As I see things, Thomas's mode of procedure here stands in contrast not only to what he writes elsewhere, but also to what he writes in the *SCG* itself. For, in chapter 4 of book I, he states that it is metaphysics that deals with divine things. And more importantly, in chapter 12, immediately preceding the proofs of God, Thomas offers the now familiar reasons for the demonstrability of God's existence. Such a demonstration is not one which proceeds from a knowledge of God's essence, *propter quid*; rather such a demonstration must proceed from a knowledge of effects to a knowledge of God's existence as the cause of such effects, *per quia* demonstrations. However, the effects that Thomas considers in chapter 13 are effects drawn from mobile being, and so they are incapable of getting us any further than a first mover of mobile being. The latter is not necessarily God, and in his second way Thomas recognizes this; for, as noted, in the second way Thomas takes some time to defend the view that the first mover is immobile, and he does so only by augmenting the proof from physics with a proof which draws on considerations in metaphysics.²² So whilst the early chapters of the *SCG* and Thomas's procedure elsewhere point to the need for a metaphysical proof of God, the proofs themselves are certainly not metaphysical.²³

The lack of metaphysical argumentation is even more striking when we turn to a work contemporaneous with the first book of the *SCG*, and that is the commentary on the *De Trinitate* of Boethius. In this commentary, Thomas treats us to an articulation of the divisions and methods of the sciences. Therein he argues that God's existence is established in first philosophy (metaphysics) as the source of all being, whereas God's revealed nature is considered in theology proper.²⁴ It is further interesting to note that the commentary on the *De Trinitate* was written on the same parchment and made use of the same Parisian ink as a substantial portion of *SCG* I,

²² *SCG*, Lib. I, Cap. 13: 'Sed quia Deus non est pars alicuius moventis seipsum, ulterius Aristoteles, in sua metaphysica, investigat ex hoc motore qui est pars moventis seipsum, alium motorem separatum omnino, qui est Deus. Cum enim omne movens seipsum moveatur per appetitum, oportet quod motor qui est pars moventis seipsum, moveat propter appetitum alicuius appetibilis. Quod est eo superius in movendo: nam appetens est quodammodo movens motum; appetibile autem est movens omnino non motum. Oportet igitur esse primum motorem separatum omnino immobilem, qui Deus est'.

²³ See also Knasas, 'Thomistic Existentialism and the Proofs *Ex Motu*', sec. II.

²⁴ See n. 16 above.

including chapter 13.²⁵ Hence, in a text contemporaneous with that chapter, written in the same geographical context and same teaching period, and indeed even written with the same stationary, Thomas affirms that the approach to God is metaphysical (*De Trinitate*), and then in the *SCG* he abandons the metaphysical way and offers physical demonstrations, taking up the metaphysical way once again only in other works.

Is there an explanation for this change in attitude?

I think it is fair to say that Aquinas is somewhat ill at ease with the proofs of God in the *SCG*; this is especially true when it comes to the proofs from motion. He goes out of his way to address disputes about the premises or conclusions, and he does not appear to exhibit the confidence (or elegance) of the later five ways of the *ST*. I think the reason for this is not because of any deficiency on Thomas's part, but because of a deficiency with the proofs themselves.

Why would Thomas choose proofs that are problematic and that he has to take some time and energy to fix?

I think the context of the *SCG* indicates that Thomas was not simply concerned with establishing the truth of the matter—something that he could have done by appeal to the caused character of existential act and a denial of an infinite series of ordered causes, as he does quite deftly in other works. Rather, Thomas's concern here is to convince either Aristotelians or those in substantial agreement with Aristotle of the existence of some absolute primary cause. This is clear from the opening lines of chapter 13, that these ways are how the philosophers and Catholic doctors have proved God's existence. The only proof from a Catholic theologian is the final way from teleology attributed to John Damascene, whereas the first four proofs are all Aristotelian in nature. This speaks to the context of the *SCG* as a whole in which Thomas states that he wishes to show the truth of the Catholic faith and set aside errors opposed to it (Chapter 2). Furthermore, when it comes to the errors he wishes to set aside, he mentions Jews, Muslims, and pagans, who do not accept the authority of Sacred Scripture, and so who must be convinced by appeal to natural reason (Chapter 2).

Whilst a systematically theological work, the *SCG* has a significant apologetical context wherein non-Catholics are being led to the truth of the Catholic faith.²⁶ In the context of those who do not accept Sacred Scripture, they must be led by natural reason. And so appeal must be made to those

²⁵ Torell, *St. Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 1, *The Person and his Work*, p. 101.

²⁶ Whilst the Dominican missionary context of the *SCG* is disputed, Torrell is sympathetic to the view that there is an apostolic and apologetical dimension to it (*St Thomas Aquinas*, pp. 104–7).

authorities of natural reason that such thinkers would take seriously; this would no doubt involve to Aristotle and the Aristotelian commentators. This explains the Aristotelian context of the proofs from chapter 13 of *SCG* I and Thomas's obvious difficulty with them, when in other contexts he prefers to proceed on the basis of metaphysical considerations pertaining to existential act.

Even though Thomas begins from an Aristotelian context in motion or more generally in physical realities, he does not remain there. We do see his existential metaphysics gradually creep into the *SCG* once he has established the eternity of God and the fact that there is no passive potency in him. After this, Thomas is free to think of God, free from passive potency, as pure act. And thence he begins to pick up the pace and enter into reasoning and argumentation with which we are more familiar and he is more comfortable (by the time he gets to book II, Thomas speaks freely of *esse* in the articulation of his metaphysics of creation).

So not only is there a significant apologetical context to the *SCG*, we also see Thomas here as a significant apologist. For he eschews an easy beginning in the metaphysical context with which he is most familiar, rather seeking a common ground with those who would disagree with him. Whilst in other contexts he may begin and remain with the metaphysics of existential act as the neatest, most convincing, and profound philosophy of God, here in the *SCG*, Aquinas leaves the metaphysical high ground and appeals to the more physical considerations with which other, non-Catholic Aristotelians would be sympathetic. But such a retreat is only so that he along with his interlocutors may take the high ground once again wherein God is considered as pure existence itself, and all the classical implications that flow from that.

3. Conclusion

By way of conclusion, I wish to reflect on what Thomas's procedure in the *Summa Contra Gentiles* can teach us today when considering demonstrations of God's existence. I think the perplexity of the proofs of God in the *SCG* lies in the fact that therein Thomas was setting out proofs that would convince others, rather than simply offering proofs that get to the truth of the matter. We Thomists of a contemporary vintage must do the same. We must of course figure out what systematically speaking is the truth of the matter, however, we cannot avoid co-operation with other philosophers and sharing with them the fruits of our contemplation.

Whilst the *SCG* deployed physical proofs for God's existence, and that because of its apologetical context, it would be fruitless to employ such physical proofs within a contemporary philosophical setting. This is not only because the physics of Aristotle requires some subtle reasoning in its defence (just as it did in Thomas's day), but also because a proof from physics establishing a first mover is so far removed from God that it would take significantly more argumentation to show that such a prime mover is God (indeed more argumentation than even Thomas had to offer in the thirteenth century to convince other Aristotelians).

Not only that, but deploying a physical proof of God in a contemporary context would require a knowledge of contemporary physics significantly more specialized and finer-grained than what was required for the same in the thirteenth century. Whilst a knowledge of Aristotle's physics requires some significant personal investment on behalf of the researcher, it does not require the specialisms required for knowledge of contemporary physics. So, the contemporary defender of philosophical theism would be quite hampered in attempting to offer a proof of God from physics. And this is aside from the more systematic point that a proof of a primary cause of all that is within the context of physics is impossible, since such a proof can get us to only a primary cause of mobile being, not a primary cause of being *per se*.

By contrast, whilst one must specialize in philosophy to pursue a proof from metaphysics, one need not specialize in the various specialisms requiring several years of training, as one would for developing a proof from contemporary physics. Furthermore, whilst the non-philosopher may find the metaphysical demonstration of God quite perplexing, it does not jar with his common-sense intuitions concerning the contrast between being and non-being, the causality involved in typical examples of *per se* causal series, the fact that the medium-sized dry goods of everyday experience do not exist essentially, and so on. These are all features of Aquinas's way to God which reflect his own profound metaphysics of *esse*, yet can be intuitively grasped without the need for a systematic education in that metaphysics. Moreover, a proof of God based on the metaphysics of *esse* abstracts from developments in the natural sciences, since whatever those developments may be, they will presuppose the actual existence of the realities with which they deal. Hence a proof of God which springboards from a consideration of the metaphysics of *esse* can incorporate any natural scientific framework. Accordingly, I submit that the metaphysical proof of God based on *esse*, which is Thomas's own and personal favourite, is quite promising from a

contemporary apologetical context (and is more than promising from a systematically philosophical context).

If contemporary Thomists are to follow Thomas's example in the *SCG*, then it will not involve defending his defence of the physical proofs to the letter, but adopting his spirit of presenting the most convincing proof of God. I believe that a very strong case can be made for the truth of Aquinas's demonstration of God from *esse*; any objections to this proof are either wrong or based on a misunderstanding. But beyond that, I also believe that, for the reasons outlined in the previous paragraph, the proof of God from *esse* is the best proof from an apologetical point of view. And so in presenting a rigorously philosophical proof of God to a contemporary audience that seeks to convince unbelievers, the best approach to take is to adopt Aquinas's way to God.

Part II.II

The Existence of God

The Five Ways

Chapter 7 - A Deeper Look at Aquinas's First Way

The first way is traditionally referred to as the argument from motion, and its general form comes from the arguments for a first mover put forth by Aristotle in books 7–8 of the *Physics*. Aquinas puts forth similar arguments in *Summa Contra Gentiles* [SCG] IV, chapter 13, as well as in other places in his works.¹ Thomas states that this is the more manifest way, and accordingly he opens the five ways with it. This argument has been attacked and defended on numerous occasions, and recently it has come within the purview of criticisms of Edward Feser's defence of the argument from motion. In what follows I propose a reading of the first way that sets it up as a metaphysical argument for God's existence. I then situate that reading within the context of Aquinas's metaphysical thought. Having done that I address one particular recent objection.

1. The First Way

In this section I will consider the first way in itself. I shall begin with a statement of the argument and then proceed to an analysis of its reasoning.

1.1. *The Argument*

The text of the first way goes as follows in *Summa Theologiae* [ST] I, q. 2, a. 3:

The first and more manifest way is taken from the side of motion. It is certain and evident to sense that something is moved in the world. Now, whatever is moved is moved by another; for nothing moves unless it is potency to that to which it is moved and something moves insofar as it is in act. To move then is nothing more than to bring something from potency to act, and

¹ Joseph Owens presents a survey of the argument from motion in Aquinas's thought in 'The Conclusion of the *Prima Via*', in *St. Thomas Aquinas on the Existence of God*, Chapter 7; see also Owens's, 'Aquinas and the Proof from the "Physics"'. The relevant passages in Aquinas are: *In I sent.*, d. 3, proem.; *Summa contra gentiles* I, ch. 13; *De potentia*, q. 3, a. 5; *Compendium theologiae*, ch. 3; *In VII phys.*, lec. 2; *In VIII phys.*, lec. 9.

nothing can be reduced from potency to act unless by something that is in act, just as the hot in act, for example fire, makes the wood, that is hot in potency, to be actually hot, and in doing so moves and alters it. It is not possible that the same thing can at once be in act and in potency in the same respect, but only according to diverse respects. So what is actually hot cannot simultaneously be potentially hot, but it is potentially cold. It is impossible then that in the same respect and mode something is mover and moved, or that it moves itself. Therefore, whatever is moved must be moved by another. If therefore that by which a thing is moved is itself moved, the latter must be moved by another, and that by another. This cannot proceed to infinity, for then there would be no primary mover, and consequently no other mover; for secondary movers do not move unless they are moved by a primary, just as the stick does not move unless moved by the hand. It is therefore necessary to come upon some primary mover that is moved by nothing, and this all understand to be God.²

To begin with, Thomas makes an observation about motion in the world; he tells us that it is evident that there is motion. Having observed motion, Aquinas goes on to explore the nature of motion, and he begins by

² *Summa theologiae* [ST] I, q. 2, a. 3: 'Prima autem et manifestior via est, quae sumitur ex parte motus. Certum est enim, et sensu constat, aliqua moveri in hoc mundo. Omne autem quod movetur, ab alio movetur. Nihil enim movetur, nisi secundum quod est in potentia ad illud ad quod movetur, movet autem aliquid secundum quod est actu. Movere enim nihil aliud est quam educere aliquid de potentia in actum, de potentia autem non potest aliquid reduci in actum, nisi per aliquod ens in actu, sicut calidum in actu, ut ignis, facit lignum, quod est calidum in potentia, esse actu calidum, et per hoc movet et alterat ipsum. Non autem est possibile ut idem sit simul in actu et potentia secundum idem, sed solum secundum diversa, quod enim est calidum in actu, non potest simul esse calidum in potentia, sed est simul frigidum in potentia. Impossibile est ergo quod, secundum idem et eodem modo, aliquid sit movens et motum, vel quod moveat seipsum. Omne ergo quod movetur, oportet ab alio moveri. Si ergo id a quo movetur, moveatur, oportet et ipsum ab alio moveri et illud ab alio. Hic autem non est procedere in infinitum, quia sic non esset aliquod primum movens; et per consequens nec aliquod aliud movens, quia moventia secunda non movent nisi per hoc quod sunt mota a primo movente, sicut baculus non movet nisi per hoc quod est motus a manu. Ergo necesse est devenire ad aliquod primum movens, quod a nullo movetur, et hoc omnes intelligent Deum'. Unless otherwise stated, all translations from the works of Aquinas will be my own. A highly readable translation of the *Summa* is *Summa Theologica*, 5 vols., trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Allen, TX: Christian Classics, 1981).

affirming that whatever is moved is moved by another. The justification for this principle represents a significant portion of the first way.³

Whatever is moved is moved only because it stands in potency to something, and in the process of being actualised it is in motion. Accordingly, what moves the thing potentially in motion must be actual and capable of moving the thing that is in potential to such actuality; in other words, the mover must have the ability to impart motion to the thing that is potentially moved. And this is what motion is: the actualisation of that which exists in potency. And such can occur only if we have something that is capable, that is actual in the appropriate respect of actualising the potency.⁴ Thomas gives the example of fire, which is actually hot, heating wood, which is potentially hot but actually cold. The first has the actuality of heat and can reduce the potentiality of the wood for being hot to actuality.

Now the same thing cannot be both in act and in potency in the same respect; for then it would be actualizing its own potency in that respect; for example, the wood cannot be both actually hot and potentially hot, for in that case it would be both actually hot and actually cold, which is impossible.

Moving on, the mover is actual with respect to the motion, in that it can bring about the motion, and the thing moved is in potency with respect to the motion, in that it undergoes the motion in question. The mover then actualizes the potentiality of the thing moved. But if the same thing cannot be in both act and potency in the same respects, then the thing moved, which is in potency in respect of the motion, and the mover, which is in actuality with respect to the motion, cannot be the same. Consequently, the thing moved must be moved by another.

Having established the principle that whatever is moved is moved by another, Thomas then goes on to set up a regress of movers. He conceives that if we have a mover and a thing moved which mover is itself moved, we can then ask about the mover of that, and then about the mover of that and so on. But, crucially, Aquinas argues this cannot proceed to infinity; for if it did there would be no primary mover, and if there were no primary mover, then there would be no secondary movers, since the latter depend on the

³ See also *In VII phys.*, lec. 1, nn. 885–86. For a somewhat different justification of this principle. In the latter Thomas defends the principle by considering a significant counterexample: self-motion. He accordingly takes a mobile object AB and divides it into its parts; thence he argues that insofar as it comes to rest by the rest of its parts, it is therefore moved by one of its parts, in which case even in self-motion whatever is moved is moved by another. Here in the *Summa* however the defence of the principle is in terms of act and potency, and so significantly different; we will return to this point later.

⁴ *In III phys.*, lec. 2, n. 285.

former for their motion. Aquinas offers the example of a stick being moved by a hand; without some primary mover to move the stick, the stick remains immobile. So, without a primary mover to move the secondary movers—movers that are both movers and moved—there would be no motion in the series. Hence it is necessary that there must be some primary mover without which there would be no motion in the series, and this is what we understand God to be.

1.2. *The Reasoning*

So much for a statement of the argument. I have deliberately avoided any gloss that would stress one interpretation over the other. The standard objections to the first way and their standard responses are all still live options at this point. Let us now consider the reasoning and what it establishes.

Aquinas begins by stating that this is the first and more manifest way. One can evidently see how this way is more manifest because it focuses on a feature of reality evident to every philosopher from the beginning of philosophy, and that is the reality of motion. Since the pre-Socratics and their grappling with the problem of the one and the many, the reality of motion has been something of a self-evident fact to philosophers. Its self-evidence does not entail that motion is easily explainable, only that one cannot escape it, not even Parmenides. Given the inescapability of motion, it is natural to think of an argument from motion as one that is more manifest. But this raises an initial problem with the first way from the outset: is it a physical argument drawn from the philosophy of nature and tracing motion in the natural world to a point of origin in some originator of cosmic motion, much like some contemporaries would trace the motions of the universe to a point of origin in the big bang? Or is it a metaphysical argument which reasons to the need for some originative source of all actuality with the physical motion observed from the outset being a springboard for the argument? Both readings of the first way have been offered, and so before even delving into the reasoning, we should investigate how to situate it in terms of metaphysics or natural philosophy.

The natural-philosophical reading of the first way has a lot to support it: it was the reasoning of Aristotle in several important places on which Aquinas comments and whose argumentative structure informs the first way; by remaining with physical motion the argument remains true to its designation as the more manifest way; and it is the natural way of reading the argument given the examples Thomas uses and the reasoning he employs. Not only that, the physical reading of the first way has the support of

no less than Cajetan and Suarez, as well as more contemporary interpreters such as Anthony Kenny.⁵

In Aquinas's commentary on Aristotle's *Physics* he defines motion generally in terms of change, and qua change motion is the act of that which exists in potency as potency.⁶ Later he applies this definition to generation, corruption, and motion proper; this motion proper is motion in the strict sense and is applicable to quality (alteration), quantity (increase and decrease), and place (locomotion).⁷ There is some scope then for interpreting the motion at work in the first way as being a kind of physical motion not unlike that deployed in Aristotle's *Physics*.

Despite these considerations, when we look at the actual argument of the *Summa Theologiae* [ST], we notice that the pivotal steps in the argument are significantly metaphysical ones. Looking at the motion principle that whatever is moved is moved by another, we notice that in the ST text, Aquinas's reasoning for its truth is based on a consideration of act and potency and how they are the backbone of the analysis of the change under consideration. We contrast this with his considerations of the same elsewhere, such as the first lectio in the commentary on book 7 of the *Physics* and thirteenth chapter of *SCG* I, where the same principle is considered and defended but primarily by means of physical considerations. In the ST text these physical considerations drop out and only the metaphysical demonstration of the

⁵ See Owens, 'Conclusion', §. 5, for Cajetan and Suarez; see also William Wallace, 'Newtonian Antinomies Against the *Prima Via*', *The Thomist* 19:2 (1956), pp. 151–92, for whom the first way was intended (by Thomas) to be understood by physical scientists. For Kenny, see *The Five Ways*, Chapter 2. Kenny sees all the ways as being embedded within medieval cosmology (p. 3) and so sees them as depending on cosmological, and thus physical, reasoning. Indeed, in dealing with the first way's principle that whatever is moved is moved by another, Kenny focuses primarily on the physical arguments in favour of this principle offered elsewhere by Aquinas (e.g., *SCG* Lib. I, Cap. 13, and *In VII phys.*, lec. 1), and he considers (and dismisses) the more metaphysical demonstration offered by Thomas in the actual text of the ST. More recently Heather Thornton McRae and James McRae have also considered the first way primarily as a physical argument, so much so that they seek to re-cast it in more contemporary cosmological terms so as to update it for the contemporary reader; see 'A Motion to Reconsider: A Defense of Aquinas' Prime Mover Argument', in *Revisiting Aquinas' Proofs for the Existence of God*, ed. Robert Arp (Leiden: Brill, 2016), pp. 29–47.

⁶ *In III phys.*, lect. 2, nn. 285–286.

⁷ *In V phys.*, lec. 2, n. 649.

principle remains; this indicates that Thomas is thinking metaphysically in the first way.⁸

Moreover, the more physical argument from motion advanced by Aristotle in the *Physics* need not conclude to anything more than a world soul which moves the outermost sphere.⁹ Indeed, Aquinas in his commentary on the *Physics* points out that Aristotle ends with a primary principle of all of nature, not of all that is. Thomas does claim that this is God, who is blessed forever; but the text itself of Aristotle does not justify this unless buttressed with more metaphysical considerations (and theological ones pertaining to God's blessedness).¹⁰ Not only that, in the *SCG* Lib. 1, Cap. 13, where Thomas is advancing several arguments from motion, he notes a problem with the physical argumentation insofar as it fails to get us to something absolute, and so it needs to be buttressed by more metaphysical considerations.

On the other hand, the primary mover of the first way at which Thomas arrives in the conclusion is simply the primary mover moved by nothing, which he claims all understand to be God. The *sed contra* of the article gives us an indication of Thomas's understanding of God, who is identified as the primary mover in the conclusion of the first way: He Who Is. But He Who Is is self-subsisting *esse*.¹¹ It follows then that the conclusion of the first way

⁸ For discussion see Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, pp. 446–47; Twetten, 'Clearing a "Way" for Aquinas: How the Proof from Motion Concludes to God'. See also my article 'The *Summa Contra Gentiles* and Aquinas's Way to God' [Chapter 6 in this volume].

⁹ See Owens, 'Aquinas and the Proof from the "Physics"'; John Knasas makes the same general point that we must distinguish between a prime mover of the spheres demonstrable in natural philosophy and the prime mover which is God demonstrable only in metaphysics; see *Thomistic Existentialism and Cosmological Reasoning*, pp. 176–77; see also Twetten, 'Clearing a "Way"', pp. 262–63, in particular p. 263: 'Aristotle's *Physics* does not expressly arrive at God for Aquinas, but at best only indicates the manner of reasoning by which the Metaphysics alone properly and expressly concludes to a first mover that can only be the first being or God'. Twetten also notes that the autograph of the *SCG* gives some evidence in the redactions that the Aristotelian proof from the *Physics* leads only to a world soul ('Clearing a "Way"', p. 269); the redactions of the autograph of the *SCG* text can be found in the Appendix to the Leonine edition.

¹⁰ In *VIII phys.*, lect. 23, n. 1172: 'Et sic terminat philosophus considerationem communem de rebus naturalibus, in primo principio totius naturae, qui est super omnia Deus benedictus in saecula'.

¹¹ *ST I*, q. 4, a. 2 ('Cum Deus sit ipsum esse subsistens, nihil de perfectione essendi potest ei deesse'); q. 11, a. 4 ('Est enim maxime ens, in quantum est non habens aliquod esse determinatum per aliquam naturam cui adveniat, sed est ipsum esse subsistens'); q. 13, a. 7 ('Hoc nomine, qui est . . . est maxime proprium nomen Dei. Primo propter sui

is not simply a primary principle of all of nature, per the *Physics*, but the first principle of all things simpliciter.¹² Hence the first way is not the same kind of argument as the physical argument of Aristotle's *Physics*.

We also must bear in mind what Thomas states about the demonstrability of God in the immediately preceding article of this question. In article 2, Thomas denies that we can have a *propter quid* demonstration of God, and this because we have no direct knowledge of the essence of God. Hence, we must have a *quia* demonstration the middle term of which does not involve a knowledge of God's essence, but a knowledge of his effects, creatures. Now, the only consideration of creatures that can generate a demonstration of God is a metaphysical consideration, and this is because such a consideration views creatures in terms of their being. As Thomas argues elsewhere, it was because previous philosophers did not consider creatures in terms of their being that they were unable to rise to the thought of a creator.¹³ Hence in order to reason our way to God, we need to construe God's

significationem. Non enim significat formam aliquam, sed ipsum esse. Unde cum esse Dei sit ipsa ejus essentia, et hoc nulli alii conveniat . . . manifestum est quod inter alia nomina hoc maxime proprie nominat Deum'); note also in particular the response to the first objection in a. 7, wherein this name is even more proper than *Deus* ('*Hoc nomen, qui est, est magis proprium nomen Dei, quam hoc nomen, Deus, quantum ad id a quo imponitur, scilicet ab esse'*'); *SCG* III, ch. 19 ('*Esse habent omnia quod Deo assimilantur, qui est ipsum esse subsistens*'); *De anima*, a. 6, ad 2: ('*Si sit aliquid quod sit ipsum esse subsistens, sicut de Deo dicimus, nihil participare dicimus*'); *De spiritualibus creaturis*, a. 1 ('*Unde dicimus, quod Deus est ipsum suum esse*' Marietti ed.); *De malo*, q. 16, a. 3 ('*Deus enim per suam essentiam est ipsum esse subsistens*' [Marietti ed.]); *Quodlibetales* III, q. 1, a. 1 ('*Cum autem Deus sit ipsum esse subsistens, manifestum est quod natura essendi convenit Deo infinite absque omni limitatione et contractione...*'); *In de divinis nominibus*, ch. 5, lec. 1 ('*Sed solus Deus, qui est ipsum esse subsistens, secundum totam virtutem essendi, esse habet*'); *In de causis*, lec. 7, n. 182 ('*Causa autem prima non est natura subsistens in suo esse quasi participato, sed potius est ipsum esse subsistens*').

¹² See James Weisheipl, 'The Principle Omne quod movetur ab alio movetur in Medieval Physics', *Isis* 56:1 (1965), p. 29, for a similar point. Weisheipl contends that in the first way we must take motion in the widest possible sense so as to signify every coming into being and thereby get us to God. Despite this, Weisheipl treats the motion principle as exclusively physical rather than as a metaphysical principle with an application in the philosophy of nature; though to be fair to Weisheipl, he is here dealing with the principle in the context of the history of science and certain problems with that principle as a scientific principle. He simply alludes to the principle in the first way as a particular presentation of it.

¹³ See *STI*, q. 44, a. 2: 'Et ulterius aliqui erexerunt se ad considerandum ens in quantum est ens, et consideraverunt causam rerum, non solum secundum quod sunt haec vel talia,

effects in terms of their very being, otherwise we will stop short of arriving at God as the originating source of all being.¹⁴

Furthermore, when we look at Aquinas's denial of an infinite regress of moved movers in the first way, we see his appealing to the notions of primary and secondary movers and arguing that the secondary are moved only as instruments of the primary. He then calls to our attention the kind of motion involved in the series involving the hand and stick, an example that is elsewhere illuminative of what are called *per se* ordered series, whose nature we will be considering. The fact that Aquinas appeals to the instrumentality of secondary movers in relation to the primary and his use of the hand and stick example as illuminative of such instrumentality—which example is quite prominent in the metaphysics of the *per se* series—shows us that Aquinas is motivated to deny an infinite regress of moved movers not on the basis of physical considerations pertaining to motion as are found in the commentary on the *Physics* and in *SCG*; rather, it is clear that Aquinas here seeks to deny an infinite regress of moved movers on the basis of metaphysical considerations pertaining to the being of primary and secondary movers such that if there were no primary, then secondary movers would not have the actuality of the motion in question.

Finally, and following on from the previous point, I take the first way as a causal demonstration of God's existence. But in the *Physics* Aquinas argues that it does not belong to natural philosophy to treat the causes of things insofar as they are causes, but only insofar as they are causes of natural changes. By contrast, it is the task of the metaphysician to consider causes as causes.¹⁵ From this it follows that it is not the concern of the natural philosopher to consider the causality possessed by any number of secondary causes and reason to a primary cause thereof possessing that causality essentially; for this would not be to consider causes as causes of natural changes, but in terms of their very causality. The proof of the first way,

sed secundum quod sunt entia. Hoc igitur quod est causa rerum in quantum sunt entia, oportet esse causam rerum, non solum secundum quod sunt talia per formas accidentiales, nec secundum quod sunt haec per formas substantiales, sed etiam secundum omne illud quod pertinet ad esse illorum quocumque modo'. See also *De potentia*, q. 3, a. 5: 'Posteriorres vero philosophi, ut Plato, Aristoteles et eorum sequaces, pervenerunt ad considerationem ipsius esse universalis; et ideo ipsi soli posuerunt aliquam universalem causam rerum, a qua omnia alia in esse prodirent, ut patet per Augustinum. Cui quidem sententiae etiam Catholica fides consentit'.

¹⁴ See my article referred to in note 8 for a discussion of how Aquinas's thought on the demonstrability of God entails that our way to God must be metaphysical proceeding from a consideration of the being of things [See also Chapter 1 of this volume].

¹⁵ In II phys., lec. 5, n. 176.

however, does just this: it considers the actuality of causality (motion) in a series of causes and reasons that such causality would not be present were it not for some primary cause. Hence the causal reasoning employed by Thomas here is on his own account the kind of reasoning with which the metaphysician deals.

Hence, the first way must be read as a metaphysical argument.

Bearing in mind then the metaphysical calibre of the first way, we proceed to consider the steps of argumentation involved. We begin then with the motion principle: whatever is moved is moved by another. This principle quite evidently has a physical application insofar as things that are moved and thus in motion are moved by another. Despite physical readings of the motion principle, we have argued that Aquinas's first way is not a physical argument, but a metaphysical one, and so the motion principle ought to be read and defended in a metaphysical light even though it bears physical application. Elsewhere Aquinas establishes this principle with a number of arguments (alluded to above) which scrutinize the nature of physical motion, but in those same places he also offers a defence of this principle based on the roles that act and potency play in a process of change.

Act and potency exhaustively divide the common being that is the subject matter of metaphysics. So, by considering motion in terms of act and potency and defending the motion principle thereby, Aquinas will be offering a metaphysical consideration of motion in the first way.¹⁶ In adopting this approach whilst abandoning the more physical approach present in other texts, Thomas opts for a thoroughly metaphysical mode of argumentation in the first way.

Accordingly, holding that motion is the reduction of something in potency to act, Aquinas argues that the thing that is in potency is not self-actualizing in the same respect to which it is in potency. Hence, the wood is not both potentially hot and actually hot, yet it is potentially cold. So, in order to be moved from hot to cold or vice versa, there must be something that has sufficient actuality to bring the wood to the state to which it stands in potency, otherwise such potency will not be actualized. That which actualizes

¹⁶ For the division of *ens commune* into act and potency see *SCG* Lib. 2, Cap. 54: 'Sic igitur patet quod compositio actus et potentiae est in plus quam compositio formae et materiae; unde materia et forma dividunt substantiam materialem: potentia autem et actus dividunt *ens commune*'. And for the metaphysical consideration of motion as pertaining to the common nature of being, see *Super de Trinitate*, qu. 5, art. 4, ad 6: 'Metaphysicus considerat etiam de singularibus entibus non secundum proprias rationes, per quas sunt tale vel tale *ens*, sed secundum quod participant communem rationem entis, et sic etiam pertinet ad eius considerationem materia et motus'.

the potency of the thing for some actuality is the other by which the thing is moved when reduced from potency to act. Hence what is moved is moved by another.

Now it will be opportune at this point to dispel some common misconceptions of this argumentation. To begin with, Thomas's reasoning is not so elementary as to make the blunder that the actualizing principle of the thing in potency is in all cases itself identical to the actuality that it brings about. Whilst of course fire produces fire, it is not the case that a king-maker must be a king or that only dead men commit murders, as Kenny points out.¹⁷ The only way in which Thomas could be committed to such an absurdity is if he is committed to the principle that 'only what is actually F will make something else become F'.¹⁸ But Thomas of course is not committed to any such principle; rather he is committed to the principle that nothing can be reduced from potency to act, except by something in act ('de potentia autem non potest aliquid reduci in actum, nisi per aliquid ens in actu'). This principle is not to say that what actualizes the potency of the thing is itself actual in the respect of which the potency is actualized; it simply must be so actual that it is within its power to actualize the potency of the thing, and hence the thing that is actualized is so moved by another and not by itself.¹⁹ Indeed, just two questions later in the *ST*, Aquinas offers an account of how perfections present in effects can pre-exist in their cause in a non-univocal, but virtual, sense and so causes, whilst not in act in the same way as their effects,²⁰ are sufficiently in act to produce their effects.²⁰

Furthermore, it is no objection to this principle that animals and in particular rational animals are self-movers and so appear to self-actualize. Aquinas is aware of this issue and addresses it later in the *Summa Theologiae* when discussing volitional activity. In ST IaIIae, qu. 9, art. 3, Aquinas explains that whilst the will moves itself to will the means to some end, it does not reduce itself from potency to act in willing the end, since (art. 4) it is moved by an object, something external, to will that end. Now, in willing the means to the end to which the will is so moved, the will moves the intellect to take counsel as to the appropriate means. And so the picture we see emerging is that an object moves the will to will an end, the will in so being

¹⁷ Kenny, *Five Ways*, p. 21.

¹⁸ Kenny, *Five Ways*, p. 21.

¹⁹ For discussion see Aquinas, *In VIII phys.*, lec. 10, nn. 1052–53; Wippel, *Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, p. 447; Scott MacDonald, 'Aquinas's Parasitic Cosmological Argument', *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 1 (1991), pp. 133–35; Edward Feser, *Five Proofs of the Existence of God*, p. 33.

²⁰ STI, q. 4, a. 2.

moved wills the intellect to take counsel as to the means, and with the means having been so understood the will in turn wills those means. At no point do we have anything that is potential in some respect being actual in that same respect, but at every point we have something being moved by something other than it.

Given the physical application of the motion principle, one might argue that it is undermined by Newtonian physics with the latter's commitment to the principle of inertia. According to this principle, things are in a constant and uniform motion unless acted upon by something else.²¹ Hence, it is not exactly the origination of motion that calls for explanation but the change of motion.

Yet even granting the principle of inertia, Aquinas's reasoning still follows, since even if things are subject to inertia, they are not self-actuating.²² Inertia is conceived to be a principle of motion of the thing, and as such a principle it can explain the motion that the thing is currently undergoing. But it says nothing as to the origin of such motion, nothing of how such inertial motion came to be applicable to the thing in the first place; and this would require appeal to some efficient cause of motion, the sort of causal appeal that generates Aquinas's reasoning in the first way. Indeed, Newton was well aware of the fact that inertia cannot be the most

²¹ Isaac Newton, *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica*, ed. A. Koyré and I. B. Cohen (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), definition III: 'The *vis insita* or innate force of matter is a power of resisting, by which every body, as much as in it lies, continues in its present state, whether it be of rest, or of moving uniformly forward in a straight line'. See also his first law of motion: 'Every body continues in its state of rest, or of uniform motion in a right line, unless it is compelled to change that state by forces impressed upon it' (*ibid.*).

²² The laconic 'if' here refers to the fact that it is not clear whether inertia is a demonstrable feature of physical things, as opposed to an inference concerning what motion would be like at the limit of resistive force, a situation which is never experienced and which it would appear cannot be tested. See Wallace, 'Newtonian Antinomies', pp. 178–80. Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange reproduces a letter from Pierre Duhem in which he (Duhem) argues that when physicists speak of inertia, they do not do so as if it were some truth about reality of which they are certain, but because it is a useful tool to make sense of motion and that no successful physical theory can do without it. Hence, as Duhem presents it in his correspondence to Garrigou-Lagrange, inertia is a principle by which we can make sense of things the truth of which we are certain, i.e. the motion of physical bodies, but it itself is not a truth of which we are certain. Thus, Duhem takes the principle to be almost like a regulative ideal by means of which we can make sense of motion. For Duhem's letter see Garrigou-Lagrange, *Dieu: son existence et sa nature* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1914), pp. 761–63.

fundamental explanation of a thing's motion, since he explicitly states in the *Opticks* that there is needed some principle by which things are put into motion and conserved in motion.²³ Consequently, Newtonian inertia, if indeed it is true of physical things, does not explain the origin of motion in things, nor does it even explain the current state of motion, since Newton himself holds that the conservation of motion requires some other principle. All in all, inertia does not account for the actuality of motion in a thing, in which case that actuality requires some cause independent of the thing, something other by which the thing is moved, and this is what Aquinas's motion principle maintains.²⁴

So much for the motion principle, now let us consider the infinite regress.

Aquinas sets up the regress argument in a familiar fashion. If we have something moved and we know that it is moved by another, we ask whether that mover is itself moved. If it is not, then we have reached a mover that is unmoved; if it is, then we infer a mover for it and consider whether that mover is moved and if so what about its mover and so on. Now Thomas denies that such a series of moved movers can go on to infinity because in that case there would be no primary mover and so nothing else would be moved, since secondary movers are moved by a primary mover, like the stick is moved by the hand. Given that there are secondary movers as the preceding reasoning of the first way makes clear, we must then arrive at some primary mover whence such secondary movers derive their ability to move others.

I interpret this denial of an infinite regress in terms of *per se* ordered causal series, but before going on to spell out what this entails, it is important to note that here Thomas does not make use of the more physical argumentation he utilizes in *SCG* Lib. I, Cap. 13, and lectio 2 of the commentary on

²³ Newton, *Opticks or A Treatise of the reflections, refractions, inflections & colours of light* (New York: Dover Publications, 1952), bk. 3, query 32: 'The *vis inertiae* is a passive principle by which bodies persist in their motion or rest, receive motion in proportion to the force impressing it, and resist as much as they are resisted. By this principle alone there never could be any motion in the world. Some other principle was necessary for putting bodies into motion; and now they are in motion, some other principle is necessary for conserving the motion'.

²⁴ For discussion of the Newtonian principle see Ernan McMullin, *Newton on Matter and Activity* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1978), Chapter 2; for the Thomistic reaction to the challenge of inertia see Wippel, *Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, pp. 454–56; Jacques Maritain, *Approaches to God*, trans. Peter O'Reilly (London: Allen and Unwin, 1955), pp. 24–5; Wallace, 'Newtonian Antinomies', pp. 173–86.

Physics 8 to deny an infinite regress. Rather his reasoning here focuses more on the interaction of primary and secondary movers such that the latter would not have motive power (causal actuality) unless for the former. This fact ties in with the more general metaphysical outlook of the first way to the effect that it was the metaphysics of act and potency that establishes the motion principle, and so the same metaphysics can be applied to the denial of an infinite regress of moved movers. This then takes us into a consideration of *per se* ordered series.

A *per se* ordered series, or essentially ordered series, is a series of causes the members of which do not possess the causality of the series in virtue of what they are. The typical example is the mental agent who moves his hands to move the stick to move the stone. The hands, stick, and stone do not possess the causality of motion in virtue of being what they are, since hands, sticks, and stones are themselves immobile unless something moves them. Hence the causal actuality that they have in this case—motion—is derived from the mental agent. Were there no such cause for the causality that these secondary causes wield, there would be no such causal series. Hence, *per se* ordered series cannot be without a primary cause for the causality of the series; and such a primary cause is primary precisely because it has the causality of the series *per se*.²⁵

Given the latter, if we have a series of moved movers, all such movers are in themselves lacking in the actuality of the motion that they have and they depend on something other than themselves for such actuality. If there were an infinite series and hence no primary mover from which all such motive actuality were derived, everything would be a moved mover and so essentially lacking in actuality; and insofar as an infinite series has no primary cause for such actuality, without a prime mover there is nothing to bring about the actuality in the things which essentially lack it. Consequently, an infinite series of moved movers would be essentially immobile, and this contradicts the manifest fact that there is motion, in which case a series of moved movers cannot be infinite.

²⁵ For further details on the metaphysics of *per se* ordered series see my articles 'Essentially Ordered Series Reconsidered', and 'Essentially Ordered Series Reconsidered Once Again' [Chapters 2 – 3 in this volume]; see also Caleb Cohoe, 'There must be a First: Why Thomas Aquinas Rejects Infinite, Essentially Ordered, Causal Series'. More recently, a consideration of *per se* ordered series as figuring in one of Avicenna's proofs of God can be found in Celia Byrne, 'The Role of Essentially Ordered Causal Series in Avicenna's Proof for the Necessary Existence in the Metaphysics of the Salvation', *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 36:2 (2019), pp. 121–38.

This reasoning against an infinite series of moved movers does not equivocate between a primary mover that is simply an earlier mover imparting motion and a primary mover which is the source of all motion, as Kenny states it does.²⁶ Given the metaphysical reading of the first way that I have been advocating, the primary mover is taken to be a mover which brings about the actuality that all secondary movers have, and not just something that is earlier in the series and gets it going. Hence throughout the argumentation, Thomas is thinking of the primary mover as the source of actuality.

Furthermore, this argument does not suffer from the problem proposed for it by Christopher Williams, who argues that employing the notions of 'primary' and 'secondary' mover in the reasoning presupposes that there is a primary mover, since one cannot have a sufficient notion of a secondary mover unless one has already arrived at a notion of primary mover from which to differentiate it. But one does not arrive at a primary mover until one has denied an infinite series of moved movers, in which case considerations pertaining to primary and secondary movers cannot be used to establish that there is a primary mover.²⁷

Williams's objection is misguided because Thomas has a clear notion of secondary mover in place when he sets up the regress, and this is to the effect that secondary movers are those movers that depend on another for their actuality, so that when we look for that by which a thing is moved we can ask whether it is dependent for its actuality and so on. Given this notion of secondary mover, we know that something is a primary mover if it is not like that; but this does not entail at this point that any such primary mover exists, only that this is what a primary mover would be. It is a further step to deny an infinite regress and affirm a primary mover; yet given the independent intelligibility of the notions of primary and secondary movers prior to the denial of such a regress, these notions can be put to use in considering whether or not the series of moved movers can be infinite.

Having arrived at a primary mover put in motion by no other and the source of motion for all, Aquinas maintains that we have arrived at what we understand to be God. This may cause some concern for physical readings of the argument insofar as some natural phenomenon, or singularity, or world soul could be the source of all motion; and indeed, on a physical

²⁶ Kenny, *The Five Ways*, 26.

²⁷ Williams, 'Hic autem non est procedure in infinitum...', pp. 403–5, in particular, p. 403: 'For not until we know that such a series is impossible can we know that all movers are properly described either as "a first mover" or as "second movers". This, however, is precisely what the argument assumes. It equates "movers other than the first mover" and "second movers"'. Kenny makes a similar objection in *Five Ways*, pp. 26–27.

reading of motion, it is not necessarily the case that the absolute source be He Who Is as conceived in the *sed contra* of the article. But if we give the argument a more metaphysical reading there is some plausibility in holding that the primary mover is God, and this precisely because as a primary mover God is the source of actuality for all things that are in motion, but whatever is in motion is in potency, in which case God is the source of actuality for all things that are in potency. As source of actuality for all things that are in potency, God himself can be in potency in no respect; for then he would not be the source of actuality for all things that are in potency. Hence, God must be pure actuality. If God as primary mover is pure act, then all things are subject to him and he is subject to nothing. This reading certainly takes us beyond some first source of all physical motion and closer to the classical conception of God as the source of all things.

2. Interpretation and Objection

So much for the first way; we have considered it in depth and related it to some of Aquinas's wider philosophical commitments. In what follows I wish to interpret the first way as a form of Aquinas's more general way to God. Having done that, I shall consider one recent objection.

2.1. *Aquinas's Way to God*

The first way pertains to motion, but not just to the observation of physical motion and the discernment of some sort of first source of that. Rather, what is under investigation is the metaphysics of motion, that is to say, what metaphysical structures need to be in place for motion to occur. This is evident in Aquinas's defence of the motion principle in terms of act and potency. As we have seen, Aquinas defends this principle by considering how act and potency are at work in motion itself. Thus, we have moved away from any one instance of physical motion and are considering the causality of motion in itself. As such, while it may springboard from a consideration of motion, Aquinas is not concerned with this or that motion and drawing a line from that to a first; rather Aquinas is concerned with any motion, and as such the reduction of any kind of potentiality to actuality. This then entails that what Thomas is striving after is not a first cause of some particular species of motion, but a primary cause without which there would be no motion.

Now, as is clear, to move something is to bring it from potency to act: '*Movere enim nihil aliud est quam educere aliquid de potentia in actum*'.

The actuality of the motion whilst the motion is ongoing is not yet complete; its actuality participates in that of the efficient cause and anticipates as an end some completion of its actuality. Motion then is an imperfect actuality originated by some motive cause, awaiting to be perfected.²⁸ So for example (the *prima via* example), the stick participates in the motion granted to it by the hand, and whilst in motion it anticipates the completion of its activity in moving the stone. If the first way is after a primary mover responsible for all motion, the first way is after a principle without which there would be no reduction of *any* potentiality to act. In other words, the first way seeks to demonstrate that the primary mover is what actualizes any potentiality. The metaphysical reading of the first way justifies the further conclusion, manifest in the following questions of *ST* Ia, that the primary mover of the first way is pure act, since as the primary mover metaphysically conceived, he is that without which there would be no actuality in any process of change. Hence, nothing is in act unless by the primary mover.

This metaphysical analysis in turn brings in the context of Aquinas's metaphysics of *esse*. The primary mover of the first way is that without which there would be no actuality; it is pure actuality. But *esse* is the act of all acts. Hence, the kind of reasoning offered here for a primary mover conceived of as responsible for all actuality is the same as that offered elsewhere by Aquinas for a primary source of *esse*. The argumentative strategy is the same on both accounts: isolate some causal feature of things which exhibits metaphysical dependency for actuality, such as motion/distinction of essence and *esse*, then locate that causal feature within the context of the metaphysics of *per se* ordered series, and then reason to a primary cause for such actuality without which there would be no actuality in question. The first way is manifestation of the more existential way to God but springboards from a different starting point.

Not only that, this reading of the first way accords with what Aquinas says elsewhere about the demonstrability of God and the raising of philosophical minds to a consideration of a primary cause as a creator. As we observed in the previous section, Aquinas holds that we reason to God by considering some feature of creatures and thence inferring that God is the cause of such a feature. We also noted that when it comes to the history of philosophical reflection on creation, Aquinas noted that it was only when

²⁸ In *XI Met.*, lec. 9, n. 2291: 'Motus non habet aliquam aliam naturam separatam a rebus aliis; sed unaquaeque forma secundum quod est in fieri, est actus imperfectus qui dicitur motus' Marietti ed.. See also n. 2310: 'Motivum dicitur ex eo quod est potens mouere; movens autem in operari, idest in eo quod est esse actu; et ita, cum movens dicatur propter motum, motus erit actus motivi'.

philosophers had considered beings in terms of their very being that they were able to raise their minds to the notion of a creator, since a primary cause of the very being of things is thus a creator. Considering these points, the first way isolates some dependent feature of creatures, such as dependency for actuality disclosed in motion, and in turn arrives at a primary cause without which there would be no actuality in question. Such a cause can only be the cause of the being of things, since the primary and most fundamental form of actuality is that of the being or *esse* that things have.

It is not the case then that here we have several ways to God in Aquinas: the first way from motion and the more existential way(s) manifest in other places. Rather, what we have is Aquinas's way to God which moves from the observation of some dependence for actuality and reasons to a primary source of actuality without which there would be nothing. Aquinas's way to God remains the same, but it is manifested as different *viae* given the different contexts from which he wants to springboard the argument.²⁹

Given this reading of the first way, one might charge that on my reading Thomas begins with natural philosophy and then moves to metaphysics. This is because I grant that Aquinas begins with an observation of physical things but quickly proceeds to consider them metaphysically, and so seeks an account for the actuality that anything has in a dependent fashion.³⁰ Someone might insist that either the argument is a physical argument and we remain with physical demonstrations or it is a metaphysical argument

²⁹ This is the same approach to the first way adopted by Owens and Knasas. See the articles by Owens, 'Immobility and Existence for Aquinas', 'Actuality in the *Prima Via*', and 'The Conclusion of the *Prima Via*' in *St. Thomas Aquinas on the Existence of God*; Knasas, *Thomistic Existentialism*, pp. 251–56. One difference I have with those is that they see the first way as based on an underlying concern for *esse* and proceeding to affirm a primary cause of *esse*. Whilst sympathetic to that approach, I maintain that Thomas's concern is for dependent actuality and so reasons to a primary source of all actuality. It may be however that the difference between us is merely one of emphasis.

³⁰ I share my reading with Wippel, *Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, p. 457: 'My view is that the first way as it appears in STI, q. 2, a. 3 starts from a physical fact, but that if it is to reach the absolutely unmoved mover or God, it must pass beyond this and beyond a limited and physical application of the principle of motion to a wider application that will apply to any reduction of a being from not acting to acting. In other words, the argument becomes metaphysical in its justification and application of the motion principle, and only then can it succeed in arriving at God. This means that, in its refutation of an infinite regress of moved movers as an alternative explanation, the argument concludes to a source of motion that is not itself moved in any way whatsoever and, therefore, is not reduced from potency to act in any way'. Knasas criticises Wippel for this reading in *Thomistic Existentialism*, pp. 254–55.

and we remain with metaphysics throughout. But I do not think that this charge can be levelled at my reading. The advertence to some physical feature of the world to springboard an argument does not entail that the feature thereby considered is drawn from a domain exclusive to natural philosophy; rather, all it shows is that the phenomenon under question is drawn from the natural world. And both the metaphysician and the natural philosopher consider the natural world, though what differentiates them is the formality under which they consider it. In the case of the metaphysician, he considers the world in terms of its very being. Hence, it is the explanation of the phenomenon taken as a starting point that will designate the argument as metaphysical or otherwise. But we have seen that the explanation of motion is in terms of act and potency and so is metaphysical. Hence, the argument, whilst observing physical realities, is metaphysical from start to finish.³¹

2.2. *Existential Inertia*

In our presentation, we have gone into some depth on the argumentative moves that Aquinas makes in the first way, and we have defended those moves against some traditional misunderstandings, such as understanding the argument as a metaphysical rather than physical argument, clarifying the nature of motion and *per se* ordered series, and noting that the causality at stake in the first way is that of actuality and so the reduction of any potentiality to actuality. These involve traditional misunderstandings of the first way, and their treatment has appeared in several notable publications since the renewal of interest in Aquinas's thought in the twentieth century, and the renewed interest in the philosophy of religion in general in the second half of the twentieth century. In dealing with these objections in the text, we have not broken a lot of new ground; we have simply clarified what Thomas said or what his exponents have already pointed out. However, there are some objections of recent vintage which whilst sharing some things in common with older objections do present themselves as new objections. This is no doubt because of the renewed interest in the argument from motion brought about because of Feser's defence thereof and the reaction it has provoked. Whilst Thomists will continue to defend the first way against various objections, I would like to focus on one particular objection here, and that is existential inertia.

³¹ On this score I am in substantial agreement with Twetten, who holds that the first way is thoroughly metaphysical from start to finish, taking as its starting point the fact of motion but explaining that in metaphysical terms of act and potency ('Clearing a "Way"', pp. 67–71).

The reason why I focus on this objection is not simply because it has recently emerged in the discussion of Aquinas's argumentation, but also because the very proposal of this as an objection requires a commitment to an underlying metaphysics alien to Aquinas's metaphysics. Hence, existential inertia as an objection can be pushed only from within the context of a non-Thomistic metaphysics. And this highlights that what is at stake in the argument is not an interpretation of some physical reality at the physical level, such as motion, but the metaphysical framework within which that physical reality is to be understood, which is that of act and potency.

Graham Oppy and after him Joseph Schmid have recently published papers in which they target Feser's argument from motion.³² In Feser's argument, he argues that the principle of actuality which actualizes something currently in act must be concurrent with it, and from there he reasons to some primary cause without which even now there would be no actuality. Oppy and Schmid object that there is an alternative account of actuality and actualization, that in the absence of some competing causal influence, the object simply remains in existence.

This is an old objection because at its core it is a reiteration of one made by Mortimer Adler. He maintained that objects do not need some cause of their current existence given that they do exist; rather unless there is a cause which stops a thing from existing, objects simply continue to exist. Accordingly, objects enjoy what has come to be called existential inertia.³³ Despite this objection being a somewhat older objection, it has received very little presentation in the literature, and next to no systematic articulation of what existential inertia involves.³⁴

If this objection is correct, then we have a problem; for it would entail that the actuality objects have is not dependent on some cause whenever they have it. Thus, whilst the objects have actuality non-essentially and so appear to be candidates for members of a *per se* causal series, there is no need for a

³² Oppy, 'On Stage One of Feser's Aristotelian Proof'; Joseph Schmid, 'Existential Inertia and the Aristotelian Proof', *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 89:3 (2021), pp. 201–20. For Feser, see *Five Proofs*, Chapter 1.

³³ See Adler, *How to Think about God: A Guide for the 20th Century Pagan*, Chapter 13.

³⁴ See: Kvanvig and McCann, 'Divine Conservation and the Persistence of the World'; Freddoso, 'Medieval Aristotelianism and the Case against Secondary Causation in Nature'; Freddoso, 'God's Concurrence with Secondary Causes: Why Conservation Is Not Enough'; Beaudoin, 'The World's Continuance: Divine Conservation or Existential Inertia?'; Feser, *Five Proofs*, pp. 232–38, and 'Existential Inertia and the Five Ways'; Audi, 'Existential Inertia'.

primary cause within which such objects participate for their causal actuality, since once gifted to them that causal actuality remains. So at most we could say there is a first cause for actuality, but not a primary cause that is *per se* actual.

Let's begin by focussing on the nature of objects as Aquinas conceives them, especially objects as they are conceived in the first way. What is being considered in the first way is the reduction of potentiality to actuality. As the argument goes, no potency is reduced to actuality unless for some principle of actuality which so reduces it. Objects then are composites of potency and act. Now the act which reduces the potency must be concurrent with the object in the reduction to act precisely because, unless the object participates in the actuality by which its potency is reduced, its potency would not be reduced. We can illustrate this by considering Thomas's thinking on essence and existence.

For Aquinas, unless something participates in its act of existence, its *esse*, it would be nothing. It is not the case that a thing can have *esse* and that the *esse* conjoin with it and remain with it once conjoined. This is because the thing is precisely nothing without the *esse*. Hence *esse* is not like a colour property of a substance which remains with the substance so long as no other cause comes along to change things (Oppy's example). Rather, *esse* is that actuality without which there would be nothing in the first place, in which case the actuality in question (*esse*) does not reside in an object already existing; rather the *esse* is the actuality without which there is nothing, so that unless the object participates in its *esse* for any moment in which it exists, the *esse* would be precisely nothing. With regard to existential act, existential inertia then is a non-starter for Thomas.³⁵

But let us just consider actuality *per se*, and not focus on existential actuality. Whilst the purveyors of the existential inertia objection are concerned only with the actual existence of the thing, one might wish to argue that the objection applies to any kind of actuality, and this because Thomas takes the motion in the first way to be any reduction of potency to act, not just the act of existence. There are two things to say about this.

First, *esse* is the act of all acts, so that any actuality in the thing presupposes *esse* and thereby participates in *esse*. Hence, if the existential inertia objection does not work against *esse*, then we have a fundamental principle of actuality without which there would be nothing and on which any actualized potency in the thing fundamentally depends for any moment of its existence. Hence, the reasoning in the first way is safeguarded.

³⁵ For more details on this issue with specific consideration of *esse*, see my article 'Existential Inertia and the Thomistic Way to God' [Chapter 4 in the current volume].

Second, even when it comes to just any actuality, a thing in question must participate in that actuality for as long as it is actual in that respect. Take Oppy's example of a colour persisting in a substance. Oppy takes this as an illustration that things remain as they are unless something comes along to change them, in which case we need not a concurrent cause for the state of things; rather we need only a cause for the change in state. But if we consider Thomas's understanding of the colour of a substance, Oppy is wrong in this respect. A substance is coloured because it is formed in some way, that is, a configuration of its matter has occurred such that it is coloured that way. This configuration of the thing's matter is the actuality that it enjoys, and so long as the matter participates in that actuality—in that form, the form remains. Hence, the matter of the thing must continually be present to the form to be so formed.

Now of course, this does not mean that the thing must be continually present to the efficient cause of the form in order to be so formed, only that it be continually present to the formal cause, the form. One cannot generalize from the fact that an object does not continually depend on an efficient cause for some actuality to the conclusion that actuality *per se* does not require some concurrent cause. In the colour case, the actuality is that of form, and the form needs to be concurrently in the matter for the matter to be so informed.

In the case of existence, we have a different kind of actuality, not a formal actuality which resides in the matter of the thing, since essence and existence are distinct. Nevertheless, unless the thing participated in its *esse*, it would not have *esse*. Hence the principle of actuality by which the thing is in act must be concurrent with the thing; and that being the case, a thing cannot have some actuality non-essentially and yet persist in that actuality independently of the primary cause of that actuality. In the colour case the primary cause of that actuality is the form; in the existential case, it is that whose essence is its *esse*.

Given what we have said above, we can engage with Schmid's recent account of existential inertia. He offers two models by which to understand it. The first is that the current existence of an object is explained by its previous state and existence along with the absence of any causally destructive factors.³⁶ This offers a precise account of existential inertia, but it gives us no reason to accept it, especially not in light of Aquinas's metaphysics.

On the Thomistic account, given that an object would not be were it not to participate in *esse*, at any point at which it is, it is dependent on *esse*;

³⁶ Schmid, 'Existential Inertia', p. 5.

for not only presently, but at any point in its past and future history, an object exists because it depends on its *esse*. Hence, unless the object is caused in its existence at any point at which it exists, it simply would not exist. Just as something is illuminated at any moment because it participates in some source of illumination and is in darkness otherwise, so too an object exists because it participates in *esse* and is nothing otherwise.

Schmid believes that if a thing persists through time, then it is something about that thing itself by which it persists through time, so that if the thing were not itself able to persist through time, not even God could cause it to persist. So, if God causes a thing to persist through time, that thing itself must be able to persist through time, in which case God's causality presupposes the persistence of a thing and does not establish it.³⁷

The problem here is that Schmid is deploying a metaphysics of his own with which a Thomist need not agree, especially when it comes to existence. A thing simply cannot exist by itself, since essence and existence are distinct in the thing, and were the thing not to participate in its existence it simply would not be. Hence, God's causality with regard to existence does not presuppose the existence of the thing, but establishes it. In that case, then, a thing persists through time precisely because it participates in its existence, which it would not have were it not for God's granting it. We can illuminate this point further by considering an example that Aquinas often uses in the context of the causality of existence.

The atmosphere is illuminated for as long as it participates in the source of illumination; it is not caused to be luminous independently of that source. Similarly, a thing exists at whatever moment it exists because it participates in *esse*; it is not caused to possess *esse* independently of the cause of *esse*. Thus, a thing exists for as long as it does exist precisely because it is present to the source of existence receiving existence from it. On Thomas's account of existence and actuality, then, existential inertia or a modification thereof makes no sense.

Schmid's second model of existential inertia is not so much a model but a claim that it is simply basic.³⁸ As such it is non-threatening to Aquinas's position insofar as Aquinas draws upon a metaphysics, defended elsewhere, which guides the steps of the first way. This does however present us with the opportunity to make an observation about Schmid's engagement here which will round off this article by exposing once again Aquinas's approach to demonstrating God's existence. The observation is this: Schmid presumes that the dialectical context of argumentation for God's existence

³⁷ Schmid, 'Existential Inertia', p. 5.

³⁸ Schmid, 'Existential Inertia', p. 9.

is metaphysically neutral, such that we can enter the argumentation free from metaphysical baggage. Accordingly, when it comes to deciding over existential inertia and what he calls the existential elimination thesis, we must have an attitude of neutrality.³⁹ Indeed, Schmid characterizes things in terms of entertaining two competing theses from the outset. Regardless of whether this is how Feser (Schmid's target) thinks about things, it is certainly not how Aquinas thought. Thomas took the demonstration of God's existence as something that occurs in metaphysics. That being the case, the argumentation is guided within the metaphysics that Thomas endorses, a metaphysics we have seen at use in our presentation of the first way. Given that existential inertia is an impossibility on the Thomistic metaphysics, we need to see some justification for why we should accept it as basic. Schmid offers none other than certain theoretical virtues; but a defender of Aquinas can simply point out that the same theoretical virtues are met with his metaphysics, and on the latter existential inertia remains an impossibility. So, unless Schmid can justify the alternative metaphysical backdrop that would make existential inertia plausible, it is not threatening to Aquinas's first way.⁴⁰

³⁹ Schmid, 'Existential Inertia', p. 9; see the introductory section.

⁴⁰ I would also observe, but not pursue the matter here, that in his discussion of the explanatory primitive nature of existential inertia, Schmid confuses something's being explanatorily basic, and so not explained by anything further, and having a justification for accepting that something is the case. The Thomist is no stranger to something's being explanatorily basic, and indeed I myself have argued that *esse* is explanatorily basic in Aquinas's thinking; see 'Thomist esse and Analytical Philosophy'. However, that does not mean that one is absolved from offering reasons for holding that something explanatorily basic like existential inertia (or Thomist *esse*) signifies how things are in reality. For the latter we need to offer reasons, a metaphysics; this is something that Thomas and Thomists in general do, but it is something that Schmid has not as yet undertaken.

Chapter 8 - The Relevance of Aquinas's Uncaused Cause Argument Today

God is typically understood to be the cause of all things and as such God is thought to be wholly uncaused, since if God is the cause of all things, there exists nothing that is not His effect, which is to say there is nothing that can act as His cause. This is what God is typically understood to be, but the argumentation by which one establishes that such a figure actually exists is not so straightforward.

Thomas's second way is one such argument that seeks to show that there is an absolutely uncaused efficient cause of all that is, and in so showing concludes that this is what we call God. The second way then seeks to establish the existence of what we typically take God to be. In this chapter I shall offer a reading of Aquinas's second way that does three things: (i) firstly I shall present a précis of the argument highlighting its main argumentative moves; (ii) secondly I shall present an analysis of the argument highlighting the deeper philosophical issues involved and offering some justification thereof; (iii) thirdly I shall consider the kind of God to which the second way commits us and the consequences that that has for our thinking about the creator/creature relationship.

1. Précis of the Argument

Let us begin with a preliminary presentation of the argument. Thomas writes as follows:

The second way is taken from the nature of efficient cause. We find there to be in sensible things an order of efficient causes such that it is never found to be nor is it possible that something is the efficient cause of itself; for then it would be prior to itself, which is impossible. Now it is not possible to proceed to infinity in efficient causes, because in all efficient causes that are ordered, the primary is the cause of the intermediate and the intermediate is the cause of the ultimate, whether the intermediate causes are many or only one. Now, remove the cause and one removes the effect. Therefore, if there is no primary cause in efficient causes, there will be neither an ultimate nor an intermediate. But if one proceeds to infinity in efficient causes, there will be no primary efficient cause, and thus

there will be no ultimate effect, nor intermediate efficient causes, which is evidently false. Therefore, it is necessary to posit some primary efficient cause, which everyone names 'God'.¹

Thomas is clear from the outset, this proof will proceed from a consideration of the nature [*ratio*] of efficient causality; his intention then is to consider the order that is followed in efficient causes and ascertain whether or not the logic of that order entails that there cannot be an infinite regress in efficient causes. Accordingly, the order that is characteristic of efficient causes is such that the cause always precedes its effect, and this is because given the mode of causality the being of the effect is derived from that of the cause, so that it could never be the case that one could have the being of the effect without the cause from which it is derived.

Having presented the order essential to efficient causality, Thomas then goes on to deny the possibility of proceeding to infinity in efficient causes that are ordered to each other. What Thomas means by efficient causes that are ordered is a series of efficient causes all of which work together to produce some effect. In a finite ordered series of efficient causes, the primary is the cause of the intermediate and the intermediate the cause of the ultimate thereby producing the effect; so all causes work together to produce the ultimate effect, and this is the case whether or not the intermediate causes are one or many. Having presented the order obtaining amongst ordered efficient causes, Thomas then goes on to connect the latter up with the nature of efficient causality itself.

Recall that in efficient causality the being of the effect depends on that of the cause, so that the effect cannot precede the cause, but the being of the cause must precede that of the effect. It follows then that in efficient

¹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, qu. 2, art. 3: 'Secunda via est ex ratione causae efficientis. Invenimus enim in istis sensibilibus esse ordinem causarum efficientium; nec tamen invenitur, nec est possibile quod aliquid sit causa efficiens sui ipsius; quia esset prius seipso, quod est impossibile. Non autem est possibile quod in causis efficientibus procedatur in infinitum, quia in omnibus causis efficientibus ordinatis, primum est causa medii, et medium est causa ultimi; sive media sint plura sive unum tantum. Remota autem causa, removetur effectus. Ergo, si non fuerit primum in causis efficientibus, non erit ultimum nec medium. Sed si procedatur in infinitum in causis efficientibus, non erit prima causa efficiens; et sic non erit nec effectus ultimus, nec causae efficientes mediae; quod patet esse falsum. Ergo est necesse ponere aliquam causam efficientem primam, quam omnes Deum nominant'. Unless otherwise stated, all translations from the work of Aquinas will be my own. A highly readable translation of the *Summa* is the following: *Summa Theologica* 5 Vols. trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Allen Texas: Christian Classics, 1981).

causality, without the cause there is no effect, i.e. remove the cause and one removes the effect. Consequently, when we consider an ordered series of efficient causes, the ultimate depends for its being on the intermediate and the intermediate on the primary, so that without the primary cause there is no intermediate, and without the intermediate there is no ultimate. But in an infinite series there is no primary cause, otherwise it would be finite. Therefore, if there were an infinite series of efficient causes, there would be neither intermediate nor ultimate causes, but this is evidently false. There must therefore be some primary efficient cause without which there is no intermediate or ultimate, and this we call 'God'.

This is a brief summary of the argument; in presenting it I have deliberately glossed over some of the important philosophical issues involved so as to give the reader a feel for the argumentative moves that Thomas makes. The deeper philosophical issues will be considered in our analysis of the argument, to which we now turn.

2. Analysis

Thomas's second way is a relatively straightforward argument. Beginning with a presentation of the order in efficient causality, he proceeds to consider the order in a series of efficient causes and thence connects the two together and denies an infinite regress of efficient causes thereby arriving at a primary cause which we call God. In analysing the argument we shall begin with (i) the order of efficient causality, (ii) the order in a series of efficient causes, and (iii) the possibility of an infinite regress; as an addendum to (i) – (iii) we shall consider (iv) Thomas's conclusion that this is what we call 'God'.

2.1. *The Order of Efficient Causality*

In considering causality, Thomas had before him a fourfold framework within which causal relations were analysed. This was the framework of the four Aristotelian causes: (i) formal, (ii) efficient, (iii) material, and (iv) final.² All such causes were taken to answer a particular type of 'why' question so that they were posited as offering an explanation of some

² Aquinas, *In VIII Phys.*, lib. 2, lect. 5, nn. 178 – 181. The following is a very accessible translation of the commentary on the *Physics* and its paragraph numbers track those of the Marietti edition: *Commentary on Aristotle's Physics* (Notre Dame: Dumb Ox Books, 1961), trans. Richard J. Blackwell, Richard J. Spath, and W. Edmund Thirkel.

phenomena.³ An effect in any of the four causal contexts is taken to be derived from and to depend on the cause in question and given the causal context the derivation and dependency of the effect on the cause is contextualised accordingly.⁴

With regard to efficient causality, the efficient cause is taken to be the first source of motion in a thing, so that without the efficient cause there would be no motion in the thing.⁵ Now, the motion that the efficient cause imparts is not to be interpreted exclusively in terms of local motion, in the way that one snooker ball imparts motion to another. Motion has a much richer meaning in Thomas's metaphysical framework than simply local motion. What is essential to Thomas's account of motion (and this especially so when the context is arguing for the existence of God) is the movement from potency to act.⁶ The move from potency to act, i.e. the actualisation of some potency signifies the essence of motion for Thomas, so that motion is the act of the thing existing in potency.⁷ Thus, in considering the causality of the efficient cause as the source of motion in the thing, we need to consider it in terms of motion interpreted as the act of the thing existing in potency. The efficient cause therefore in imparting motion to the thing actualises the thing existing in potency, so that the effect in question depends on the efficient cause for its actuality, and its actuality is derived therefrom.

Now in considering actuality within Aquinas's wider metaphysical thought, we must bear in mind Aquinas's fundamental development over Aristotle in this respect, and that is the distinction and composition of essence and *esse* in the finite thing. The essence of a finite thing is related to its *esse* as potency to act, so that it is *esse* that actualises the potentially

³ Aquinas, *In II Phys.*, lib. 2, lect. 5, n. 176: '...Nos non opinamur nos scire unumquodque, nisi cum accipimus propter quid, quod est accipere causam...'.

⁴ *Ibid.*, lib. 1, lect. 1, n. 5: '...Causae autem dicuntur ex quibus aliqua dependent secundum suum esse vel fieri...'; *Ibid.*, lib. 2, lect. 5, n. 183: '...Dicitur causa id ex quo fit aliquid'; *In V Met.*, lect. 2, n. 763: '...Uno modo dicitur causa id ex quo fit aliquid...'.⁵

⁵ *In II Phys.*, Lib. 2, lect. 5, n. 180: 'Ulterius autem dicit quod alio modo dicitur causa a quo est principium motus vel quietis', see also *In V Met.*, lect. 2, n. 765.

⁶ It is precisely this metaphysical interpretation of motion that Aquinas offers in the first way, which immediately precedes the proof of God we are now considering; for commentary of this aspect of the *prima via* see Joseph Owens, 'Actuality in the "Prima Via" of St Thomas', in *St Thomas Aquinas on the Existence of God*.

⁷ *In III Phys.*, lect. 2, n. 285: 'Unde neque est potentia existentis in potentia, neque est actus existentis in actu, sed est actus existentis in potentia: ut per id quod dicitur actus, designetur ordo eius ad anteriorem potentiam, et per id quod dicitur in potentia existentis, designetur ordo eius ad ulteriorem actum'.

existing essence.⁸ Without *esse* there is nothing, so that all things come to be through *esse*. All act then is derivable from *esse*, and *esse* is thereby the act of all acts.⁹ Given then that the efficient cause actualises the effect so that the effect depends on the efficient cause for its actuality, the efficient cause is responsible for the *esse* of the thing, so that in Aquinas's metaphysical framework it is the efficient cause that imparts *esse* to the thing in rendering it actual. The being of the effect, its very *esse*, is therefore derived from and dependent on the being of the cause.

With this rich metaphysical background in mind, we can begin to appreciate Thomas's thought on the order of efficient causality presented at the beginning of the *secunda via*. He tells us that it is not possible that an efficient cause could be the cause of itself, for then it would have to be prior to itself. When we consider the metaphysics of the matter, this stands to reason. The efficient cause is what actualises the effect and causes it to be through imparting *esse*. If an efficient cause were the cause of itself, it would be the effect of itself. As cause it would impart *esse* to itself; as effect it itself would be without *esse* awaiting to receive it from an efficient cause, in this case itself. But what is without *esse* is precisely nothing, devoid of all actuality, in which case the thing in question could not impart *esse* to itself, for it would be nothing, and thus requires a cause other than itself, already in possession of *esse*, from which to receive *esse* and to which it stands as effect to cause. Thus, in efficient causality, some distinct efficient cause is required to actualise the effect, in which case no efficient cause can be the cause of itself.¹⁰

⁸ See for instance: *In I Sent.*, d. 19, qu. 2, art. 2: '...Esse est actus existentis, in quantum ens est'; *ibid.*, d. 23, qu. 1, art. 1: '...Essentia dicitur cuius actus est esse'; *In II Sent.*, d. 3, qu. 1, art. 1, ad. 4: 'Potentia tenet se ex parte quidditatis, et esse est actus ejus'; *De Ente et Essentia*, p. 377: 147 – 152: 'Omne autem quod recipit aliquid ab alio est in potentia respectu illius, et hoc quod receptum est in eo est actus eius; ergo oportet quod ipsa quiditas vel forma que est intelligentia sit in potentia respectu esse quod a Deo recipit, et illud esse receptum est per modum actus'; *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, qu. 76, art. 6: 'Primum autem inter omnes actus est esse'. I have endeavoured to present Thomas's views on *esse* as act in a context where the existence of God need not be assumed. However, the *De Ente* text above takes God's existence to be established (a presupposition for which Thomas offers an argument in the preceding lines), though the point he is making need not assume the existence of God, since Thomas need only appeal to the received and thereby caused character of *esse* in things in order to infer that *esse* stands to essence as act to potency.

⁹ *De Potentia Dei*, qu. 7, art. 2, ad. 9: '...Hoc quod dico esse est actualitas omnium actuum, et propter hoc est perfectio omnium perfectionum'; *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, qu. 3, art. 4: '...Esse est actualitas omnis formae vel naturae'.

¹⁰ Thomas says the same in his proof for the existence of God in *De Ente* Cap. 4, wherein the causality of *esse* is explicitly to the fore, *De Ente*, Cap. 4, 377:131 – 135: 'Non autem

The logic of efficient causality entails then that the efficient cause be distinct from its effect and prior to its effect, since the being of the effect is derived from that of the cause. Behind the logic of efficient causality lies a more fundamental causal principle, at work in all other forms of causality, which is to the effect that something is caused insofar as it is dependent in some fashion, so that an effect is precisely an effect insofar as it is dependent on some cause. Thus, Thomas is not committed to the view that all beings require a cause, only that those beings that are dependent in some way require a cause. This is an important point, since Thomas will seek to argue that there is some being dependent in no way and thus uncaused, which we call God; but if he were to lay down a causal principle that *all* beings require a cause, he would be contradicting himself in concluding that there is an uncaused cause. Thus, Thomas does not commit himself to the principle that all beings require a cause, which would be to rule out *a priori* the possibility of any uncaused cause, but to the more sober and parsimonious principle that all dependent beings require a cause. In the case of the second way, the dependency in question is a dependency for motion understood as act understood as *esse*, which is imparted by the efficient cause. Let us now consider an ordered series of efficient causes.

2.2. *Ordered Efficient causes*

Having considered the order in the efficient causal relationship, Thomas then states that it is impossible to proceed to infinity in efficient causes, and from

potest esse quod ipsum esse sit causatum ab ipsa forma uel quiditate rei, causatum dico sicut a causa efficiente, quia sic aliqua res esset causa sui ipsius et aliqua res seipsam in esse produceret, quod est impossibile.' In *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, p. 460, John Wippel also makes a conceptual connection between the second way and the proof of God in the *De Ente*, but he hastens to add that if one were to interpret the *secunda via* in such a fashion, one would be giving it a metaphysical reading not endorsed by its starting point in sensible things, as Wippel says concerning the cause of *esse*: '...This is not the kind of efficient causality that is immediately given to us in sense experience...' Whilst it may be true that one does not immediately experience what could be called existential efficient causality, it is nevertheless the fundamental form of efficient causality, since the efficient cause is the principle of motion in the thing, and motion is the act of the thing existing in potency and, for Thomas at least, the act of the thing existing in potency is *esse*; thus the transfer of *esse* is involved in every instance of efficient causality, in which case experience of any instance of efficient causality is implicitly an experience of existential efficient causality. I thus submit that one can read the second way in a more existential sense, closer to the argument from *De Ente* without thereby distorting the argumentation.

there proceeds to consider an ordered series of efficient causes. Perhaps a word of explanation is required for his move from a statement of the denial of an infinite series of efficient causes to a consideration of an ordered series of efficient causes.

When considering an infinite series, Thomas is keen not to deny just any infinite series of causes, but an ordered series of causes. Elsewhere, Thomas distinguishes between (i) an essentially ordered series of causes and (ii) an accidentally ordered series of causes. An essentially ordered causal series is one such that all of the causes work in harmony to produce the effect whereas in an accidentally ordered series one cause works to produce one effect and so on. Thomas does not deny the possibility that the latter could be infinite but he denies that the former could be infinite.¹¹

In the argument under consideration, Thomas points out that in an ordered series of efficient causes, the first is the cause of the intermediate and the intermediate the cause of the ultimate, whether the intermediate is one or many. Thomas's point here is that the causal transitivity of the primary cause does not terminate in the intermediate cause(s), but in the ultimate cause responsible for the ultimate effect. So in such an ordered series of efficient causes, the ultimate would be causally inefficacious without the intermediate and the intermediate inefficacious without the primary. It follows then that not only is the primary cause the cause of the intermediate cause(s), but it is also the cause of their causality and thereby the cause of the ultimate cause and its causality. Effectively then, there is no ultimate effect without the primary cause. This serves to locate the causal series in question within what Thomas elsewhere characterises as an essentially ordered causal series and this as distinct from an accidentally ordered causal series; so let us now consider these distinct series.

An essentially ordered causal series is one in which the causal transitivity of the primary cause does not terminate in its immediately succeeding effect, but is the cause of the causality of its effect thereby making the primary cause responsible for the effects in the series. There is thus an essential order in such a series insofar as if any preceding cause in the series were removed,

¹¹ See for instance, *De Veritate*, qu. 2, art. 10; *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, qu. 7, art. 4, qu. 46, art. 2, ad. 7; *Quaestiones Quodlibetales*, Quod. 9, qu. 1, Quod. 12, qu. 2, art. 2. For contemporary discussions of the distinction between essentially ordered series and accidentally ordered series and the related question of the infinite regress of such series, see Patterson Brown, 'Infinite Causal Regression', R. G. Wengert, 'The Logic of Essentially Ordered Causes', *Notre Dame Journal of Formal Logic* (1971), 12, Scott MacDonald, 'Aquinas's Parasitic Cosmological Argument', Gaven Kerr, 'Essentially Ordered Series Reconsidered' [Chapter 2 in this volume], and Kerr, *Aquinas's Way to God*, Chapter 5.

the subsequent causal relata of the series would be removed. An accidentally ordered series is one in which the transitivity of the primary cause is terminated in its immediately succeeding effect; if there is a series of such causes, it would be simply a series of a single cause producing a single effect, and that effect producing its own effect, irrespective of its cause, and so on. There is thus no essential order in such a series, but the series is merely connected together with each link therein following one after another.

Thomas's examples of such causal series are as follows:

- (i) Essentially ordered series: the mind moves the hand which moves the stick which moves the stone.
- (ii) Accidentally ordered series: a father produces a son who produces a son who produces a son and so on.¹²

In the essentially ordered series, the mind is the primary cause not only imparting motion to the series but also in so imparting motion imparting causality to the series. Thus, the hand would not move without the mind, and the stick would not move without the mind's urging the hand to move it, and the stone would not move without the stick's being moved by the hand's being moved by the mind. All causes in the series act as one so as to produce the ultimate effect, and would fail to act without the mind's imparting motion to the series. Thus the cause of the effect is primarily the mind and secondarily the intermediate causes, so that if one were to remove the mind, one would remove the effect.

The priority of the primary cause here is important; the primary cause is not only temporally prior but logically prior, such that remove the cause, the effect will be removed. What this then entails is that the secondary causes in the series do not just depend on the primary cause simply in virtue of coming after it, rather they depend on it for their very causality; without a primary cause for the series all subsequent causes would be secondary or intermediate and thereby lacking in causal efficacy. Thus, it is possible to divorce the temporal priority of the primary cause in such a series from its logical priority, so that what is essential is that the primary cause be logically prior as that without which the secondary causes would be lacking in causal efficacy, irrespective of whether the intermediate causes are finite or infinite.¹³

In the accidentally ordered series the case is quite different. A father produces a son, but in producing a son the father is not the cause of the causality

¹² Both examples are drawn from *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, qu. 46, art. 2, ad. 7.

¹³ In *H Met.*, lib. 2, lect. 3, n. 303. It is important to bear this clarification in mind, since failure to do so leads to misunderstanding and the charge that Thomas equivocates between a primary cause which is temporally prior and a primary cause prior to which there is nothing, cf., Anthony Kenny, *The Five Ways*, p. 44.

of the son. Doubtless without the father the son would not be, but the son can himself be a father without the help of his father. Thus, in the fathers/sons series, the father is not the father of his son's son (the father's grandson), rather the son is the father of the grandson, and the father is thereby the grandfather. The grandfather is the cause of his son, but not the cause of his grandson; the son can bring about his own son without the aid of his father. Thus, unlike the essentially ordered series, it is not the case that some primary cause is responsible for both the existence and the causality of the effect; rather, in an accidental series, the cause is simply responsible for the existence of the effect.

This clarification of the causal series in question helps us to situate the second way, since Thomas is quite clear in the second way that he is considering only an ordered series of efficient causes. Now in the second way Thomas speaks of primary, intermediate, and ultimate causes in such an ordered series, and this goes to indicate that the series he has in mind is an essentially ordered series; for it is only within an essentially ordered series that considerations of the causality of intermediate and ultimate causes have their explanatory context, whereas in accidentally ordered series, there is no distinction between intermediate and ultimate causes, there are simply causes and effects heaped together accidentally. This clarification of the order of the causal series feeds into Thomas's denial of an infinite regress of causes, as we shall see.¹⁴

2.3. *Infinite Regress*

In the preceding sub-section the order of the efficient causal series was clarified, and this was to the effect that the primary is the cause of the intermediate and the intermediate the cause of the ultimate. This was further

¹⁴ Whilst Anthony Kenny, to his credit, recognises that the causal series involved in the second way is of the essentially ordered kind (*The Five Ways*, p. 41), he nevertheless takes as a paradigm example of the causal series involved here that of human generation, as he says: 'In human generation, if anywhere, we have a relation of efficient causality which will provide a premise for the Second Way'. It is odd that Kenny states this, since he goes on to point out that human generation is one of the examples that Thomas offers of the accidentally ordered series (p. 41), in which case how could it be a premise for the second way when the second way is involved with the essentially ordered series? There is significant confusion here in Kenny's consideration of the causal series involved in the second way, along with a failure to consider the metaphysics behind Thomas's thought on essentially ordered series. Such weaknesses in Kenny's treatment lead him to the absurd conclusion that the second way is based on medieval astrology (p. 44) as opposed to a highly refined metaphysics of causality.

contextualised within Thomas's wider philosophical position on the distinction between essentially ordered and accidentally ordered causal series, such that in the former the primary cause is cause of both the existence and the causality of the effects whereas in the latter the primary cause is cause only of the existence of the effect. When we come to consider Thomas's denial of an infinite regress of efficient causes, he announces a principle that if applied to a series of essentially ordered causes is true, but when applied to a series of accidentally ordered causes is false.

The principle that Thomas announces is: 'remove the cause and one removes the effect'. Taken in isolation, this principle is subject to immediate counter example provided by Thomas himself later in the *Summa* (Ia, qu. 46, art. 2, ad. 7); for in the case of a father and son, the father is the father of the son and thereby his efficient cause. However, having caused the son to exist, the father can cease to exist without the son thereby ceasing to exist, in which case we have a clear counter example to Thomas's principle that if you remove the cause you remove the effect.¹⁵

What this counter example shows is that Thomas's second way is not to be read in the context of accidentally ordered series of causes, but in the context of essentially ordered series. Recall that in an accidentally ordered series a cause is simply the cause of the existence of its immediately succeeding effect, so that once the cause performs its causal duty, the cause can drop out and the effect remain. In that case, if one were to remove the cause, one would not thereby remove the effect; so Thomas's principle is inapplicable to the accidentally ordered series. However, it is applicable to the essentially ordered series, since not only is the primary cause of that series the cause of the existence of its effects, but also of their causality, so that without the presence of the primary cause to the effects of that series the posterior causal relata would fail; in other words, remove the cause and you remove the effect. Let us consider this with regard to the mind/hand/stick/stone example.

¹⁵ One could save the principle by interpreting it in a modal fashion such that if in some possible world the father were prevented from having sexual relations at the time which in the actual world brought about the conception of his son, then in that possible world his son would not have come into being. Such is one way of reading Thomas's principle, and seems to be implicit in Kenny's reading of the second way, see *The Five Ways*, p. 43. However, this seems like a strained reading insofar as Thomas does not announce the principle in a modal context, but rather in the context of everyday sensible things. Furthermore, given that the alternative reading I am here proposing, to the effect that the principle is applicable to the essentially ordered series but not the accidentally ordered series, fits in with Thomas's wider philosophical thought, one need not offer the modal reading of the principle.

The mind/hand/stick/stone series is unlike the father/son series insofar as one cannot remove the mind (the primary cause in this particular series) without thereby removing the causal efficacy of the remaining causal relata; for if the mind ceased to impart motion to that series, the motion of the posterior causal relata would cease – this is in effect the priority of the primary cause in such a series to all secondary causes, since *qua* secondary they are dependent for their causal efficacy on something prior to them. On the other hand, in the father/son series one can remove the father after he has brought the son into existence, and yet the son can remain in existence and act as a cause by bringing about his own son. Thomas's principle then: remove the cause and you remove the effect, must be read in the context of essentially ordered series of causes, which is the reading that I am here proposing, otherwise the second way not only fails but is at odds with Thomas's wider philosophical views.

Taking the principle that if you remove the cause then you remove the effect, we can apply it to the essentially ordered series of causes and observe that if there were no primary cause in such a series, then the intermediate and the ultimate causes would be causally inefficacious with respect to the causal property of the series, since in an essentially ordered series of causes, the intermediate and ultimate causes depend on some primary cause not only for their existence but also for their causality. Returning thus to the mind/hand/stick/stone example, the causal property in question is motion – the mind induces motion to the hand, the hand to the stick, and the stick to the stone. Should the mind fail to induce motion to the hand, or in the course of inducing motion suffer some irreparable damage that it cannot see through the intention of such motion, the motion passing to the hand/stick/stone would end and the causal series of itself would fail. Thus, if there were no primary cause in an essentially ordered series there would be no intermediate or ultimate causes.¹⁶

But if it is the case that an essentially ordered series of causes must have a primary cause, otherwise the intermediate or ultimate members lose their causal efficacy, then there could not be an infinite series of such causes, since an infinite series is infinite precisely insofar as it has no primary cause. It follows that if there were postulated an infinite essentially ordered series without a primary cause, there would be no cause for both the existence and

¹⁶ This of course is not to say that without the mind the hand/stick/stone would cease to exist, only that they would cease to be in respect of the motion imparted to the series by the mind; but given that motion is not the only causal influence such things can undergo, they can be subject to different causal influences, one or many of which keep them in existence.

the causality of the posterior causal relata. In that case, given an infinite series of essentially ordered causes, not only would there be no primary cause, but there would be no intermediate cause(s) and no ultimate cause, in which case there would be no causal series!¹⁷ Applying this then to the reasoning of the second way, Thomas denies that there is an infinite series of (essentially) ordered efficient causes, since he takes for granted that there are efficient causes that are ordered and are either intermediate or ultimate, in which case they point to some primary efficient cause. But do they?

2.4. *This is what we all name 'God'*

Thomas has argued that the series of ordered efficient causes cannot proceed to infinity in which case there must be a primary efficient cause, and this is what we call God. However, we typically understand God to be an uncaused cause, supreme and absolute in Himself and everything subject to Him. Indeed this is what Thomas thinks he has arrived at in the second way. Nevertheless, it is possible to appreciate the causal reasoning in the second way and deny that we have arrived at some supreme uncaused cause. This is because Thomas has only established that there must be some primary efficient cause, not that such a cause is absolutely uncaused. Indeed Thomas has

¹⁷ It is clear that Thomas's strategy is not, as it is for Duns Scotus and Ockham, to presuppose the impossibility of an actual infinity, infer that an infinite series of causes leads to an actual infinity, and that such a causal series must be thereby finite. Rather, his strategy is to argue that in an infinite series of essentially ordered efficient causes there is no primary cause and thus no intermediate nor ultimate causes, which Thomas takes to be absurd. Thus, Thomas holds that an infinite series of essentially ordered efficient causes would fail precisely as a causal series, note the following evaluation by Lawrence Dewar in 'St Thomas and Infinite Causal Regress', p. 125: 'If the causal hierarchy is truly causal, positing an infinity of members negates the very causal structure. One might envisage a hierarchy of created pure spirits, and it might be posited to stretch to infinity, but it could not be an efficient causal hierarchy, even as regards some added perfection such as illumination. The structure of an infinite series cannot have a causal nature'. For details on Duns Scotus and Ockham see Scotus, *Opera Omnia* Vol. II, *Ordinatio* I, dist. 2, pars. 1, qu. 2, nn. 48–54, and Ockham, *Opera Theologica* Vol. II, *In I Sent.*, dist. 2, qu. 10, 342:17–354:14 [Contra Opinonem Scoti], and 354:15–357:9 [Responsio Auctoris]. It should be clear also that considerations of the transfinite made acceptable by Cantor do not affect Thomas's reasoning, since Thomas is not here concerned with the mathematically infinite, but the causally infinite whose logic is spelled out in terms of the accidentally and essentially ordered series. For details on Cantor and the infinite, particularly in relation to theology see Joseph W. Dauben, 'Georg Cantor and Pope Leo XIII: Mathematics, Theology, and the Infinite', *Journal of the History of Ideas* (1977), 38:1, pp. 85–108.

assumed that in establishing the primary cause, he has established an uncaused cause, and this we call 'God'. But is this a safe assumption?

In order to appreciate why this may not be a safe assumption, consider Thomas's example of the essentially ordered series: the mind moves the hand which moves the stick which moves the stone. In such a series the mind is undoubtedly one of those things that can induce motion of itself; one can freely choose to move the stick and the stone out of nothing but sheer indulgence (think of somebody going to the golf course just to knock balls about). The mind then in such a series is primary and uncaused in respect of the causal property of the series (motion), but that does not entail that the mind is absolutely uncaused, since of course the mind has a cause for its existence (and indeed a final cause motivating the desire to move the stick to move the stone). Thus, whilst one can establish that there is a primary cause in some essentially ordered series and in thereby establishing a primary cause we establish that it is uncaused, such a cause is only uncaused in respect of the causality of that series, it is not absolutely uncaused. But God is typically taken to be a cause that is absolutely uncaused, in which case if the second way does not establish a primary efficient cause that is absolutely uncaused, then the second way has not arrived at what we call 'God'.¹⁸

I think the key to overcoming this tricky evaluative issue is to remember once again the nature of efficient causality. An efficient cause is the primary source of motion for a thing, and motion is understood in terms of potency and act, so that an efficient cause is what actualises a thing. Now, as was indicated above, act is understood in Thomas's metaphysical thought in terms of *esse*, so that nothing could be unless it has *esse*. Thus, *esse* is that act to which all other acts are subject – *esse* is the act of all acts. Efficient causality then essentially involves the causality of *esse*. Given the latter, when Thomas speaks of an ordered series of efficient causes, one can consider him as speaking of an ordered series of causes of *esse*. Thus, whereas in the mind/hand/stick/stone example, the causal property in question was

¹⁸ This captures Paul Edwards's general objection to the cosmological argument, to the effect that those who endorse an infinite regress do not remove some primary cause, they simply deny its exalted status as uncaused, see 'The Cosmological Argument', p. 203 *et seq.* A similar issue is raised and addressed by Scott MacDonald with regard to the first way, see 'Aquinas's Parasitic Cosmological Argument', p. 146 *et seq.* It is worth pointing out however that Thomas himself was aware that a primary cause in a series of causes is not automatically an absolutely primary cause, note in particular the following. *Summa Theologiae*, IaIIae, qu. 6, art. 1, ad. 1: 'Sed tamen sciendum quod contingit aliquid principium motus esse primum in genere, quod tamen non est primum simpliciter sicut in genere alterabilium primum alterans est corpus caeleste, quod tamen non est primum movens simpliciter, sed movetur motu locali a superiori movente.'

motion, in the second way it is *esse*. Considered from the point of view of *esse*, the second way has some appeal in establishing an absolutely primary uncaused efficient cause.¹⁹

The essentially ordered series terminates in a primary cause of the causal property of that series, so that the primary cause is uncaused with respect to the property of that series. Now the objection is that such a cause may be primary with respect to that series, but not with respect to another series. Let us now consider that *esse* is the causal property of the series. In terminating an essentially ordered series of causes of *esse*, the primary cause is a primary uncaused cause of *esse*. As a primary uncaused cause of *esse*, such a cause is cause of all that has *esse* but is not itself caused to have *esse* (elsewhere Thomas argues that such a cause is pure *esse*). Anything other than the primary uncaused cause of *esse* either (i) has *esse* and is thereby an effect of this cause or (ii) is without *esse* and is thereby nothing. It follows then that the primary uncaused cause of *esse* cannot be caused in any respect since in order to be caused there must be something other than it acting as its cause, but what is other than it is either (i) an effect of it or (ii) nothing. Therefore, the primary uncaused cause of *esse* which terminates the essentially ordered series of causes of *esse* is absolutely primary and uncaused.

Interpreted in light of *esse*, Thomas's second way establishes a primary uncaused cause which is caused in no respect; in other words, the second way establishes an absolutely primary uncaused cause of *esse*. Everything other than this cause is either nothing or caused by it, in which case this cause is the cause of all that is, but uncaused in itself. And if God has been understood to be anything in the history of Western philosophical theology, He has been understood to be an absolutely primary uncaused cause of all that is. Therefore, Thomas legitimately concludes that this is what we name 'God'.

3. Conclusion

¹⁹ To be sure, all cases of efficient causality involve a transfer of *esse* at bottom, since *esse* is the act of all acts; but such transference of *esse* can be occluded by the particular causal property in question, e.g. motion. Thus, in the current context, I am focussing on *esse* as a causal property so as to show how a denial of an infinite series of efficient causes of *esse* leads to an absolutely uncaused efficient cause. Such an argumentative procedure is only implicit in the second way but is explicit in the proof of God in *De Ente*; for details of the latter see Gaven Kerr, 'Aquinas's Argument for the Existence of God in *De Ente et Essentia*, Cap. IV: An Interpretation and Defense' [Chapter 5 in this volume], and for fuller treatment, Kerr, *Aquinas's Way to God*.

In concluding this chapter on the contemporary significance of Aquinas's second way, I do not wish to dwell on the fine detail of Aquinas's wider philosophical thought on issues such as causality, *esse*, essentially ordered series etc. and the significance of that for contemporary philosophy. This is because these are well worn tracks in Thomistic studies that (i) would require independent chapters and (ii) would take me off the topic of the contemporary relevance of the second way. The second way is a heavyweight metaphysical argument for the existence of God, and so my concluding comments shall focus on the contemporary relevance of the second way precisely as an argument for God's existence.

I noted above that if God has been understood to be anything within the Western tradition of philosophical theology, He has been understood to be an absolutely primary uncaused cause of all that is, i.e. that from which all things derive their existence. Everything stands to God then as creature to creator, and so a kind of creationism is implied in Thomas's concept of God as a primary uncaused cause of *esse*.

Creation is often viewed as some singular event that happened at the beginning of the universe, with God giving the universe its first nudge into existence. God is effectively thought of almost as the great cosmic finger that pushes the first in a row of cosmic dominoes. On this view, God's creative causality is thought of in terms of God's acting at the beginning of time to bring everything into existence. Working with such an understanding of creation, if one can deny that the universe had a beginning, one could deny that there is any role for God in relation to bringing the universe into existence. This is precisely Stephen Hawking's approach; for he argues that on his model of the universe, it is a finite enclosed system with no boundary or edge signifying its beginning.²⁰ As a self-contained system with no boundary or edge signifying a beginning, we need not look into the conditions in place extrinsic to the universe that caused it to be; Hawking infers that this has significant repercussions for God's role in the creation of the universe, as he says:

The idea that space and time may form a closed surface without boundary also has profound implications for the role of God in the affairs of the universe. With the success of scientific theories in describing events, most people have come to believe that God allows the universe to evolve according to a set of laws and does not intervene in the universe to break these laws. However, the laws do

²⁰ Stephen Hawking, *A Brief History of Time* (London: Bantam Press, 1998), p. 154.

not tell us what the universe should have looked like when it started – it would still be up to God to wind up the clockwork and choose how to start it off. *So long as the universe had a beginning, we could suppose it had a creator* [my emphasis]. But if the universe is really completely self-contained, having no boundary or edge, it would have neither beginning nor end: it would simply be. What place, then, for a creator?²¹

It is Aquinas's concept of God that emerges from the second way that tells us precisely the place for a creator in a beginningless universe.²²

In the Middle Ages, Aquinas was (in)famous for holding that a beginningless created universe is possible, and his reasons for thinking so emerge in the thinking implicit in the second way.²³ In analysing the second way, we focussed on the ordered series of causes that Thomas considered, such that in an essentially ordered series of efficient causes the causal property of which is *esse* we must terminate in an absolutely primary uncaused cause of *esse*; such a causal series has an origin in the cause of *esse*, in which case all things that exist trace their origin back to the cause of *esse*. But this does not entail that there was a beginning of existence; for being dependent on another for existence does not entail that one's existence has a beginning. The time at which a thing begins to exist coincides with the origin of its existence, but this does not entail that because a thing has an origin that it begins to exist at a time. Consider the following analogy drawn from Richard Taylor.²⁴

Imagine that the sun and the moon have existed eternally such that neither the sun nor the moon had a beginning of existence. The moon is illuminated by the sun, and since sun and moon have existed eternally, the illumination of the moon by the sun never began to be. However, the illumination of the moon is caused by the sun, such that if one were to remove the sun the moon would no longer be illuminated, in which case the illumination of the moon has its origin in the sun without itself having a temporal beginning.

Now, when considering creation, we are considering the origin of things, and not the beginning of things. In the case of God and creatures, all creatures

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 160 – 161.

²² For a developed Thomistic response to Hawking that focuses on Aquinas's thought as a whole rather than the thought that emerges from the second way, see Gaven Kerr, 'A Thomistic Metaphysics of Creation'.

²³ For the scholarly details of Aquinas's thought in this regard see John Wippel, 'Thomas Aquinas on the Possibility of Eternal Creation', in *Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas Vol 1*.

²⁴ Richard Taylor, 'The Metaphysics of Causation' in *Causation and Conditionals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975) ed. E. Sosa, pp. 39 – 44.

have their origin in God insofar as God is the cause of their *esse*. As cause of *esse* God creates not by presupposing anything from which to create, since outside of *esse* there is nothing. Rather, God immediately brings into existence the creature whole and complete, such that it is out of nothing other than His own resources that God creates. None of this entails that creation had a beginning; for creation could be like the illumination of the moon in the above example, never having had a beginning, but nevertheless having an origin.²⁵ Thus, a beginningless created universe is not impossible, and Hawking's insistence that a beginningless universe is an uncaused universe seems to employ a basic fallacy: if the universe had a beginning, then it had a cause/there is a role for the creator ($P \rightarrow Q$), but the universe does not have a beginning ($\neg P$), therefore the universe does not have a cause/there is no role for the creator ($\neg Q$) – and this is the fallacy of denying the antecedent.

I introduce Hawking here merely as a foil to introduce the Thomistic notion of creation and to highlight how distinct the latter is from a more unreflective popular notion of creation. For Thomas, to create is to produce a thing in existence according to its total substance, which is to say the thing whole and complete is actualised in its existence by the creator.²⁶ The concept of God that we saw emerge from the second way is a cause of the *esse* of things, so such a God creates by granting *esse* to things, and in so granting *esse*, God produces them in their existence according to their total substance. This is because it is a distinct essence that receives *esse*, so it is not the case that God in a Demiurgic manner takes a number of ingredients and puts them together to make a creature; rather, God grants *esse* to the potentially existing essence whole and complete. Creation thus presupposes nothing, but everything presupposes creation.²⁷ Given the latter, creation is not a kind of change or making, since to change or to make something is to take something already existing and to modify it in some way. God does not take anything already existing, since as the primary uncaused cause of *esse*, if anything exists it has

²⁵ There is of course a disanalogy here, since in the sun and moon example, both sun and moon exist with the latter being illuminated by the former, whereas concerning God and creatures, creatures do not exist without the causal activity of God. However, what the analogy highlights is that we can distinguish between the temporal beginning of something and its origin, such that we can talk of its origin without thereby presupposing a beginning, in which case we can talk about creatures having their origin in God without creation thereby having a beginning.

²⁶ Aquinas, *In II Sent.*, dist. 1, qu. 1, art. 2: 'Hoc autem creare dicimus, scilicet producere rem in esse secundum totam suam substantiam'.

²⁷ Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, lib. 2, cap. 21: 'Creatio autem est prima actio: eo quod nullam aliam praesupponit, omnes autem aliae praesupponunt eam'.

been caused to exist and is therefore created by God. Creation then is not change.²⁸

With these foregoing remarks in mind, we can return to Hawking's paradigmatic view that to create is to be somehow prior to the beginning of the universe and to give it its first nudge into existence. On Thomas's account, this is not what it means to create. Creation is not simply giving the universe its first nudge into existence or winding up the clock. To create is to bring the creature into existence; and as a result of being created the creature depends on God for its existence. Returning to the second way, such causality and dependency is located within the essentially ordered series of causes of *esse*, so that the posterior causal relata in that series, the creatures, would neither exist nor be able to act as causes if not for the primary causality of God. Consequently, God's creative causality is not simply an act that happened way back at the beginning, but is an act that embraces all that is and nothing that is not, so that anything that at all exists is being created by God.

As I see things, the contemporary significance of the second way is two-fold. Firstly, it establishes the existence of a primary uncaused cause of all that is without whose causal influence nothing would be, and this we call God. Secondly, this is a notion of God that does not lend itself to unreflective ideas about creation or God's role before the big bang; rather, Thomas's God is a God without whom none of the above would be, and is such that all things that exist, whatever their stage of development, must be present to God receiving their existence from God. The second way thus presents some metaphysically rich and philosophically challenging argumentation for its conclusion, and thereby merits consideration by contemporary philosophers.

²⁸ *Ibid.* lib. 2, cap. 17: 'Ubi autem tota substantia rei in esse producitur, non potest esse aliquid idem aliter et aliter se habens: quia illud esset non productum, sed productioni praesuppositum. Non est ergo creatio mutatio'. See also discussions of the same in: *De Potentia Dei*, qu. 3, art. 3; *De Substanti Separatis*, Cap. 9, n. 49, and cap. 10, n. 56.

Chapter 9 - Aquinas's Third Way

The Five Ways are the most well-known and discussed portions of Aquinas's philosophical work. This comes with its own blessings and drawbacks. It is good that there is a piece of philosophizing drawn from the thought of Aquinas that continues to prompt interest several centuries later; the hope is that in being so drawn to Aquinas the reader will come to discover the greater fruits of his contemplation. The drawback is that often this is the only piece of philosophical activity in Aquinas with which the reader is familiar, and more often than not the Five Ways receive treatments by non-specialists that are not only inaccurate but downright bizarre.¹

Each of the Five Ways presents an independent argument for God's existence. Accordingly, a reader may engage with just one of the ways and from within the background of Aquinas's wider philosophical views, such a reader may affirm the existence of God. One of the more attractive ways to God is the Third Way, the argument from possibility and necessity—sometimes, though erroneously, referred to as the argument from contingency. This is strange because the third way involves considerations of possibility and necessity which are peculiar to Thomas, and certainly not capturable in a post-Leibnizian climate whereby reflections on possibility and necessity turn on considerations of being able not to be and not being able not to be. In other words, Thomas's Third Way is quite a demanding argument which asks a lot of the reader; the unsuspecting can believe that they are following the argument, when in reality they have substituted an argument from contingency of a more contemporary variety for Thomas's Third Way.

In what follows, I shall present an account of the Third Way which situates it within Aquinas's own thought and presents it as a valid argument for the demonstration of God's existence. In doing so, I shall articulate the philosophical context of the Third Way, and address some concerns that have been raised concerning the legitimacy of the argument. Finally, I shall integrate Aquinas's third way into his wider thought.

Before considering the Third Way, let us situate it with respect to the other 'ways'. The first two ways consider features of reality quite self-evident to sense experience: motion and causality. It is clear why Thomas chose these two ways as the first two given how manifest they are; hence they

¹ I have in mind Anthony Kenny's treatment of the Five Ways in his book-length study, *The Five Ways*.

make for quite effective starting points.² Nevertheless, whilst Thomas makes use of self-evident starting points in the earlier ways, he moves quite quickly into some deep philosophical analyses. Not only that, as the ways themselves progress we are offered as starting points features of reality that are less and less evident to experience. This does not mean that we ever begin with something not evident to experience, but that through the progression of the ways the starting points require greater reflection on experience for their isolation. Motion and causality, the first and second ways, require very little reflection on experience as we focus our attention on them, but when we get to the Third Way we arrive at a starting point which does require some reflection and hence some contextualization.

The Third Way is taken from possibility and necessity. Whilst we experience possibility and necessity, it is arguable that our awareness of such is not as evident as it is for motion and causality. Hence, a certain focus of mind is required to come to terms with this starting point and how it figures in reality. As we shall soon see, Aquinas breaks this way down into two parts, the first of which seeks to situate possibility and necessity within reality and the second of which is the causal demonstration leading to God proper.

The third way reads as follows:

We find in things some which are able to be and not to be (*possibilita esse et non esse*), since they are found to be generated and corrupted and so are able to be and not to be. It is impossible that all things are like this because what is able not to be at some time (*quandoque*) is not. If therefore all things are able not to be, at some time (*aliquando*) there was nothing. But if this is true, then even now there would be nothing, because what is not does not begin to be except through something that is. If therefore there was nothing, it would be impossible for anything to come into being, and thus there would be nothing, which is patently false. Not all things therefore are possible, but there has to exist something that is necessary. Whatever is necessary either has a cause of its necessity from another or it does not. It is not possible to proceed to infinity in necessary things which have a cause of their necessity, just as with efficient causes, as has been proved. Therefore, it is necessary to posit something that is necessary *per se*, which does not have a

² Indeed, Thomas calls the First Way the 'more manifest', hence its primacy.

cause of necessity from another, but which is the cause of necessity for others, which all call God.³

Before proceeding we should note a discrepancy in the editions in which the argument is found. The second sentence in the Leonine edition reads, *Impossible est autem omnia quae sunt talia semper esse [...]*. This changes the sense of the argument at this stage, since on that reading Thomas affirms that it is impossible for *possibilia* always to be. On the other hand, the Marietti edition, which I use here, is without the *semper*, in which case Thomas affirms that it is impossible for all things to be *possibilia*. On the

³ *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, qu. 2, art. 3: 'Invenimus enim in rebus quaedam quae sunt possibilia esse et non esse, cum quaedam inveniantur generari et corrupti, et per consequens possibilia esse et non esse. Impossible est autem omnia quae sunt, talia [Leonine: semper] esse, quia quod possibile est non esse, quandoque non est. Si igitur omnia sunt possibilia non esse, aliquando nihil fuit in rebus. Sed si hoc est verum, etiam nunc nihil esset, quia quod non est, non incipit esse nisi per aliquid quod est; si igitur nihil fuit ens, impossibile fuit quod aliquid inciperet esse, et sic modo nihil esset, quod patet esse falsum. Non ergo omnia entia sunt possibilia, sed oportet aliquid esse necessarium in rebus. Omne autem necessarium vel habet causam suae necessitatis aliunde, vel non habet. Non est autem possibile quod procedatur in infinitum in necessariis quae habent causam suac necessitatis, sicut nec in causis efficientibus, ut probatum est. Ergo necesse est ponere aliquid quod sit per se necessarium, non habens causam necessitatis aliunde, sed quod est causa necessitatis aliis, quod omnes dicunt Deum'. Another version of this argument can be found in *Summa contra gentiles*, Book 1, chap. 15. Some hold the historical inspiration for the Third Way to be Moses Maimonides, *Guide for the Perplexed*, trans. by Michael Friedländer (New York: Dover, 1956), Book 2, chap 1; for discussion see Paul Gény, 'À propos des preuves thomistes de l'existence de Dieu', *Revue de philosophie*, 31 (1924), pp. 575–601; A.-D. Sertillanges, 'À propos des preuves de Dieu, la troisième "voie" thomiste', *Revue de philosophie*, 32 (1925), pp. 24–37; idem, 'Le P. Descoqs et la "tertia via"', *Revue thomiste* 9 (1926), pp. 490–502; Pedro Descoqs, 'Les derniers écrits du P. Gény', *Archives de philosophie* 3 (1925–26), pp. 96–137; Étienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St Thomas Aquinas*, trans. by Laurence K. Shook (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1956), p. 69. Others have held that the historical source is actually Aristotle's *De caelo* 281a28b1; see Thomas Kevin Connolly, 'The Basis of the Third Proof for the Existence of God', *The Thomist* 17 (1954), pp. 281–349, and Dermot O'Donoghue, 'An Analysis of the *Tertia Via* of St Thomas', *The Irish Theological Quarterly* 20 (1953), pp. 129–51. Still others hold that the historical source is Aristotle's *Metaphysics*; see Lucien Chambat, 'La "tertia via" dans saint Thomas et Aristote', *Revue thomiste* 10 (1927), pp. 334–38, and Henri Holstein, 'L'origine aristotelicienne de la "tertia via"', *Revue philosophique de Louvain*, 48 (1950), pp. 354–70.

Leonine reading Thomas reasons from the fact that *possibilia* cannot always be to the need for some necessary being, whereas on the Marietti reading Thomas makes an observation that not all things can be *possibilia* and the subsequent lines of argument seek to show that. Standard editions of the *Summa* prefer the Marietti reading, but aside from palaeographical reasons favouring Marietti, the latter simply makes better philosophical sense.

On the Marietti reasoning Aquinas's argumentation can be summarized as follows: there are *possibilia*, but not all things can be *possibilia* because what is such at some time is not, and if all were like this even now there would be nothing in existence. On the other hand, the Leonine reasons: there are *possibilia*, it is impossible for *possibilia* always to be, because what is possible not to be at some time is not, and if all were like this even now there would be nothing in existence. The Leonine introduces a principle: *possibilia* cannot always be, a principle that does not reappear in the subsequent reasoning of the *via*; this principle contributes nothing to the sense of the argument at this stage, and indeed in the absence of which this stage still makes sense. Hence, I favour the Marietti reading.⁴

Now, as noted at the beginning, there is a certain allure to the Third Way, especially in a post-Leibnizian philosophical context within which possible worlds are used to give us an insight into the metaphysical constitution of reality. The allure goes something like this: our world is one of many possible worlds, and there is nothing about it which guarantees its existence; so why our world and not another world? We cannot appeal to something about our world to justify its existence, so we look at something that transcends this and all possible worlds as the cause of this world (or of any other world that exists); and since this cause transcends all possible worlds, it itself is not something merely possible but must be necessary.

Whilst this reasoning may reflect something of the intuition behind the Third Way, it is often perilous to read Aquinas's philosophical thought outside of the context of his own metaphysics. Aquinas and Leibniz occupy two quite distinct metaphysical landscapes, and it is generally problematic to read Aquinas's more general metaphysical thought in light of contemporary developments in modal metaphysics (a point that I have made in regard to

⁴ For discussion see John Knasas, 'Making Sense of the *Tertia Via*', *New Scholasticism* 54 (1980), pp. 476–511 (p. 488 n. 43); Kenny, *The Five Ways*, pp. 55–56; Charles Kelly, 'Some Fallacies in the First Movement of Aquinas' Third Way', *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 12 (1981), pp. 39–54 (p. 41). Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, p. 462, n. 52, notes that the majority of manuscripts omit the *semper*, and even an author as early as Godfrey of Fontaines omits the *semper* from his *abbreviatio* of the third way.

his thinking on essence and *esse*).⁵ Therefore we must establish the context of the Third Way before examining its reasoning.

Furthermore, when we come to the reasoning of the Third Way itself we notice something unusual. There seem to be two arguments here. The first and arguably more controversial ends with his proof that there must be something that is necessary. Most contemporary non-Thomists would be of the view that if we have established the existence of a necessary being, we have established the existence of God (or at least taken a major step in that direction). But Thomas goes on to argue that when it comes to necessary being, we must determine whether the necessity of something necessary is caused or uncaused. And only when he has shown that there is an uncaused necessary being does Aquinas conclude that this being is God. Many non-Thomists would see this second argument as superfluous, and this brings us back to the context within which Aquinas is considering possibility and necessity in the Third Way.

So, in considering the argument, we will begin by considering the metaphysical context within which it is situated; then we will consider the two stages of argumentation of the third way.

1. The Context

As we have already noted, Aquinas is dealing with possibility and necessity in the Third Way. On the surface, then, this context makes the Third Way congenial to contemporary treatments of modality. However, we have also noted that several Thomists have disassociated Thomistic metaphysics from contemporary modal metaphysics, and indeed that in the Third Way itself Aquinas does not take it as established that God exists once a necessary being has been established to exist. Rather, it is only when what is necessary *per se* is established that God's existence has been established. This entails that not only does Aquinas's understanding of possibility and necessity diverge from contemporary notions based on possible worlds, but also that there is a kind of necessity which, *pace* contemporary views, is a necessity subject to causal influence.

Aquinas was aware of the position more popular in contemporary non-Thomist circles that God is the only necessary being and all creatures are

⁵ See the discussion in *Aquinas's Way to God*, chaps. 2–3, and also my article, 'Thomist Esse and Analytical Philosophy'.

contingent; this is a view that Thomas ascribed to Avicenna.⁶ The more modern view borrows heavily from Leibniz, for whom a necessary being is one whose non-existence would entail a contradiction. Hence, it would be contradictory to entertain the non-existence of a necessary being.⁷ Within the context of possible worlds, a necessary being is one that exists in all possible worlds, such that there is no world in which a necessary being does not exist.⁸

Now, in a very general sense we can say that all things created and creatable are possible (and not necessary) owing to the ability of the agent of creation to bring such things into existence; indeed, this is what the Avicennian and contemporary accounts seem to have in mind: insofar as everything other than God may or may not be, such things are not necessary but possible and hence contingent. This, however, is not the possibility (or necessity) with which we are dealing in the Third Way. In the Third Way we are dealing with the possibility and necessity that pertains to the being of things themselves and not to the cause of such beings. Thus, we are

⁶ See Aquinas, *De potentia Dei*, qu. 5, art. 3: ‘Avicenna namque posuit. quod quaelibet res praeter Deum habebat in se possibilitatem ad esse et non esse. Cum enim esse sit praeter essentiam cuiuslibet rei creatae, ipsa natura rei creatae per se considerata, possibilis est ad esse; necessitatem vero essendi non habet nisi ab alio, cuius natura est suum esse, et per consequens est per se necesse esse, et hoc Deus est’. For discussion, see Thomas B. Wright, ‘Necessary and Contingent Being in St Thomas’, *The New Scholasticism* 25 (1951), pp. 439–66 (p. 448); Connolly, ‘The Basis of the Third Proof for the Existence of God’, pp. 299–308; Kenny, *The Five Ways*, p. 47.

⁷ See Leibniz, *Monadology*, nos. 44–45, in Leibniz, *Philosophical Texts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998). J. J. C Smart attributes this understanding of necessity to proponents of the cosmological argument, in whose company he includes Aquinas, when he writes in ‘The Existence of God’ (in *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, ed. by Anthony Flew and Alasdair MacIntyre [London: SCM Press, 1955]), pp. 28–46, at p. 38): ‘[B]y a “necessary being” the cosmological argument means “a logically necessary being”, i.e. “a being whose non-existence is inconceivable in the sort of way that a triangle’s having four sides is inconceivable”’. Also Paul Edwards, in the editor’s introduction to the section entitled, ‘The Existence of God’, in *A Modern Introduction to Philosophy*, ed. by Arthur Pap and Paul Edwards (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1957), p. 455: ‘To say that there is a necessary being is to say that it would be a self-contradiction to deny its existence’; R. W. Hepburn, *Christianity and Paradox* (London: C.A. Watts & Co., 1958), p. 171: ‘The contingent is what happens to exist, but need not have existed: necessary being is being that has to exist, that cannot not exist’.

⁸ Two contemporary *loci classici* for the possible-worlds understanding of modality are Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), and Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*.

concerned with whether or not the thing in question is in its nature a possible or necessary being, not whether its being created is possible.⁹

In contrast with the Avicennian position, Aquinas finds the position of Averroës more reasonable. On Aquinas's understanding of it, the Averroistic position is that there are some things that in themselves are necessary; possibility, on the other hand, is rooted in the materiality of the thing, such that some material things are generable and corruptible and so able to be and not to be.¹⁰ These material things are subject to contrary forms, and so they can be generated and corrupted. On the other hand, what is necessary for Aquinas is not simply that whose non-existence entails a contradiction (or what exists in all possible worlds, although Thomas wouldn't reason in this way); rather, the necessary is what cannot be otherwise, and all other senses of necessity are reduced to this one.¹¹ Aquinas thinks that there are many non-divine things that are necessary in this way, such as the heavenly bodies (on the common view of physics at the time), the human soul, and angels. None of these things are able to be otherwise and so do not have the possibility for existence and non-existence in the way that contingent things do because, even though there is no identity of essence and *esse* therein, there is no possibility of substantial change in their being once acquired.¹² Yet

⁹ Aquinas, *De potentia Dei*, qu. 5, art. 3: '[I]n rebus a Deo factis dicitur aliquid esse possibile dupliciter. Uno modo per potentiam agentis tantum; sicut antequam mundus fieret, possibile fuit mundum fore, non per potentiam creaturae, quae nulla erat; sed solum per potentiam Dei, qui mundum in esse producere poterat. Alio modo per potentiam quae est in rebus factis; sicut possibile est corpus compositum corrumpi'.

¹⁰ See *ibid.*

¹¹ See Kenny, *The Five Ways*, pp. 47–48, and Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles*, Book 2, chap. 30; *In V Met.*, lect. 6, n. 832: '[N]ecessarium etiam diciimus sic se habere, quod non contingit aliter se habere: et hoc est necessarium absolute'; see n. 836 for the reduction of other senses of necessity to this one.

¹² See Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Book 2, chap. 30: 'Illae igitur res in quibus vel non est materia, vel, si est, non est possibilis ad aliam formam, non habent potentiam ad non esse. Eas igitur absolute et simpliciter necesse est esse'; *De potentia Dei*, qu. 5, art. 3: 'Materia etiam, cum non possit esse sine forma, non potest esse in potentia ad non esse, nisi quatenus existens sub una forma, est in potentia ad aliam formam. Dupliciter ergo potest contingere quod in natura alicuius rei non sit possibilitas ad non esse. Uno modo per hoc quod res illa sit forma tantum subsistens in esse suo, sicut substantiae incorporeae, quae sunt penitus immateriales. Si enim forma ex hoc quod inest materiae, est principium essendi in rebus materialibus, nec res materialis potest non esse nisi per separationem formae; ubi ipsa forma in esse suo subsistit nullo modo poterit non esse; sicut nec esse potest a se ipso separari. Alio modo per hoc quod in materia non sit

even though these beings are necessary, they are not independent of any efficient cause whatsoever, since heavenly bodies, the human soul, and angels all have a cause and are indeed created, though of course not generated.¹³ Thus, being caused and being necessary are not inconsistent for Aquinas as they are for many contemporary metaphysicians; the non-existence of a necessary being is not logically contradictory for Aquinas.¹⁴

Indeed, one may speculate that if Aquinas's notion of necessity were that of a logically necessary being such that its non-existence entails a contradiction, then shouldn't Thomas have been defending some version of the Anselmian argument (which he explicitly rejected), and shouldn't contemporary Thomists be offering more rationalist interpretations of the Third Way?¹⁵ But the Thomist tradition is emphatic in its rejection of any sort of *a priori* demonstration of God. These facts alone, independent of any knowledge of Aquinas's actual notion of necessity, should be (and should have been) enough for interpreters to realize that the notion of necessity operating in the Third Way is not logical necessity.

So, when we approach the Third Way, we must be guarded against reading into it a contemporary context informed by accounts of necessity and contingency which Thomas did not accept, and indeed from which he

potentia ad aliam formam, sed tota materiae possibilitas ad unam formam terminetur; sicut est in corporibus cœlestibus, in quibus non est formarum contrarietas'. Aquinas is of course wrong here in his account of the heavenly bodies.

¹³ Aquinas dissociates being created and being generated on a number of occasions; see for instance *Summa contra gentiles*, Book 2, chap. 17, and *De potentia Dei*, qu. 3, art. 2. Aquinas argues that creation is no kind of change since change always presupposes something pre-existent from which the change occurs, whereas creation is the bringing into existence of the total substance. Hence a substance can be necessary—that is, neither generable nor corruptible—and yet depend on God for its existence. For the metaphysical framework that buttresses this view see my *Aquinas and the Metaphysics of Creation*.

¹⁴ See Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles*, Book 2, chap. 30: 'Esse autem necesse simpliciter non repugnat ad rationem esse creati: nihil enim prohibet aliquid esse necesse quod tamen sua necessitatis causam habet, sicut conclusiones demonstrationum. Nihil igitur prohibet quasdam res sic esse productas a Deo ut tamen eas esse sit necesse simpliciter'. For general discussions of Aquinas's notion of necessity as it pertains to the Third Way, see also, in addition to the literature referred to in the preceding notes, J. J. MacIntosh, 'Aquinas on Necessity', *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, 72 (1998), pp. 371–403 (pp. 391–95); Patterson Brown, 'St Thomas' Doctrine of Necessary Being', *Philosophical Review*, 73 (1964), pp. 76–90, reprinted in *Aquinas: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. by Anthony Kenny (London: MacMillan, 1969), pp. 157–75.

¹⁵ Brown makes a similar point in 'St Thomas' Doctrine of Necessary Being', p. 160.

explicitly distanced himself. When establishing the existence of God on the basis of possibility and necessity, Aquinas cannot simply argue to the existence of some necessary being and conclude that God is thereby established, since he must show that the necessary being so established is one that is not subject to any cause. And this is precisely the strategy of the Third Way. Its first part seeks to establish that there is something necessary, whereas the second part proceeds to show that not all necessary things are necessary because of another, that is, caused in their necessity; rather, there is something that is *per se* necessary and does not have a cause of its necessity.

2. The Reasoning

The Third Way begins with the statement of a fact: there are things that are able to be and not to be; a fact we infer on the basis that there are things that are generated and corrupted, thereby signifying their possibility to be and not to be. Aquinas argues that not all existing things can be like this.

What is able to be and not to be at some time is not. But if all things were like this, at some time there would have been nothing, and since nothing comes from nothing, even now there would be nothing, which is false. Hence, not all things are possible, and there must be something that is necessary.

This is an extremely controversial argument. Thomas reasons based on his understanding of possibility that if we have a possible being, then at one point it is not (either prior to its generation or subsequent to its corruption). He then infers that if all things are like this, then at one point there would have been nothing in existence. But this inference seems to reason from some feature of one individual to a feature for all such individuals, a fallacy variously referred to as a fallacy of composition or quantifier shift fallacy. Thus, simply because possible being A at some point is not, whether past or future, we are not justified in inferring that the same applies to all possibles; it is entirely conceivable—indeed on Thomist principles pertaining to successiveness in causal series—that as every previous possible being ceases to be a new one takes its place, so that whilst there is a time before and after which a possible being is, there is no point before or after which all such beings are. Hence, this argument seems to reason that insofar as each possible is non-existent at some time, then at some time there was nothing existent.¹⁶ Aquinas seems to be making the same logical fallacy that one

¹⁶ See Kenny, *The Five Ways*, p. 56; Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, pp. 464–65. For details of those who deal with such an objection to Aquinas's

makes when reasoning that insofar as everyone has a mother there is a mother of everyone.¹⁷

To address these concerns, we will consider different ways of reading the argument, and based on the reading we favour, we will show how Thomas's argument cannot be taken as fallacious.

There are three ways of reading this argument: (i) as referring to past time: whatever is possible at some time is not, in which case if all things are possible, there was a time in the past at which there was nothing; (ii) as referring to future time: whatever is possible at some time is not, in which case if all things are possible, there will be a time when there will be nothing; (iii) as tenseless: whatever is possible at some point is not, in which case if all things are such that they are possible, there would be nothing unless there is something not merely possible but necessary. Readings (i) and (ii) align the paraphrase quite closely with Thomas's actual words, whereas reading (iii) is a somewhat contrived reading of Thomas's words, yet makes philosophical sense and aligns the thinking to that of similar argumentation for God's eternity outlined in *Summa contra gentiles*, Book 1, chapter 15.

Taking the past tense interpretation, this is the one favoured by Wippel, Owens, and De Nys (though Owens also places the argument within the context of Aquinas's wider metaphysics and so draws close to our reading (iii)).¹⁸ Accordingly, whatever is possible not to be at some time in the past

reasoning here, see Joseph Owens, 'Quandoque and Aliquando in Aquinas' *Tertia Via*', *The New Scholasticism*, 54 (1980), pp. 447–75 (p. 448 n. 1); to the latter I would add Kelly, 'Some Fallacies in the First Movement of Aquinas' Third Way', pp. 42–46; Robert F. Brown, 'A Reply to Kelly on Aquinas' Third Way', *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 13 (1982), pp. 225–27 (it should be noted that on p. 225 in criticizing Kelly's defence of Aquinas, Brown includes some things as *possibilia* that Aquinas would have considered necessary and this seems to govern Brown's reaction to Kelly); and Martin De Nys, 'If Everything Can Not-Be There Would Be Nothing: Another Look at the Third Way', *Review of Metaphysics*, 56 (2002), pp. 99–122.

¹⁷ This intuitive example was given by Bertrand Russell in his debate on the existence of God with Frederick Copleston.

¹⁸ See Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, p. 464, Owens, 'Quandoque and Aliquando', pp. 457–58, and De Nys, 'If Everything Can Not-Be There Would Be Nothing', pp. 102–04. For a helpful summary, note in particular what Owens says on pp. 457–58: 'Can it be on the future? Hardly. How can one know that what has possibility for non-existence is in fact going to cease to exist at a time yet to come? [...] The possibility of non-existence in the future does not in any obvious way entail the fact that at some future time the thing will go out of existence. Yet for the demonstration in the *tertia via* the mere possibility for nonexistence has to entail cogently the factual non-existence at some designated time. On the other hand, there is no doubt about the past

is not and if all things are like this then at some time there was nothing in existence. As Aquinas says, *quod possibile est non esse, quandoque non est. Si igitur omnia sunt possibilia non esse, aliquando nihil fuit in rebus.* The *fuit* in the argumentation strongly indicates that Aquinas is thinking in the past tense, and that past tense then influences our interpretation of the *quandoque* and *aliquando* in the text. Consequently, the argument seeks to show that at some time in the past there were no possible beings, in which case unless there is some necessary being, there would be nothing, and from nothing only nothing can come.¹⁹

One of the problems with this reading is that there is something of an inconsistency with Aquinas's wider thought. On Aquinas's account of *per accidens* ordered series, the members of the series possess the causality of themselves, in which case the series can successively go on and on without requiring a primary cause. So, for example, the generation of some possible beings, such as fathers generating sons, can go on to infinity and be without a beginning, given their successiveness. Given that this is Thomas's position elsewhere, it would be odd if he were to reason in the past temporal sense here in the Third Way; for then he would be saying that we could trace the line of possible beings back to a point at which there was no such possible being. But this is not metaphysically necessary, given Thomas's thought on the *per accidens* series: the line of possibles generating other possibles can go on to infinity. This seems to militate against a past-tense reading of the Third Way. Indeed, if we read this stage of argumentation as pertaining exclusively to moving to a point in the past where there is nothing in existence on the supposition that there are only possibles, then Aquinas would have indirectly established a beginning of creation—something that he consistently denied to the powers of unaided human reason from his earliest writings.²⁰

factual nonexistence of something that has been generated.' For further details on authors who take Thomas to be thinking of past time here see Joseph Bobik, 'The First Part of the Third Way', *Philosophical Studies*, 17 (1968), pp. 142–60.

¹⁹ Owens holds that whilst the *quandoque* refers to past time, the *aliquando* refers to imaginary time to signify the metaphysical condition of some point of a creature's non-being; see 'Quandoque and Aliquando', pp. 456–65. Note also what Owens says in his concluding summary on p. 475: '[T]he *quandoque* refers easily to real time in the past and the *aliquando* to imaginary time, in a setting in which both temporal adverbs denote the metaphysical condition of preceding non-existence that is required by generated things'.

²⁰ See Aquinas, *In II Sent.*, dist. 1, qu. 1, art. 2: 'Si autem accipiamus tertium oportere ad rationem creationis, ut scilicet etiam duratione res creata prius non esse quam esse

The future-tense interpretation is the one Kenny favours.²¹ Kenny notes that on the past-tense interpretation Aquinas would be begging the question in favour of the beginning of creation in time. He then observes that what is special about corruptible beings is not that they had a beginning, but that they will cease to be in the future. Not only that: if we knew that the world of corruptible things began in time, the first part of the Third Way would be superfluous since there would then be a time when there was nothing contingent in existence. So, Kenny sees Aquinas as reasoning here that if all things are possible things, then at some future time there will be nothing in existence. This interpretation ties in with the Leonine reading of the text, to the effect that it is impossible for *possibilia* always to be (though Kenny himself rejects the Leonine reading).

Where do we go from here? Well, if it is the case that only possibles exist and that at some future point they will all cease, then assuming the infinity of the past as at least a live option, at some point in that past infinity the end of all possible things would have been. Hence, we need some necessary thing which does not progress towards non-being the way the possibles do. As Brown puts it:

[I]f past time be infinite [...] then this day of universal decay and death would already have arrived; for in an infinite amount of time all the individual processes of corruption would have been completed. Now, if indeed this had ever come to pass in the history of the world—namely, that nothing at all existed—then there would still be nothing in being at the present time. Things cannot just have begun to exist again without some cause; so that there can have been no fresh beginning, as it were [...]. We must therefore conclude that our earlier premise was wrong; there do not exist only inherently deteriorating, contingent things. There must in fact exist some being or beings which by their nature do not progress toward nonexistence.²²

Both Owens and Knasas root this futuristic reasoning in the argument from Maimonides to the effect that whatever is possible for a species (of things)

habeat, ut dicatur esse ex nihilo, quia est tempore post nihil, sic creatio demonstrari non potest, nec a philosophis conceditur; sed per fidem supponitur'. For details of this denial by Aquinas, see Kerr, *Aquinas and the Metaphysics of Creation*, chap. 5.

²¹ Brown also offers a futuristic reading in 'St Thomas' Doctrine of Necessity', pp. 170–72, as does Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St Thomas Aquinas*, p. 69.

²² Brown, 'St Thomas' Doctrine of Necessity', p. 171.

must necessarily come about. So, given that the non-existence of possible things is possible for them, then given that they are, at some point they must not be.²³ The same reasoning can be discerned from the passage in Aristotle's *De caelo* I.12, where he argues that what is possible has its capability of generation and corruption within some period of time; so assuming past time to be infinite, at some point *after* their being all possibles will cease.²⁴

The problem with this reading is twofold. First, it deploys the assumption of the infinity of past time to get us to the point that even now there would be nothing in existence, so that if time were infinite in the past, then at some point in that infinite past all possibles would have tended to non-existence. But there is no indication that this is what Aquinas had in mind in this argument. Second, if the future interpretation were what Thomas meant, then he would plainly contradict his own reasoning against the rational demonstrability of a beginning of creation, since when investigating similar arguments for the finitude of past time, he stresses that the successiveness of time entails that as the old passes away the new can take its place, and this can go on *ad infinitum*, in which case there is no rational problem of an infinite past time. So similarly here and consistently with what he says elsewhere, it could be the case that as past possibles pass away new ones take their place, and so the infinity of a past of nothing but possibles would *not* result in the non-existence of anything even now. Overall, then, the future interpretation of this portion of the Third Way is unsatisfactory.

The final reading of this argumentation is the tenseless one. According to this view, Aquinas is not speaking of coming to be and ceasing to be in the past or future, but he is talking about the nature of possibility as such, that is to say, coming to be and ceasing to be as such.²⁵ So, given that for

²³ See Owens, 'Quandoque and Aliquando', p. 467; Knasas, 'Making Sense of the *Tertia Via*', p. 478.

²⁴ See Knasas, 'Making Sense of the *Tertia Via*', p. 478, n. 7; for St Thomas's reporting of this view see *In Aristotelis libros De caelo et mundo*, Book 1, lect. 29, n. 283: 'Unde dicit manifestum esse quod impossibile est id quod est corruptibile, quandoque non corrupti. Quia si quandoque non corrumpetur, potest non corrumpi. et ita erit incorruptibile [...]'.

²⁵ See MacIntosh, 'Aquinas on Necessity', p. 391, for a tenseless interpretation of the phrase 'what is able not to be at some time is not' (*quod possibile est non esse, quandoque non est*). Whilst endorsing a tensed interpretation of the argument, Owens also interprets the reasoning in a metaphysical sense, that is, as pertaining to the nature of possibility and dependency, so as to avoid the composition fallacy; see 'Quandoque

any and every possible thing, its nature is such that it is generable and corruptible, not everything can be of such a nature, for then one would have dependent beings with nothing on which to depend. The point here is similar to that made in the consideration of infinite regress of *per se* ordered series. The secondary members of *per se* series—for instance, the hand-stick-stone in a series where the mind moves the hand to move the stick to move the stone—are such that they are dependent in some significant respect, for example in respect of motion. Hence, given the nature of such things, multiplying them to infinity will not do any good, since then we would just have an infinity of dependent things, but we still need something that is not so dependent on which they can depend. Multiplying dependent things of the same dependent nature will not account for the dependence; only something which does not share that dependence—that is, something that is independent in that respect—can account for the dependency of such things. Here in the Third Way the consideration is in terms of possibility, in which case Aquinas is arguing that not all things can be possible things, since all such things are dependent in some way given that they are generated and corrupted. So within the created hierarchy there must be something that is necessary.²⁶

This approach to reading the Third Way does not commit the composition fallacy, which would argue that the whole system of possible beings is itself somehow a possible and in need of a necessary being to account for it. This is a state of affairs that Aquinas explicitly rejects; for he argues that not every composite requires a cause for its compositeness, for example, a man might be both a certain complexion and musical, and there

and *Aliquando'*, pp. 462–63. See also Chambat, 'La "tertia via" dans saint Thomas et Aristote', pp. 334–38; Knasas, 'Making Sense of the *Tertia Via*', also defends the more metaphysical (that is, tenseless) interpretation.

²⁶ The proximate historical source for this reading of the Third Way is Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, Book 12, chap. 6, where he argues that not everything can be in potency, for if so all things able to exist need not exist and so would not actually exist unless there were something which is not in potency but in act and which brings potentially existing things into actual existence. For further discussion, see the articles by Chambat and Knasas. Note in particular Knasas, 'Making Sense of the *Tertia Via*', p. 479: 'The key thought is that the possible needs an actual cause. Without that cause the possible remains possible. So the *quandoque non est* would be referring to the possible in separation from its cause'.

are causes for each of these characteristics, but this does not entail that there is a single cause of a musical man of that complexion.²⁷

Note also that this tenseless approach does not revert to considering the Third Way in terms of logical possibility and necessity, as Kenny suggests it does.²⁸ For by considering the nature of things that are possible independently of their temporality, we are not considering them in terms of their being subject to an act of existence and thus in the absolute sense able to be and not to be, but rather in terms of being the kinds of things that are generable and corruptible—that is, because they have matter subject to contrariety—and thus in contrast to kinds of created things that are non-generable and incorruptible.

I do, however, agree with Kenny and others who would say that reading the third way in this way strains the reading of plain old Latin terms like *quandoque* and *aliquando*.²⁹ But I think that it is inevitable when doing philosophy of this kind that terms of ordinary language must be used in a somewhat extraordinary sense which can strain their meaning. Outside the context of the Five Ways, one just has to follow Aquinas's use of the term *esse* to see how strained things get in order to make a point central to his whole metaphysics (one could make the same point about Heidegger's use of the term 'Dasein' or the Fregean sense of 'being', the latter of which Kenny elsewhere endorses and defends). Linguistic strains are not reason to reject an interpretation of a piece of philosophical reasoning unless that interpretation can be shown to be inconsistent with something else in the philosopher's thinking. But we have seen that this interpretation is far from being inconsistent with Aquinas's wider metaphysical thought; indeed, it does not result in the inconsistencies that the past- and future-tense interpretations raise.

Furthermore, Aquinas himself uses temporal terms in a tenseless sense in the Third Way. For example, in the conclusion of the first part of the argument he states: 'If therefore all things are able not to be, at some time there was nothing in existence (*Si igitur omnia sunt possibilia non esse, aliquando nihil fuit in rebus*)'. Now, Aquinas cannot mean that there was literally some time *aliquando* at which there was nothing in existence. This is because if there is nothing in existence, there is no time; for time is the measurement of the before and after in a process of change. Consequently,

²⁷ See Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles*, Book 3, chap. 86; also see MacIntosh, 'Aquinas on Necessity', pp. 396–97.

²⁸ See Kenny, *The Five Ways*, p. 57.

²⁹ See *ibid.*

the *aliquando* that Aquinas is asking us to imagine is merely conceptual. Such tenseless imaginings are necessary for considering hypothetical propositions such as this. Similar modes of speech are deployed when discussing the 'before' and 'after' when it comes to the beginning of time.³⁰ In general, if we cannot make tenseless use of temporal terms, then all of Augustine's reasonings in the *Confessions*, Book 11, about the beginning of creation, Thomas's commitment to the Catholic truth that there is a beginning of creation, and the typical hypothetical scenarios entertained in philosophical thought experiments would come to nothing. Accordingly, one can read temporal language in a tenseless manner for the purposes of explicating a point that is more metaphysical in nature.

So, I propose that the tenseless reading is the strongest interpretation of the Third Way. On this reading what Thomas is discussing in the first part of the way is the metaphysical constitution of possibles as being dependent in a created hierarchy, given their nature as possibles. On that account, should that causal condition fail, such possibles would not be. The use of *quandoque* and *aliquando* in the argument then signifies those metaphysical conditions. And such usage of temporal terms in a non-temporal sense is common in Aquinas's writings, not only in discussing the beginning of creation, for example, but also to specify metaphysical conditions more generally.³¹

Now with that in mind we can go on to address the composition fallacy. Recall that the fallacy is that because this or that possible being comes to be and ceases to be, all possibles come to be and cease to be. Hence, it is not logically valid to infer from the coming to be and ceasing to be of individuals that if all were like this, then at some point there would be nothing.

Certainly, on the tensed reading of the Third Way, past or future, the fallacy would be obvious, since Thomas would then be reasoning from a feature of individuals to an affirmation of that feature for all those individuals as a group, whether in the past or future. But if we take the

³⁰ See Knasas, 'Making Sense of the *Tertia Via*', p. 487: 'Our way of imagining is not to be confused with what really is so. The "aliquando nihil fuit" would be referring to the way we imagine total possibility before it is actualized'. See also Aquinas, *In VIII Phys.*, lect. 2, n. 990, for a discussion of how we can talk of a 'before' and an 'after' as imaginary and not real times when it comes to the beginning of time.

³¹ A search of the *Index Thomisticus* will reveal a plethora of instances where Thomas uses terms like *quando* and *quandoque* in a non-temporal sense to designate metaphysical conditions; such usage is easily translatable into English since the same usage occurs in English.

tenseless, more metaphysical reading, the shift fallacy does not apply. On this interpretation, we are not holding that just because at some point in time a possible being comes to be and ceases to be, at some other point in time all possible beings come to be and cease to be. Rather, we are reasoning that given the nature of possible beings, they are dependent beings, that is, they cannot be of themselves; and so without a being of a metaphysically different kind—that is, one that is not a possible—they would have nothing on which to depend. That being of a different kind is necessary being, in which case there must be at least one necessary being. The composition fallacy does not occur here because we have not moved from considering a feature of an individual and applied it to a group of the same individuals. We are not in the business of affirming a mother for all men just because all men have mothers. We are seeking out the independent ground of dependent possible beings, and that ground is to be found in at least one necessary being; otherwise we would have possible dependent beings with nothing on which to depend.

So much for the first and more controversial part of the Third Way. The second part deploys reasoning familiar from the first two ways. What is necessary either has a cause of its necessity or it does not. This is clear from what we have already considered concerning necessity, since we now know that a necessary being can have an efficient cause if its essence is not identical with its existence. But we cannot go to infinity in caused necessary beings; in support of this, Thomas refers to what he has already argued in the Second Way, and which we shall explain below. Thus, we must arrive at a primary necessary being, and this is what we call God.

The most controversial feature of this argumentation is Thomas's denial of an infinite regress of causes of necessity, borrowed from the Second Way. What this reasoning alludes to is Aquinas's distinction between *per se* and *per accidens* ordered series, and how the former arrives at a primary whereas the latter can go to infinity.³² A *per se* ordered series is such that its members do not possess the causality of the series in virtue of what they are. By contrast, a *per accidens* ordered series is such that the members of the series do possess the causality of the series in virtue of what they are. The two standard examples of these series are: (i) *per se*: the mind

³² For details, see Gaven Kerr, 'Essentially Ordered Series Reconsidered' and 'Essentially Ordered Series Reconsidered Once Again' [Chapters 2 – 3 in this volume]; Caleb Cohoe, 'There Must be a First: Why Thomas Aquinas Rejects Infinite, Essentially Ordered, Causal Series'; Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, pp. 460–62.

moves the hand to move the stick to move the stone; (ii) *per accidens*: a father produces a son who produces a son who produces a son, and so on.

Reflecting on these examples, we can see that the hand-stick-stone in the *per se* series do not possess the causality (motion) of the series in virtue of what they are. This is because hands, sticks, and stones are in themselves immobile. Hence, they are dependent for their mobility, such that without a cause of their mobility, the hand-stick-stone would be immobile. The mental agent in the series is the cause of the mobility that the hand-stick-stone enjoy, and as such it is the primary cause of mobility in the series precisely because it possesses the causality of the series (mobility) in itself.

On the other hand, the fathers and sons in the *per accidens* series possess the causality of the series (paternity) in themselves in virtue of what they are (biologically functioning males of the same species). Given this fact, a father can produce a son, and that father can die, but the son can still grow up to produce his own son without his father's help. Hence, earlier members of the series are not required for the continuance of the series. It follows as a consequence of this that the series can be beginningless and yet continue as the series that it is. *Per se* ordered series necessarily terminate in a primary cause on which the members of the series depend, whereas *per accidens* series may happen to have a first cause, but this is not necessarily so.

Now we can apply this reasoning to the Third Way as follows. In the second stage we have arrived at the point where it has been established that some necessary being exists; but Thomas points out that any necessary being either has its necessity *per se* or through another. If such a necessary being has its necessity through another, it is caused in its necessity. And so we ask whether in the series of causes of necessity, there can be an infinity. Thomas denies that there can be an infinite regress of causes of infinity, and given his reasoning on *per se* ordered series it is clear why. Necessary beings that are caused in their necessity do not have their necessity in themselves but through another. Hence, like the hand-stick-stone in the *per se* ordered series above, they do not possess the causality of the series in themselves. But just like the hand-stick-stone in the series above, unless such effects depend on a primary cause that does have in itself the causality of the series, the effects would have nothing on which to depend for their causality, and so would be causally ineffectual. In the context of the Third Way, this entails that unless there is a primary cause of the necessity of necessary beings—a primary cause that is necessary in itself or *per se*—caused necessary beings would have no cause for their necessity. Hence, there must be a primary

cause of the necessity of necessary beings, a cause that is necessary *per se*, and this is what all call God.

So much then for the reasoning of the Third Way. I submit that the interpretation offered here overcomes the standard misconceptions and objections offered against the argument. Not only that, it establishes what it sets out to establish, namely, that there is some primary cause that is absolutely necessary. Let us now move on to offer some brief and closing interpretative remarks.

3. Interpreting the Third Way

Let us first advert to the fact that the Third Way is taken from possibility and necessity; it does not proceed from possibility to necessity. This may seem like an obvious remark and one not worth reflecting upon, but the misunderstanding of such a small matter can prove problematic in the end.³³ Why is this such an important point?

It is important because in the first half of the argument, Aquinas's primary aim is not to reason from *possibilita* to some necessary being as the cause of such *possibilita*, although it is true that necessary beings are part of a causal hierarchy in creation. Rather, his reasoning in the first half is that, given the causal hierarchy, *possibilita* are not all that exist in creation.³⁴ Consequently, there must exist some other being(s) that is (are) not possible and so necessary. Thus begins the second stage of argumentation in which Aquinas considers things that are necessary through another as reducible to what is necessary *per se*. The causal nature of the second stage of the argument is indisputable; and in its considerations it invokes the *per se* ordered series found in Aquinas's wider thinking and detailed above.

Given that causal considerations do not appear explicitly until the second half of the way, Aquinas is not thinking of causality here in terms of *possibilita* depending on what is necessary through another, and what is necessary through another depending ultimately on what is necessary *per se*. In other words, he is not thinking of an ordered causal hierarchy with the lower participating in the higher and the higher ultimately participating in the creator, so that the creator creates the higher and the higher the lower. The latter would be a more Neoplatonic emanationist view of creation,

³³ See Aquinas, *De ente et essentia*, chap. 1: '[P]arvus error in principio magnus est in fine [...].'

³⁴ See Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* Ia, qu. 2, art. 3: 'Non ergo omnia entia sunt possibilia, sed oportet aliquid esse necessarium in rebus'.

which Aquinas saw in the thought of Avicenna and Algazel, and which he rejected.³⁵ Aquinas rejects this position, because then God would not be *per se* necessary, but would be necessitated by his own divine nature to create. Hence, to be *per se* necessary, God must be free to create. And if he is free to create, he creates both those things that are necessary and those things that are possible.

Bearing all of this in mind, the first half of the *tertia via* depicts an order of creation in which there are both *possibilia* and *necessaria*, and then in the second half, through a consideration of the *necessaria per aliud* Aquinas is led to affirm the existence of what is necessary *per se*. Consideration of the created causal hierarchy in the first half of the way is a step towards establishing that there are both possible and necessary beings in creation. Now, if God is necessary *per se*, it cannot be that his being simply overflows into emanating the necessary, and then those necessary emanate the *possibilia*. Rather, as *per se* necessary, God creates both what is necessary and what is possible, otherwise he wouldn't be *per se*. This then gives us a clue to the order of causality here; for whilst Aquinas reasons to God from possibility and necessity, the argument seeks to establish that God is the primary cause of the being of the things that are necessary (and possible). Hence, it is the primary cause that gives being to these necessary and possible things as the beings that they are. Otherwise, the primary cause would be the cause only of necessary creatures and such necessary creatures would in turn be the causes of possible creatures, which would be the emanationist scheme that Thomas elsewhere rejects. Hence, it is the cause of being that Thomas has in his sights.

We have used the emanationist account of creation from the Neoplatonist and Islamic traditions as a foil against which to illuminate Aquinas's argument here; Aquinas cannot mean that God as *per se* necessary simply causes the conditionally necessary, and the latter cause the possibles. Not only would this conflict with Aquinas's rejection of such emanationism elsewhere, but it also conflicts with Aquinas's own account of the Third Way as taken from possibility and necessity. We can in turn use as a foil certain

³⁵ See Aquinas, *De potentia*, qu. 3, art. 4: '[Q]uorumdam philosophorum fuit positio, quod Deus creavit creaturas inferiores mediantibus superioribus, ut patet in Lib. de causis; et in Metaphys. Avicennae, et Algazelis, et movebantur ad hoc opinandum propter quod credebat quod ab uno simplici non posset immediate nisi unum provenire, et illo mediante ex uno primo multitudo procedebat. Hoc autem dicebant, ac si Deus ageret per necessitatem naturae, per quem modum ex uno simplici non fit nisi unum'. For details of Aquinas's engagement with this view and his own view of creation, see my *Aquinas and the Metaphysics of Creation*, chap. 3.

non-Thomist accounts of necessity to illuminate the argument further. These non-Thomist accounts of necessity envisage necessity as some property added to the essence of a thing, such that a thing is necessary so long as it has this property. Accordingly, when God causes something to be necessary, he gives it something special, typically existence in all possible worlds.

As we have seen at the beginning of this paper, Aquinas does not take possibility and necessity in those terms. Rather, what is possible in this context is what can be generated and corrupted, whereas what is necessary is what is neither generable nor corruptible. God certainly produces something special when he produces something necessary, but not because he gives it some special feature such as existence in all possible worlds; rather, things are necessary because of the kinds of things that they are, and in being such things they are neither generable nor corruptible. Hence, God does nothing more special in producing necessary things than producing things of a certain kind; but he does the same when producing *possibilia*; for in producing *possibilia* God simply produces things that are generable and corruptible, in which case he does not give them any special mark of possibility such as only existing in some possible worlds. The product is different in each case because possible things and necessary things are different, but the production is the same, since both kinds of things participate in the same act of creation. Accordingly, when in the second half of the Third Way Aquinas speaks of there being a cause of necessity, he is not speaking of God's engaging in some special kind of causality whereby he bestows a special gift on those things that are necessary, a causality different from what he uses to produce *possibilia*. Rather, in causing necessary things to be necessary, God simply brings about beings of a kind that are neither generable nor corruptible.

On this reading, then, Aquinas is justified in the conclusion of the Third Way that the *per se* necessary being, cause of necessity for others, is God. This is because, as we have seen, the *per se* necessary being is the cause of the being of other things; for to cause the necessity of others is to cause them as the beings that they are. Hence, the *per se* necessary being is the originator of beings. But the originator of beings is a creator. So what the Third Way establishes is a creator of all things, and this is what all understand God to be.

Chapter 10 - A Reconsideration of Aquinas's Fourth Way

The five ways are perhaps the most commented upon of Aquinas's philosophical texts. Insofar as they seek to offer simple and succinct demonstrations of God's existence they have drawn attention from specialists and non-specialists alike. However, there is something striking and at times baffling about the fourth way. A non-specialist reader can at least see what Aquinas is up to in his considerations of motion, causality, possibility and necessity, finality in the other ways, even if such a reader may not appreciate the subtleties of Aquinas's thought. The fourth way on the other hand is quite enigmatic (and somewhat elusive). It would appear that Aquinas is making deceptively simple observations and leaps which defy the gravity of reason leading one to consider whether or not we should even take the argument seriously.

On the other hand, for those who are specialists in Aquinas's thinking, and particularly his Neoplatonic metaphysics, the fourth way is not only a strong argument for God's existence, but it carries with it his whole metaphysical vision for how creator and creature relate to each other. Far from being an obscure argument of which we cannot make sense, the fourth way, better than any other way, encapsulates Aquinas's most cherished way to God based on a move from participated to unparticipated being.¹

I have some sympathy for the latter approach. I do think there is a lot more going on in the fourth way than what those without an understanding of Aquinas's metaphysical thought would be prepared to admit.

¹ When I speak of Aquinas's Neoplatonic metaphysics, what I mean is his metaphysics of participation in *esse*, whereby what is *per aliud* depends on and participates in what is *per se*. This teaching appears throughout Aquinas's corpus. For a systematic presentation of the theme of participation in Aquinas's thought, see Cornelio Fabro, *La Nozione Metafisica di Partecipazione secondo S. Tommaso D'Aquino* (Turin: Società Editrice Internazionale, 1950); and *Participation et causalité selon s. Thomas d'Aquin*. For another account of participation with a slightly different nuance, see Louis-Bertrand Geiger, *La Participation dans la philosophie de s. Thomas d'Aquin* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1942). For a general discussion of this theme in Aquinas's thought and an attempt to reconcile Fabro and Geiger, see John Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, Chapter 4. For an account of Aquinas's relationship to the Platonic and Neoplatonic inheritance, see Wayne Hankey, 'Aquinas, Plato, and Neoplatonism', in *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, ed. Brian Davies and Eleonore Stump, pp. 55–65. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

Furthermore, I believe that once we understand the fourth way against Aquinas's metaphysical backdrop, the same backdrop against which we read the other four ways, we can see it as part of the same general causal approach to God deployed in all the ways, though it is not my intention here to defend that reading of the five ways.² My intention in this paper is to consider the fourth way in light of Aquinas's more general metaphysical commitments, and to show how it is a heavy-duty metaphysical argument for God's existence on a level with his other more explicitly metaphysical proofs.

1. The Argument

The fourth way runs as follows:

The fourth way is taken from the gradations that are found in things. Accordingly, there is found in things something more or less good, and true, and noble, and such like. But 'more' and 'less' are said of diverse things according as they diversely approach what is [so] maximally; just as the hotter is that which approaches what is maximally hot. There is something then that is most true, and best, and most noble and consequently maximally in being [*maxime ens*]; for what are maximally true, are maximally beings, as is said in the second book of the *Metaphysics*. Now, what is maximally such in a given genus is the cause of all members of that genus, as fire which is maximally hot is the cause of all hot things. Therefore, there is something which is the cause for all beings of *esse* and goodness and of every other perfection and this we call God.³

² Both Joseph Owens and John Knasas have argued that there is a unified approach to God in Aquinas's thought which is revealed in each of the ways; this is a position with which I am in substantial agreement, though Knasas and I may disagree on the particular issues involved. For details see Joseph Owens, 'Aquinas and the Five Ways', in *St Thomas Aquinas on the Existence of God*, pp. 132–42. Also note his closing statement in 'The Conclusion of the Prima Via', in *St Thomas Aquinas on the Existence of God*, p. 168: '[The five ways] are merely different ways of proceeding in what is fundamentally the same argument. All five *viae* proceed by finding in various ways the existential act of sensible things and then reason to the source of that act, which is subsistent *esse*'; see also Knasas, *Thomistic Existentialism and Cosmological Reasoning*.

³ *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, qu. 2, art 3: 'Quarta via sumitur ex gradibus qui in rebus inveniuntur. Invenitur enim in rebus aliquid magis et minus bonum, et verum, et nobile, et sic de aliis huiusmodi. Sed magis et minus dicuntur de diversis secundum quod appropinquant diversimode ad aliquid quod maxime est, sicut magis calidum est, quod

The fourth way is broken down into two general stages. The first stage is the *maxime* stage in which Thomas seeks to establish something that is maximum with respect to certain attributes (goodness, truth, and nobility). Having established this Thomas reasons that what is maximal regarding these attributes must be maximal in being. The second stage argues that this maximal being is the cause of all other beings, not only in their *esse*, but also in the attributes just mentioned (goodness, truth, and nobility).

Clearly the most important stage of the argument is the first stage whereby something maximum in being is established. Given Thomas's wider metaphysical commitments, it is relatively straightforward to move from what is maximal in being, or being *per se*, to the dependence of all other beings on it for their existence and perfection. Thus, the second stage of the argument follows from Thomas's other metaphysical commitments.

Given the two staged approach to this argument, we shall consider each stage in turn. Having done that, we will go on to consider issues pertaining to the argument as a whole within Aquinas's wider metaphysical outlook.

1.1. *The Maxime Stage*

As is clear from the argument, Thomas begins by appealing to some feature of reality: that various gradations can be found amongst beings. He gives as examples goodness, truth, and nobility, and he notes that such attributes can be found more or less in things. Thus, we can see that in things there is more or less goodness, truth, and nobility. He then reasons that we predicate such gradations in things only because the things themselves approximate to something that is maximal in the required respect. As an example, he uses heat and he states that the more or less hot is only so insofar as it approaches

magis appropinquat maxime calido. Est igitur aliiquid quod est verissimum, et optimum, et nobilissimum, et per consequens maxime ens, nam quae sunt maxime vera, sunt maxime entia, ut dicitur II Metaphys. Quod autem dicitur maxime tale in aliquo genere, est causa omnium quae sunt illius generis, sicut ignis, qui est maxime calidus, est causa omnium calidorum, ut in eodem libro dicitur. Ergo est aliiquid quod omnibus entibus est causa esse, et bonitatis, et cuiuslibet perfectionis, et hoc dicimus Deum¹. Other versions of this argument can be found in: *In I Sent.*, dist. 2, qu. 1, art. 1, *contra*; *De Potentia Dei*, qu. 3, art. 5 [argument attributed to Aristotle], *In II Met.*, Cap. 1, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Lib. 1, Cap. 13, *Super Evangelium S. Ioannis lectura* (Turin: Marietti, 1952), Proemium. The best single study of the fourth way is Cornelio Fabro, 'Sviluppo, significato e valore della IV via', *Doctor Communis* 7 (1954), pp. 71-109.

what is maximally hot, which in accord with the physics of his time is fire. Accordingly, given that we can predicate the more or less good, true, and noble, and that such predication are only so because the things which are such approximate to what is maximal in the required sense, there must be something which is maximally good, true, and noble, and as such is maximally in being.⁴

There is a lot to break down in this stage of the argument, and perhaps the best entryway into an understanding of it is to begin with the examples Thomas uses: goodness, truth, and nobility. Thomas reasons at the beginning of the argument that these attributes can be found more or less in things. This is an important point to bear in mind. The goodness, truth, nobility of things is not something conditioned by our apprehension of things. Certainly, we can more or less apprehend the goodness, truth, and nobility of creatures; be that as it may, their goodness, truth, and nobility are features possessed by them not insofar as they are understood by us, but irrespective of our understanding of them. These are real features of beings that all beings have, and so they are attributes which pertain to the being of the thing in question. Thus, the goodness, truth, and nobility of a thing is conditioned not by our understanding of the thing but by the being of the thing itself. What this entails is that whilst we may compare things as more or less without ourselves appealing to what is maximum in order to do so, the things themselves are nevertheless so comparable because they approach what is maximum. Hence, recognition of a maximum by us in our comparisons is not a condition for the comparability of things; such comparability is a feature of the things themselves given their relation to a maximum.

These examples recall Thomas's doctrine of the transcendental perfections of being. These perfections are attributes possessed by any and every being insofar as it is a being. Elsewhere and in various places Thomas offers a deduction of the transcendental perfections; what these deductions amount to is the fact that any being whatsoever will display certain properties simply because it exists. Thus, simply because a thing is, it will have a certain degree of goodness, truth etc. Consequently, there is a convertibility between these perfections and being itself. So, what is maximal with respect to these perfections will be maximal in being; and this anticipates Aquinas's later reasoning in this same stage of argumentation.⁵

4 The inference from maximally good, true, and noble to maximally being is justified by an appeal to Aristotle's *Metaphysics* Bk. II wherein Aristotle argues for the convertibility of being and truth, see *Metaphysics*, Bk. II, 993b30.

5 For a classic deduction of the transcendentals see *De Veritate*, qu. 1, art. 1 and augmented with qu. 21, art. 1. For a comprehensive treatment of the transcendentals in

Nevertheless, whilst introduction of the transcendentals might help to situate the argument within Aquinas's wider metaphysics, it also creates two problems. First, if we grant that Thomas does have in mind transcendental perfections, we should notice that he here mentions nobility along with goodness and truth; but nobility is a perfection that does not appear in any list of the transcendentals offered elsewhere by Aquinas. So, its appearance in the fourth way either points to a new transcendental perfection other than the ones he typically recognises or suggests that whilst the fourth way may be concerned with some transcendental perfections (goodness and truth) it is also concerned with other non-transcendental perfections (nobility).⁶

The second problem follows from the first. If we take the second disjunct and hold that the inclusion of nobility amongst the examples indicates that Thomas is thinking of non-transcendental perfections, then it seems possible that his thinking here could also apply to life, power, wisdom etc all of which admit of degrees and therefore presumably point towards a maximum. However, if this is correct, then the later reasoning viz. that what is maximal in the required respect is also maximal in being is considerably weakened. This is because if we have non-transcendental perfections, we have perfections that are *not* convertible with being, in which case what has or is those perfections maximally need not be a maximal being. So before proceeding we need to consider these issues.

To the first issue, that is, the placing of nobility amongst the transcendentals, it does not seem that Aquinas is here presenting any new transcendental in the fourth way. Rather, if we read nobility within the wider context of Aquinas's thought, it would seem that what he means is the general notion of perfection; for elsewhere Aquinas links nobility with the creature's perfection or actuality and hence its possession of *esse*, so that the degree of nobility that a thing has will depend on its degree of participation in *esse*.⁷

Aquinas's thought and within the wider context of medieval philosophy see Jan Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy and the Transcendentals: The Case of Thomas Aquinas* (Leiden-New York-Cologne: Brill, 1996).

⁶ Van Steenberghen, *Le Problème de l'existence de Dieu dans les écrits de s. Thomas d'Aquin*, pp. 209 and 216, takes the argument to be concerned mainly with transcendental perfections, so that introduction of nobility is problematic for the argument. Garrigou-Lagrange also takes the argument to be concerned primarily with transcendental perfections, *Dieu. Son existence et sa nature*, pp. 278, 280–281.

⁷ See for instance: *In I Sent.*, d. 17, qu. 1, art. 2, ad. 3: 'Unde illud quod excedit in esse, simpliciter nobilis est omni eo quod excedit in aliquo de consequentibus esse'; *Compendium Theologiae*, Lib. I, Cap. 74: 'Quia vero unumquodque intantum nobile et perfectum est, inquantum ad divinam similitudinem accedit. Deus autem est actus purus absque potentiae permixtione; necesse est ea quae sunt suprema in entibus, magis esse

What is clear from the various instances in which Thomas discusses nobility is that it resides in the completion or perfection of a thing, which perfection comes through a thing's *esse*; for *esse* is not only the act of all acts but also the perfection of all perfections.⁸ Hence, Aquinas is not introducing a new transcendental perfection, yet the use of nobility as an example and his linking that with *esse* elsewhere will still permit him to reason from what is maximal in nobility to maximal in being as we shall shortly see.

Nevertheless, if we adopt this interpretation of nobility, we stumble onto the second problem. Recall that the second problem only emerges if we concede that in adverting to nobility Thomas is considering non-transcendental perfections, i.e., perfections which actual beings possess but which are not convertible with being. With that in mind, the later reasoning of the fourth way, that whatever has the perfections of good, truth, and nobility maximally is a maximal being, is considerably weakened; for it is unclear how what is maximal in some non-transcendental perfection e.g., wisdom, is maximal in being.

The way of dealing with this issue should be evident given what we have said about nobility and perfection when dealing with the first problem. A thing's nobility is its perfection, and a thing is perfect to the degree that it has *esse*. Accordingly, what is maximally noble (or perfect) will be maximal in *esse*, and so will be maximally in being. The latter then entails that

in actu, et minus de potentia habere, quae autem inferiora sunt magis in potentia esse'; *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, qu. 4, art. 2: '...[I]n Deo sunt perfections omnium rerum. Unde et dicitur universaliter perfectus, quia non deest ei aliqua nobilitas quae inveniatur in aliquo genere. . .'; *De Substantiis Separatis*, Cap. 7, n. 34: 'Manifestum est autem quod cum ens per potentiam et actum dividatur, quod actus est potentia perfectior, et magis habet de ratione essendi: non enim simpliciter esse dicimus quod est in potentia, sed solum quod est actu. Oportet igitur id quod est superius in entibus, magis accedere ad actum; quod autem est in entibus insimum, propinquius esse potentiae'; *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Lib. I, Cap. 28, note in particular: '... [N]obilitas cuiuscumque rei est sibi secundum suum esse'; *De Ente et Essentia*, Cap. 5: '... [Q]uamvis sit esse tantum, non oportet quod deficiant ei reliquae perfections et nobilitates, immo habet omnes perfections, quae sunt in omnibus generibus. . . Sed habet eas modo excellentiori omnibus rebus, quia in eo unum sunt, sed in aliis diversitatem habent. Et hoc est, quia omnes illae perfections convenient sibi secundum esse suum simplex', *Super Ioan., Proem.*: '... Quanto aliquid est nobilior in gradibus rerum, tanto minus habet de mutabilitate'. Garrigou-Lagrange also takes nobility here to be synonymous with perfection, see *Dieu. Son existence et sa nature*, p. 281.

⁸ *De Potentia Dei*, qu. 7, art. 2. ad. 9: '... [H]oc quod dico esse est actualitas omnium actuum, et propter hoc est perfectio omnium perfectionum'; *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, qu. 4, art. 2: 'Omnium autem perfections pertinent ad perfectionem essendi, secundum hoc enim aliqua perfecta sunt, quod aliquo modo esse habent'.

whatever perfection we consider, e.g., life, power, wisdom, all will be such i.e., perfections, because of the *esse* of the thing. Life, power, wisdom and whatever else then are only perfections because they signify some actuality of a thing which actuality is derived from a thing's *esse*.⁹ *Esse* is the principle of perfection (indeed it is the perfection of all perfections). Accordingly, whatever has these perfections maximally has the principle of perfection maximally, which is to say that it has *esse* maximally (later I shall argue that it is *esse per se*). And so, such a thing is a maximal being.

As I see it then, Thomas does indeed envisage the transcendental perfections in the first stage of the argument of the fourth way, but he does not envisage only those perfections; he envisages other perfections as well. In so considering other perfections Thomas can root the fourth way in the notion of perfection itself and so one can link the reasoning here with his wider reasoning on *esse*.

When it comes to the approximating relation, there is a tendency to think about certain examples which would lead us away from Aquinas's actual argument or even the spirit thereof. The temptation is to think of the relation as quantitative, so that the more and the less in relation to a measure is seen to pertain to quantity. We can take the metre as an example; other measurements are defined in terms of that metre, e.g., centimetre, millimetre, kilometre, and those other measurements approximate to the metre depending on how close they come to being a metre. Thus, it takes only 100 centimetres to equal a metre but 1000 millimetres. The fourth way is sometimes interpreted in this respect, with the 'magis et minus' often translated as 'greater and less'. Accordingly, the approximation of the fourth way is in turn taken to be akin to quantitative approximation. This conception of the approximating relation is far from what Thomas had in mind.¹⁰

⁹ *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, qu. 3, art. 4: '... [E]ssere est actualitas omnis formae vel naturae, non enim bonitas vel humanitas significatur in actu, nisi prout significamus eam esse'; *ibid*, qu. 4, art. 2: 'Omnium autem perfections pertinent ad perfectionem essendi, secundum hoc enim aliqua perfecta sunt, quod aliquo modo esse habent'.

¹⁰ See for example Paul Weingartner, *God's Existence. Can It Be Proven? A Logical Commentary on the Five Ways of Thomas Aquinas* (DeGruyter Inc: 2013), p. 89: "The argument begins with an empirical premise which seems hardly deniable: something is greater than something else with regard to some positive aspect or property." See also Bochenski, "The Five Ways," in *The Rationality of Theism*, ed., A. García de la Sierra, (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000), p. 83. (Bochenski thinks of the fourth way in terms of degrees of greatness). Kenny incidentally observes that it cannot be quantitative approximation with which Thomas is concerned in the fourth way, since that would not transcend the universe, and so Thomas must employ Platonic reasoning concerning

According to Thomas, all beings have perfections because they exist; their perfections flow from their existence, signifying something that they have in actuality rather than in potency. Hence, the degree to which a thing has *esse* signifies the degree to which it is perfect. The more and the less perfect then, whether that is a transcendental perfection, such as goodness or truth, or some general perfection such as life, power, or wisdom, is signified by the extent to which a thing has *esse*. This is far from the quantitative conception because it would be absurd to think of things as having a quantity of *esse*. Things simply have *esse* or they do not. It is certainly the case that in having *esse*, the *esse* they have is limited to the kind of thing that they are; for this is part and parcel of Thomas's commitment to the view that unreceived act is unlimited. But this is not a commitment to the view that the thing whose *esse* is limited possesses only a certain quantity of *esse*, but that the thing possesses *esse* as that kind of thing and not another.¹¹

Related to the previous point, the quantitative conception of the approximating relation would entail that the gradated perfection is possessed univocally by the members that approximate to the maximum. Thus, whilst the centimetre and the millimetre do not literally have the measurement of the metre, they are both fractions of measurement with what is predicated and the mode of predication being the same, the only difference is in the length or quantity. Thomas will be keen to deny that there is any univocity between creaturely perfections and God Who is the source of all such perfections. Hence the approximating relation in the fourth way is something different from a quantitative relation.

We can turn to Thomas himself for explanation in this regard. He argues that the notions of increase and decrease are certainly, at least initially, taken from quantitative measurements and then applied to spiritual things.

participation when it comes to approximation—Kenny is surely right in this respect, see *The Five Ways*, p. 81.

¹¹ *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Lib. I, Cap. 43: 'Omnis actus alteri inhaerens terminationem recipit ex eo in quo est: quia quod est in altero, est in eo per modum recipientis. Actus igitur in nullo existens nullo terminatur'; *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Lib. II, Cap. 52: 'Esse autem, in quantum est esse, non potest esse diversum: potest autem diversificari per aliquid quod est praeter esse; sicut esse lapidis est aliud ab esse hominis'; *De Potentia Dei*, qu. 1, art. 2: 'Esse enim hominis terminatum est ad hominis speciem, quia est receptum in natura speciei humanae; et simile est de esse equi, vel cuiuslibet creaturae'. For discussion see William Norris Clarke 'The Limitation of Act by Potency in St Thomas: Aristotelianism or Neoplatonism' in *Explorations in Metaphysics: Being-God-Person*, pp. 65–88; John Wippel, 'Thomas Aquinas and the Axiom that Unreceived Act Is Unlimited', in *Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas II* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007), pp. 123–52.

We can have corporeal measurements and the quantitative relation here pertains to the perfection of quantity due to the body in question. Moving on we can have measurements of form pertaining either to (i) the form itself or to (ii) the degree of participation in the form. Concerning the degree of participation in the form, this is dependent on the subject in which it is found, e.g., as a subject is more or less healthy given the form of health itself, and in this regard we have the more or less. Notice that this approximating relation is not a quantitative relation, like that of corporal measurement. In the health case, a subject is more or less healthy because he approximates to what it is to be healthy for the individual that he is.¹²

The approximating relation most appropriate to the fourth way then is the one articulated in terms of participation, i.e., as a subject participates more or less in something given the perfection of that in which it participates. And what is to be noted here is that the specification of the perfection to which the subject approximates is something absolute in itself, not something relative to the subject. Hence, that to which the subject approximates is an independent measure of the subject.

Now, as noted, a thing has *esse* in a more or less fashion insofar as its essence limits *esse* in some respect. In other words, an existing thing is an existing essence; its essence is actualised by its *esse*. Accordingly, the *esse* it has, hence its perfections, will be determined, limited, and individuated by the kind of thing that it is. The *esse* of a rock will be that of a rock, so that the perfections of a rock will be a rock's but not a dog's. A dog's *esse* is that of a dog and not a cat, and certainly not of a human. Things are more or less in *esse* then according as their essences admit of more and less. And for Thomas there is an essential hierarchy of being in accordance with which a thing's essence can receive being.

Inanimate things are incapable of receiving *esse* in any significant respect, they simply exist as the things that they are. This is not to render inanimate things such as diamonds, fine metals, and planets insignificant, since insofar as they have *esse* they disclose the creativity of the creator. Nevertheless, their having of *esse* is of a grade lower than animate things.Animate things receive *esse* in a more significant respect insofar as they not only exist, but they also live. Merely animate things take in nutrition; sensitive animals are not only nourished but can live and move within an environment; rational animals can do all of that and consider the truth about

12 See *Summa Theologiae*, IaIIae, qu. 52, art. 1; for discussion of this particular article see Garrigou-Lagrange, *Dieu. Son existence et sa nature*, 279; see also Van Steenberghe, *Le problème*, p. 208.

reality, each other, and God. Each higher stage in the hierarchy represents a capacity for being that a lower stage is without. Accordingly, each higher stage is a better, more intelligible, more noble and ultimately more intensively existing being than what exists on the previous stage. This is what Thomas means by the more or less in perfection.¹³

So far so good, but now we must consider how to arrive at what is maximal in the required respect.

What is common to all the degrees of perfection is the fact that the perfection is not possessed *per se* by the thing in question. It is merely a participated perfection. The thing in question is not *per se* good, true, noble; rather it *has* goodness, it *has* truth, it *has* nobility. And it only has these things because it participates in *esse* which actualises it thereby making it good, true, and noble as an existing thing of that kind. Hence, beings to which gradated perfection pertains are beings which have the perfection *per participationem*, in which case they do not have the participated perfection of themselves, but because of something else (or *per aliud*). This something else cannot merely have the perfection *per participationem*, because that then would not be the cause from which such beings *per participationem* get their participated perfection. The other from which such beings get their perfection must have that perfection *per se*, otherwise we have no ground for the participated perfection; we would have a participated perfection with nothing in which the participants can participate for that perfection. Accordingly, there must be something which *per se* has the perfection in question, i.e., something that does not merely have the perfection, but is the perfection in question.¹⁴

We have closely aligned the possession of some perfection with the possession of *esse*. A thing has its perfections to the degree that it has *esse*. Whatever then is the *per se* source of the participated perfection that things

¹³ See *In I Sent.*, d. 8, *expositio textus*: ‘. . . [M]agis et minus potest dici aliquid dupliciter: vel quantum ad ipsam naturam participatam, quae secundum se intenditur et remittitur secundum accessum ad terminum vel recessum; et hoc non est nisi in accidentibus; vel quantum ad modum participandi; et sic etiam in essentialibus dicitur magis et minus secundum diversum modum participandi . . .’, see also *In Librum Beati Dionysii De Divinis Nominibus Expositio* (Turin: Marietti, 1950), Cap. 5, lect. 1, nn. 614–7; for discussion see Fernand Van Steenberghe, “Prolégomènes à la «Quarta Via»,” *Rivista di Filosofia Neo-Scolastica* 70:1 (1978), pp. 104–5. For an account of the created hierarchy rooted in Aquinas’s metaphysics of creation, see Gaven Kerr *Aquinas and the Metaphysics of Creation*, pp. 222–30.

¹⁴ *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, qu. 44, art. 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’.

have will ultimately be *esse per se*, that is, it will be *esse* itself. When Thomas then reasons in the fourth way from gradated perfections to a maximal in perfection and ultimately in being, he is reasoning from perfections possessed *per participationem* to a *per se* instance of that perfection. And since all such perfections derive from *esse*, Thomas is reasoning from *esse* possessed *per participationem* to *esse per se*, or, to *ipsum esse subsistens*.¹⁵

As I am reading the maxime stage, Aquinas's reasoning can only make sense when what is gradated in some respect and approximates to what is perfect is *per aliud* or *per participationem*. Hence the perfect to which it approximates is *per se*. Accordingly, the perfect is the participated source whence all that are *per participationem* not only have the participated perfection but measured against which they are said to be deficient in perfection; and their deficiency in perfection is precisely because they do not have the perfection *per se*, but in a limited and participated sense. Let us now turn to the second stage of the argument.

1.2 The Causality Stage

The second stage is the causality stage. Whereas the first stage established that for gradated perfections there must exist a most perfect, and that what is maximal in that respect is maximal in being, the second stage seeks to establish that what is maximal in being is the cause of the being of all else. Both Van Steenberghen and Fabro see this stage as something of an outgrowth of the previous stage, and in this they are surely correct.¹⁶ The first stage of the argument arrives at a maximum in being, or what is *per se*, but it does not show that such is the cause of all that is. Hence, the argument moves naturally to this second stage in which it is established that the maximum (or what is *per se*) is just such a cause.

¹⁵ We can see similar reasoning in the arguments which share a family resemblance to the fourth way from *De Potentia Dei*, qu. 3, art. 5 [argument attributed to Aristotle], and *In Iohann., Proem. n. 5*. Interestingly, whilst these arguments are both similar to the fourth way, the argument from *De Potentia Dei* is attributed to Aristotle, whereas the one from the commentary on John, is attributed to Plato. Not only that, the argument attributed to Avicenna in *De Potentia Dei* qu. 3, art. 5 also bears a resemblance to the argumentation of the fourth way, since in the Avicennian argument Thomas reasons from what is *per aliud* to what is *per se* and reasons that what is *per se* is the cause of all that is *per participationem*. However, the latter reasoning seems to be the general kind of reasoning that is applicable to many of Aquinas's proofs.

¹⁶ Van Steenberghen, *Le problème*, p. 222 and Fabro, 'Sviluppo', p. 102.

Accordingly, Thomas states that what is maximal in a given genus is the cause of all else within that genus.¹⁷ The first stage of the argument has just established that there is something maximal in being, in which case all else that is in being but is not maximal must be caused by what is maximal in being. Hence, we have a cause of all beings, and this is what we call God.

Immediately we are met with three problems: (i) doesn't this reasoning implicitly affirm that being is a genus? (ii) granted that we have something maximal in being, does that entail that it is the cause of *all* beings? (iii) is this really what we call God?

Let us deal with each problem individually.

It is one of the first things that a student learns about Aquinas's metaphysics: being is not a genus. The reason why being is not a genus is because it cannot be differentiated in the way that a genus can. Thus, take some genus, e.g., animal, and divide it into its various species, e.g., human, cat, dog. The genus is divided because some differentiating feature not part of the genus itself can specify it, e.g., rationality, felinity, caninity. But being cannot be specified in this way because there is nothing outside of being which can specify it.¹⁸ Hence we have the old Parmenidean problem of how we can have diversity of being without introducing non-being with which to diversify it.

Thomas's solution to this problem follows the well-worn path established by Plato and Aristotle and it is to argue that being is a plurivocal notion, an analogical one to be exact. Hence, he doesn't see being as a univocal reality that can be divided up like a genus, and he criticises Parmenides for seeming to think that it must be so.¹⁹ Nevertheless, despite the rejection of being as a genus, it would appear that Thomas takes it to be so in the second half of the fourth way; for here he not only explicitly refers to what is primary in a genus as being the cause of all others in that genus, but he also holds this to be true of being itself. Indeed, conceiving of being as a genus

¹⁷ Aquinas articulates the same principle elsewhere, notably in *In Librum De Causis Expositio* (Turin: Marietti, 1955), Lect. 9, n. 227: '... [I]d quod est primum et excellentiissimum in unoquoque ordine est causa omnium consequentium in ordine illo'; lect. 18 n. 340: '... [I]n unoquoque genere est causa illud quod est primum in genere illo a quo omnia quae sunt illius generis in illo genere constituantur'.

¹⁸ In *V Met.*, lect. 9: 'Nihil autem posset esse extra essentiam entis, quod per additionem ad ens aliquam speciem entis constitutum: nam quod est extra ens, nihil est, et differentia esse non potest. Unde in tertio huius probavit philosophus, quod ens, genus esse non potest', see also *In I Met.*, lect. 9, n. 138.

¹⁹ See John Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, Chapter 3 for Thomas's criticism of Parmenides and the analogy of being as a resolution to the issue.

is essential for him to establish that what is maximal in being is the cause of all else. So, we are met with a serious problem of interpretation.

Thomas's actual wording at this stage of the argument is that what is maximal in a genus is the cause of the members of that genus. If we read the notion of maximal as I have interpreted it in the maxime stage, what he means is that what is *per se* in a given genus is the cause of all the members of that genus. In accord with this reading, the members of the genus are not *per se* but *per participationem*; and this is borne out by the fire example offered in confirmation. Fire is taken to be *per se* hot, i.e., it is hot in virtue of what it is and so does not derive its heat from another, whereas things that simply have heat participate in the heat of the fire, and so are hot *per aliud* or *per participationem*. Indeed, in the argument from the Proemium to the commentary on John, Thomas uses the very same example to highlight the *per se* and *per participationem* dependency relation amongst beings.

How then to read his talk of genus regarding being?

I don't think that Aquinas has broken his strictures on treating being as a genus. The driving force of the reasoning here is the *per se/per participationem* dependency such that what is primary in a given respect (or in a given genus) is *per se* in that respect whereas what is secondary in that respect (or in that genus) participates in what is primary for that respect. One might want to be somewhat pedantic and maintain that by implication being must be a genus but two responses can be made to such an attitude.

First, a charitable reading would move one to see that Thomas is not using the term 'genus' in its strict sense, i.e., as a univocal notion diversified by something distinct from it. Rather, he is thinking more in terms of a certain grouping of things which are alike in some respect; elsewhere Thomas recognises the legitimacy of this usage when discussing being.²⁰

Secondly, one can affirm the *per se/per participationem* dependency relation without holding that being is a genus, and per the previous point take 'genus' as signifying a certain grouping of things that have something in common. Accordingly, when we have a group of things that are alike in some respect, such as having goodness, truth, and nobility, we can reason to what is *per se* in that respect, and such things participate in the *per se* in order to be in that respect. The respect then that we are considering at this point is in being, since nothing would have any perfection were it not for *esse*. But such things which only have *esse* but are not *esse* itself, have *esse*

20 *In X Met.*, lect. 8: 'Et non dicit quod sit simpliciter genus; quia sicut ens genus non est, proprie loquendo, ita nec unum quod convertitur cum ente, nec pluralitas ei opposita. Sed est quasi genus, quia habet aliquid de ratione generis, inquantum est communis'.

through participation. This then entails that there is something that is *per se esse*, otherwise one would have things dependent for their *esse* with nothing on which to depend. Consequently, we have something which is *per se esse* on which all other things which have *esse* depend for their *esse*.

So much for the worry that being is now taken to be a genus; let's consider the second problem.

It can be objected that whilst we may have something primary or maximal in being, can we really say that it is the cause of being for all else? The force of this objection is that simply granting something primary in being and causing others does not establish that we have an absolute primary cause, since two alternatives can be envisaged: (i) the primary cause may only cause some initial beings, and they go on themselves to cause further beings, and they further beings and so on; hence the primary cause is not the cause of all beings;²¹ (ii) the primary cause may be the cause of being for some or all the things that exist, but there are other features of the being of things which escape its causal influence and so it is not an absolute primary cause.

Thomas is clearly thinking of a cause of *esse* (among other things) at this stage of the argumentation; his very words are explicit on this matter: "Ergo est aliquid quod omnibus entibus est causa esse, et bonitatis, et cuiuslibet perfectionis..." To generalise then, if we have followed the reasoning and arrived at something that is maximal in being, we have arrived at something that is *per se esse* on which whatever has *esse* but is not identical to its *esse* depends. In accordance with Thomas's general metaphysics, anything in which there is distinction and composition of essence and *esse* participates in this maximal being for its *esse*. In the terms of the fourth way, any being that is sub-maximal will depend on the maximal being. So, the primary cause is not simply the cause of some initial beings having *esse*, it is the cause of all beings having *esse*, regardless of what point in the creative hierarchy they are found—all that is sub-maximal participates in what is maximal. The causality of the primary cause of *esse* then extends to all things whatsoever, since none of them would be or have *esse* without it.

21 Thomas was well aware of this kind of emanationist causality in creation and he attributes it to the Neoplatonists and some Islamic philosophers, see *De Potentia*, qu. 3, art. 4: '...[Q]uorumdam philosophorum fuit positio, quod Deus creavit creaturas inferiores mediantibus superioribus, ut patet in Lib. de causis; et in Metaphys. Avicennae, et Algazelis, et movebantur ad hoc opinandum propter quod credebant quod ab uno simplici non posset immediate nisi unum provenire, et illo mediante ex uno primo multitudo procedebat. Hoc autem dicebant, ac si Deus ageret per necessitatem naturae, per quem modum ex uno simplici non fit nisi unum'. For Aquinas's rejection of this kind of creative causality see Kerr, *Aquinas and the Metaphysics of Creation*, Chapter 3, §. 3.

So far so good, but is this cause absolute?

Recall what was said earlier concerning perfections. *Esse* is the act of all acts, the perfection of all perfections. Nothing would be perfect were it not for *esse*; for it is the principle of perfection. Accordingly, all perfections depend on *esse*, so that without *esse* there would be no perfection. A primary cause of *esse* then is a primary cause of goodness, truth, and whatever else; since these perfections only exist because of *esse*, and indeed they signify various ways in which a given thing could be, in which case they presuppose *esse*. Thus, it is sufficient to establish that there is a primary cause of *esse* in order to establish that there is a primary cause of all the other perfections noted in the fourth way.

Not only that but stepping outside of the context of perfections, a primary cause of *esse* is the cause of all that is; for nothing would be unless it had *esse*, in which case what is *per se esse* on which all else depends is the cause of everything *tout court*. The primary cause of *esse* then is a cause without which there is nothing. So when it comes to the third problem viz whether this is really what we take God to be, not only has Thomas established that this cause is *per se esse*, or pure *esse* itself, but also that this cause is the creator of all that is. Whatever else God is taken to be, He is taken to be this, and so Thomas's conclusion is justified.

2. The Metaphysical Backdrop

We have taken some time to lay out the reasoning of the fourth way. As I noted at the beginning, the fourth way is both striking yet baffling; opinion swings on the estimation of this way. It is either seen as infantile, unsophisticated, and hardly worth considering, or it is seen to be one of the deepest and most profound proofs of God. I indicated that I had some sympathy for the latter interpretation, and this is because, as we have seen, Aquinas's metaphysics of *esse* and participation is very close to the surface in this way. Elsewhere Thomas presents arguments that are quite similar to this way and they explicitly deploy his metaphysics of *esse* and participation. Given the centrality of the latter to his thinking about God and creation, I think it is true to say that the fourth way is of central importance in Aquinas's philosophical approach to God.

Concerning the fourth way, it is easy to tie it in with the causality of *esse* since it is the only way in which *esse* is explicitly referred to in its concluding stages. The other ways argue that there is a primary cause of motion, a primary efficient cause, a primary cause of necessity etc; but this way states that there is a primary cause of *esse*. Indeed, given what we have seen, it is

clear why Thomas does explicitly mention the primary cause as a primary cause of *esse*: because he is here concerned with gradated perfections and *esse* is the perfection of all perfections. Hence, given that we have gradated perfections and that they approximate to what is maximal in that perfection we can make the link to *esse*. No perfection would be a perfection were it not for *esse*. As the act of all acts *esse* is what accounts for the actuality hence perfection of any being, in which case the key metaphysical reality at stake in the fourth way is *esse*. So as with Aquinas's other demonstrations of God where the metaphysics of *esse* was more explicit, e.g., *De Ente et Essentia*, Cap. 4, *In I Sent.*, dist. 3, *De Potentia Dei*, qu. 3, art. 5 etc, Aquinas is deploying reasoning pertinent to that metaphysics here in the fourth way.

Furthermore, in the treatment above, I argued that when Thomas reasons to a maximal being in respect of *esse*, he is thinking of what is *per se esse* with all other beings having *esse per participationem*. The relationship between what is *per se* and what is *per participationem* is primarily a causal relationship, since Thomas holds elsewhere that a principal example of participation, especially real ontological participation in *esse*, is that of an effect in its cause. Hence, when we have beings that depend *per participationem* on something for some real feature that they have (heat for instance) they depend on that which has that feature *per se* (fire). In the case of *esse*, beings have *esse per participationem*, and they depend on what is *per se* or what is *esse per se* for their *esse*. So we have a causal relationship between beings which exist through participation and that which exists in itself.²² So, like the other proofs mentioned in the previous paragraph, the fourth way is a causal demonstration for the existence of God in the order of *esse*. Remaining with causality, we must address a vexed issue in the interpretation of the fourth way.

Granted that the fourth way is concerned with causality, commentators have disagreed over whether the causality involved is that of exemplar or efficient causality. To be more precise, they have disagreed over whether the causality involved in the first stage is concerned solely with how particulars relate to their exemplars (hence the approximating relation) or is there implicit in Thomas's considerations an appeal to efficient causality (made explicit in the second stage). Most agree that by the second stage Thomas is thinking of efficient causality, but it is not so clear to some that he is thinking

22 *De Hebdomadibus*, Lect. 2: '... [E]t similiter effectus dicitur participare suum causam, et praecipue quando non adaequat virtutem suaem causae; puta, si dicamus quod aer participat lucem solis, quia non recipit eam in ea claritate qua est in sole. Praetermisso autem hoc tertio modo participandi, impossibile est quod secundum duos primos modos ipsum esse participet aliquid'.

of the same in the first stage. Depending on the charity with which one reads Thomas's reasoning, if he does move from considering exemplar causality to efficient causality, the soundness of the whole argument may be in jeopardy.

Sister M. Annice and Garrigou-Lagrange hold that the first stage is concerned with exemplar causality, but that this discloses an underlying concern for efficient causality.²³ That exemplar causality is at work in the first stage of the argument should come as no surprise, and this is because to set up the approximating relation, we need an exemplar of which the instances in question are only approximations. Hence exemplars of goodness, truth, and nobility are the causes of the goodness, truth, and nobility of creatures. But in considering these exemplars as causes, we implicitly think of them as that from which creatures receive their goodness, truth, and nobility. And so whilst they are exemplars, they are also efficient causes of the properties in question. It follows then that what is really at work in the first stage of the fourth way is efficient causality under the guise of exemplarity, which guise is removed in the second stage to reveal efficient causality itself.

On the other hand, there is the view represented by commentators such as Van Steenberghen, Brady, Charlier, Bobik, Little, Fabro, and Wippel that Thomas is concerned only with exemplar causality in the first stage of argumentation, and that the second stage is a development proper of the argument which proceeds to consider how creatures are efficiently caused by God. Thus, whereas in the first stage we affirm a primary exemplar cause without which there would be no approximating relation, the second stage establishes that such a cause is the cause of being for creatures.²⁴

23 Sister M. Annice, 'Logic and Mystery in the *Quarta Via* of St Thomas', *The Thomist* 19:1 (1956), pp. 22–58; Garrigou-Lagrange, *Dieu. Son existence et sa nature*, pp. 279–314.

24 See Van Steenberghen, *Le problème*, p. 211, Jules Brady, 'Note on the Fourth Way', *The New Scholasticism* 48:2 (1974), pp. 219–32, L. Charlier, 'Les cinq voies de saint Thomas', *L'existence de Dieu. Cahiers de l'actualité religieuse* 16 (Tournai-Paris: Téqui, 1961), pp. 181–227, Joseph Bobik, 'Aquinas's Fourth Way and the Approximating Relation', *The Thomist* 51 (1987), pp. 33–6, Fabro, 'Sviluppo', p. 78, Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, p. 473, Arthur Little, *The Platonic Heritage of Thomism* (Dublin: Golden Eagle Books, 1950), p. 63. Note in particular Little's summary of the situation in the first stage of the argument: '... [T]he doctrine that we shall conclude to be that of St. Thomas is that the aspect of efficient causality called exemplarity can be considered alone by prescinding from the other aspects. In other words we can consider what is in fact an effect extrinsic to the agent as an imitation of its exemplar and disregard its other relations (of efficiency and finality) to its origin. Thus

It seems to me that the best way to unify the positions of these commentators is not to come down on one side over the other, but to grant that both have something legitimate to say concerning the argumentative strategy of the fourth way. Along with Van Steenberghen, Wippel et al., it is clear that Thomas's concern in the first stage of argumentation is explicitly formal or exemplar causality. But it also appears to be the case that such exemplar causality is envisaged in terms of the exemplar granting such features as goodness, truth, and nobility to things; in short, it seems that Thomas envisions such exemplar causality within the context of efficient causality. So, the task is to show how Thomas can consistently think in that manner (i) without being accused of making arbitrary leaps between one domain of causality and the other and (ii) without reducing the exemplar causality to efficient causality.

I think the most fruitful approach would be to consider a suggestion made by Van Steenberghen and Fabro. Both hold that the fourth way is bound up with Aquinas's Neoplatonic metaphysics. Van Steenberghen traces the roots of the fourth way to Thomas's commentaries on the *De Causis* and the *De Divinis Nominibus* of Dionysius, whereas Fabro holds that it is Thomas's participation metaphysics (itself thoroughly Neoplatonic) that is operative in the fourth way.²⁵ As we have seen, what this metaphysical outlook entails is that whatever does not possess some characteristic *per se* possesses it through participation in that which does so possess it. Hence all participants have the participated characteristic *per aliud*, and the other through which they have that characteristic has it essentially. This is the significance of the fire example which is frequently offered in the context of participation.²⁶

With the latter in mind then, we can read the first stage of the argument as considering goodness, truth, and nobility as participated perfections, in which case we preserve the exemplar readings. However, given the participation relationship, what is lurking in the background is the realisation that

we can have a principle (exemplarity) capable by itself of proving the existence of God as exemplar: The imperfect requires to imitate the perfect in order to exist'.

²⁵ See Van Steenberghen, 'Prolégomènes à la "Quarta Via"', pp. 99–112; *Le Problème*, pp. 207–10. Fabro, 'Sviluppo', pp. 71–109. Fabro goes even further and holds that the fourth way signifies Thomas's whole philosophical vision for the relationship between creatures and creator, p. 85: '... [L]a cosiddetta IV via non costituisce soltanto della esistenza di Dio, ma esprime precisamente la formula radicale della creatura come tale, sia per mostrare la dipendenza della creatura dal creatore, sia per mostrare l'opposizione fondamentale di struttura fra la creatura e il creatore'.

²⁶ Fabro, 'Sviluppo', p. 74.

what is *per aliud* is reduced to what is *per se*. Hence what is good, true, and noble *per aliud* is reduced to what is such *per se*; and per the interpretation of these things in terms of actuality and hence of *esse*, what is or exists *per aliud* is reducible to what is or exists *per se*. Consequently, the maxime principle is established on the basis of participation, since we arrive at what is maxime when we arrive at what is *per se*, but not only that, in so arriving at what is maxime we have arrived at something that is cause of all that is *per aliud*, in which case efficient causality is at the heart of our considerations, and we have a nice bridge to the second stage of argumentation.²⁷

Nevertheless, one problem with interpreting the maxime stage in terms of participation is that it would seem to beg the question. If the maxime stage is really a manifestation of Aquinas's participation metaphysics, then Aquinas presupposes that there is something that is *per se* in which all that is *per aliud* participates. Thus, in the context of the fourth way, the maxime stage presupposes the existence of the maximum to which what is not maximum approximates (or in which it participates). But it is precisely the existence of the maximum that needs to be established, whereas so far it has been presupposed.²⁸ This would be a version of Williams's classic objection to the reasoning in the first way viz to think of secondary movers is implicitly to think of a primary differentiation from which makes them secondary.²⁹

27 Evidence for the fact that Thomas had his participation metaphysics in mind with the fourth way is seen from the fact that in other places where he is reporting on the Platonists he establishes the relationship of the imperfect to the perfect in terms of participation, see for instance the following two arguments remarkably similar to the fourth way: *Super Ioan.*, Proem.: '... [O]mne 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 sint per participationem entia, necesse est esse aliquid in cacumine omnium rerum, quod sit ipsum esse per suam essentiam, idest 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'; *De Substantiis Separatis*, Cap. 3: 'Posuit enim Plato omnes inferiores substantias immateriales esse unum et bonum per participationem primi, quod est secundum se unum et bonum. Omne autem participans aliquid, accipit id quod participat. ab eo a quo participat: et quantum ad hoc, id a quo participat, est causa ipsius; sicut aer habet lumen participatum a sole, quae est causa illuminationis ipsius. Sic igitur secundum Platonem summus Deus causa est omnibus immaterialibus substantiis, quod unaquaque carum et unum sit, et bonum. Et hoc etiam Aristoteles posuit: quia, ut ipse dicit, necesse est ut id quod est maxime ens, et maxime verum, sit causa essendi et veritatis omnibus aliis'.

28 See Van Steenberghen *Le problème*, p. 218.

29 Williams, "Hic autem non est procedure in infinitum . . .", pp. 403–5.

I think this objection misses the point of the participation relationship and its manifestation in the maxime stage. Participation does not presuppose from the outset that what is *per se* exists; rather it presupposes that what is not *per se* (or what is not maximal) exists, and sees this as a problem unless there is something *per se* (or maximum). So just as in the first three ways the existence of secondary movers, secondary causes, contingent and non-absolute necessary beings all point to a cause that is primary, so too does the existence of things which are *per aliud* point to something that is not *per aliud* but *per se*. Adding on more and more of what is *per aliud* will never give an explanation for why there is any *per aliud*, and this is because no matter what you add, so long as it is *per aliud* it shares the same metaphysical status as everything else that is *per aliud*: it is incapable of accounting for itself regarding the metaphysical property in question, i.e., goodness, truth, nobility (*esse*) and so is *per aliud* (or non-maximal). Thus, unless there is something primary (or maximal) in which such things participate, there will be no explanation of what is *per aliud*/secondary/non-maximal. This suffices to show that in interpreting the first stage of the fourth way in terms of participation we are not caught up in a *petitio principii*.

The upshot of the foregoing reading of the fourth way is that it bears interpretation in the context of Aquinas's metaphysics of *per se* ordered series deployed in the first three ways and arguably in the fifth way, thereby permitting integration of the fourth way with the five ways as a whole.³⁰ A key feature of the metaphysics of such series is that secondary members of the series do not possess the causality of the series essentially; rather they depend on something else for such causality. That something else on which they depend cannot itself be a secondary member of the series, because not possessing the causality *per se* such secondary members cannot originate the causality of the series. Hence, we are led to a cause for such causality which cause can originate the causality of the series in question.³¹

The primary cause in *per se* causal series has the causality of the series of itself, that is to say, it does not depend on another for its causal efficacy but is able to originate the causality without the help of another. One classic

30 The first three ways deploy reasoning pertaining to *per se* ordered series in terms of the denial of an infinite regress of causes; I've explored such reasoning in the second way in 'The Relevance of Aquinas's Uncaused Cause Argument Today', [Chapter 8 in this volume]; I have also argued that the fifth way deploys such reasoning but in terms of final causality in 'Design Arguments and Aquinas's Fifth Way', [Chapter 11 in this volume; see also Chapter 9 for discussion of the same with respect to the third way].

31 For a detailed defence of the metaphysics of *per se* causal series see my articles 'Essentially Ordered Series Reconsidered', 'Essentially Ordered Series Reconsidered Once Again', [Chapters 2 – 3 of this volume].

example Aquinas deploys (and which partially appears in the first way) is the series of the mind moving the hand to move the stick to move the stone. In this example, the mind is the primary cause which can originate the motion of the series of itself given what it is; the hands-stick-stone are immobile in themselves and cannot bring about their own motion, in which case they participate in the causality granted to them by the primary cause. More generally then, the primary cause of *per se* causal series has the causality of the series intrinsically and not *per aliud* or *per participationem*, and to it all members are related *per participationem*.

So, in the context of the fourth way, given that we have beings which have but are not identical to the perfections in question, fundamentally *esse*, we have beings that are secondary in some sort of causal relation. Their secondary nature is the same as the secondary members of the *per se* series, i.e., they have the causality of the series but they are not identical to it, they are incapable of originating it. Thus, our beings in the fourth way which have these perfections to one degree or another are not identical to the *esse* that they have. Whence then originates the actuality for such perfections? It cannot be anywhere but from what is *per se* in respect of that actuality. And this is the precise reasoning of the *per se* causal series: unless we have something that is *per se* with respect to the causality of the series, we have members of the causal series which would be causally inert. Put another way, if we have secondary members of a *per se* causal series without a primary cause, we have things which must depend on something for their causality but with nothing on which to depend.

So, in the context of the fourth way, unless there were a primary cause of *esse* and hence all the other perfections, we would have beings showing various degrees of perfection with nothing on which to depend. That they need something on which to depend is clear from the fact that they have such perfections only *per participationem*. Hence without a primary cause of perfection, of *esse*, we would have participants with nothing in which to participate.

Enigmatic and metaphysically dense as it is, the fourth way is not so idiosyncratic that it cannot be read against the backdrop of Aquinas's more familiar metaphysical reasoning for arriving at God's existence. And indeed, given what we have seen in this section, we see the fourth way as following a similar argumentative strategy, viz causality and *per se* ordered series, as the other four ways. Aside from coverage in texts devoted to all the five ways, the fourth way has very few detailed studies in comparison to the others. In dealing with the fourth way in this article I have sought to disclose Thomas's argumentative procedure against the backdrop of his more

familiar metaphysics, a metaphysics against which the other ways are also read. This should serve to bring the fourth way out of relative obscurity and place it front and centre as another manifestation of Aquinas's metaphysical way to God.

Chapter 11 – Design Arguments and Aquinas’s Fifth Way

Design arguments have traditionally focused on some structured or ordered aspect of the universe and have argued that such order requires the assistance of a supernatural designer. These arguments seek to conclude that order cannot be a product of merely natural processes. The standard instance of this type of argument is William Paley’s (in)famous watchmaker argument.¹ The mechanical parts of a watch coalesce to allow the watch to function for its designed purpose, that is, telling the time. This purposeful functioning points to a watchmaker who so organizes the parts of the watch as to give them their purpose. The analogy with the created universe is manifest and the argument is applied to infer a cause of the universe. This cause so organizes things that the universe comes about and functions for the purpose for which it, the maker, ordained it.

The salient features of Paley’s argument are threefold: (i) mechanistic functioning pointing to (ii) purposeful action which signifies (iii) a designer. These features in turn form part of a venerable tradition in the history of debate on this subject: (i) is a standard presupposition of a modern scientific worldview, (ii) is a presupposition of teleology in nature, and (iii) conceives of the designer as a demiurgic maker who imposes form on the constituents of the universe.² Hence standard design arguments are those that come under the aegis of Paley’s argument and in particular make use of (i) – (iii) as their guiding principles.

In light of developments in the natural sciences, especially in the theory of evolution, design arguments have somewhat shifted their focus. Now they tend to the view that the probability of the conditions for the possibility of there being anything at all is so slim that there must have been supernatural intervention for it to occur. Nevertheless, such arguments still maintain a focus on the mechanistic functioning of the universe and the inference to

¹ William Paley, *Natural Theology or Evidence of the Existence and Attributes of the Deity, Collected from the Appearances of Nature*, ed. M. W. Eddy and D. Knight (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

² See Edward Oakes, S.J., ‘Dominican Darwinism: Evolution in Thomist Thought after Darwin’, *The Thomist* 77 (2013), p. 361: ‘Paley . . . managed to fuse Plato’s Demiurge, Aristotle’s teleology, and Newtonian mechanism into an entire natural *theology* through his analogy of a watch discovered on an island, which the explorer takes as an infallible sign of the presence (somewhere) of a watchmaker’.

a designer as the best explanation thereof. Such recasting of design argumentation remains loyal to some or all of (i) – (iii) in modified form.³

My contention in this article is that Aquinas's fifth way does not fall within the scope of the design argument so construed. Undoubtedly many have thought that it does, since Aquinas's fundamental concern in that argument is to account for the finality operative in unintelligent things, which ultimately rests with God. It is assumed that Aquinas was making the same sort of inference as Paley, namely, that the goal-directed behaviour of complex things is a result of the intricate design imposed on them by some supernatural being. Moreover, Aquinas elsewhere employs argumentation similar to that adduced by Paley. If one assumes that the argument of the fifth way is not significantly dissimilar to these other arguments, it is easy to infer that the fifth way is a design argument of roughly the Paleyite variety.⁴

In question 5, article 2 of the disputed questions *De Veritate*, Aquinas writes:

We see that harmony and usefulness happen in the works of nature either always or for the most part; hence they cannot occur by chance, and thus must proceed through the intention of an end. But that which is without intellect or knowledge is unable to tend directly to an end unless through another's knowledge of an end given to it and directing it to that end. Hence it must be that since natural things are without knowledge, there pre-exists some intellect that ordains natural things to an end; just as an archer gives a certain motion to the arrow so that it tends to a determinate end.⁵

Similarly, in book 1, chapter 13 of the *Summa contra Gentiles*, he attributes the following argument to John Damascene and Averroës:

3 See for instance Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), chap. 8; idem, *Is There a God?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), chap. 4; and idem, 'The Argument from Laws of Nature Reassessed', in *Reason, Faith and History: Philosophical Essays for Paul Helm*, ed. Martin Stone (Aldershot, U.K.: Ashgate, 2008), 69–83. Swinburne notes that this article is based on chapter 8 of the second edition of *The Existence of God* (2004).

4 I say 'roughly' because of course the fifth way will display Aquinas's own characteristic metaphysics and philosophy of science which will justify his premises, and the same is true for Paley's watchmaker argument. But this does not preclude a similarity in form sufficient for the two to be classified as the same type of argument.

⁵ *De Veritate*, q. 5, a. 2.

It is impossible for contrary and dissonant things always or almost always to accord [*concordare*] in one order unless out of some government, by which everything and every single thing are made to tend to a certain end. But in the world we see things of diverse natures coming together [*concordare*] in one order, and not rarely or by chance, but always or for the most part. It must be, then, that there is something by whose providence the world is governed; and this we call God.⁶

That which has to be explained in both arguments is the harmony found in natural things. It is argued that this harmony occurs not by chance but through natural things acting for an end ordained by an intelligent agent (*De Verit.*) or through the intervention of some intelligent agent who brings it about (*ScG*). Thus, natural things are subject to the harmonizing activity of an intelligent agent. There is thereby brought to mind an agent who assembles into a certain order or harmony the materials out of which he constructs the universe; this agent's activity is architectural, that of a designer. Given this, it is easy to see how these arguments fall squarely into the traditional design argument classification.⁷

It is clear, then, that Aquinas was familiar with design-type arguments and employed them in his writings. But what about the fifth way? Is it of the Paleyite variety? If it is, then *mutatis mutandis* it is subject to the typical weaknesses of standard design arguments, especially those emanating from the philosophical fall-out from the theory of evolution. But if it is not, then

⁶ All translations, unless otherwise stated, are my own. When discussing the design argument, Kwame Anthony Appiah (*Thinking It Through* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003], pp. 324-25) classifies this argument (and not the fifth way) as Aquinas's design argument.

⁷ John Wippel disassociates the argument of *De Veritate* from that of the *Summa contra Gentiles* by emphasizing the focus on finality, the acting for an end, evident in *De Veritate*, which is not to be found in the argument from the *Summa contra Gentiles*. Wippel sees the argument of *De Veritate* as anticipating the fifth way; see *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, pp. 410-13. However, I think Wippel glosses over the focus on harmony, evident in the opening passage of the argument in *De Veritate*, and the fact that both arguments seek to explain the harmony of natural things, whether by focussing on finality or by focussing on orderly design. The fifth way, by contrast, seeks to explain finality itself, and not to use finality in order to explain harmony. Thus, while I grant that the focus on finality brings the argument in *De Veritate* closer to the fifth way than does the argument in the *Summa contra Gentiles*, the focus on finality in *De Veritate* serves a different purpose than it does in the fifth way.

it cannot be dismissed along with other design arguments that are mistakenly taken to be similar in kind to it. My goal in what follows is to show that far from being similar in kind to standard design arguments, the fifth way is in fact a causal proof that depends on Aquinas's own characteristic metaphysical thought. Calling it a 'teleological argument' is etymologically accurate, but misleading, given the latter's connection with standard design arguments.

My purpose is not to defend Aquinas's fifth way against criticisms emanating from post-Darwinian biology, but to show that it is a causal proof integrated with the metaphysics of causality that Aquinas adopts, and hence is quite distinct from arguments of the Paleyite variety. The question of whether such differentiation absolves the fifth way of the evolutionary objections commonly presented to design arguments remains open. At the very least, such objections will have to be rethought if they are to be applied to the fifth way.

I am not the first to point out the disconnection between the fifth way and standard design arguments. John Wippel does so in his treatment of the fifth way in *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, and more recently Edward Feser has offered a reading of the fifth way based on Aquinas's metaphysics of finality, thereby disassociating it from design-based arguments.⁸ By contrast, Marie George has taken issue with Feser's reading of the fifth way; she argues that Aquinas is not therein concerned with causality, and that while finality is a consideration, what Aquinas is seeking to show is the existence of an intelligent agent who orders all things in the universe.⁹ It follows that, despite acute differences between Aquinas and Paley in their metaphysical outlooks (differences which George in fact plays down), there is enough similarity in respect of the need for an intelligent designer for Aquinas's fifth way to be classified as an argument of the Paleyite variety. I think, however, that George reads the fifth way too strictly. It is true that Aquinas does not engage there in the fine-grained analyses that Feser offers, or indeed that I offer here, but George seems to conclude that those analyses and clarifications should not play an interpretative role in reading the argument. In particular, George dismisses the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic teleology as being a key factor in reading the

⁸ Edward Feser, 'Between Aristotle and William Paley: Aquinas's Fifth Way', *Nova et Vetera* (Eng. ed.) 11 (2013), pp. 707-49.

⁹ Marie George, 'A Thomistic Rebuttal of Some Common Objections to Paley's Argument from Design', *New Blackfriars* 97, no. 1069 (2016), pp. 266-88. The first section is particularly worth noting for its engagement with Feser's reading of the fifth way and its presentation of George's alternative reading.

fifth way, nor does she permit a focus on intrinsic teleology in this respect.¹⁰ Yet the notion of finality in things as a result of their natural principles is to be found in Aquinas's wider philosophical thought, and, given that Aquinas is quite a systematic thinker, one must often incorporate what he says elsewhere into the analysis of a given text. Just as we can interpret the earlier *viae* in terms of his wider thinking on act/potency, essence/*esse*, *per se*/*per accidens* series, so too are we permitted to approach the fifth way with his wider thinking on teleology in mind. It is of course the case that some intelligent agent is responsible for the ordering of all created things; that is orthodox Thomism, and indeed the fifth way points us to an agent that intelligently orders such things. But this fact alone is not enough to establish that what we have with the fifth way is an intelligent designer of the Paleyite variety as opposed to an intelligent creator of the Thomistic variety. The former plays an architectural role, whereas the latter brings all things, including their order, into being. By focusing on causality (and indeed the causality of ordered series), we are able to move beyond a Paleyite designer and towards a primary cause of all things.

I agree with those readers of Aquinas who interpret the fifth way as a causal argument, and I think there is a strong case for recognizing intrinsic teleology in Aquinas's thought and reading the fifth way in light of that. What I offer in this article that, to my knowledge, has not been said elsewhere is an interpretation of the fifth way in light of the metaphysics of essentially ordered causal series; this is reasoning which Aquinas employs explicitly in the first two ways and implicitly in the third and fourth. Thus, I am offering an extension of the causal interpretation of the fifth way into the metaphysics of essentially ordered series, a metaphysics commonly thought to be confined to considerations of efficient causality.¹¹

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 268–70.

¹¹ In 'Essentially Ordered Series Reconsidered Once Again'. [Chapter 3 in this volume], I offer an account of how Aquinas's thinking on essentially ordered series can be interpreted in light of final causality and how we can integrate such series with those that involve efficient causality. That paper does not address the fifth way, though at the end I suggest that what I say there has implications for interpreting the fifth way. This article draws out those implications.

1. The Fifth Way

The fifth way reads as follows:

The fifth way is taken from the governance of things. [1] We see that there are things without knowledge, such as natural bodies, that operate for an end; [1.1] and this is clear insofar as they always or more frequently operate in the same way so that what is best follows. [2] Hence it is apparent that it is not by chance but by intention that they act for an end. [3] Those things that do not have knowledge, do not tend to an end unless directed by something with knowledge and intelligence, such as the arrow [directed by] the archer. [4] Therefore, all natural things are ordered to an end by something intelligent, and this we call God.¹²

Aquinas begins this argument by advertiring to the goal-directed behaviour of unintelligent things [1], and adduces evidence for this from the fact that such things often act in the same way so as to produce the best result [1.1]. He claims that it is manifest that in so acting these things are not acting by chance but by intention [2], but those things without knowledge could not do so unless directed by something that has knowledge and intelligence [3], in which case all natural things are ordered to their end by something intelligent, which is what we call God [4].

Premise [1] is an expression of Aquinas's views on finality, and so asserts that natural things without intelligence act for an end. This expression of finality is a springboard for the entire argument: what is ultimately to be explained is the goal-directed behaviour, the finality, of naturally unintelligent things. In contrast to some of his earlier argumentation, Aquinas is here concerned with explaining finality itself; he is not making use of finality in order to explain the harmony of things.

Given the fifth way's starting point in finality, I will first consider Aquinas's thought on finality, then consider the integration of that into the metaphysics of essentially ordered series. Having done that I will be in a position to offer a conclusion as to why Aquinas's fifth way is not a design argument.

¹² *STh* I, q. 2, a. 3.

2. Teleology

The teleology or goal-directed activity to which Aquinas advertises in the fifth way is that found in natural bodies; hence it is a teleology found in nature. This teleology can be considered from two aspects: (i) from the point of view of the goal-directed activity of living things and (ii) from the point of view of the goal-directed activity of nonliving things.

In general, the advertence to goal-directed activity amounts to recognition of the fact that natural things function in a certain way, and that a description of their functioning will be a description of their goal-directed activity. The very ratio of finality for Aquinas is the 'in order to' or the 'for the sake of which' (*cuius causa fit*) of the thing in question. In other words, for Aquinas finality in natural things is signified by that for the sake of which they act.¹³

Bearing this in mind, the idea that living things display goal-directed activity is quite straightforward, and, when freed from misunderstanding, rather uncontroversial. When we think of the functioning of living things, we often think of certain physiological processes involving various bodily organs. Thus, the eye functions for the sake of sight, the ear for hearing, the heart for pumping blood, the lungs for extracting oxygen, and so on. In each of these cases, when one inquires after the sake for which each of these organs function, the response is their end. Furthermore, not only can the individual organs listed above have their own ends, but such ends can be subordinated to some further end. There is thus a hierarchy of ends: the organs which themselves act for an end, are subordinated to the end of the body of which they are organs.¹⁴

¹³ For affirmations of this see *In II Phys.*, lect. 4 n. 173: 'De ratione finis est quod sit cuius causa fit'; *In I Met.*, lect. 4, n. 70: 'Nam motus incipit a causa efficiente, et terminatur ad causam finalem. Et hoc est etiam cuius causa fit aliquid, et quae est bonum uniuscuiusque naturae'; *In II Met.*, lect. 4, n. 316: 'Finis est id quod non est propter alia, sed alia sunt propter ipsum'; *In III Met.*, lect. 4, n. 374: 'Finis autem, et cuius causa fit aliquid, videtur esse terminus alicuius actus'; *In V Met.*, lect. 18, n. 1039: 'Sed finis non solum habet quod sit ultimum, sed etiam quod sit cuius causa fit aliquid'.

¹⁴ *STh I-II*, q. 12, a. 2: 'In motu autem potest accipi terminus dupliciter, uno modo, ipse terminus ultimus, in quo quiescit, qui est terminus totius motus; alio modo, aliquod medium, quod est principium unius partis motus, et finis vel terminus alterius. Sicut in motu quo itur de a in c per b, c est terminus ultimus, b autem est terminus, sed non ultimus'; for affirmations of the same, see *STh I-II*, q. 21, a. 1, ad 2, *II-II*, q. 23, a. 7; q. 123, a. 7; *In II Phys.*, lect. 5, n. 181; *In V Met.*, lect. 2, n. 771.

Now a living thing can only function insofar as it is in act, and for Aquinas a (nondivine) thing is in act insofar as it is a composite unity of essence and *esse*.¹⁵ The essence itself, if that of a material substance, is in turn a composite unity of matter and form. The form of a material thing is that for the sake of which its matter exists, such that the matter would not exist unless its form is actuated as the matter of some particular substance.¹⁶ Thus, the form of a material thing is its end; hence form and end coincide in material things.¹⁷ A thing acts for an end, that is, displays goal-directed behaviour, in virtue of the form that it has; and its specific end is determined by its specific form. It follows from all this that finality or goal-directed behaviour is intrinsic to natural substances, something that they exhibit in virtue of what they are.

Already this notion of finality serves to disassociate Aquinas's thinking from that of Paley, since for Paley the finality of the watch is something extrinsic, imposed on the components of the watch, whereas for Aquinas it is an intrinsic feature of the thing signifying the tendencies it has on account of what it is.¹⁸ It follows that, as their accounts of finality are different, their modes of accounting for that finality will be different. Paley's extrinsic finality requires a designer that moulds and guides the purposes of the thing it designs; Aquinas's intrinsic finality requires a creative cause which brings into existence some formed substance, and this substance can act in the world in ways that signify what it is.

Thus far I have focused solely on the finality prevalent among living things. This is problematic because it is evident that living things do act with some purpose (at the fundamental level, the preservation of their being), whereas it is not so clear that nonliving things act for any purpose—their being seems to be purposeless. But the fifth way envisages nonliving things as well as living things, and so finality must extend to them.

The teleology of nonliving things can be discerned in what Aquinas says about the finality of natural bodies in the fifth way and the example he uses. He states that the finality of natural bodies is evident insofar as they operate always (or more frequently) in the same way so that what is best follows; later he gives as an example of this an arrow being shot by an archer. What I want to draw out from this is that nonliving beings have a kind of activity

¹⁵ *De ente et essentia*, c. 4.

¹⁶ *In II Phys.*, lect. 15, n. 273.

¹⁷ *In II Phys.*, lect. 11, nn. 246 and 242; *In VII Met.*, lect. 6, n. 1392; *In VIII Met.*, lect. 4, n. 1737; *De principiis naturae*, c. 4 ([Rome: Leonine, 1976], 45, ll. 114–16).

¹⁸ Feser emphasises this difference in 'Between Aristotle and William Paley', sect. 2; George plays it down (see n. 9 above).

that is determined, such that unless the being in question is subject to some divergent causal series, it acts always in the same way. Such determined activity indicates finality insofar as it is determined in view of an end; for if there were no end, there would be no determination, and the activity of a natural thing would not terminate in anything predictable. For instance, a flame acts so as to produce heat; this is the determination of its action. If it had no such determination, it could produce heat on one occasion and then something else on another. But this is not the case. Given the kind of thing that a flame is, its activity is determined so as to produce heat, and the production of heat is the flame's end. Such ordered determination is to be found in all nonliving things and it reveals that such things act for an end. Yet since nonliving things (as well as some living things) are unintelligent, Aquinas holds that they have this end not willfully but by a natural inclination.¹⁹

Such determination need not be restricted to one determinate effect for it to have finality. Take the arrow example of the fifth way, or, less grisly, a bride throwing her bouquet. An archer can shoot his arrow, a bride can throw her bouquet, into a crowd of people with no particular person being singled out. Nevertheless, the motion of the arrow/bouquet still displays finality insofar as it has a determinate aim and direction of travel to reach a target. Thus, the action of the arrow/bouquet is determined, even though the target is indeterminate.²⁰ Of course, this raises the question of what establishes the

¹⁹ *STh I-II*, q. 1, a. 2: 'Haec autem determinatio sicut in rationali natura per rationalem fit appetitum, qui dicitur voluntas; ita in aliis fit per inclinationem naturalem, quae dicitur appetitus naturalis'. Paul Hoffman comments on this: "In order to do anything an agent has to do something in particular. But an agent can do something in particular only if it is determined to one particular thing as opposed to some other particular thing. And to be determined to a particular thing is to have that thing as an end" (Paul Hoffman, 'Does Efficient Causation Presuppose Final Causation? Aquinas vs Early Modern Mechanism', in *Metaphysics and the Good: Themes from the Philosophy of Robert Merrihew Adams*, ed. Samuel Newlands and Larry M. Jorgensen [New York: Oxford University Press, 2009], p. 296).

²⁰ The same goes, *mutatis mutandis*, for the activity of nonliving things not directed by human intervention, e.g., hurricanes, tsunamis, and even when there is no target involved, e.g., planetary motion. Hoffman holds that in cases of indeterministic motions we have to weaken Aquinas's view and hold that a cause can be aimed at a set of incompatible effects, whereas he takes Aquinas to hold that a cause cannot be indeterminate between two or more effects (Hoffman, 'Does Efficient Causation Presuppose Final Causation?', p. 309); see *ScG III*, c. 2. Be that as it may, in the cases I have mentioned, the cause is not indeterminate with respect to several incompatible effects, but to compatible effects, since an arrow can pierce more than one person, a bouquet can be (and often is) caught by more than one person, hurricanes and tsunamis can simultaneously wreak havoc on more than one area. In such cases, conceptually speaking, such things

natural inclinations of unintelligent things so that their action is determined, a question that is the driving force behind the fifth way. But at this stage, at least, the fact of such goal-determined activity is clear, even if the cause is not.

With this explanation of goal-directed activity in mind, we may turn to the presence of such activity in nature, and in particular to how it is to be explained. In accord with Aristotle, Aquinas holds that the nature that the philosopher of nature investigates is mobile being.²¹ The natural bodies to which Aquinas refers in the fifth way must therefore be mobile bodies. The finality that is the subject of the fifth way will be the goal-directed behaviour of beings that are subject to motion.

The attentive reader of the five ways will have noticed that in the first way Aquinas offers a succinct but profound analysis of motion. In the *prima via* he holds that motion is fundamentally the movement from potency to act, and this motion is governed by a principle of actuality such that the motion cannot occur without that principle actuating some potency. Motion, then, is neither act alone nor potency alone, but actualized potency.²²

As subject to motion, mobile beings are composites of potency and act. They have a principle of potency that is able to be actuated in some respect, and this actuation is brought about by the principle of actuality that governs the motion. Keeping all this in mind, finality is the *in order to* of the mobile being's motion; it specifies how such a being moves or acts. Thus, finality is coordinate with actuality insofar as it signifies the kind of activity in which the being engages. Any explanation of a thing's finality will have to be an explanation in terms of its actuality; there must be some principle of actuality that determines a thing's movement to its end. And this brings us to final causality, since for Aquinas the end plays a causal role in determining the being of mobile things.

Causality for Aquinas is aligned with the *why* of things, that is to say, one offers a causal response when asked why things are the way they are.²³ Causality is a kind of derivation and dependence of the effect on the cause, and

can be determined to all of the effects, and thus have a single determination which is analysable in multiple aspects.

21 *In VI Met.*, lect. 1, n. 1155: 'Ens enim mobile est subjectum naturalis philosophiae'; *In XI Met.*, lect. 7, n. 2260.

22 For an affirmation of this outside of the context of demonstrating God's existence, see *In III Phys.*, lect. 2, n. 285: 'Unde neque est potentia existentis in potentia, neque est actus existentis in actu, sed est actus existentis in potentia: ut per id quod dicitur *actus*, designetur ordo eius ad anteriorem potentiam, et per id quod dicitur *in potentia existentis*, designetur ordo eius ad ulteriorem actum'.

23 *In II Phys.*, lect. 5, n. 176.

such derivation and dependence entails that the effect is in potency to the cause in the required respect.²⁴ Causality is thus able to be analysed in terms of act and potency.²⁵ It follows that if there are specifically different contexts in which the act/potency relation can be found, then there will be specifically different contexts in which causality will be found. Hence causality is not a univocal notion but an analogous one proportionate to the context in which it is applied. As is well known, the four traditional causal contexts that Aristotle enumerates and Aquinas adopts are (i) material, (ii) formal, (iii) efficient, and (iv) final.²⁶

In the causality of mobile beings, form actuates matter into the matter of a particular kind of thing (e.g., a cat, dog, horse, tree), but form does not act of itself; rather, it requires some efficient cause to introduce it. The efficient cause introduces form for the sake of some end, whether that end is foreseen and willed by a rational creature or proceeds by way of a natural inclination, as in the case of nonrational creatures. Therefore the final cause, while not first in the causal process, is primary insofar as the efficient cause would not act without the end, and if the efficient cause did not act, the form (the formal cause) would not actuate the matter.²⁷ Without the final cause, then, there can be no causality; it is the cause of causes.²⁸

While anybody can observe and record the goal-directed activity of mobile beings, only the metaphysician can offer an explanation of it. This is because an explanation of such activity will not be a recording that it took place; rather, it will endeavour to offer an account as to why the efficient

²⁴ *De potentia Dei*, q. 5, a. 1: ‘Effectum enim a sua causa dependere oportet. Hoc enim est de ratione effectus et causae’.

²⁵ *In V Met.*, lect. 1, n. 751: ‘Hoc nomen causa, importat influxum quemdam ad esse causati’; and *In V Met.*, lect. 3, n. 794: ‘Potentia et actus diversificant habitudinem causae ad effectum’; *In II Phys.*, lect. 5, n. 183: ‘Omnia ista habent unam rationem causae, prout dicitur causa id ex quo fit aliquid’.

²⁶ *In V Met.*, lect. 2, nn. 763–71; and *In V Met.*, lect. 3, nn. 777–82.

²⁷ *STh I-II*, q. 1, a. 4: ‘Prima autem inter omnes causas est causa finalis. Cuius ratio est, quia materia non consequitur formam nisi secundum quod movetur ab agente, nihil enim reducit se de potentia in actum. Agens autem non movet nisi ex intentione finis. Si enim agens non esset determinatum ad aliquem effectum, non magis ageret hoc quam illud, ad hoc ergo quod determinatum effectum producat, necesse est quod determinetur ad aliquid certum, quod habet rationem finis. Haec autem determinatio, sicut in rationali natura fit per rationalem appetitum, qui dicitur voluntas; ita in aliis fit per inclinationem naturalem, quae dicitur appetitus naturalis’. See also *De Verit.*, q. 28, a. 7; *De Princip. Natur.*, c. 4.

²⁸ See *In I Sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 1, ad 4; d. 45, q. 1, a. 3; *In II Sent.*, d. 9, q. 1, a. 1, ad 1; *STh I*, q. 5, a. 2, ad 1; *De Verit.*, q. 28, a. 7; *De Princip. Natur.*, c. 4.

cause acted in such a manner; that is, it will offer an explanation for the causality of the efficient cause. Thus, an explanation of the goal-directed activity of a natural thing seeks to isolate the cause of the efficient cause's causality, and so will in turn be an explanation of a kind of causality (efficient causality) by appeal to a different type of cause (the final cause). Given that the finality of the efficient cause is imparted to it by the final cause, the presence of finality in a system requires a causal explanation in terms of the final cause, so that advertence to finality as an *explanandum* will require an appeal to causality. Clearly, as it is concerned with finality, the fifth way must be interpreted causally, and hence it seeks to conclude to a cause for the finality of things, and not merely a designer. Having said this, we can integrate such an interpretation of the fifth way deeper into the metaphysics of Aquinas by considering the relationship between final and efficient causality in causal series.

3. The Explanation of Teleology

We have noted that the explanation of finality is a determining factor in the interpretation of the fifth way. We have noted that the final cause is what motivates the efficient cause to initiate a causal series, and so the causal series exhibits the finality, the 'in order to', granted to it by the efficient cause. To return to the example of the fifth way, the archer shoots the arrow and the arrow exhibits finality, but the motivation of the archer to shoot the arrow, thereby giving it finality, is derived from the final cause, in this case something like the archer's intending to hit the target. In natural processes the process is unconscious but subject to the same analysis. The primary efficient cause of the natural process gets the process going, and its action is for *something*, it does *something* which *something* is its end. Hence each stage of the process exhibits finality for that end and thereby participates in the finality granted to the process by the efficient cause which is 'motivated' to act by the final cause. We thus have a complex interweaving of efficient and final causal series.

In demonstrations of God's existence, we can get a good grasp of efficient causal series since we can easily visualize the causal regress and see where the argument against the infinity of such series is going. The case is different for final causal series since, at least in the fifth way, Aquinas does not present us with a model for explaining the causal series within which finality is operative; he takes it for granted, and this is no doubt a contributing factor to misinterpreting the fifth way as a design argument. Arguments of the Paleyite variety do not incorporate the finitude or nonfinitude of causal

series, but focus more on explaining certain features of things within the universe as the result of some design; the finitude or nonfinitude of causal series is often the consideration of those arguments for God that are lumped together as cosmological arguments.²⁹ Given Aquinas’s metaphysics of causality and the focus on finality in the fifth way, we can read the fifth way as utilizing the metaphysics of causal series, a metaphysics that is to be found explicitly in the first two ways (and in my opinion implicitly in the third and fourth ways). Accordingly, although Aquinas does not explicate that metaphysics in the fifth way, it should nevertheless be read as being in harmony with the metaphysics of the causal series present in the earlier *viae*.

This metaphysics of causality that is present in all five ways is the causality of ordered series. In the second way Aquinas writes:

In all efficient causes following an order, the first is the cause of the intermediate, and the intermediate is the cause of the ultimate, whether the intermediate are many or only one. Therefore, if there were not a primary in efficient causes there would be no ultimate or intermediate. So if one were to proceed to infinity in efficient causes, there would be no primary efficient cause, and thus there would be no ultimate effect, nor intermediate efficient causes.³⁰

What Aquinas is drawing upon here is his thought on what have come to be called essentially ordered series (Aquinas himself uses the terminology of *per se* series). The members of such a series do not possess the causality of the series essentially, and so require a cause for their causality. By contrast, in an accidentally ordered series the members do possess the causality of the series essentially and so do not require a cause for their causality.³¹

²⁹ This is a characterization that is often made of Aquinas’s primary cause arguments—unfairly so, in my opinion, because in such arguments Aquinas is intent on showing that not only do things within the cosmos require a cause, but also things outside the cosmos (e.g., angels).

³⁰ See *STh I*, q. 2, a. 3. Aquinas exhibits the same kind of reasoning in the first way, though he does not use the terminology of ordered causes. In the first way he writes: ‘Hic autem non est procedere in infinitum, quia sic non esset aliquod primum movens; et per consequens nec aliquod aliud movens, quia moventia secunda non movent nisi per hoc quod sunt mota a primo movente, sicut baculus non movet nisi per hoc quod est motus a manu. Ergo necesse est devenire ad aliquod primum movens, quod a nullo moveretur’. For an analysis of the second way, which focuses heavily on Aquinas’s metaphysics of ordered series, see Gaven Kerr, ‘The Relevance of Aquinas’s Uncaused Cause Argument’, [Chapter 8 in this volume].

³¹ For an account of Aquinas’s thought on essentially ordered series, see Gaven Kerr, ‘Essentially Ordered Series Reconsidered’, [Chapter 3 in this volume] and *idem*,

causality of the efficient cause.³⁴ Given this, and given the fact that a *per se* series is one in which a cause of the causality of the series is required, a final causal series, or a causal series in which finality is operative, is a *per se* series. Any final causal series is one in which there are effects (efficient causes), which depend on some cause (the final cause) for their causality, and that is a defining feature of *per se* series. Hence, an explanation of finality will be a causal one which utilizes the metaphysics of essentially ordered series, a metaphysics which, it will be recalled, eliminates the possibility of an infinite regress of causes in the first and second ways.

All we have to do now is to modify the efficient essentially ordered series outlined above so as to incorporate final causality, and with that we will have a causal model for interpreting the fifth way.³⁵

We may give an account of the mind-hand-stick-stone example in terms of finality.³⁶ We represented the series as follows: $w \rightarrow (x \rightarrow (y \rightarrow z))$. Now, instead of a mind-hand-stick-stone, we may imagine Dr. Smith going to the golf course to hit balls: Dr. Smith (w) moves his hands (x) to swing the club (y) to move the ball (z); considering the causal series in this way will give us a plausible scenario by which we can introduce finality (though the model for representing final causality is applicable to both conscious and unconscious situations, given that finality and hence final causality is applicable to both).

Why does Dr. Smith go to the golf course—for what reason or purpose? Perhaps he works in a department whose dean is a fan of golf and easily impressed by a skillful golfer. The opportunity for promotion has come along and Dr. Smith wants to impress the dean. So Dr. Smith goes to the golf course to hit balls *in order to* improve his swing *in order to* impress the dean. Here we have final causality at work. The overall final cause is to impress the dean—that is what motivates Dr. Smith—but to do that he must improve his swing. The goal of impressing the dean by means of his golf

³⁴ In *V Metaphys.*, lect. 2, n. 775: 'Efficiens est causa finis quantum ad esse quidem, quia movendo perducit efficiens ad hoc, quod sit finis. Finis autem est causa efficientis non quantum ad esse, sed quantum ad rationem causalitatis. Nam efficiens est causa in quantum agit: non agit nisi causa finis. Unde ex fine habet suam causalitatem efficiens'; *De Princip. Natur.*, c. 4, ll. 16-19: 'Efficiens enim dicitur causa respectu finis, cum finis non sit in actu nisi per operationem agentis: sed finis dicitur causa efficientis, cum non operetur nisi per intentionem finis'.

³⁵ Aquinas gives us an indication of how to think of final essentially ordered series in *STh I-II*, q. 12, a. 2.

³⁶ I first proposed this account of finality and essentially ordered series in my 2017 article, 'Essentially Ordered Series Reconsidered Once Again'. [Chapter 3 in this volume].

skills exercises causality over Dr. Smith, and hence the *in order to* of the series exhibits that finality.

With ‘B’ standing for improving his swing and ‘A’ standing for impressing the dean, we modify our formulation of the essentially ordered series as follows: $[(w \rightarrow (x \rightarrow (y \rightarrow z))) \leftarrow B] \leftarrow A$. The original efficient causal series, including the overall causal scope of the primary cause (the mind, or Dr. Smith), is now contained within the overarching (final) causal scope of A (impressing the dean), whose causal scope requires a subordinate final cause B (improving the swing). A, and by subordination B, motivates w to induce motion to the series of x, y, z , in order to achieve that end. As primary efficient cause, w would not impart causality to the series unless motivated to do so by A, its final cause. Hence the causality of w is caused by A, which is the final cause. We have now integrated finality into our initial model of the essentially ordered series. Thus, we can link efficient and final causality in essentially ordered series.

Elsewhere I have argued that if we can locate a causal feature of (efficient) causal series without which there would be nothing, and if we can locate that causality within essentially ordered series, then we can establish that there is a primary cause without which there would be nothing. In the case of efficient causality, this causal feature is Thomist *esse*; whatever does not have *esse* is nothing. Similarly, if we can isolate a kind of final causality without which there would be no finality, and if we can locate that within a suitable essentially ordered series, then we must come to a primary final cause without which there would be no finality and hence no efficient causality (and certainly no primary efficient causality). Defending these claims is not my goal here; I am concerned rather with how to read the fifth way. This will be the focus of my concluding remarks.³⁷

4. Concluding Remarks

In the five ways, as indeed in nearly all of his arguments for the existence of God, Aquinas's mode of procedure is to isolate some feature of reality and argue that that feature requires some absolute primary cause, otherwise it would not be; this is a key strategic move in his inference from participated

³⁷ For more detailed discussions of a primary efficient cause and a primary final cause, see my works cited in this article: ‘Essentially Ordered Series Reconsidered’ [Chapter 2 in this volume]; *Aquinas's Way to God*; ‘The Relevance of Aquinas's Uncaused Cause Argument’ [Chapter 8 in this volume]; and ‘Essentially Ordered Series Reconsidered Once Again’ [Chapter 3 in this volume].

to unparticipated being. In the first way, this is motion conceived in terms of act and potency; in the second, it is efficient causality; in the third, necessity and contingency; and in the fourth, degrees of perfection. Most important for our purposes, in the fifth way the relevant feature of reality is finality: "We see that there are things without knowledge, such as natural bodies, that operate for an end." God's existence is required to account for the finality of things that do not determine their own ends.

As pointed out above, arguments for the existence of God that proceed from an advertence to finality or teleology, and thence infer God as the governor of that finality, are often classified as design arguments; this is precisely because in that case God is simply an architect who arranges things in their dispositions to act and to relate to one another in just the right way. Aquinas may share the same starting point, but the advertence to the goal-directed behaviour of things means that his mode of argumentation is not the same as that of design arguments.

Aquinas seeks to explain the finality of things that do not have minds but act with intention. Their acting with intention entails that they are ordered to their end; and so the ordered acting for an end requires explanation. This is evident when Aquinas says that 'it is apparent that it is not by chance but by intention that they act for an end' and in his conclusion that God is responsible for the ordering of the acting for an end: 'All natural things are ordered to an end by something intelligent, and this we call God'. This ordering of natural things to their ends calls for an interpretation not only in terms of final causality, but also in terms of essentially ordered series, as I have argued.

So how can we cast the fifth way?

We begin with unintelligent things acting for an end. Such things act as efficient causes to bring something about, but they do not bring something about by means of their own intentions; their finality is caused from without. Just as the hand-stick-stone in the mind-hand-stick-stone series do not possess the causality of the series themselves but require a primary cause which originates their causality, so too unintelligent things do not possess finality of themselves but require some cause of their finality in which they participate. The argument thus takes place within the context and indeed the metaphysics of *per se* ordered series. Now in accord with the metaphysics of that series, unless there is some primary cause which itself is capable of originating the causality of the members of the series, there is no causal series. If the causality is not originated, the members of the series have no causality. Applying such metaphysics to the fifth way, we must conclude that there is some primary cause which originates the finality of all unintelligent things

in creation, without whose causality such things would not display finality. Drawing out the metaphysics further, we can see that the primary cause of finality for all unintelligent things must be uncaused in respect of final causality, or it would not be the primary cause of the series, but an effect within the series.

This interpretation thus far considers only unintelligent things, things incapable of willing the end for themselves. This works as an interpretation of the fifth way, since that is all the fifth way envisages. But an interesting question is whether or not all things, intelligent and unintelligent, require some ultimate final cause in whose causality such things participate for their own finality. I have argued elsewhere that we do need such an ultimate final cause, and indeed that Aquinas's metaphysics of essentially ordered final series commits us to just such a cause. All finality is ordered toward the good of those participating in it. Finality guides the efficient cause to its end, to what it is for; hence the final cause signifies the completion or perfection of the efficient cause. The presence of finality in all things, then, intelligent and unintelligent, guides such things to their ends and hence their goods. The causality of finality then is the causality of the good; goodness is the causal feature of final causal series so that every final causal series is motivated by the good in some way. Given the necessary finitude of essentially ordered series, there must be in final essentially ordered series some ultimate (or primary) final cause whose goodness is not caused but which causes the goodness of others (just as in other contexts Aquinas argues there must be some primary efficient cause of *esse* whose *esse* is not caused). This ultimate final cause would be the good itself, and as the cause of the causality of final causal series it would be that which all desire, and what ultimately motivates all efficient causality, such as is found in the earlier *viae*.³⁸

Intelligent things, no less than unintelligent things, are subject to the causality of the good itself. The difference is that intelligent things implement that finality through their willing of some course of action, not through a natural propensity to act in such a way. Consequently, while the fifth way explores the finality only of unintelligent things, the metaphysics which informs it can be extended to intelligent things as well.

It is not surprising that Aquinas's fifth way can be interpreted as a causal argument drawing on the metaphysics of essentially ordered series. In more recognisable demonstrations of God's existence, such as we have in the earlier ways, we meet with some form of causality and infer a primary

³⁸ In 'Essentially Ordered Series Reconsidered Once Again' [Chapter 3 in this volume] I argue that the primary final cause is identical with the primary cause of *esse*.

cause without which such causality would not be. Indeed, Aquinas conceives of God as that on which all things depend for their being: the participated yet unparticipating source of all that is. In coming to the conclusion that the primary being in each of the five ways is what we understand God to be, Aquinas maintains that the particular mode of argumentation adopted in each way gets us to that primary source, He Who Is, as the *sed contra* of question 2, article 3 conceives of Him. It would be odd for Aquinas to deliver us a primary being exercising causality over all beings in the first four ways, and then in the fifth way conclude to a primary being that is nothing more than a glorified architect. The oddness disappears when we interpret the fifth way not as a design argument but as a causal argument utilizing Aquinas's metaphysics of essentially ordered series. Once we have that in place, we can say that the fifth way concludes to a primary (final) cause of all that is (unintelligent). Interpreting the fifth way in this way allows us to align it more closely with the earlier *viae* and more intimately with Aquinas's wider thought.

Epilogue – From God’s Existence to God’s Nature

The previous chapters in this volume have been concerned with a matter of fact: whether God exists. In dealing with this, they have addressed either the metaphysical buttressing of proofs for God’s existence, or those proofs themselves as found in the thought of Aquinas. But of course, the mere existence of God is not the only interest of the philosopher or theologian; what is of at least equal and perhaps of greater interest is the nature of God.

Whilst we have not thus far dealt with God’s nature, the same philosophical reasoning that informed the proofs for God’s existence in Aquinas’s thought also offers us a principled way of considering God’s nature. In this final chapter, I propose to consider Thomas’s strategy for arriving at some knowledge of the nature of God in a philosophically principled manner. St Thomas adopts what could be called a first cause approach to the divine attributes, and this is in contrast to (i) the perfect being approach and (ii) the necessary being approach. It is important to distinguish Thomas’s first cause approach from the other two insofar as there is a tendency in critiques of classical theism to treat all classical theisms as if they were the same and criticise them accordingly.¹

This chapter does not propose to go through the various divine attributes showing how Thomas derives each one of them; such a project has been done in the past, followed by painstaking objections often met with often more painstaking refutation. It seems to me that in the contemporary literature, the objections to the classical divine attributes rest on a fundamentally

¹ For a general overview of classical theism, see Brian Davies, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), Chapter 1. For an engagement with the criticisms of classical theism by so called neo-classical theists and the emphasis that the latter oftentimes proffer an account of classical theism that not all classical theists would adopt, see Edward Feser, ‘The Neo-Classical Challenge to Classical Theism’, *Philosophy Compass* (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1111/phc3.12863>. Feser is right to note that the perfect being approach tends to dominate the neo-classical reaction, and that critics of Thomism tend to interpret Aquinas’s thought through the lens of the perfect being approach especially as it appears in the work of Katherin Rogers.

different approach to God from that of Aquinas. Thus, the contemporary objections to classical theism that place Thomas in their sights presuppose an approach to the divine attributes that is not Thomas's; effectively they are attacking a straw man.²

As noted above, I take there to be three different classical approaches to the consideration of the divine essence: (i) the perfect being approach, (ii) the modal approach (iii) the first cause approach.³ The perfect being approach holds that God has all properties that it would be better for Him to have rather than not to have. This approach to the divine essence can be found in the thought of Augustine, Boethius, and particularly St Anselm.⁴ The modal approach holds that we derive the divine attributes in virtue of God's being a necessary being. This is the approach of Avicenna.⁵ The first

² Feser echoes this point in 'The Neo-Classical Challenge to Classical Theism', p. 2; §§. 2 – 3 of the paper engage precisely with ways in which neo-classical theists misrepresent Thomistic classical theism.

³ For some details see Brian Leftow, 'God, Concepts of', in E. Craig (Ed.), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy Online* (Taylor and Francis: 1998); <https://www.rep.routledge.com/articles/thematic/god-concepts-of/v-1>

⁴ St Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, trans. R.P.H Green (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), Bk. 1, Chapter 7: 'Now although he alone is thought of as the god of gods, he is also thought of by those who imagine, invoke, and worship other gods, whether in heaven or on earth, in so far as their thinking strives to reach a being than which there is nothing better or more exalted'. Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. S.J. Tester (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973) Bk. 3, Chapter 10: 'That God, the principle of all things, is good is proved by the common concept of all men's minds: for since nothing better than God can be conceived of, who can doubt that that, than which nothing is better, is good?'; St Anselm, *Monologion*, Chapters 1 – 3, 15, *Proslogion*, Chapter 2. For discussion see Katherin Rogers, *Perfect Being Theology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), Chapter 1, note in particular what she writes on p. 4: 'We will reserve the title of perfect being theologian for those who attempt a systematic analysis of the divine attributes beginning with the concept of God as limitless perfection'; on p. viii, Rogers includes Aquinas as a proponent of perfect being theology alongside St Augustine and St Anselm.

⁵ Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of the Healing* (Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 2005), trans. Michael E. Mamura, Bk. 1, Chapter 6, and *The Metaphysica of Avicenna* (New York: Global Scholarly Publications, 2004), trans. Parviz Morewedge, Chapter 17 *et seq* and for commentary see *ibid*, pp. 206 – 249; for commentary on Avicenna's overall approach to God in contrast to the perfect being approach see Mohammad Saleh Zarepour, *Necessary Existence and Monotheism: An Avicennian Account of the Islamic Conception of Divine Unity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), in particular Chapters 1 – 3, note in particular the following summary of Avicenna's position he offers on p. 8: 'Avicenna believes that God must be understood in

cause approach holds that God has those attributes that He has in virtue of being the absolute primary cause that He is. Accordingly, we deduce the divine attributes based on God's being an absolute primary cause. This is the approach of Aquinas which we will depict in the next section.

In dividing these approaches to God, it should be noted that all the thinkers involved affirm something that is essential to the other approaches. Thus, they all affirm that God is perfect, that He is absolutely necessary, and that He is the absolute primary cause. However, what distinguishes these approaches is the primacy accorded to the particular conception of God in question. So for St Anselm, God is primarily conceived as absolutely perfect, and His being necessary and the first cause is derivative of that; for Avicenna, God is primarily thought to be absolutely necessary, and His perfection and being the primary cause is derivative of that; finally, for Aquinas, God is primarily thought to be the primary cause from which all things come, and He is thought to be perfect and absolutely necessary from that. So, whilst purveyors of each approach affirm what is essential to the other approaches, they do not do so as the primary consideration of the divine essence.

In what follows, I will set out Aquinas's first cause approach to the divine attributes and in doing so I will contrast it with the perfect being and the modal approaches. Having done that, I will address the issue of the distinction between the God of the Bible and the God of philosophy.

1. The First Cause Approach

As we have seen, Aquinas offers a philosophical demonstration of God's existence drawn from effects to the affirmation of God as primary cause of all things. In accord with what we observed in previous chapters, the effects that springboard Thomas into a demonstration of God's existence are many and varied, yet they all pertain in some way to the being of the thing so that such things are said to be *per aliud* and are thereby reducible to what is *per se*. Hence, God is the *per se* source of being for all things, and as such He is self-subsisting *esse*.

the first place as the Necessary Existent (*wājib al-wujūd*). In his various works, he provides different versions of an ingenious argument for the existence of the Necessary Existent - the so-called Proof of the Sincere (*burhān al-ṣiddiqīn*) - and argues that all the properties that are usually attributed to God can be extracted merely from God's having necessary existence'.

So much is clear from our previous considerations. However, the astute reader will notice that in our conclusion of the previous paragraph, we moved from a consideration of God as the cause of the being of things to God as a He is in Himself. For we reasoned that as primary cause God is *per se*, and as such He is self-subsisting *esse*. This follows from the fact that in all demonstrations for God's existence, it is the actuality of creatures that is at stake, so that God as responsible for that actuality is actual *per se* and not through another. Hence, He is the source of all actuality. The demonstration of God's existence then leads naturally into a consideration of God's nature.

The foregoing ties in well with Aquinas's scientific framework for demonstrating God's existence, something we saw in Chapter 1. Recall that Aquinas distinguishes between two kinds of demonstration: (i) a *propter quid* demonstration and (ii) a *quia* demonstration. *Propter quid* demonstrations not only give us the fact but the reason for the fact, and they do so because the middle term tells us something about the essence of the subject of demonstration. *Quia* demonstrations only give us the fact but not the reason for the fact. Hence the middle term of a *quia* demonstration tells us something about the effect(s) of the subject of demonstration and thence infers something about the subject.

Aquinas is clear that we cannot use a *propter quid* demonstration for God's existence, and this stands to reason since such a demonstration employs a middle term revealing something about the subject of demonstration, but this is impossible when attempting to establish the existence of God. By contrast we can employ a *quia* demonstration for God's existence, since we can move from some known effect to a primary cause of such an effect; and this is the kind of demonstration that we have seen Thomas deploy in his various arguments for God's existence explored in the previous papers.

Now what does all of this tell us about how we approach God's nature?

Thomas's approach to God is a causal one, by proceeding from some effect to God as the primary cause of that effect. Our primary knowledge of God then is as the source of being for all things; for the middle term by which we approach God is some created effect without which there would be no creatures. God accordingly is the cause of such an effect, and insofar as there would be nothing were it not for God's causing such an effect, God is the primary cause of all things. Hence, the first thing that we can know about

God philosophically speaking is that He is a primary cause. Whatever else we come to know about God will be known subsequent to our knowledge of Him as primary cause.⁶

When we say that further knowledge of God is had subsequent to our knowledge of Him as a primary cause, we do not simply mean that insofar as we can only do one thing at a time the demonstration of God's existence comes first and then other things after that. Rather, we mean that the proper order of consideration is God's existence first, and then what we can know of His nature given that He is such a cause.⁷ Not only does this order of consideration follow Thomas's scientific procedure, it also captures his approach in his major systematic works, *Summa Contra Gentiles* and *Summa Theologiae*.

In summary then, Thomas's way to God begins with establishing God's existence as the primary cause of all that is. Having done that, we can then proceed to consider what God is like given that He is such a primary cause. In other words, as the *per se* source of being, God as *per se* actual can be characterised in certain ways. The details of how Thomas characterises God are well rehearsed in the literature and they are in line with the divine attributes of classical theism.⁸ Thomas's derivation of the divine attributes from God's *per se* actuality is an important version of classical theism within the history of philosophy. This approach to the divine attributes is distinctive of Thomas's classical theism, and it stands in contrast to the perfect being and the modal approaches.

On St Anselm's view, our primary approach to God is through a consideration of his absolute perfection. Anselm offered an early proof for

⁶ This is in significant contrast to the perfect being and the necessary being approaches, both of which take it that what we are establishing when we establish that God exists is a perfect or necessary being and thence infer the divine attributes.

⁷ *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, qu. 3, proem: 'Cognito de aliquo an sit, inquirendum restat quomodo sit, ut sciatur de eo quid sit'.

⁸ If one turns to Thomas's deduction of the divine attributes in *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, qq. 3 – 11, one notices that in all of these discussions Thomas offers some justification for characterising God as such on the basis of His being the primary cause and what follows from that, i.e. His being pure actuality. One can even restrict oneself to his proofs of what could be taken to be the core set of divine attributes of classical theism: (i) simplicity (qu. 3), (ii) perfection and goodness (qq. 4 – 6), (iii) immutability (qu. 9), and (iv) eternity (qu. 10), and one will see Thomas deploy argumentation from God's being the primary cause to God's being ascribed such attributes.

God's existence in the *Monologion* and then a more refined proof in the *Proslogion*. The *Monologion* proof proceeds on the basis of a move from the imperfection of creatures to a perfect primary being, and the *Proslogion* proof proceeds by way of a consideration of God as that than which nothing greater can be thought. On both accounts, God comes out as absolutely perfect, whether by way of the measure of perfection for all else (*Monologion*) or as a premise in the proof of God (*Proslogion*). Anselm then proceeds to characterise God in terms of His absolute perfection as opposed to in terms of His being the primary cause of all that is.⁹

In reaction to the Anselmian approach, it is well known that Aquinas rejected Anselm's argument for God's existence drawn from the *Proslogion*, but focussing on this may direct attention away from the fact that Aquinas has a wholly different starting point from Anselm; for Anselm attributes what he attributes to God on the basis of His absolute perfection. Aquinas by contrast considers God's nature based on His absolute primacy over all things. At the end of this section, we will offer systematic reasons why Thomas would be motivated to take such an approach, but for now we wish simply to note the fact that here we have two different (yet significant and influential) classical theists defending their classical theism in different ways. Anselm is just as committed to God's simplicity, goodness, immutability, eternity etc as Aquinas, yet both defend these attributes in different ways.

Moving to the modal approach of Avicenna, he focuses on the possibility or contingency of creatures and argues that unless there is an absolutely necessary being, creatures would be nothing. Whilst Avicenna does consider God as the primary cause of all things, he does so in terms of His being the necessary ground of contingency. And so Avicenna's primary characterisation is of God as absolutely necessary. Accordingly, whilst God is absolutely primary, His divine attributes are not characterised by His being the primary cause of all things, but through His being necessary.

⁹ This is characteristic of Anselm's approach to God in both the *Monologion* and *Proslogion*; for commentary see Brian Leftow, 'Anselm's Perfect-Being Theology', in *The Cambridge Companion to Anselm* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), ed. Brian Davies and Brian Leftow, pp.132 – 157, Katherin Rogers, *Perfect Being Theology*, and 'Anselm's Perfect God', in *Models of God and Alternative Ultimate Realities* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2013) eds., Jeanine Diller and Asa Kasher.

Once again, we simply highlight the fact that the modal approach differs from Aquinas's first cause approach since for Thomas, God's divine attributes are known based on His being the primary cause of all things, whereas for Avicenna, God's attributes (and His primacy as first cause) are known on the basis of His necessity. So once again, we have a version of classical theism that is committed to many of the same divine attributes to which Thomas is committed, and yet is defended in a different way from that of St Thomas.

Before proceeding to offer some systematic reasons as to why St Thomas would be motivated to adopt the approach that he did (and in turn not to adopt the perfect being and modal approaches) we should dwell on the fact that we here have at least three different types of classical theism. They are theisms of a classical variety insofar as they affirm the typical set of divine attributes of God, but they are different classical theisms insofar as the justification of such is embedded within an entirely different philosophical worldview. What this highlights is that the argument over classical versus non-classical theism is not one characterised by some kind of entry level metaphysical neutrality; rather, prior to the consideration and justification of classical theism, there is a metaphysical framework out of which the philosopher works and which is deployed in the defence or otherwise of the version of theism under question. Failure to consider the metaphysical buttressing of the argumentation for classical theism is a failure to consider those very philosophical moves which justify the classical theism in question.¹⁰

With the latter remarks in mind, let us now consider more systematic reasons why Thomas would be motivated to adopt a first cause approach to the divine attributes over the perfect being and modal approaches. We have already alluded to the scientific context *viz propter quid* and *quia* demonstrations within which Thomas believes that God's existence can be demonstrated; and I believe that the key to understanding Thomas's particular

¹⁰ In this respect, Ryan Mullins is surely correct when he emphasises that we need to consider the metaphysics behind our commitment or otherwise to a timeless God, see *The End of the Timeless God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), Preface, and Joseph Schmid is surely wrong in his belief that the dialectical situation is one of neutrality in the face of competing metaphysical claims that operate within discussions of classical theism, see for instance Joseph Schmid, 'Existential Inertia and the Aristotelian Proof', Introduction.

approach is to understand the created effect on which he focuses in demonstrating God's existence.

As the previous papers in this volume have shown, each time Thomas approaches God's existence, he does so through a consideration of some kind of actuality that creatures have *per aliud*. This not only permits Thomas to set up a causal regress of *per se* ordered series terminating in a primary, since in such series the members do not possess the causal actuality *per se*, but it also permits Thomas to affirm God as an absolute primary cause, since insofar as creatures do not have the actuality in question *per se*, they would be lacking such actuality were it not for some primary cause of actuality. The latter cannot have actuality *per aliud*, but must itself have actuality *per se*. In short, Thomas's way to God is via participated actuality to an affirmation of unparticipated actuality. We see this in each of the five ways and most conspicuously in the proof from *De Ente et Essentia*, Cap. 4.

On the latter approach, the dependent actuality of creatures and the role of God as primary cause of actuality are our primary considerations in approaching God. With that established, we can in turn know God as pure perfection and absolutely necessary *because* of His *per se* actuality. The perfect being and modal approaches then are subsequent to the primary cause approach; in other words, they presuppose God as the source of all actuality and so are derivative thereof.

Accordingly, not only does Aquinas in fact adopt a different approach when it comes to the defence of classical theism, he does so for principled philosophical reasons. Engagement with Thomistic classical theism will therefore require engagement with the metaphysical buttressing of that classical theism (as it will for Anselmian or Avicennian classical theism). In other words, the classical theism articulated by the philosopher will be embedded within the particular metaphysical system by which that philosopher defends it. And this stands to reason since any commitment to theism will involve a metaphysics by which that theism (i) is defended and (ii) makes sense.

Given our emphasis on the metaphysical calibre of classical theism, one final issue emerges that is not restricted to Thomism but certainly challenges Aquinas's classical theism. This is the division between the God of the Bible and the God of the philosophers. We have seen in this chapter and throughout this volume a commitment to God's nature that may come across

as somewhat distant and far from the religious witness to God as found within the Bible. The challenge then is that whilst we have presented a philosophically profound account of God's existence and approach to the divine nature, perhaps the divine being with which we are left is a counterfeit double and not the actual God that St Thomas daily worshipped.

2. God of the Bible and the God of the Philosophers

In *The God of the Philosophers*, Anthony Kenny concludes that the God of traditional natural theology, what we could call the God of classical theism as understood by scholastic theologians, does not exist given what Kenny sees to be the incoherence of the two divine attributes he there considers: omniscience and omnipotence.¹¹ Nevertheless, there is the phenomenon of the God of faith, the God Who saves and in Whom believers for centuries have placed their faith. They did not place their faith in a simple, immutable, omni-x creator, but in a saviour, a mighty counsellor etc. Whilst on Kenny's reading the God of the philosophers may not exist, this does not exclude the God of faith. Thus, there is a divergence between the supposed incoherent God of classical theism and the God of faith in Whom classical theists presumably had faith for their salvation, consolation etc yet about Whom were just wrong in their characterisation.

Part of the stand-off in differing conceptions of divinity is the under-determination of the divine attributes within revelation and religious experience. Both attribute certain activities and interventions to God which are claimed necessary for any conception of God. However, the classical conception of God, whilst no doubt sufficient, is not necessary given the aforesaid under-determination. Thus, one can believe in the God of the Bible and all that He has done without believing in the God of classical theism.

This issue brings us full circle to the opening chapter of this book. In our first chapter, we considered the possibility of demonstrating God's existence, and we noted O'Callaghan's point that whilst we can demonstrate divinity with the traditional arguments, without further development we are at a loss as to which divinity we have established. And something similar is going on in this standoff. Remaining with Thomistic classical theism, whilst

¹¹ Anthony Kenny, *The God of the Philosophers* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), p. 121.

Aquinas's conception of God as pure *esse* itself and all that follows is a sufficient characterisation of God, it is not necessary given Biblical revelation and religious experience.

Just as our response to O'Callaghan relied on the view that our commitment to divinity in the traditional arguments is a commitment to that concrete agent to Whom the classical attributes of divinity can be applied, so too we shall argue here that a commitment to the biblical/religious concept of divinity is itself a commitment to a concrete agent to Whom the classical divine attributes, as articulated by Aquinas, can be applied. Thus, whilst the inspired authors and religious may not have affirmed the classical divine attributes, and indeed may not even have been interested in such attribution, what they reveal in their authorship and private revelations is the God of classical theism.

Recall that in the first chapter we noted that the descriptive content of our concept of the divinity is not to be confused with the referent; in other words, the descriptions that we use in this instance should not be taken to be synonymous with the name 'God'. Rather, our descriptions simply fix the reference of some concrete entity that we already have in our sights. Per our discussion in Chapter 1, we can have some named individual in our sights, e.g. Aristotle, and make use of various descriptions to identify that individual, e.g. Plato's greatest student. But in other contexts, those descriptions could be taken to apply to a different individual. Nevertheless it is still Aristotle that we have in our sights and to whom we wish to refer when we use those descriptions.

With the foregoing in mind, Kenny's sundering of the God of the philosophers from the God of the Bible can only be successful if he presupposes that the descriptions that we use when speaking of God are taken to be synonymous with the name 'God', so that when scripture uses descriptions of God that by Kenny's lights are inconsistent with the descriptions of classical theism, biblical authors and classical theists must be referring to different entities. By contrast, if such descriptions merely serve to fix the reference, then both biblical authors and classical theists can have the same divine being in their sights but simply make use of different descriptions to fix the reference of the being to Whom they are referring. A biblical author may make use of such descriptions as 'mighty counsellor', 'ancient of days', 'He Who is' etc to designate the entity he has in his sights, whereas the classical

theist makes use of different descriptions that characterise the philosophical context within which he considers God. Yet both the biblical author and the classical theist have the same being in their sights. Similarly, Plato may have made use of various descriptions to designate Aristotle, and, not having known Aristotle as Plato did, we may make use of different descriptions (it is highly unlikely that Plato would have referred to Aristotle as the author of the *Metaphysics*), yet both Plato and we have the same individual in our sights.

Accordingly, both the classical theist and the biblical authors are referring to the same individual despite the different descriptions that they use to fix that reference. Only if it is assumed that such descriptions are synonymous with the name 'God' could they be referring to different individuals; but there is nothing to justify the claim that the descriptions are being used as synonymous with the name. That being the case, there is no distinction between the God of the Bible and the God of the philosophers, only a difference in how one approaches Him, whether through philosophical analysis or through personal faith and accompaniment. But both approaches to God can be found within the life of the individual; and in the life of St Thomas Aquinas, as well as numerous other classical theists, such approaches were found. Thomas's personal faith in God went hand in hand with his philosophical understanding, so that whilst the former illuminated the latter, the latter served to develop and articulate the former.

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