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PUNISHMENT AS MEDICINE IN THE THOUGHT OF ST. THOMAS AQUINAS

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A man who is unjust, is thoroughly miserable,
the more so if he doesn't get his due punishment
for the wrongdoing he commits.
(Plato, *Gorgias* 472e)

He wounds as he heals. (Job 5:18)

IN 1953, POPE PIUS XII addressed a gathering of Italian jurists in Rome, observing that "most modern theories of penal law explain punishment and justify it in the last resort as a protective measure."[1] This deterrent function, along with attempts to reform, he said, fail adequately to explain punishment, the ultimate purpose of which "must be sought on a higher plane," namely, the restoration of that order which has been upset in the commission of a crime. Only "this more profound understanding of punishment" can get us "to the heart of the matter," to the sacredness of the law itself, "so that whoever breaks it is punishable and will be punished."[2]

Pius XII was responding to a type of humanist thinking about punishment in vogue in the first half of the twentieth century.[3] Philosopher Michael Davis notes that in the 1960s,

[1] The English translation of the address, given in French, is from chapter 30 of *Major Addresses of Pope Pius XII*, ed. Vincent A. Yzermans, vol. 1, *Selected Addresses* (St. Paul, Minn.: North Central Publishing, 1961), 255.

[2] Ibid., 256.

[3] This type of thinking is connected to legal positivism, which Pius also critiques in his address. The classical statement of legal positivism in this period is that of H. L. A.

the kind of theories critiqued by Pope Pius, C. S. Lewis,[4] and others suffered a "long and steep decline."[5] In the 1970s, "preventive theories of punishment" gave place to various forms of what came to be called "retributivism."[6] In the United States, this revival of interest in the retributive meaning of punishment was legal as well as philosophical, being reflected in debates following the 1972 and 1976 Supreme Court decisions on the punishment of death.[7] Retributivists maintain that the defining feature of punishment is that it gives to wrongdoers something that they deserve because of a prior wrong.[8] It is desert that justifies the infliction of harm on another person, which punishment necessarily involves. In response to retributivist arguments, others maintain that retribution does not define or justify punishment, and that harming another by punishing him can only be justified by looking to some good effect or effects to

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Hart (*The Concept of Law* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, {1961} 1994]). The humanitarian theory has by no means died out, though its proponents now have to respond to the objections of the new retributivism. Consequentialist justifications of punishment still abound, and one can still find arguments, as in a 2005 book by American legal scholar Deirdre Golash, that we would be better off without the "institution" of punishment (*The Case against Punishment: Retribution, Crime Prevention, and the Law* [New York: NYU Press, 2005], 152). The "moral education theory of punishment" in the earlier work of Jean Hampton is another alternative to retributivism; Hampton suggests that the goal of educating the offender and the public at large about the moral wrongness of certain acts provides "a complete justification of punishment" ("The Moral Education Theory of Punishment," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 13 [1984]: 209).

[4] C. S. Lewis, "The Humanitarian Theory of Punishment," *The Churchman* 73, no. 2 (1959): 55-60.

[5] Michael Davis, "Punishment's Golden Half Century," *Journal of Ethics* 13 (2009): 74.

[6] Ibid., 74. See also Michael Moore, *Placing Blame: A Theory of the Criminal Law* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 83.

[7] Furman v. Georgia (1972) declared capital punishment to violate the 8th and 14th amendments, prohibiting cruel and unusual punishment. Gregg v. Georgia (1976) mitigated this judgment by ruling that the punishment of death did not necessarily violate the Constitution. See the article by Hugo Adam Bedau (modified by the ACLU), "The Case against the Death Penalty," https://www.aclu.org/other/case-against-death-penalty.

[8] See Davis, "Punishment's Golden Half Century," 74; and Peter K. Koritansky, *Thomas Aquinas and the Philosophy of Punishment* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2012), chaps. 1-2.

be achieved through the punishment (the "nonretributivist" position). Although, as we will see, twentieth-century retributivism differs in important respects from classical accounts of punishment, its proponents often look to that tradition for support, and some of them find in Thomas Aquinas a compelling defense of just retribution. But is Thomas a retributivist?

Although it would be a mistake to examine Thomas's thought on punishment exclusively within the bounds of the contemporary categories (retributivist vs. nonretributivist), we begin there in order to highlight the present relevance of this study, and to see exactly where and why Thomas does not "fit in" to the contemporary dialogue, in order that we may better know the contours of his account and at the same time realize what contemporary explanations of punishment tend to omit. Ultimately we want to know what is the right way for a Christian to think about punishments: should we desire them as good, or should we look at them as necessary but unfortunate features of life, to be chosen only as far as is necessary to preserve the good order of society?

In light of this general goal, this paper has three specific aims. It aims to show, first, that Thomas's account of punishment is better described as "medicinal" than "retributivist," and, second, that a correct understanding of the medicinal character of human punishments requires reference to the revealed truth of divine retribution. Finally, through these clarifications of the Thomistic account of punishment, the third aim of this paper is to highlight what is lacking in the contemporary debates, and thereby contribute to a more Christian view of the phenomenon of punishment.

We will begin with an analysis of contemporary retributivism to pose the "retribution or medicine" question, after which we will turn to Thomas's own account of punishment. After considering some difficulties with the use of "punishment" as a translation of *poena*, we will consider how Thomas defines this phenomenon, and the various ways in which it resembles medicine. This will bring us to the theological perspective, which I will argue is essential to understanding medicinal human

punishment. We will then be in a position to see more clearly the difficulty in calling Thomas a "retributivist," why the medicinal characterization better fits his account, and what this account has to offer the contemporary debate.

I. The New Retributivism

In the second half of the twentieth century, a lively debate between "retributivists"[9] and "nonretributivists"[10] flourished in Anglo-American philosophical literature.[11] H. L. A. Hart, probably the foremost twentieth-century defender of legal positivism, says that retributivist theories characteristically "[deny] that the practice of a system of punishment is justified by its beneficial consequences and claim instead that the main justification of the practice lies in the fact that . . . the application to the offender of the pain of punishment is itself a thing of value."[12] Michael Moore, a proponent of retributivism, describes it as "a very straightforward theory of punishment," which maintains that "We are justified in punishing because and only because offenders deserve it. Moral responsibility ('desert')

[9] Some of the more influential retributivist arguments in the period in question are those of Herbert Morris (see his "Persons and Punishment," *The Monist* 52 [1968]: 475-501), Jeffrie Murphy ("Marxism and Retribution," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 2 [1973]: 217-43), George Sher (*Desert* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989]), and Michael Moore (*Placing Blame*).

[10] Since nonretributivists look to some good external to punishment to justify the practice, their view has also been called "externalist," in contrast to those who justify punishment by something internal to the act of punishing, the "internalists." These are the terms favored by Davis ("Punishment's Golden Half-Century," 74) and Anthony Ellis (*The Philosophy of Punishment* [Charlottesville, Va.: Imprint Academic, 2012], chap. 1).

[11] See Davis, "Punishment's Golden Half-Century," 74.

[12] H. L. A. Hart, "Prolegomenon to the Principles of Punishment," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society,* n.s. 60 (1959-60): 8. There is a close connection between legal positivism (the view that "law is a social construction") and antiretributivism, which justifies punishment only by its positive social consequences (Leslie Green, "Introduction," in H. L. A. Hart, *The Concept of Law*, 3rd ed. [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012]). The connection is present in the thought of Jeremy Bentham, the modern originator of both theses.

in such a view is not only necessary for justified punishment, it is also sufficient."[13]

Retributivists, while focusing on desert as the central and justifying characteristic of punishment, do not necessarily exclude from consideration other goods to be achieved through punishment. Even Kant, well-known for maintaining that "only the law of retribution (*ius talionis*) . . . can specify definitely the quality and the quantity of punishment," does not rule out the desirability of achieving other goods through such punishment.[14] A punishment "can never be inflicted merely as a means to promote some other good for the criminal himself or for civil society," he says, but one may still hope and intend to achieve such goods as well as to satisfy the "Law of Retribution."[15] Perhaps not for Kant, but for some retributivists, goods such as reform and deterrence could even form part of the determination of punishment itself. For such thinkers, retribution is a necessary but not a sufficient criterion for justified punishment. We can call this view moderate retributivism.

A retributivist is expected to offer an "answer to the question of why offenders deserve to suffer."[16] One way to answer this, found in such thinkers as Herbert Morris, George Sher, and John Finnis, is that offenders deserve to suffer because this suffering removes an advantage they have unfairly gained through their wrongs. This is not the material gain (if any) of their crimes, but some internal (psychological or ontological) benefit gained in the very wrongdoing itself, such as freedom from self-restraint. Punishment restores equality by counteracting this freedom, giving to the offender something which he does not want and thereby restoring the balance of social

[13] Moore, *Placing Blame*, 91.

[14] Immanuel Kant, *Metaphysics of Morals*, rev. ed., trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 115.

[15] Ibid., 114. I am obliged to an anonymous reviewer for this point about Kant.

[16] See Ellis, *Philosophy of Punishment*, 62: "The Simple Desert Theory refuses a substantive answer to the question why offenders deserve to suffer" because it takes it as a self-evident first principle.

"benefits and burdens" disrupted by the crime.[17] Certain passages in Thomas seem to confirm such a way of looking at punishment, for example in his answer to the question of whether one of the effects of sin is the "debt" of punishment (*reatus poenae*).[18] In his affirmative answer, Thomas compares punishment to natural phenomena in which we observe one contrary react against another. In a similar way, when a human being acts inordinately (i.e., sins), the order against which he acts responds with a contrary action (punishment).[19] In a later question in the *Secunda pars*, Thomas asks about the goodness of vengeance (*vindicatio*), and here he seems to hold as a practical first principle *poena debetur peccato* ("punishment is due to sin").[20]

The proponents of nonretributive justifications of punishment, on the other hand, do not think that punishment is justified because it is the correct response to a wrong committed, but rather because it produces certain positive effects, whether these effects are individual, communal, or some combination of the two. Not all nonretributivists go so far as Jeremy Bentham to say that "all punishment is in itself evil," but they generally agree with the conclusion Bentham draws: "[punishment] ought only to be admitted in as far as it promises to exclude some greater evil."[21] Contemporary proponents offer many variations

[17] Ellis, *Philosophy of Punishment*, chap. 3. See also Morris, "Persons and Punishment"; and John Finnis, "Retribution: Punishment's Formative Aim," *American Journal of Jurisprudence* 44 (1999): 91-103.

[18] *STh* I-II, q. 87, a. 1. References to the *Summa* are to *Summa Theologiae* (Ottawa, Canada: Commissio Piana, 1941), which includes corrections based on the Leonine edition. Translations of Thomas are my own, except where noted.

[19] Ibid. This passage will be considered in detail further on.

[20] *STh* II-II, q. 108, a. 4, s.c. The fact that no authority is cited in this sed contra seems to support the conclusion that this is a first principle evident to reason, which can be elaborated and commented upon, but cannot be demonstrated, having the evident character of a first principle. See also *De Malo*, q. 4, a. 5, where to help him explain the will as the subject of original sin, Thomas says simply that it is "manifest" that sin is something which carries the debt of punishment ("Manifestum est autem quod peccatum, secundum quod nunc de peccato loquimur, est cui debetur pena"; *Quaestiones disputatae de malo* [Rome: Commissio Leonina, 1982], 23:118, ll. 52-54).

[21] Jeremy Bentham, *The Principles and Morals of Legislation* (New York: Hafner Publishing, 1948), XIII.ii.

on this theme, but their arguments for the most part can be reduced to the following form: if an institution contributes to the general happiness of society, then it is justified. Punishment contributes to the general happiness and hence it is justified.[22] The nonretributivist maintains that the only way to justify punishment, since it involves harming another human being, is some good to be achieved through punishing. Such seems to be the thinking also in the following response which Thomas makes to the question of foregoing spiritual goods on account of scandal:

> The infliction of punishments is not sought for its own sake [*propter se*], but punishments are inflicted like medicines for restraining sins [*ad cohibendum peccata*]. And therefore they have the character of justice [*ratio iustitiae*] insofar as sins are restrained through them. But if it were manifest that more and greater sins would follow the infliction of punishments, then the infliction of punishments will not be included under justice.[23]

In other words, punishment does not justify itself; it must be justified by its effects in "restraining sins." Nor is this an isolated instance; Thomas frequently refers to the medicinal character of punishment, as we will see below, as the consideration that drives the selection of punishment, and even the choice of whether or not to punish in a particular instance.

How then should we classify Thomas's account of punishment? He affirms the notion that punishment is due to sin, which for him seems to have the character of a first

[22] Some contemporary examples may be found in S. I. Benn ("An Approach to the Problems of Punishment," *Philosophy* 33 [1958]: 325-41), David Boonin (*The Problem of Punishment* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008]), Michael J. Zimmerman (*The Immorality of Punishment* [Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2011]). Ellis offers a justification of punishment as a form of self-defense, noting that "the general prohibition on deliberately harming others can be overridden in cases of self-defence" (*Philosophy of Punishment*, 136) Why they can be so overridden "is a surprisingly difficult question," he admits (ibid., 137), but his reasoning is basically utilitarian, revolving around analysis of the costs and benefits of punishment as a social institution. He takes it for granted that some sort of cost-benefit analysis is the basis of human motivation (ibid., 154).

[23] *STh* II-II, q. 43, a. 7, ad 1.

principle, and he thinks that to punish is (or may be) an act of justice. This would seem to make him a retributivist. With the nonretributivists, on the other hand, Thomas looks to the effects of punishment on the common good, not only as an addition to the retributive goodness already present in the chosen punishment, but as the very thing that justifies the choice of that particular punishment.[24] The resolution of this puzzle will require us eventually to abandon the retributive/nonretributive framework, but before we do so, we should look at the most promising way of resolving it within that framework.

II. THOMAS AQUINAS, RETRIBUTIVIST?

While there are many representatives of what we have called moderate retributivism, John Finnis has an account that is of particular importance for our purposes, both because of its clarity and insight and as an interpretation of Thomas. Finnis argues that retribution is the essence of punishment, its "formative aim."[25] According to Finnis, in punishment a wrongdoer suffers something contrary to his will, and in so suffering he loses the benefit he illicitly gained when he indulged his will to excess in doing the wrong.[26] Whether or not any good effects follow from punishment, Finnis argues, it has at least this good aspect, that "punishment 'sets in order' the

[24] I have simplified the classification of contemporary theories in order to bring out the aporia. One should also note the so-called "expressive theory of punishment" advocated in Hampton's work. Hampton first posits the moral education theory as an alternative to retributivism, but in later developments embraces the designation "retributivist." See Richard Dagger, "Jean Hampton's Theory of Punishment: A Critical Appreciation," *APA Newsletter on Philosophy and Law* 10, no. 2 (2011): 6-11.

[25] The title of Finnis's most complete discussion of punishment is "Retribution: Punishment's Formative Aim." His earlier treatment ("The Restoration of Retribution" *Analysis* 32, no. 4 [1972]: 131-35) contains some elements of his later account, which is reiterated more concisely, but with no substantial change, in his book *Aquinas: Moral, Political, and Legal Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998): 210-18.

[26] This profit or advantage is principally an immaterial one, that of indulging one's own will, rather than a material advantage that may or may not be achieved in any given wrongful act (Finnis, "Retribution," 102).

guilt whose essence was wrongful willing."[27] Punishment "sets in order" or reestablishes equality by "cancelling the wrongdoer's unfair profit."[28] But how does punishing someone heal disorder? Finnis explains:

> The precise benefit or advantage whose fair distribution it is the primary and shaping purpose of punishment to uphold is the advantage of freedom, in one's choosing and acting, from external constraints including the constraints appropriately imposed by laws made for the common good.[29]

This reaffirms Finnis's assertion in an earlier work that

> What the criminal gains . . . is the advantage of indulging a (wrongful) self-preference, of permitting himself an excessive freedom in choosing . . . being something that his law-abiding fellow-citizens have denied themselves insofar as they have chosen to conform their will (habits and choices) to the law even when they would "prefer" not to.[30]

With regard to "the 'medicinal' or 'healing' point of punishment, of which Aquinas often speaks," Finnis argues that it *includes* retribution.[31] In other words, retribution is medicine applied to the community as a whole, removing the extra

[27] Ibid., 99.

[28] Ibid., 102.

[29] Ibid., 101. This same view can be seen in an earlier book, where Finnis says that "the defining and essential . . . point of punishment is to restore an order of fairness which was disrupted by the criminal's criminal act. That order was a fairly (it is supposed) distributed set of advantages and disadvantages, the system of benefits and burdens of life in a human community" (John Finnis, *Fundamentals of Ethics* [Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1983], 128).

[30] Finnis, "Restoration of Retribution," 132.

[31] "When he speaks of punishment's medicinal function, Aquinas has in mind not only reform and deterrence and restraint and coercive inducement to decent conduct, but also the function [of] . . . redressing of the disorder caused by the offense. Why is this medicinal, curative healing? Because it is the healing of a disorder—precisely an unjust equality—introduced into a whole community by the wrongdoer's criminal choice and action" (Finnis: "Retribution," 97). Finnis adds that for Thomas "this (re)ordering [ordinativa] point of punishment can either be accounted remedial [medicinalis], or contrasted . . . with the remedial (deterrent, reformative)," depending on the context (ibid., 99).

"freedom in choosing" that the wrongdoer gained by causing him to suffer something opposed to his will.

Peter Karl Koritansky rightly questions this explanation of retribution's medicinal character in itself and as an interpretation of Thomas. He points out that the language of "benefits and burdens" arises from a contractarian view of political society.[32] In this view, binding oneself to obey the civil law is limiting one's freedom. Citizens willingly accept such limits and bear the "burden" of obeying the laws, for the sake of the many benefits that accrue to them when a great number of persons do likewise. The criminal, on the other hand, grasps for the "benefit" of acting precisely as he wishes, regardless of the law. As Koritansky argues at some length,[33] proponents of the "benefits and burdens" view of punishment have a hard time explaining how exactly criminal action is advantageous to the criminal, apart from any material gain he may accrue (which is a matter for restitution and is not the issue in punishment).[34]

Further, it is hard to accept Finnis's account as a reading of Thomas, for whom obedience is a virtue and sin a deficiency or loss. True, the criminal may see obedience as burdensome, but as Aristotle says, "in all such cases it seems that what is really so is what appears so to the excellent person."[35] When we accept the notion that in following the law good citizens are somehow "losing out," we seem to affirm the disordered perception of the criminal, rather than correcting it. (Compare Socrates's comment to Gorgias, cited in the epigraph to this essay.) As Koritansky puts it, for Thomas, "Criminals are, on the contrary, supremely *disadvantaged* by their criminal actions which,

[32] Koritansky, *Thomas Aquinas and the Philosophy of Punishment*. Koritansky develops his thesis in a number of shorter pieces, most recently in "Retributive Justice and Natural Law" *The Thomist* 83 (2019): 407-35.

[33] Koritansky, *Thomas Aquinas and the Philosophy of Punishment*, chap. 2.

[34] Thomas grants that one can speak in terms of profit (*lucrum*) and loss (*damnum*) about all matters of justice, but these names, which belong properly to matters of buying and selling, are used improperly or metaphorically about other matters of justice; see *STh* II-II, q. 58, a. 11, ad 3. Perhaps the idea of a benefit in freedom gained through wrongdoing takes the metaphor too literally.

[35] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 10.5.1176a16 (trans. Terence Irwin, 2nd ed. [Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett, 1999], 161).

precisely because they fly in the face of one's natural inclination to serve and promote the political common good, make those who perform them into *a worse person*."[36] Thomas, as we will see below, does affirm that punishment heals the disorder introduced by wrongdoing, but in his view it does so by removing, not a benefit, but a diseased excess.[37]

Despite these limitations, Finnis puts us on the right track in suggesting that for Thomas *all* punishment is *both* retributive *and* medicinal. If retribution provides the very form of penal acts, then we need not ask whether punishment is or should be retributive. If it is not retributive, it is not punishment. If, in turn, retribution is itself medicinal, then all punishment is also in some way therapeutic or healing. Retribution and healing, then, are not two different goals, but two aspects of the same goal. Finnis's insight into the unity of retribution and medicine will prove helpful in interpreting Thomas's account of punishment, to which we now turn.

[36] Koritansky, *Thomas Aquinas and the Philosophy of Punishment*, 150. Finnis's own illustration in "Retribution" highlights the problem. In the "incident on hill 102," Private Eriksson was not disturbed because he thought that he had lost something that his comrades had gained. A good man does not consider it a "benefit" to be able to rape and murder, nor does he consider himself as losing or giving up something in restraining himself from doing such acts. On the contrary, he perceives those actions as they truly are, denigrations.

[37] In Hampton's "moral education theory of punishment," retribution is replaced with the idea "that punishment is intended as a way of teaching the wrongdoer [and the community in general] that the action she did (or wants to do) is forbidden because it is morally wrong and should not be done for that reason" (Hampton, "Moral Education Theory of Punishment," 212). If "education" is understood broadly enough (i.e., not as merely imparting information, but as moral formation), then it could be taken as equivalent to the goal of healing, in which case the same response may be made that "education" and "retribution" are not so much two different goals to be achieved in punishing, but two different aspects of (or views on) the same goal. The criminal being punished by the state, for example, naturally sees his punishment as the state's infliction of a painful thing on him in response to his crime, while those inflicting the punishment may see it in light of education/healing.

III. *MALUM, CULPA, POENA*—EVIL, FAULT, PUNISHMENT

As we turn to a closer examination of Thomas's discussion of punishment, it will be helpful to clarify some terms, first and most fundamentally the term "punishment" itself, which is a traditional but not unproblematic translation of Thomas's *poena*. Thomas consistently uses the terms *poena* and *culpa* to describe evil or defects found in a rational nature. *Malum*—usually translated "evil" but perhaps more accurately "defect" or "badness"—refers most broadly to any "privation of a form or ordering or proper measure, whether in a subject or in an act."[38] When the defect is "natural" (e.g., blindness or lameness), Thomas calls it simply *malum*, but when the defect is in an agent's end-directed action, he calls it *peccatum*, which "is said of an act lacking its proper ordering or form or measure,"[39] that is, when an agent acts but does not attain the end for which he acts.[40] We do not have a single word in English for this concept of "defective action"; the traditional but misleading translation is "sin."[41] "Sin" is misleading because we do not normally refer, for example, to the error of a grammarian in writing[42] as a "sin," even though it too is a voluntary act failing to attain its end. *Culpa*, often translated as "fault,"[43] but also

[38] *De Malo*, q. 2, a. 2 (Leonine ed., 23:33, ll. 125-28): "Nam malum communius est: in quocumque enim, siue in subiecto siue in actu, priuatio forme aut ordinis aut mensure debite mali rationem habet."

[39] Ibid. (Leonine ed., 23:33, ll. 128-30): "Set peccatum dicitur aliquis actus debito ordine aut forma siue mensura carens."

[40] *De Malo*, q. 3, a. 1 (Leonine ed., 23:66, ll. 132-35): "That something is called a sin, insofar as it is found in natural and in artificial things, arises from the fact that someone in acting does not attain the end for which he acts" ("Peccatum enim communiter dictum secundum quod in rebus naturalibus et artificialibus inuenitur, ex eo prouenit quod aliquis in agendo non attingit ad finem propter quem agit").

[41] See Robert Pasnau, review of Thomas Aquinas, *On Evil* (translations by R. Regan and J. A. and J. T. Oesterle) in *Review of Metaphysics* 57 (2004): 599-601. "Defective action" is the phrase Pasnau uses in his review.

[42] *De Malo*, q. 3, a. 1 (Leonine ed., 23:66, ll. 136-41). See also *De Malo*, q. 1, a. 5.

[43] John and Jean Oesterle's translation of *De Malo* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995) uses this wording.

"moral wrong,"[44] refers to a voluntary or willed defect in action, which corresponds more nearly to what we mean by "sin."[45]

The problem, however, seems to be not only a problem of translation; Thomas himself is aware that there is ambiguity in the use of *peccatum*. Were we to be perfectly precise, we would say "*culpa*" when we wanted to speak of a moral defect, since *peccatum* is a broader term including both moral and nonmoral defects. This broader meaning of *peccatum* is rooted in the classical tradition, but in the Christian tradition it typically refers to those defects of human persons by which they are estranged from God.[46] Hence in theological contexts, *peccatum* often means the same thing as *culpa*.[47] Despite his own clear distinction between *peccatum* and *culpa*, Thomas does not attempt to impose a more precise usage contrary to the

[44] Richard Regan uses this expression in his translation of *De Malo* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

[45] *De Malo*, q. 2, a. 2 (Leonine ed., 23:33, ll. 134-40): "Any inordinate act whatsoever can be called a *peccatum*, whether in nature, or art, or morals. But *peccatum* does not have the nature of *culpa* unless it be voluntary, for nothing is imputed to someone as a fault except from the fact that it is in his power. And thus it is evident that *peccatum* is found in more instances than *culpa*" ("Quilibet enim actus inordinatus potest dici peccatum uel nature uel artis uel moris. Set rationem culpe non habet peccatum nisi ex eo quod est uoluntarium: nulli enim imputatur ad culpam aliquis inordinatus actus, nisi ex eo quod est in eius potestate. Et sic patet quod peccatum est in plus quam culpa").

[46] "In pagan antiquity, peccatum (Greek: ἁμαρτία, κακία) has a broad spectrum of meanings. It can be related to non-ethical error, ethical failures and mistakes, but also to crimes against the divine world in its broadest sense. In the Jewish and Christian tradition, peccatum is a core concept with various meanings, which all have to do with a wrong attitude towards God and His plan with humanity. The term peccatum represents an attitude of transgression and violation of morality and thus a distancing from God. Sin causes disorder and disharmony in the relation between God and humanity, between human beings, and in human beings themselves" (Mathijs Lamberigts, *Augustinus Lexikon Online*, ed. Robert Dodaro O.S.A., Cornelius Petrus Mayer, and Chrisof Müller (Schwabe Verlag), s.v. "peccatum."

[47] In the Vulgate, for example, see Rom 3:20: "per legem enim cognitio peccati"; Psalm 50(51):4: "a peccato mea munda me"; Gen 4:7: "in foribus peccatum aderit."

tradition, and so he also uses *peccatum* interchangeably with *culpa*, when the distinction itself is not at issue.[48]

We find a similar situation when we turn to the other side of *malum*, that is, to evil which is suffered rather than done. Besides the evil of *culpa*, there is another evil proper to rational or intellectual beings, which Thomas names *poena*, following Augustine, who says that "*culpa* names an evil which we do, but *poena* an evil which we suffer."[49] In this sense, *poena* includes any evil whatsoever suffered by a rational agent, a much broader meaning than the English "punishment" or "penalty," which typically connotes a civic and even an "artificial" reality (we will return to this idea later). Yet although *poena* is broader than our "punishment," Thomas understands all suffering, and not only civil penalties, to be the consequence of sin, and therefore to be precisely "punishments" in the typical sense.[50] To translate *poena* as "suffering" or "pain" risks obscuring the relationship between suffering and fault. With this in mind, I will often leave the term *poena* untranslated (and likewise *culpa*, *peccatum*, and *malum*). Where it would not lead to confusion,

[48] *De Malo*, q. 2, a. 2 (Leonine ed., 23:33, ll. 141-42): "according to the usage common among theologians, one may use *peccatum* and *culpa* for the same thing" ("licet secundum communem usum loquendi apud theologos pro eodem sumantur peccatum et culpa"

[49] Augustine, *De lib. arb.* I, quoted in *De Malo* q. 1, a. 4 (Leonine ed., 23:20, ll. 187-89): "ut patet per Augustinum in I De libero arbitrio, ubi culpam nominat malum quod agimus, penam uero malum quod patimur."

[50] "According to the Catholic faith, it is to be held without doubt that death and all similar defects of the present life, are a *poena* for original sin" ("Absque omni dubio secundum fidem catholicam tenendum est quod mors et omnes huiusmodi defectus praesentis uite sunt pena peccati originalis") (*De Malo*, q. 5, a. 4 (Leonine ed., 23:137, ll. 61-64). The text goes on to clarify that some of these *poenae* are directly inflicted by God, while others are concomitant effects of the primary *poenae*. That the understanding of all the sufferings of human life is a revealed truth is underlined in the reply to the first objection, where Thomas notes that "Seneca and other pagan philosophers did not consider [death] as having the nature of *poena*." See also q. 1, a. 4 (Leonine ed., 23:20, ll. 138-39), which concludes that the *mala* found in intellectual creatures, whether in the soul, the body, or in exterior things, "must be called *poenae* according to the understanding of Catholic faith" ("tale malum secundum fidei catholice sententiam necesse est quod pene dicatur").

the traditional translation "punishment" is used, keeping in view the theological connection to fault.

IV. THE NATURE OF *POENA*/PUNISHMENT

The *Disputed Questions on Evil* (*De Malo*) contain Thomas's most comprehensive discussion of *poena* and *culpa*.[51] Thomas distinguishes these two kinds of *mala* by means of three criteria.[52] First, *poena* is the consequence of *culpa*.[53] Second, *poena* is *contra voluntatem*: contrary to the will of the one suffering it, while *culpa* is *secundum voluntatem*: it proceeds from the will.[54] Third, *poena* is a *passio*, that is, something suffered; while *culpa* is an action, something done.[55]

"*Poena* is inflicted to limit and regulate the badness of *culpa*";[56] fault introduces disorder and punishment (re)introduces order.[57] Punishment as a response to fault takes the phenomenon from the agent's view, rather than the patient's; it is in this sense that punishment is a moral act, something intended.[58] Punishing is an act of justice, which consists in giving another his due. When disorder has been caused by an

[51] Parallel discussions of the *poena/culpa* distinction are found in II *Sent*., d. 35, q. 1, a. 1; d. 37, q. 3, a. 2 (*Scriptum super Sententiis*, ed. Mandonnet and Moos [Paris: Lethielleux, 1929]); *STh* I, q. 48, aa. 5-6; and *Comp. Theol.* I, cc. 119-22 (Leonine ed. [Rome, 1979], 42:125-26). The distinction made is the same in each place.

[52] For a clear presentation of the three criteria, see Koritansky, *Thomas Aquinas and the Philosophy of Punishment*, chap. 4.

[53] *De Malo*, q. 1, a. 4 (Leonine ed., 23:20, ll. 140-43). See also *ScG* III, c. 141 ([Rome: Commissio Leonina, 1926], 14:424-25) on the difference and the order of punishments.

[54] *De Malo*, q. 1, a. 4 (Leonine ed., 23:20, ll. 153-57). See also *ScG* III, c. 142 (Leonine ed., 14:426-27).

[55] *De Malo*, q. 1, a. 4 (Leonine ed., 23:20, ll. 167-71).

[56] *De Malo*, q. 1, a. 5, ad 7 (Leonine ed., 23:25, ll. 325-26): "set potius e conuerso ideo infertur malum pene ad cohercendam et ordinandum malitiam culpe."

[57] *De Malo*, q. 1, a. 4 (Leonine ed., 23:20, ll. 179-81): "ex malo actionis quod est culpa, sequitur malum agentis quod est pena, diuina prouidentia culpam per penam ordinante."

[58] See *De Malo*, q. 1, a. 5, ad 6 (Leonine ed., 23:25, ll. 318-22).

offense, the remaining disorder creates a "debt" of punishment (*debitum poenae*).[59]

While Thomas clearly sees *poena* as something that can be intended in a virtuous way, he nonetheless classifies it as *malum*, insofar as it is a privation, the loss of a good, something painful to the one suffering it. In this sense, *poena* is something evil and hence not willed for its own sake. As pains, *poenae* are not willed *per se*.[60] However, *poena* takes away a good in order to bring about a greater good, the just order disturbed by wrongdoing. This good is what is willed *per se* in choosing to punish. Punishment, then, like the associated emotion of anger, has a dual object: a loss to another, an evil, which cannot be willed for its own sake; and a good, which is willed for its own sake.[61]

The second characteristic of *poena* is its being *contra voluntatem*. In his discussion of the evil of *poena*, Thomas points out that something may be contrary to someone's will in three ways: actually, habitually, or according to natural inclination. Something is contrary to a person's actual will when he knowingly endures something contrary to what he wills. For example, someone is convicted of theft and spends a year in prison, when he would rather be able to move about freely. Second, something is contrary to a person's habitual will when he is deprived of something that would be contrary to his will, if he knew about the loss. For example, a son is deprived, against his habitual will, of his inheritance, even if he does not actually know of the loss. Third, something is contrary to a person's natural inclination when it is contrary to those goods toward which the human will is inclined by nature, even if it is

[59] *STh* I-II, q. 87, a. 6: "Unde patet quod, cessante actu peccati vel iniuriae illatae, adhuc remanet debitum poenae." The alternative phrase Thomas often uses is "reatus poenae," as in a. 1 of the same question.

[60] V *Nic. Ethic.*, lect. 16: "For *poenae* are not willed by the lawgiver on their own account (per se), but like a kind of medicine for sin" ("Non enim poenae sunt per se intentae a legislatore, sed quasi medicina quaedam peccatorum") (*Sententia libri Ethicorum*, ed. Spiazzi [Turin and Rome: Marietti, 1949], 298b [n. 1089]).

[61] On anger as the desire for punishment, see *STh* II-II, q. 158, a. 2. See also Nicholas Lombardo, O.P., *The Logic of Desire* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 66.

not contrary to the person's actual or habitual will, as when "someone who does not will to have virtue is habitually deprived of virtue, though the natural inclination of his will tends to the good of virtue."[62] *Poena* is contrary to the will in at least one of these three ways. This "contrariness" constitutes the bitterness of punishment.[63]

The final characteristic of *poena* is its being something received rather than done, a passion rather than an action. Thomas says that a fault produces a debt of punishment in the wrongdoer.[64] Moral fault, he explains, has two aspects: the actual wrong committed (*actus culpae*) and the effect this wrong leaves in the soul (*macula sequens*).[65] Even when the person is no longer actually engaged in doing wrong, the disordered state remains, and this disorder is what *poena* addresses. Thomas describes three orders disrupted by a moral fault, to which correspond three *poenae*: (1) the internal order of the human soul under reason (virtue), (2) the order of human society under designated human beings (familial, civic, ecclesiastical), and (3) the order of all things under divine providence.[66] In the internal order, a penalty for fault, the prick of conscience (*conscientiae remorsus*), follows from knowledge of the fault.[67] In the social order, the punishment is determined and inflicted by human authorities according to what is customary in the time and

[62] *De Malo*, q. 1, a. 4 (Leonine ed., 23:20, ll. 157-68): "Sciendum tamen est quod pena tripliciter repugnat uoluntati: quandoque quidem uoluntati actuali, sicut cum quis se sciente sustinet aliquam penam; quandoque uero est contra uoluntatem habitualem tantum, sicut cum alicui ignoranti subtrahitur aliquod bonum de quo doleret si sciret; quandoque uero solum contra naturalem inclinationem uoluntatis, sicut cum quis priuatur habitu uirtutis qui uirtutem habere non uult, set tamen naturalis inclinatio uoluntatis est ad bonum uirtutis."

[63] Finnis points out that this is in contrast to the idea of Nietzsche, Bentham, and others that (physical or exterior) pain itself is the essence of punishment ("Retribution," 97-98).

[64] *STh* I-II, q. 87, a. 1.

[65] *STh* I-II, q. 87, a. 6.

[66] *STh* I-II, q. 87, a. 1: "Unde secundum tres ordines quibus subditur humana voluntas, triplici poena potest homo puniri."

[67] Ibid.

place,[68] inflicting losses either to external or to bodily goods. In the order of divine providence, there are both temporal and eternal *poenae* inflicted by God.[69]

In summary, "the essence of punishments . . . is that they subject offenders to something contrary to their wills."[70] In what sense (or senses) may this same reality be described as medicine?

V. Punishment as Medicine

Thomas follows Aristotle[71] in describing punishment (both in the narrow and in the broad senses treated above) with the use of medicinal imagery. In the discussions of *poena* in his theological summaries,[72] and in the longer discussion in the *Disputed Questions on Evil*,[73] Thomas is consistent in his use of the medical analogy that he takes from book II of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, where Aristotle says that "virtue has to do with pleasure and pain . . . [an] indication of [which] is the fact that pain is the medium of punishment; for punishment is a sort of medicine, and it is the nature of medicine to work by means of

[68] See *STh* I-II, qq. 95-97, especially q. 97, a. 3, on the change in human law through custom.

[69] *ScG* III, c. 140 (Leonine ed., 14:422-23); and IV, c. 91 (Leonine ed., 15:284-86).

[70] Finnis, "Retribution," 98. This formula captures all three criteria, since being "subjected" implies a passion, while "offender" presupposes someone guilty of intentional wrong (*culpa*).

[71] There have been a number of studies on Aristotle's use of medical imagery in his ethical thought. See Werner Jaeger, "Aristotle's Use of Medicine As Model of Method in His Ethics," *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 77, part 1 (1957): 54-61; G. E. R. Lloyd, "The Role of Medical and Biological Analogies in Aristotle's Ethics," *Phronesis* 13 (1968): 68-83; M. Seidler, "The Medical Paradigm in Aristotelian Ethics," *The Thomist* 42 (1978): 400-433.

[72] II *Sent*., d. 36, q. 1, a. 3, arg. 3; d. 42, q. 1, a. 2; III *Sent*., d. 19, q. 1, a. 3, qcla. 2. *STh* I-II, q. 87, a. 8; II-II, q. 39, a. 2, ad 1; a. 4, ad 3; q. 43, a. 7, ad 1; q. 66, a. 6, ad 2; q. 99, a. 4; q. 108, a. 4; *ScG* III, c. 158; *Comp. Theol.* I, c. 121, c. 172. In many of these places, Thomas does not cite Aristotle by name, but the notion is clearly the same one he derives from the *Ethics*.

[73] *De Malo*, q. 2, a. 10, ad 4 (without mentioning Aristotle).

opposites."[74] Thomas references this passage often and applies it to many specific questions, for example when explaining why one ought to correct a sinner privately before denouncing him publicly,[75] why it can be just for public authority to execute,[76] and in discussing the doctrine of purgatory.[77]

For a richer understanding of the medical image, a brief glance at medieval medicine is in order. Although Thomas does not seem to have caught much of his teacher Albert's interest in the actual science of medicine, he does make liberal use of a handful of traditional definitions and examples, gathered from ancient medical science and possibly also from Avicenna's *Canon of Medicine*.[78] He accepts the traditional definition of medicine as the knowledge of health and sickness (*scientia sani et aegri*),[79] and of health as a balanced mixture of humors (*contemperatio humorum*).[80] This definition (which will have implications for the analogy to punishment), presupposes a view

[74] Aristotle, *Nic. Ethic.* 2.3.1104b15, 17-18 (trans. Henry Rackham [New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1926]). Aristotle uses a form of the verb κολάζειν, "to chastise, punish" (Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*, rev. Henry Stuart Jones [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940], s.v. "κολάζω"). Later, in discussing temperance (3.12.1119a22), Aristotle uses a related term, ἀκολασία, to describe the excess in pleasure-seeking (Rackham translates it "profligacy").

[75] *STh* II-II, q. 33, a. 7. See also *De Virtut.*, q. 3, a. 2, ad 12 (*Quaestiones disputatae de virtutibus* [Turin: Marietti, 1953]): "if a physician proceeds immediately to cut off a corrupt member, he acts incautiously, and may remove many members which could have been healed; but if he be wise, he begins with lighter remedies."

[76] *STh* II-II, q. 64, aa. 2-3.

[77] IV *Sent.*, d. 17, q. 3, a. 5, qcla. 2.

[78] Avicenna's *Canon of Medicine* was known to Thomas, and is cited by name in at least one place: *De Verit.*, q. 2, a. 8. However, the reference is a very general one from the beginning of the treatise. Mark Jordan notes that Thomas's references to medical authors, both ancient and medieval, are "precisely the sort of aphoristic locus easily learned at second-hand" ("Medicine and Natural Philosophy in Aquinas" in *Thomas von Aquin: Werk und Wirkung im Licht neuerer Forschungen* [New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1988], 236). It seems reasonable to suppose that Albertus Magnus was the proximate source of Thomas's knowledge of these authors.

[79] VIII *Phys.*, lect. 2 (*Commentaria in octo libros Physicorum* [Turin: Marietti, 1954], n. 7).

[80] II *Phys.*, lect. 4 (Marietti ed., n. 5); VII *Phys.*, lect. 5 (Marietti ed., n. 6).

of the body as containing four bodily humors (blood, black bile, yellow bile, and phlegm) which produce health when they exist in balanced proportion, and illness when the balance is disturbed by an excess or deficiency in one of them. The physician, Thomas notes, "knows health as the form, and cholera and phlegm as the matter in which health exists, for health consists in the proper mixture of humors."[81] The medical art, in this view, attempts to get the body to produce more or less of the imbalanced humor. To put it another way, medicine acts by way of instrumental efficient cause in relation to the bodily powers which are the primary efficient causes. The primary efficient cause of health is not the *medicus*, but nature itself, which medicine assists: "the art [of medicine] does not cause health principally, but as something helping nature and ministering to it."[82] Medicine, then, is the art which aids nature in producing or preserving a proper balance of humors in the body.

Besides this general use of *medicina* to refer to the healing art, Thomas also uses the term in the narrower sense of a specific remedy or treatment, usually painful or unpleasant; this corresponds to our use of "medicine" to mean either the art as a whole or a specific substance to be applied or ingested as a remedy. Both senses of *medicina* are relevant to the dictum "punishments are like medicines." First, *poena* is like medicine in the narrow sense, because it is a painful or unpleasant remedy, something undesirable in itself, and chosen only as instrumental to something else. Second, drawing on the broad sense, the infliction of *poena* is like an act of the medical art which determines and applies such remedies. We now turn to a closer examination of these two related features of the medical analogy: its instrumentality and its artificiality.

[81] II *Phys*., lect. 4 ([Rome: Commissio Leonina, 1884], 2:65): "sicut medicus cognoscit sanitatem ut formam, et choleram et phlegma et huiusmodi sicut materiam in qua est sanitas, nam in contemperatione humorum sanitas consistit."

[82] *In De Sensu et sensato*, tract. 1, proem. (*Sentencia libri De sensu et sensato*, [Rome: Commissio Leonina, 1985], 45/2:9, ll. 310-12): "set quia ars non principaliter causat sanitatem set quasi adiuuans naturam et est ministrans ei."

VI. Punishment as Instrumental Good

Punishment, like medicine, is not desired for its own sake. In his commentary on the text of Aristotle from which the dictum is taken, Thomas says:

> As medicines employ certain bitter drinks and remove agreeable things for the restoration of health, so also punishments are like medicines for the restoration of virtue, operating through the removal of pleasant things or the application of painful things. For medicines naturally work through contraries, as when the body's heat is excessive, physicians apply cold things.[83]

We have already seen in the definition of *poena* in *De Malo* that punishment is by definition *contra voluntatem*.[84] In both medicine and punishment, the bitter remedy is desired not for itself, but for the sake of an end: "a sick person not only wants to attain health, but even wants to drink bitter medicine, which he would not otherwise will, that he may attain health."[85] As medicine is applied to a bodily illness, so punishment is applied to a spiritual sickness, namely, to sin (*peccatum*).[86] Since the root of sin is a disordered will, from which disordered acts proceed, its remedy cannot but be "against" this will. Punishment must be *contra voluntatem* in the way that medicine must be *contra morbum*. The description in both cases does not name the good to be attained, but the defect to be corrected.

[83] II *Nic. Ethic.* lect. 3 (Marietti ed., n. 270): "Sicut enim medicinae ad sanitatem restituendam sunt quaedam amarae potiones exhibitae et delectabiles subtractae, ita etiam poenae sunt quaedam medicinae ad reparandam virtutem. Quae quidem fiunt per subtractionem aliquarum delectationum vel adhibitionem aliquarum tristitiarum. Quia medicinae natae sunt fieri per contraria, sicut quando superabundat calor medici adhibent frigida." The idea of punishment being the medicine of fault is already present in II *Sent.*, d. 36, q. 1, a. 3, arg. 3 and ad 3.

[84] See also II *Sent.*, d. 36, a. 3 (Mandonnet, ed., 928).

[85] *De Malo*, q. 3, a. 12 (Leonine ed., 23:92, ll. 126-29): "sicut infirmus non solum uult consequi sanitatem set etiam uult bibere medicinam amaram quam alias nollet, ad hoc ut sanitatem consequatur."

[86] E.g. "morbus spiritualis hominis viatoris, scilicet peccatum" (*De Verit.*, q. 24, a. 11, s.c. 4 (*Quaestiones disputatae de veritate* [Rome: Commissio Lenonia, 1973], 22/3:710, ll. 106-7).

One consequence of the instrumental character of punishment is that if a particular punishment is foreseen not to be conducive to the end, it ought not to be chosen, since instruments are only desired insofar as they contribute to bringing about the good at which they aim. A particularly clear example occurs in a question about the sin of scandal, where Thomas asks whether it is right to forgo spiritual goods to avoid the risk of scandal. In one of the replies, he explains:

> The infliction of punishments is not sought for its own sake; on the contrary *poenae* are inflicted like medicines for restraining sins. And therefore *poenae* are just [*habent rationem iustitiae*] insofar as sins are restrained through them. But if it were manifest that more and greater sins [*peccata*] would follow from the infliction of *poenae*, then their infliction would not be just [*non continebitur sub iustitia*].[87]

Note that although the punishment in question is *deserved*, Thomas maintains that it should not be inflicted, if it can reasonably be anticipated that it will have no effect in "restraining sins": to inflict such a punishment would no longer belong to justice. This is a clear illustration of the idea that, for Thomas, reciprocity is not the same as just punishment. However, the medicinal approach does not in all cases mean favoring a lesser punishment. In some cases, Thomas argues, justice may prompt one to multiply or increase deserved punishments, precisely because "the punishments of the present life are medicinal, and hence when one punishment is not enough to coerce a person, another is added, as physicians prescribe diverse bodily medicines when one is ineffective . . . but if one punishment suffices, others ought not to be added."[88]

Another striking example of this consequence of the instrumental nature of *poena* occurs in book 3 of the *Summa contra Gentiles*, in a chapter on "how man is freed from sin." Thomas argues that in the ordinary course of things man is not

[87] *STh* II-II, q. 43, a. 7, ad 1. This passage is part of a question on whether one ought to forgo spiritual goods in order to avoid scandal. Thomas argues that although one ought to avoid being the cause of scandal wherever possible, one cannot omit pursuing genuine spiritual goods simply for fear that others will take offense.

[88] *STh* II-II, q. 39, a. 4, ad 3.

freed from sin except through punishment, since it is not enough for the sin to be forgiven in order for the sinner to be truly freed from that sin (i.e., if the sinner is still inclined to the same sin in the future, he is not yet really free). He adds:

> We must observe, however, that when the mind is turned away from sin, its displeasure with sin and the cleaving of its mind to God may be so fervent, that the obligation to a certain punishment does not remain. For as may be gathered from what was said above, punishment which someone suffers after the remission of sin is necessary *in order that the mind adhere more firmly to the good*, man being castigated through punishments, which are like medicines, and that the order of justice be preserved, since he who sinned, receives a punishment. But the love of God [*dilectio ad Deum*] suffices to fix the mind of man firmly in the good, especially if it is fervent, and displeasure with one's past fault, when intense, brings great sorrow. Therefore through fervent love of God and hatred of past sin, the necessity of satisfactory or purgative punishment is removed, and even if such fervor be not such as completely to remove punishment, yet the more fervent it is, the less punishment will be needed [*tamen, quanto vehementius fuerit, tanto minus de poena sufficiet*].[89]

This passage qualifies the assertion two paragraphs earlier that "the order of justice demands that punishment be awarded for sin."[90] Evidently, this is not to be taken in the sense of absolute reciprocity. While ordinarily the order of justice is served when punishments are meted out for offenses, there will be times when justice is not served by punishing, either because the punishment would produce greater evils (as in the example of scandal) or because the penitent's "detestation of sin" and his "clinging to God" accomplishes the very "order of justice" which punishment intends to effect. One does not continue to use the instrument when the instrument's end has been achieved.

[89] *ScG* III, c. 158 (Leonine ed., 14:463a22-b11).

[90] Ibid. (Leonine ed., 14:462b21-22): "Ordo iustitiae hoc requirit ut peccato poena reddatur."

VII. Art and Nature in the Determination of Punishment

The second feature of punishment highlighted by the medical analogy is what was called above its "artificiality," by which is meant those features of determinations of practical reason which resemble the features of an art. Unlike the speculative sciences, which aim at correct knowledge in itself, practical forms of knowing aim at an activity or a product achieved by means of correct knowledge.[91] The end in such knowing is not achieved in the art's exercise itself, but in its product. Thus medical knowledge is pursued for the sake of medical practice, and ultimately for the health of those being treated by such practice. Likewise, political knowledge is pursued for the sake of political activity (e.g., legislating), and ultimately for the good of the community of persons subject to such legislation. While the knowledge required for politics aims at action rather than at a product, and is thus a species of prudence rather than of art, the two genera of practical knowing bear some key similarities.

As a practical form of knowing, medicine aims at an end already determined and therefore not part of the deliberation of its practitioners, namely, the good of health.[92] Thomas describes the good sought in punishment in a number of ways: the restraining of sin,[93] the order of justice,[94] virtue,[95] and peace.[96] Ultimately, these descriptions do not indicate different aims, but different aspects of one and the same aim, for the restraining of sin is simply the negative condition for virtue, and virtue is the necessary condition for peace, which Thomas identifies with

[91] See VI *Nic. Ethic.*, lect. 3 (Marietti ed., n. 1150).

[92] "In the physician's action, health is the end; therefore health is not subject to the choice of the physician, but is rather his starting point [*principium*]" (*STh* I-II, q. 13, a. 3).

[93] *STh* II-II, q. 43, a. 7, ad 1: "poena infliguntur ut medicinae quaedam ad cohibendum peccata."

[94] *ScG* III, c. 158 (Leonine ed., 14:463b1-2): "ut etiam ordo iustitiae servetur, dum qui peccavit, sustinet poenam."

[95] II *Nic. Ethic.*, lect. 3 (Marietti ed., n. 270).

[96] See also *STh* I-II, q. 98, a. 1: "For the end of human law is the peace of the temporal city" ("Legis enim humanae finis est temporalis tranquilitas civitatis").

just order. "Peace" is perhaps the most all-encompassing name for this end, and is especially suggested by the medical analogy, given the humoral understanding of health described above. Thus Thomas can say that "as the physician in his action intends health, which consists in the ordered concord of humors, so the ruler of the city in his action intends peace, which consists in the ordered concord of citizens."[97] In both medicine and ruling, the end is determined prior to any deliberation:

> This is what the ruler of a people ought above all to intend, that the unity of peace be procured. Nor does one rightly consider whether he ought to work for peace among the people subject to him, any more than the physician about whether to heal the sick person in his care. For no one ought to take counsel about the end which he ought to intend, but rather about those things which are for the sake of the end.[98]

While the end is given, the means are subject to deliberation, and it is precisely excellence in such deliberation that makes someone a possessor of art (or prudence). Unlike the necessary conclusions of science, these deliberations are contingent, adapted to the particular nature of the material, the instruments available, and so on. If there are necessary aspects of art, these are derived from nature, for example, that clay can only be shaped before it is baked in the oven.

In his choice of means, the skilled physician applies as much medicine as is necessary to accomplish the end of healing, not as much medicine as he can, since medicine is not intended *per se*,

[97] *ScG* III, c. 146 (Leonine ed., 14:434a38-42): "Sicut medicus in sua operatione intendit sanitatem, quae consitit in ordinata concordia humorum, ita rector civitatis intendit in sua operatione pacem, quae consistit in *civium ordinata concordia*."

[98] *De Regno* I, c. 2 (*De regno ad regem Cypri* [Rome: Commissio Leonina, 1979], ll. 13-19): "Hoc igitur est ad quod maxime rector multitudinis intendere debet, ut pacis unitatem procuret; nec recte consiliatur an pacem faciat in multitudine sibi subiecta, sicut nec medicus an sanet infirmum sibi commissum: nullus enim consiliari debet de fine quem intendere debet, sed de hiis que sunt ad finem."

but on account of an end.[99] As Thomas explains in his commentary on Aristotle's *Politics*:

> The desire for that which is for the sake of the end is not unlimited, but has a terminus according to the rule and measure provided by the end, as the medicinal art tends toward healing without limit, since it produces as much health as it can, but does not give as much medicine as it can; rather it gives according to the measure of its utility for healing.[100]

One might say that the physician applies as much medicine as is proportionate to the illness, but not the illness considered abstractly, that is, not simply as an instance of this or that species of illness. The skilled physician does not consult only the nature of the illness in deciding what and how much to prescribe, but also the condition and circumstances of the patient. For example, a cancer treatment that would be proportionate to a forty-year-old patient may not be proportionate to an eighty-year-old suffering from the same disease. The physician chooses the medicine proportionate to the illness, considered concretely, as the condition of this particular patient at this particular time.

Similarly, in political matters, such as the choice of a particular punishment, deliberations are contingent. Punish-

[99] *STh* II-II, q. 43, a. 7, ad 1: "The infliction of *poenae* is not considered on account of itself, but rather *poenae* are inflicted like medicines for restraining sins" ("Ad primum ergo dicendum quod poenarum inflictio non est propter se expetenda, sed poenae infliguntur ut medicinae quaedam ad cohibendum peccata"). See also *STh* II-II, q. 184, a. 3; q. 188, a. 7, ad 1; *STh* III, q. 15, a. 6, ad 4; V *Nic. Ethic.*, lect. 16 (Marietti ed., n. 1089); and *In II Cor.*, c. 7, lect. 2.

[100] I *Polit.*, lect. 8 (*Sententia libri Politicorum* [Rome: Commissio Leonina, 1971], 48:105, ll. 15-21): "desiderium autem eius quod est ad finem non est in infinitum, sed habet terminum secundum regulam et mensuram finis: sicut ars medicinalis intendit ad sanandum in infinitum cum inducit sanitatem quantamcumque potest, set medicinam non dat quantamcumque potest set secundum mensuram que est utilis ad sanandum." Here Thomas is talking about the desire for money. He uses similar medical comparisons to illustrate the need for discretion in performing exterior acts of piety such as fasts and vigils, which are desired not for their own sake, but for the sake of interior acts of faith, hope, and charity, of which we ought to have as much as we can (*In Rom.*, c. 12, lect. 1) Naturally there is a difference between things like money, which are good, but merely in an instrumental way, and painful things, which are bad considered in themselves but may be instrumental to achieving a good. Thus, punishments are more like medicines than like money.

ment, in fact, is the example Thomas uses of a determination of natural law. There is no natural or necessary punishment for a particular crime, which is why mitigating or increasing punishment according to the circumstances may be just. This does not make the choice arbitrary or irrational, merely contingent.[101] As the physician prescribing medicine has the health of the patient in view, so the one determining punishments has the peace of the community in view. He does not seek to inflict as much punishment as possible, but as much as is necessary to accomplish the end. Thus the correct model is not one of pure reciprocity (*contrapassum*), the view Aristotle attributes to the Pythagoreans, in which the punishment is to match the severity and kind of offense as exactly as possible.[102] Reciprocity is a part of the deliberation about punishment, but is of itself an inadequate measure, as Thomas explains when commenting on this passage:

> [Aristotle] says that in many cases such vengeance [of strict reciprocity] is found to be discordant with true justice. For example if a ruler were to strike a private person, justice does not demand that the ruler be struck back, and similarly, if someone strikes a ruler, he ought not only to be struck, but to be punished more severely.[103]

A just punishment considers not only the species of wrong, but also the condition of the offender and the one offended, and other circumstances. This by no means does away with proportionality, as Steven Long rightly points out: to say that a determination is not necessary is not to say that it is arbitrary.[104] Long wants to preserve an aspect of necessity in the

[101] Stephen Long, "*Evangelium Vitae*, St. Thomas Aquinas, and the Death Penalty," *The Thomist* 63 (1999): 527-28.

[102] Aristotle, *Nic. Ethic.* 5.5.1132b21-24 (trans. Irwin).

[103] V *Ethic.*, lect. 8 (Marietti ed., n. 968): "dicit quod in multis locis talis vindicta invenitur dissonare verae iustitiae, ut si aliquis in principatu constitutus percusserit aliquam privatam personam, non requirit hoc iustitia quod princeps repercutiatur, et similiter, si aliquis percutiat principem, oportet quod non solum percutiatur, sed quod etiam gravius puniatur."

[104] Long, "*Evangelium Vitae*, St. Thomas Aquinas, and the Death Penalty," 528.

determination of punishment, suggesting that some determinations might be "necessitated" insofar as "given a certain second matter, there is only one way to achieve some given effect."[105] Yet since the lack of necessity is precisely what causes the need for determination, this is puzzling. In the determinations of art, whatever necessity exists arises from the natural materials being used in the art; likewise, in the determination of punishment, whatever necessity exists arises from the nature of the human acts in question (both the wrongful acts to be punished, and the range of acts by which such wrongs can be punished). Long conceives of determination as a kind of particularization of a (universal) form, a comparison suggested by Thomas in the question on human law. However, in Thomas's use of this comparison, the form is not just being made concrete (particularized); rather, that which is general (e.g., the form of house) is being specified (to a particular *kind* of house).[106] Again, the need for such specification arises precisely because the generality belonging to natural law cannot be particularized without first being specified, and this specification is the work of prudence.[107]

In summary, reciprocity plays the role in punishment that pathology plays in medical treatment. That is, it provides the one making the determination certain boundaries within which he must make his judgment. The physician must know the nature and extent of the disease he is treating, and the types of treatments that can be used for this disease; likewise, the one punishing must know the nature of the crime he is punishing and the range of penalties available to him. Such knowledge

[105] Ibid., 529.

[106] *STh* I-II, q. 95, a. 2: "The second way [in which precepts are derived from natural law] is like that in the arts when general forms [*formae communes*] are determined to something specific [*ad aliquid speciale*], as when an architect has to determine the general form of house to this or that shape of house."

[107] General precepts could also be specified by divine decree, as in the Mosaic Law. However, Thomas argues that the New Law, the Law of the Gospel, does not impose specific judicial precepts, leaving these to the determination of men (*STh* I-II, q. 108, a. 2, ad 4).

provides the basis for deliberation about treatment or about punishment, but it is not itself the determination.

VIII. *MINISTRA NATURAE*

The term that for Thomas captures the nature of the relationship between the practitioners both of art and of political prudence is *minister*. A minister is what Thomas calls *causa adiuvans*, a helping or assisting cause, for the minister is not the principal agent in those actions pertaining to his ministry, but an assisting cause, one who "works not for his own end, but for another's."[108] This is true of the physician: medicine assists nature in achieving nature's end, health. In medical acts, Thomas notes, the principal agent (*agens principale*) is not the physician: "Medicine is like an instrument to nature, which is the principal agent in causing health."[109] "The physician heals as exterior assistant, and nature as an interior agent."[110] Medical actions assist the body in achieving health by removing obstacles, promoting some natural processes and inhibiting others, and, in general, by helping those internal causes which are primarily responsible for health. Thus the medical art is called by Thomas *ministra naturae* since "it is nature that heals, to which medicine is a minister."[111] And the physician himself is a minister to nature (*minister naturae*) "by

[108] II *Phys*., lect. 5 (Leonine ed., 2:70): "the efficient cause is fourfold, namely, perfecting, preparing, helping, and counseling" ("quadruplex est causa efficiens, scilicet perficiens, praeparans, adiuvans et consilians. . . . Adiuvans vero est, quod non operatur ad proprium finem, sed ad finem alterius").

[109] *De Pot*., q. 6, a. 5, ad 2 (*Quaestiones disputatae de potentia* ([Paris, 1883], 1:309): "quia medicinae corpori humano exhibitae operantur ad sanitatem quasi instrumenta; natura autem est sicut agens principale."

[110] *Q. D. De Anima,* q. 4, ad 6 (*Quaestiones disputatae de anima* [Rome: Commissio Leonina, 1996], 24/1:36, ll. 246-47): "medicus sanat sicut exterius aminiculans, natura autem tamquam interius agens"

[111] *De Verit.*, q. 11, a. 1 (quoted below). See also *De Spir. Creat.*, a. 9, ad 7 (*Quaestio disputata de spiritualibus creaturis* [Rome: Commissio Leonina, 2000], 24/2:98, ll. 475-79).

strengthening nature and applying medicines, which nature uses like instruments for healing."[112]

We can see evidence of a similar thought in the use of terms like "prime minister," though the reason may be obscured by the same contractarian way of thinking about political life that affected Finnis's account of punishment. For under that view, it is not obvious what prior and "natural" reality is being served by the political agent, unless it is simply the will of the majority. For Aristotle and Thomas, on the other hand, the political body is a natural entity, insofar as it is the term of a natural process,[113] a process that is rooted in, and provides the end for, that activity which belongs to man by virtue of his rational nature: speech. The capacity for language is actualized in deliberation about what is just and unjust. "But communication about such things makes the household and the city. Therefore man is naturally a domestic and civic animal."[114]

Yet civic society is not produced by nature as a complete thing; it requires human establishment, involving deliberation and choice, and thus can reasonably be called a work of art. In considering this portion of Aristotle's *Politics*, Thomas comments:

> [Aristotle] treats of the institution of the civic community, concluding from the foregoing that among all men there is a certain natural impulse toward the civic community, as there also is toward the virtues. Even so, as the virtues are acquired through human efforts, as he says in the second book of the *Ethics*, so also are civic communities instituted by human activity. And the one who

[112] *De Verit.*, q. 11, a. 1 (Leonine ed., 22/2:351, ll. 295-99): "Sicut medicus in sanatione est minister naturae quae principaliter operatur, confortando naturam et apponendo medicinas quibus velut instrumentis natura utitur ad sanationem." Here Thomas is comparing the physician to the teacher, who acts as the instrumental cause of the coming to be of knowledge in the student.

[113] "There is in everyone by nature an impulse toward this [political] sort of community" (Aristotle, *Politics* 1.2.1253a30 [trans. Carnes Lord, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013)]).

[114] I *Polit.*, lect. 1 (Leonine ed., 48:79a152-54): "Set communicatio in istis facit domum et ciuitatem; ergo homo est naturaliter animal domesticum et ciuile."

first instituted the civic community was the cause of the greatest goods for man.[115]

Even though the civic community is natural, it still requires "makers"; it is thus a work both of nature and of art. The political "art," like the medical, ministers as an assisting cause to a more primary, natural activity, found in the human inclination to communicate about what is just and unjust. From this point of view, in contrast to the contractarian view, the work of political "experts" is to help direct the inclination toward social life more effectively toward its given end. One of the ways in which this is done is by prescribing particular punishments for particular crimes. Thomas calls this *determinatio*, and punishment, as we have seen, is his prime example for such judgments.[116]

IX. "*DEI MINISTER EST*"

As noted at the beginning of this essay, contemporary literature on punishment revolves around the task of "justifying" punishment, that is, of defending it against the charge that acts of punishing are acts of injustice.[117] Attempting to give a Thomistic "justification" of punishment is somewhat like attempting to give a Thomistic theodicy (it tries to make Thomas answer a question which his own account would render

[115] Ibid. (Leonine ed., 48:79a200-208): "Deinde . . . agit de institutione ciuitatis, concludens ex premissis quod in omnibus hominibus inest quidam naturalis impetus ad communitatem ciuitatis, sicut et ad uirtutes; set tamen sicut uirtutes acquiruntur per exercitium humanum, ut dicitur in II Ethicorum, ita ciuitates sunt institute humana industria. Ille autem qui primo instituit ciuitatem fuit causa hominibus maximorum bonorum."

[116] "Punishment is the tradition's stock example of the need for *determinatio*, a process of choosing freely from a range of reasonable options none of which is simply rationally superior to the others" (Finnis, "Retribution," 103).

[117] Though Finnis presents his reading of Thomas in dialogue with contemporary accounts of punishment (Hart, Morris, etc.), his starting point is different. He challenges Nietzsche's genealogy of punishment, providing an alternative account of what punishment in fact is.

incoherent).[118] For since Thomas takes the notion that "punishment is due to sin" as a first principle in moral reasoning, he cannot also prove that punishment is just; this would amount to demonstrating the indemonstrable. What needs to be proven is not that punishment *in general* is just, but that this or that punishment is just, or that this or that person ought to punish. In other words, it is not a matter of justification but of determination.

If there is a sense in which Thomas is interested in "justifying" punishment, then, it is in justifying the authority of human agents to punish. Of course, if human punishments were the only punishments there were, this would be a distinction without a difference. And this brings us to the crucial point. The ultimate reason Thomas is not a "retributivist" in the modern sense is not that he rejects the importance, the necessity, and the goodness of retribution, but that he does not think of retribution as something primarily found in human institutions or accomplished by human agents. In his view, retribution belongs primarily and properly to God, a view founded in revelation and supported by the Fathers.[119]

In Thomas, the derivative nature of human punishment can be seen in the treatment of the virtue of *vindicatio* or just vengeance. The first article of question 108 in the *Secunda*

[118] Edward Feser argues that the logical problem of evil (and the evidential problem) is based on a category error. See his "The Thomistic Dissolution of the Logical Problem of Evil" *Religions* 12:268 (2021) (https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/12/4/268).

[119] See Anselm, *Cur Deus homo* I, c. 12: Presented with the objection that since the Lord commands us in the Gospel to forgive all wrongs against us, that God himself cannot be less merciful than he commands us to be, Anselm says that "God is giving us this teaching in order that we should not presume to do something which belongs to God alone. For it belongs to no one to take vengeance except to him who is Lord of all. I should explain that when earthly powers take action in this way in accordance with right, it is the Lord himself, by whom they have been appointed for the task, who is acting." (Anselm of Canterbury, *The Major Works*, ed. Brian Davies and G. R. Evans [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008], 285) See also Augustine, *Letter* 100, n. 1: "We [Christians] are not looking for vengeance on earth over our enemies . . . we do want public authority to act against them, but not to make use of the extreme punishment [of death] which they deserve" (*Letters of Saint Augustine, Vol. II (83-130)*, vol. 18 of *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation* [Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1953], 142).

secundae asks whether *vindicatio* is "permitted" or "licit" (*licita*). After rejecting the desire for vengeance based on hatred and intending the harm of another as the end, Thomas concludes that there is a licit *intentio vindicandis*, which is not *per se mala*:

If the intention of the one seeking vengeance is moved mainly toward something good to be achieved through punishment of the sinner, for instance the amendment of the sinner, or at least toward his being restrained and the peace of others, and toward the conservation of justice and the honor of God, such vindication can be licit, other due circumstances being observed.[120]

Apart from the argument itself, we must note the significance of asking whether *vindicatio* is licit, since this is not a question asked about every virtue.[121]

In one sense, as Thomas says elsewhere, "everything contrary to a precept of the natural law is illicit,"[122] but that is not the sense intended here. Thomas is inquiring whether something violates divine law, and more specifically, the New Law. This is a question that only arises in the presence of an explicit divine injunction, whether in the form of a command or a counsel.[123]

[120] *STh* II-II, q. 108: "Si vero intentio vindicantis feratur principaliter ad aliquod bonum, ad quod pervenitur per poenam peccantis, puta ad emendationem peccantis, vel saltem ad cohibeitionem eius et quietem aliorum, et ad iustitiae conservationem et Dei honorem, potest esse vindicatio licita, aliis debitis circumstantiis servatis."

[121] Most often the first article of a question in the *Secunda secundae* begins with asking whether the quality in question is a virtue, or whether it is a specific virtue. In a handful of questions this consideration is preceded by a question about licitness: whether it is licit to judge others (q. 60); whether it is licit to resist evildoers by war, killing, and other forms of violence (qq. 40, 64, 65); whether it is licit to take oaths (qq. 89-90), to possess property (q. 66), and to maintain perpetual continence (q. 152). Two other questions include similar queries about acts or passions which are the matter for a virtue: q. 149, a. 3 asks whether the use of wine is licit, which pertains to the virtue of sobriety; and q. 158, a. 1 asks whether the passion of anger can be licit, which relates to the virtue of *vindicatio*.

[122] *STh* II-II, q. 152, a. 2, obj. 1: "Omne enim quod contrariatur praecepto legis naturae est illicitum."

[123] In some of the cases mentioned above, the Lord's words seem to forbid something: judging others, killing, taking oaths, possessing property, drinking wine, being angry. In q. 152, he recommends something (perpetual continence) that would

We find that the questions about lawfulness all pertain to those evangelical teachings in which Jesus is said to fulfill the moral precepts of the old law.[124] For example, the question on oath-taking, after asking whether taking an oath (*iurare*) consists in invoking God as a witness (*STh* II-II, q. 89, a. 1), immediately proceeds to a consideration of the lawfulness of this practice. The reason is that a literal reading of Matthew 5:34 (and James 5:12) would conclude that oaths are altogether forbidden.[125] Thomas argues that oath-taking is not wrong, even though it can be used wrongly, and it is not altogether forbidden by the Lord's saying in the Gospel, although the evangelical teaching encourages a severe restriction to prevent irreverence and other faults. The Letter of James confirms this teaching.[126]

The discussion of the lawfulness of *vindicatio* in article 1 of question 108 follows a similar pattern. As in the article on the lawfulness of oath-taking, all of the objections are scriptural. Already in the Old Testament, we find a check on the appetite for vengeance in Deuteronomy 32:35. It would seem, as the first objection concludes, that to take vengeance is to usurp something that belongs properly to God, making it a vice against justice (failing to give what is owed, not to men, but to God).[127] This is made even clearer in the New Testament, as the third objection argues: "Vengeance is taken through punishments, from which servile fear is produced. But the new law is

seem to contradict a previous divine injunction ("Be fruitful and multiply" Gen. 1:28). But in each case, the question arises precisely because of explicit divine legislation.

[124] *In Matt*., c. 5, lect. 7 (Marietti ed., n. 476) (Lander, Wyo.: Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2013): "in prima adimplet legem quantum ad praecepta moralia."

[125] *STh* II-II, q. 89, a. 2, obj. 1: "For nothing which is prohibited in the divine law is licit. But oath-taking is prohibited in Matt 5:34, 'But I say to you, do not swear at all'" ("Nihil enim quod prohibetur in lege divina est licitum. Sed iuramentum prohibetur *Matth. 5, [34]: Ego dico vobis, non iurare omnino*").

[126] See *STh* II-II, q. 89, a. 2, ad 1.

[127] "Quicumque enim usurpat sibi quod Dei est, peccat. Sed vindicta pertinet ad Deum: dicitur enim *Deut. 32, [35], secundum aliam litteram: Mihi vindictam: et ego retribuam*. Ergo vindicta est illicita."

not a law of fear, but of love. . . . Therefore, at least in the New Testament, vengeance ought not to be taken."[128]

Note that even though Thomas indicates (in the *sed contra*) that *vindicatio* is not *per se malum*, and argues (in the *corpus*) that the intention in *vindicatio* may be virtuous and not sinful, he is not engaged in the kind of abstract justification that we find in the contemporary retributivists. That God himself takes vengeance is presumed (since it is evident from Scripture, both Old and New Testaments), and "nothing is to be expected from God except what is good," as the *sed contra* notes. The doubt is about whether it is right for human beings to take vengeance. Thomas argues that *vindicatio* may be permitted to men, so long as one intends the right thing, namely, not the pain to be inflicted on the sinner, but the good to be accomplished thereby. The one who does this "does not usurp what is proper to God," as the first objection suggests, "but uses the power divinely conceded to him."[129] Thomas grants the objector's major premise: vengeance does truly and properly belong to God. The reason men can take vengeance is indicated by St. Paul in Romans 13:4 (RSV): "But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he is the servant [διάκονός - Vulg. *minister*] of God to execute his wrath on the wrongdoer." In Romans 13:1-7, Paul teaches that all human authority is derived from God. To mete out deserved punishment is to exercise a power which belongs properly to God;[130] hence it is either a usurpation or an exercise of instrumental (ministerial) power.

[128] "Praeterea, vindicta per poenas fit, ex quibus causatur timor servilis. Sed lex nova non est lex timoris, sed amoris, ut Augustinus dicit, contra Adamantum. Ergo, ad minus in novo testamento, vindicta fieri non debet."

[129] *STh* II-II, q. 108, a. 1, ad 1: "non usurpat sibi quod Dei est, sed utitur potestate sibi divinitus concessa."

[130] *In Rom*., c. 13, lect. 1. See also *STh* II-II, q. 108, a. 1, ad 1. Thomas interprets the derivation of power from God in a metaphysical, not an historical sense. It is not necessary that the ruler be able to trace his authority back to an explicit divine appointment, as Sir Robert Filmer tried to do (John Locke's target in the *First Treatise of Government*). It must, however, be obtained lawfully, and "[observe] the precepts of divine justice" (*In Rom*., c. 13, lect. 1).

Not only is the authority to punish derived from God, it is also subject to divinely given limitations. The limitation in this case does not derive from a Benthamite calculus (because punishments are unpleasant, and pleasure is the ultimate good, one ought to reduce punishments to the absolute minimum necessary in order to prevent greater unpleasantness); nor does it arise from a Lockean premise of an individual right to punish malefactors which men relinquish to the civil authority in order to secure a happier life for themselves.[131] Unlike Locke, Thomas sees punishment as an exercise of political authority existing in the community as a whole, rather than a natural right existing in the individual.[132] For Thomas, the limitation on human punishment derives from reverence for the divine lawgiver, to whom punishment properly belongs, and depends on divine (revealed) law.[133]

[131] "And that all Men may be restrained from invading others Rights, and from doing hurt to one another, and the Law of Nature be observed, which willith the Peace and *Preservation of all Mankind*, the *Execution* of the Law of Nature is in that State, put into every Mans hands, whereby every one has a right to punish the transgressors of that Law to such a Degree, as may hinder its Violation" (John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008], II, §7, ll. 1-7) For Locke the right to punish is a natural, individual right.

[132] *STh* I-II, q. 97, a. 3, ad 3: "Therefore although it is not possible for individual persons to make law, the people as a whole can do so." In the case of punishment, which involves harming someone who is a part of the community, only the community has the authority to decide to sacrifice a part for the good of the whole (*STh* II-II, q. 64, a. 3, ad 3). Insofar as it is exercised by an individual ruler (see *STh* I-II, q. 105 on the superiority of monarchy), this individual acts on behalf of the entire people. And the precepts that he makes (*praecepta iudicialia*, as contrasted with *praecepta moralia*) are changeable, not being essential to justice in itself (*STh* I-II, q. 105, a. 2, ad 4).

[133] The idea that the human power to punish derives from God has scriptural roots beginning in the Book of Genesis with the divine injunction regarding Cain in Genesis 4:15. Cain's fear that "whoever finds me will kill me" can be cited as evidence of the natural tendency toward vengeance; the Lord's words show that this tendency is not simply to be acted upon. In fact, God explicitly forbids this by putting his mark on Cain, and it is not until after the Flood that the descendants of Noah are instructed: "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed" (Gen 9:6 [RSV]). According to some Scripture scholars, this "ancient legal formula . . . was probably originally intended to set limits to blood revenge" (*Collegeville Bible Commentary,* ed. Dianne Bergant and Robert J. Karris [Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1989], 49). "Modern scholars have pointed out that the text actually has a chiastic structure,

Regarding the limitations of human punishment, Thomas thinks that while human punishment aims to be proportional (this is included within the very *ratio* of punishment), it recognizes that "the punishments inflicted in the present life, whether by God or by man, do not always correspond to the gravity of the fault."[134] Only God can punish a wrongdoer exactly as he deserves; divine (eternal) retribution alone is properly and fully retributive, while at the same time being perfectly medicinal.[135] Not only are human beings lacking in knowledge of true desert, they also tend toward excess in punishing, an extreme that must be counteracted by restraint.[136]

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typical of Hebrew wisdom literature. Recent translations, including the NAB, indicate that the verse is thus poetic in form, yet biblical laws were never written in poetic form" (James Megivern, *The Death Penalty: An Historical and Theological Survey* [Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1997], 15). Further, while the laws given through Moses were accompanied by the establishment of governing authority, this was not the case with the revelation to Noah, which was not accompanied by any special authority to legislate and to punish. Rather than commanding a specific punishment, the Noahic covenant sanctioned and set limits to the already established practice of blood-vengeance.

[134] *De Malo*, q. 2 a. 10 ad 4 (Leonine ed., 23:58, ll. 114-16): "Set pene que in presenti uita infliguntur siue a Deo siue ab homine non semper respondent grauitati culpe." In this reply, Thomas includes divine temporal punishments along with human punishments as falling short of the true measure, not of course because of any lack of knowledge or power in God, but precisely because "the punishments of the present life are applied as medicines." Surprisingly, Thomas gives this as the reason why a lesser fault may be punished more severely than a graver one, in order to avoid a great temporal danger. It should be noted that the objection to which he is replying compares two punishments prescribed in the Torah, which both correspond to serious sins, schism and blasphemy, but one of which, being an offense against God, is considered more grave, and yet is punished less severely. Both are punished with death, in fact, but while blasphemy was punished by stoning, the schism in Numbers 26: 10 was punished by the death of many.

[135] "Divine retribution or punishment for sin, far from being an act of hatred toward the sinner, is above all an act of mercy, for it is directed to healing the sinner's will (*STh* I, q. 45, a. 6, corp. and ad 2). . . . Like a good physician providing the necessarily painful remedy for a deadly disease (e.g., chemotherapy for cancer), Aquinas's God acts to cure disordered 'values' through an involuntary but health-restoring therapy (*STh* I, q. 48, a. 5)" (James Lehrberger, O. Cist., "Nietzsche and Aquinas," *The Thomist* 80 [2016]: 451).

[136] The question on the virtue of vengeance should be read together with the question on the virtue of clemency in *STh* II-II, q. 157.

Finally, even if human authorities were possessed of the best knowledge and dispositions, they would still lack the power to accomplish perfect retribution. Thus human punishment is guided by the more modest aim of serving the community's good (and that of the offender, who is part of that community) in inflicting punishments that respond to wrongs in a proportional way. From this we see why Thomas consistently refers to punishment as medicine, and that where he distinguishes between human and divine (or temporal and eternal) punishment, "medicinal" becomes the specific difference identifying human, temporal punishment.

Thomas holds human punishment to be retributive, but it is misleading to call him a "retributivist" insofar as the term implies that retribution is something that can be achieved by human agents. While "punishment is due to sin,"[137] it is due primarily from God. It is due also from the human community insofar as this community was offended by the crime. That is, the human obligation to punish is defined by the temporal good of the particular community in question, for which those human authorities are responsible before God, and not by a general obligation to set right the cosmic imbalance produced by wrongdoing. Thus "human law does not prohibit all vices . . . but only the more grave, from which it is possible for the majority to abstain, and principally those which are harmful to others, without the prohibition of which human society could not be preserved."[138]

Such human punishments are ministerial: those who inflict them are like the stewards in the Gospel parable, making judgments for now, according to the guidance left them, awaiting the return of the master and the true manifestation of righteousness. Civil punishments accomplish their ministerial function to some degree, but it is in the Church's sacramental life that one finds more perfect remedies; as Thomas says in a comment on Matthew 21, "spiritual illnesses cannot be cured

[137] *STh* II-II, q. 108, a. 4, s.c.

[138] *STh* I-II, q. 96, a. 2. The attempt by civil law to do more than inhibit the grosser vices would tend to produce more evil than good, as Thomas suggests (ibid., ad 2).

except in the Church."[139] It is worth noting, although we cannot explore it here, that the medical image features prominently in Thomas's treatment of the sacrament of penance.[140]

X. Implications for the Philosophy of Punishment

The placement of human punishment in its metaphysical and theological context has far-reaching implications for philosophical treatments of punishment. When philosophers came to the defense of retributive punishment in the second half of the twentieth century, it was a purely secular retributivism, without reference to divine retribution. According to Michael Davis, in fact, one of the reasons for the major development of punishment theory in the latter half of the twentieth century was precisely the decision to exclude "various other topics which, though using the term 'punishment' (in a recognizably related sense), seem to belong to other fields . . . [e.g.] divine punishment of the traditional Christian sort."[141] John Finnis similarly argues that "hell is only by an extended analogy a matter of punishment."[142] Finnis and the philosophers to whom Davis refers imply more than simply the assertion that

[139] *In Matt.*, c. 21, lect. 1 (Marietti ed., n. 1700): "morbi spirituales non curantur nisi in Ecclesia."

[140] See, e.g., *STh* III, q. 84, a. 10, ad 5: "penance derives its power from Christ's Passion, as a spiritual medicine." *ScG* IV, c. 72, which asserts the necessity of the sacrament of penance for the remission of postbaptismal sin, notes that while the body can sometimes heal itself without the help of medical art, the restoration of spiritual health requires external aid: "for man to be cleansed of sin, it is necessary not only that the mind adhere to God, but also to the mediator between God and man, Jesus Christ, in whom the remission of all sins is given: for spiritual health consists in the turning of the mind to God, which we cannot attain except through Jesus Christ, the physician of our souls" (Leonine ed., 15:225b23-31) The current *Code of Canon Law* likewise describes the forgiveness of sins in the sacrament of confession in medicinal terms. Canon 978 §1 reads: "In hearing confessions the priest is to remember that he is equally a judge and a physician and has been established by God as a minister of divine justice and mercy, so that he has regard for the divine honor and the salvation of souls."

[141] Davis, "Punishment Theory's Golden Half Century," 75.

[142] Finnis, "Retribution," 103.

punishment is said analogously (a claim with which Thomas would agree). Divine punishment, they imply, and more precisely, the eternal punishment of hell, is not really relevant to understanding the human phenomenon of punishment.[143] Certain methodological assumptions about the autonomy of philosophical inquiry may make it impossible for the contemporary analytic philosopher to consider divine punishment, but this was not a problem for Thomas, for whom, as we have seen, just human punishment is inconceivable apart from its divine source. If he is correct, attempts to justify human punishment on a merely human basis are doomed to fail.

So argued Dietrich von Hildebrand in 1932 in a short essay on the nature of punishment. Hildebrand warns of the grave mistake being made by those who begin their thinking about punishment with civil punishment, and fail to place this reality in its proper metaphysical context.[144] In the end, Hildebrand argues, only God can punish. Human agents can do so only insofar as they act in God's place.[145] In systems that reject God, this means that "punishment" becomes something else: therapy, mediation, a political tool.[146] For the Christian, on the other hand, punishment remains a necessary responsibility of public

[143] This seems to suggest that they think of punishment as an instance of metaphorical as opposed to proper analogy. For a detailed discussion on the relationship between metaphor and analogy, see Ralph McInerny, *Aquinas on Analogy* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 134-36.

[144] One must begin with a metaphysical consideration of the essence of punishment, which shows us the intrinsic connection between moral guilt and punishment, such that "there can be no true consciousness of guilt without thinking [oneself] deserving of punishment" (Dietrich von Hildebrand, "Zum Wesen der Strafe," in *Gesammelte Werke,* Band VIII: *Situationsethik und kleinere Schriften* [Regensburg: J. Habbel, 1974], 260) Punishment is what Hildebrand calls a "value response," which alone constitutes an appropriate response to moral evil, altering the cosmic effect of that evil (ibid., 264, 270).

[145] Ibid., 273-74. This is the traditional patristic view captured in Anselm's comment, quoted above.

[146] Or "restorative justice," which the *OED* describes as "an approach to criminal justice focusing on rehabilitation of offenders through reconciliation with victims and the community at large" (Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. "restorative"). However, insofar as this approach requires the offender's acknowledgement of guilt and desire to seek reparation, it has something in common with the notion of satisfaction.

authority, entrusted to it by God; its retributive form cannot be replaced with something else, for retribution links human punishment to God as the source of its legitimacy, as Pius XII notes: "In the metaphysical order the punishment is a consequence of our dependence on the supreme Will, a dependence which is written indelibly on our created nature."[147] Separated from this foundation, civil punishment necessarily appears in need of justification, a justification that turns out to be difficult to supply. From a purely secular perspective, punishment remains a paradox.[148] On the one hand, we experience in ourselves the inclination toward retribution as something good. On the other hand, we see nothing in the nature of things that would give one man such power over another, equal to him in dignity.[149] Moreover, we see the excesses toward which the natural appetite of vengeance leads, and the unending cycle of violence in which it lands us, classically illustrated in the history of the house of Atreus.

Divine law teaches us both to think of punishment as something good and to restrain our appetite for it. The divine source of punishment, as we have seen, is not only a justification of human punishment, but also a motive for its restraint, derived not from a rejection of retribution, but from reverence for the divine judge, and knowledge of human weakness. The Gospel teaches us not to avenge ourselves, and also to hunger and thirst for justice. Our desire to right wrongs is fulfilled only when it is offered back to God, from whom it came. Not surprisingly,

[147] Pius XII, "Address to the Sixth Congress of International Penal Law (3 Oct 1953)," in Yzermans, ed., *Major Addresses of Pius XII*, 256.

[148] Sher describes "the air of paradox that surrounds the assertion that actions that are wrong in ordinary contexts are permissible or mandatory as punishment" (*Desert*, 69).

[149] Even reference to the common good runs into difficulty, insofar as one wants to affirm that even the criminal retains his dignity and does not become merely instrumental with respect to the good of the whole. See the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2003 [rev. 2018]), n. 2267: "Today, however, there is an increasing awareness that the dignity of the person is not lost even after the commission of very serious crimes."

Thomas finds a model of this twofold attitude in the Apostle Paul, ready to use severity when necessary for the good of the Christian community (and the good of the offender), yet ever ready to welcome back the repentant sinner with the same mercy that had been shown to him, the worst among sinners (1 Tim 1:15). On the words of Paul to the Corinthians, "I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved unto repenting" (2 Cor 7:9 [RSV]), Thomas offers the following comment, with which we can appropriately close our reflections:

> [Paul] gives the reason for his joy, because I am not glad that you were made sorrowful, but at the effect, namely, your amendment, because you were made sorrowful, not unto despair, but unto penance; just as a physician is not glad at the bitterness of the medicine, but at the effect, namely health: as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing (2 Cor 6:10).[150]

[150] *In II Cor.*, c. 7, lect. 2 (trans. Fabian R. Larcher, O.P. [Lander, Wyo.: Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2020; originally published 1991]).

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NATURE DOES NOTHING IN VAIN: REEXAMINING AQUINAS'S FIFTH WAY

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AT THE BEGINNING of his *Summa theologiae*, Thomas Aquinas famously presents his Five Ways to demonstrate the existence of God. In each of the Five Ways, he draws attention to some general feature of the world and argues that this feature can only be explained by a divine being. In his Fifth Way, Aquinas takes as his starting point the observation that beings that lack cognition act for the sake of ends, and his explanation for this phenomenon is a divine intelligence who directs such beings to their ends. However, as is the case with each of the Five Ways, the proper interpretation of the Fifth Way is a matter of dispute. Commentators disagree about both the precise nature of the end-directed activity in question and the exact manner in which an intelligent being explains it. In this article, I consider the three dominant interpretations of the Fifth Way found in recent literature and argue that, while each of these interpretations accurately captures important elements of Aquinas's understanding of final causality, each interpretation also faces serious textual or philosophical difficulties. I then propose a fourth interpretation of the Fifth Way that circumvents the problems that undermine these other interpretations.

The fact that the text of the Fifth Way is interpreted in several incompatible ways is in large part due to its brevity. Aquinas states the entirety of the argument as follows:

The fifth way is taken from the governance of things: We see that some things lacking cognition, namely, natural bodies, act for an end. This is apparent from the fact that they always or very frequently act in the same way so that they attain what is best, and from this it is clear that it is not by chance, but intentionally, that they attain the end. But things lacking cognition tend toward an end only if they are directed by something that has cognition and intelligence, in the same way that an arrow is directed by an archer. Therefore, there is something with intelligence by which all natural things are ordered toward an end—and this we call a God.[1]

At its core, the argument is a simple *modus ponens*:

1. Things that lack cognition, namely, natural bodies, act for an end.
2. If natural bodies act for an end, then they must be directed to the end by something with cognition and intelligence.
3. Therefore, there exists something with cognition and intelligence that directs natural bodies to an end, and this we call a God.

Although this basic characterization of the argument is accepted by each of the rival interpretations considered in this paper, disagreements arise in their attempts to clarify both the meaning of and the justification for both premises.

However, before turning to these rival interpretations, three preliminary points must be addressed.[2] First, while Aquinas is clear elsewhere in his corpus that the activity of *every* being is

[1] *STh* I, q. 2, a. 3: "Quinta via sumitur ex gubernatione rerum. Videmus enim quod aliqua quae cognitione carent, scilicet corpora naturalia, operantur propter finem, quod apparet ex hoc quod semper aut frequentius eodem modo operantur, ut consequantur id quod est optimum; unde patet quod non a casu, sed ex intentione perveniunt ad finem. Ea autem quae non habent cognitionem, non tendunt in finem nisi directa ab aliquo cognoscente et intelligente, sicut sagitta a sagittante. Ergo est aliquid intelligens, a quo omnes res naturales ordinantur ad finem, et hoc dicimus Deum." I translate the key phrase *ex intentione* as "intentionally" rather than the more typical renderings "designedly" or "by intention" with the hope that this translation avoids favoring one interpretation over the others. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own and are based on the Latin text from Sancti Thomae de Aquino, *Opera omnia*, Iussu impensaque, Leonis XIII P.M. edita (Rome: Ex typographia polyglotta S. C. de Propaganda Fide, 1882-).

[2] In addition to the three points discussed here, I leave aside a number of other textual issues. Marie George discusses some of these issues in her "A Thomistic Rebuttal of Some Common Objections to Paley's Argument from Design," *New Blackfriars* 97, no. 1069 (2016): 266-88.

for the sake of an end,[3] in the Fifth Way he narrows his focus to a specific class of beings: "things lacking cognition, namely, natural bodies." The kinds of beings he has in mind when he refers to "natural bodies" (*corpora naturalia*) are physical, nonliving beings like wood, stones, fires, water, as well as physical, living beings like plants, animals, and even human beings.[4] However, the scope of the Fifth Way extends only to those natural bodies which lack cognitive powers. At the very least, then, the natural bodies referred to in the Fifth Way include beings like fires and plants, though some interpreters also include the functional parts of animals in this category.[5] It is the end-directed actions of these kinds of beings that interest Aquinas in the Fifth Way. For the sake of simplicity, throughout the paper I will use the phrases "natural body" and "natural bodies" to refer only to those natural bodies which are the subject of the Fifth Way, that is, those which lack cognitive powers.

Second, questions have rightly been raised concerning the validity of the Fifth Way, as it appears to fall victim to the quantifier-shift fallacy.[6] To see this one must only note that the second premise of the argument states that every natural body must be directed to an end by something intelligent, while the conclusion seems to suggest that there is one unique intelligence, God, who directs every natural body to its end. However, as stated, the premises do not guarantee a unique intelligence responsible for directing every natural body to its end. Rather, even if true, the premises seem to leave open the possibility that there are multiple intelligences responsible for

[3] *ScG* III, c. 2.

[4] II *De Anima*, lect. 1 (*In Aristotelis librum de Anima,* ed. A. M. Pirotta [Turin and Rome: Marietti, 1948], n. 218). See also, *STh* I, q. 18, a. 1.

[5] See, for instance, Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *God: His Existence and Nature*, vol. 1 (St. Louis: Herder Press, 1934); J. J. C. Smart and John Haldane, *Atheism and Theism* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2003), 89; and Lawrence Dewan, "St. Thomas's 'Fifth Way' Revisited," *Universitas* 31 (2004): 47-67.

[6] This is the main criticism that Anthony Kenny levels against not only the Fifth Way but each of the Five Ways. See Anthony Kenny, *The Five Ways* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1980).

directing natural bodies to their ends—as many intelligences as there are natural bodies, in fact.

There are two general responses to this problem. First, one can interpret the premises of the Fifth Way such that, when sufficiently elucidated, they do guarantee a unique intelligence.[7] To do this, one must show that the fact that natural bodies act for ends does not merely require that there be *at least* one divine intelligence, but additionally it requires that there be *only* one such intelligence. Second, one can hold that Aquinas's aim in the Fifth Way is merely to demonstrate that there is at least one divine intelligence and that his arguments for the existence of God's uniqueness are presented later in his *Summa*.[8] The interpretation of the Fifth Way that I defend in this paper suggests that both of these responses have merit. On this interpretation, the line of reasoning that Aquinas presents later in his *Summa* to support the uniqueness of God is a simple extension of the line of reasoning present in the Fifth Way. A fuller treatment of this response will be developed later in the article.

Finally, it is important to note that even once the validity of the argument has been established, the Fifth Way does not purport to demonstrate the existence of a God who possesses all of the divine-making properties traditionally ascribed to the God of Christianity. Rather, its purpose is more modest, namely, to demonstrate the existence of a divine intelligence that orders the world according to its providence.

I. THE KEY INTERPRETATIVE QUESTIONS

We can now turn to the three most common and, at least initially, attractive interpretations of the Fifth Way and consider the key interpretive questions confronting these rival approaches. Although aspects of each of these interpretations will

[7] See, for instance, Edward Feser, "Between Aristotle and William Paley: Aquinas's Fifth Way," *Nova et vetera* (Eng. ed.) 11 (2013): 734-39; and Garrigou-Lagrange, *God*, 368-74.

[8] A fuller treatment of this response can be found in John Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas: From Finite Being to Uncreated Being* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1999), 485-92.

ultimately be shown to be problematic, considering them side by side will both help to clarify the broader issues involved and serve to motivate the interpretation of the Fifth Way defended later in the paper.

The primary distinguishing characteristic of these interpretations is their differing understandings of the first premise. While each agrees that Aquinas's argument takes as its starting point the claim that natural bodies act for an end, they disagree about the precise feature of reality described by this claim. The three interpretations of the first premise can be stated briefly as follows:

Intrinsic Finality Interpretation: Some natural bodies, namely, organisms and their functional parts, act for ends, where the ends are their own preservation and perfection in being.
Extrinsic Finality Interpretation: Every natural body acts for an end, where the end is the common good or perfection of the universe.
Final Causality Interpretation: Every natural body acts for an end, where the end is the determinate effect toward which it is inclined.

The Intrinsic Finality Interpretation is thus called because it holds that the first premise is based on the observation that some natural bodies act for their own *intrinsic*, or individual, good. The Extrinsic Finality Interpretation takes its name from the fact that it holds that this premise is concerned with the observation that natural bodies act for some end *extrinsic* to themselves, namely, the common good of the universe. Finally, the Final Causality Interpretation holds that the first premise of the Fifth Way is concerned with the more general observation that natural bodies act for ends at all.

While many commentators provide accounts of the first premise that fall neatly into one of these three interpretations, others suggest that the premise can be interpreted as making claims involving more than one of these interpretations. For instance, John Haldane, John Kronen, and Sandra Menssen each in a distinct way suggest that the first premise of the Fifth Way can be interpreted along the lines of both the Intrinsic

Finality Interpretation and the Extrinsic Finality Interpretation.[9] Likewise, at various points in his discussion of the Fifth Way, Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange suggests that, in addition to being interpreted in accordance with the Intrinsic Finality Interpretation, the argument can be interpreted along the lines of the Final Causality Interpretation.[10] These commentators appear to be united in holding that the first premise of the Fifth Way is ambiguous, and that a valid argument can be constructed on the basis of more than one of the disambiguated premises. However, even if a valid argument can be constructed on the basis of all three of these renderings of the first premise, because the Fifth Way is one argument, not two or three parallel arguments, and because the Intrinsic Finality Interpretation, Extrinsic Finality Interpretation, and Final Causality Interpretation must give rise to distinct arguments, *at best* only one of these disambiguated premises can represent Aquinas's intended argument in the Fifth Way.

However, because Aquinas affirms the claims made by each of these interpretations throughout his corpus, even if *at best* only one can be correct, none can be dismissed out of hand. Instead, their accuracy must be evaluated in relation to the remainder of the text of the Fifth Way, other similar passages in Aquinas's corpus, and his broader philosophical commitments.

The second premise also presents interpretive difficulties. Aquinas states that the end-directed actions of natural bodies require the existence of an intellect extrinsic to the natural bodies, but instead of defending this claim, he presents an analogy: Natural bodies are directed to an end by a divine intellect "in the same way that an arrow is directed by an archer." While Aquinas makes use of the analogy of the arrow frequently throughout his works, the relation between intellectual activity and the end-directed action it attempts to illuminate is not always obvious. In many passages where the

[9] See Smart and Haldane, *Atheism and Theism*, 89; and John Kronen and Sandra Menssen, "Hylomorphism and Design: A Reconstruction of Aquinas's Fifth Way," *The Modern Schoolman* 89 (2012): 155-80.

[10] See Garrigou-Lagrange, *God*, esp. 364.

analogy is found, he says little to clarify its meaning.[11] Rather, as in the Fifth Way, he seems to assume that its import will be perspicuous to his readers. However, even in those passages where he more clearly states its significance, he does not always do so in the same way. In one set of passages, Aquinas suggests that the analogy of the archer is meant to illustrate that a natural agent could not act for some definite effect without some intellect determining it to that effect.[12] In a second set of passages, Aquinas clarifies this position by additionally suggesting that being determined to a definite effect is a kind of ordering to that effect, an ordering which only an intellect can explain.[13] Finally, in a third set of passages, he further clarifies that an intellect is required because the ordering in question requires knowledge of the end, the means to the end, and the proportion between means and ends.[14]

Considering these texts together suggests the following rudimentary characterization of the analogy: Aquinas invites his readers to imagine themselves witnessing an arrow fly through the air and strike a target. He thinks it evident that upon witnessing this scene one would be justified in believing that the arrow was shot at the target by an archer, even if the archer were out of sight. One would be justified in drawing this conclusion because arrows do not by nature possess the necessary powers, including the necessary intellectual powers, to move themselves to targets. Thus, if the movement of the arrow to the target is to be explained, it must be explained by appealing to an archer who is both aware of the target as an end and understands the means necessary to move the arrow to it. Similarly, Aquinas thinks that when we observe natural bodies acting for ends, we witness beings without cognitive powers

[11] See *ScG* II, c. 23; *STh* I, q. 23, a. 1; q. 59, a. 1; *De Pot*., q. 3, a. 11, ad 5; and V *Metaphys*., lect. 16 (*In duodecim libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis exposition*, ed. M. R. Cathala and R. M. Spiazzi [Turin and Rome: Marietti, 1950], n. 1000).

[12] See *ScG* III, c. 24; *STh* I, q. 103, a. 1, ad 3; and *STh* II-II, q. 90, a. 3.

[13] See *ScG* III, c. 64; *STh* I-II, q. 1, a. 2; q. 12, a. 5; q. 13 a. 2, ad 3; *De Verit*., q. 22, a. 1; I *Phys*., lect. 15 (Leonine ed., 2:53-54, n. 10); and II *Phys*., lect. 12 (Leonine ed., 2:90, n. 1).

[14] I *Sent*. d. 35, q. 1, a. 1; *ScG* II, c. 23; *De Pot*., q. 1, a. 5; and q. 3, a. 15.

acting in ways that would be inexplicable were they not moved to those ends by some intelligence who could grasp both the ends of natural bodies and the means required to move natural bodies to such ends. Thus, the analogy suggests that just as we must explain the movement of the arrow through reference to an extrinsic intellect (i.e., an archer), so too must we explain the movements of natural bodies through reference to an extrinsic intellect (i.e., God).

However, characterized this way, the analogy gives rise to a further interpretative difficulty. To perceive this difficulty, one must first recognize that throughout his works Aquinas accepts the following two theses:

(1) *Divine Intelligence Thesis*: Natural bodies are directed to their ends by some divine intelligence, namely, God.
(2) *Nature Thesis*: Natural bodies are directed to their ends by their very natures, i.e., their substantial forms and powers.

Our discussion of the analogy of the archer has provided ample evidence that Aquinas holds the Divine Intelligence Thesis. However, it is equally evident that he holds the Nature Thesis. Early in his *Summa theologiae*, for example, he presents what seems to be a perfectly naturalistic account of final causality: "From the form follows [a being's] inclination to an end or to action or to something of the sort. For each thing, insofar as it is in actuality, acts and tends toward that which is suitable to it according to its form."[15]

Underlying the claim that a being's action for an end follows upon its form is a broadly Aristotelian metaphysics of powers.[16] Aquinas holds that all natural beings, including natural bodies, possess distinctive powers in virtue of being the bearers of kind-specific substantial forms, and when a natural body acts, it acts

[15] *STh* I, q. 5, a. 5.

[16] For a comprehensive recent study of Aquinas's metaphysics of powers, see Gloria Frost, *Aquinas on Efficient Causation and Causal Powers* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2022). For a much briefer summary of Aquinas's views, see Jeffrey Brower, "First Principles: Hylomorphism and Causation," in *The New Cambridge Companion to Aquinas*, ed. Eleonore Stump and Thomas Joseph White (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 31-56.

through the operation of these powers.[17] A fire has the power to heat, water has the power to be heated, a tree has the power to absorb nutrients from the soil, and so on. In each case, Aquinas attributes powers to things in order to explain why they regularly act in ways characteristic of their kinds. *Active powers* explain the ways in which a thing regularly acts on other things, and *passive powers* explain the ways in which it is regularly acted upon by other things.[18] Furthermore, Aquinas holds that both of these kinds of powers, insofar as they are powers, are intrinsically directed or ordered (*ordinatur*) to an action the terminus of which is an end, although in different ways.[19] The active powers of a natural body are directed to an end such that they of themselves give rise to an inclination that determines their operation for the sake of an end.[20] For instance, the active power by which a fire heats a pot of water is a power inclined toward producing heat of a determinate temperature. It is not a power to perform any other kind of action or produce any other effect, and, in suitable circumstances, a fire will always perform its characteristic action and produce its characteristic effect through the operation of this power. Passive powers, in contrast, are intrinsically directed such that they come to

[17] *STh* I, q. 36, a. 3, ad 1; q. 77, a. 1, ad 3; q. 77, a. 6; q. 5, a. 5; and *ScG* II, c. 68.

[18] In addition to active powers and passive powers, Aquinas holds that there is a third kind of power that is both active and passive. See *De Virtut.*, q. 1, a. 1. However, because these "mixed" powers are all in some measure rational, they are not directly relevant to the Fifth Way, dealing as it does with beings incapable of cognition, and for the purposes of this article they can be ignored.

[19] *STh* I, q. 77, a. 3.

[20] On the account that I am endorsing here, when Aquinas speaks of a natural body's natural inclination to an end, he is speaking of a natural body's active powers insofar as these powers are ordered to an action the terminus of which is an end. This ordering to an action involves possessing an impetus to the end, which explains why active powers operate whenever the relevant conditions obtain. My view is seemingly at odds with that of Gloria Frost, who appears to hold that a natural body's natural inclination to an end is distinct from its active powers. See Frost, *Aquinas on Efficient Causation and Causal Powers*, 125-26. While it is beyond the scope of this article to defend my account of natural inclinations, it is worth noting that the interpretation of the Fifth Way I defend below does not depend on my interpretation of the relation between causal powers and natural inclinations and, *mutatis mutandis*, is also consistent with Frost's account.

operate for an end by means of the activity of other beings, that is, beings with the relevant active powers. Strictly speaking, passive powers are not inclined toward ends, but disposed toward ends.[21] The passive power by which some water is heated is a power directed *toward* the end of being heated *by* an agent with the power to heat; the power is disposed toward being heated by something outside of itself which has the power to heat. Thus, for Aquinas, being ordered to an end is a feature of a power *qua* power; it is impossible for a power to be a power without being so directed. In virtue of its active powers, a natural body is inclined toward ends, and in virtue of its passive powers, it is disposed to be moved toward ends. Aquinas holds that the end-directed actions of all natural bodies are explained by the intrinsically directed powers that they possess in virtue of being the kinds of things that they are.[22]

The fact that Aquinas accepts both the Divine Intelligence Thesis and the Nature Thesis might lead one to think that his account of end-directedness suffers from overdetermination.[23] He appears to hold that both a divine intellect and a natural body's nature explain the exact same phenomenon, namely, a natural body's directedness toward an end. However, Aquinas is

[21] For recent discussions of Aquinas's account of passive powers, see Gloria Frost, "Aquinas on Passive Powers," *Vivarium* 59 (2021): 33-51; and Frost, *Aquinas on Efficient Causation and Causal Powers*.

[22] It is noteworthy that when Aquinas argues that natural bodies "act" for an end in the Fifth Way, he uses the Latin term *operantur* to denote their activity. Elsewhere in his corpus, Aquinas regularly uses *operantur* to refer to the operation of both active and passive powers, and thus it is a mistake to think that the end-directed activity at issue in the Fifth Way is limited to the actions of natural *agents* or efficient causes. Patients, through the operation of their passive powers, also act (*operantur*) for an end, though only through the influence of some efficient cause.

[23] Stephan Schmid, "Teleology and the Dispositional Theory of Causation in Thomas Aquinas," *Logical Analysis and History of Philosophy* 14 (2011): 21-39 argues just this point. Schmid argues that there is tension between Aquinas's dispositionalist theory of end-directed action—his account of end-directed action as being consequent upon substantial forms and powers—and his claim that God explains end-directedness. On Schmid's account, God cannot account for the end-directed actions of natural beings without robbing them of their own intrinsic directedness to their ends. One of the goals of this paper is to show that there is nothing in Aquinas's texts that requires attributing to him this inconsistency.

able to avoid the charge of overdetermination by holding a third thesis:

(3) *Creation Thesis*: God directs natural bodies to their ends by creating them with natures directed to those ends.

That Aquinas accepts the Creation Thesis is no less clear than that he accepts the other two theses. For example, in his "treatise on divine government" in his *Summa theologiae*, he claims that the natures of things are a kind of impression (*impressio*) from God, and the means by which God directs things to their ends is by creating them with natures directed to those ends.[24] Similarly, in his *Summa contra gentiles*, he argues that every operation of a power is consequent upon some form, so the cause of motion must be God, who has given to things their forms.[25] Clearly, there is no overdetermination in claiming that natural bodies are directed to their ends by their natures, while at the same time being directed to their ends by God, who creates and sustains their natures.

Nevertheless, beyond clarifying why he cannot be charged with overdetermination, Aquinas's acceptance of the Creation Thesis is largely irrelevant to one's interpretation of the Fifth Way. The Creation Thesis assumes the existence of God, which is precisely what the Fifth Way attempts to demonstrate, and thus interpreters of the Fifth Way cannot assume this thesis in their defenses of the argument. Moreover, because the Creation Thesis cannot be assumed, the fact that Aquinas accepts both the Nature Thesis and the Divine Intelligence Thesis presents interpreters with a difficulty. All of the Five Ways—and, indeed, all of Aquinas's arguments for the existence of God—take the form of *quia* demonstrations.[26] That is, they purport to demonstrate the existence of God by showing that some observed effect can be explained *only* by a being with one or more of the divine attributes. In the Fifth Way, the observed effect is that natural bodies act for ends, and the argument proceeds by

[24] *STh* I, q. 103, a. 1, ad 3.

[25] *ScG* III, c. 67.

[26] *STh* I, q. 2, a. 2.

claiming that such actions can *only* be explained by some divine intelligence. However, given that Aquinas accepts the Nature Thesis, interpreters of the Fifth Way face the difficulty of explaining how he justifies the claim that *only* a divine intelligence can explain a natural body's action for an end. In other words, given that Aquinas accepts that natural bodies are directed to their ends in virtue of possessing substantial forms and powers, it is not clear why he also holds that a divine intelligence is needed to explain their end-directed actions.

To respond to this difficulty, interpretations of the Fifth Way must meet what I call the Quia Demonstration Condition:

Quia Demonstration Condition: To be successful, any interpretation of the Fifth Way must show how, on Aquinas's own account, the end-directed actions of natural bodies are not completely explained by their intrinsic principles, namely, their substantial forms and powers, but further require explanation in terms of a divine intelligence.

We can elucidate the rationale behind the Quia Demonstration Condition by once again considering the analogy of the arrow. As Aquinas himself suggests, a key feature of the analogy is that the arrow by nature lacks the powers necessary to move itself to the target.[27] It is only because it lacks these powers that it is obvious to an observer that the arrow is directed to the target by an archer. If, however, we inhabited a world where arrows by nature possessed the powers necessary to direct themselves to targets, then, upon seeing an arrow strike a target, an onlooker would not be justified in thinking that an arrow was shot by an archer. Likewise in the case of natural bodies, if the intrinsic principles of natural bodies were sufficient to explain their end-directed activity, then there would be no reason to think that they were directed to their ends by a divine intelligence. Thus, it is necessary for interpreters of the Fifth Way to meet the Quia Demonstration Condition by identifying some feature or aspect of the end-directed activity of natural bodies that requires a divine intellect and not merely a nature.

[27] *STh* I, q. 23, a. 1.

II. THREE INTERPRETATIONS OF THE FIFTH WAY

A) The Intrinsic Finality Interpretation

With this understanding of the key interpretative issues in place, we can begin our discussion of the common interpretations of the Fifth Way by considering the view I have labeled the Intrinsic Finality Interpretation.

On the Intrinsic Finality Interpretation, endorsed by such thinkers as Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, Lawrence Dewan, and John Haldane,[28] the first premise is understood as referring to the fact that at least *some* natural bodies, namely, organisms, are equipped with functional parts through which they act for their own preservation and perfection in being.[29] Dewan, for instance, compares the phenomenon referenced in the first premise of the Fifth Way to the irreducibly complex systems discussed by Michael Behe.[30] Likewise, Haldane suggests that the subject of the first premise is the "apparent purpose in the organization and activity of living things,"[31] and Garrigou-Lagrange states that the first premise "concerns the *intrinsic finality* observed in the activity of beings which, taken separately, lack intelligence. For instance, the eye is for seeing, and wings for flying."[32] Common to all of these interpretations is the claim that not only do living things act for ends which are good for them, but that their so acting is a consequence of their parts being organized or ordered to attain those ends.

The Intrinsic Finality Interpretation interprets the second premise of the Fifth Way as advancing the claim that the

[28] As mentioned above, Garrigou-Lagrange and Haldane also endorse other interpretations of the Fifth Way (the Final Causality Interpretation and the Extrinsic Finality Interpretation, respectively). However, both thinkers primarily focus on observations involving intrinsic finality in their discussions of the Fifth Way.

[29] Dewan, "St. Thomas's 'Fifth Way' Revisited"; Smart and Haldane, *Atheism and Theism*; Garrigou-Lagrange, *God*.

[30] Dewan, "St. Thomas's 'Fifth Way' Revisited," 58. See also, Michael J. Behe, *Darwin's Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution* (New York: Free Press, 2001).

[31] Smart and Haldane, *Atheism and Theism*, 89.

[32] Garrigou-Lagrange, *God*, 347.

explanation for this ordering among the functional parts of an organism must be some intelligence extrinsic to the organism.[33] The argument supporting this premise is a familiar one: If there exists a real and not merely apparent order among things, there must be some explanation for that order. There exists a real order among the functional parts of organisms, and so there must be some explanation for this order. Now, two explanations are possible: chance and intelligence. However, given that these functional parts operate, always or for the most part, for the good of the organism, the order among them cannot exist by chance but must be the result of some intelligence. Therefore, there must be some intelligence responsible for the ordering among the functional parts of organisms. Moreover, this intelligence cannot be found in the functional parts of organisms, because these functional parts lack intelligence. Likewise, this intelligence cannot be found in the whole organism, because the whole organism is unable to determine for itself the ordering of its functional parts. Therefore, this intelligence must be extrinsic to the organism.

Much could be said about the merits of this kind of argument, but the question before us is not whether this is a good argument, but whether it is the argument of the Fifth Way. The first thing to note in evaluating this argument as an interpretation of the Fifth Way is that its claims are consistent with claims Aquinas makes elsewhere in his corpus. Aquinas clearly holds both that the functional parts of an organism are ordered to the good of the whole organism and that, in general, order requires an intellect.[34]

Furthermore, although not explicitly addressed by its defenders, this interpretation is capable of meeting the Quia Demonstration Condition. To do so, defenders of this interpre-

[33] Dewan, "St. Thomas's 'Fifth Way' Revisited," 64, Garrigou-Lagrange, *God*, 367-72.

[34] For evidence that Aquinas holds that organisms possess the kind of intrinsic order that the Intrinsic Finality Interpretation attributes to them, see *De Verit.*, q. 5, a. 2; *ScG* III, c. 3; *STh* I, q. 65, a. 2; and II *Phys.*, lect. 13 (Leonine ed., 2:93, n. 5). Moreover, in *De Verit.*, q. 5, a. 2; and II *Phys.*, lect. 14 (Leonine ed., 2:96, n. 8), Aquinas suggests that this order requires a divine intellect.

tation can argue that the natures of living beings explain their end-directed activities, but a further explanation is required for the existence of beings that possess these kinds of natures. The account would go something like this: The natures of living beings exhibit a kind of ordered complexity. The powers they possess consequent upon their substantial forms are ordered both hierarchically, such that one power is ordered to another, and complementarily, such that the powers complement one another. Furthermore, it is in virtue of these ordered natures that organisms are able regularly to act for and to attain their ends. However, because such ordered natures do not explain themselves, a further explanation is required, and this further explanation is a divine intellect. Thus, an organism's nature and the divine intelligence explain two different features of its end-directed activity. Its nature explains why the organism is directed to an end, and a divine intelligence explains why the organism's nature exhibits the order required for it to be so directed.

However, despite its strengths, there is a significant textual reason for thinking that the Intrinsic Finality Interpretation does not accurately capture the argument of the Fifth Way. To begin, a natural reading of the first premise of the Fifth Way does not suggest that Aquinas is speaking only of living beings. The natural reading of his claim that "some things lacking cognition, namely, natural bodies, act for an end,"[35] is that he is referring to *all* natural bodies that lack cognition, not merely organisms and their functional parts. Moreover, in the conclusion, Aquinas claims that the Fifth Way has demonstrated "something with intelligence by which all natural things are ordered toward an end."[36] The conclusion that *all natural things* are ordered toward an end does not follow from the premise that *some natural bodies*, namely, living beings, are ordered to an end. By limiting the scope of the Fifth Way to just organisms

[35] *STh* I, q. 2, a. 3: "Videmus enim quod aliqua quae cognitione carent, scilicet corpora naturalia, operantur propter finem."

[36] Ibid.: "Ergo est aliquid intelligens, a quo omnes res naturales ordinantur ad finem."

and their functional parts, the Intrinsic Finality Interpretation is unable to account for the Fifth Way's strong conclusion.

It may be objected that this is a problem for any interpretation of the Fifth Way, not just the Intrinsic Finality Interpretation. For even if one interprets the first premise broadly to include all natural bodies that lack cognition, one cannot account for the stronger conclusion which refers to all natural things, due to the fact that some natural things possess cognition. While this response contains some truth, those who interpret the first premise more broadly have a more plausible response than defenders of the Intrinsic Finality Interpretation. First, they could hold that the phrase "all natural things" in the conclusion refers only to those natural bodies that lack cognition. Second, and more plausibly, they could hold that it refers to all natural things insofar as they are natural, that is, insofar as they possess *natural* inclinations and dispositions to ends, inclinations and dispositions that are not consequent on some apprehended form. Either of these responses is more credible than claiming that "all natural things" refers merely to organisms and their functional parts.

B) The Extrinsic Finality Interpretation

While more could be said about the Intrinsic Finality Interpretation, our discussion thus far is sufficient to show that it faces a serious textual difficulty. We can now turn our attention to the Extrinsic Finality Interpretation. Like the Intrinsic Finality Interpretation, the Extrinsic Finality Interpretation holds that the basic structure of the Fifth Way concerns the ordering of parts to wholes and the need for a divine intellect to explain such ordering. However, in contrast to the Intrinsic Finality Interpretation, the Extrinsic Finality Interpretation interprets the first premise of the Fifth Way as referring not to the ordering of functional parts of organisms to the preservation and perfection of whole organisms, but rather to the ordering of *all* natural bodies to the preservation and perfection of the whole universe. Given that it interprets the first premise as applying to all natural bodies, the Extrinsic Finality Interpre-

tation avoids the chief textual problem facing the Intrinsic Finality Interpretation.

The most philosophically sophisticated version of this interpretation is advanced by Jacques Maritain in his book *Approaches to God.*[37] Maritain introduces the Fifth Way by describing the observation on which he thinks the first premise is based:

> It is a fact that in this universe, myriads of beings exist and act, but neither know nor think. And it is a fact that the activities of these beings follow regular courses, which are translated into the laws that our science establishes, and which give rise to recurrences of constant periodicity. . . . Whether one considers the actions which they exert upon one another or the general movement of their history, things are thus seen to be engaged in a system of regular relations and oriented in a stably defined direction.[38]

Maritain goes on to say that the continued existence of this "system of regular relations" or "ordered multitude" requires that the beings that are part of this system are directed toward maintaining it in existence.[39] Thus, as Maritain interprets the first premise of the Fifth Way, Aquinas's argument begins with the observation that natural bodies have as their end participating in and contributing to the order or common good of the universe, and he supports this observation with the claim that the order of the universe could not be so preserved unless its parts were so directed.

Maritain's interpretation of the second premise is less clear than his interpretation of the first. He appears to justify this premise using an argumentative move typical of "fine-tuning" arguments. He argues that if we take seriously the claim that beings without cognition are ordered to the common good of the universe, we need an explanation for this fact. He holds that only two explanations are possible: chance or intelligence.

[37] Jacques Maritain, *Approaches to God* (New York: Harper Brothers, 1954). As mentioned earlier, Haldane, Kronen, and Menssen also suggest that the Fifth Way can be interpreted along the lines of the Extrinsic Finality Interpretation, though they do not develop their own versions of this interpretation.

[38] Ibid., 58.

[39] Ibid., 65.

Using an argument of his own—not Aquinas's—he dismisses chance as a possible explanation and concludes that the explanation must be intelligence.[40]

Like the Intrinsic Finality Interpretation, the Extrinsic Finality Interpretation attributes to Aquinas positions that he does, in fact, hold. For instance, consonant with the Extrinsic Finality Interpretation's reading of the first premise, Aquinas argues that the order exhibited by things in the universe is evidence that things are directed toward maintaining this order.[41] He suggests that for goodness to be produced in the universe as a whole, not only must individual beings be directed to their own individual ends, but also the ends of individual beings must complement the ends of other individual beings. For example, he notes that while heat contributes to the good of the universe as a whole by breaking beings down "up to a certain point and in a certain way,"[42] if heat, or hot things like fires, broke down other beings without limit, then the order of the universe would be upset. That these effects do not occur, or do not occur regularly, shows that beings within the universe are fundamentally ordered to the common good of the universe. Similarly, the Extrinsic Finality Interpretation's gloss on the second premise also attributes to Aquinas a position that he, in fact, holds. For instance, in the *Summa contra gentiles*, Aquinas argues that in order for diverse things to be ordered to a common end, they must be ordered by an intelligence that both knows the common end and the relations between the things ordered to the end.[43]

Moreover, although Maritain does not explicitly address the Quia Demonstration Condition, a response is implicit in his defense of the second premise. The general form of this response is that while the natures of natural bodies can explain their inclinations toward their own individual ends, they cannot explain how the ends of the many diverse beings that compose

[40] Ibid., 61-64.

[41] *De Verit.*, q. 5, a. 2.

[42] Ibid.

[43] *ScG* II, c. 24.

the universe are ordered so as to promote the perfection of the universe as a whole. In order to explain this second feature of the world, appeal must be made to a divine intelligence.

Nevertheless, as was the case with the Intrinsic Finality Interpretation, although Aquinas does hold the positions that the Extrinsic Finality Interpretation attributes to him, there is reason to believe that these are not the positions on which the Fifth Way rests. The most significant difficulty is noted by Lawrence Dewan, who argues that a close reading of book III, chapter 64 of Aquinas's *Summa contra gentiles* undermines this interpretation.[44] In this passage, Aquinas gives several arguments for the claim that God governs the world through his providence. One of these arguments is similar in structure to the Fifth Way, although instead of attempting to demonstrate God's existence it attempts to prove God's providence. Aquinas writes:

> It is proved that natural bodies are moved and act for an end—even though they do not know the end—from the fact that what happens to them is always, or often, what is best; and, they would not be accomplished differently if they were done by means of art. But it is impossible for things that do not know their end to act for the end, and to arrive at the end in an orderly way, unless they are moved by someone who has knowledge of the end, as an arrow is directed to the target by the archer. Therefore, the whole working of nature must be ordered by knowledge in some way. And, indeed, either directly or indirectly, this must lead back to God, since every lower art and type of knowledge must receive its principles from a higher one, as we also see in the theoretical and practical sciences. Therefore, God governs the world by his providence.[45]

[44] Dewan, "St. Thomas's 'Fifth Way' Revisited."

[45] *ScG* III, c. 64: "Probatum est quod corpora naturalia moventur et operantur propter finem, licet finem non cognoscant, ex hoc quod semper vel frequentius accidit in eis quod melius est; et non aliter fierent si fierent per artem. Impossibile est autem quod aliqua non cognoscentia finem operentur propter finem et ordinate perveniant in ipsum nisi sint mota ab aliquo habente cognitionem finis: sicut sagitta dirigitur ad signum a sagittante. Oportet ergo quod tota operatio naturae ab aliqua cognitione ordinetur. Et hoc quidem vel mediate vel immediate oportet reducere in Deum: oportet enim quod omnis inferior ars et cognitio a superiori principia accipiat, sicut etiam in scientiis speculativis et operativis apparet. Deus igitur sua providentia mundum gubernat" (Leonine ed., 14:179).

It is clear that this argument follows from the same observations referred to in the Fifth Way. In both cases, Aquinas notes that natural bodies act for an end and this would not be possible without a divine intellect directing them to their end. Dewan juxtaposes this argument with a second argument Aquinas makes immediately following the first:

> Things that are different according to their natures do not come together in one order unless they are assembled into a unity by someone who orders them. But in the universe things are distinct and possess contrary natures; yet all come together in one order, and while some give assistance to others, there are also some that are served or ruled over by others. Therefore, there must be one orderer and governor of the universe.[46]

While there is some ambiguity about the kind of end-directedness at play in the first argument, this second argument is clearly concerned with the ordering of individual beings to a common end. Thus, Dewan's criticism of the Extrinsic Finality Interpretation is that these are two distinct arguments and the Extrinsic Finality Interpretation confuses the first argument for the second.[47] On the reasonable assumption that Aquinas would not present two essentially identical arguments in the same passage, it follows that the first argument in this passage must take as its starting point something other than the ordering of beings to the common good of the universe. Moreover, due to the similarities between the first argument and the Fifth Way, the Fifth Way, too, must not be based on such ordering. Although textual arguments of this sort are difficult to settle conclusively, I suggest that this argument provides a convincing reason for rejecting the Extrinsic Finality Interpretation.

[46] Ibid.: "Ea quae sunt secundum suam naturam distincta, in unum ordinem non conveniunt nisi ab uno ordinante colligantur in unum. In universitate autem rerum sunt res distinctas et contrarias naturas habentes, quae tamen omnes in unum ordinem conveniunt, dum quaedam operationes quorundam excipiunt, quaedam etiam a quibusdam iuvantur vel imperantur. Oportet igitur quod sit universorum unus ordinator et gubernator" (Leonine ed., 14:179).

[47] Dewan, "St. Thomas's 'Fifth Way' Revisited," 56.

C) The Final Causality Interpretation

Having considered the difficulties encountered by the first two interpretations, we can now turn to the last of the common interpretations of the Fifth Way, what I have labeled the Final Causality Interpretation. The Final Causality Interpretation has been advanced by a number of thinkers, most prominently John Wippel and Edward Feser.[48] While there are slight differences in approach and emphasis between these thinkers, they interpret both premises in much the same way. Common to their interpretations is the claim that the Fifth Way is not, strictly speaking, a design argument. Design arguments, like the Intrinsic Finality Interpretation and the Extrinsic Finality Interpretation, seek to argue from some order present in nature to the existence of some intelligence responsible for the order. In contrast, the Final Causality Interpretation holds that the Fifth Way seeks to prove the existence of God on the basis of directedness itself. That is, it holds that the observation on which the Fifth Way is based is not that natural bodies act for the sake of some individual or common good, but rather that natural bodies are directed toward ends at all. Moreover, because on this view *all* natural bodies are directed toward ends, the Final Causality Interpretation also avoids the textual problem faced by the Intrinsic Finality Interpretation.

According to defenders of the Final Causality Interpretation, the Fifth Way's first premise refers to the observation that natural bodies exhibit what they call "finality."[49] That is, natural bodies "inherently or of their nature 'point to' their characteristic effects as to an end."[50] What does it mean for a natural

[48] See Wippel, *Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 480-85; and Feser, "Between Aristotle and William Paley," 707-9. Similar interpretations are also defended by William Newton, "A Case of Mistaken Identity: Aquinas's Fifth Way and Arguments of Intelligent Design," *New Blackfriars*, 95, no. 1095 (2014): 569-78; and Gavin Kerr, "Design Arguments and Aquinas's Fifth Way," *The Thomist* 82 (2018): 447-71.

[49] Wippel, *Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 480; Feser, "Between Aristotle and William Paley," 726; and Kerr, "Design Arguments and Aquinas's Fifth Way," 451 and 468.

[50] Feser, "Between Aristotle and William Paley," 726.

body to "point to" its characteristic effect? In the context of Aquinas's natural philosophy, we can locate this understanding of finality in the active powers of things.[51] As we saw in our earlier discussion of the Nature Thesis, Aquinas holds that in virtue of possessing kind-specific substantial forms, beings also possess powers that "point to," or are intrinsically directed to, effects characteristic of their kinds. Feser suggests that this account of powers and ends is broadly analogous to the accounts of powers and their manifestations given by contemporary causal powers theorists.[52] Where Aquinas speaks of powers and ends, contemporary theorists speak of dispositions and manifestations. Just as dispositions "point to" their manifestations, so too do powers "point to" their characteristic effects, or ends.

Defenders of this interpretation are clearly correct in holding that Aquinas believes that natural bodies exhibit finality on the basis of their intrinsic principles, as our earlier discussion of the Nature Thesis has shown. The chief task confronting the Final Causality Interpretation lies in defending its interpretation of the second premise, that is, providing evidence for the claim that Aquinas holds that a divine intelligence is necessary for natural bodies to exhibit finality. To see that this task might prove difficult, one must only recall our earlier discussion of the Quia Demonstration Condition, where we saw that for the Fifth Way to succeed as a quia demonstration there must be some feature of end-directed activity that can *only* be caused or explained by God, and not merely by a being's nature. Thus, for the Final Causality Interpretation to succeed, it must show why a natural body's nature cannot completely explain its inclination

[51] To my knowledge, none of the defenders of the Final Causality Interpretation distinguish between the manner in which active powers point to their ends—i.e., they are inclined to their ends—and the manner in which passive powers do so—i.e., they are disposed to be moved to ends by some agent. Instead, they appear to focus exclusively on the inclinations of natural bodies, that is, on the ordering of the active powers of natural bodies to their ends. Therefore, in my discussion of this interpretation I also focus exclusively on the inclinations of natural bodies, even though the Fifth Way is not concerned only with this kind of directedness (see n. 22).

[52] Feser, "Between Aristotle and William Paley," 747-48.

toward an end and why a natural body's "pointing to" its characteristic effect requires further explanation in terms of a divine intellect. In what follows, I will argue that defenders of the Final Causality Interpretation fail in this task.

With this in mind, let us turn to the two arguments that Wippel and Feser between them employ to support the claim that a divine intellect is necessary for things to possess natures that are directed toward ends.[53] The first argument is defended by both Wippel and Feser. It begins with the claim that being directed toward an end requires some cognition of the end. Wippel and Feser support this claim by arguing that in order for an agent to direct its action toward an end, the end must be the cause of the agent's action, and in order for the end to be the cause of the action, it must influence the agent in some way. Moreover, they argue that because the end does not exist in reality prior to the action of the agent—in many cases, the agent acts to bring the end into existence—the only way that the end can influence an agent is if it exists in an intellect. On their view, the paradigm case of an end influencing the action of an agent by means of an intellect occurs in voluntary human action. A human being possesses powers of intellect and will and by means of these powers is able to apprehend the end he wants to attain prior to acting and then to direct his actions toward achieving it. Wippel and Feser believe that the same

[53] In addition to the two arguments marshalled by Wippel and Feser, Kerr ("Design Arguments and Aquinas's Fifth Way") employs a third argument for the Final Causality Interpretation. Kerr argues that natural bodies do not possess their finality of themselves, so to explain how they are directed toward ends, we must understand them as being members of an essentially ordered causal series. Moreover, if they are members of an essentially ordered causal series, then there must be some primary cause of that series that explains the end-directedness of each member of the series. Therefore, Kerr's reasoning seems to go, the primary cause of the essentially ordered series must be some intelligence responsible for the end-directedness of each member of the series. However, while Kerr's discussion of essentially ordered causal series succeeds in illuminating the Creation Thesis—that is, it succeeds in clarifying Aquinas's account of how God directs natural bodies to their ends—he is unable to demonstrate that God directs them to their ends. The chief problem with the argument is that Kerr overlooks the fact that Aquinas accepts the Nature Thesis, that is, that Aquinas holds that natural bodies *do* possess finality of themselves.

relation between cognition and end-directedness must hold more broadly, including in the case of natural bodies. They argue that because a natural body does not possess cognitive powers of its own, the end of a natural body cannot influence its action by existing in its own intellect, but rather must exist in the intellect of some divine intelligence. Thus, they conclude that there must be some agent who directs natural bodies to their ends by impressing on them inclinations that are directed to those ends.[54] Wippel expresses the essence of his understanding of the second premise as follows:

> An agent does not act in a given way unless it is influenced by an end. Noncognitive agents cannot explicitly know their ends. Hence the only way of accounting for the ability of an end to influence such an agent is to appeal to an inclination that is impressed upon that agent by an intelligent being.[55]

Thus, Wippel and Feser hold that if a divine intelligence did not impress on a natural body an inclination to an end, then the natural body would not incline toward the end and, hence, would not act for the end. Given that natural bodies do act for ends, Wippel and Feser hold that there must exist some divine intellect directing them to their ends.

There are two closely related problems with this argument. First, neither Wippel nor Feser provides textual support for the key claim that the influence that an end has on an agent can only be explained by some cognition of the end. Wippel admits that this line of reasoning is not explicitly found in Aquinas's texts, while Feser attributes the argument to "Scholastic philosophers," not to Aquinas himself.[56] Second, in many pas-

[54] Feser, "Between Aristotle and William Paley," 736; Wippel, *Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 484-85.

[55] Wippel, *Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 483-84; see also, Feser, "Between Aristotle and William Paley," 733-35.

[56] Wippel, *Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 483; and Feser, "Between Aristotle and William Paley," 734. To my knowledge, Robert Pasnau presents the lengthiest defense of the claim that, according to Aquinas, the only way that an end can causally influence an agent is by means of some cognition of the end. However, Pasnau's defense relies on weak textual evidence. His argument consists of showing that Avicenna and Scotus accept the claim and, on this basis alone, suggesting that Aquinas accepts it as

sages where one would expect Aquinas to claim that a being's inclination toward an end must always be caused by some cognition of the end, he instead claims that a being's inclination toward an end is always *consequent upon some form*. Furthermore, he clearly states that it is only in cases of voluntary action that this form must be an apprehended form; in cases of natural action, an agent is inclined toward an end consequent upon its substantial form and active powers.[57] These texts coincide with those cited in our earlier discussion of the Nature Thesis, where we saw that Aquinas possesses an account of how natural bodies incline toward ends which does not rely on cognition but on the intrinsically directed powers that they possess as bearers of their substantial forms. The end of the action causes the action—it *influences* or *explains* the action—because it is the determinate effect toward which the agent, through its powers, is inclined. The influence that an end exerts on an agent is found in the very structure of the active powers of natural bodies, which are always directed *to* some end.[58] On this account, no cognition, on the part of either a natural body or something extrinsic to the natural body, appears to be necessary. Thus, Wippel and Feser's argument in support of the second premise does not succeed in showing that a divine intellect is necessary for finality. The feature of reality that they argue needs to be explained by God, Aquinas himself suggests can be explained by substantial forms and active powers.

The second argument used to justify the second premise is presented by Feser alone. He begins his argument by

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well. See Robert Pasnau, "Intentionality and Final Causes," in *Ancient and Medieval Theories of Intentionality*, ed. Dominik Perler (Boston: Brill, 2001), 301-23.

[57] See, for instance, *ScG* III, c. 3; *STh* I, q. 5, a. 5; and *STh* I-II, q. 8, a. 1, ad 1.

[58] Of particular relevance to one's evaluation of Wippel and Feser's argument is *STh* I-II, q. 8, a. 1, ad 1, where Aquinas claims that the end of an action causes an action by preexisting in the intention of the agent (*in intentione agentis*). Although Aquinas writes this in the context of human action, taking "*in intentione agentis*" to mean more broadly "in the natural inclination of the agent," it is an equally valid response in the context of natural bodies. This interpretation of the passage should be particularly amenable to defenders of the Final Causality Interpretation, as they interpret *ex intentione* as it appears in the Fifth Way as "on the basis of some natural inclination."

referencing the following passage from the *Summa contra gentiles*:

> Things can be ordered only by knowing their relation and proportion to one another, and to something higher, which is their end; for the order of certain things to one another is for the sake of their order to an end. But only a being endowed with intellect is capable of knowing the mutual relations and proportions of things; and to judge of certain things by the highest cause is the prerogative of wisdom. All ordering, therefore, is necessarily effected by means of the wisdom of a being endowed with intelligence.[59]

While acknowledging that this passage could be used to support design-type interpretations of the Fifth Way, Feser holds that it can also be used to support the Final Causality Interpretation. He makes use of this passage to argue, in a way similar to that of design arguments, that a divine intelligence must exist to account for order. However, unlike ordinary design arguments, the order Feser suggests is involved in the second premise of the Fifth Way is the order between a single natural body considered individually and its typical effect. He uses the example of fire, suggesting that "fire . . . can 'point to' heat as its typical effect only if an intellect fits the former to the latter as an appropriate means to the latter."[60] He defends this suggestion by further claiming that "whatever relates [fire and heat] in this law-like way must be capable of grasping their natures and relations in the abstract, and something capable of such abstraction just is something with an intellect."[61] While Feser does not develop either of these claims, he could be making one of two different arguments. First, he could be arguing that a fire's directedness toward heat is a contingent feature of the fire, and therefore some intellect is required to explain why a fire is inclined toward an effect that is appropriate for it, like heat, and not one that is inappropriate for it, like cold. Second, he could be suggesting that being directed to any effect at all, appropriate or

[59] *ScG* II, c. 24. In order to represent Feser's argument most accurately, I have used James F. Anderson's translation of this text as cited in Feser, "Between Aristotle and William Paley," 735.

[60] Feser, "Between Aristotle and William Paley," 736.

[61] Ibid.

inappropriate, is a kind of ordering, and this ordering like any other must be explained in terms of an intellect.

Let us evaluate each of these possibilities in turn. The first gloss on Feser's argument is problematic because it requires that the relation between fire and heat be a contingent one, when on Aquinas's view it is not. For Aquinas, being directed toward producing heat is an essential feature of what it is to be a fire. In other words, a thing cannot possess the substantial form of a fire without also possessing an active power directed toward producing heat. Aquinas is clear that the active powers of a substance are essential principles of the substance; they are *propria* that "flow from" (*fluant ab*) its substantial form.[62] Now, Aquinas thinks that God can give a thing powers in addition to those it possesses by nature without changing its essence,[63] and it seems reasonable to hold that God can also impede a fire from exercising its power to heat without changing its essence. However, given that possession of the power to heat is an essential principle of a fire, even God could not remove this principle without changing its essence.[64] And because a natural body and its active powers are related essentially, not contingently, it makes no more sense to say that it is appropriate that a fire is directed toward heat than it does to say that it is appropriate that water is H_2O. In both cases, the concept of appropriateness does not apply. There is, therefore, no reason to think that a divine intellect is necessary for a natural body to be directed to its characteristic effect. Thus, the first gloss on Feser's argument does not succeed in justifying the second premise of the Fifth Way.

But what about the second gloss on Feser's argument? Does the fact that a natural body points to its characteristic effect require that it be ordered to that effect by an intellect, even if its

[62] *STh* I, q. 77, a. 6. Also, see *De Pot.*, q. 5, a. 7, where Aquinas states that because active and passive powers are proper accidents of the elements, they must be caused by the essential principles of the elements.

[63] For instance, Aquinas suggests that God can give fire the power to cleanse the world in addition to the power to heat, without changing the essence of fire. See *STh* Suppl., q. 74, a. 3, ad 2.

[64] *De Pot.*, q. 5, a. 7.

pointing to the effect is essential to it? While it is difficult to answer this question with confidence, there are convincing reasons to think it does not, especially in the context of Aquinas's thought. To begin, the text on which Feser's argument is based does not support attributing to Aquinas the view that "pointing to" an effect is a kind of ordering. In the passage that immediately follows the text quoted by Feser, Aquinas uses the example of an architect to illustrate his claim that "things can be ordered only by knowing their relation and proportion to one another, and to something higher, which is their end." By choosing the example of an architect, Aquinas suggests that it is the design and order among diverse things that requires an ordering intellect. Thus, the natural reading of the text suggests that the line of reasoning quoted by Feser properly applies to the argument that the Extrinsic Finality Interpretation mistakenly attributes to the Fifth Way. Nothing in this passage supports attributing to Aquinas the view that the mere directedness of powers is a kind of ordering.

In addition to being unsupported by the text, there are other reasons for thinking that "pointing to" an effect does not require an ordering intellect. To begin, while it may be clear that a natural body that is ordered to some effect will "point to" that effect, it is not clear that the converse is true. That is, it is not clear that merely pointing to an effect requires being ordered to that effect. Rather, as Aquinas himself states in the passage quoted by Feser, ordering includes the further notions of mutual relations and proportions. To say that some means is ordered to some end suggests that, in addition to pointing toward the end, it is also appropriately proportioned to attaining the end. But if merely pointing to an end is not a sufficient condition for a thing to be ordered to the end, then the fact that an active power points toward an end is not sufficient to show that it is ordered to the end. Rather, what would need to be shown is that the active power somehow exhibits an appropriate proportion to that effect. Now, design-type interpretations of the Fifth Way are capable of showing that an active power exhibits this kind of proportion to its effect, because these arguments take the effect to be something

that can only be achieved if multiple powers are proportioned and coordinated with respect to each other. On the Intrinsic Finality Interpretation, a living being's powers must be coordinated in order to achieve the good of the organism, and on the Extrinsic Finality Interpretation, the powers of every natural body must be coordinated in order to achieve the common good of the universe. Once one has shown that powers are somehow proportioned and coordinated with one another, then one can infer they are not merely directed to an effect, but ordered to it.

However, Feser cannot make use of this kind of argument. The Final Causality Interpretation aims to show that the mere fact that a natural body is directed toward its characteristic effect is sufficient to establish that it is ordered to that effect by an intelligence, even when the natural body is considered individually and not in relation to anything external to it.[65] However, when considered individually, many natural bodies do not appear to exhibit such order. For instance, Aquinas suggests that the active powers of a fire include heat, lightness, and dryness.[66] Unlike the case of an organism, there is no reason to believe that these powers must be ordered or coordinated with each other. In other words, there is no reason to think that heat is ordered to lightness or dryness, lightness is ordered to heat or dryness, and so on. However, if this is the case, then there is no reason to think that the directedness of an active power is a true ordering. Thus, neither the text cited by Feser nor Aquinas's broader commitments on the nature of order support the view that merely "pointing to" an effect entails being ordered to it, and the second gloss on Feser's argument also fails to establish that Aquinas holds that an intellect is required to explain the fact that natural bodies incline toward their characteristic effects.[67]

[65] Feser, "Between Aristotle and William Paley," 736.

[66] *STh* I, q. 6, a. 3.

[67] To be clear, in rejecting the Final Causality Interpretation's claim that the mere directedness of powers constitutes an ordering, I am not thereby rejecting the claim that Aquinas thinks that powers are ordered to ends. As I have already argued, Aquinas clearly holds that powers *are* ordered toward ends. My claim is merely that, in contrast

If our reasoning until now is sound, then defenders of the Final Causality Interpretation have failed to show that their reading of the second premise reflects a view accepted by Aquinas. The Fifth Way aims to prove the existence of God by first observing some feature of reality and then arguing that this feature can only be explained by a divine intelligence. According to defenders of the Final Causality Interpretation, the feature that requires explanation is that natural bodies "point to" determinate effects. But, by their own admission, Aquinas holds that this feature of reality is explained by something other than a divine intellect; it is explained by the natures of the natural bodies. Moreover, each of their attempts to show that Aquinas thinks that, in addition to the natures of natural bodies, God is necessary to explain the fact that natural bodies "point to" determinate effects either contradicts or is deeply in tension with Aquinas's clearly stated views. The Final Causality Interpretation thus fails to meet the Quia Demonstration Condition, and we must look elsewhere for a compelling interpretation of the Fifth Way.[68]

III. A Fourth Interpretation

The three interpretations of the Fifth Way that we have considered thus far each face difficulties. The Intrinsic Finality Interpretation and the Extrinsic Finality Interpretation encoun-

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to the other interpretations discussed in this paper, the Final Causality Interpretation does not give an adequate account of this ordering.

[68] An additional reason for thinking that merely "pointing to" an effect does not require intellectual cognition is the fact that so many metaphysicians, from Aristotle to contemporary powers theorists, have failed to recognize this requirement. Rather, many of these thinkers take directedness to be a primitive feature of powers themselves, one that does not require explanation in terms of something else. For convincing accounts of the role that a divine intelligence plays in Aristotle's natural philosophy, see Monte Ransome Johnson, *Aristotle on Teleology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 258-63; and Mariska Leunissen, "Teleology in Aristotle," in *Teleology: A History*, ed. Jeffrey K. McDonough (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 39-63. Both argue that Aristotle's account of finality does not include reference to a divine ordering intellect, and none of the passages cited by defenders of the Final Causality Interpretation suggest that Aquinas holds otherwise.

ter problems on a textual level, while the Final Causality Interpretation, in addition to lacking textual support for its reading of the second premise, is unable to meet the Quia Demonstration Condition. In this section, I advance a fourth interpretation of the Fifth Way, one that aims to address the problems encountered by these other interpretations.

This fourth interpretation rests on two observations. The first observation is that for Aquinas there are at least two distinct ways in which natural bodies exhibit end-directedness. He distinguishes between these two kinds of end-directedness in a passage in *De veritate*, where he states:

> In the case of natural things, there are three prerequisites for obtaining any end: a nature proportioned to that end, an inclination for the end, which is a natural desire for the end, and a movement toward the end.[69]

To possess a nature proportioned to an end just is to be a bearer of a substantial form; to possess an inclination toward an end just is to possess active powers that are intrinsically directed toward an action the terminus of which is an end; and to move toward an end is to actualize, or exercise, these powers. Thus, on one hand, Aquinas holds that there is the end-directedness of a natural body's inclination toward an end, or more generally, a natural body's powers, both active and passive. On the other hand, Aquinas holds that there is the end-directedness of a natural body's action or movement toward an end. These two features of reality must be distinct on Aquinas's account because he allows that a being can possess powers directed toward an end and yet not move toward the end because it is prevented or impeded from doing so.[70] A stone may be inclined to move downwards, but be impeded from actually moving downwards by the man who is holding it. Likewise, suppose that God created a world that contained only one being: a fire. In this

[69] *De Verit.*, q. 27, a. 2: "Cum enim diversarum naturarum diversi sint fines, ad consecutionem alicuius finis in rebus naturalibus tria praeexiguntur: scilicet natura proportionata ad finem illum; et inclinatio ad finem illum, quae est naturalis appetitus finis; et motus in finem" (Leonine ed., 22/3:794). See also *De Pot.*, q. 5, a. 5.

[70] V *Metaphys.*, lect. 6 (Marietti ed., n. 829).

world, the fire would exist, at least for a short while, and it would possess an active power inclined toward heating, but it would never in fact heat anything, because there would be no other beings present that it could heat. Similar considerations obtain in the case of passive powers, as a being's possession of a passive power is no guarantee that the power will ever be exercised. In each of these cases, a being is directed to an end in one sense, it possesses powers intrinsically directed toward an end, but it is not directed to an end in another sense, it is not acting for or operating for the sake of the end. For the sake of clarity, in what follows I will (somewhat arbitrarily) refer to the intrinsic directedness of active powers using the terms "inclination," "is inclined," and "inclines"; the intrinsic directedness of passive powers using the terms "disposition" and "is disposed"; and the directedness of actions and activities using the terms "moves toward," "acts for," "operates for," and "tends toward."

The second observation follows immediately upon the first: That a natural body inclines toward an end or is disposed to be moved toward an end can be explained by its own nature, but that a natural body acts for an end and through its action attains the end cannot be. To understand why this is so, we need to develop Aquinas's account of action further than we did earlier.[71] To begin, Aquinas holds that in ordinary cases of action, an agent acts on a patient, and the action of the agent and the movement of the patient both tend toward an end.[72] The action of the agent tends toward an end because the agent, through its action, aims at producing a determinate effect in the patient; and the movement of the patient tends toward an end because, due to the action of the agent, the patient is moved from being the bearer of one form to being the bearer of the form determined by the agent. Moreover, as we saw earlier, the agent acts on the patient through the operation of its active

[71] For a comprehensive account of Aquinas's views on efficient causality, see Frost, *Aquinas on Efficient Causation and Causal Powers*. For more succinct accounts, see Michael Rota, "Causation," in *The Oxford Handbook of Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Brian Davies and Eleonore Stump (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 104-14; Brower, "First Principles."

[72] *STh* I-II, q. 12, a. 1.

powers and the patient is acted upon or moved by the agent through the operation of its passive powers. The agent and the patient attain the end only after the powers of both have been perfectly actualized through the production of the intended form in the patient. For example, when a fire heats some water, the action of the fire tends toward producing heat in the water, and the water, due to the action of the fire, tends toward being heated. The fire attains its end when it has maximally, in respect to its active power, produced heat in the water, and the water attains the end when it has maximally, in respect to its passive power, had heat produced in it.

Now, while the agent is the primary explanation for the end-directed action, the patient also contributes to the explanation. The end-directed action is explained by the agent because the agent acts on the patient in accordance with its intrinsic inclination toward an end. The water is heated by the fire *because* the fire possesses an active power directed toward the effect of producing heat. However, the end-directed action is also partially explained by the intrinsic disposition of the patient. The water is heated by the fire *because* the water has the passive power to be heated. Thus, a natural body's intrinsic directedness toward an end—whether the directedness takes the form of the inclination of an active power or the disposition of a passive power—is a necessary but not sufficient condition for its action for an end and, ultimately, its attainment of the end. To act for and attain an end, in addition to being directed toward the end, the natural body must be in contact with some suitable agent or patient. That is, it must come into contact with something that possesses the requisite active or passive power.

Of course, there are cases of end-directed activity that require a more complicated account than the one given here. For instance, the nutritive actions of a living being involve not merely a change in the patient—the nutrients—but also involve a change in the agent—the organism. Nevertheless, a natural body's end-directed activity, whether as an agent or a patient, ultimately involves some being or beings extrinsic to it. For this reason, for a natural body to act for and attain an end more is required than that it merely possesses powers that "point to"

some effect. Rather, the natural body must possess powers that are appropriately related to specific states of affairs extrinsic to it. In order to act for an end, a fire's active powers must be proportioned to some really existing thing outside of itself, in this case something that possesses the passive powers to be heated. Likewise, in order to be moved to an end by the fire, the water must possess passive powers proportioned to the fire's active powers. In every case, Aquinas holds that a natural body's action for an end requires not only that the natural body possesses powers directed toward an end, but that these powers are appropriately ordered or proportioned to states of affairs in the world extrinsic to it.[73]

With these two observations in hand, we can now turn to the interpretation of the Fifth Way that I will defend, what I will call the Attainability Interpretation. This interpretation construes the first premise of the Fifth Way as follows:

Attainability Interpretation: Every natural body acts for an end, where the end is the determinate effect for which it acts and which it regularly attains.

While in some respects similar to the Final Causality Interpretation, the Attainability Interpretation holds that the observation on which the first premise is based is that natural bodies *act for and regularly attain their* ends, not merely that they *incline toward* ends. Defenders of the Final Causality Interpretation appear to assume that if a natural body "points to" an end, then it must also act for the end; and if it acts for an end, it does so merely as a result of its "pointing."[74] However, as we have just seen, this view is not supported by Aquinas's account of natural

[73] In *De Virtut.*, q. 1, a. 10, Aquinas states that natural active powers are proportioned to the powers of natural patients. Similarly, in ibid., ad 13, he states that there is an order in passive powers that responds to the order of active powers. See also *ScG* III, c. 45; and *STh* I, q. 77, a. 3, ad 1.

[74] Feser claims that the Fifth Way is not concerned with the fact that things move toward ends, but only that they tend toward ends, where tending toward an end is to be understood merely in terms of possessing an inclination (see Feser, "Between Aristotle and William Paley," 732-33). However, this view is undermined by parallel passages where Aquinas clearly holds that the "tending toward" in question is a thing's *movement* to an end. See, for instance, *ScG* III, c. 64.

action. For natural bodies to act for and attain their ends, their powers must not merely exist but must also be appropriately ordered to the world extrinsic to themselves. Once this oversight is corrected, it becomes possible to develop an interpretation of the Fifth Way that preserves the insights of the Final Causality Interpretation while avoiding its problems.

On the Attainability Interpretation, the Fifth Way is similar in form to an argument for the existence of God that Aquinas presents in his early commentary on Lombard's *Sentences*, where he writes:

> In some agents the knowledge which determines the action and predetermines the end is united with the agent, just as a human being predetermines the end of his action for himself. However, in other agents it is separated, as in those things which act by nature. For the actions of natural things are not in vain [*frustra*], as is proved in Book II of the *Physics*, but are ordained to certain ends by the intellect who established nature, so that, as the Philosopher says, the whole working of nature is, in a certain way, the work of intelligence.[75]

Here, Aquinas argues for the existence of a divine intelligence on the basis of the observation that "the actions of natural things are not in vain." Elsewhere, he distinguishes between chance and "the vain" by explaining that a chance event occurs when an unintended effect is produced, while "the vain" occurs when an intended effect is not produced.[76] Thus, to say that the actions of natural things are not in vain is to say that they are not frustrated in the pursuit and attainment of their ends. Moreover, while the above argument focuses on "the vain" in the context of the actions of natural bodies, Aquinas holds that, like actions, powers are not in vain as they, too, are capable of

[75] II *Sent.*, d. 25, q. 1, a. 1: "Determinatio autem agentis ad aliquam actionem, oportet quod sit ab aliqua cognitione praestituente finem illi actioni. Sed cognitio determinans actionem et praestituens finem, in quibusdam quidem conjuncta est, sicut homo finem suae actionis sibi praestituit; in quibusdam vero separata est, sicut in his quae agunt per naturam: rerum enim naturalium actiones non sunt frustra, ut in 2 Physic. probatur, sed ad certos fines ordinatae ab intellectu naturam instituente, ut sic totum opus naturae sit quodammodo opus intelligentiae, ut philosophus dicit" (*Scriptum super libros Sententiarum magistri Petri Lombardi episcopi Parisiensis*, vol. 2, ed. R. P. Mandonnet [Paris: P. Lethielleux,, 1929], 645).

[76] II *Phys.*, lect. 10 (Leonine ed., 2:85, n. 9); *STh* I, q. 25, a. 2, ad 2.

attaining the ends toward which they are ordered.[77] For instance, a fire's natural inclination toward heating other things is not in vain; it is not frustrated by the world extrinsic to the fire. Rather, the fire is inclined by its active powers toward producing an effect that is attainable. And likewise for all other natural bodies.

To see how a similar line of reasoning is present in the Fifth Way, we need to consider the text more closely. Aquinas begins the Fifth Way by referencing the fact that natural bodies act (*operantur*) for the sake of ends. He supports this claim by appealing to the regularity of their actions, arguing that natural bodies regularly act so as to attain what is best (*consequantur id quod est optimum*), which shows that they attain the end (*perveniunt ad finem*) not by chance, but intentionally (*ex intentione*). Now, on the Final Causality Interpretation, this section of the argument is taken to be primarily concerned with ruling out chance as a possible explanation for the actions of natural bodies. On this view, to say that beings regularly act intentionally for the sake of ends is simply to say that their actions are the result, not of chance, but of some natural inclination. However, Aquinas does not merely claim that natural bodies act with regularity; he claims that they regularly *attain what is best* and *attain the end*. In other words, Aquinas is observing that natural bodies, through the operation of their powers, are able to act for and attain the ends toward which they are ordered. Or to use slightly different language, Aquinas claims that neither the actions nor the powers of natural bodies are in vain. Thus, contrary to what is suggested by the Final Causality Interpretation, the observation on which the first premise of the Fifth Way is based is not merely that the actions of natural bodies are not the result of chance. Rather, the first premise of the Fifth Way depends on the observation that the actions of natural bodies and the powers from which they proceed are neither the result of chance, *nor are they in vain*.

According to the text of the Fifth Way, the fact that the powers and actions of natural bodies are not in vain establishes

[77] *ScG* II, c. 16. See also *ScG* I, c. 43; and *ScG* III, c. 85.

that they are the result of some intention. However, the intention in question cannot be the intrinsic inclination of a natural body, as the Final Causality Interpretation would have it.[78] Rather, it must be some intention that is capable of encompassing both the natural body and the world extrinsic to the natural body and explaining why the powers of natural bodies are ordered to the extrinsic states of affairs necessary for them to act for and attain their ends.[79] For, as our earlier discussion showed, there is nothing in the end-directed powers of an individual natural body that requires that it will ever act for an end, let alone regularly achieve its end. To use again the example of fire, if one limits oneself to considering just the metaphysical constituents of fire, there is nothing in the fire that necessitates that it will ever actually heat anything, because there is nothing in the fire that entails that its active powers are intrinsically directed to things that actually exist. In other words, there is nothing in the fire that entails the existence of things with the passive power to be heated. Nor is there anything in the fire that entails that the fire will ever come into contact with something with the passive power to be heated. Nevertheless, in the world as we observe it, fires regularly heat other things. Moreover, we observe that this is true not just in the case of fires, but generally speaking natural bodies are

[78] Wippel, *Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 481; and Feser, "Between Aristotle and William Paley," 725-26. While translating *ex intentione* as "as a result of some natural inclination" is legitimate, it is not the only legitimate translation. Aquinas also suggests that when a ruler orders the movements of his subjects, the subjects move by the intention of the ruler. See *STh* I-II, q. 12, a. 1. Thus, the coordinated movements of individuals can also be *ex intentione*. For this reason, when the Fathers of the English Dominican Province render *ex intentione* as "designedly," they too are translating the phrase legitimately. Which of these translations is preferable requires taking a stance on the broader question of how the Fifth Way is to be interpreted.

[79] Despite differences in approach and terminology, a similar reading of the second premise of the Fifth Way appears in James Dominic Rooney, "Evolutionary Biology and Classical Teleological Arguments for God's Existence," *The Heythrop Journal* 54 (2013): 617-30. The key claim in both readings of the second premise is that a divine intellect is required to explain, not that natural bodies *incline* toward ends, but that they *act* for ends. However, Rooney's interpretation appears to differ from mine, in that his reading of the first premise does not reference Aquinas's claim that nature does nothing in vain.

ordered to the world extrinsic to themselves such that they are regularly able to attain their ends. We see that hot things regularly heat, cold things regularly cool, dry things regularly dry, wet things regularly wet, heavy things regularly fall, and light things regularly rise. Moreover, among living things we see that plants, animals, and even human beings are ordered both intrinsically with respect to their functional parts and extrinsically with respect to their environments such that they are capable of regularly achieving their ends.[80] Only an intention that exists apart from each individual natural body can explain the ordering of these individuals to their ends.

To see this more clearly, it may be helpful to contrast the end-directed actions of natural bodies with the end-directed actions of human beings. Consider the case of a student who takes as her end a career as a lawyer. We might say that such a student desires, or is inclined toward, this career. However, merely being inclined toward a career is not sufficient for attaining the career. Additionally, she must adapt her actions to that end. She must take the appropriate courses and do sufficiently well in them, she must apply to law schools, she must develop the interpersonal skills necessary for work in the law profession, and she must to do many of these things in a particular order. If her actions are not adapted and proportioned to her end in this way, she will never succeed in attaining this end. Now, what role does the student's intellect play in adapting and proportioning her actions to her end? First, her intellect allows her to grasp the end toward which she must direct her actions and understand it as an end. Second, her intellect allows her to comprehend the relations between the end and the means to the end. In short, because she possesses an intellect, she is aware of states of affairs extrinsic to herself and

[80] The Attainability Interpretation, like the Intrinsic Finality Interpretation, holds that considering the end-directed actions of organisms is relevant to one's understanding of the first premise of the Fifth Way. However, whereas the Intrinsic Finality Interpretation holds that the premise refers only to the end-directed actions of organisms, the Attainability Interpretation sees the premise as referring to end-directed action more broadly, of which the end-directed actions of organisms are merely a special case.

is capable of ordering her actions in response to these states of affairs.

Now consider the case of a natural body like a fire. Like the student, the fire has an intrinsic inclination toward an end which, by itself, is not sufficient for it either to act for or to attain its end. However, unlike the student, the fire does not possess an intellect. Because of this, the fire is neither aware of its end, nor is it aware of the means to its end. As such, it is unable to order or adapt its actions to its end. Instead, the fire is determined to, or inclined toward, a type of end (producing a determinate quantity of heat in a patient) by means of a type of action (heating). Nevertheless, despite these limitations, fires manage both to act for ends and by means of these actions to attain their ends. Moreover, they do so regularly. They regularly come into contact with beings that have the capacity to be heated, and heat them.

Now if fires were the only natural bodies that regularly attained their ends, one might think that fires were not truly ordered toward heating. Rather, one might suggest that the relation between fires and objects with the capacity to be heated is merely an apparent order, not a real one, and underlying this apparent order is mere chance. On this view, we just happen to inhabit a world that includes both fires that are inclined toward ends and the conditions necessary for fires to act for and attain their ends. An explanation may be required for both the existence of fires and the existence of things with the passive power to be heated, but no further explanation is required for the relation between these beings. However, if Aquinas is correct—if nature truly does nothing in vain—then the world we inhabit is ordered in every respect. Not only are fires ordered to things outside of themselves, but so too are all other natural bodies. Not only are fires able to act for and attain their ends, but every kind of natural body is able to do so. The ubiquity of this order cries out for an explanation that cannot be explained away as the result of mere chance. Now, we know that, in contrast to the student, natural bodies do not possess intellects of their own. Thus, following Aquinas, we can justifiably conclude that there must be some extrinsic intelligence

that moves these beings to their ends by creating them with natures by which they are ordered to these ends.

Consequently, the Attainability Interpretation justifies the second premise of the Fifth Way by means of the now-familiar argument that if there exists a real order among things, there must be some explanation for that order, and that explanation must be an intellect. More specifically, Aquinas argues that the kind of ordering that is required for a being to act for and attain an end involves both an apprehension of the end as an end and an apprehension of the proportion between means and ends.[81] Thus, the Attainability Interpretation meets the Quia Demonstration Condition by drawing attention to the fact that, lacking intellectual powers, natural bodies by their very natures cannot apprehend either of these things, and, hence, their natures are unable to explain why their powers are adapted and proportioned to attaining their ends.

This reading the Fifth Way also helps to illuminate Aquinas's analogy of the arrow. Particularly noteworthy is the following passage from his commentary on Aristotle's *On the Heavens*:

> All that is in nature is either from God, such as the first natural things, or from nature as a secondary cause, such as the lower effects. But God does nothing in vain, because, since he is a being who acts through intelligence, he acts for an end. Likewise, nature does nothing in vain because it acts as moved by God as a first mover, just as an arrow is not moved in vain insofar as it is shot by an archer to some definite thing. Therefore, it follows that nothing in nature is in vain.[82]

In this passage, Aquinas uses the analogy of the arrow to illustrate his claim that, because nature is ultimately the work of a divine intelligence, it follows that nature does nothing in vain. On the Attainability Interpretation, in the Fifth Way Aquinas

[81] *De Pot.*, q. 1, a. 5.

[82] I *De Caelo*, lect. 8: "Omne quod est in natura, vel est a Deo, sicut primae res naturales; vel est a natura sicut a secunda causa, puta inferiores effectus. Sed Deus nihil facit frustra, quia, cum sit agens per intellectum, agit propter finem. Similiter etiam natura nihil facit frustra, quia agit sicut mota a Deo velut a primo movente; sicut sagitta non movetur frustra, inquantum emittitur a sagittante ad aliquid certum. Relinquitur ergo quod nihil in natura sit frustra" (Leonine ed., 3:36, n. 14).

uses the analogy of the archer to illustrate the inverse claim: Because natural bodies do not act in vain, it follows that they must be moved to their ends by a divine intelligence. However, his use of the analogy of the arrow in both passages is complementary. If one were to know that an intelligent archer, that is, an archer who is competent in ordering an arrow to an end, is responsible for shooting an arrow toward a target, then one would be justified in believing that the arrow would strike the target. Similarly, if one were to see an arrow fly through the air and strike a target, one would be justified in believing that it was shot by an intelligent archer, even if the archer remained unseen. In both texts, an important aspect of the analogy is that the arrow actually moves toward and strikes the target. In the passage above, it is only because we know that the archer is intelligent that we are justified in believing that the arrow he shoots will strike the target. Similarly, in the Fifth Way, it is only because the arrow moves toward and strikes the target that we are justified in believing it was shot by an intelligent archer.

As in the case of the arrow, so too in the case of natural bodies. Observation of the world reveals that natural bodies act for and attain their ends, and thus their powers and actions are not in vain. This suggests that they are ordered to their ends by an intelligence, one who possesses knowledge of the end, the means to the end, and the proportion between the means and the end. Thus, the analogy of the arrow illustrates the claim that a divine intelligence moves natural bodies to their ends by creating them with natures that are not only directed toward ends, but directed toward *attainable* ends. And being directed toward attainable ends suggests that the powers of natural bodies do not merely point to determinate effects, but are ordered to those effects.

Finally, on the Attainability Interpretation, the argument of the Fifth Way can be readily extended to establish the existence of a unique divine intelligence. In question 11, article 3 of the *Summa theologiae*, where Aquinas treats the topic of divine uniqueness, he articulates a line of reasoning that is in some respects already implicit in the Attainability Interpretation. He argues that the order and harmony among the many diverse

beings with divergent ends in the natural world can only be explained if all natural bodies are directed by a single intellect.[83] He often compares God's government of the universe with a political ruler's government of his kingdom.[84] Just as a ruler orders and directs the activities of his kingdom, so too does God order and direct the activities of natural bodies. If there were two or more rulers of a single kingdom, neither of whom was subordinate to the other, then conflicts would invariably break out over how the kingdom was to be governed. These conflicts would manifest themselves as disharmonious relations among citizens. The same is true, Aquinas thinks, of the natural world. If there were more than one intellect responsible for directing natural bodies to their ends, then there would be more than one order of ends in the universe and these different orders would conflict with each other. Disharmonious relations among natural bodies would become apparent. In short, nature would do something in vain. However, Aquinas thinks that this is not what we observe in nature. Hence, we can conclude that there must be only one intellect responsible for directing natural bodies to their ends.[85]

CONCLUSION

I want briefly to suggest that if the interpretation that I have defended in this paper is correct, then the Fifth Way is not without contemporary relevance, even for those working outside of the Aristotelian tradition. Although contemporary causal powers theorists often hold positions contrary to Aquinas's on

[83] *STh* I, q. 11, a. 3.

[84] *De Verit.*, q. 5, a. 2. See also *ScG* I, c. 42; and *STh* I, q. 103, a. 6, ad 3.

[85] Like the Attainability Interpretation, the argument that the Extrinsic Finality Interpretation attributes, albeit mistakenly, to the Fifth Way can also be extended to establish the uniqueness of the divine intellect. However, given that the two interpretations read the first premise differently, they would also read the analogy differently. On the Attainability Interpretation, the focus would be on the ruler's role in ordering the kingdom such that every citizen is able to achieve his own individual good. In contrast, on the Extrinsic Finality Interpretation, the analogy would focus on the ruler's role in promoting the common good of the kingdom. Although closely related, these two ways of extending the argument are ultimately distinct.

the nature of powers, nevertheless, many contemporary accounts of causal powers must confront what Neil Williams calls the "the problem of fit." He describes this problem as follows:

> The problem is one that concerns the way those powers work together to produce their manifestations. Powers must (typically) act in conjunction with one another to produce manifestations; a requirement of their working together is that they have the appropriate 'fit' for one another. If the salt is to manifest its solubility in the water, the water must likewise manifest its power to have the salt go into solution; there is no space for disagreement. However, as powers are intrinsic, and the manifestations they are capable of producing are set and incapable of change, their managing to line up is a matter of great mystery. Somehow the powers must be engineered such that they have the appropriate fit for one another. I call this the problem of fit.[86]

If the interpretation that I have defended in this paper is correct, Aquinas's Fifth Way is a kind of argument for the existence of God from the problem of fit. More specifically, it is an argument for the existence of God on the basis of the observation that the powers of natural bodies "fit" the extrinsic world such that they are able to attain their ends. Though translating the argument of the Fifth Way into language amenable to contemporary powers theorists is far beyond the scope of this paper, it nevertheless appears to be an avenue for development.

For those already within the Aristotelian tradition, the soundness of the argument is even more plausible. The Fifth Way, taken as it is "from the governance of things," ultimately seeks to prove the existence of a divine intellect who orders nature providentially. This divine intellect's providential ordering of nature explains why natural bodies are regularly able to act for and attain those ends toward which they are directed; it is the guarantor of the Aristotelian dictum that nature does nothing in vain. In Aquinas's own words, "among the works of

[86] Neil E. Williams, "Puzzling Powers: The Problem of Fit," in *The Metaphysics of Powers: Their Grounding and Their Manifestations*, ed. Anna Marmadora (New York: Routledge, 2010), 84-105.

God, none is in vain, just as none is in vain among the works of nature, for nature has this trait from God."[87]

[87] *ScG* III, c. 156. I would like to thank the editors and two anonymous reviewers of *The Thomist* for very helpful comments on an earlier draft of this article.

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THOMAS AQUINAS ON KNOWING THE ESSENCES OF MATERIAL SUBSTANCES

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I. THE DIFFICULTY OF ATTAINING KNOWLEDGE OF ESSENCES OF SUBSTANCES

A CONDENSED OUTLINE of Thomas Aquinas's explanation of how we attain intellectual knowledge might be expressed as follows: the activity of the agent intellect, using the phantasm as its instrument, produces impressed intelligible species in the possible intellect, which in turn forms its own concepts, or expressed intelligible species, through which it knows the natures of things, in a universal manner.[1] Much study would be required before one could even begin to unpack the carefully thought-out details that have been worked out in the above description, but in what follows, I wish to begin by first taking for granted the whole Thomistic epistemological doctrine thus outlined.

Given this explanation, the problem that I here propose to solve is *how* it is possible to provide human beings with a knowledge of the essences of material substances.[2] For if it is

[1] Cf. *ScG* I, c. 53 (Marietti ed., 441-44) (Thomas Aquinas, *Liber de veritate catholicae fidei contra errores infidelium seu Summa contra gentiles*, ed. P. Marc, C. Pera, and P. Caramello [Turin and Rome: Marietti, 1961]). Parenthetical numbers in citations of Marietti editions of Thomas's works refer to paragraph numbers in those editions.

[2] The term "essence" signifies *what* a thing is—it is that "through which and in which a being has existence" ("per eam et in ea ens habet esse") (*De Ente*, c. 1 [Leonine ed., 43:370, ll. 51-52). Thomas notes that "essence is properly and truly in substances,

true that all human knowledge has its origin in the senses[3] and that the senses provide likenesses only of accidents,[4] then it is unclear how the agency of the intellect, together with the agency of the phantasms, would be at all sufficient to produce any likeness of a material substance's essence, for the production of the likeness of a substance's essence from the likeness of mere accidents seems to be producing something from nothing.[5] And yet, Thomas clearly states that the proper object

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but in accidents in a certain way and *secundum quid*" ("essentia proprie et vere est in substantiis, sed in accidentibus est quodammodo et secundum quid") (ibid. [Leonine ed., 43:370, ll. 55-57]). As for the term "substance," some substances (immaterial substances) are completely determined by their essence, whereas material substances exist only when their form is further received in and limited by a particular matter; hence, *what* these material substances *are* (i.e., their essence) must include both form and matter (see *De Ente*, c. 4 [Leonine ed., 43:376, ll. 62-64]).

All citations of the Leonine edition of Aquinas's works (*Sancti Thomae Aquinatis doctoris angelici Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII P.M. edita* [Rome: Ex Typographia Polyglotta S.C. de Propaganda Fide, 1882–]) will include volume, page, and line numbers. All translations of Thomas are my own.

[3] "According to the Philosopher, all our knowledge has its beginning from the sense" ("Secundum philosophum omnis nostra cognitio a sensu ortum habet") (*Super Boet. De Trin.*, q. 1, a. 3, s.c. [Leonine ed., 50:86, ll. 59-60]).

[4] "Our intellect, which properly knows the quiddity of a thing as its proper object, receives from the sense[s], whose proper objects are external accidents" ("Intellectus noster, qui proprie est cognoscitivus quidditatis rei ut proprii obiecti, accipit a sensu, cuius propria obiecta sunt accidentia exteriora") (*STh* I, q. 18, a. 2 [Leonine ed., 4:226]). "For to understand [*intelligere*] is as if to read inside a thing [*intus legere*]; for sense and imagination know only external accidents, but the intellect alone reaches to the interior and essence of a thing" ("Enim intelligere quasi intus legere. Sensus enim et imaginatio sola accidentia exteriora cognoscunt; solus autem intellectus ad interiora et essentiam rei pertingit") (*De Verit.*, q. 1, a. 12 [Leonine ed., 22/1:35, ll. 26-29]). Cf. *De Verit.*, q. 10, a. 6 (Leonine ed., 22/2:311-13); III *De Anima*, c. 7 (Leonine ed., 45/1:236, ll. 62-85); *STh* I, q. 84, a. 7 (Leonine ed., 5:325); *STh* I, q. 84, a. 6 (Leonine ed., 5:323-24); *STh* I, q. 89, a. 1 (Leonine ed., 5:370-71); etc. See also: John Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas: From Finite Being to Uncreated Being* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2000), 35 n. 43.

[5] I am by no means the first to note the apparent difficulty here. See, for example, the overview of this problem presented by Ralph B. Gering, in "The Knowledge of Material Essences according to St. Thomas Aquinas," *The Modern Schoolman* 33 (1956): 153-81. See also: Norman Kretzmann, "Infallibility, Error, and Ignorance," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, suppl. vol. 17 (1991), 159-94; John Jenkins, "Aquinas on the Veracity of the Intellect," *Journal of Philosophy* 88 (1998): 623-32; and

of the human intellect is the quiddity (or essence) of a material thing, and he further maintains that our intellect cannot fail in its understanding of this object.[6]

Before attempting to resolve this problem, I want to emphasize its importance briefly, lest unavoidably technical details fool us into thinking of this problem as merely an esoteric exercise in understanding medieval terminology. The question of how we know the essences of material beings lies at the heart of all our questions about what we can know in this life and thus touches directly on questions of man's purpose and final end.[7] When I see, touch, or otherwise experience something—

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especially, P. L. Reynolds, "Properties, Causality and Epistemological Optimism in Thomas Aquinas," *Recherches de théologie et philosophie médiévales* 68 (2001): 270-309.

[6] "But the proper object of the human intellect, which is joined to the body, is the quiddity or nature existing in bodily matter" ("Intellectus autem humani, qui est coniunctus corpori, proprium obiectum est quidditas sive natura in materia corporali existens") (*STh* I, q. 84, a. 7 [Leonine ed., 5:325]); "The intellect is not deceived about the *what it is*") ("Intellectus non decipitur in quod quid est") (III *De Anima*, c. 5 [Leonine ed., 45/1:224, ll. 12-13).

[7] Aristotle writes, "None of the other animals is happy, since they in no way share in contemplation. Happiness extends, then, just so far as contemplation does, and those to whom contemplation more fully belongs are more truly happy, not accidentally, but in virtue of the contemplation; for this is in itself precious" (Aristotle, *Nic. Ethic.* 10.8.1178b27-31 [*The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, vol. 2 (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984), 1863]). Thomas himself, in his own Christian way, recognizes the truth of this statement: "But [the study of wisdom] is more sublime because chiefly through it man approaches the divine likeness, which makes everything in wisdom. Hence, because likeness is the cause of delight, the study of wisdom chiefly joins one to God through friendship" ("Sublimius autem est quia per ipsum homo praecipue ad divinam similitudinem accedit, quae omnia in sapientia fecit: unde, quia similitudo causa est dilectionis, sapientiae studium praecipue Deo per amicitiam coniungit") (*ScG* I, c. 2 [Marietti ed., 8]). This love of contemplation is why, as Robert Brennan once explained, "There is scarcely a page in all [Thomas's] vast tomes that does not contain some reference to his views on knowledge and its processes" (Robert Edward Brennan, O.P., *Thomistic Psychology: A Philosophic Analysis of the Nature of Man* [New York: The Macmillan Company, 1941], 173). Here we should of course distinguish between natural and supernatural contemplation—though this article is not the place to work out these distinctions. I will simply note that I am in complete agreement with Maritain here that "metaphysics is not the doorway to mystical contemplation. That doorway is Christ's humanity, for by Him we have been given grace and truth" (Jacques Maritain, *Distinguish to Unite or The Degrees of*

for example, a dog, a plant, a rock, the moon, another human person—how is it that I can claim that I really know anything else besides my own ideas and my own conscious activities? Perhaps indeed it might seem more reasonable to say, together with John Locke and other so-called empiricists, "Since the mind, in all its thoughts and reasonings, has no other immediate object but its own ideas, which it alone does or can contemplate, it is evident, that our knowledge is only conversant about them."[8] We should here remember that Locke, like Aristotle and like Thomas, also claims that all our knowledge originates from our senses. It is precisely in *how* Locke and other empiricists understand this process of knowing to take place that leads them to fundamental and far-reaching disagreements with the long-held tradition of perennial philosophy.[9]

Knowledge, trans. Gerald B. Phelan, The Collected Works of Jacques Maritain, vol. 7 [Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995], 13).

[8] John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Kenneth P. Winkler (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1996), bk. 4, chap. 1, §1.

[9] Note that Locke himself contends that his epistemology at least does not prevent an indirect knowledge of things: "Simple ideas are not fictions of our fancies, but the natural and regular productions of things without us, really operating upon us; and so carry with them all the conformity which is intended; or which our state requires: for they represent to us things under those appearances which they are fitted to produce in us" (ibid., bk. 4, chap. 4, §4]). Yet there is a clear and logical progression from the principles of Locke through Hume and to Kant, who ends up concluding that there simply cannot be any knowledge of things in themselves, period: "Since that which is not appearance cannot be an object of experience, it can never overstep the limits of sensibility, within which alone objects are given to us" (Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen Wood [New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998], A246/B303); "How they might be outside of the relation to possible experience and consequently to sense in general . . . will always remain unknown to us, so that it even remains unknown whether such a transcendental (extraordinary) cognition is possible at all" (ibid., A258/B314). As Aristotle might note here: "The least initial deviation from the truth is multiplied later a thousandfold. . . . A principle is great rather in power than in extent; hence that which was small at the start turns out a giant at the end" (Aristotle, *De Caelo* 1.5.271b8-9, b12-13 [Barnes, ed., 2:452]). "As they begin badly, [they] cannot fail to end badly" (Aristotle, *Polit.* 5.1.1302a6-7 [Barnes, ed., 2:2067]); "The beginning is thought to be more than half of the whole" (Aristotle, *Nic. Ethic.* 1.7.1098b7 [Barnes, ed., 2:1736]).

In contrast, Thomas Aquinas thinks that we really can attain actual knowledge of things, not just of our own ideas, and things are knowable only in their natures or essences.[10] Following Aristotle, Thomas further thinks that it is manifest by experience that what we know first, prior to our ideas, is precisely this "external," material world, and it is this very fact that must be explained by our epistemology; in typical Aristotelian fashion, Thomas does not wish to explain away what is more manifest by what is less manifest.[11] But merely positing our knowledge of things as a starting point by no means removes the question of how this knowledge is possible, and because the difficulties involved in understanding this question are indeed great and intricate—especially for those who, like Thomas, hold that all knowledge originates in the senses—the temptation to turn away from a natural realism remains an ever-looming danger. All the more so then, the question of how Thomas thinks it is possible to know the essences of material substances is worth pursuing. Despite the fact that this article will necessarily be limited to trying to understand just one piece of Thomas's epistemology and cannot demonstrate anything beyond that limited scope, what is ultimately at stake is precisely the question of what knowledge, if any, is possible to us in this life; and, in the words of Joseph Pieper: "True philosophy rests upon the belief that the real wealth of man lies not in the satisfaction of his necessities, nor,

[10] "A thing is knowable through its essence" ("Res per essentiam suam cognoscibilis est") (II *Sent.*, d. 37, q. 1, a. 1 [*Scriptum super libros Sententiarum magistri Petri Lombardi*, 4 vols., 1-2 ed. Pierre Mandonnet, 3-4 ed. Maria Fabianus Moos (Paris: Lethielleux, 1929-47), 2:944]).

[11] See, for example, the kind of arguments Thomas presents in *De unitate intellectus*: "But if the intelligible species of the possible intellect are neither received from phantasms nor illuminate them, they will be altogether different and have nothing proportional to them, nor would the phantasms cause anything to be understood, which is manifestly false" ("Si autem species intelligibiles intellectus possibilis neque accipiuntur a phantasmatibus, neque irradiant super ea, erunt omnino disparatae et nihil proportionales habentes, nec phantasmata aliquid facient ad intelligendum; quod manifeste repugnat") (*De Unit. Intel.*, c. 4 [Leonine ed., 43:310, ll. 257-62]).

again, in 'becoming lords and masters of nature,' but rather in being able to understand *what is*—the whole of what is."[12]

II. A Proposed Thomistic Solution: Knowledge of Specific Essences of Substances

For Thomas, intellectual knowledge does not begin with the knowledge of any specific kind of substance; rather, it begins with the knowledge of being,[13] which is then distinguished into at least an implicit knowledge of *being as substance* and *being as accidents* (i.e., being that properly exists only in substances). It should be stressed that this knowledge of being and the

[12] Josef Pieper, "The Philosophical Act," in *Leisure the Basis of Culture; The Philosophical Act*, trans. Alexander Dru [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2009], 92. "When man shuts himself up in his environment, in the sphere defined and limited by his immediate needs, the degeneration that follows is only possible because spiritual degeneration is possible. The really human thing is to see the stars above the roof, to preserve our apprehension of the universality of things in the midst of the habits of daily life, and to see 'the world' above and beyond our immediate environment. And with that we are back unawares at our first question: 'What do we mean by philosophizing?' It means to experience the fact that our immediate surroundings, prescribed as they are by the aims and needs of life, not only can be, but must be broken in upon (not only once but ever and again), by the disturbing call of 'the world', of the whole world and the everlasting and essential images of things mirrored by reality" (ibid., 105).

[13] "That which the intellect conceives first, as the most known and that into which all conceptions resolve, is being" ("Illud autem quod primo intellectus concipit quasi notissimum et in quod conceptiones omnes resolvit est ens") (*De Verit.*, q. 1, a. 1 [Leonine ed., 22/1:5, ll. 100-102]). "Being (*ens*) is the first [thing] that falls under apprehension, simply speaking" ("Ens est primum quod cadit in apprehensione simpliciter") (*STh* I-II, q. 94, a. 2 [Leonine ed., 7:170]). "But it must be said that what are more universal are what is known first by simple apprehension, for *being* [*ens*] falls first in the intellect, as Avicenna says, and *animal* falls in the intellect before *human*. For just as in real being [*esse naturae*], which proceeds from potency into act, an animal is prior to a human, so too in the generation of knowledge, *animal* is conceived in the intellect prior to *human*" ("Sed dicendum, quod magis universalia secundum simplicem apprehensionem sunt primo nota, nam primo in intellectu cadit ens, ut *Avicenna* dicit, et prius in intellectu cadit animal quam homo. Sicut enim in esse naturae quod de potentia in actum procedit prius est animal quam homo, ita in generatione scientiae prius in intellectu concipitur animal quam homo") (I *Metaphys.*, lect. 2 [*In duodecim libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis expositio*, ed. M.-R. Cathala and Raymond M. Spiazzi, 2nd ed. (Turin and Rome: Marietti, 1971), 46]).

distinction between substance and accident will undoubtedly be only vague and implicit, at least initially. But any child who distinguishes between, for example, her mother and her mother's color or shape can do so only after first achieving some implicit understanding that some things exist in themselves and some things exist *in* what exists in itself.

The question of how this prior, general knowledge of being and substance can happen will be addressed in the section that follows; in this section, however, I wish first to explain how, according to Thomas, the knowledge of a specific kind of essence (e.g., the essence of a man, of a horse, of a tree, etc.) can come about. In the *Summa contra gentiles*, after Thomas explains that "whatever the intellect knows about anything, it knows through the knowledge of the substance of that thing," he immediately adds that the intellect "must arrive at its understanding of the substance through the knowledge of sensible accidents."[14] It follows then that, whereas the general

[14] "Quicquid intellectus de aliqua re cognoscit, cognoscit per cognitionem substantiae illius rei. . . . per sensibilium accidentium cognitionem oportet ad substantiae intellectum pervenire" (*ScG* III, c. 56 [Marietti ed., 2328]). "Because substance exists in a distinguished and primordial way, any term expressing a subject of existence or an object of understanding involves some sort of relation, no matter how indirect, to what is both the primary subject of existence and the primary object of understanding, namely, substance" (Yves Simon, "Essay on Sensation," in *Philosopher at Work: Essays by Yves Simon*, ed. Anthony O. Simon [Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999], 99). "In its first act, the intellect does not receive a perfect likeness of the quiddity, which would represent this essence in all its complexity. Although certain texts could let it be thought that such is the position of Thomas, a number of other texts attest that quidditative knowledge is not immediate and requires the work of reason and the use of certain accidental properties. Nevertheless, for logical reasons, it is necessary to posit a knowledge of the essence that precedes the intellectual knowledge of a singular that has this essence. This is precisely the advantage of the notion of substance: it has essential properties prior to all essential predication. Socrates is necessarily a human being before he is white. In the order of knowing, one finds, in a different way, this priority of substantial and universal knowledge, which corresponds to the primacy of the form in the quiddity. It is first by its substantial form that a being belongs to this or that natural species. One first knows an individual as belonging to a natural species, whether or not one considers the true form of the individual or is mistaken. It is logically necessary to form a universal substantial concept in the first place" ("L'intellect ne reçoit pas une similitude parfaite de la quiddité dès son premier acte, qui lui représenterait cette essence dans toute sa complexité. Même si certains textes peuvent laisser penser que

knowledge of being is conveyed to the intellect immediately in the first intellectual apprehension, and furthermore, the general knowledge of substance (being-existing-in-itself) must soon follow, it remains that the knowledge of a specific kind of substance can be obtained only posteriorly through the knowledge of its accidents. This interpretation allows us to save both of the principles that Thomas here lays out, even in the same passage, namely, (1) that the intellect knows everything through its initial general knowledge of being and substance and (2) that the intellect knows the specific essences of substances through knowledge of those substances' accidents.

Before delving into this doctrine in more detail, we should note that neither of these principles is a later development in Thomas's thought; they are both consistently present throughout his writings. In his early *Sentences* commentary, after arguing that the quiddity of things is the proper object of the intellect, Thomas shows that the knowledge of a specific kind of substance is still attained only through knowledge of a thing's accidents. First Thomas argues that the intellect really attains to a thing's essence:

"Intellect" by its own name signifies a knowledge that extends to what is internal in a thing. Hence, since the sense and imagination are concerned with the accidents that are, as it were, standing around the essence of a thing, the

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telle est la position de Thomas, de nombreux autres attestent que la connaissance quidditative n'est pas immédiate, qu'elle requiert un travail de la raison et l'usage de certaines propriétés accidentelles. Néanmoins, pour des raisons logiques, il faut poser une connaissance de l'essence qui précède la connaissance intellectuelle d'un singulier ayant cette essence. C'est précisément l'intérêt de la notion de substance. Celle-ci possède des propriétés essentielles antérieures à toute prédication essentielle. Socrate est nécessairement un homme avant d'être blanc. Dans l'ordre cognitif, on retrouve, sous une autre forme, cette priorité de la connaissance substantielle et universelle, qui correspond au primat de la forme dans la quiddité. C'est d'abord par sa forme substantielle qu'un étant appartient à telle ou telle espèce naturelle. On connaît d'abord un individu en tant qu'il appartient à une espèce naturelle, que l'on considère ou non la véritable forme de l'individu ou que l'on se trompe. Il est logiquement nécessaire de se former en premier lieu un concept substantiel universel") (Robert Aurelian, "Penser la substance: Étude d'une question médiévale (XIIIe-XIVe siècles)" [PhD. diss., Université de Nantes, 2005], 128); translation mine.

intellect extends to its essence. Hence according to the Philosopher, the object of the intellect is the *what* [*quid*].[15]

But he immediately follows this claim with an explanation of how this is possible, noting that there is something special about the manner in which human intellects apprehend a specific essence:

But in the apprehension of *this* essence there is a difference. . . . Sometimes an intellect does not arrive at what is internal *except* through those things that are set around it, as if through certain gates; and here is the mode of apprehension in men, *who from effects and properties proceed to the knowledge of the essence of a thing*. And because in this there must be a certain discourse, therefore the apprehension of man is called reason, although reason is completed in understanding because inquiry leads to the essence of a thing. Hence, if there is anything that is immediately apprehended without the discourse of reason, there is not said to be reason of these things, but understanding, as, for example, first principles, which when heard, everyone immediately accepts. . . . *But as the human mind does not advance to the essence of the thing except through accidents*, so too neither does it advance to spiritual things except through bodily things and likenesses of sensible things.[16]

This beautiful passage from the *Sentences* commentary demonstrates that, even early in his career, Thomas did not think that the human intellect has direct and immediate knowledge of specific kinds of essences (except, of course, in the general sense already outlined above), despite the fact that

[15] "Intellectus secundum suum nomen importat cognitionem pertingentem ad intima rei. Unde cum sensus et imaginatio circa accidentia occupentur quae quasi circumstant essentiam rei, intellectus ad essentiam ipsam pertinget. Unde, secundum Philosophum . . . objectum intellectus est *quid*" (III *Sent.*, d. 35, q. 2, a. 3, qcla. 1 [Moos, ed., 3:1198]).

[16] "Sed in apprehensione hujus essentiae est differentia. . . . *Aliquando* vero ad intima non pervenitur nisi per circumposita quasi per quaedam ostia; et hic est modus apprehendendi in hominibus, qui ex effectibus et proprietatibus procedunt ad cognitionem essentiae rei. Et quia in hoc oportet esse quemdam discursum, ideo hominis apprehensio *ratio* dicitur, quamvis ad intellectum terminetur in hoc quod inquisitio ad essentiam rei perducit. Unde si aliqua sunt quae statim sine discursu rationis apprehendantur, horum non dicitur esse *ratio*, sed *intellectus*; sicut principia prima, quae quisque statim probat audita. . . . *Sicut* autem mens humana in essentiam rei non ingreditur nisi per accidentia, *ita* etiam in spiritualia non ingreditur nisi per corporalia, et sensibilium similitudines" (III *Sent.*, d. 35, q. 2, a. 2, qcla. 1 [Moos, ed., 3:1198]); emphases added.

essences or *quiddities* are indeed the proper object of the intellect. Since this seems to be a consistent teaching of Thomas, all the passages in which he talks about essences as the proper object of the intellect ought not to be interpreted in such a way as to imply that he believes there is any sort of direct access to the knowledge of specific kinds of essences of substances.[17]

In the above passage, Thomas also provides a helpful analogy: just as the human intellect arrives at a knowledge of spiritual things through bodily things (i.e., through reasoning from them *a posteriori*, from effect to cause), so too does the human intellect arrive at knowledge of the essences of specific kinds of substances through a knowledge of their accidents (i.e., by reasoning from effect to cause). As he explains more explicitly in *De ente*: "For essential differences are unknown in sensible things also, and hence they are signified through accidental differences, which arise from essential differences, *as a cause is signified through its effect*."[18] As we will see below, this cause-and-effect relationship between the essence and its accidents is in fact the key to understanding how the knowledge of accidents can provide any knowledge of the essence at all.

[17] "It is licit to say that . . . substantial essences are to some degree 'discovered' by the mind, neither 'bared' certainly, nor from within . . . but discovered *by their outsides* (the accidents, in turn, not being known by the inside, which would be to know them in derivation from the substance, but by the operations)" (Maritain, *Degrees of Knowledge*, 220).

[18] "In rebus enim sensibilibus etiam ipse differentie essentiales ignote sunt; unde significantur per differentias accidentales que ex essentialibus oriuntur, sicut causa significatur per suum effectum" (*De Ente*, c. 5, §94 [Leonine ed., 43:379, ll. 76-80]; emphasis added). "Because the essential principles of things are unknown to us, we must therefore use accidental differences in signifying essential things. . . . And through these, namely, through accidental differences, we arrive at knowledge of essential things" ("Quia principia essencialia rerum sunt nobis ignota, ideo oportet quod utamur differnciis accidentalibus in designatione essencialium. . . . Et ut per ea, scilicet per differencias accidentales, perueniamus in cognitionem essencialium") (I *De Anima*, c. 1 [Leonine ed., 45/1:7, ll. 254-60]). "Essential forms are not *per se* known by us but must be manifested through some accidents that are signs of that form" ("Forme essenciales non sunt nobis per se note, oportet quod manifestentur per aliqua accidencia, que sunt signa illius forme") (II *Post Anal.*, lect. 13 [Leonine ed., 1*2:222, ll. 119-21]).

However, there is an additional epistemological problem here that must first be acknowledged. Whenever one has knowledge of something that is strictly accidental to the knowledge of something else, the knowledge of the former can never provide any necessary or essential knowledge of the other thing. Thomas himself affirms this logical principle: "Those things that we know to exist through something accidental to them are such that in no way through this knowledge do we know *what* they are, because we do not even truly know *that* they exist through an accident of this kind."[19] If the only knowledge available to us regarding substances were accidental, then no knowledge of substances would be essential. If I know only the accidents of a thing and not the thing itself in any way, I cannot even say whether those accidents are caused by one thing or by many things.

For example, say I notice perturbations in the orbit of a planet. I may posit that there is another planet causing those perturbations, but in fact, there could be many objects causing them all at once, or indeed, several successive and different objects causing those perturbations at different times. In this example, knowledge of these accidents (the perturbations) alone would reveal nothing necessary about even the existence of any particular substance (though one should note that even in this example, *some* substance must exist if there are accidents).[20] But if it is true that the accidental cannot provide knowledge of the substantial, then we are back at square one: How can the knowledge of sensible accidents produce knowledge of the essences of substances at all?

Part of the answer to this quandary lies in the ambiguity of the word "accident." For even though a being is either a substance or an accident (and nothing in between), one can still make a distinction between those accidents that are predicated of a subject "accidentally" and those accidents that are

[19] "Illa de quibus scimus quod sunt per aliquod *accidens* ipsorum, *nullo modo* per hoc se habent ad hoc quod cognoscamus de ipsis '*quid est*', quia *neque* etiam per huiusmodi accidens uere scimus ea esse" (II *Post Anal.*, lect. 7 [Leonine ed., 1*2:199, ll. 156-60]).

[20] Cf. II *Post Anal.*, lect. 19 (Leonine ed., 1*2:239-41).

predicated of a subject as its "properties."[21] "Properties" are those accidents that are not wholly accidental to a thing's essence but instead are caused by it, even though these accidents are neither the essence itself nor a part of that essence.[22] We should note that the term "property" is used in a number of analogous and related senses,[23] but for the purposes of

[21] "If we take 'accident' in this way [i.e., as one of the five predicables in logic, rather than as the exclusive distinction between substance and accident], then there is something intermediate between substance and accident, that is, between a substantial predicate and an accidental predicate; and this is a *property*. For *it is indeed like a substantial predicate inasmuch as it is caused from the essential principles of the species*; and therefore, the property of the subject is demonstrated through the definition, which signifies the essence. But it is like an accidental predicate in that it is neither the essence of the thing nor a part of the essence, but something besides it" ("Sic igitur accipiendo accidens est aliquid medium inter substantiam et accidens, id est inter substantiale predicatum et accidentale: et hoc est proprium. Quod quidem conuenit cum substantiali predicato in quantum causatur ex principiis essentialibus specie: et ideo per diffinitionem significantem essentiam demonstratur proprietas de subiecto. Cum accidentali uero predicato conuenit in hoc quod nec est essentia rei nec pars essentie, set aliquid preter ipsam") (*De Spirit. Creat.*, a. 11 [Leonine ed., 24/2:120, ll. 272-81]; emphasis added).

[22] "The actuality of the accidental form is caused by the actuality of the subject. Thus that subject, inasmuch as it is in potency, is receptive of the accidental form, but inasmuch as it is in act, it is productive of it. But this I say about the proper and *per se* accident" ("Actualitas formae accidentalis causatur ab actualitate subiecti. Ita quod subiectum, inquantum est in potentia, est susceptivum formae accidentalis: inquantum autem est in actu, est eius productivum. Et hoc dico de proprio et per se accidente") (*STh* I, q. 77, a. 6 [Leonine ed., 5:246]). "Since the existence of an accident depends on the subject, it must also be the case that *its definition, signifying its existence, contains the subject in itself*. Hence, when a subject is put in the definition of a predicate that is its proper accident, this is the second mode of *per se*" ("Cum esse accidentis dependeat a subiecto, oportet etiam quod diffinitio eius significans esse ipsius contineat in se subiectum. Vnde secundus modus dicendi per se est quando subiectum ponitur in diffinitione predicati quod est proprium accidens eius") (I *Post Anal.*, lect. 10 [Leonine ed., 1*2:39, ll. 61-67]); emphasis added).

[23] "In the sense intended here—for the word has several meanings—a *proprium* is a non-essential attribute that is convertible (coextensive) with its subject qua species. The standard medieval examples of properties (also known in the schools as 'proper accidents' and 'proper passions') are the capacity to laugh in human beings and containing the sum of two right angles . . . in triangles. . . . The term *proprium* has other senses too, and its precise sense is not always clear. In what is perhaps the most basic sense of the term, a *proprium* is anything that belongs to one thing alone (whether or

understanding the attainment of the knowledge of the essences of material substances, we are particularly interested in those proper accidents that flow from the essence *necessarily* and thus always exist with that essence, even though they are not identical with the essence itself: "For if any accident exists in a subject always and out of necessity, it must be because it has a cause in the subject; once the subject is supposed, it is impossible for the accident not to exist."[24] It is precisely these sorts of proper accidents that allow for the knowledge of substances through their accidents, for, as Thomas notes, "Substantial forms are unknown through themselves, but they become known to us through their *proper* accidents."[25] And again, in *De veritate*: "The substantial differences of things are unknown to

not that thing always possesses it)" (Reynolds, "Properties, Causality and Epistemological Optimism in Thomas Aquinas," 272-73). Reynolds then points out a further possible distinction: "It seems that terms such as *proprium* and *passio propria* sometimes denote accidental features that belong necessarily and naturally to a species but not exclusively so" (ibid., 274). In the strictest sense of the term, however, a property is that which belongs to *only* one species, to all of that species, and always; see Porphyry, "Isagoge," in *Five Texts on the Mediaeval Problem of Universals: Porphyry, Boethius, Abelard, Duns Scotus, Ockham*, trans. and ed. Paul Vincent Spade (Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1994), 10.

[24] "For if any accident exists in a subject always and out of necessity, it must be because it has a cause in the subject; once the subject is supposed, it is impossible for the accident not to exist. This can indeed happen in two ways: in one way, when the accident is caused from the principles of the species, and such an accident is called a *per se* passion or a property; in another way, this happens when the accident is caused by the principles of the individual, and this is an inseparable accident" ("Si enim aliquod accidens ex necessitate et semper insit subiecto, oportet quod causam habeat in subiecto, qua posita, non possit accidens non esse. Quod quidem contingit dupliciter: uno modo quando ex principiis speciei accidens causatur, et tale accidens dicitur per se passio uel proprium; alio modo quando accidens causatur ex principiis indiuidui, et hoc est accidens inseparabile") (I *Post Anal.*, lect. 14 [Leonine ed., 1*2:53, ll. 30-39]). Reynolds explains that "one cannot so cut off a substance from its properties, even in the mind, that no trace of the properties is left, since the effect is latent and pre-exists in the cause. Heat is not part of the essence of fire, and one can have first-order understanding of what fire is without heat. But because heat flows naturally and necessarily form fire, there must be something heat-like in the essence of fire" (Reynolds, "Properties, Causality and Epistemological Optimism in Thomas Aquinas," 282).

[25] "Forme substantiales per se ipsas sunt ignote, set innotescunt nobis per accidentia propria" (*De Spirit. Creat.*, a. 11, ad 3 [Leonine ed., 24/2:121, ll. 333-35]; emphasis added).

us . . . the accidents themselves designate or signify the essence, as the *proper* effects signify a cause."[26] This last phrase is important, as it is not just any accidents that reveal the essence of a thing, but rather, those accidents that are the proper effects of a thing's essence. These accidents, which are always found together with the substance, are what enable some partial knowledge of a thing's essence, and this knowledge is possible precisely because here there is some necessary connection, a necessary cause-and-effect relationship. So, for example, through a grasping of the quality of "risibility" in man, one can begin to reason to the *cause* of that risibility and thus begin to grasp something of the essence of a human being.

We must be careful here to remember that, for Thomas, the essence of a material substance is a real composition of both matter and form; a material essence is not a Lockean "substance," in the stripped-down sense of some featureless underlying thing of which nothing can be predicated, but which somehow unites these proper accidents.[27] Rather, the essences of material substances are precisely a unified and specified composite of both form and matter. *Per impossibile*, if the

[26] "Substantiales rerum differentiae sunt nobis ignotae . . . ipsa accidentia designant vel notificant essentiam ut proprii effectus notificant causam" (*De Verit*., q. 10, a. 1, ad 6 [Leonine ed., 22/2:299, ll. 278-83]; emphasis added).

[27] Anscombe's criticism of some version of understanding Aristotle's "substance" is applicable here, *mutatis mutandis*: "Such views are based on the unconscious assumption—which we have seen in Locke—that one can identify a *thing* without identifying it as *a such-and-such*—or that if one cannot do this, this is because *we* are incapable of conceiving substance except as having some qualities. The thing, then, that is taken to be postulated becomes a thoroughly mysterious entity which *in itself* has no characteristics: a 'somewhat we know not what' which is postulated as *underlying* the characteristics that it is said to 'have' and which alone enable us to conceive it. Because Aristotle distinguishes between substance and quality, those who take a predicate like 'man' to signify a complex of properties readily suppose him to be distinguishing between the being of a thing and the being of any attributes that it has. They then take the thing itself to have no attributes. It would be almost incredible, if it had not happened, to suppose that anyone could think it an argument to say: the ultimate subject of predication must be something without predicates; or that anyone who supposed this was Aristotle's view could do anything but reject it with contempt" (G. E. M. Anscombe and P. T. Geach, *Three Philosophers* [Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1963], 10-11).

essences of material substances were purely formal and immaterial, then it is true that in no way could their material, sensible accidents tell us anything about the essences of their substances, except perhaps their bare existence.[28] But because material essences necessarily entail matter, they are to that extent communicable to material senses.[29] So although it is true that external sensible accidents will never give us comprehensive knowledge of a thing's essence, nevertheless, the sensible

[28] "For a cause is known through an effect either [1] by reason of a likeness that is between the effect and cause or [2] inasmuch as an effect demonstrates the power of a cause. But by reason of likeness, from an effect one cannot know the *what it is* of a cause, unless the agent [cause] is of one species [with its effect]. . . . But by reason of power, this also cannot be except when the effect is commensurate [*adaequat*] to the power of the cause: for then, the whole power of the cause is known through the effect, and the power of the thing demonstrates its substance" ("Nam per effectum scitur causa vel ratione similitudinis quae est inter effectum et causam: vel inquantum effectus demonstrat virtutem causae. Ratione autem similitudinis, ex effectu non poterit sciri de causa *quid est*, nisi sit agens unius specie. . . . Ratione autem virtutis, hoc etiam non potest esse nisi quando effectus adaequat virtutem causae: tunc enim per effectum tota virtus causae cognoscitur; virtus autem rei demonstrat substantiam ipsius") (*ScG* III, c. 41 [Marietti ed., 2188]). "When an effect is *commensurate* [*adaequat*] to the power of the agent, it must be that that form exists in the maker and the made according to the same *ratio*; for then the maker and made would fall together in the same species" ("Quando effectus adaequat virtutem agentis, oportet quod secundum eamdem rationem sit illa forma in faciente et in facto; tunc enim faciens et factum coincidunt in idem specie") (*De Pot.*, q. 7, a. 5 [*Questiones disputate*, t. 2, *De potentia; De virtutibus in communi*, ed. M.-R. Cathala and Raymond M. Spiazzi, 2nd ed. (Turin and Rome: Marietti, 1971), 59]; emphasis added).

[29] The sensible matter that is part of material essences explains why, for example, it is easier for human beings to know the nature of a rock than that of a fly: the rock has a form that has less actuality than the fly's, and so a rock can be more easily understood by us through its proper, sensible, accidental forms. "For as matter, inasmuch as it is so, is in potency, so too an agent, inasmuch as it is so, is in act" ("Sicut enim materia, inquantum huiusmodi, est in potentia; ita agens, inquantum huiusmodi, est in actu") (*STh* I, q. 4, a. 1 [Leonine ed., 4:50]); "To the extent that a power extends itself to many, to that degree it is more immaterial" ("Virtus quanto est immaterialior tanto ad plura se possit extendere") (*De Verit.*, q. 15, a. 2, ad 7 [Leonine ed., 22/2:488, ll. 389-90]); "Water is more material than all bodies, except earth" ("Aqua . . . inter omnia corpora est materialior praeter terram") (*De Pot.*, q. 4, a. 1, ad 5 [Marietti ed., 33]). It is important, however, to note that it does require reasoning even to grasp something of the essence of a rock; see *Super Ioan.*, c. 1, lect. 1 (*Super evangelium S. Ioannis lectura*, ed. R. Cai (Turin and Rome: Marietti, 1952], 26).

accidents, as they actually exist in substances, may indeed grant some knowledge of a material essence, that is, precisely insofar as these accidents flow from that material thing's essence.[30] It is thus that Thomas can claim, "The *ratio* of a substance is known through accidents,"[31] and more precisely, "We know the substance of a thing from its properties or activities."[32]

But how does the human intellect distinguish a property from other accidents in the first place? To answer this question, it will be helpful to review a well-known passage from Thomas's commentary on the *Posterior Analytics*. In this passage, Thomas is trying to explain how we attain our knowledge of universal principles, but his explanation can also be applied, *mutatis mutandis*, to the attainment of the knowledge of the essences of things. The important principle that Thomas brings into play

[30] Although it is true that the external sensible accidents perceived by our senses can never be commensurate (*adaequans*) to the substance that causes them, they can, nevertheless, be commensurate to *some* knowledge of that material essence. "Through its form something is seen in two ways. In one way through the form that is the thing itself. . . . But a thing is seen through its form in another way through a form that is from itself, whether it be abstracted from itself, as when indeed a form is more immaterial than the thing, as the form of a stone is abstracted from a stone, or whether it is impressed" ("Per formam autem suam aliquid dupliciter uidetur: uno modo per formam que est ipsa res . . . alio modo per formam que est ab ipso: siue sit abstracta ab ipso, quando scilicet forma immaterialior est quam res, sicut forma lapidis abstraitur a lapide, siue sit impressa") (*Super Boet. De Trin.*, q. 1, a. 2 [Leonine ed., 50:84, ll. 52-59]). "Indeed something is known in itself when it is known through a proper species commensurate [*adaequatam*] to the knowable thing itself, as when the eye sees a human being through the species of a human being" ("In seipso quidem cognoscitur aliquid, quando cognoscitur per speciem propriam adaequatam ipsi cognoscibili: sicut cum oculus videt hominem per speciem hominis") (*STh* I, q. 14, a. 5 [Leonine ed., 4:172]).

[31] "Per accidentia cognoscitur ratio substantiae" (*STh* III, q. 75, a. 2, ad 3 [Leonine ed., 12:160]).

[32] "Substantiam rei ex proprietatibus vel operationibus eius cognoscimus" (*STh* I, q. 13, a. 8 [Leonine ed., 4:157]). "Activity belongs to the composite, as also existence belongs to the composite, for to act belongs to the existing thing. But the composite has existence substantially through a substantial form; but it acts through the power that follows the substantial form" ("Actio est compositi, sicut et esse: existentis enim est agere. Compositum autem per formam substantialem habet esse substantialiter; per virtutem autem quae consequitur formam substantialem, operatur") (*STh* I, q. 77, a. 1, ad 3 [Leonine ed., 5:237]).

here is the role of *experience* (and consequently, of the *cogitative power*) in determining what pertains to the essence of a thing and what is completely accidental.[33]

Thomas first provides us with a definition of "experience": "But from the memory of the same thing, made many times, albeit in diverse singulars, comes experience; for experience seems to be nothing other than receiving something from many things retained in the memory."[34] Now even though human experience certainly involves the rational power, there can be experience in nonrational animals as well. So Thomas contrasts experience, simply speaking, with intellectual understanding, which nevertheless can follow from experience:

> But nevertheless, experience requires some reasoning about particulars, through which one thing is compared to another, which is proper to reason. For example, when someone remembers that such an herb has healed many from a fever many times, there is said to be experience that such an herb can heal a fever. But reason does not stop in the experience of particulars, but from many particulars in which it has experience, it receives one common thing, which is established in the soul, and it considers that thing without consideration of anything of singulars, and this common thing it receives as a principle of art and knowledge. For example, so long as a doctor has considered this herb to have healed Socrates of fever and Plato of fever and many other individual men of fever, this is experience. But when in his

[33] "For experience is from the collection of many singulars received in the memory. But a collection of this kind is proper to human beings and pertains to the cogitative power, which is called particular reason, which collects individual intentions, as universal reason collects universal intentions" ("Experimentum enim est ex collatione plurium singularium in memoria receptorum. Huiusmodi autem collatio est homini propria, et pertinet ad vim cogitativam, quae ratio particularis dicitur: quae est collativa intentionum individualium, sicut ratio universalis intentionum universalium") (I *Metaphys*., lect. 1 [Marietti ed., 15]).

[34] "*Ex memoria autem multociens facta* circa eandem rem, in diuersis tamen singularibus, fit *experimentum*, quia *experimentum* nichil aliud esse uidetur quam accipere aliquid ex multis in memoria retentis" (II *Post Anal*., lect. 20 [Leonine ed., 1*2:244, ll. 147-51]). "The cogitative acquires experience by a comparison (*collatio*) of one thing to another to see what they have in common" (Mark Barker, "Experience and Experimentation: The Meaning of *Experimentum* in Aquinas," *The Thomist* 76 [2012]: 60).

consideration he ascends to this, that such a species of herb heals fever simply, this is received as a certain rule of the art of medicine.[35]

In contrasting reason with experience, Thomas is not implying that a human person has experience without the use of his reason. Clearly, in the above example, the doctor's intellectual power is involved throughout his acquiring knowledge of this herb. However, so long as the doctor's understanding of a thing remains particular, it will bear the same name as the "experience" that is common to animals; an animal too can be trained to avoid or pursue a certain herb, but this is not because it has universal knowledge. But when the doctor considers "such a species of herb" universally and universally attributes the accident of "fever-curing" to it, this is the activity of reasoning that is proper to the intellectual level. In this example, the doctor is precisely trying to discover something about the *essence* of this substance, this herb. Its accident of curing a fever is certainly accidental to the herb, in the sense that it is not part of its essence. But, nevertheless, after experiencing this accident many times, the doctor can begin to ask whether this accident is a *property* of this specific kind of herb, an attribute that flows from its essence and that is always present with the herb. Experience is transformed into intellectual reasoning about the herb's nature when the doctor begins to consider whether "fever-curing" is more than just accidental simply, but instead, an accident that bears some intrinsic connection to what the herb is. It is the reasoning that

[35] "Set tamen experimentum indiget aliqua ratiocinatione circa particularia, per quam confertur unum ad aliud, quod est proprium rationis. Puta, cum aliquis recordatur quod talis herba multociens sanauit multos a febre, dicitur esse expertum quod talis sit sanatiua febris. Ratio autem non sistit in experimento particularium, set ex multis particularibus in quibus expertus est, accipit unum commune, quod firmatur in anima, et considerat illud absque consideratione alicuius singularium. Et hoc commune accipit ut principium artis et sciencie: puta, quandiu medicus considerauit hanc herbam sanasse Sortem febrientem et Platonem et multos alios singulares homines, <est experimentum>; cum autem sua consideratio ad hoc ascendit quod talis species herbe sanat febrientem simpliciter, hoc accipitur ut quedam regula artis medicine (II *Post Anal.*, lect. 20 [Leonine ed., 1*2:245, ll. 152-69]).

follows from experience then that can help us begin to distinguish between properties and merely contingent accidents.

At this point, we should qualify the above statements by noting that the discovery of properties in the strict sense is in fact posterior to knowing a thing's essence distinctly and as such:

> Because the essential forms are not known to us in themselves, they must be shown through some accidents that are signs of that form. . . . But one must not take the proper accidents of that species, because such must be demonstrated through the definition of the species. But the form of the species must be made known through some more common accidents, and according to this, the taken *differences* are indeed called *substantial*, inasmuch as they are brought forward in order to declare the essential form, but they are more common than the species, inasmuch as they are taken from some signs that follow higher genera.[36]

Since properties (in the strictest sense of accidents that necessarily flow from an essence and that belong only to that essence) are known *as such* only through a prior knowledge of the species, Thomas argues here that, in order to arrive at knowledge of a species itself (i.e., knowledge of the essence of a specific kind of thing), we must begin by focusing on features of that essence that are in fact common to multiple species (i.e.,

[36] "Quia forme essenciales non sunt nobis per se note, oportet quod manifestentur per aliqua accidencia, que sunt signa illius forme. . . . Non autem oportet accipere accidencia propria illius speciei, quia talia oportet per diffinitionem speciei demonstrari; set oportet notificari formam speciei per aliqua accidencia communiora, et secundum hoc differencie assumpte dicuntur quidem substanciales, in quantum inducuntur ad declarandum formam essencialem, sunt autem communiores specie, in quantum assumuntur ex aliquibus signis, qae consecuntur superiora genera" (II *Post Anal.*, lect. 13 [Leonine ed., 1*2:222, ll. 119-31]; emphasis added). Thomas teaches this same doctrine in his *De anima* commentary: "For if the essential principles could be known and rightly defined, the definition would not lack the accidents; but because the essential principles of things are unknown to us, we must therefore make use of accidental *differences* in the designation of what is essential (for 'two-footed' is not essential, but it is placed in the designation of what is essential)" ("Si enim recte diffinirentur et possent cognosci principia essencialia, diffinitio non indigeret accidentibus; set quia principia essencialia rerum sunt nobis ignota, ideo oportet quod utamur differenciis accidentalibus in designatione essencialium (bipes enim non est essenciale, set ponitur in designatione essencialis") (I *De anima*, c. 1 [Leonine ed., 45/1:7, ll. 252-58]; emphasis added).

not proper to this species alone).[37] However, as Thomas continues to explain in this same lecture, these more common attributes must still be necessary and universal features of a thing—even if not necessarily unique properties of the species—if they are to help in pinning down what is both essential and specific to a thing's nature.[38] So, for example, someone trying to understand the essence of a horse might first discover and collect together such necessary features as "four-legged," "mammal," "grass-eating," "hoofed," "one-toed," and so on, in order to be able to arrive eventually at some working definition of the essence of a horse, even though none of these attributes in themselves are unique to that species of animal.[39] But

[37] The claim here is that essence is disclosed through the discovery of what can be predicated as "differences," which are indeed predicated essentially, as "a part of what the thing was to be" (Porphyry, "Isagoge" [Spade, ed., 10]). Properties, on the other hand, are not a part of the essence itself—they are not part of what the thing is—but instead, they flow from the essence and as such are not discovered to be properties *as such* until it is demonstrated that they are indeed proper to that specific nature. Nevertheless, as shown above, before they are demonstrated to *be* properties, they can in fact help the intellect to reason to what is essential.

[38] "Because those things that are predicated in the *that which it is* are in it necessarily, but whatever exists in it necessarily is predicated universally, it is necessary that . . . those things that are predicated in the *that which it is* in the aforementioned way are predicated universally and out of necessity" ("*Quod* ea *que predicantur in eo 'quod quid est'* ex necessitate insunt, quecunque autem ex necessitate insunt, uniuersaliter predicantur, necesse est quod . . . accipiantur predicto modo ea que predicantur *in eo quod quid*, quod *ex necessitate* et uniuersaliter predicentur") (II *Post Anal.*, lect. 13 [Leonine ed., 1*2:222, ll. 139-41]).

[39] As another example, Thomas often offers "two-footed animal" as the definition of man, pointing out that "two-footed" is here predicated of man as a difference while "animal" is predicated as a genus (see especially VII Metaphys., lect. 12); however, it is obvious in this example that man is not the only species that could be defined as "two-footed animal," and other differences must be supplied before one can arrive at a more distinct knowledge of man's essence. "For as much as we fully consider a thing's differences from others, so much will we more perfectly know each thing. For each thing has in itself a proper existence that is distinct from all other things. Hence also, in things of which we know the definitions, we first gather them together in a genus, through which we know what is in common. And afterwards, we add differences, by which something is distinguished from other things. And thus the complete knowledge of the substance of a thing is perfected" ("Tanto enim unumquodque perfectius cognoscimus, quanto differentias eius ad alia plenius intuemur: habet enim res

nevertheless, from a definition reached in this manner, one could then begin to try to discern those accidents that are truly proper to the nature of that specific animal.[40]

Thus, for Thomas, human knowledge of the essence of a specific substance is obtained gradually and is necessarily subject to growth and development, both by the process of distinguishing those accidents that have an intrinsic relationship to a thing's essence from those that do not and by distinguishing those attributes that are necessary, but common and remote, from those attributes that are truly proper to the species. This need to work continually on developing one's knowledge of even material things explains Thomas's well-known claim that "our knowledge is so weak that no philosopher could perfectly investigate the nature of one fly; hence one reads that one philosopher spent thirty years in solitude that he might know the nature of the bee."[41]

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unaquaeque in seipsa esse proprium ab omnibus aliis rebus distinctum. Unde et in rebus quarum definitiones cognoscimus, primo eas in genere collocamus, per quod scimus in communi quid est; et postmodum differentias addimus, quibus a rebus aliis distinguatur; et sic perficitur substantiae rei completa notitia") (*ScG* I, c. 14 [Marietti ed., 117]). Cf. *STh* I, q. 85, a. 3 (Leonine ed., 5:336).

[40] In this article, I am primarily concerned with how we first *attain* knowledge of the essences of substances, but a further account of how that knowledge is *developed* and perfected according to Thomas would necessarily entail a description of how we arrive at knowledge via the way of analysis/resolution and the way of synthesis/composition (see Benjamin Block, "Thomas Aquinas on How We Know Essences: The Formation and Perfection of Concepts in the Human Intellect" [PhD. diss., The Catholic University of America, 2019], chap. 5). Briefly, one could describe the process of the development of intellectual knowledge thus: in the act of intellectual abstraction, we arrive at a universal intelligible species, and this is by way of resolution, for the universal intelligible species acts as a principle for further understanding. But that intelligible species can be made more perfect and distinct (cf. *ScG* II, c. 75 [Marietti ed., 1557-58]). Thus, in our further reasoning about various natures, we discover their various properties and features, and by way of composition, we bring together the various principles and causes that we have apprehended in order to understand these natures better. Finally, in the perfection of our knowledge, we understand what we know in light of the highest, simplest principles, and this is again by way of resolution. See also Eileen Sweeney's excellent article on this subject: "Three Notions of *Resolutio* and the Structure of Reasoning in Aquinas," *The Thomist* 58 (1994): 197-243.

[41] "Sed cognitio nostra est adeo debilis quod nullus philosophus potuit unquam perfecte investigare naturam unius muscae: unde legitur, quod unus philosophus fuit

The above examples reinforce the important point that the idea of essence is not something "added" posteriorly to the experience of proper accidents, as if a material being's essence were something completely inaccessible to our knowledge. Instead, in and through our experience, there is first a general intellectual understanding of a substance's essence, and it is this general understanding that must then gradually be made more determinate. For Thomas, even though one's understanding of a specific kind of essence is developed gradually and through a process of reasoning, one must still begin one's knowledge of a material substance with a more confused and general understanding of its essence:

It must be known that whether a thing exists [*an est*] can be known about no thing unless in some way what it is [*quid est*] is known about the thing, either in perfect knowledge or at least in a confused knowledge. . . . For he who knows that *human being* exists, and who seeks to know what *human being* is, must know through a definition what this name "human being" signifies. Nor could this be unless in some way he conceived some thing that he knows exists, even if he didn't know its definition. *For he conceives human being according to the knowledge of some proximate or remote genus and its accidents that externally appear from it*. For the knowledge of definitions, as also of demonstrations, takes its beginning from some preexisting knowledge.[42]

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triginta annis in solitudine, ut cognosceret naturam apis" (*In symbolum apostolorum*, prol. [*Opuscula theologica*, t. 2: *In Symbolum Apostolorum, scilicet "Credo in Deum" expositio*, ed. R. M. Spiazzi, 2nd ed. (Turin and Rome: Marietti, 1953), 864]).

[42] "Sciendum quod de nulla re potest sciri an est nisi quoquo modo sciatur de ea quid est, uel cognitione perfecta, uel saltem cognitione confusa. . . . Oportet enim scientem hominem esse et quaerentem quid est homo per diffinitionem scire quid hoc nomen 'homo' significat. Nec hoc esset nisi aliquam rem quoquo modo conciperet quam scit esse, quamuis nesciat eius diffinitionem: concipit enim hominem secundum cognitionem alicuius generis proximi uel remote, et aliquorum accidentium que extra apparent de ipso. Oportet enim diffinitionum cognitionem sicut et demonstrationum ex aliqua preexsistenti cognitione initium sumere" (*Super Boet. De Trin.*, q. 6, a. 3 [Leonine ed., 50:167, l. 114-168, l. 129]; emphasis added). "The Philosopher says that what is clear and certain to us is at first more confused, but afterwards we know in distinguishing the principles and elements distinctly. But it is clear that to know something in which many things are contained, without having proper knowledge of each of those things that are contained in it, is to know something under a certain confusion" ("philosophus dicit, in I *Physic.*, quod *sunt primo nobis manifesta et certa confusa magis; posterius autem*

The question remains then: How do we attain this "general intellectual understanding of a substance's essence," which is later developed? It is this question that we will take up in the following section.

At this point, however, it will be helpful to review what we have established thus far. I have made two major claims in regard to the intellect's attainment of the knowledge of the essences of substances and attributed these principles to Thomas. (1) First, the intellect's knowledge of substance is prior to the knowledge of accidents in general; as such, accidents are known only in distinction from substances. However, the knowledge of substance that is prior here is an indistinct and general notion of substance, not a knowledge of a specific kind of substance. (2) Second, when it comes to the knowledge of a specific kind of substance, that is, of the essence of a particular species, the knowledge of its accidents will be prior to the distinct knowledge of that essence itself; knowledge of a specific kind of substance is gained, in part, by distinguishing between accidents that have a necessary relation to a thing's essence and accidents that do not. As for the knowledge of specific kinds of substances, as we have shown above, some sort of inference theory[43] seems to be a good candidate for explaining how

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cognoscimus distinguendo distincte principia et elementa. Manifestum est autem quod cognoscere aliquid in quo plura continentur, sine hoc quod habeatur propria notitia uniuscuiusque eorum quae continentur in illo, est cognoscere aliquid sub confusione quadam") (*STh* I, q. 85, a. 3 [Leonine ed., 5:336]).

[43] I wish here to draw readers' attention to the inference theory of Richard of Mediavilla in particular, who wrote soon after the death of Thomas and was greatly influenced by him. I believe that the inference theory explicitly expounded by Richard can be found at least implicitly in Thomas, albeit with important differences discussed further in this article (for more on Richard's theory, see Block, "Thomas Aquinas on How we Know Essences," chap. 4). Richard provides a carefully thought-out account of how we might arrive at the knowledge of a particular substance through its sensible accidents: "We do not know substance through its proper species . . . but through its properties, in arguing from that which in those things is some likeness of the substance, but nevertheless not in a univocal way. For through the species of the accidents that are received in the intellect through the mediation of the sense, the intellect knows *the intention of a dependent being*. And from this, in argumentation, the intellect concludes that for that being there is naturally some *subsistent being*. And finally, it concludes that

Thomas thinks one attains this kind of knowledge.[44] Again though, for Thomas, simply parsing between those accidents

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being is subsistent in itself, and it arrives at knowledge of the substance whose *ratio* is being existent in itself. Afterwards, from these properties it further hunts for the differences of substance and can only proceed inasmuch as it can draw from these properties. . . . Hence also, when philosophers hunted for the differences of substances, they made this from the comparison of substances to their properties and only descended to them inasmuch as the properties could lead them by the hand. And anyone can experience this way of knowing for himself. For if he is asked how he ought to respond to 'what is fire,' he would say that it is a being existing in itself, naturally subject to dimensions and naturally apt for heat and dryness and lightness, and so on from its other properties. And it is evident that if man could otherwise know the differences of substances other than through a comparison to properties, he could otherwise express them" ("Non cognoscimus substantiam per propriam eius speciem, sed per suas proprietates argumentando eo quod in illis est aliqua similitudo substantiae, non tamen modo univoco. Per species enim accidentium quae mediante sensu recipiuntur in intellectu, cognoscit intellectus intentionem entis dependentis. Et ex hoc argumentando concludit quod illi enti natum est aliquod ens subsistere. Et tandem concludit illud ens esse per se subsistens et devenit in cognitionem substantiae, cuius ratio est ens per se exsistens. Postea ex illis proprietatibus ulterius venatur differentias substantiae et tantum potest procedere, quantum potest ex illis proprietatibus elicere et non plus naturaliter et de communi lege. Unde et philosophi cum venebantur differentias substantiarum, hoc faciebant ex comparatione substantiarum ad earum proprietates et tantum descendebant quantum per proprietates poterant manuduci. Et hunc modum cognoscendi potest homo experiri. Si enim requisitus debeat respondere: quid est ignis, dicet quod est ens per se existens natum subdi dimensionibus et aptum natum ad caliditatem et siccitatem et levitatem, et sic de aliis proprietatibus eius. Et constat quod, si homo aliter posset cognoscere differentias substantiae quam per comparationem ad proprietates, aliter posset eas exprimere") (Richard of Mediavilla, II *Sent.*, d. 24, p. 3, q. 3 [*Clarissimi theologi magistri Ricardi de Media Villa seraphici ord. min. convent. super quatuor libros Sententiarum Petri Lombardi Quaestiones subtilissimae* (Brescia, Italy: Vincentium Sabbium, 1591), 100vb-101ra]; translation and emphasis mine). I am grateful to Timothy Noone for pointing out this text from Richard of Mediavilla; the Latin text in this footnote was transcribed by him. Cf. Timothy Noone, "The Problem of the Knowability of Substance: The Discussion from Eustachius of Arras to Vital du Four," in *Philosophy and Theology in the Long Middle Ages: A Tribute to Stephen F. Brown*, ed. Kent Emery, Jr., Russell L. Friedman, and Andreas Speer (Boston: Brill, 2011), 63-89.

[44] "We do not know most properties of sensible things, and in most things we cannot perfectly discover the *rationes* of these properties that we apprehend by the sense" ("Rerum enim sensibilium plurimas proprietates ignoramus, earumque proprietatum quas sensu apprehendimus rationes perfecte in pluribus invenire non possumus") (*ScG* I, c. 3 [Marietti ed., 18]). "Hence he adds that again in these things, namely in man and in

that flow from the essence and those accidents that do not cannot be the complete story when it comes to the knowledge of the essences of substances. For it is still necessary to account for how we attain to a general knowledge of the essences of substances in the first place.

III. A Proposed Thomistic Solution: General Knowledge of Essences of Substances

Unless we propose that Thomas's theories are internally inconsistent or contradictory, we cannot claim that he has a pure inference theory for the knowledge either of being or of substance in general. For an accident, proper or not, is still not a part of the essence itself, and if the proper object of the intellect is the essences of things, there must still be some sense in which what is first grasped is the essence of a substance, even if this is so only in a vague and general manner. In other words, for Thomas, the general and indistinct knowledge of a substantial essence cannot be *merely* the careful piecing together of accidents unless, again, we are to admit of some incoherence or contradiction between his different claims.

In order to explain how the initial intellectual knowledge of substance is attained in the first place, it will be helpful to look

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horse, the soul stands in its consideration until it discovers something indivisible in them, which is the universal. As for example, we consider this animal and that animal, say man and horse, until we arrive at *animal* in common, which is the genus. And in this genus we do similarly until we arrive at some higher genus. Because therefore we receive universal knowledge from singulars, he concludes that it is manifest that it is necessary to know the first universal principles through induction. For thus, namely by way of induction, the sense makes the universal internal in the soul, inasmuch as all singulars are considered" ("Vnde subdit quod *iterum in hiis*, scilicet in homine et equo, anima stat per considerationem quousque inueniatur aliquid impartibile in eis, quod est uniuersale, *ut puta* consideramus tale *animal* et tale, puta hominem et equum, *quousque* perueniamus ad commune *animal*, quod est genus; *et in hoc similiter* facimus quousque perueniamus ad aliquod genus superius. Quia igitur uniuersalium cognitionem accipimus ex singularibus, concludit *manifestum* esse quod necesse est *prima* uniuersalia principia cognoscere per inductionem: *sic* enim, scilicet per uiam inductionis, *sensus facit uniuersale intus* in anima, in quantum considerantur omnia singularia") (II *Post Anal.*, lect. 20 [Leonine ed., 1*2:246, ll. 273-87]).

more closely at the activity of the cogitative power, for Thomas thinks that this internal sense power also somehow attains knowledge of substances, albeit only on the material, particular level. If we can present a coherent picture of how the cogitative power attains some knowledge of particular substances, then we will also understand better how the intellect can attain some general knowledge of substances on the universal level, prior to its attainment of the intellectual knowledge of a specific kind of substance.

One might reasonably object that attributing this role of knowing substances to the cogitative power is simply moving the problem back a step without actually solving it. Let it be granted that the cogitative power receives particular knowledge of substances, which would allow the intellect the possibility of a universal knowledge of substance (which we could reason to either by means of an *a fortiori* argument or by positing that the agent intellect simply abstracts the cogitative power's phantasm of a particular substance).[45] Even so, how can the cogitative power itself receive knowledge of any substances in the first place, since it too must ultimately be actualized by the external

[45] Mark Barker argues that the activity of the cogitative power, in its formation of an experiential notion, is *absolutely necessary* prior to the intellect's act of abstraction; whether or not the cogitative power's activity is absolutely necessary, I think he is correct in positing that its activity is in fact temporally prior to the first act of intellectual abstraction, though the question can be answered either way without affecting my argument here. "The standard account of Thomistic epistemology omits the intermediary experiential notion, presenting instead a direct passage from a singular phantasm to a universal concept. While this would require further discussion, Aquinas explicitly teaches the contrary in at least one text" (Barker, "Experience and Experimentation," 69 n. 78). The text he refers to reads as follows: "It is impossible for a universal to be looked at without induction. And this is indeed clearer in sensible things, because through experience, which we have about singular sensible things, we receive a universal knowledge" ("*Inpossibile est uniuersalia speculari* absque inductione. Et hoc quidem in rebus sensibilibus est magis manifestum, quia in eis per experienciam quam habemus circa singularia sensibilia, accipimus uniuersalem noticiam") (I *Post Anal.*, lect. 30 [Leonine ed., 1*2:109, ll. 40-45]).

sense powers?[46] We must keep this objection in mind throughout the presentation that follows.

For Thomas, the cogitative power allows one to perceive what is only *per accidens* sensible, although indeed, in a particular fashion.[47] What might seem surprising, however, is that it is individual *substances* that Thomas calls "*per accidens* sensible," and Thomas is also explicit in saying that the cogitative power itself knows individual substances as its proper and *per se* object, at least in some manner.[48] We see this teaching in his early *Sentences* commentary:

[46] "Accidents and motion and privations have little or nothing of being; and nevertheless, these are more known to us than the substances of things, because they are closer to the sense, since they fall *per se* under sense as the proper or common sensibles" ("Accidentia et motus et privationes parum aut nihil habent de entitate; et tamen ista sunt magis nota quo ad nos quam substantiae rerum, quia sunt viciniora sensui, cum per se cadant sub sensu quasi sensibilia propria vel communia") (VII *Metaphys.*, lect. 2 [Marietti ed., 1304]).

[47] Cf. II *De Anima*, c. 13 (Leonine ed., 45/1:121, l. 191-122, l. 222); II *Post. Anal.*, lect. 20 (Leonine ed., 1*2:244, l. 88-246, l. 287); *STh* I, q. 78, a. 4 (Leonine ed., 5:255-56).

[48] "Aristotle called the concomitant *perceptible* objects *per accidens* or incidental sensibles, because they are non-sensible features of realities that are apprehended concurrently with the essential sensibles grasped by acts of external sensation. . . . While such perceptible objects are incidental to essential sensibles, when taken in themselves these *per se* perceptible and potentially intelligible features of reality were called particular intentions (*intentiones*) by Avicenna and Thomas Aquinas, and were often called non-sensed intentions (*intentiones nonsensatae*) by various Scholastics. These *per se* particular intentions specify a formal object that belongs to the spectrum of cognitive operations that Aquinas used to differentiate an internal sense power called 'natural instinct' or the 'estimative power' in nonhuman animals, and the 'cogitative power,' 'particular reason,' and the 'passive intellect' in human beings" (Daniel D. De Haan, "Perception and the *vis cogitativa*: A Thomistic Analysis of Aspectual, Actional, and Affectional Percepts," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 88 [2014]: 402-3); "The aspectual identification of a sensible manifold involves a perceptual apprehension of an individual as an individual, that is, the apprehension of the sensible gestalt as more [than] just bare *per se* sensibles. In perception one is able to discern, register, or become acquainted with a superficial identity or aspect determination beyond the raw *per se* sensibles, hence the term *aspectual percept*" (ibid., 414); "This faculty provides the possibility for the awareness of an individual of a natural kind on the level of perception. This, in turn, renders the entire abstraction process, which is part of the intellect, more coherent. Given this analysis, Aquinas holds that the *vis cogitativa* is a necessary component between sense perception and thought through abstraction"

Something that is sensed *per accidens* does *not* produce a passion of the sense, neither insofar as it is a sense nor insofar as it is *this* sense, but rather, what is sensed *per accidens* is *joined* to those things that produce a passion of the sense *per se*, such as *Socrates*, and *the son of Diarius*, and *friend*, and other things of this kind, *which are known per se*, *as universals in the intellect, and as particulars in the cogitative power* in human beings and in the estimative power in other animals. But then the external sense is said to sense things of this kind, although *per accidens*, when from what is sensed *per se*, the apprehensive power (to which it belongs to know what is known *per se*) immediately apprehends without doubt and discourse, as when we see someone is alive from the fact that he speaks.[49]

Note that Thomas is saying that particular substances, such as Socrates or a friend, are known by the cogitative power, not incidentally, but *per se*, even though the cogitative power is one of the sense powers. We must be careful here, for certainly, the cogitative power does not grasp particular substances "as such" (i.e., the power cannot provide the universal knowledge necessary to understand that these particular substances are instances of the genus *substance*)[50] but it does grasp, as its

(Anthony Lisska, "A Look at Inner Sense in Aquinas: A Long-Neglected Faculty Psychology," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 80 [2007]: 16).

[49] "Per accidens autem sentitur illud quod non infert passionem sensui neque inquantum est sensus, neque inquantum est hic sensus; sed conjungitur his quae per se sensui inferunt passionem; sicut Socrates, et filius Diaris, et amicus, et alia hujusmodi: quae per se cognoscuntur in universali intellectu; in particulari autem in virtute cogitativa in homine, aestimativa autem in aliis animalibus. Hujusmodi autem tunc sensus exterior dicitur sentire, quamvis per accidens, quando ex eo quod per se sentitur, vis apprehensiva, cujus est illud cognitum per se cognoscere, statim sine dubitatione et discursu apprehendit; sicut videmus aliquem vivere ex hoc quod loquitur" (IV *Sent.*, d. 49, q. 2, a. 2 [*Opera omnia*, t. 7/2, *Commentum in quartum librum Sententiarum magistri Petri Lombardi* (Parma: Typis Petri Fiaccadori, 1858), 1202a]; emphasis added).

[50] "However much existence [*esse*] might be in sensible things, nevertheless the sense does not apprehend the *ratio* of existence, or the intention of being [*ens*], as neither does it apprehend any substantial form, except accidentally" ("Quamvis esse sit in rebus sensibilibus, tamen rationem essendi, vel intentionem entis, sensus non apprehendit, sicut nec aliquam formam substantialem, nisi per accidens") (I *Sent.*, d. 19, q. 5, a. 1, ad 6 (Mandonnet, ed., 1:489). "But the sense does not know existence except under the here and now" ("Sensus autem non cognoscit esse nisi sub hic et nunc") (*STh* I, q. 75, a. 6 [Leonine ed., 5:204]). "Strictly speaking, what is perceived is an existent rather than

proper objects, individual beings that subsist in themselves (individual substances), rather than merely sensing accidents or a compilation of accidents.

Thomas repeats this same teaching, in much more explicit terms, in his later *De anima* commentary. First, he lays out two important qualities that belong to everything that is *per accidens* sensible, and then he notes that what is *per accidens* sensible is still *per se* known by another knowing power:

> It must be known therefore, that in order for something to be sensible *per accidens*, it is first required that it is accidental to that which is *per se* sensible, as it is accidental to *white* that it is a man, and it is accidental to it that it is sweet. Second, it is required that it is *apprehended* by the one sensing; for if what was accidental to what is sensible were hidden from the one sensing, it would not be called *per accidens* sensible. *It must be the case therefore that it is known* per se *by some other knowing power of the one sensing*. And this indeed is either another sense, or the intellect, or the cogitative power (or estimative power).[51]

Since particular substances are *per accidens* sensible, it is clear from this passage that they must be accidental to the *per se* sensibles, such as color and taste, inasmuch as they are not passions of the external sense powers as such. Nevertheless, as we will show below, being sensible *per accidens* does not preclude any necessary relation at all between particular substances and what is *per se* sensible. Furthermore, this passage explains again that particular substances, even though *per accidens* sensible, are still known *per se* by another knowing

existence as such. Hence such knowledge of existence is still only implicit. Existence will not be singled out or isolated as such for consideration at the level of the senses. But the raw material is now at hand for the intellect to advert to the fact that the senses are perceiving some object and for it to judge that the thing in question actually exists" (Wippel, *Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 36).

[51] "Sciendum est igitur quod ad hoc quod aliquid sit sensibile per accidens primo requiritur quod accidat ei quod est per se est sensibile, sicut accidit albo esse hominem et accidit ei esse dulce, secundo requiritur quod sit apprehensum a senciente: si enim accideret sensibili quod lateret sencientem, non diceretur per accidens sentiri. Oportet igitur quod per se cognoscatur ab aliqua alia potencia cognoscitiua sencientis, et hec quidem uel est alius sensus, uel est intellectus, uel uis cogitatiua aut uis estimatiua" (II *De Anima*, c. 13 [Leonine ed., 45/1:120, ll. 164-74]; emphasis added).

power, which, as Thomas goes on to explain, is precisely the cogitative power:

> What is not known properly by a sense therefore, if it is something universal, is apprehended by the intellect. Nevertheless, not everything that is able to be apprehended in the sensed thing by the intellect can be called sensible *per accidens*, but only that which is immediately apprehended by the intellect when it meets with the sensed thing. As, for example, when I immediately see someone speaking or moving himself, I apprehend his life through the intellect and hence can say that I see he is alive. But if something is apprehended in the singular, as, for example, when I see something colored I perceive *this man* or *this animal*, then apprehension of this kind in human beings takes place through the cogitative power, which is also called particular reason, from the fact that it gathers together individual intentions, just as universal reason gathers together universal *rationes*. Notwithstanding, this cogitative power is nevertheless in the sensitive part, because the sensitive power in its highest form participates something of the intellective power in human beings, who have the sense joined to the intellect.[52]

Thus, though Thomas knows full well that the cogitative power belongs to the sensitive part of the soul, he continues to affirm that individual substances, rather than accidents, are *per se* known by the cogitative power. Note that Thomas also echoes the *Sentences* commentary here in insisting that a *per accidens* sensible is immediately perceived together with the *per se* sensibles, prior to any reasoning or comparison that might take place in either the intellect or the cogitative power.

As Thomas also explains here, the fact that something is *per accidens* sensible does not further entail that the connection

[52] "Quod ergo sensu proprio non cognoscitur, si sit aliquid uniuersale, apprehenditur intellectu. Non tamen omne quod intellectu apprehendi potest in re sensata, potest dici sensibile per accidens, set quod statim ad occursum rei sensate apprehenditur intellectu, sicut statim cum uideo aliquem loquentem uel mouere se ipsum, apprehendo per intellectum uitam eius, unde possum dicere quod uideo eum uiuere. Si uero apprehendatur in singulari, ut puta <si>, cum uideo coloratum, percipio hunc hominem uel hoc animal, huiusmodi quidem apprehensio in homine fit per uim cogitatiuam, que dicitur etiam ratio particularis, eo quod est collatiua intentionum indiuidualium sicut ratio uniuersalis est collatiua rationum uniuersalium, nichilominus tamen hec uis est in parte sensitiua, quia uis sensitiua in sui suppremo participat aliquid de ui intellectiua in homine, in quo sensus intellectui coniungitur" (II *De Anima*, c. 13 [Leonine ed., 45/1:121, l. 182-122, l. 201]; emphasis added).

between what is *per se* sensed and the substance that underlies the *per se* sensible is only contingent: "Whether that which is the subject of a sensible quality is *per se* its subject or not, this makes no difference as to whether or not a thing is itself *per accidens* sensible. For no one would say that fire, which is the proper subject of heat, is *per se* sensible to touch."[53] In other words, the term "*per accidens* sensible" should not mislead us into thinking that what we know *per se* through our external senses is only purely accidentally predicated of the substances in which these sensible qualities exist. There may indeed be a necessary connection here, and indeed, the fact *that* there is a substance or substances underlying accidents is something that Thomas considers manifest, even at a nonintellectual level: "A substance of this kind is apparent, that is, clear, since it is subject to sense. And therefore, one ought not to delay the knowledge of it."[54]

Above, I brought up the objection that attributing the knowledge of particular substances to the cogitative power was simply moving the problem back a step. In the response to this objection that follows, it is important to remember that, just as Thomas does not suppose an unerring knowledge of any specific kind of substance in the intellect, neither does he suppose an unerring knowledge of any particular substance in the cogitative power. In fact, he claims explicitly that "the judgment of sense sometimes errs in regard to the common sensibles or the *per accidens* sensibles."[55] Furthermore, the fact that the cogitative power *per se* perceives the so-called "*per accidens* sensibles" does not entail that it cannot err in regard to its particular judgment about them in any way, for indeed, the

[53] "Non enim refert ad id quod est sensibile per accidens utrum id quod est subiectum sensibilis qualitatis sit per se subiectum eius uel non per se; nullus enim diceret ignem, quod est proprium subiectum caloris, esse per se sensibile tactu" (ibid. [Leonine ed., 45/1:120, ll. 119-24]).

[54] "Huiusmodi substantia <<est aperta>>, idest manifesta, cum sensui subiaceat. Et ideo circa eius cognitionem non oportet immorari" (VII *Metaphys*., lect. 2 [Marietti ed., 1296]).

[55] "De sensibilibus communibus vel per accidens interdum iudicium sensus fallitur" (*De Verit*., q. 1, a. 11 [Leonine ed., 22/1:35, ll. 112-13]).

common sensibles too, about which the sense may also err, are also perceived *per se*.[56] Similar to the way in which the intellect knows the essences of particular species with scientific knowledge only after a process of reasoning, the cogitative power knows particular substances with a degree of certitude only after a process of "particular reasoning" and experience. Yet, nevertheless—and this is crucial to Thomas's epistemology—as the intellect does not fail to recognize being in general, even in its initial act of understanding, so too, the cogitative power does not fail to recognize *some* particular "underlying substance" or "underlying substances" through the sensible accidents perceived by the external sense powers.[57] More precisely, although the cogitative power may indeed err in its grasp of any particular substance (though it is no small matter that for the most part it correctly grasps something of these substances), and though it may indeed err in its judgment that any particular substance exists, in any case, it does not err in recognizing *some* particular substance existing and causing the sensible accidents; that is, the cogitative power does not err in understanding *that*

[56] "The common sensibles are not sensed *per accidens* by any of the senses, but they are sensed *per se* by many" ("Sensibilia communia non senciuntur per accidens ab aliquo sensuum, set per se a pluribus") (III *De Anima*, c. 1 [Leonine ed., 45/1:175, ll. 156-58]).

[57] We should note here again that although both the intellect and the cogitative power collect and compare universal and particular intentions, respectively, what is *per accidens* sensible is only what is immediately apprehended by these powers when sensible things are sensed: "Nevertheless, not everything in the sensed thing that is able to be apprehended by the intellect is able to be called sensible *per accidens*, but rather what is immediately apprehended by the intellect upon meeting the sensed thing" ("Non tamen omne quod intellectu apprehendi potest in re sensata, potest dici sensibile per accidens, sed quod statim ad occursum rei sensate apprehenditur intellectu") (II *De Anima*, c. 13 [Leonine ed., 45/1:121, ll. 184-87]). But as we have already established, what is immediately apprehended by the intellect, before reasoning, is not infallible knowledge of a specific essence, though the intellect does perceive being and essence in general; similarly, what is immediately apprehended by the cogitative power is not infallible knowledge about a particular substance or *that* a particular substance exists, since it too may err in this regard and must "reason" about what it perceives; rather, the cogitative power immediately perceives infallible knowledge of *some* "particular substance" that necessarily underlies the *per se* sensible.

there is some substance in some way underlying the sensible accidents.

For example, if one were to see a moving shadow in the distance, one might indeed mistake, purely at the sense level, the object to be a substance or substances that it is not actually. But one would not be mistaken in recognizing immediately *that* there must be a substance that underlies that motion and that causes that shadow.[58] Thomas notes that there are certain "things about which it is necessary to know first *that* they are, such as principles,"[59] and in the case of the cogitative power, every individual experience of a substance is a principle for that power's further development in its knowledge of particular things:

> And it is clear that singulars have the *ratio* of principles because the universal is received from singulars. For, from the fact that this herb causes health for this one, it is received that this species of herb has the power of healing. And because singulars are properly known through sense, it must be that in regard to these singulars, which we say are principles and extremes, man has sense [knowledge], not only external sense but also internal sense, which above he [Aristotle] said was prudence, namely, the cogitative or estimative power, which is called particular reason.[60]

[58] But what if one is crazy and merely *imagining* that something moved when there is nothing externally happening at all? We must recall that Thomas is not concerned here with the modern project of justifying an absolute subjective certainty; the senses are here assumed to be healthy and operating normally. "For as natural powers do not fail from their proper activities, except in the least part, because of some corruption, so too, the senses do not fail from the true judgment of proper sensibles, except in the least part, because of some corruption of the organ" ("Sicut enim potencie naturales non deficiunt a propriis operationibus nisi in minori parte propter aliquam corruptionem, sic et sensus non deficiunt a uero iudicio propriorum sensibilium nisi in minori parte propter aliquam corruptionem organi") (II *De Anima*, c. 30 [Leonine ed., 45/1:198, ll. 65-70]).

[59] "*Alia* sunt de quibus *necesse est prius* cognoscere *quia sunt*, sicut principia" (I *Post Anal.*, lect. 2 [Leonine ed., 1*2:11, ll. 54-55]; emphasis added).

[60] "Et quod singularia habeant rationem principiorum, patet quia ex singularibus accipitur universale; ex hoc enim quod haec herba fecit huic sanitatem, acceptum est quod haec species herbae valet ad sanandum. Et, quia singularia proprie cognoscuntur per sensum, oportet quod homo horum singularium quae dicimus esse principia et extrema, habeat sensum non solum exteriorem, sed etiam interiorem, cuius supra dixit esse prudentiam, scilicet vim cogitativam sive aestimativam quae dicitur ratio particularis" (VI *Ethic.*, lect. 9 [Leonine ed., 47/2:367, ll. 173-84]).

Thus, what Thomas says in his *Physics* commentary is borne out, namely, that even on the level of sense knowledge, which knows things only as particulars, *the more common is still known prior to the less common*. That is, one senses something as a particular substance prior to sensing it as a particular animal or a particular human.[61]

Since (a) Thomas unwaveringly affirms that the cogitative power knows *per se* individuals that are substances and yet (b) he acknowledges the cogitative power can err in some respects in regard to its knowledge of particular substances, I believe I have presented above a reasonable interpretation of Thomas's position on what the cogitative power knows in knowing particular substances. Even if one grants the above presentation, however, all that will have been established is *that* Thomas thinks the cogitative power perceives individual substances, at least in some vague manner. This does not yet fully answer the question of *how* the cogitative power perceives particular substances.[62]

I propose here that the reason why the cogitative power (and *a fortiori*, the intellect) can attain to knowledge of substances in this general fashion is precisely because the existence of accidents is an existence that is caused by a substance or substances. For the existence of all accidents is always an existence that is caused by and participates in the existence of substances; if nothing else, the substance in which the accident inheres is at

[61] "Thus, the more common sensible is known to us according to sense prior to the less common sensible, as for example, this animal [is known prior] to this man" ("Ita communius sensibile est prius notum nobis secundum sensum, ut puta hoc animal quam hic homo") (I *Phys*., lect. 1 [Leonine ed., 2:6]). Cf. Deborah Black, "Avicenna's 'Vague Individual' and its Impact on Medieval Latin Philosophy," in *Vehicles of Transmission, Translation, and Transformation in Medieval Textual Culture*, ed. Robert Wisnovsky and others (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2011), 259-92.

[62] Before turning our attention to this question, we must be careful to note that the question of how the cogitative power perceives substances is not at all explicitly spelled out by Thomas himself. Thus, the explanation I am providing below must be understood as somewhat speculative in regard to what Thomas himself thinks, though I believe there is substantial evidence to support this interpretation.

least that accident's material cause.[63] Thus, though it is through the common sense that the external senses are united, it is through the cogitative power that one recognizes the cause or causes of the objects of the external senses (the *per se* sensibles), namely, an individual substance or substances. The first proposition from the *Liber de causis*, and Thomas's commentary thereon, is key here:

> *Every first cause impresses more on what is caused than a second universal cause*. . . . The activity by which a second cause causes an effect is caused by the first cause . . . therefore, the first cause is more of a cause than the second cause of this activity, by which the effect is produced by the second cause. . . . The first cause is more a cause than the second; therefore its power is more perfect. But insofar as the power of any cause is more perfect, so much so will it extend itself to more things. Therefore the power of the first cause extends itself to more than the power of the second cause. But that which is in more things is first in arriving and last in receding. Therefore the impression of a first cause arrives first and recedes last.[64]

Thomas explains further on that this principle is true for all kinds of causes in *per se* orders of causality. Now since a substance is the cause of the accidents that inhere in it, it is thus

[63] "Thomas concludes . . . by observing that a subject is in some fashion a cause of all the accidents which are sustained within the being of that same subject" (John Wippel, "Thomas Aquinas on Substance as a Cause of Proper Accidents," in *Philosophie im Mittelalter*, ed. Jan P. Beckmann and others [Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1987], 203). "Throughout his career Thomas holds that a substance serves as a receiving or material cause for the accidents which inhere in it. Hence the subject is in potency to such accidents, and the accidents may be regarded as it its secondary acts or secondary forms" (ibid., 211); "Proper accidents which follow upon a thing's species are caused efficiently by that thing's essential and intrinsic principles. At the very least, something more than receiving or material causality is involved" (ibid., 207-8).

[64] "Omnis causa primaria plus est influens super suum causatum quam causa secunda universalis. . . . Operatio qua causa secunda causat effectum, causatur a causa prima . . . ergo huius *operationis* secundum quam *effectus* producitur a *causa secunda*, magis est causa *causa prima* quam causa secunda. . . . Causa prima est magis causa quam secunda; ergo est perfectioris virtutis. Sed quanto virtus alicuius causae est perfectior, tanto ad plura se extendit; ergo virtus causae primae ad plura se extendit quam virtus causae secundae. Sed id quod in pluribus est, prius est in adveniendo et ultimum in recedendo; ergo impressio causae primae primo advenit et ultimo recedit" (*Super librum De causis expositio*, ed. H. D. Saffrey [Fribourg (Suisse)-Louvain: Société Philosophique Nauwelaerts, 1954], prop. 1, 5:1-2; 7:1-5; 8:5-11).

also the cause of their very ability to affect the senses: "An accidental form has the fact that it is a principle of action from a substantial form."[65] Therefore, it is true to say, in at least some respect, that substances leave a greater impression on the knowing powers than their accidents and, further, that substances arrive first in the sense powers—though it is true that, of the sense powers, only the cogitative power perceives substances *per se*. In somewhat poetic language, one could say that the cogitative power sees through the existence of the accidents to the presence of the substance itself. More precisely, the cogitative power grasps the presence of the cause of the accidents (a particular substance) together with the presence of their effects (the accidents themselves) because it perceives the presence of accidents precisely as a presence in a subject: "A higher power *per se* looks to a more universal *ratio* of an object than a lower power does, because inasmuch as a power is higher, so much does it extend to more things."[66] The cogitative power does not grasp the accident without grasping something of that accident's cause.[67]

There is implicit evidence for such an interpretation in Thomas's writings. First, we should note that it is a Thomistic principle that every effect is like its cause (hence, we can even naturally know God himself not only by way of causality and by

[65] "Hoc ipsum quod forma accidentalis est actionis principium, habet a forma substantiali" (*STh* I, q. 77, a. 1, ad 4 [Leonine ed., 5:237]).

[66] "Potentia superior per se respicit universaliorem rationem obiecti, quam potentia inferor: quia quanto potentia est superior, tanto ad plura se extendit" (*STh* I, q. 77, a. 3, ad 4 [Leonine ed., 5:241]).

[67] "Sense attains existence in act without itself knowing that it is existence. Sense delivers existence to the intellect; it gives the intellect an intelligible treasure which sense does not know to be intelligible, and which the intellect, for its part, knows and calls by its name, which is *being*" (Jacques Maritain, *Existence and the Existent*, trans. Lewis Galantiere and Gerald B. Phelan [Garden City, N.Y.: Image Books, 1956], 21). "Our intellect understands existence in the way in which it discovers it in lower things, from which it grasps scientific knowledge" ("Intellectus autem noster hoc modo intelligit esse quo modo invenitur in rebus inferioribus a quibus scientiam capit") (*De Pot.*, q. 7, a. 2, ad 7 [Marietti ed., 56]).

way of negation, but also by way of eminence):[68] "But it is clear that an effect must pre-exist in its causes as in an exemplar [*exemplariter*], because causes produce effects according to their own likeness; and conversely, things that are caused have the image of their causes."[69] Furthermore: "Each thing is known through that which is in act; and therefore the actuality itself of a thing is a certain light of the thing itself, and because an effect has that it is in act through its cause, it follows that it is illuminated and known through its cause."[70] More specifically: "The action of an accidental form depends on the action of a substantial form, as the existence of an accident depends on the existence of a substance."[71] Hence, here we also have the Thomistic axiom that *agere sequitur esse*, activity follows existence.[72] It follows that, if the existence of an accident necessarily

[68] See, e.g., I *Sent*., d. 3, pro. (Mandonnet, ed., 88-89); *STh* I, q. 13, a. 1 (Leonine ed., 4:139).

[69] "Manifestum est autem quod oportet effectus praeexistere in causis exemplariter, quia causae producunt effectus secundum suam similitudinem; et e converso *causata habent imaginem suarum causarum*" (*Liber de causis*, prop. 14 [Saffrey, ed., 85:20-23]).

[70] "Unumquodque cognoscitur per id quod est in actu; et ideo ipsa actualitas rei est quoddam lumen ipsius et, quia effectus habet quod sit in actu per suam causam, inde est quod illuminatur et cognoscitur per suam causam" (*Liber de causis*, prop. 6 [Saffrey, ed., 45:12-15]).

[71] "Ita actio formae accidentalis dependet ab actione formae substantialis, sicut esse accidentis dependet ab esse substantiae" (*STh* III, q. 77, a. 3, ad 2 [Leonine ed., 12:197]). "The actuality of an accidental form is caused by the actuality of the subject" ("Actualitas formae accidentalis causatur ab actualitate subiecti") (*STh* I, q. 77, a. 6 [Leonine ed., 5:246]).

[72] "For there is no activity except of a being in act; hence, in the same way that something acts, in that way it exists" ("Non enim est operari nisi entis in actu: unde eo modo aliquid operatur, quo est") (*STh* I, q. 75, a. 2 [Leonine ed., 5:196]). "For that by which a thing primarily acts is its form to which the activity is attributed. . . . And the reason for this is that nothing acts except inasmuch as it is in act; hence in the way that something is in act, in that way it acts" ("llud enim quo primo aliquid operatur, est forma eius cui operatio attribuitur. . . . Et huius ratio est, quia nihil agit nisi secundum quod est actu: unde quo aliquid est actu, eo agit") (*STh* I, q. 76, a. 1. [Leonine ed., 5:208]). "Each agent acts inasmuch as it is in act" ("Unumquodque agens agit secundum quod in actu est") (*De Pot*., q. 2, a. 1 [Marietti ed., 8]). "Active power follows being in act: for each thing acts from the fact that it is in act" ("Potentia activa sequitur ens in actu: unumquodque enim ex hoc agit quod est actu") (*ScG* II, c. 7 [Marietti ed., 888]). "Act follows being [*esse*] in act" ("Agere sequitur ad esse in actu") (*ScG* III, c. 69

participates in the existence of some substance, as we have already established, then the reception of an accidental form—that is, the sense's being actualized by the actuality of the accidental form—will indeed be sufficient to provide some knowledge of that substance to any knowing power that is penetrating enough. But indeed, as we have already seen, the higher powers of the soul guide and direct the lowers powers as their instruments and indeed, through the lower powers, penetrate more deeply into the knowledge of their objects.[73] This is why Thomas sees no problem in positing that the cogitative power properly knows individual substances, even though it may indeed err in its "particular reasoning" about an individual substance or about the existence of any particular substance.

We must affirm again that Thomas is not claiming that we have an immediate, certain, and infallible knowledge of individual substances through either the cogitative power or the intellect. The initial knowledge gained through either the power of the intellect or of the cogitative power does not seem to grant any more knowledge than *that* there is substantial being

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[Marietti ed., 2450]). "For action is properly the actuality of a power, as being [*esse*] is the actuality of a substance or essence" ("Actio enim est proprie actualitas virtutis; sicut esse est actualitas substantiae vel essentiae") (*STh* I, q. 54, a. 1 [Leonine ed., 5:39]). "The essence of the soul itself is also the principle of acting, but though a mediating power" ("Essentia ipsius animae est etiam principium operandi, sed mediante virtute") (I *Sent.*, d. 3, q. 4, a. 2, ad 2 [Mandonnet, ed., 117]). See Daniel Kambembo, "Essai d'une ontologie de l'agir," *Revue phlosophique de Louvain* 65 [1967]: 382-84, for different interpretations of this maxim. See also Joseph de Finance, *Etre et agir dans la philosophie de saint Thomas*, 2nd ed. (Rome: Università Gregoriana, 1960); William A. Wallace, "The Intelligibility of Nature: A Neo-Aristotelian View," *The Review of Metaphysics* 38, no. 1 (1984): 33-56; W. Norris Clarke, "Action as the Self-Revelation of Being: A Central Theme in the Thought of St. Thomas," in idem, *Explorations in Metaphysics: Being—God—Person* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 45-64.

[73] "Powers of the soul that are prior according to the order of perfection and nature are the principles of the others in the mode of an end and active principles" ("Potentiae animae quae sunt priores secundum ordinem perfectionis et naturae, sint principia aliarum per modum finis et activi principii") (*STh* I, q. 77, a. 7 [Leonine ed., 5:247]). "The intellective powers are prior to the sensitive powers, and hence direct them and command them" ("Potentiae intellectivae sunt priorers potentiis sensitivis: unde dirigunt eas et imperant eis") (*STh* I, q. 77, a. 4 [Leonine ed., 5:243]).

underlying the accidents perceived by the senses. For example, the first time that the external senses perceive the shape, color, size, and motion of a horse, the cogitative power's initial perception will not be a perception of *this horse* in any distinct sense, for the cogitative power does not yet have any grasp of this substance from experience. It would be more accurate to say that the initial perception through the cogitative power would instead simply be that there is a particular substance or substances underlying the accidents. In this example, if one is already familiar with animals in general (i.e., if one has experience of animals), then the cogitative power might further perceive that one is sensing a *particular animal* here, even if it does not have enough experience of horses to recognize anything further than that. This is why, in the passage already quoted above, Thomas says that, on the level of the intellect, "the form of the species must be made known through some more *common* accidents,"[74] for the first time that one experiences a horse, one will first have to come to conclusions about this substance based upon what this kind of animal has in common with other animals that one has experienced, in order to determine whether and how this kind of animal differs from them. Again, the actualization of the cogitative power has its source in the external senses, which as such perceive only sensible accidents, but these sensible accidents, precisely as the effects of substance, are sufficient to provide the cogitative power with the perception that there is some particular substance underlying these accidents.[75] But any detailed

[74] "Non autem oportet accipere accidencia propria illius speciei, quia talia oportet per diffinitionem speciei demonstrari; set oportet notificari formam speciei per aliqua accidencia communiora" (II *Post Anal.*, lect. 13 [Leonine ed., 1*2:222, ll. 122-26]; emphasis added). See also VIII *Metaphys.*, lect. 2.

[75] "For when any effect is more manifest to us than its cause, we proceed to the knowledge of the cause through the effect. But from any effect one can demonstrate the existence of its proper cause (if at least its effects are more known to us) because, since an effect depends on a cause, if an effect is posited, it is necessary for the cause to pre-exist it" ("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 dependeant a causa, posito effectu necesse est causam praeexistere") (*STh* I,

knowledge about the nature of a particular substance, such as *horseness*, will of course involve the gathering together and the experience of many particular sensations, which experience must in turn be universalized and developed by the intellect.[76]

Similarly then, since the cogitative power can perceive something of an individual substance beyond its accidents (not individual substance as such, but an individual substance as a subject of those accidents),[77] *a fortiori*, when the phantasm of some particular substance is presented to the intellect, the intellect can understand that substance in a universal manner, and thus attain to some knowledge of the essence of a natural substance.[78] What the cogitative power can perceive on a

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q. 2, a. 2 [Leonine ed., 4:30]). As we saw in the passage from III *Sent.*, d. 35, Thomas thinks that the way we obtain a knowledge of separated substances is analogously similar to the way we attain to knowledge of the essences of natural things.

[76] "But how this one thing is able to be received, Aristotle manifests in the following. For it is manifest that the singular is what is sensed properly and *per se*, but nevertheless, there is sensing, in a certain way, also of that universal. For one knows Callias not only inasmuch as he is Callias, but also inasmuch as he is this man, and similarly one knows Socrates inasmuch as he is this man. And from the fact that there is in the sense such a pre-existing reception, the intellective soul is able to consider man in both individuals. But if it were the case that the sense apprehended only that which is of the particular, and in no way when it did this apprehended the universal nature in the particular, it would not be possible that the sense in apprehension could cause in us knowledge of the universal" ("Qualiter autem hoc unum accipi possit, manifestat consequenter. Manifestum est enim quod *singulare sentitur*, proprie et per se, set tamen *sensus* est quodam modo etiam ipsius *uniuersalis*: cognoscit enim Calliam non solum in quantum est Callias, set etiam in quantum est hic homo, et similiter Sortem in quantum est hic homo. Et exinde est quod, tali acceptione sensus preexistente, anima intellectiua potest considerare hominem in utroque. Si autem ita esset quod sensus apprehenderet solum id quod est particularitatis et nullo modo cum hoc apprehenderet uniuersalem naturam in particulari, non esset possibile quod ex apprehensione sensus causaretur in nobis cognitio uniuersalis") (II *Post Anal.*, lect. 20 [Leonine ed., 1*2:246, ll. :257-71]).

[77] "Just as one cannot properly sense danger, but only dangerous things, one cannot perceive individual identity as such by external sensation" (Mark Barker, "Aquinas on Internal Sensory Intentions: Nature and Classification," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 52 [2012]: 215).

[78] "But to our intellect according to its present state of life nothing is present as an object, except through some likeness of it, or something received from its effect, because through effects we arrive at the causes" ("Intellectui autem nostro nihil est secundum statum viae praesens ut objectum, nisi per aliquam similitudinem ipsius, vel suo effectu

particular, material level, the intellect is able to perceive on a universal, intellectual level.[79] Furthermore, even in its own initial act of apprehension in which it simply perceives *being*, the intellect is able to know *being* precisely because it does not merely receive the species of a sensible accident in complete separation from that accident's cause. The intelligible species through which the intellect knows, even if it is a likeness of an accident, still bears a necessary relation to substance: "In the thing apprehended through the sense, the intellect knows many things that the sense cannot perceive."[80] Thus, through the intelligible species produced by the agent intellect and the phantasm (whether of a particular accident *or* of a particular substance), the intellect's first concept is simply a general notion of *being*. But the intellect subsequently makes distinctions regarding this general notion of *being*, clarifying (at least implicitly and vaguely) the difference between the notions of *being* that exists in itself (substance) and being that exists in another (accidents, which again, can only be understood in light of understanding beings that exist in themselves). But this order of development in our concepts is possible precisely because the senses do not perceive accidents in complete separation from the substances in which they exist, but instead, precisely as necessarily caused by them.

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acceptam: quia per effectus devenimus in causas") (I *Sent*., d. 17 q. 1, a. 4, ad 4 [Mandonnet, ed., 404]).

[79] "One cannot know natures without one's intellect, but one cannot know signate material individuals without the cogitative. Universal reason, upon seeing a person speaking or moving, can recognize that individual's life. 'Life' is on a higher level of abstraction than 'human.' It is a universal intention that is only apprehended by intellect. Upon seeing someone speaking or moving, one's intellect immediately apprehends 'life,' and this apprehension may be followed by a judgment in which one applies that universal notion to the individual, as in 'I see that he is alive.' In contrast, if one sees a human approach, the cogitative apprehends or perceives that it is so-and-so, and then applies this individual intention to him in a judgment such as 'I see Socrates.' Thus, merely seeing someone's face provides the matter for an individual intention, which actualizes the sensed form with respect to its knowability as belonging to a given individual" (Barker, "Aquinas on Internal Sensory Intentions," 215).

[80] "In re apprehensa per sensum intellectus multa cognoscit quae sensus percipere non potest" (*STh* I, q. 78, a. 4, ad 4 [Leonine ed., 5:256-57]).

Before concluding this section, it will helpful to review Thomas's description of the acquisition of intellectual knowledge of essences, from beginning to end. The five external senses provide sense knowledge: color, shape, motion, touch, and so on. These external senses are united by the common sense, which is their root and principle. The three internal sense powers of imagination, memory, and the cogitative power are themselves further actualized by what is received through the senses. The cogitative power, however, attains to knowledge of the singular *thing*: its knowledge is not limited to a knowledge of merely the accidents, the *per se* sensibles, but it perceives that there is a particular substance or substances underlying these accidents. However, the products of the internal sense powers are still particular. The action of the agent intellect on the phantasms presented by the internal sense powers then produces impressed intelligible species, which are universal and immaterial, but whose content is still a product of the phantasms. The very first intellectual understanding will form an expressed species (i.e., concept) of being that will quickly be distinguished into clearer and more distinct concepts. The distinction between substance and accident will occur quite early in this process, though the intellectual knowledge of substance as such is necessarily temporally prior (or at the very least concomitant) to the knowledge of accident as such. The knowledge of any *specific* kind of substance, however, will occur through distinguishing between different kinds of accidents, with the aid of the cogitative power, and the attempt to discover which accidents flow from a thing's essence and which do not.[81]

[81] Thus, in Thomas's epistemology, we do indeed see the "inference" picture of Richard of Mediavilla in the attainment of the knowledge of specific kinds of substances, but we also see that, in contrast, Thomas retains the intellect as a power that can actually see beyond accidents, which can know being itself, even from its first act of simple apprehension.

CONCLUSION

This article began with a concern about the ability of our intellect to grasp effectively the essences of things at all. Since all our knowledge has its origin in the senses, one might conclude that all human knowledge is merely of external accidents or of our own activities. In the above attempt to explain how knowledge of essences of material substances is possible for Thomas, I have shown how, in his account, the cogitative power and the intellect penetrate beyond the merely accidental to the substantial natures that underlie accidents.

Nevertheless, as we know by both experience and reason, the initial knowledge of the human intellect is quite sparse. For Thomas, that intellect begins its journey with a completely general grasp of the essences of things, starting from the greatest potentiality for knowledge and from the greatest imperfection in what it knows; it is only in reasoning about what we conceive that our intellect is perfected. Knowledge about the essences of specific natures requires a slow, careful process of distinguishing and combining acts of judgment, as well as further reasoning from those acts of judgment, and complete subjective certainty regarding the essences of specific natures is not a property of human knowledge in this life. This poverty of the human intellect is why Thomas places human beings at the very lowest rung of intellectual knowers; while other intellectual beings are pure intellects, immediately grasping essences, the human person requires many different powers and activities for the little knowledge that he does obtain.[82] It is thus that our own knowledge remains at a certain horizon between the material and the immaterial.[83]

Yet we should also remember that, according to Thomas, the human soul is *fittingly* united to the human body.[84] The human body, from the sense power of touch to the complex nerve

[82] "The human soul needs many and different activities and powers" ("Multis et diversis operationibus et virtutibus indiget anima humana") (*STh* I, q. 77, a. 2 [Leonine ed., 5:240]).

[83] Cf. *ScG* II, c. 68 (Marietti ed., 1453).

[84] Cf. *STh* I, q. 76, a. 5 (Leonine ed., 5:227-28).

systems of the human brain, is the instrument most suited for our growth in human knowledge. It is true that we begin life as knowers only in potency, and much of what we later think we know is uncertain; yet there is some certainty in our intellectual knowledge, insofar as we can have at least a general grasp of material essences and insofar as the human intellect can approach certainty as it continues to develop its knowledge of specific material essences—and indeed, even as it develops its natural knowledge of some of the properties of immaterial beings. So long as the human intellect remains faithful to its own nature, to the rules of logic and to the instruction of experience, we can continue in our human hope of approaching the perfection of our knowledge.[85]

[85] This article has been adapted primarily from selections of chapter 4 of my dissertation, "Thomas Aquinas on How We Know Essences: The Formation and Perfection of Concepts in the Human Intellect." A more thorough treatment of surrounding epistemological issues and the historical development of these problems can be found therein.

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REMEMBERING GEORGE LINDBECK AT THE CENTENARY OF HIS BIRTH

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WHEN I MOVED INTO St. Mary's Priory in New Haven in the fall of 1974 to begin graduate studies in the department of religious studies at Yale University, about ten years had passed since the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council.[1] George Lindbeck—the man with whom I was to work on the theology of religions and interreligious dialogue—had been among the delegated observers at the council (1962-64), representing the World Lutheran Federation. He had already written a book about his experience and the implications of the council for the future of Catholic theology.[2] He was fascinated by the fact that my time of formation in the Dominican Order had coincided with the years of the council and its somewhat tumultuous immediate aftermath.

It was not until years later that I would become more reflective about the impact of the council on the formation communities of the Province of St. Joseph. At the time of my conversations with Lindbeck, I recalled my formation years as largely peaceful ones. Considering my experience in the light of the fragmentation that he had seen elsewhere in the post-conciliar Church, Lindbeck marveled at the comparative

[1] An earlier version of this memoire was delivered at a Thomistic Institute conference on postliberal theology on April 8, 2017 at the Dominican House of Studies in Washington, D.C.

[2] George Lindbeck, *The Future of Roman Catholic Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press,1970).

tranquility of the situation I remembered and eventually he found a way to interpret it for me.

Some of what I learned from him in those conversations I later ventured to formulate in a lecture in 2009 on the occasion of the dedication of the new academic wing and theological library at the Dominican House of Studies in Washington, D.C. Lindbeck had helped me to see the importance, for the Dominicans, of

> the relatively calm assimilation of the renewal measures promulgated by the Second Vatican Council. This development was due, at least in part, to the fact that during and after the years of the council the faculty and senior friars in the DHS community and in the province construed the conciliar teachings as being in essential continuity, rather than a disruption or break . . . with previous Catholic teaching and the tradition.

As I acknowledged in that lecture:

> Although there were difficulties, perhaps especially during the 1970s, the council was generally not experienced as a revolution. Without the destructive turmoil that had beset some other Catholic institutions and communities, the fundamental patterns of the Dominican religious and liturgical life of the priory, as well as those of formation and theological education in the Thomistic tradition, while undergoing necessary adjustments, continued more or less undisturbed.[3]

When I heard Pope Benedict XVI, in his momentous Christmas discourse to the Curia on December 22, 2005, contrast the hermeneutic of discontinuity and rupture with the hermeneutic of reform and continuity in the interpretation and implementation of the Second Vatican Council, I naturally thought of Lindbeck who had, over thirty years before, first introduced me to these categories for understanding the postconciliar period.

I

What I had absorbed in my conversations with Lindbeck about the impact of Vatican II on the eastern province of

[3] J. A. Di Noia, O.P., "*Discere et docere:* The Identity and Mission of the Dominican House of Studies in the Twenty-First Century," *The Thomist* 73 (2009): 119.

Dominican friars was just one element in his analysis of the state of late-twentieth-century theology. For me—and probably for others as well—the immense interpretive power of this analysis only emerged gradually as I began to teach theology after leaving Yale in 1980.

In his first-rate new guide to Lindbeck's life and thought, Shaun Brown notes that "coming out of his experience as an observer at Vatican II," Lindbeck's "cautious optimism" about the future of Roman Catholic theology was on display in the book bearing that title in 1970.[4] Five years later, however, his essay "The Crisis of American Catholicism" marked a shift in his thinking as he noted that, instead of the "great upsurge of Christian vitality and faithfulness within the Roman Catholic communion . . . the aftermath of Vatican II can be read as disastrous."[5]

During our conversations in the following decades, Lindbeck framed his analysis of the fractious state of American theology in terms of a perceptive account of the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council. According to this analysis, although united in their appeal to the authority of Vatican II, rival American Catholic theological positions were divided by two opposed readings of the nature of the conciliar response to modernity and its implications for the theological agenda. According to one reading, the council was understood to commend a strong reaffirmation of Catholic Christian identity, taking the broadest view of its historic traditions, yet open to the cultural and religious pluralism characteristic of our times. But in the eyes of an influential group of American theologians, such a reading reversed the true priorities of the council. It was not restoration, but modernization, dialogue, and social commitment that Vatican II chiefly sought to cultivate in the contemporary Church. To a large extent, the state of theology in the United

[4] Shaun C. Brown, *George Lindbeck: A Biographical and Theological Introduction* (Eugene, Ore.: Cascade Books 2022), 82.

[5] George Lindbeck, "The Crisis in American Catholicism," in John Deschner et al., eds., *Our Common History As Christians: Essays in Honor of Albert C. Outler* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 49.

States (and elsewhere) reflected the predominance of the second interpretation of the council.

As the conciliar documents reveal, both programs—*ressourcement* and *aggiornamento*, as they came to be called—were addressed at the council. But which of them had priority? The documents themselves did not provide an explicit answer to this question. Lindbeck persuasively argued that if one gives priority to *ressourcement*, then one will read the conciliar documents in the light of the Constitutions on Divine Revelation and the Church (*Dei Verbum* and *Lumen Gentium*). But if *aggiornamento* has priority, then the Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*) is seen as providing the interpretative key for the rest of the documents. In an effort aimed at what came to be called *reaccentramento*, the Extraordinary Synod of 1985, under the leadership of Pope St. John Paul II and then Cardinal Ratzinger, sought to resolve this question by balancing tradition-mindedness with modernization. But it was a sign of the ascendancy of *aggiornamento* in the American Catholic reception of the council that such recentering efforts were routinely decried by some theologians as retrogressive and anti-conciliar.

This disagreement about the nature of the council's response to modernity needed to be set within the context of broad trends in twentieth-century theology. Throughout most of the earlier part of the century, Catholic theologians saw the program of modernization (*aggiornamento*) as possessing an important but subordinate value in comparison with the program of *ressourcement*. It is well known that *ressourcement* furnished a powerful impetus for theological work in both Catholic and Protestant circles throughout the first half of the twentieth century, and even more so in the period between World War II and the opening of Vatican II. The impulse arose not from historical or antiquarian interests but from a determination to reaffirm Catholic Christian identity by means of a creative reappropriation of its principal formative sources. In part, and especially in its late-nineteenth-century phase, *ressourcement* involved the recovery of medieval and Scholastic sources. But

gradually and more broadly, attention shifted to Scripture, liturgy, and the Fathers of the Church.

It became increasingly clear as the century wore on that modernization would be an important byproduct of *ressourcement*. The earlier recovery of medieval and Scholastic sources had been so successful as to have restored and reinforced a fundamentally post-Tridentine theological edifice, with at least deference to—if not actual adoption and promotion of—the positions of Aquinas as its cornerstone. This neo-Scholastic and neo-Thomistic revival supplied the means to refute the errors of modernity if not always to engage its challenge. But study of the biblical, liturgical, and patristic sources afforded theologians access to the immeasurably more pluralistic pre-Scholastic period. In a strategic deployment of *ressourcement*, its practitioners sought to recover the greater tradition at the expense of what they considered the narrower post-Tridentine tradition enshrined by neo-Scholastic and neo-Thomistic theology. For neo-Scholastic theologians, *ressourcement* had provided access to an arsenal; for biblically and patristically oriented theologians, it seemed to unlock a treasure.

Thus it transpired that the later phase of the twentieth-century *ressourcement* had a powerfully modernizing edge. It cut into the neo-Scholastic hegemony through the radically pluralizing introduction of biblically and patristically based theological positions in dialogue with modern culture and philosophy. The passion at the core of the *ressourcement* program stemmed, nonetheless, from a tradition-minded reaffirmation of Catholic Christian identity. *Ressourcement* theologians shared the confidence that the richness of the Christian tradition, once displayed in all its wonderful diversity and breadth, could not fail to win a favorable hearing in the modern world.

While this conception of the balance of *ressourcement* and *aggiornamento* remained in place throughout the council, it did not fare well in the postconciliar period. In the popular American reception of the results of the council, it never even had a chance. Almost from the start, the program of *aggiornamento* was seen by the public and the media as providing the key to the conciliar deliberations and actions. Vatican II came rather

quickly to be viewed as representing a sharp break with the previous centuries and as charting a new course for the Church as it entered the twenty-first century. In part, this reception was fostered by the early implementation of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*). This document, in addition to recommending the reform of the liturgy, was also understood to signal a vast overhaul of Catholic life. Reform and renewal were widely viewed as equivalent with modernization rather than with the reaffirmation of Christian identity implicit in the *ressourcement*. Modernization came to entail in practice a vigorous engagement in dialogue and in socially transformative action.

With massive consequences for the future of Catholic theology in the United States, the program of *aggiornamento* prevailed in American Catholic reception of the council from the outset. In theology, the priority of *aggiornamento* over *ressourcement* entailed more than simply the updating of forms of life and expression. It often meant a readiness to appropriate the agenda of modernity, especially in correlationist and revisionist modes of theological reflection. In correlationist conceptions of the relation of faith and modern culture, culture asks the questions to which faith provides the responses. In revisionist conceptions, faith tailors its claims with an eye to prevailing canons of reasonability and applicability. Both theological styles in varying degrees embodied an accommodationist appropriation of the modern agenda that was not favorable to the affirmation of traditional Christian claims about revelation, the status of Scripture, the person of Jesus Christ, and the meaning of human life.[6] Even where correlationism and revisionism were not operative as explicit methodological commitments, the priority of *aggiornamento* fostered a climate in which modern criteria of rationality were perceived to be in competition with fidelity to the Christian doctrinal tradition.

[6] For an analysis of religious accommodationism, see Peter Berger's deeply influential address, "A Sociological View of the Secularization of Christianity," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 6 (1967): 3-16.

American Catholic theology increasingly came to display a typically modern profile. The characteristic concerns of modern theology, singly or in combination, gained prominence in theology over the final decades of the twentieth century: the primacy of the category of experience (whether religious or common human experience); the subjective turn, with its emphasis on the structures of human existence as affording the chief context for theological affirmation; the centrality of theological anthropology; universalism in the doctrine of revelation; pluralism in the attitude to other religions; insistence on the historically conditioned nature of formulations of the faith; the ascendancy of historical-critical approaches to the study of Scripture; antipathy to doctrinal norms; the centrality of critique and dissent with reference to the tradition and magisterium; a preference for procedural over thematic ecumenism; in ethics, the centrality of obligation and the autonomous agent. In addition to these familiar characteristics of modern theology, some American Catholic theology drew from liberation theology an emphasis on political activism and the notion that certain experiences, especially those of the oppressed, afford a privileged access to the meaning of revelation.

II

While Lindbeck helped me to understand mid-twentieth-century Catholic theology in the light of postconciliar trends, it was especially in listening to the lectures of his Yale colleague Hans Frei on nineteenth-century Protestant thought that I began to see the parallels between Protestant liberalism and Catholic *aggiornamento*.

Frei's *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* was published during my first year in New Haven.[7] This enormously important book eventually led biblical scholars and theologians to question the hegemony of historical-critical methodologies for mediating the meaning of the Scriptures for theological, doctrinal, and other

[7] Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974).

churchly uses. As Brown points out, Lindbeck attests to Frei's significant influence on his own understanding of biblical hermeneutics.[8] Frei was critical of the modern theory and practice of biblical hermeneutics and persuasively underscored the validity of precritical narrational and typological hermeneutics, which had read the Scriptures as a unified account of revelation and salvation with Jesus Christ at the center.

Later it would be clear that Frei's book had opened the way for the recovery of a doctrinally and liturgically structured reading of the Scriptures that is central to postliberal theology. But more influential for me at the time were his lectures on nineteenth-century philosophy and theology, and his seminars on Karl Barth. Though I had learned something about them in history of philosophy courses at our house of studies in St. Stephen's Priory (Dover, Massachusetts), I had never read Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* and *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, or Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* and *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, or Schleiermacher's *On Religion: Speeches to Cultured Despisers* and *The Christian Faith*. Barth had not figured significantly in my theological studies. But now I read his *Church Dogmatics* and his study of nineteenth-century Protestant thought.[9] Frei's lectures and his brilliant essay on "Niebuhr's Theological Background" were my guides.[10] When I chose the somewhat playful title for the earlier version of this memoire in 2017—"Taking the Cure at Yale"—what I had in mind chiefly was the intellectual epiphany I experienced when reading nineteenth-century philosophy and theology under the guidance of Frei and Lindbeck.

Like so many young Catholic theologians of my generation, I had become a fledgling Rahnerian after braving the daunting obscurities of transcendental philosophy to write my S.T.L. thesis on Rahner's theology of grace and the Trinity. For many of them, and certainly for me, transcendental Thomism had

[8] Brown, *George Lindbeck*, 121-22.

[9] Karl Barth, *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2002).

[10] Hans Frei, "Niebuhr's Theological Background," in Paul Ramsey, ed., *Faith and Ethics: The Theology of H. Richard Niebuhr* (New York: Harper & Row, 1954), 9-64.

swept into the vacuum created by the postconciliar eclipse of classical Thomism.

But I now saw, as I wrote later in an essay on philosophical theology, that

> the 20th century transcendental turn in Catholic theology, associated especially with the work of Karl Rahner, roughly parallels the 19th-century turn to the subject in Protestant theology. The prevailing Rahnerian (if not Rahner's) theology in the Catholic community exhibits remarkable formal and material similarities to modern Protestant theological positions.[11]

It became clear to me that there was another way and that there were very good reasons not to think of Kant's critique of metaphysics as a definitive block to robust Christian affirmation. But more on this later.

More broadly, Lindbeck and Frei helped me to see that the postconciliar Catholic experience in effect seemed to represent a compressed and accelerated recap of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Protestant experience. I found that study of the range of Protestant responses to modernity would prove to be instructive for understanding developments in Catholic theology and in Catholic life generally in the aftermath of the council.

The polarizing tensions that divided many Protestant ecclesial communities into conservative and liberal branches at the turn of the nineteenth century began to surface in the postconciliar Catholic Church. In both the Protestant and the Catholic contexts, issues turned on how to understand and confront the challenge of modernity. In both Catholic and Protestant circles in the United States, the conservative/liberal split became more significant than denominational differences. Progressive Catholics and liberal Protestants found themselves allied against tradition-minded Catholics and evangelical Protestants. Evangelical Protestantism continued its rapid growth, in comparison with a long-range decline in mainstream Protestant

[11] J. A. Di Noia, "Philosophical Theology in the Perspective of Religious Diversity," *Theological Studies* 49 (1988): 410. See also my book, *The Diversity of Religions* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1992), 120-26.

denominations. This trend confirmed the prediction that Christian communities with a clear sense of their distinctive identity vis-à-vis the wider culture possessed a competitive advantage over those whose accommodationist strategies had blurred their distinctively Christian profile.

The modernizing accommodationist strategies typical of modern Protestant theology (and with them, the forms of institutional adjustment they legitimated) were already showing signs of exhaustion. One could predict that, over the long haul, *aggiornamento* would not sustain a fully Catholic Christian theology and a vital Church life. The agenda of modernization by itself turned out to be an inadequate program for the practice of Christian theology. Prevailing trends within the history of Christian thought suggested that *ressourcement* supplied a more lastingly potent principle of theological energy. In fact, within American Catholic theology, there was a growing movement that sought to reassert the priority of *ressourcement* over *aggiornamento* in the appropriation of Vatican II and in the theological enterprise generally. There was no question of reversing the tremendous gains in flexibility, in collegiality, in religious freedom, in social and political awareness, in commitments to dialogue with other Christians, other religious people, and nonbelievers, in respect for diversity within the world Church, and so on—all achieved in the name of *aggiornamento*. Rather, there was a recovery of the astute insight that fueled the work of the original *ressourcement* theologians: that an uncompromising, unapologetic but open reaffirmation of the fullness and richness of the Christian tradition is in itself a powerful form of engagement with modernity.

In combination with wider cultural and intellectual trends, these developments produced a favorable environment within Protestant and Catholic theology in America for the emergence of a complex set of approaches that would come to known as postliberal theology.[12] I was hooked.

[12] For perspective, see James J. Buckley, "Postliberal Theology: A Catholic Reading," in Roger A. Badlam, ed., *Introduction to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster

III

Naturally, when I arrived in New Haven in 1974, I had never heard of postliberal theology, and neither had anyone else. It was only ten years later, in 1984, after the publication of Lindbeck's *The Nature of Doctrine*, that it entered common discourse.[13] The group of graduate students whom I found at Yale in 1974 and those who later joined us there formed deep bonds of intellectual and spiritual friendship that have endured to this day. We didn't have a name for it then, but we knew that something quite remarkable was taking shape there and that we were very fortunate to be among its early beneficiaries.

Forty years ago we probably would have called it the "Yale School"—comprising not only theologians like Lindbeck, Frei, and David Kelsey, but also the philosopher of religion William Christian, the historian of doctrine Jaroslav Pelikan, and the Scripture scholars Brevard Childs and Wayne Meeks, just to mention the most prominent. Despite considerable differences among them, these Yale professors—and others elsewhere who shared their convictions—believed that new opportunities for Christian affirmation were emerging as theology freed itself from the strictures imposed by characteristically modern presuppositions. Not unlike *ressourcement* theologians in Catholic circles, the postliberal theologians among these thinkers in varying degrees turned to premodern and classical sources of philosophy and theology—not in order to repristinate the past as if the modern era had never occurred, but in order to make these sources speak anew in the irreversibly pluralized postmodern era.

Among several elements that could be cited, three imparted a distinctively postliberal flavor to the new theological initiatives.

John Knox Press, 1998), 89-102; Bruce D. Marshall, "Aquinas as a Postliberal Theologian," *The Thomist* 53 (1989): 353-402.

[13] In *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, 25th Anniversary edition (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2009), xxxiii, Lindbeck coined the term "postliberal" to trace a path in the interpretation of religion and religious doctrines that distances itself from modern developments without reverting to a "preliberal orthodoxy," and then devoted the final chapter to the shape of postliberal theology.

In the first place, in the service of a broader conception of rationality, Lindbeck and other postliberal theologians rejected the modern (Cartesian) quest for a foundation for all knowledge, modeled on mathematical or scientific paradigms of rationality. As a Thomist might say, reasonability and certainty are analogous concepts, applicable to diverse domains of knowledge in ways that are dependent on the principles operative from one context to another. Scientific claims are truth-bearing in ways that are distinctive from claims in other fields like philosophy, ethics, religion, history, literary criticism, and so on. In assessing claims to rationality and truth, it was axiomatic for postliberal theologians to attend to the context in which these claims are embedded. Truth and rationality are far broader notions than modern thinkers were generally prepared to acknowledge. In this connection and in sharp contrast to modernity, postliberal theologians insisted on the centrality of tradition and authority in legitimating and supporting truth and rationality (not only in the religious but in the scientific and philosophical fields as well).

Two other characteristic elements in postliberal theology were the insistence on the role of texts and narratives in shaping thought and culture, and its stress on the importance of relationships and community in fostering intellectual and personal identity. These emphases challenged rationalism and positivism in modern philosophy of language and epistemology, and individualism in modern moral and political philosophy. In part the postliberal insistence on the culture- and identity-shaping roles of language was the outcome of the so-called "linguistic turn"—a series of developments in continental and Anglo-American philosophy stemming from the thought of Heidegger and Wittgenstein respectively.[14] Postliberal theologians sought to secure the objectivity and realism of knowledge with reference, not to the inner workings of consciousness (as in rationalism) or to their correspondence to objective facts

[14] See Fergus Kerr, O.P., *Theology after Wittgenstein* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986).

(as in positivism), but to a shared world of meaning and truth embodied in the linguistic practices of a community.

IV

Traditionally, the Yale divinity faculty was known to welcome confessional commitments in its graduate students. Whether Anglican, Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed, or other, these confessional backgrounds were regarded as the natural seedbed of theology. In seminars Lindbeck would routinely invite students to speak to the issues under discussion out of their distinctive doctrinal or theological traditions. You can imagine my alarm when Lindbeck turned to me in a seminar to inquire about what Aquinas had to say about the matter under discussion. Thus it happened that another important aspect of the "cure" I took in those six years in New Haven was to return to the study of Aquinas so that I would be able reply to Lindbeck intelligently.

Once I began teaching, my recovery of Aquinas began in earnest. My teaching responsibilities included the first forty-three questions of the *Prima pars* of the *Summa theologiae*—that is, the courses on the nature of theology, and on the doctrine of God One and Three. Later they would extend to the doctrine of creation and theological anthropology, and even, occasionally, sacramental theology.

As my rediscovery of Aquinas reshaped my thought, I found that my developing Thomism and newly formed postliberal sympathies made for quite congenial partners. The characteristic postliberal determination to overcome the legacy of modernity's turn to the subject in epistemology and ethics resonated with Thomistic metaphysics and the modest place within it occupied by epistemology. Like postliberal theology, Thomism rejects the modern equivalence of consciousness with the true self, insisting instead on the fundamental importance of bodiliness—and hence on the immersion of human beings in a natural cosmic order and on patterns of activity in a community of social and personal relations—as a constitutive element of personal identity. In postliberal theology, thought, bodiliness,

agency, and community replace subjectivity, consciousness, and the autonomous self as fundamental anthropological categories. Read straightforwardly—rather than in the modernizing construal given him by transcendental Thomism—Aquinas supports precisely this displacement of the Cartesian separations of mind and matter, of spirit and body, of subject and object, and of moral self and moral agent. As the years of teaching unfolded, I found that my reading of Aquinas and my reading of postliberal theologians were mutually enriching in ways that I could not always specify. Looking back on those twenty years of teaching at DHS, I can identify four areas in which characteristic elements of postliberal theology coalesced with my understanding of Aquinas to produce a distinctive—and one hopes not incoherent—style of theological affirmation.

Biblical hermeneutics was one of the first areas in which the impact of postliberal thought was felt, particularly its insistence on the interplay between the communal reading of texts and their community-shaping power. Although it was generally admitted that historical-critical approaches have much to contribute to Christian understanding of the Bible, in the practice of theology these approaches are logically subordinate to the doctrinally and liturgically shaped reading of the Bible precisely as Scripture.[15] I saw that Aquinas's understanding of the appropriation of the results of other disciplines by *sacra doctrina* in terms of the subalternation of sciences could be enormously helpful in sorting out the complex logic of the relation of historical and literary exegesis to theological hermeneutics. Directly relevant to a reading of Aquinas on these issues was the fact that the movement from *lectio* to *quaestio* in his own theological work represented the cresting of one of the most potent movements of *ressourcement* in the history of Christian thought.

Another area in which postliberal theology bore fruit in my teaching was in my whole approach to systematic theology. If in modern theology the basic question was, how can a modern

[15] See David H. Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975).

person believe this doctrine? then in postliberal theology the basic question became, how can the deep intelligibility of this doctrine be exhibited? From the outset, postliberal theology avoided posing skeptical questions about the Christian scheme of doctrine. There was a deep suspicion of the Cartesian methodological starting point of doubt. The assumption was not that religious claims inevitably challenge and bend accepted canons of rationality. Rather, canons of rationality in the religious realm have their own integrity and scope, and, although they do not isolate the religious domain from other domains, they nonetheless involve a distinctive logical structure. Systematic theology in the postliberal vein begins by trying to discern and exhibit this structure. The initial assumption is that a doctrinal scheme and the religious pattern of life it commends make good sense in theory and in practice. The task of Christian theology is to explicate the inherent intelligibility of a particular doctrine in connection with the whole body of Christian doctrines. Again, Aquinas's vision of the fundamental and integral intelligibility of the mysteries of the Christian faith is very attractive to postliberal theology. In his employment of metaphysical and other conceptions in the service of this explication, he was careful to avoid forcing the Christian scheme onto a philosophical grid.

What is more, in postliberal theological approaches and in marked contrast to those of modernity, Christianity's particularistic claim to universality constitutes not an embarrassment but a necessary feature of its commitment to and proclamation of the truth about God's dealings with us in Christ. The postliberal emphasis on the narrational and communal sources and embodiment of a community's claim to truth renders the Christian insistence on the uniqueness of Christ intelligible and, incidentally, comparable to the particularistic claims of other religious communities. Universal meaning is embedded in the particularistically depicted and narrated story of the passion, death, resurrection, and glory of Jesus of Nazareth, delivered to us as Christ and Lord. The motto of von Balthasar's theology is pertinent here: "the greatest possible radiance in the world in virtue of the closest possible following of Christ." The

replication of the pattern of Christ, in the *imitatio Christi*, is not only the vehicle through which Christian personal and communal identity is shaped. It is also the particularistic medium in which the universally applicable, though not universally accessible apart from revelation and evangelization, truth of Christ is made known to the whole world beyond the visible ambit of the Christian community. The scandal of particularity is no scandal for postliberal theology. Despite much well-intentioned defense of the interplay of history and metaphysics in Aquinas, particularity is no scandal for his theology either. At the center of his theology is a doctrine of salvation, embedded in a Christologically shaped narrative. The objective of theological explication is to provide as complete as possible an account of the principal characters upon whose agency the movement and action depicted in the narrative depends: God, angels, humans, and Christ. The narrative is not universalized by the introduction of metaphysical concepts. Rather, its particularistic claim to universal relevance is secured by a web of exegetical, theological, philosophical, and other patterns of argumentation.

Finally, postliberal theology helped me to understand that the interweaving of philosophical analysis and construction in the web of theological argument in the *Summa* is in the service of properly theological affirmation. The outcome is not a theological/philosophical system, but a highly ramified complex of interrelated dialectical arguments, always open to embracing or engaging alternative positions that can be rationally justified. The *principle* of unity and coherence is supplied by the mysteries of the faith in their own interconnection and intelligibility, itself rooted in the *scientia divina*. The exigencies of doctrinal and theological affirmation are seen to demand a robust theological realism, and it is for this reason that wide-ranging appeals are made to philosophy and other non-theological disciplines. At each turn in the larger argument, such appeals function as needed to secure the intelligibility of the doctrine under consideration, whether it be the concept of relation in the Trinity, or the concept of making in creation, or

the concept of end in moral life, or the concept of disposition (*habitus*) in grace and the virtues, and so on.

The *Summa's* sparing methodological passages support this reading of the role of philosophy in the explication of the Christian faith. Though transposed to a new—a "supernatural"—level of activity, ordinary patterns of human perception, thought, and language are internal to knowledge and talk about God in faith and, ultimately, in vision. According to Aquinas, the life of grace involves not the infusion of a set of capacities geared exclusively to engagement with God, but the transformation and empowerment of natural capacities for exercise at a new level. Hence, wherever relevant and appropriate, the results of nontheological inquiries as well as the logic of assertion and argument can be brought to bear on the theological explication of the contents of Christian faith. With respect to its overarching formal interest, theology is thus a field-encompassing field (Stephen Toulmin), and nontheological disciplines contribute to its pursuit of understanding and explication of divine revelation. Because of the prominence of the role of philosophy here, these issues are usually considered under the rubric "theology and philosophy." But other nontheological disciplines contribute to theological understanding and explication, notably literary criticism, history, sociology, psychology, and the natural sciences.

The role of the philosophical component in Aquinas's theological arguments can be seen in Aquinas's discussion of the triune God in questions 2-43 of the *Prima pars*. That the discussion of the existence and nature of God in questions 2-26 has a properly theological role to play is clear from Aquinas's prior description of the nature of theological inquiry (q. 1). Asserting that theology gets its subject matter from revelation entails that faith in God constitutes one of the principles of the inquiry now getting underway. The triune God is already "in place," so to speak, in his full Christian characterization. The burden of the argument in question 2, on the existence of God, is to assert that the one confessed as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is the cause of the world. Through an interweaving of philosophical and scriptural premises, the subsequent argument

in questions 3-26 exhibits something of the kind of life the triune God enjoys as cause of the world. The force of these arguments is to secure the particularistic claim to universality which the Christian community makes for its doctrines.

Philosophically shaped arguments concerning God's existence function to secure this universal claim. Starting with observable features of the world, such arguments affirm the divine agency as the source of these features and of the world order as a whole. Whatever their logical merits or probative force, their position at the beginning of the theological inquiry signals the logical space that Christians' claims are understood to occupy. This discussion functions to locate Christian worship, nurture, practice, and belief with respect to the widest possible conceptual map. The triune God who is adored, confessed, and proclaimed in the Christian community has not only a local, narrative, or contextual reference within the usage of a particular cultural and linguistic community. He is none other than the cause of the world.

While developed in connection with scientific and metaphysical claims, such arguments are subsumed in a properly theological and scripturally based inquiry. They do not displace, but rather presuppose the reading of Scripture as a "canonically and narrationally unified and internally glossed . . . whole centered on Jesus Christ, and telling the story of the dealings of the Triune God with his people and his world in ways that are typologically . . . applicable to the present."[16] In effect, philosophical analysis and construction enable Aquinas to address the question (here and in subsequent discussions of the divine nature and agency, of angelic and human natures, and, finally and decisively, of Jesus Christ as divine-human agent): what must be true of the main characters of the Christian narrative for it to have the features Christians claim for it, truth and "followability"? Philosophy and other nontheological disciplines contribute as needed to filling out these complex characterizations. A literary analogy may help at this juncture.

[16] George Lindbeck, *The Church in a Postliberal Age*, ed. James Buckley (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2002), 203.

In a critical study of Melville's *Moby Dick*, for example, the complex narrative need not be continually retold in the course of literary analysis of the motivations and structure of the main characters. In somewhat the same way in the *Summa theologiae*, Aquinas presumes his readership's detailed familiarity with the Christian narrative in order to show—or, more accurately, to remove obstacles to seeing—that its central claims are true and its chief injunctions followable.

Aquinas thus provides a powerful model of theological affirmation and realism over against alternatives that locate the reference for Christian talk about God either in human experience of God or in the linguistic practices of the community. The philosophical component in his discussion of the existence and nature of the triune God serves purposes internal to this properly theological project. In this discussion, the triune God is not left behind but presupposed. The central affirmation of questions 2-26 of the *Prima pars* is that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are together one God, sharing the single divine life of sheer existence (*ipsum esse per se subsistens*).

V

My conversations with Lindbeck continued after I moved on to the Dominican House of Studies. Especially during the fall semesters when I was teaching the nature and method of theology, we often reprised the theme of *ressourcement* and *aggiornamento*. We talked about the affinities between postliberal theology and the *ressourcement* agenda in Catholic theology. Like *ressourcement,* postliberal theology favors tradition-mindedness over traditionalism, on the one hand, and revisionism and correlation, on the other. In contrast to the program of *aggiornamento*, postliberal theology sees systematic importance in the reaffirmation of Christian identity as a means of promoting Christian fidelity and Christian proclamation. When accorded primacy over *ressourcement, aggiornamento* looks to postliberal eyes as if always on the verge of running out of breath as the culture rushes several steps ahead. Conceived simply as the updating of theology, *aggiornamento* is never

finished catching up; conceived more grandly as modernization, it is already far behind.

On the other hand, *ressourcement* theology has sometimes shown itself unable or unwilling to confront and resolve the conceptual problems—the *quaestiones,* as Aquinas might say—that the sources themselves serve up. *Lectio* is not always enough. Lindbeck and I talked about this often. We agreed that Aquinas provides a set of strategies for the disciplined appropriation of the results of nontheological intellectual inquiries—like philosophy, philosophical ethics, history, and psychology—in order to advance the analysis and resolution of such problems. The vastly pluralized postmodern contexts in which theology is undertaken today accentuate the challenge. Though sympathetic to the *ressourcement* agenda, postliberal theology has never shared its unfortunate antipathy for Thomism. The rigorous philosophical analysis and sound patterns of argumentation fostered in the Thomistic tradition are skills and habits of mind that are also much valued in postliberal theology.

Lindbeck appreciated and imitated what he called the "question approach" of Aquinas. In a 2007 interview, speaking about the ecumenical purpose of *The Nature of Doctrine*, he said:

> [Like Aquinas] you raise a question, and then there is an objection to the position that you're going to take, and then you try to answer the objection. I would say that what I'm trying to do in *The Nature of Doctrine*—to develop a so-called rule theory of doctrine, a grammatical rule theory of doctrine—is an attempt then to provide a supporting conceptuality for seeing how this "question method" proceeds and how apparently contradictory views can be shown not to contradict each other [if one introduces] the appropriate distinction.[17]

For this "Yale School" approach that influenced my own teaching, I owe a considerable debt of gratitude to Lindbeck and Frei. Frei we lost early and very suddenly in 1988. Lindbeck we

[17] John Wright, ed., *Postliberal Theology and the Catholic Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2012), 72.

lost in 2018, five years short of his hundredth birthday (March 10, 1923) in Luoyang, China.

As we honor the centenary of Lindbeck's birth, both theologians familiar with his work and new students will welcome Shaun Brown's splendid introduction to his life and thought. Brown's seven chapters consider in turn Lindbeck as a Lutheran, a student, a medievalist, an observer at Vatican II, an ecumenist, a postliberal, and an Israelologist. I am not aware of any comparable overview of Lindbeck's major books and essays. Brown joins clear exposition with judicious commentary to produce an extraordinarily useful companion to Lindbeck's theology. Here I have tried to convey something of the gradual way I came in varying degrees to absorb Lindbeck's thought over the course of years of studying and teaching theology, and applying it to the challenges of the global Catholic community. Readers of *The Thomist* will have grasped that Lindbeck's theology constitutes more than anything else an approach to theological construction that, as John Webster put it, "has sought to revisit Christian doctrine, asking not so much what might be wrong with it but what resources it may contain to redefine or illuminate current perplexities."[18]

When he visited the Dominican House of Studies, Lindbeck loved to participate in the Eucharist and the Liturgy of the Hours in the chapel. He especially loved chanting the Psalms. I remember once, after Midday Prayer, he turned to me while we were still sitting in the choir stalls and said, "You know, Joe, I think I could have been a Dominican." That was over forty years ago. In the 2007 interview quoted above, when asked if his work was a preparation for the future, Lindbeck replied:

> The one advantage of living a long time is that one mistrusts entirely predictions of what the future will bring. . . . At any rate, given the revolutions that are likely to be taken and the way we find ourselves reacting to reality, I can't help but think that there is at least a good chance that the sorts of things that drove the church to what we call neo-orthodoxy that required a sizable

[18] John Webster and George Schner, S.J., eds. *Theology after Liberalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 55.

interest in the visible unity of the churches, is something we won't escape in this century either. That's the way I look at the future. Therefore, I think of what I have been doing all my life in working for the visible unity of the church . . . might very well be very valuable in the things that will be happening in the not very distant future. So I am quite willing to leave this life, and quite optimistic about my life's work.[19]

[19] Wright, *Postliberal Theology and the Catholic Church*, 73-75.

BOOK REVIEWS

Thomas Aquinas and Contemplation. By RIK VAN NIEUWENHOVE. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021. Pp. ix + 220. $85.00 (cloth). ISBN: 978-0-19-289529-5.

A medievalist and systematician already known for his scholarship on Flemish mysticism, Rik Van Nieuwenhove has brought together a series of eight philosophical and theological essays on contemplation in Aquinas that make for highly stimulating reading. The resulting collection takes ongoing intra-Thomist debates further in important ways, and also opens up new interpretative as well as speculative questions on fascinating themes such as the seven gifts of the Spirit or the ways in which grace can (and cannot) stretch the human being's cognitive capacities before the divine mystery. The author sets a difficult task for himself, as he tackles a wide range of issues closely linked to the theme of contemplation, such as the metaphysics of the transcendentals, the relation of philosophy and theology, and the limits of discursive knowledge in the higher types of graced contemplation. The choice of this breadth of topics enables the pursuit of a panoramic approach to Aquinas's thought, a breadth that hardly excludes in-depth analysis of several key texts in Aquinas's vast corpus. One of the book's many strengths is surely its fresh engagement in the well-trodden territory of question 180 of the *Secunda secundae* and similar texts. One of its weaknesses is a lack of engagement with recent Aquinas scholarship on some of the more crucial issues raised. The ultimate aim of the book is not so much to present an exhaustive account of the nature of contemplation in Aquinas's thought as to offer a rich sketch that invites completion.

After (1) a substantial introduction that forms the book's opening chapter, the reader is treated to seven beautiful essays that treat the following themes: (2) some key epistemological issues such as the intellect's three acts (apprehension, judgment, reasoning), the role of phantasms in human understanding, and the nature of the mind's simple gaze; (3) the contemplation of the transcendentals; (4) thirteenth-century mendicant debates on the active and contemplative life; (5) the relation between faith, theology, and contemplation; (6) the link between charity and contemplation; (7) the role of the Spirit's seven gifts in contemplation; and finally, (8) happiness and the beatific vision.

The introduction may exaggerate somewhat the extent to which scholars of Aquinas have neglected the theme of contemplation in recent decades. The book does not mention the ground-breaking study by Cruz-Gonzalez Ayesta on the gift of wisdom in Aquinas, nor Daria Spezzano's magnificent work on divinization and wisdom. The fifth chapter does not mention the recent historical monographs on *sacra doctrina* in Aquinas by francophone scholars such as Henry Donneaud and Adriano Oliva (though the author does mention some of Oliva's other articles). As I will argue below, a deeper engagement with these and other voices would have helped the author to avoid some interpretive missteps. Van Nieuwenhove's preferred interlocutors include Bernard McGinn and Simon Tugwell (though he ultimately transcends the limits of the latter's problematic reading of contemplation in Aquinas, done in complete abstraction from the theology of the seven gifts). Setting these difficulties aside, we should note that the introductory (first) chapter nicely anticipates chapter 5, as the author clearly and ably situates Aquinas's approach to theological contemplation in relation to philosophical and beatific contemplation. Along the way, he convincingly compares and contrasts Aquinas's way to the more charismatic style of Bonaventure's theology (though one does wonder if Aquinas's understanding of the ideal theologian as a studious man of prayer radically open to the Spirit's movement in the seven gifts and charisms is somewhat obscured).

The book's second chapter sets forth some of its more controversial claims. The author helpfully reads Thomas in contrast to Bonaventure on the relation between certain knowledge and human access to the divine ideas. He then interprets Aquinas's vision of the mind's three basic operations in light of his angelology. The presentation of Aquinas's noetics is both accessible to beginners and rich in analytical detail. I do find the author's hypothesis of a fourth act of the intellect (as intuitive understanding) perplexing: nothing in Aquinas's general epistemology (as articulated in questions 75-89 of the *Prima pars* and in his commentaries on Aristotle) seems to support this theory of a fourth noetic act distinct from judgment (or second act), and the author himself seemed to step away from this hypothesis in a Thomistic Institute podcast published in 2021. Why would Aquinas invent a new act of the mind at question 180 of the *Secunda secundae*, but say nothing about it elsewhere? And why would he categorize the Spirit's gift of wisdom as an act of judgment, instead of presenting it as an instance of a fourth act? Finally, given these textual lacunae, how would such a theory fit with the pedagogical aim that Aquinas set for himself (and executed so well) in the *Summa theologiae*?

Since at least the seventeenth century, Thomists have faced the temptation of locating in Aquinas something close to the kind of intuitive mystical knowledge that some of the major early modern schools of spirituality propose. The Thomists who have given in to this temptation (e.g., Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange) thereby risk over-Platonizing Aquinas. However, like his teacher Albertus Magnus, Aquinas steered a deliberate course away from some of the more adventuresome readers of Dionysius the Areopagite (e.g., Thomas

Gallus, who would indirectly influence Carthusian, Franciscan, and Carmelite authors in important ways). Aquinas minimized the distance between natural and supernatural modes of knowing God (for all that is known is known in the mode of the receiver), all the while maintaining a clear distinction between them (for grace truly elevates nature), as he made theoretical space for a certain kind of supernatural intuitive cognition (especially by the four noetic gifts within the seven gifts of the Spirit) that retains a deep continuity with other kinds of knowing. In other words, Aquinas gently yet very consistently corrects Dionysian (and medieval Dionysian) epistemologies that seem to underestimate the place of acquired knowledge in supernatural cognition (as a close reading of Aquinas's much-neglected *De Divinis nominibus* shows), and it is crucial for his readers to trace this move so as to grasp his fundamental doctrinal intentions in his theology of contemplation. Van Nieuwenhove's hypothesis of a fourth act of the intellect seems to push Aquinas further toward Neoplatonism than he himself was willing to go.

To be clear, the author largely succeeds in his overall endeavor: the fourth act remains a hypothesis, and much of the panoramic sketch laid out in this book succeeds well without that hypothesis. The third chapter draws a neat contrast between medieval Franciscan approaches to the transcendentals and Aquinas's path. The latter distinguishes more firmly between philosophy and theology, and also defends the legitimate autonomy of the former, all the while showing how philosophical contemplation also disposes for the theological kind.

Chapter 4 gives the work a more historical flavor as Aquinas's theory of contemplation is set against the backdrop of the fierce mendicant controversies that unfolded in mid-thirteenth-century Paris, which very much turned on the nature of the active and contemplative lives and their place in the life of the Church. Here, the author not only draws good fruit from Jean-Pierre Torrell's historical analyses of Aquinas's writings on the religious life, but also engages critically with an almost-forgotten gem, namely, Hans Urs von Balthasar's 1954 commentary on the *Summa* questions covering the charisms and contemplation. This fourth chapter displays the author's considerably synthetic power, as he demonstrates the patristic (Gregorian) roots of Aquinas's theology of contemplation as well as its link to his doctrine of the episcopate, yet without obscuring the undeniable and strong Aristotelian framework.

Chapter 5 competently traces an important development in Aquinas's notion of faith from his early to his later writings, which helps the author to articulate the significance of Aquinas's way of appropriating the theme of subalternation in his theory of *sacra doctrina* (101-6). We then find a wonderfully creative illustration of the grasp of first principles as the author draws an analogy between the principles of sacred doctrine and the way in which we engage with art and literature (107-8). Further on, the author traces Aquinas's distinction between knowing and believing perhaps almost to the point of separation, such that his explanation of how rational argumentation functions

in Aquinas's theological texts becomes somewhat muddled (117-23). At this point, the decision not to engage in an extensive way with some of the vast Thomistic literature on topics such as the role of philosophy within theological argumentation shows its disadvantage.

Chapter 6 centers on a refutation of Jean-Pierre Torrell's explanation of how Aquinas distinguishes between philosophical and theological contemplation (though no specific reference to Torrell is given in the notes). The chapter's strong points emerge in the author's exposition of love of God and love of self, and its convincing rehabilitation of philosophical contemplation as a good in its own right. Strangely, the sixth chapter's last section covers the *imago Dei* in three pages, a theme that seems ripe for more extensive use in a study on contemplation, and most helpful to gain a fuller grasp of how Aquinas relates the contemplative and active life (one thinks especially of his integration of John Damascene's theology in question 93 of the *Prima pars*).

The author likely intended chapters 2, 5, 6, and 7 to stand as the pillars of his work. If this reading is fair, then the seventh chapter brings this book to its climax, in a study of the Spirit's gifts, prayer and wisdom. I have already noted the absence of some key interlocutors on this theme. The author first rightly identifies an important limitation in Garrigou-Lagrange's modern classic, *Christian Perfection and Contemplation*, where the famous Angelicum professor reads Aquinas partly with Carmelite eyeglasses (and, we might add, vice versa) (147). One does wish that Van Nieuwenhove had engaged with the brilliant French mystical theologian more extensively in this book, despite the latter's problematic hermeneutic. In this chapter, Tugwell very much becomes the author's main inspiration, though not exclusively so. He demonstrates well Aquinas's distinction between prayer (i.e., intercessory prayer) and the contemplative act (148-54). The originality of Aquinas's approach to the Spirit's seven gifts comes to the fore thanks to a solid comparison and contrast with Bonaventure and Albert (156-68). Unlike Garrigou-Lagrange, the author reads the *Summa*'s teaching on the seven gifts on its own terms, in abstraction from the less-developed and earlier theology of the *Sentences* commentary. Yet surprisingly, he makes the same move as Garrigou-Lagrange when he misreads the Son's invisible mission (*STh* I, q. 43) as a description of the Spirit's gift of wisdom (172). In fact, the former is linked with any new gift of sanctifying grace, while the actualization of the latter does not bear this essential link to a new sanctification. The author rightly distinguishes the ultimate fruit of the Spirit's noetic gifts (such as understanding and wisdom) as a simple knowledge or cognitive repose, yet perhaps also separates the working of the Spirit's gifts from that of discursive reasoning in ways that Aquinas does not (169-74). Here too, one is reminded of Garrigou-Lagrange's reading of Aquinas (and of John of St. Thomas). Why can gifts such as knowledge or wisdom not assist, perfect and crown such acts of reasoning? Here, a closer analysis of Aquinas's texts on the gift of understanding would have helped (*STh* II-II, q. 8 is covered in less than a page) (169).

Chapter 8 places Aquinas's vision of happiness in relation to Albert and Bonaventure. Here, the intellectual tensions between Aquinas and his teacher quickly come to the fore. It is hard to do justice to such a broad and controversial topic in one chapter, especially in a comparison of three major thinkers, but the author provides a stimulating survey of the key issues in play and a solid overview of Aquinas's stance on beatitude.

Overall, Van Nieuwenhove renders medievalists and scholars of Aquinas an invaluable service in several ways. First, he judiciously selects the kinds of texts in Aquinas that we need to bring into an analysis of his theology of contemplation. Second, he sets out the kind of questions that we need to pose of these texts as we work toward a panoramic vision of Aquinas's thought on contemplation. Third, he makes a strong argument for the presence of a particular kind of simple intuition in Aquinas (even if one might dispute some of the details in his description thereof). Fourth, he helpfully avoids speculative forays into theories of metaconceptual contemplation in an effort to explain Aquinas's notion of the contemplative summit in this life (unlike readers such as Jacques Maritain). That is, the author's arguments on behalf of intuitive knowledge in Aquinas remain cautious and close to the primary text. Fifth, the work is remarkably accessible, given the many technical nuances involved with many of the subthemes, not to mention the breadth of topics treated. For these and many other reasons, Van Nieuwenhove's monograph should restart and move forward important debates among philosophers, dogmaticians, moralists, historians, and scholars of spirituality on medieval and Thomistic theories of contemplation.

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Salvation through Temptation: Maximus the Confessor and Thomas Aquinas on Christ's Victory over the Devil. By BENJAMIN E. HEIDGERKEN. Foreword by PAUL M. BLOWERS. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2021. Pp. xiv + 316. $75.00 (hardcover). ISBN: 978-0-8132-3412-0.

Benjamin Heidgerken's first monograph draws attention to the dense cosmology of the premodern world. The universe consists of parts both visible and invisible. The invisible world may not be susceptible to inquiry vis-à-vis the physical sciences. Nevertheless, the invisible world is the subject of intense scrutiny by early and medieval Christian authors. Even the demons, who are invisible but by no means imperceptible, behave according to a certain logic.

Locating Maximus and Aquinas within this "thicker universe" is a reminder to theologians who, rather than wrestling within these premodern conditions, pass over the talk of angels and demons as superfluous. If theologians do not take this material seriously, then they disqualify themselves from shaping theological imaginations by refusing to use their own. We need not be surprised why the worse, and not the better, occupies this void.

Heidgerken offers a constructive contribution to fill this gap with his present work, which is a revision of his doctoral dissertation. His research falls in line with one recent study of Maximus (though absent from his bibliography), John Gavin's *They Are Like the Angels in the Heavens: Angelology and Anthropology in the Thought of Maximus the Confessor* (Rome: Institutum patristicum Augustinianum, 2009). For Gavin, angels serve as a foil to clarify Maximus's theological anthropology. In a similar way, Heidgerken uses demonology to elucidate Maximus's soteriology. Heidgerken argues that demonic temptation resolves issues in scholarly treatments of Maximus. Christ "is like us in all things save sin" (Heb 4:15). Yet, in his mature description of Christ's human will, Maximus claims Christ lacks a "gnomic will," that is, a deliberating function between alternatives, resulting from and conditioned by human fallenness. The author proposes that demonic temptation—an externalized, personified force—allows Christ to experience temptation's bites. This view avoids positing imperfections within Christ's psyche, while reverencing the fullness of human experience. One would be satisfied with a complete inventory of the Confessor's demonology in relation to his Christology. Yet, Heidgerken's book goes beyond the seventh century to compare Maximus with Thomas Aquinas. In his *Introduction*, Heidgerken inserts himself among Marcus Plested, Matthew Briel, and Christiaan Kappes, who have explored the intellectual exchange between Greek and Latin thinkers in the medieval period and have revised in important ways the hackneyed labels of "Eastern" and "Western" through their assiduous historical studies. Heidgerken follows the work of Antoine Levy's *Le créé et l'incréé*, which compares Maximus and Aquinas in order to arbitrate the Palamite controversy. This comparative approach is not without pitfalls. Both figures are saturated with secondary literature and any influence of Maximus on Aquinas is heavily mediated—as Heidgerken is aware—through Aquinas's medieval precursors John of Damascus, Peter Lombard, and Alexander of Hales.

Chapter 1 treats Maximus's sources for his anthropology and Christology. Heidgerken identifies fourth-century bishop Nemesius of Emesa's *On Human Nature* as a key influence on Maximus's development of the will and the role of choice. I will say more on this later. He turns to Gregory of Nyssa's *On the Soul and Resurrection*, where Nyssa posits that affective behavior is natural to the human condition, and choice results from human sinfulness. Heidgerken then outlines Origen's and Evagrius's teachings on demonic temptation. He shifts to Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory of Nazianzus to sketch the Christological picture Maximus inherits, pointing out the different ways they describe Christ's relationship to unfallen and fallen human existence.

Chapter 2 discusses Maximus's anthropology with special reference to human temptation. Heidgerken describes Adam's original state as good, containing the *logos* of immutability. However, Adam's *tropos* or manner of being was susceptible to motion and therefore change and corruption. Heidgerken focuses on Satan's role in the Fall in line with his overarching argument. He draws attention to *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 62, where Maximus explains that Adam's sinfulness constructs a home for the devil to dwell in and continue his attacks. Heidgerken maps out the progression of the moral act described by Maximus in *Opusculum* 1. He then explains Maximus's discussion of willful and unwillful temptation in *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 58, a theme found elsewhere in the Confessor's works, most notably in the *Commentary on the Our Father*. Maximus advises that Christians should pray to be led away from the vicious temptations (willful) and accept gladly the trials that assail us from the outside as an ascetic exercise (unwillful). Heidgerken then discusses Christ's subversion of demonic temptation in *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 21 to show how temptation and soteriology function in Maximus's vision of the ascetic life.

Chapter 3 evaluates Maximus's account of Christ's temptation. In *Opusculum* 1, Maximus distinguishes between essential and relational appropriation: what belongs to Christ's human nature as such, and what Christ's human nature encounters but does not contain. For Heidgerken, the key frontier is human choice. Maximus denies the presence of choice in Christ in his mature anti-Monothelite works. Yet, building on Nemesius, Heidgerken maintains that choice belongs essentially to the *logos* of human nature and human rationality. According to Heidgerken, the lack of choice in Christ would preclude the assumption of a full humanity. Heidgerken points to texts where Maximus discusses that the salvific activity of Christ offers "stabilizing choice" for humanity and allows for "choice without passion." Maximus points out, most notably in *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 21, that Christ accepts human passibility, such as physical weakness. Christ likewise disposes himself to vulnerability, as identified by his temptation in the desert. According to Heidgerken, Maximus teaches that Christ's experience subverts the devil who exerts a vicious grasp on free choice and human passibility. Heidgerken sees the demonological aspect of Christ's soteriology as essential for Maximus's dyothelite position. If, for Maximus, the natural will cannot resist the divine, then the problem must be located elsewhere. For Heidgerken, this role is played by demonic temptation, which diverts the natural will from its divine object. As Heidgerken asserts quite clearly: "If the natural will itself is what separates one from the divine, the Monothelites would be right to reject its presence in Christ" (124).

The rest of the book follows the same pattern to explore Thomas Aquinas. Chapter 4 discusses Aquinas's sources, naming Burgundio of Pisa's Latin translation of John of Damascus's *On the Orthodox Faith,* which re-presents in large part Maximus's account of the will. Heidgerken discerns several key differences from Maximus that John of Damascus will transmit to later

medieval authors, namely, the ambivalence of the natural will to God and the denial of choice in Christ. He also credits Burgundio's translation with changing temptation's origin from a demonic source, "τοῦ διαβόλου προσβολῆς," to a more impersonal "*immissio perniciosi.*" He then evaluates Augustine of Hippo and Gregory the Great as patristic precedents for Aquinas, concluding that both develop a Latin tradition that denies the interior temptation of Christ. He ends the chapter with discussion of Peter Lombard and Alexander of Hales; he importantly suggests that they attribute to human concupiscence, or the "*fomes peccati,*" the origin for temptation, supplanting demonic suggestion.

Chapter 5 details Aquinas's anthropology in reference to human temptation. According to Heidgerken, Aquinas holds that temptation in the flesh is strictly speaking a postlapsarian phenomenon brought about by Adam's sin. Prior to the fall, temptation was external and morally educative; temptation was the means God used to lead Adam and Eve from grace to glory. According to Heidgerken, Aquinas limits the role temptation—both concupiscence from within and demonic suggestion from without—can play morally to educate the fallen human being. Temptations play primarily a punitive role. Heidgerken contrasts this with Maximus, who considers all forms of temptation, internal and external, as arising from the demonic and therefore as potential instruments for salvation in the hands of Christ in conjunction with the willing ascetic.

Chapter 6 develops Aquinas's account of Christ's temptation by the devil. Heidgerken sees Aquinas in contrast with earlier medieval writers, who tended to minimize Christ's association with temptations associated with fallenness. Aquinas holds that Christ is subject to human vulnerability, such as hunger and thirst. Christ is also subject to being transported by the devil while being tempted in the desert. Aquinas denies any concupiscent element or internal demonic stirrings in Christ, which he argues is unnecessary for Christ's satisfaction for sin. Further, concupiscence in Christ frustrates his "status as a *comprehensor* who shares proleptically in the glorified condition of humankind" (283). In other words, a concupiscent Christ cannot offer us the ideal of a heavenly humanity.

A few issues should be noted. First, Heidgerken's claim that Nemesius is "undoubtedly the central source" for Maximus's psychology is assumed rather than investigated (22). Maximus is the first correctly to attribute the work to Nemesius instead of Gregory of Nyssa and citations of Nemesius can be found throughout Maximus's writings. However, these citations almost invariably appear as block quotes. Maximus clearly cited Nemesius. It is less clear that he digested Nemesius and incorporated him into his thinking. This is evidenced by his later denial of the gnomic will in Christ. For Nemesius, the human moral act requires deliberation. Maximus contends that such deliberation is an element of fallenness. Heidgerken argues that Maximus uses language of "immutability of choice" or "choice without passion" resulting from Christ's assumption of human flesh (*Opusculum* 1 [*PG* 91:29C-32A]). In both these

instances, these are attributes offered to humanity, not necessarily originating in Christ himself. Further, this modification of choice does not entail a blind acceptance of Nemesius. At least, it appears that Maximus amends the Nemesian position, and, at most, he disagrees with him. In the same *Opusculum* that Heidgerken cites, Maximus asserts that "the humanity of God was not moved according to choice" (*PG* 91:32A). He gives an important reason. The faculty of choice distorts Christ's humanity in a Nestorian fashion, rendering his human nature into "a bare human being" capable of potentially choosing against the will of God (cf. *PG* 91:29B). If the devil can prey on human choice without possessing it, then Christ can heal human choice and stabilize it in a deified human in the same way.

Second, one of Heidgerken's more central points of comparison between Maximus and Aquinas is their account of affective virtue. He argues that "Maximus holds a non-eschatological conception of affective virtue that is extrinsic and historically realized." (89) For Aquinas, the perfection of affective virtue for humans is only realizable eschatologically, that is, not within historical time. Heidgerken asserts that Maximus remains "apophatic" in his discussion of the affective life in the eschaton (95-96). This is not entirely accurate. Maximus has a sophisticated understanding of the transformation of vicious passions into virtuous emotions, each with their place in divine life. Vicious fear is transmuted to awe before the throne of God (*Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 10), and vicious grief is transformed to participation in God's grief for those not yet saved (*Questions and Doubts* 129). Maximus describes eschatological rest, "the Sabbath of Sabbaths," as an "erotic ecstasy" for God alone (*Two Hundred Chapters on Theology* 1.39). Hence, Maximus is replete with cataphatic language regarding eschatological, perfected affective virtue beyond the historical time.

Heidgerken should be commended for his ambitious reading of two of the most important figures in the Christian tradition, East and West. One can learn much from the history Heidgerken traces, even if at some points I disagree. The labels "East" and "West" in reference to theology have rightly been problematized, for they can obscure where they should clarify. To go beyond these paradigms, one must go deep before going broad. "The devil is in the details," the adage goes, and the devil rarely fixes problems; he only makes new ones.

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The Same God Who Works All Things: Inseparable Operations in Trinitarian Theology. By ADONIS VIDU. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2021. Pp. xix + 352. $50.00 (hardcover). ISBN: 978-0-8028-7443-6.

Adonis Vidu's *The Same God Who Works All Things: Inseparable Operations in Trinitarian Theology* defends the principle of the "hard inseparability" of the operations of the three divine persons (xv). That is, in any action performed by God in the created order by way of efficient causality, all three divine persons act together inseparably. If this were not the case, then not all three persons would be fully divine, because God would act in the world without one or two of the persons acting. Vidu develops this theme through nine chapters, building on or critiquing the Fathers of the Church, conciliar teachings, Thomas Aquinas, and modern authors. Since it is more recent authors who abandon the principle of hard inseparability, they in particular will be subject to critique.

Vidu observes that the principle of hard inseparability is suggested by the Scriptures (xiv), and in his first chapter he pursues "a biblical theology of inseparable operations" (1) in five steps. After a word on Jewish monotheism (1-11), he shows that Scripture identifies Jesus and the Spirit with the God of Israel (11-23) and equates Jesus with the creator (23-31). He then considers the inseparability of Christ and the Spirit (31-36) and examines the works of the Trinity in the Gospel of John (36-49). Vidu argues, especially from the Pauline corpus, that Christ and the Holy Spirit are God, and that therefore they must have one same agency as God, with the Father and with each other. For instance, he notes that both Christ and the Holy Spirit are recognized as the YHWH of the OT who has returned to his people—a compelling insight (16). The fact that Christ and the Spirit do divine things, such as forgive sins, shows that they have divine being and must therefore act inseparably (19). For Vidu, the strongest possible biblical support for the principle of inseparability is the identification of Christ with the creator, since the act of creation cannot be delegated to a creature; Christ must then simply be YHWH (23). Regarding the inseparability of Christ and the Spirit, Christ works through the Spirit; he is empowered by the Spirit and then gives the Spirit to us (35). In the Gospel of John, Christ is not speaking of mere delegation when he says in 5:19 that he does whatever the Father does (37).

In chapter 2, Vidu ponders the rise and decline of the idea of inseparable operations in four sections on the Fathers (53-63), Augustine and Aquinas (63-74), Christ's two wills and two operations (74-82), and contemporary theology (82-89). Vidu documents the defense of the principle of inseparability by Athanasius and the Cappadocian Fathers in their responses to heresies. He then turns to Augustine's and Aquinas's accounts of appropriation and the divine missions for assistance in articulating the harmony between personal distinction and inseparable unity. In appropriation, we attribute something that is common to all three persons to just one distinct person, based on a real affinity between that common attribute and a property

of that person; for instance, we appropriate wisdom (which describes all three persons) to the Son, since he alone proceeds (from the Father) by way of knowledge (71). In the missions of the Son and the Spirit we have all three persons producing a created effect that signifies only one distinct person, because only one person is the exemplar of that effect. For instance, since the Son alone proceeds by way of knowledge, the gift of wisdom that comes with grace signifies the Son alone (72-73). With respect to Christ's two wills and two operations, Vidu argues that the Trinitarian principle of inseparability helped resolve the question of the number of wills and operations in Christ, because the number of wills and operations is determined by the number of natures, not the number of persons (75). In early Christological debates, all parties accepted the Trinitarian principle of inseparability (78). It is possible for only the Son to be united to a human nature, because while the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit act as one in the created order, they each act according to their distinct personal mode (78). Finally, Vidu reviews more recent authors like Karl Rahner, Colin Gunton, and Catherine LaCugna, who are concerned that the principle of hard inseparability blurs real personal distinction, results in the reduction of the divine person to a relation, and cannot adequately account for the distinct missions of the Incarnation and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (88). However, abrogating this principle risks cutting ourselves off from Scripture and conciliar teaching (82 n. 82, 90).

Chapter 3 probes unity and distinction in divine action, in three parts: triune causality (92-106), the knowledge of the divine persons and their actions *ad extra* (106-16), and social Trinitarianism (116-22). Regarding triune causality, actions in the created order cannot be the basis of distinction within God, otherwise God would be dependent on creatures (93). A key principle here is equiprimordiality—namely, that perfect unity of essence and real distinction of persons must both be asserted at the same time; neither can be subordinated to the other (97). Vidu refreshingly observes that "the impression that the East emphasizes the persons while the West stresses the essence is caricatural" (ibid.) and that there is no monarchy of the Father in the thought of the Fathers but rather a monarchy of all three persons (98). The latter especially corrects a position that is simply taken for granted in much secondary literature. Vidu rejects the assertion that the immanent Trinity is the economic Trinity—widely popularized by Rahner—noting that such a claim compromises divine transcendence (105). Each person acts according to his distinct personal mode, but this is only visible in the created order "in the form of final causality," that is, in the drawing back of rational creatures to God through the distinct missions of the Son and the Spirit (106). Vidu explains that because the divine persons act together inseparably in the created order, we cannot know the persons in their distinctness through created effects that we see in the world; we have knowledge of the three divine persons through the missions of the Son and the Spirit (113). With this knowledge, we can appropriate common attributes or operations to distinct persons to gain insight into the persons' properties (112, 114). Vidu concludes

that social Trinitarianism is at odds with monotheism in its conception of three exemplars of "God" (116) who essentially have different jobs but work together in agreement. Even so, he is sympathetic to its best intuitions of a strong notion of distinct personhood (122).

In chapter 4, Vidu investigates the topic of the Trinity in the act of creation. He considers the account offered by Tradition (126-36), two modern critiques of the traditional account (136-40), patristic accounts of inseparable operations in creation (140-46), and Aquinas's account of creation as a Trinitarian act (146-56). God creates each thing through an idea of it in the divine intellect; thus, God is the exemplar cause of all things, in addition to being the efficient and final cause of all things (134). Vidu shows that corrected Platonic themes are redeployed in service of the Gospel by Augustine (144-45) and Aquinas (146). For Aquinas, the Father creates through the Word and in Love, where the Word is understood as the exemplar of all creatures; the divine processions are the cause and exemplar of the procession of creatures; all three persons act inseparably here (145-46, 149-50).

Chapter 5 takes up the question of the incarnation of the Son alone, in four steps. Vidu distinguishes the common action of the divine persons in uniting a human nature to the Son from the *state of being united* to a human nature, which is proper to the Son (159-63). Vidu then considers the personal causality of the Son upon the human nature (163-66) before examining the consequences of termination (166-71): The Son is the term of the Incarnation in the sense that the action of assuming terminates in the Son alone (167-68), but the Holy Spirit is the term of all actions in the economy as the "perfecting cause" (168) in whom the Father and the Son act. Finally, Christ's human nature reveals the Son (171-78) by completely receiving his personal filial mode—for instance, his "eternal receptivity" and "return[ing] everything back to the Father in love," which is manifested on a human level as obedience (177).

Chapter 6 is on Christology and Trinitarian agency, which Vidu covers in five parts. Concerning the witness of Tradition (182-85), Vidu reports Aquinas's clear distinction that "the human operation, in which the Father and the Holy Spirit do not share, except by Their merciful consent, is distinct from [Christ's] operation, as the Word of God, wherein the Father and the Holy Spirit share" (184). In pondering persons, natures, and actions (185-93), Vidu notes that, after Scotus, nature became separated from will and action: whereas the patristic strategy was to argue from same action to same nature, the modern inclination is to argue from distinct action to distinct person (185). With respect to the actions of Christ's human nature (193-202) and theandric action (202-9), Vidu observes that for Scotus, the actions of the human nature are its own and are only predicated of the Son on account of its union with the Son (196); for Aquinas, by contrast, although the human nature has its own operation on the human level, as an instrument of the divinity, it does not have a distinct action, but is an instrument in the principal agent's action (201). In his discussion of Christ's suffering (209-213), Vidu

intends to avoid Patripassianism by attributing actions inseparably to all three persons but attributing passions only to the Son (210).

Chapter 7 takes up atonement in four steps. In reflecting on whether human actions can bear upon divine actions (218-27) or whether humanity has a necessary place in a divine mission (227-29), Vidu replies in the affirmative but only as a "consequent condition." That is, the Son needs his human nature to be filled with the Holy Spirit in order to send the Spirit to us (220), not absolutely but only as a condition consequent upon God's plan to work through his human nature. Concerning the necessity of Christ's death (229-38), Vidu concludes that in taking on our human nature, Christ experienced divine condemnation, and the Crucifixion was inevitable yet not as the cause or antecedent condition of reconciliation but as the necessary manner of manifesting it (238). Vidu sees the Spirit's role in atonement (238-77) as necessary (238); and this "at-one-ment" effects the full pneumatization of Christ's human nature (246). Christ's death was necessary not in order to obtain a reward—as God does not react to any creaturely action—but "because the way to new and divine life goes precisely through the old nature with its death" (243).

Ascension and Pentecost are the topics that concern chapter 8. In the first of five sections, Vidu reviews some historical explanations (248-51), noting that some Protestant authors speak of Christ's ability to send the Spirit as a reward for his obedience—an idea not present in the Fathers, such as John Chrysostom (249). Vidu then discusses the missions (251-54), especially concerning Christ's human nature in sending the Spirit (254-66); he approves of Aquinas's explanation that Christ is a cause of grace in us through his meriting to be such a cause, where his human nature is an efficient instrument cause (255). He departs from Aquinas's position that Christ had the fullness of the Spirit in grace from his conception, arguing instead that Christ received this at his baptism (264). This accords with Vidu's understanding that Christ's human nature was gradually deified to the point where he could give the Spirit to us (266-74). In his interpretation of Christ as a life-giving spirit (274-77), Vidu maintains that it is the Spirit's role to make Christ present to the Church after his Ascension "in the same way as in the Old Covenant the Spirit mediated YHWH's presence to Israel" (275).

In chapter 9, Vidu examines the indwelling of the Holy Spirit as Love, in six sections. He reports on the "appropriation tradition" (281-83), which appeals to appropriation since it respects the inseparable action of all three divine persons in producing the indwelling of the Spirit. He then considers critiques of this tradition that judge it to underappreciate the distinction of persons in actions in created order (283-88), and then he critiques these critiques (288-94) for risking introducing change and composition into God in disregarding the principle of inseparability. Vidu defends the appropriation tradition and, with the help of Aquinas, introduces an understanding of real relations to distinct divine persons in the baptized, based on exemplar causality, not efficient causality (294-300): we are conformed to and led back

to the Son and the Spirit in grace through the gifts of wisdom and love (299). The graced created effect of love does not buffer the Holy Spirit (300-302), like a layer of mortar between bricks; it is rather like the seal in wax (313). It is simply the effect of regeneration and the possession of the Spirit (302); thus, the priority of the Spirit himself as uncreated grace is retained. Vidu wishes to enhance Aquinas's account (302-17) by emphasizing more strongly the Christoformation of the Spirit's indwelling through the human nature of Christ (312).

Overall Vidu's exposition and conclusions assist in faith seeking understanding; however, there are a few cases where his positions seem difficult to square with Scripture and Tradition, and there are a number of ideas whose formulation could use improvement. For instance, the overall context in which Vidu situates all of his theological claims is a word game, according to "Wittgenstein's conception of 'theology as grammar'" (xiv-xv; see also 95, 103, 114, 163, 319-20). But if our words, as limited and fragile as they are, do not attain the reality signified in our speech about God, then it is difficult to see how "we are called to witness to the reality of God's dealings with us" (xiv), as Vidu recognizes we in fact are. If the ultimate reach of our assertions is a word game, then as long as our theological claims obey the rules, reality—which is precisely what eludes us here—seemingly cannot be our guide.

Regarding some difficulties in formulation, Vidu writes that "the Word too is spoken, or breathed out" (57), but it is the Spirit who is breathed out. Moreover, Vidu in different ways confuses spirated with spirating (67, 71, 251), seeming to lose the difference between active and passive spiration—the latter alone being the same as procession. He asserts that "the relations (paternity, filiation, spiration—active and passive) constitute the persons as such" (100), but this would make four divine persons; in fact, active spiration does not constitute a person. Vidu claims that "the relations establish the processions" (100), but it is the processions that establish relations. Furthermore, the divine essence does not proceed, as Vidu asserts (106); if it did, there would be at least two essences. And he states that "there is a single person in whom two natures subsist" (193), but in fact there is only one that subsists—the single person, who subsists in two natures.

Because of space constraints, I can only list a few more difficulties, without comment: the Son is distinct from the Father and the Spirit "because the human nature that he assumes takes on the existence of the Son and acquires the personal property of the Son" (202); "to say that the Son is begotten by will is . . . simply to specify the manner in which the Son proceeds from the Father" (61); "suffering can be predicated nevertheless of the divine essence" (211); "[The human nature of Christ] exists as proceeding from the Father" (205); "it is an outstanding question whether the incarnate Son shares in the divine efficient causality of creation, or whether some other account can be given of his participation in the activity of creation" (140); "to eliminate from the explanatory apparatus for actions the prepersonal dimension of willing, or natural willing, renders any account of action deficient" (110); and the human

nature of Christ is an *esse secundarium* (168, 211), but the human nature has no *esse secundarium* (216, 278).

Vidu initiates an important discussion and lays out an extensive defense of the hard inseparability of the divine persons in their actions *ad extra*. He elucidates the key principles by gathering and analyzing a rich dossier of biblical texts, patristic sources, Thomistic doctrine, and contemporary authors. This work would especially benefit professors and more advanced students in theology, who would be more prepared for the depth of the discussion and more ready to bring their own critique to Vidu's interpretations.

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From the Alien to the Alone: A Study of Soul in Plotinus. By Gary Gurtler, S.J. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2022. Pp. ix + 269. $75.00 (cloth). ISBN 978-0-8132-3451-9.

Plotinus admitted, ruefully I would imagine, that Plato sometimes spoke "enigmatically" about the soul. Thoughtful readers of the dialogues will find it difficult to argue with this claim. Although Plotinus never thought of himself as anything other than a Platonist and an accurate expositor of Platonism, his reflections on many issues regarding "soul" (*psychē*) led him frequently to go beyond the explicit words of the text and both to speculate on their implications and to defend a Platonic account of the soul against opponents. Herein lay Plotinus's originality: drawing out the implications of Platonic claims and addressing arguments against, in particular, the immateriality and immortality of the human soul.

Students of Plotinus know that the fourth *Ennead* is entirely devoted to the soul and psychological matters, broadly speaking. But there is hardly a treatise among the other five *Enneads* that does not provide us with additional insight into how Plotinus struggled with the problems regarding the soul and how he "located" it within the Platonic system. Students also know that the fourth *Ennead* contains nine treatises that were written over many years; they do not represent a chronologically coherent or ordered set of papers on a single topic or group of topics. Thus, we have treatises chronologically numbered 21, 4, 27-29, 41, 2, 6, 8 (out of a total of 54). Most of the secondary literature on the soul in Plotinus focuses on the fourth *Ennead* with ancillary material drawn from elsewhere. This is not wrong or hermeneutically unsound, but it does suppose a topic-oriented approach on Plotinus's part that probably does not correspond with reality. One of the distinctive features of Gary Gurtler's

monograph is that he intentionally ignores the fourth *Ennead* and instead focuses on a chronological commentary on passages in several major treatises wherein the soul is discussed. This unusual approach certainly comes across as an intriguing novelty for those already familiar with all the treatises. I wonder, however, if such an approach would not be found disorienting by someone not steeped in Plotinus. So, this is not a book for beginners or even for those who come to Plotinus from a study of Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics, wondering how he internalized and reacted to some six hundred years of intense philosophizing about the soul.

The treatises commented on (in part) are chronologically 1, 9, 10, 12, 19, 20, 22-23, 26, all roughly from Plotinus's "middle period." They are: I.2 [19] (*On Virtue*), I.3 [20] (*On Dialectic*), I.6 [1] (*On Beauty*), II.4 [12] (*On Matter*), III.6 [26] (*On the Impassibility of Things without Bodies*), V.1 [10] (*On the Three Primary Hypostases*), VI.4-5 [22-23] (*That Being, One and Identical, Is Simultaneously Everywhere Whole*), and VI.9 [9] (*On the Good or the One*). The variety of topics discussed in these treatises is considerable. Gurtler's strategy is to approach the account of the soul from a number of different perspectives, especially in its relations to intellect, the Good, the body, and matter. All of this is done with the assumption that, as Plotinus thought about the topics in these treatises, he continually added new perspectives on the soul. Gurtler agrees with most scholars that there is no profound "development" in Plotinus's thinking over the relatively short period in which he wrote these treatises. Nevertheless, this certainly does not preclude the likelihood that his views on the soul were more and more profoundly integrated within his larger metaphysical framework.

After an introductory overview of the material to be covered and the methodology to be employed, Gurtler begins in chapter 1 to consider our embodied experience of beauty as this is described in Plotinus's first treatise, *On Beauty*. Gurtler's central insight here arises from his focus on the experience of physical beauty, that is, its "psychic nature." For Plotinus, beauty is form which can be present in the admiring soul as much as it is present in the body. The experience of beauty is, for Plotinus, transformative because the beauty—not a representation of it—is in the soul. And since form is closer to the One or the Good than is form plus body, beauty elevates us in the direction of our ultimate destination. And for this reason, beauty moves us beyond the limitation that form is or has to the unlimited or infinite first principle of all. Gurtler finds in the treatise *On the Good or the One* a complement to *On Beauty*, that is, a reversal of the perspective from ascent to descent or production. Ascent to the One is for embodied human beings a matter of reversing the dispersal of the person into a plurality of subjects of embodied experience. The aim is to reverse the otherness of all pluralities with respect to the One. Our own "oneness" needs to be cultivated by a precise series of steps beginning with alienation from the body and ending with identification with intellect. This identification is variously represented by Plotinus and by Gurtler, but it comes down to reflection on the true good that

we all want and an awareness that the psychic "we" that wants nothing but the true good is the subject of intellectual activity, especially contemplation. Our gradual alienation from our otherness in relation to the One turns out to be the homecoming to which we all aspire.

In the second chapter, dedicated to *On the Three Primary Hypostases*, Gurtler situates the embodied soul within the broad metaphysical framework famously articulated in this important treatise. One of the central tasks of any interpreter of this treatise is to distinguish the individual human soul from the soul of the cosmos and also from the hypostasis Soul. Gurtler rightly makes central to his account the striking claim of Plotinus that soul is matter to intellect as form. What this means, among other things, is that our intellects are present in all our psychic activities. Although Gurtler does not mention this, I take it that this suggests that all our so-called irrational behavior is in fact the behavior of a rational animal and that the irrationality is purely normative. By this I mean that the behavior goes against a standard of behavior that one has reason to believe the agent himself endorses. As for the above issue of distinguishing the soul from the hypostasis, Gurtler does not quite resolve the issue, although he seems to suggest that the hypostasis Soul is just the life of the hypostasis Intellect, eternally cognitively identical with the Living Being, as is stated in *Timaeus*. I should add that in this chapter, Plotinus obviously has the great Parmenides in view in his account of being and oneness and Gurtler makes effective use of Plotinus's introduction of Parmenides in this regard.

Chapter 3 concerns the difficult but portentous treatise *On Matter* and Plotinus's rejection or rather reinterpretation of this fundamental Aristotelian concept in Platonic terms. Aristotle argues that form, matter, and privation are the basic and irreducible principles of change. Plotinus responds that there is no difference between matter and privation if we consider prime matter. But if that is the case, then what is called "proximate matter" is not matter at all but actually an additional hylomorphic composition. Thus, real matter is totally incorporeal. As Gurtler shows, the consequences of this reconceptualization of matter are immense for Plotinus's understanding of the embodied soul. Specifically, matter cannot affect soul because matter is unqualifiedly inert. The "impassivity" of soul in regard to matter is thus secure. How then can embodiment be a locus of peril for the soul? Because embodiment entails a "dispersal" of the soul into a plurality of subjects of embodied states. What is open to corruption—and to punishment via reincarnation—is the soul-body composite alienating itself from its own good. So, it turns out that reflection on matter refocuses the philosophical reflection on the soul and the challenges of embodiment. In addition, matter is no longer to be viewed as itself evil but rather more as the terminus of a trajectory on the path of a soul that has lost its way. In contrast to matter in the sensible world, intelligible matter cannot be the receptacle for the instantiation of Forms, since in the intelligible world all the Forms are internally related. That is why Being is, as Plotinus says, a "one-many." Intelligible matter does not underlie body, but rather substance

or *ousia*, allowing for the articulation of the array of intelligibles by an eternal intellect. Gurtler suggests, all too briefly, that the hypostasis Soul is intelligible matter, a claim which, if true, would illuminate the account of the procession from the One according to which intelligible matter seems to be Intellect prior to its full "formation" by its reversion to the One and its achievement of the Good insofar as this is possible for any intellect.

In the fourth chapter, Gurtler examines Plotinus's remedy for alienation: virtue. Following a Platonic tradition well-established by his time, Plotinus distinguishes among grades of virtue especially as these are articulated and implied in Plato's *Phaedo* and *Republic*. The civic or popular virtues revolve around the restraint of the body; philosophical virtue is aimed at the identification of the embodied self with intellect and the consequent alienation from the body. This is the simple story, although later Platonists add nuance. For Plotinus, dialectic is the name for the practices or exercises that facilitate this identification. Another name for it is "philosophy." Gurtler nicely links the acquisition of philosophical virtue with the erotic attachment to intelligible beauty discussed in the first chapter.

The fifth and sixth chapters may be considered together since they concern what amounts to one long and complex discussion in which Plotinus tries to explain how the eternal immaterial world is related to the sensible world. Gurtler notes that the seemingly incongruent characteristics of immanence and transcendence, when applied to the intelligible world in relation to the sensible world, emerge with an explanation of how the body is related to the soul. Gurtler shows that the problem Plotinus addresses is the common mistake of viewing the intelligible world as an abstract representation of the sensible world when in fact the causal line is exactly the opposite. This error is the primary reason for objections to participation. The key to Plotinus's approach is to recognize that the intelligible world is eternally present everywhere and all at once to anything capable of receiving it and exactly to the extent that they are capable. This principle, as applied to soul in relation to body yields the result that soul is everywhere in the body and there at all times and the various parts of the body receive as much of it as they are able. As much can be said for Intellect's presence to individual human souls. The "moral alienation" of the soul, as Gurtler terms it, should be understood as an inclination to the separation provided by corporeality and disinclination to the unity that Being's presence involves. Finally, the above distinctions lead to the account of the transcendence and immanence of the first principle of all, the Good or One. As Plotinus says in V.1, the Good is in us, but it is so according to the capacity of the receiver. At the same time, that presence does not exclude its transcendence, but entails it because any presence can only be a complex manifestation of the absolutely simple first principle. So, everything either advances towards unity or continues on a deviation from it, but each according to its own capacity and habits. Thus, our undeniable desire for our own good turns out to be identical with our desire for the Good itself.

The seventh and final chapter is really a continuation of the third chapter, matching up the incorporeality and impassivity of matter with that of soul. This chapter contains a discussion of Plotinus's arguments against Stoic materialism in III.6, the details of which must be left out here. Whereas the impassivity of matter ensures its utter inertness, the impassivity of soul entails its everlasting activity. Thus, Gurtler ends where he began, with the experience of soul.

The book has a brief concluding chapter highlighting the main claims made and issues addressed.

Gurtler's decades-long encounter with Plotinus has resulted in a very thoughtful book from a rather unusual perspective. As I said at the beginning, someone new to Plotinus might not be able to profit all that much from its allusive nature. Like the corporeal in relation to the incorporeal, the reader will benefit from Gurtler's reflections according to his or her capacity for reception.

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