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The Noetical, Ontological, and Theological Foundations of *Bonum* according to Saint Thomas Aquinas

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1. Introduction

The purpose of metaphysics, or First Philosophy, is to study all of reality so as to discover its most universal causes: the first and ultimate causes, as well as the first principles. Such a science would be "architectonic," founding all other sciences and allowing man to engage in contemplation, his most excellent activity. This science, being the First, is unique in having to establish its own object of study (*subiectum*); classical tradition has fixed it as *ens qua ens* (τὸ ὄν ἧ ὄv)—being, considered simply inasmuch as it is.[1] Although Aristotle considered it to be the least "necessary" science (albeit the most excellent),[2] in the sense that other sciences are more directly "useful" or "productive" (the way biology, for example, is useful for medicine), metaphysics does prove to be very "useful" in at least two ways: as a preparation for the the study of dogmatic theology (which, once man has access to it through Revelation, turns out to be the true queen of sciences) and as a foundation for all of the other sciences inferior to it.

Metaphysics studies *ens*, and thus in addition to its causes, it must consider the "properties," or *passiones*, of its *subjectum* (much as chemistry must undertake to discover the properties of elements and chemicals). This essay will focus on this latter aspect, especially on the *passiones*' discovery and foundation. What makes their study difficult is that *ens* is not like the *subiectum* of secondary sciences, which is ordinarily "univocal"—meaning that it can be predicated the same way of all those realities that possess it. *Ens*, on the other hand, could be characterized as "transcendental" (superior to all of the "categories," or supreme genera of reality) and "analogical" (predicated differently according to the consistency of the subject). The *passiones*, being properties that are convertible with, consequent to, and—in reality, but not conceptually—the very same as *ens*, suffer from

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[1] See ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysics*, in *Metaphysics I-IX*, trans. by H. TREDENNICK, vol. 17, Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1933, Γ, 1, 1003a20-33.
[2] ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysics*, A, 2, 983a10-12.

a similar difficulty. Hence they are "transcendental," just like *ens*. By discovering and founding them, however, in addition to learning about *ens* itself, we discover the attributes of its transcendent Cause.

I have chosen to limit my study in this essay to the transcendental *bonum*, which serves as an excellent test case, because it directly involves all of the types of causality that metaphysics considers: the intrinsic causes (the *actus essendi* and the essence) and the extrinsic causes (God as efficient, exemplar, and final cause off all *entia*). Moreover, it serves as a springboard for two very important fields of study: Trinitarian theology and ethics.

2. Noetical Foundation of *Bonum*

2.1 Derivation of the Good *in Via Inventionis*

As with any metaphysical investigation, the first inquiry into *bonum* must be made *in via inventionis*; that is, starting from what is best known so as to proceed to what is less well known. To begin this task, Saint Thomas begins with the most general notion of the good, which is that of "appetiblity" or desirability.[3] Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics* describes τὸ ἀγαθόν as οὖ παντ᾽ ἐφίεται ("that which all things desire"),[4] which Thomas translates as *quod omnia appetunt*. From the context of both the *Ethics* and the *Summa*, it is clear that Aristotle and Thomas are not suggesting (at this stage, at any rate) that there is a single Good that all things desire;[5] rather, they are discussing the good in general, and they agree that desirability is the fundamental notion of good (*ratio boni*)—the one best known to us.[6] Thomas argues that "desirability" can be founded on the perfection of the object of desire: we desire something because it has a quality or other aspect that make us more perfect in some way.[7] Perfection, however, is founded on act, and thus we can say that the good is coextensive with act. Moreover, since—as Thomas puts it—"*esse enim*

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[3] The fundamental text for this treatment of the discovery of *bonum* is the *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 5, a. 1. See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae: pars prima, a quaestione I ad quaestionem IL*, in *Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII*, vol. 4, Typographia Polyglotta, Rome 1888, I, q. 5, a. 1, co.

[4] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. by H. Rackham, vol. 19, Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1926, I, 1, 1094a3.

[5] Of course, we will eventually prove that there is a *Summum Bonum* to which all things tend.

[6] Good ice cream is precisely that ice cream which is desirable to eat. The criterion of desirability is easy to see in the case of the objects of our appetites. In the case of moral goodness, however, it is more complicated. (In what way is a good man "desirable" inasmuch as he is good?) It seems to me that there is an analogy of attribution. Good *acts* are those which are desirable for making one happy (which is not a problem, because acts are objects of the rational appetite). We call a *man* good (by attribution) because he does good *acts*, and likewise, good *habitus* are so called because they produce good acts.

[7] Saint Thomas notes in *De veritate* 21 that *bonum* also adds the notion of *perfectivum*—the flip side of *appetibile*, so to speak—to *ens*. See Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate*, in *Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII*, vol. 22:3/1, Sancta Sabina, Rome 1973, q. 21, a. 1, co.

est actualitas omnis rei,"[8] it follows that *ens* is coextensive with act, and therefore, also to the good.[9] In fact *ens* and *bonum* are not simply coextensive but the same *in re*; the good "adds" the notion (and only the notion) of desirability.[10]

This coextensiveness, however, is not at all evident. An obvious objection is that certain *entia* (for example, Satan, totalitarian regimes, terrorists—even mosquitoes) are not objects of desire.[11] In what way are they "good"? Thomas argues that the notion of *ens* is strictly correlated to that of act (as we saw above), and therefore *ens* is predicated most properly of the type of act that is distinguished from pure potency (that is, prime matter), as opposed to informed matter.[12] Therefore it is substance that is called *ens simpliciter* (without qualification);[13] and any further acts (*actus superaddti*) are called *ens secundum quid* (with respect to a certain aspect).[14] With the good, the situation is reversed: since its *ratio* is desirability, which depends on its perfection, a thing is called good *simpliciter* inasmuch as it has reached its *ultimate* perfection, which is to be found (in creatures) in the *actus superaddti*.[15] Inasmuch as a thing has substantial *esse*, therefore, it is only good

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[8] Thomas Aquinas, *S.Th.* I, q. 5, a. 1, co.

[9] Aristotle proves that *ens* is coextensive with act, first by dividing τὸ ὄν into four groups (*per accidens*, according to the ten categories, true-and-false, and act-and-potency) in *Metaphysics* Δ, 7, and then by reducing τὸ ὄν to its two principle meanings, οὐσία (substance) and ἐνέργεια (act). See Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Δ, 7, 1017a7-1017b9, and Θ, 8, 1049b4-28.

[10] The idea that the good is coextensive with *ens* may stem from Aristotle. In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, A, 6, for example, he says, τὸ δ' ἀγαθὸν λέγεται καὶ ἐν τῷ τί ἐστι καὶ ἐν τῷ ποιῷ καὶ ἐν τῷ πρός τι, that the good is in essence, quality, and relation. These are precisely the "key" categories, the ones that are common to all substances, even pure forms (separated intelligences, or—in our parlance—angels). This would seem to indicate that Aristotle considers τὸ ἀγαθόν to be trans-categorical. See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, A, 1, 1096a19-23. We will see below in exactly what way *bonum* "adds" a notion.

[11] Thomas does not raise this objection in *Prima pars*, q. 5, but he does so in *De veritate* 21, 5. See Thomas Aquinas, *De veritate* q. 21, a. 5, co.

[12] An accidental form has pre-formed matter as its substrate, whereas the substrate of a substantial form is prime matter. The substantial form entails a much more radical reduction of potency to act.

[13] This argument provides a justification for Aristotle's reduction of τὸ ὄν to οὐσία in *Metaphyics* Γ. See Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Γ, 2, 1003a33.

[14] For example, accidents are said to inhere in the substance, and thus would be characterized as having *esse in* rather than *esse*.

[15] See Thomas Aquinas, *De veritate* q. 21, a. 5, co.: "*Unde absolute bonitatem non obtinet nisi secundum quod completum est secundum substantialia et secundum accidentalia principia.*" See also A. Contat, "*Esse, essentia, ordo*: verso una metafisica della partecipazione operativa", in *Espíritu* 61 (2012), 10.

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secundum quid.[16] This resolves the *aporia* of the evil creatures mentioned above: they are good *secundum quid* (at a minimum, thanks to their substantial *esse*), but not *simpliciter*. (Indeed, they leave much to be desired).[17]

2.2   Derivation of the Transcendentals *in Via Iudicii*

Now that *bonum* has been identified as a *passio* of *ens*, with the the *ratio* of desirability, the next step is to explain its derivation, together with the other *passiones*, *in via iudicii*. In his *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate*, q. 21, a. 1, Thomas—who is discussing the good—considers the ways in which one notion can be "added to" (that is, can further specify or determine) another, so as to discover exactly what the good "adds" to *ens*. It turns out that there are three types of *additio*: the "addition" can be something outside of a thing's essence, as when one specifies a substance's quality;[18] or else, the "addition" can—to use Thomas' expression—"contract," or determine, what is being specified, as when one narrows a genus down to one of its species;[19] finally, the "addition" can add a merely conceptual notion (a notion that is *rationis tantum*) that adds nothing *in re*.[20] *Ens*, however, is not an ordinary "genus," in the sense that many different realities are grouped under one head: substances, the various kinds of accidents, and even—in one sense—*Ipsum Esse*.[21] Since there is no reality outside of *ens*, it is clear that the first type of "addition" is not

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[16] To illustrate, the ultimate perfection of a Roman pizza is to be crispy, hot, and tasty. We could say, that is its *virtus* or ἀρετή. A good pizzeria with a wood-burning oven will produce pizza that is good *simpliciter*. If you go to a cheap tourist place with an electric oven, the pizza will still be good in certain respects (perhaps the sauce is good, or the cheese—*secundum condimentum* or *secundum caseum*, so to speak), but not *simpliciter*.

[17] The discussion of *bonum simpliciter* and *bonum secundem quid* is to be found in Thomas Aquinas, *S.Th.* I, q. 5, a. 1, ad 1um, and Thomas Aquinas, *De veritate* q. 21, a. 5, co.

[18] For example, "red" adds something to "apple," in the sense that, although the redness is just an accident, nevertheless it is real.

[19] "Apple" is more comprehensive than "fruit" and thus specifies real characteristics that must be determined in order for the fruit in my hand to be truly an apple.

[20] Saint Thomas gives the example of a man and his blindness, noting that blindness is not really a being but only a privation and thus adds nothing real to "man."

[21] *Ens* ordinarily refers to *ens per participationem*, the *ens* proper to creatures. However, there are cases where Saint Thomas uses *ens* so that it can also be predicated of *Esse per essentiam*. We will discuss this below.

possible. *Ens* can, therefore, either be "contracted" to a *modus specialis essendi*—that is, to one of the ten categories or *praedicamenta*—or else a merely conceptual notion can be "added" to it.[22]

Ens, however, is also the most fundamental and self-evident notion, and therefore all other notions in the intellect are obtained by adding something to *ens*. We are interested in those that are consequent upon every *ens*; however, argues Thomas, this is possible only in two ways: the *ens* could be considered in itself, or else with respect to something else. Considering the first way, the only possible affirmation regards the essence, and this property is called *res*. (*Ens* by itself signifies the very *actus essendi*.) The only possible negation that is consequent upon every *ens* regards division, from which is derived *unum*: every *ens* is one *in actu* and (in the case of creatures) divided only *in potentia* (equivalently, we can say that it is *divisible*).[23] Considering one *ens* with respect to another, the property could involve the division of the former from the latter (*aliquid*), or else the correspondence (*convenientia*) of an *ens* to a spiritual being whose soul is *quodammodo omnia*. In the last case, *bonum* entails a *convenientia* with the appetitive faculties; *verum*, with the intellectual.[24] In *De veritate* 21, Thomas specifies that both *verum* and *bonum* add the notion of *perfectivum*. *Verum*, however, only adds it *secundum rationem speciei tantum*; that is, insofar as the intellect grasps only the "species" or "quidditas" of what perfects it. *Bonum*, on the other hand, is also perfective *secundum esse quod habet in rerum natura*;

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[22] *Additio* is discussed fully in *De veritate* q. 21, a. 1, co., but is also seen in q. 1, a. 1, co. See also J.F. WIPPEL, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquians*, Catholic University of America, Washington 2000, 192.

[23] Aristotle hints at a similar idea in *Metaphics* Γ when he discusses the equivalence of τὸ ὄν and τὸ ἕν. See ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysics*, Γ, 2, 1103b23-1004a3.

[24] The most well known derivation of the transcendentals is to be found in THOMAS AQUINAS, *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate*, in *Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII*, vol. 22:1/2, Sancta Sabina, Rome 1970, q. 1, a. 1. See also WIPPEL, *The Metaphysical Thought* …, 192-194. The derivation in q. 1, a. 1, is in tension with what Thomas says in q. 22, a. 1: he argues that a purely conceptual addition could only be a type of negation (since non-being does not really "add" anything, as we saw with the example of the blind man) or a type of relation. (The example that Thomas gives is that of knowledge and its object. "Knower" is real relation—hence it "adds" something to the knower—but "known" is a purely conceptual relation.) This arrangement easily accounts for *unum* (a negation), *aliquid*, *bonum*, and *verum* (which are relations), but it seems difficult to place *res*, which—as Thomas says above—results from an affirmation. It is tempting, therefore, to say that *res* adds the (purely conceptual) relation that an *ens* has with itself.

in other words, an *ens*, inasmuch as it is good, communicates one of its real perfections to the one who receives it, not just the *ratio*.[25] In this derivation, a sort of sequence of the first notions can be discerned: first *ens*, which gives rise to *non-ens*,[26] then *divisio*, and hence *non-divisum* (*unum*), and *multum*, which entails *aliquid* (*divisum ab alio*). It should be stressed, especially as regards *verum* and *bonum*, that this derivation describes only the *noetical* foundation of the transcendentals: thus, for example, it is not the case that *entia* are only true or good to the degree that spiritual creatures relate to them as such. In reality, they possess an intrinsic perfection that spiritual creatures are *capable* of relating to (without necessarily doing so).[27]

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[25] See Thomas Aquinas, *De veritate* q. 22, a. 1, co.

[26] See Thomas Aquinas, *De veritate* q. 1, a. 1, ad 7um.

[27] In a way, all *entia* do depend on a relation with a spiritual substance, namely God, as we will see. In this case, of course, the relation of dependence is entirely in the creature.

3. Ontological Foundation

After having established *bonum* as a property of *ens*, the task now is to found it through both its intrinsic and extrinsic causes: in other words, to seek its ontological and theological foundation. Founding a *passio entis* ontologically entails reducing it, by means of *resolutio secundum rationem* to the real composition of essence and *actus essendi*. In our expostion of the noetical foundation, we outlined the first steps of this *resolutio*: *bonum* is linked, through the notion of desirability, to perfection, and then act; this foundation is confirmed by way of *compositio*, since *bonum* adds the notions of *perfectum*, *perfectivum* (*secundum esse quod habet in rerum natura*), and *appetibile* to *ens*. To complete the *resolutio*, we note that *ens per participationem* is not identical with its goodness; moreover, although it is founded on act, it is always limited, which points to a potential principle. In this way, we can see that *bonum* is founded on the real composition of *actus essendi* and essence.

In Thomas' usage, *ens* ordinarily refers to *ens per participationem*, the *ens* that is proper to creatures, as he makes clear in his commentary on the *Liber De Causis*: "*ens autem dicitur id quod finite participat esse.*"[28] Sometimes, however, *ens* can be a fully "generic" notion, without committing to any particular "mode" of *ens*, and hence could refer even to God, who is *Esse per essentiam*. For example, we find the latter usage when Thomas refers to the Cause as *maxime ens* in the Fourth Way,[29] or else when he says says, "*ens et bonum convertuntur.*"[30] This terminology in no way challenges the transcendence of God; his manner of being *ens* is radically different (*aliquid*) from that of created *entia*, thanks to his divine simplicity.

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[28] Thomas Aquinas, *Super librum De Causis expositio*, ed. by H.D. Saffrey, Société Philosophique-Nauwelaerts, Fribourg 1954, lc. 6.
[29] See Thomas Aquinas, *S.Th.* I q. 2 a. 3 co.
[30] See Thomas Aquinas, *De veritate* q. 1 ad 2.

The notions added by *bonum*, then, can be applied, *servatis servantis*, both to *ens per participationem* (creatures) and to *Esse per essentiam*. In the case of *ens per participationem*, its desirability is proportional to its perfection and hence to the degree that it is in act. Since it is composed, it it can never attain utter fullness of perfection; moreover, its operations depend on faculties that are distinct from it. Therefore, it desires to go, through operation, from its initial perfection—which makes it good *secundum quid*—to its ultimate perfection, which makes it good *simpliciter*. It is, to use Thomas' terminology, *ordered to an end*. *Esse per essentiam*, on the other hand, is utterly simple.[31] It has the fullness of perfection, and thus—for the *entia* that participate in it—is maximally perfective and desirable. It is not "perfect," however, in the sense that it attains perfection starting from an initial, imperfect state; rather, it is fully in act from all eternity.[32] Therefore, it does not desire, nor is it ordered to an end.

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[31] See Thomas Aquinas, *S.Th.* I, q. 3, a. 7.
[32] See Thomas Aquinas, *S.Th.* I, q. 4, a. 1, ad 1um.

4. Theological Foundation

Having established the ontological foundation of the good, we must now proceed to the theological foundation. The method, this time, is *resolutio secundum rem*, which is accomplished by means of the *triplex via*, adapted by Saint Thomas from pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. It consists in the *via causalitatis*, in which one affirms that God is the ultimate extrinsic cause of creatures and its properties; the *via remotionis*, in which some property that entails imperfection is denied absolutely with respect to God; and the *via eminentiae*, in which we affirm the perfection in question (*res significata*) but deny the manner (*modus significandi*) in which it is ascribed to creatures.[33] Following the model of the Fourth Way, when a transcendental perfection—one that is convertible with *esse*—is found to be *magis et minus*, it follows that there must be a *maxime ens* that has that same perfection *maxime*.[34] The perfection in the creature, therefore, is a participation in that of the Creator. It is important to recall that although participation on the predicamental level (such as the participation of a species in its genus) entails univocal predication of a perfection, between God and creature (and among creatures of different ontological levels) the predication is analogical and the participation is transcendental.[35] In fact, the

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[33] See J. Mitchell, Resolutio secundum rem, *the Dionysian* triplex via *and Thomistic Philosophical Theology*, Dykinson, Madrid 2011, 398-400. *Res significata* and *modus significandi* are described in Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae de potentia*, in *Quaestiones disputatae*, ed. by P.M. Pession, vol. 2, Marietti, Turin 1965[10], q. 7, a. 2, ad 7. For an example of how the *triplex via* is applied, see Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae de potentia* q. 9, a. 7, co., and especially ad 2um, where Thomas applies it to numerical terms in God. The reply to the second objection says, "*Licet in remotione quorumdam a Deo, sit cointelligenda praedicatio eorumdem de Deo per eminentiam et per causam, tamen quaedam solummodo negantur de Deo et nullo modo praedicantur; sicut cum dicitur: Deus non est corpus. Et hoc modo posset dici secundum opinionem Magistri, quod omnino negatur a Deo quantitas numeralis; et similiter secundum id quod ponimus, omnino negatur ab eo essentiae divisio, cum dicitur: essentia divina est una.*"

[34] See Thomas Aquinas, *S.Th.* I, q. 2, a. 3, co.: "*Quod autem dicitur maxime tale in aliquo genere, est causa omnium quae sunt illius generis.*" See also Thomas Aquinas, *S.Th.* I, q. 44, a. 1, ad 1um: "*Ex hoc quod aliquid per participationem est ens, sequitur quod sit causatum ab alio.*"

[35] See Thomas Aquinas, *S.Th.* I, q. 4., a. 3, ad 3um: "*Non dicitur esse similitudo creaturae ad Deum propter communicantiam in forma secundum eandem rationem generis et speciei,*"

degree of participation of a perfection in God's "exemplar" is directly proportional, as it were, to the *ens*'s degree of participation in *Esse per essentiam*.[36] The *actus essendi*, in turn, is "measured" by the essence, which functions as a *potentia essendi*.[37] *Esse* and essence, therefore, form a real and transcendental[38] composition, which indicates a radical dependence on a Composer, for "it is necessary that every compound depend on another, prior, agent. Therefore the First *Ens*, which is God, from which all things come, cannot be composed."[39] God is revealed as both the efficient and the exemplary cause of the perfections in his creatures, and thus there is a real likeness between the creaturely and divine perfections.[40]

This method applies well to *bonum*. God, who is all perfect, communicates his perfection to his creatures. Consequently, he renders them all desirable, in varying degrees, according to their ontological level. The foundation of *bonum secundum quid*—which is proportional to substantial *esse*—is fairly straightforward: *entia per participationem* are not identical with their own goodness, and hence must receive their perfection from *Esse per essentiam*, which is not composed.[41] The good, however, also adds the notion of desirability, and so God is revealed as the First Desired,[42] which means that he is the ultimate *final* cause and that all things are ordered to him as ultimate end. Indeed, this ordering

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sed secundum analogiam tantum; prout scilicet Deus est ens per essentiam, et alia per participationem." See also J. AERTSEN, *Medieval Philosophy and the Transcendentals*, E.J. Brill, Leiden 1996, 431-432.

[36] See THOMAS AQUINAS, *S.Th.* I, q. 4., a. 2, co.: "*Omnium autem perfectiones pertinent ad perfectionem essendi, secundum hoc enim aliqua perfecta sunt, quod aliquo modo esse habent.*"

[37] See THOMAS AQUINAS, *Quaestiones disputatae de potentia* q. 7, a. 2, ad 9um: "*Nihil autem potest addi ad esse quod sit extraneum ab ipso, cum ab eo nihil sit extraneum nisi non-ens, quod non potest esse nec forma nec materia. Unde non sic determinatur esse per aliud sicut potentia per actum, sed magis sicut actus per potentiam.*"

[38] "Transcendental," because it applies to all ontological levels of creatures.

[39] THOMAS AQUINAS, *Quaestiones disputatae de potentia* q. 7, a. 1, co.: "*Oportet ergo quod omne compositum dependeat ab aliquo priore agente. Primum ergo ens, quod Deus est, a quo sunt omnia, non potest esse compositum*" (my translation).

[40] This reasoning corresponds well to, and helps to justify, the axiom *omne agens agit simili sibi*. See THOMAS AQUINAS, *Quaestiones disputatae de potentia* q. 7, a. 1, ad 8um

[41] See THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa contra gentiles*, in *Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII*, vol. 13, Typis Riccardi Garroni, Rome 1918, I, 38, 4.

[42] See THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa contra gentiles* I, 37, 4.

is what gives *entia* their *ratio boni*: "*Est igitur Deus omnis boni bonum.*"[43] Since *esse* is "measured" by essence but does not exhaust all of its ἐνέργεια in actuating the essence, it tends to "overflow" and "expand," by means of operation.[44] In this way, it attains its ultimate perfection and becomes good *simpliciter*. Goodness in its twofold richness thus reveals that the ultimate causes of *ens* operate in a framework of *exitus a principio* (in God's efficient and exemplary causality) and *reditus in finem* (in God's final causality).[45]

The theological foundation of *bonum* is, therefore, threefold: "In this way, therefore, everything is said to be good thanks to divine goodness, as the first exemplary, efficient, and final principle of all goodness."[46] God, as efficient cause, creates both the perfection and the *esse* that corresponds to its ontological grade. Because he is the efficient cause, and since *omne agens agit simili sibi*, the perfection is a likeness of divine perfection (which is the exemplar); and the "emergence" or "expansion" of the *actus essendi* leads *ens* to seek its ultimate perfection through operation. Eventually, it even seeks to attain God, who is its ultimate final cause.

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[43] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles* I, 40, 4.

[44] See Contat, "Esse, essentia, ordo …", 36.

[45] See *ibid.*, 29.

[46] Thomas Aquinas, *S.Th.* I, q. 6, a. 4, co.: "*Sic ergo unumquodque dicitur bonum bonitate divina, sicut primo principio exemplari, effectivo et finali totius bonitatis*" (my translation).

5. Relation with Other Transcendentals

From the derivation of the transcendentals above, it is immediately evident that they readily form two "triads" (provided we include *ens*): those that regard *ens in se* (*ens*, *res*, and *unum*), and those that regard one *ens* in relation with another (*aliquid*, *verum*, and *bonum*). It is tempting to try to place these triads in parallel. Since *res* adds the notion of essence and the "measurement" of *esse*, and *verum* regards a perfection of the soul with respect to the *ratio speciei*, it does not seem difficult to pair them together. Since the scope of this investigation regards *bonum*, I will not consider here the pairing of *aliquid*; however, it is not immediately clear whether to pair *bonum* with *unum* or with *ens*.

The solution, it seems to me, will depend on the basis for the correspondence. If the basis is noetical—regarding how they are discovered *in via inventionis*—then *bonum* seems to fit with *ens*. *Unum* and *aliquid* follow one another thanks to the notion of division (which is denied in one and affirmed, in a different way, in the other). *Ens* and *bonum* turn out to be similar, since they are both directly related to act, albeit, so to speak, in opposite directions. (*Ens* concerns above all the first act born of *exitus*, whereas *bonum* most directly concerns the second act born of *reditus*.) This arrangement fits well with the "chiasm" of how their notions are considered *simpliciter* and *secundum quid*; it is also a natural result of the fact that *ens* is discovered first and *bonum* last.

If, however, the criterion is more ontological and theological, it seems to me that there is greater affinity of *bonum* for *unum*. *Bonum* is included in the *ratio unius*; that is, greater unity entails greater perfection. Likewise, *unum* is included in the *ratio boni*; every act of volition is either a desire for or an actual union with the object desired, and ultimate perfection includes a healing of division and a increase of internal unity. If the transcendentals are grouped in this way—*ens*, *res*, and *unum*; followed by *aliquid*, *verum*, and

bonum[47]—the *passiones entis* reveal themselves to be "triadic" in nature: the first in each group emphasizes efficient causality; the second, formal or exemplar causality; and the last, final causality. Although this is a philosophical discourse, one cannot help but notice the analogy with Holy Trinity: the Father as the First Cause and Principle of all things, the Son as Λόγος and Exemplar, and the Holy Spirit as Love and Unity. Saint Thomas, in fact, finds a *vestigium* of the Trinity along much the same lines.[48]

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[47] I will mention in passing that *aliquid* could have an affinity with *ens* because it is *divisum ab alio* thanks to its active principle, and *ens*, of course, signifies the very *actus essendi*.

[48] See Thomas Aquinas, *S.Th.* I, q. 45, a. 7, co. Thomas, in fact, relates the Father to a creature's cause and principle (and one imagines, especially its *efficient* cause); the Son to "form and species" (which reminds one of the essence); and the Holy Spirit to "order," which recalls final cause. See Contat, "Esse, essentia, ordo …", 23-26 for a fuller treatment of this topic.

6. Conclusion

The foundation of *bonum*—that is its discovery, or noetic foundation, as "desirability;" its ontological foundation on the real composition of *actus essendi* and essence (and ultimately on the dynamism and "expansivity" of the *actus essendi*); and its theological foundation on God as efficient, exemplary, and final cause—proves to be enormously fruitful. I illustrated above how a well made theological foundation can offer invaluable preparatory work even for the most sublime area of dogmatic theology, namely, Trinitarian theology. The ontological foundation and reduction to the real composition (as well as the theological foundation) can also help in the study of *operatio*. If *actus essendi* is properly understood in all of its dynamism, and the role of the essence as "measure" of the act is properly considered, then it is much easier to account for the necessity of operation (in all of its levels). Ethics discovers that man has certain tendencies; a properly founded metaphysics of the good explores the ultimate *causes* of those tendencies, and then helps to give the foundation for all of the "mechanisms" of ethics (human acts, virtues and vices, faculties, and so on). It trust that this study on the various foundations of the good has shown that, although metaphysics may be less "necessary" than other sciences, neither is it less fruitful.

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