

**METAPHYSICAL GROUNDWORK OF *THE FIVE WAYS* OF
ST. THOMAS AQUINAS**

by
Darko Piknjač

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ABSTRACT

METAPHYSICAL GROUNDWORK OF THE *FIVE WAYS* OF ST. THOMAS AQUINAS

by

Darko Piknjač, Ph.D.

1998 Philosophy Dept. at The University of Toronto

The Five Ways are not an instance of what is nowadays understood as the *cosmological argument*. The reason is that the First Cause, or God, to which St. Thomas' arguments conclude is "the proper cause of the act of being." (*Summa Contra Gentiles*, II, 21, 4) But the *cosmological* inquiry, in any of its aspects, does not deal with the act of being. The First Cause encountered in cosmology is insufficient for understanding the God of St. Thomas. Consequently, St. Thomas' arguments for God's existence must be viewed in the context of the intellectual activity that deals with the act of being. This is metaphysics. More specifically, it is the metaphysics centered around existence as the highest act, and as the act exercised by the effects of the First or Proper Cause of the act of being.

Therefore, the context of the Five Ways is that of a philosophical activity in which one tries to reach the ultimate cause in an actual thing of that which ultimately gives it actuality. For St. Thomas, the act of existence is the actuality of all acts, and is therefore that which gives real things their actuality. But if God is the proper cause of that which makes things in the world actual, then their dependence on the First Cause must first be seen along the lines of their act of being or existence. It will not do, as many contemporary cosmological interpretations of the Five Ways attempt, to read St. Thomas as arguing only for the ultimate cause of motion or efficient causality in the actual things in the world. The Five Ways are an instance of an existentially metaphysical argument.

DEDICATION AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I dedicate this thesis to all those who taught me, either as official or unofficial teachers, either in person or only through their written works. Thank you.

My first expression of gratitude goes to my parents. Your support came to me in so many different and important ways, that I know I could not have finished my doctoral studies in as enjoyable and timely manner as I did. You have provided for me the one essential element required for the life of the mind: leisure, which is that form of restful, work-free, peace and silence required for the apprehension of reality.

I also thank Profs. Joe Boyle and Barry Brown of the University of Toronto for their close work with me on my thesis, and for their very helpful guidance and correction. If the thesis contains more than a usual number of deficiencies, it is not due to their guidance but due to my youthful inability to be guided better.

Thank you all. I pray that God bless you and keep you in his love.

D. P.

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Introduction

Almost all of philosophy is directed towards the knowledge of God.

St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*

What follows is an attempt to understand five arguments for the existence of God. They are the arguments of St. Thomas Aquinas known as the *Five Ways*. The manner in which I attempt to understand them in this work is not new. My contribution does not come in the form of an interpretation; the interpretation I offer is one that I borrow from a group of more or less like-minded interpreters who seem to me to have gotten it right. But it also seems to me that something stands in the way of our seeing why the interpretation I offer is correct. That something is the so called *cosmological argument*. It is true that several different versions of the *cosmological argument* have been put forth by philosophers since Immanuel Kant first classified arguments for God's existence into three basic types: *ontological*, *cosmological*, and *teleological (physico-theological)*. There is not one *cosmological argument*. Nevertheless, a contemporary understanding of the *cosmological argument* which is often viewed as Thomistic is completely misleading. It is this: *St. Thomas begins his argument for God's existence from some simple fact about the world, such as that it is full of things that are caused to exist by other things*. Much effort is spent by them that understand St. Thomas' arguments this way in showing that such an attempt to prove God's existence cannot succeed because the causal relations between things in the world can be shown to be such that "what everyone calls God" is not required for a full explanation. And so we are told that "the contemporary exponent of the [Thomistic] argument probably should concede that

this traditional defense of 5 is unsuccessful—that indeed each contingent thing exists because of the causal activity of other contingent things in the universe.”¹

The main contention of this work is that we cannot decide whether or not St. Thomas’ attempt to demonstrate God’s existence is successful if we view his arguments through the glasses of a *cosmological argument*. First of all, St. Thomas does not take as his starting point “some simple fact *about the world*.” He begins each of his arguments with this or that actual existent existing as being moved, as moving something else, etc. St. Thomas does not focus on the *world*, but on certain features of existents we find in our experience. Secondly, he has a very important story of what it means to speak philosophically about a being’s existence, and what it is to be caused to exist. Central to this story is his understanding of *act* and *potency*, and a distinction between the act of existence and other acts in actual beings we encounter in our experience. These are either completely ignored or less than adequately explained in contemporary *cosmological* interpretations.

In order to see how St. Thomas is formulating and putting together the premises of his arguments we must understand the context in which he is working. The word “context” signifies the philosophical structure erected by St. Thomas in order to make true statements about God.² The accomplishment of the task is dependent upon having a good understanding of St. Thomas’ metaphysics.³ Thus while I shall

¹ Michael Peterson, *et al.*, *Reason and Religious Belief*, (Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 79.

² I am aware that the overall structure of St. Thomas’ thought is theological, that he is first and foremost a theologian. Nevertheless, that structure contains bodies of knowledge of his day headed by philosophy. In chapter five we shall examine more closely what for him it means to philosophise in a way conducive to knowing God.

³ To acquire such an understanding we shall have to get used to his calling metaphysics a science. I shall refrain from using the term as much as possible and substitute for it the expression *a legitimate intellectual activity*. I am doing this because the present intellectual climate considers scientific only that which has been demonstrated through the methods of empirical experimentation. But St. Thomas holds that the kind of philosophical activity where one thinks about God is a particular kind of intellectual activity which is different enough from other kinds of intellectual activities to be a special kind of science. Here we come upon the first indication of the need to separate contemporary

be providing a context for the Five Ways I shall also be saying something about the character of St. Thomas' metaphysics.

But why must the proper context of the Five Ways be that of metaphysics, and what does it mean to say that the context is metaphysical? In order to answer we must notice what St. Thomas, in most general terms, says about metaphysics. He calls it by three different names: theology, metaphysics, and first philosophy. These names arise, for him, from the fact that metaphysics has as its subject matter God, being, and first causes of things.⁴ The context, then, of St. Thomas' metaphysics is that of philosophizing about God in terms of first causes of being, and the aim of a metaphysical demonstration of God's existence is to reach God as the first cause of being. This may be asserted on the basis of St. Thomas' claim that "the proper cause of the act of being is the first and universal agent, namely God."⁵ For reasons that I do not see, many commentators of the Five Ways attempt to understand them without paying any attention to this claim. My position is that the claim is *the* key to a proper understanding of the Five Ways! Any interpretation of St. Thomas' arguments for God that does not give an adequate account of St. Thomas' understanding of *being*, *act* and *potency*, and, what St. Thomas calls, *proper* and *first* cause, is of little or no help to a contemporary reader. If, philosophically speaking, God is for St. Thomas the first and proper cause of the act of being, then an argument for God must involve philosophizing about *being*, *actuality* and *potentiality*, and *proper causality*.

context and terminology of philosophical God-talk from St. Thomas'. Unless we do so, we shall not only disable ourselves from reading profitably the Five Ways, we shall also impose upon his arguments the kind of reasoning he does not employ.

⁴ I assert this on the basis of St. Thomas' prologue to his commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics* which I shall translate and discuss in some detail in chapter five.

⁵ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, II, 21, 4, trans. by Anton C. Pegis, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975). This work shall henceforth be referred to as *SCG*. In *De Ente et Essentia* (*On Being and Essence*), trans. by A. Maurer, (Toronto: PIMS, 1968), ch. IV, 7, St. Thomas says that "the first being, which is being in all its purity... is the first cause, or God."

If philosophizing about God, therefore, is an activity in which we seek to discover the highest cause of things, what does it mean to speak of such a cause? I take this to be the most important question facing an interpreter of the Five Ways. It is important because our understanding of what St. Thomas is trying to reach philosophically will greatly determine how we read his formulation and the joining together of the premises of his arguments. Our understanding of what St. Thomas means by *first* or *highest cause* determines our understanding of his inquiry into that cause, and different understandings are sure to give rise to opposing interpretations. I do not mean to suggest that all of the disputes will be settled if common ground is reached on what St. Thomas means by the first cause, but a general answer to what he means by it will give us the direction in which to look in order to establish the context of the Five Ways. It will enable us at least to decide between contemporary *cosmological* interpretations of the Five Ways and the interpretations guided by a metaphysics in which the act of existing plays the dominant role (see ch. VIII).

What, then, is the meaning of the first or highest cause of things? My small contribution to the discussion is my own answer to this question. I shall argue in this work that the first or highest cause means the cause of that in virtue of which an actual being is ultimately actual—is ultimately caused to be.

Therefore, a proper understanding of St. Thomas' philosophizing about God or of the highest cause must include an understanding of what, for him, in the final analysis makes an actual thing actual or what makes a being exist. This, St. Thomas says is *being* (*esse*). "*Being* is the highest perfection of all. *Being* is the actuality of all acts, and therefore the perfection of all perfections."⁶ It is only upon learning

⁶ St. Thomas Aquinas, *De Potentia* (*On the Power of God*), trans. by English Dominican Fathers, (Westminster, MA: The Newman Press, 1952). q. VII, a. 2, ad 9. Henceforth *De Pot.* See also *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 4, a. 1, ad 3, "Existence is the most perfect of all things, for it is compared to all things as that by which they are made actual." Translation of the Fathers of the English Dominican Province. This work shall henceforth be referred to as *ST*.

something of St. Thomas' understanding of *being* that we can make sense of his inquiry into the ultimate cause of the being of things, or the proper cause of their act of being. The Five Ways are five different demonstrations of the existence of that cause. Therefore, *the context of the Five Ways is that of a philosophical activity in which one tries to reach the ultimate cause in an actual thing of that which ultimately makes it actual or gives it actuality*. This is a point I shall stress throughout. I am not at this point insisting on a definite description of that in virtue of which, for St. Thomas, an actual thing is actual. But I do hold that any discussion of the Five Ways must develop along the lines of philosophizing about the highest cause causing in an actual thing that in virtue of which it is ultimately actual, because only in that way can it be said that we have reached the highest cause. Even though we may interpret St. Thomas' understanding of being in more than one way, we cannot without such an understanding put forth a plausible interpretation of his demonstration of the proper cause of the act of being which is God. In chapters seven and eight I shall suggest a possible interpretation of St. Thomas' understanding of being. For now I suggest only that this point gives us the right direction for determining the proper context of St. Thomas' arguments in the Five Ways, as well as that along which any plausible interpretation of the Five Ways must develop. St. Thomas' own general description of metaphysics, about which I shall say more in chapter five, seems to point us in that direction.

A main contention of this work is that a profitable reading of the Five Ways can only be attained if we acquaint ourselves with the metaphysics and epistemology of the author of the Five Ways, and if we allow ourselves to be so acquainted without placing on St. Thomas the context of any non-scholastic metaphysics and epistemology. We must, therefore, guard against an approach to the Five Ways that pays little or no attention to some metaphysical treatments of important points St.

Thomas makes in his two *Summae*, and in his commentaries on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, *Physics*, and *Posterior Analytics*.

We must also keep in mind that *Summa Theologiae* and the Five Ways were in St. Thomas' day given to students of theology taught by *magistri* who had a good grounding in the metaphysics of the schools.⁷ St. Thomas clearly expects that philosophizing about God be preceded by a great deal of knowledge.

In order to know the things that the reason can investigate concerning God, a knowledge of many things must already be possessed. For almost all philosophy is directed towards the knowledge of God, and that is why metaphysics, which deals with divine things, is the last part of philosophy to be learned. This means that we are able to arrive at the inquiry concerning the aforementioned truth only on the basis of a great deal of labour spent in study. Those who wish to undergo such labour for the mere love of knowledge are few.⁸

We, however, give the Five Ways to undergraduate students who have little or no philosophical training of any kind, let alone of scholastic philosophy, and then explain to them why St. Thomas' arguments fail to prove God's existence using modern philosophical methods that ignore key Thomistic insights. I have found this to be a frequent practice among contemporary philosophers of religion who place the Five Ways into a group of arguments called *cosmological*, and then proceed to criticise them by way of modern and contemporary philosophical methods devoid of St. Thomas' philosophy of being.⁹ I offer here an alternative.

⁷ For a detailed explanation of scholastic educational methods and of the curriculum of the liberal arts in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, see Maurice DeWolf, *An Introduction to Scholastic Philosophy*, trans. by P. Coffey, (New York: Dover Publications, 1956), specially ch. I, sect. 9. See also St. Thomas Aquinas, *In Librum de Causis*, lect. 1, where St. Thomas insists that undergraduates are to apply themselves to the divine science (which is metaphysics and not sacred theology) where questions of God's existence and attributes are addressed *after* logic, mathematics, and cosmology.

⁸ *SCG*, I, 4, 3.

⁹ See, for example, William Wainwright, *Philosophy of Religion*, (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1988), William Rowe, *Philosophy of Religion*, (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1993), Michael Peterson, *et al. Reason and Religious Belief*, (Oxford University Press, 1991), John Hick, *Philosophy of Religion*, (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990), Yeager Hudson, *The Philosophy of Religion* (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield Publishing, 1991), David Stewart, *Exploring the Philosophy of Religion*. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1992).

I am aware that a deeper and broader grounding in scholastic metaphysics than I offer here is necessary for a full understanding of the Five Ways. But I attempt here to provide the basic outlines of the groundwork and context of the Five Ways which should enable anyone to see how the mind of St. Thomas operates as he argues for God's existence. It should enable contemporary critics of St. Thomas to see where exactly they ought to point their criticism if they wish it to be effective and to have their efforts worth considering.

Finally, I shall not commit myself in this work to an elaborate defense of St. Thomas against objections to his arguments for God's existence, nor to a defense of his metaphysics. But I will try to present his arguments and their metaphysical context in as compelling a manner as I can.

In Part One I attempt to show that a groundwork of scholastic philosophy of being is necessary for a good understanding of the Five Ways. That this is so becomes clear in chapter two where I consider three contemporary interpretations of the first three Ways which either fail to make use of some key concepts St. Thomas employs, or make use of them in ways that can only be made clearer within a wider framework of Thomistic philosophy of being. In other words, the interpretations considered in chapter two shed little or no light on St. Thomas' claim that God is the proper cause of the act of being.

The four chapters of Part Two are designed to show the role metaphysics has in St. Thomas' overall project, and the centrality of being and its highest act which is existence. Part Three naturally flows from Part Two as a continuation of philosophy of being which deserves its own title, that of natural or philosophical theology. The connecting point between philosophy of being and natural theology is causality and its very center which, for St. Thomas, is existence. Thus chapters eight and ten are key, because they show how, in the Thomistic context, we reach the very possibility of engaging in philosophizing about God, and how that philosophizing must unfold.

Part One

THE NEED FOR A GROUNDWORK OF THE *FIVE* WAYS

CHAPTER I

Modern Opposition to Philosophy of God

"Then if you don't know what I mean what right have you to call it nonsense?" asked the princess.

George MacDonald, *The Princess and the Goblin*

Some Objections to Reasoning to God's Existence

In popular contemporary texts in philosophy of religion one often comes across objections to the sort of philosophizing about God that we are attempting to do in this work. Medieval scholastic metaphysics has been under strong attack since the eighteenth century when David Hume and Immanuel Kant put forth formidable arguments against the very possibility of engaging in philosophical demonstrations for God's existence and for some of his attributes. We cannot here expound on their arguments,¹⁰ but we can point out that the main line of their objection is that knowledge can be legitimately acquired only by way of sense-experience and only of that which can be experienced. But God is not experienced through our sense faculties. Therefore, meaningful and true statements about God are out of reach for the human mind.

Perhaps the best known twentieth-century opposition to philosophical God-talk is that of logical positivism. Its objection rests on what it calls the 'verification

¹⁰ For a good study of Hume's and Kant's positions on the knowability of God see James Collins, *God in Modern Philosophy*, (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1959). ch. 4 and 6.

principle.' A. J. Ayer, in his *Language, Truth and Logic*, puts forth a strong and a weak formulation of the principle, discards the strong as far too drastic a criterion of meaningfulness, and decides that the weak version is sufficient to dismiss as largely nonsensical all philosophical claims about God. The weak principle is as follows:

We say that the question that must be asked about any putative statement of fact is not, 'Would any observations make its truth or falsity logically certain?' but simply, 'Would any observations be relevant to the determination of its truth or falsehood?' And it is only if a negative answer is given to this second question that we conclude that the statement under consideration is nonsensical.¹¹

Because all philosophical statements about God claim to make factual assertions about things that are not objects of sense experience, no observation can be relevant to their truth or falsehood, consequently we can say, according to Ayer, that such statements are nonsensical and have no philosophical value.

Another twentieth-century objection to the possibility and meaningfulness of philosophical God-talk comes in the form of a discussion under the title 'Theology and Falsification.'¹² The objection is that claims such as 'God exists', 'God created the world', and 'God loves us as a father loves his children', are always made and qualified by theists and religious believers in such a way that nothing could count against them.

Someone tells us that God loves us as a father loves his children. We are reassured. But then we see a child dying of inoperable cancer of the throat. His earthly father is driven frantic in his efforts to help, but his Heavenly Father reveals no obvious sign of concern. Some qualification is made—'God's love is not a merely human love' or 'it is an inscrutable love', perhaps—and we realise that such sufferings are quite with the truth of the assertion that 'God loves us as a father (but, of course, ...)' We are reassured again. But then perhaps we ask: what is this assurance of God's (appropriately qualified) love worth, what is this apparent guarantee really a guarantee against? Just what would have to happen not merely (morally and wrongly) to tempt but also (logically and rightly) to entitle us to say 'God does not love us' or even 'God does not exist'?¹³

¹¹ A. J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic*, (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1952), p. 38.

¹² See the discussion between Antony Flew, R. M. Hare, and Basil Mitchel in *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, ed. by A. Flew and A. MacIntyre, (New York: Macmillan, 1955).

¹³ *Ibid.* p. 98.

The difficulty seems to be that theists are failing to realise that meaningful statements must exclude the possibility of other facts which, if they should occur, would falsify the theistic statements. That is, a statement about God which purports to square with a particular state of affairs, but does not successfully exclude other possible states of affairs which allows for an adherence to the truth of statements regardless of what occurs, is not really a statement. But the claims about God are always so stated and qualified that they do not allow even for the possibility of considering claims that could count against them.

The objections to philosophical God-talk on the basis of both the verification and falsification principles maintain that theists make their claims about God in such a way that anyone insisting on experiential criteria for knowledge cannot argue against them, and that therefore, from the point of view of philosophers insisting on such criteria, the claims are meaningless.

These objections have slowly lost their appeal over the last forty years. They seem to be claims not primarily concerned with philosophical thinking about God, but with the very nature of philosophical thinking. Modern empiricists and logical positivists make their objections to philosophizing about God on the basis of *their* understanding of what it means to know something. But the question of what it means to know *anything* ought to be settled between disputants well before the question of the knowability of God can be entertained. We ought, for example, to settle this question first: What are the faculties of the human mind, and how and what do they know? For if the human mind is so tied to sensory experience that it is capable only of knowing sensible particulars, ideas of a being transcending all possible sense experience could not plausibly be entertained by such a mind. But is the human mind exclusively such a faculty? St. Thomas certainly does not think so. Along with this question we ought to settle this one: Are the faculties of human knowledge the measure of the real which, as real, is knowable, or is the real the

measure of the power of the faculties of human knowledge? A philosopher like Kant thinks the former is the case, while Aristotle and St. Thomas think the latter is the case. There cannot be a meaningful debate about the knowability of God between philosophers operating within epistemologies stemming from positions that are this radically opposed. Unless they first find common ground from which the very questions of their debate can be formulated, the debate will not be joined at the issue.

Is it, for example, the case that for a logical positivist the notion of God cannot even arise as a meaningful notion? If so, how does the content of his objection to scholastic theism, for example, even have any meaning for him as a logical positivist? Could he possibly know, within his understanding of what it is *to know*, what a scholastic is talking about when talking about God? If not, his objection does not arise from a good understanding of his opponent's position. Would not also then all scholastic responses to his objections necessarily be as meaningless to him as the very notion of God? This makes for circumstances too infelicitous for a profitable debate. The only way to improve the circumstances is to move the debate to the more fundamental questions regarding human knowledge and its proper objects. But at that point objections based on verification and falsification principles are not yet concerned with philosophizing about God, and may not even reach such a concern.

Furthermore, a claim that something cannot be known, which amounts to saying "I know that it cannot be known," poses great difficulties because it amounts to a claim of not knowing while retaining the advantages of knowledge. If there cannot be knowledge of that which, for example, transcends experience, we cannot know that there cannot be. Why not? Knowledge that there cannot be such knowledge is itself knowledge that is beyond experience, and according to modern empiricists and positivists there can be no such thing. These philosophers claim to be operating

solely with the knowledge that is on the level of experience, but no such knowledge can yield the knowledge that there is no knowledge beyond experience because such knowledge is itself beyond experience. They are not merely saying that natural reason does not know, for example, that God exists, but that natural reason *cannot* know that God exists. This is a claim to knowledge about the unknowable, and such entertainment of strong notions about the unknowable is not only puzzling but it is very difficult to see how it can be seriously entertained at all. And yet it has occupied the minds of contemporary thinkers considered by many to be worth taking seriously. We shall do better, I think, if we exert our intellectual efforts on the arguments put forth by philosophers operating with epistemologies that are significantly different than those of modern empiricists and logical positivists.

J. J. C. Smart's Criticism of Philosophical God-Talk

Before we examine scholastic arguments, let us consider another type of objection to philosophizing about God. In the middle of this century, in an article entitled "The Existence of God", an Australian philosopher J.J.C. Smart developed a twofold attack on attempts to prove God's existence. Smart insists that any such attempt is "radically unsound" and that it "rests on a thorough absurdity".¹⁴ His criticism is fairly brief but it is representative of some fairly influential twentieth-century thinking about demonstrations of God's existence, and for that reason it deserves consideration.

The first part of Smart's attack deals with what is known as the *cosmological argument*—an attempt to demonstrate God's existence which takes as its starting point some general fact about the world from which it then seeks to reach God by

¹⁴ J. J. C. Smart, "The Existence of God," *The Cosmological Arguments*, ed. by Donald R. Burrill (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967). p. 267 and 270. Originally this work was an article which appeared in the *Church Quarterly Review* (1955).

way of principles of causality and sufficient reason, and the impossibility of an infinite causal regress. Smart takes all such attempts to proceed in this way:

[to] explain why something exists and is what it is, we must explain it by reference to something else, and we must explain that thing's being what it is by reference to yet another thing, and so on, back and back. It is then suggested that unless we can go back to a logically necessary first cause we shall remain intellectually unsatisfied. We should otherwise only get back to something which might have been otherwise, and with reference to which the same questions can again be asked.¹⁵

The main point of Smart's criticism at this stage is that all attempts to demonstrate God's existence by way of a *cosmological argument* make the mistake of resorting, in the final analysis, to a claim that the proposition "God exists" is a logically necessary one. It is this kind of necessity on which such attempts depend to secure their conclusion. By *logical* necessity Smart means a necessity that arises out of "the rules for the use of the symbols"¹⁶ we employ to express necessary propositions. In other words, if we ask, what makes the necessary propositions *necessary*, the answer is the rules for employing the symbols to express the propositions, the symbols which we ourselves have invented. But the problem with the proposition "God exists" is that it is meant to be an informative proposition, a proposition that purports to tell us what is the case, and "no informative proposition can be logically necessary."¹⁷ Therefore, any attempt to demonstrate God's existence by way of the *cosmological argument* is largely a futile activity. It is clear from the way Smart talks throughout his article that he regards the Five Ways as instances of the *cosmological argument*, and that for him every interpretation and defense of St. Thomas' arguments are attempts working within the context of this type of argument which makes them subject to a criticism that an informative proposition cannot be regarded as logically necessary.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* This comment reveals Smart's understanding of what the scholastics call *the impossibility of infinite causal regress*. As we shall see in chapter ten, this is an inaccurate understanding.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

This aspect of Smart's attack on attempts to demonstrate God's existence does not pose a serious threat to our attempt at understanding St. Thomas's arguments in the Five Ways. In the conclusion of Third Way, for example, St. Thomas says that we must posit the existence of a being whose necessity comes from itself and does not receive it from another and which causes in others their necessity. It is clear that when in Third Way St. Thomas says that a necessary being exists he is not saying that "God exists" is a *logically* necessary proposition (in Smart's sense of the word *logical*); nowhere in the Third Way does he even mention or imply logically necessary propositions. What precisely St. Thomas means requires a good deal of careful reading and interpreting of all of the Five Ways. But even without such a reading we are not in any way compelled to regard a discussion of a necessary being as identically a discussion of a *logically* necessary being; a necessary being may also mean a being that is indestructible, or a being that has never come to be and can never cease to be. Furthermore, Anthony Kenny points out that the incoherence of "necessary being" has not been clearly shown by philosophers like Smart because "it has not been shown that the necessity of necessarily true propositions derives from human convention; there is much evidence, in the recent history of philosophical logic, in the contrary direction."¹⁸ So much, then, for the first part of Smart's attack.

The second part consists in a defense of the claim that the question "Does God exist?" is not a proper question."¹⁹ This, I think, is a far more serious objection to any attempt to understand the Five Ways, for if Smart is right, there is nothing to be understood in the Five Ways because the Five Ways are an attempt to answer a question that does not and cannot arise from a real intellectual need. Smart likens the question to questions like "Does virtue run faster than length?" and "How fast does time flow?" which are grammatically correct questions but not meaningful

¹⁸ Anthony Kenny, *The Five Ways*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1969). p. 2.

¹⁹ Smart, *op. cit.*, p. 270.

questions, that is, they are not really asking anything. Smart's reason for holding this position is closely tied up with his insistence that any God-talk is possible only within a religious context.

Smart is very clear that he does not regard religious worship of God as a meaningless activity on the grounds that God cannot be sensibly regarded as logically necessary. God may still be sensibly spoken about, and he may still be regarded as necessary, just not logically necessary. He may, for example, be theologically necessary. What does that mean? Smart gives an analogy from physics in order to explain.

It is not a *logical* necessity that the velocity of light in a vacuum should be constant. It would, however, upset physical theory considerably if we denied it. Similarly it is not a logical necessity that God exists. But it would clearly upset the structure of our religious attitudes in the most violent way if we denied it or even entertained the possibility of its falsehood. So if we say that it is a *physical* necessity that the velocity of light *in vacuo* should be constant ... similarly we can say that it is a *religious* necessity that God exists.²⁰

Just as we could not continue to do physics along the lines of the present theory without positing the physical necessity of light's constant velocity in a vacuum, so we cannot be Christians, for example, without positing the religious or theological necessity of God's existence.

We may ask, as we did in the case of necessary propositions, what is the source of theological necessity? Smart's answer is this: our being religious, that is, our being *converted* to some religion like Christianity. The theological necessity of God's existence does not rest on a proof, on "a metaphysical argument *a priori* ... [where it can only rest] on absurdity born of ignorance of the logic of our language."²¹ It is a necessity that becomes apparent only to them that take the plunge, so to speak, into religion, it is apparent only to the converted, and they stand in no need of metaphysics.

²⁰ *Ibid.* pp. 270-1.

²¹ *Ibid.* p. 271.

But what about those that do not take the plunge? Can they engage in God-talk? No, says Smart, certainly not meaningful God-talk! Asking the question, "Does God exist?" as an unbeliever is like asking, "Do electrons exist?" as someone who has never performed an experiment with cathode-ray tubes and knows nothing about the Wilson cloud chamber. The very concept of electron cannot enter our minds until we are well immersed into the theories and experiments of modern physics. Just so, the very concept of God, and along with it the question "Does God exist?" cannot enter our minds until we are converted to some religion where "the word *God* gets its meaning [and its usefulness] from the part it plays in religious speech and literature."²² But once we are converted the question of God's existence no longer comes up. So, to a religious person the question of God's existence is superfluous and for the unbeliever it has no meaning. And with that we can and should put to rest all philosophical God-talk.

But how is it that for over two thousand years the questions about God and his existence has been entertained philosophically? Smart does not say, but given his position we can venture a guess as to what he might say. Religion is older than philosophy and so religious believers have talked about God amongst themselves and to the unbelievers throughout history. They spoke and wrote about various supernatural revelations in which God has made himself known to people, has laid down for them laws according to which they are to relate to him and to one another, has given them promises of good things in this life and in the life to come. They have interpreted certain baffling events in their lives and in the physical world around them to God's power and guidance. The word *God* thus acquired currency in human speech. Then along came philosophers inquiring about anything and everything and thought it quite within their philosophical rights to inquire into this God or gods

²² *Ibid.*

everyone seems always to have been talking about. Suddenly philosophical questions regarding God's existence and attributes came to be raised. This has been going on until some modern philosophers tried, more or less successfully, to put an end to it. In the twentieth century philosophy came to be conceived by many as exclusively an activity of logical and linguistic analysis, that is, logic and the philosophy of language were regarded as philosophy proper. Philosophers of this sort made even more progress in putting an end to the philosophy of God. Finally, Smart in his article "The Existence of God" put the last nail into the coffin of all philosophical God-talk by showing us just how self-contradictory and absurd it is.

In chapter seven we shall encounter another way in which philosophical God-talk can arise, a way that does not depend on religion, nor as a response to the question, "Does God exist?". But we can note at this point that Smart seems to be erroneously identifying believing in God with being religious. He seems to think that it is impossible to hold that God is real and not to be religious. This is contrary to facts. I know people who have never been exposed to any kind of organised religion, nor had an experience we would call a *conversion*, but who also believe that a higher being is in some way involved in the world. An expression like "God damn it," or "honest to God" often crosses their lips, and they do not think it to be either a religious expression like "Praise the Lord," or an entirely meaningless phrase.

Furthermore, Smart's suggestion that the notion of God arises only in the minds of the religious, that it is meaningful only to believers, cannot be true if atheism is possible.²³ Jean-Paul Sartre's atheism, for example, is a philosophical one resting on his argument about human freedom. What he argues against is primarily a general

²³ Dogmatic philosophical atheism is not the same as unbelief. An atheist thinks there is no God, no Supreme Being to whom we owe our existence, nature, and devotion; he thinks no higher being exists that could give rise to a religious life. An unbeliever, on the other hand, has no faith and trust in a God whose existence he is quite prepared to grant, and whom he sees as a legitimate object of worship for some but not for him.

belief in some higher being people call God, not this or that religion. So if it is possible to engage in a philosophical argument that there is no God, it is also possible to engage in a philosophical argument that there is God.

But a far more serious objection may be put to Smart. His case against the possibility of philosophical God-talk rests on the claim that God-talk is meaningful only within a religious context, only among those who have been converted to some religion. Until a person is converted to some religion, Smart insists, the word “God” and the question “Does God exist?” are meaningless. But this clearly cannot be correct. For how can a person become converted to Christianity without having in one’s mind the notion of God? To be converted to Christianity is not to be converted to the notion of God. The Christian claim is “Jesus of Nazareth is God,” and it asks us, “Do you believe that, and are you willing to let him be *your* God?”. We could neither assent nor withhold our assent to the Christian claim without already possessing the notion of God. In Judaism the first of the ten commandments is “you must have no other gods beside me.” How can this be a commandment to someone who does not already possess a notion of God? Smart’s analogy, then, between religion and modern physics, between entertaining the notions of God and electrons, does not apply to religion, and certainly not to Judaism and Christianity. His notion of theological or religious necessity is therefore not a good one.

Furthermore, Christians are told by St. Paul that everyone possesses some understanding of the reality of God independently of religious worship.

For all that may be known of God by men lies plain before their eyes; indeed God himself has disclosed it to them. His invisible attributes, that is to say his everlasting power and deity, have been visible to the eye of reason ever since the world began in the things he has made. There is therefore no possible defense for their conduct; knowing God, they have refused to honour him as God, or to render him thanks.²⁴

²⁴ Romans 1:19-20 — The New English Bible.

St. Paul is clearly saying that everyone knows God without special revelation and understands himself to be in a real way related to Him. If what St. Paul says is true, and a Christian like St. Thomas believes it is, a rational demonstration of God beginning with “the things he has made” (not with rational concepts like *perfection* or with concepts of *logical necessity*) is possible. We can conclude, then, that Smart’s objection to a philosophical God-talk on the grounds that it is meaningless is not one that excludes at the outset our attempt to understand the Five Ways. But Smart does, however, force us to consider how philosophical God-talk arises for St. Thomas. Such a consideration is part and parcel of a preparation of the proper context of the Five Ways.

In the following chapter we shall examine three interpretations of some of St. Thomas’ arguments in the Five Ways in order to see if they can help us understand how St. Thomas is arguing to God, and if they can contribute to an establishment of the context in which St. Thomas is working.

CHAPTER II

Three Interpretations of the *Five Ways*

"Tell me," said Faraday to Tyndall, who was about to show him an experiment, "tell me what I am to look for."

Frederick Copleston's Commentary on the Second Way

Frederick Copleston is well known in academic circles as a historian of philosophy. In his less historical and more philosophical work entitled *Aquinas* he devotes a section where he tries to make clear for the modern reader St. Thomas' arguments for God's existence, or at least to safeguard them against some misconceptions to which contemporary readers may be liable. He warns that it is "impossible to discuss these arguments profitably unless they are first understood. And misunderstanding of them is only too easy, since the terms and phrases used are either unfamiliar or liable to be taken in a sense other than the sense intended."²⁵ This is very good advice. But we must also notice that in order to know what St. Thomas intends it is not enough simply to look at the Five Ways themselves, because in them St. Thomas does not tell us how he intends the terms and phrases he is using but seems to be assuming that we already know them. In other words, we

²⁵ Frederick Copleston, *Aquinas*, (London: Penguin Books, 1955). p. 122.

need to develop a proper context for the arguments. Copleston attempts to make a contribution to this end.

He thinks the First and the Second Ways are similar and may be understood along the same lines. I shall concentrate on his explanation of the Second Way, which St. Thomas states in the following way.

The second way is taken from the nature of the efficient cause. In the world of sense we find there is an order of efficient causes. There is no case known (neither is it, indeed, possible) in which a thing is found to be the efficient cause of itself; for so it would be prior to itself, which is impossible. Now in efficient causes it is not possible to go on to infinity, because in all efficient causes following in order, the first cause is the cause of the intermediate cause, and the intermediate cause is the cause of the ultimate cause, whether the intermediate cause be several, or only one. Now to take away the cause is to take away the effect. Therefore, if there be no first cause among the efficient causes, there will be no ultimate, nor any intermediate cause. But if in efficient causes it is possible to go on to infinity, there will be no first efficient cause, neither will there be an ultimate effect, nor any intermediate efficient causes; all of which is plainly false. Therefore it is necessary to admit a first efficient cause, to which everyone gives the name of God.²⁶

According to Copleston, the data to be explained in the Second Way is active agents or efficient causes.²⁷ The explanation of this data must proceed in a twofold way. First, it must be shown “that there is a hierarchy of efficient causes, a subordinate cause being dependent on the cause above it in the hierarchy.”²⁸ Secondly, it must be shown that this hierarchy cannot infinitely regress, and that we must therefore posit a special, that is, a first cause at the top of the hierarchy, which is God.

²⁶ ST, I, q. 2, a. 3.

²⁷ Some understanding of efficient causes is necessary to make sense of the Second Way; in fact, the better our understanding of St. Thomas’ explanation of them, the better we can understand the Second Way. For now, let St. Thomas’ general definition of *cause* suffice. “A cause is said to be that from whose existing another follows.” *The Principles of Nature*, in *Selected Writing of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. by R.P. Goodwin, (New York: The Macmillan Publishing Company, 1965). p. 17. In another place St. Thomas defines it as “that upon which the existence of another follows.” *Commentary on Aristotle’s Physics*, trans. by R. Blackwell, et al. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963), Bk. II, ch. 3, lect. 10, n. 240.

²⁸ Copleston, *op. cit.*, pp. 121-122.

Copleston's contribution to the explanation of the first point amounts to showing that what is meant by the hierarchy of efficient causes is not a temporal series, as for example the series child-parent-grandparent. The hierarchy has to do with the *dependence* of efficient causes on another cause for their activity of causing whatever they do efficiently cause. In other words, the efficiency of efficient causes is in the present dependent on the causal activity of another for their activity of efficiently causing something in another here and now. For example, a child, in order to produce a change in another, is no longer dependent on the parent, grandparent, etc., but is dependent on some factor like the life-preserving activity of the air for its efficiency, that is, without the efficiency of air to preserve the child's life, the efficiency of the child to produce whatever change it produces in another cannot take place. Copleston offers another example. When a pen is marking up a page, that activity of the pen is at that moment dependent upon the activity of a person's hand, which is in turn dependent on the causal activity of other factors.

This gives us a clearer focus on the data of the second way. It is the dependency of efficient causes on the causal activity of another causing in them their own efficiency. In other words, the data is causes causing, and the question is *why* are the causes dependent for their activity of causing an another efficient cause?

The second point of St. Thomas' argument in the Second Way follows closely upon the first. Infinite regress of causal activities causing the efficiency of subordinate causes is impossible. The regress in question, says Copleston, is not a horizontal, temporal regress, but a vertical hierarchy. The regress is impossible because the dependence of efficient causes on another cause for their efficiency cannot infinitely recede upward; it cannot because such a regress of dependence would mean that the entire hierarchy would never get started—every cause in the hierarchy would be dependent, and a set of dependents is impotent to cause in another that which it does not have. Therefore, a non-dependent efficient cause

must be a member of a set of efficient causes. Such a cause is special, special enough to be the First Cause.

Recall the first example above. The life-preserving efficiency of air is itself dependent on the efficiency of some other factor (thus the more natural science we know the better), and this factor is itself dependent on another, and so on. “Unless there is a ‘first’ member, a mover which is not itself moved or a cause which does not itself depend on the causal activity of a higher cause, it is not possible to explain the... causal activity of the lowest member.” [Furthermore] “the word ‘first’ does not mean first in the temporal order, but supreme or first in the ontological order.”²⁹ And this *first* is God.

Can it be said that Copleston’s explanation makes the argument of the Second Way clear? Does Copleston show us why St. Thomas thinks he has demonstrated God’s existence? I think the answer to the second question is clearly ‘no’, but I also think that Copleston does not try to answer it, and so we cannot charge him with failing to do so.

The usefulness of Copleston’s explanation with respect to the first question depends on whether or not he has explained well the data of the Second Way. It is clear that he *identifies* the data correctly: the efficient causal *activity* or *operation* of efficient causes. The reason why this data needs explanation is that efficient causes are here and now, as they exercise their efficiency, *dependent* on another for that efficiency—they could not of themselves do what they do. Why not? The answer is crucial for getting to God! According to Copleston, other factors are required for the exercise of that efficiency to take place, factors, which the efficient causes themselves cannot provide and therefore depend upon. The sort of dependency Copleston has in mind is a dependency upon necessary factors or conditions for an

²⁹ *Ibid.* p. 123.

agent's causal activity, factors or conditions without which the causal activity could not take place. What kind of factors? Example: the life-preserving activity of the air which human efficient causes need if they are to exercise their efficiency (and this factor is again dependent on other factors for its own efficiency, and so on). Now Copleston admits that "this illustration is [not] in all respects adequate for the purpose."³⁰ He does not tell us why it is inadequate, but he thinks it suffices to show that St. Thomas is talking about an order of causes that is not in a linear or temporal series but is a hierarchical order headed by some 'first' cause that must be understood to be the first *ontologically*.

But this, in my judgment, is precisely what Copleston does not show. He insists that there is an ontological hierarchy that needs explaining, but he does not explain it clearly. We do not see how the life preserving activity of the air and all the other required factors for a child to produce a change in another, reveal a hierarchical causal dependence that is ontological, and that calls for a radically different member of the hierarchy, a member so *ontologically* different that it deserves the status of a *First Efficient Cause*. My main difficulty with Copleston's interpretation of the Second Way is that I do not see what is so *ontological* about a dependence on air. Such dependence, and all such others in Copleston's hierarchical series are physical. The first cause of such a series is then at best a first only because it is not dependent on some physical factor. This by itself is not only too negative to be of much help, but it seems a long way from what everyone would call God.

But Copleston insists that in St. Thomas' argument the "word 'first' does not mean first in the temporal order, but supreme or first in the ontological order."³¹ By *ontological* order, Copleston seems to mean a metaphysical order. My assumption here is based on his concluding remarks on the Second Way where he argues that

³⁰ *Ibid.* p. 122.

³¹ *Ibid.* p. 123.

cause must be understood as St. Thomas intended it, if an interpretation or a criticism of the Second Way is to be valid. He points out that presumably St. Thomas “would have said that the sufficiency of a phenomenalist interpretation of causality for purposes of physical science proves nothing against the validity of a metaphysical notion of causality.”³² In other words, criticisms of the Second Way operating within the context of Hume’s or Kant’s philosophy do not as such directly address themselves to the arguments of St. Thomas, and for that reason they do not pose a serious threat to a claim that St. Thomas has successfully demonstrated God’s existence. A profitable discussion of the arguments in the Five Ways is only possible if we first establish a *metaphysical* groundwork along the lines of St. Thomas’ metaphysics where his notion of causality receives the fullest treatment. Copleston insists that this is what we must do, but he himself does not do so, giving us instead a non-metaphysical understanding of the dependence of the intermediate cause upon the first cause. That is why his account of St. Thomas reasoning is insufficient for a good understanding of the Second Way. In fact, as I have tried to show, his account is misleading. If we try to follow him in the direction he points out, we shall not end up where St. Thomas thinks he has ended up—we shall not end up with the First Efficient Cause understood metaphysically (in terms of *being*), because the dependence of causes in a hierarchical series for their act of causing is explained by Copleston only along physical lines.³³

³²*Ibid.* pp. 123-124. By “metaphysical notion of causality” Copleston may mean a notion that differentiates between, what is known as, *per se* and *per accidens* causality. But if he does, he ought to explain what it means and the bearing it has on the argument of the Second Way. Furthermore, it seems to me that a clear distinction must be made between instrumental and principal causes and the specific character of their causal activity for a good indication of how St. Thomas thinks he is arguing to the First Cause who is God. See pp. 272-278 below.

³³ The distance between Copleston’s explanation of the dependence of the intermediary cause on the first cause and St. Thomas’ understanding of the dependence on the first cause or God is made apparently wide in the following passage from *SCG*, II, 52, 7. “Since every agent acts so far as it is in act, it belongs to the first agent, which is most perfect, to be most perfectly in act.... Act itself is more

Peter Geach's Reading of the First Way

Like Copleston, Peter Geach tries to help the modern reader not acquainted with scholastic philosophy to understand how St. Thomas is arguing for God's existence. His help comes in a twofold way. He first offers an explanation of what the general character of the arguments in the Five Ways is like, and then he points out what they cannot be like.

In his "Commentary on Aquinas"³⁴ Geach suggests that the arguments in the Five Ways have the following form: "since the world is of such-and-such a nature, there must be some being who made it and keeps it going; we give this being the name 'God'."³⁵ Furthermore, we must understand St. Thomas' attempt "to *prove* there is a God [as an attempt] to *prove* that somebody made everything else, in the relevant sense of the verb 'made'."³⁶ By "relevant" sense of *making* Geach means a sense applied to God by analogy with other already familiar senses bringing out the similarities and differences between ordinary uses and the special use applying only to God.

For example, in one respect the use of the word ['making'] when applied to God is more like 'the minstrel made music' than 'the blacksmith made a shoe'; for the shoe is made out of pre-existing material, and, once made, goes on existing independently of the smith; whereas the minstrel did not make the music out of the pre-existing sounds, and the music stops if he stops making it; and similarly God did not make the world out of anything pre-existing, and its continued existence depends upon his activity.³⁷

perfectly in act than that which has act, since the latter is in act because of the former.... Now this act is *being*, wherein generation and all movement terminate, since every form and act is in potentiality before it acquires being. Therefore it belongs to God alone to be His own being, just as it pertains to Him to be the first agent." The intermediate cause, therefore, stands in relation to the first cause as one whose act of being is actualised by the one who *is* that act. Now that sounds unmistakably ontological or metaphysical! This points out the right direction for reaching the proper context of the Second Way.

³⁴ 'Aquinas' is Part Two of a three-part work by G.E.M. Anscombe and P.T. Geach entitled *Three Philosophers*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1963). Section II of 'Aquinas' is reprinted in *The Cosmological Argument*, ed. by Donald R. Burrill, pp. 58-82.

³⁵ Peter Geach, "Commentary on Aquinas," in *The Cosmological Arguments*, ed. by D. Burrill, p. 58.

³⁶ *Ibid.* p. 59.

³⁷ *Ibid.* p. 60.

This understanding of the character of the arguments in the Five Ways is further supported by Geach when he argues that the Five Ways have often been misread by the interpreters who insist that St. Thomas is proving God's existence from the existence of some randomly chosen thing in the world, rather than from the existence of the whole world. What gives Geach confidence in claiming that such a reading is a misreading is that an answer to a causal question regarding this or that individual thing need not be God: "the cause of a man's existence, say, is that he was generated by his parents."³⁸ It will not do, Geach continues, to point out that the man's parents were also caused to exist by the generative act of their parents, because the causal question regarding the existence of the first man was satisfactorily answered by finding out who his parents are. In other words, "we need not bring into account all the past and perished generations of men, and it is no matter whether they were a finite or infinite series." The reason why a finite or an infinite series is irrelevant here is that a whole series is a secondary cause "used instrumentally by the First Cause."³⁹ But in order to see that the whole series is in fact a secondary cause used instrumentally by the First Cause we must, Geach assumes, employ his understanding of what St. Thomas is doing in the Five Ways; that is, the only way left to us for reaching God's existence is from the existence of the world as a whole. Thus we must see that

what is in fact essential to the "Five Ways" is something tantamount to treating the world as a great big object. If the world is an object, it again seems natural to ask about it the sort of causal questions which would be legitimate about its parts. If it began to exist, what brought it into existence? In any case what keeps it from perishing, as some of its parts perish? And what keeps its processes going? And to what end?⁴⁰

³⁸ *Ibid.* p. 61.

³⁹ *Ibid.* p. 62.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* p. 63. By "world" Geach means "earth, solar system, galaxy, cluster of galaxies , ..." in other words, everything that in any way is except God, if there is a God.

Seeing no difficulty with the suggestion, Geach proceeds to interpret the Five Ways. A careful reading of the Five Ways, he says, will reveal that at least four of the Ways “quite clearly depend on the legitimacy of that lumping-together of things by which one would pass from particular things to the world as a whole.”⁴¹ Geach thinks the first two Ways may be treated together because the only difference between them is that the First has to do with things changing and the Second with things coming to be.⁴²

Let us then consider the First Way. St. Thomas’ argument is as follows.

The first and the more manifest way is the argument from motion. It is certain, and evident to our senses, that in the world some things are in motion. Now whatever is in motion is put in motion by another, for nothing can be in motion except it is in potentiality to that towards which it is in motion; whereas a thing moves inasmuch as it is in act. For motion is nothing else than the reduction of something from potentiality to actuality. But nothing can be reduced from potentiality to actuality, except by something in a state of actuality. Thus that which is actually hot, as fire makes wood, which is potentially hot, to be actually hot, and therefore moves and changes it. Now it is not possible that the same thing should be at once in actuality and potentiality in the same respect, but only in different respects. For what is actually hot cannot simultaneously be potentially hot; but it is simultaneously potentially cold. It is therefore impossible that in the same respect and in the same way a thing should be both mover and moved, *i.e.*, that it should move itself. Therefore, whatever is in motion must be put in motion by another, and that by another again. But this cannot go on to infinity, because there would be no first mover; seeing that subsequent movers move only inasmuch as they are put in motion by the first mover; as the staff moves only because it is put in motion by the hand. Therefore, it is

⁴¹ *Ibid.* p. 64.

⁴² Note that Geach does not say that the data of the First Way is change or motion, but things as changing or moving. This is significant, and it also points us in the right direction. Some interpreters think the First Way is intended as a lesson in a physicist’s understanding of motion. But if that were the case, St. Thomas would not call it “the more manifest way.” A physicist’s study of motion requires a great deal more than that which is visible to the senses, whereas a moving thing is very accessible to the senses.

But Geach’s suggestion that the data of the second way is things coming to be is, I think, wrong. Copleston’s understanding of the data is more accurate. However, both Copleston and Geach seem to me to underestimate, and even fail to grasp clearly, the difference between the data of the First and Second Ways. The data of the First Way is beings being moved; the data of the Second Way is beings moving another. The former are patients and the latter agents. The difference here is great; agents act while patients are recipients of action; patients become something while agents cause another to become something. The ways to God’s existence from these vastly different starting points are far more different than Copleston and Geach seem to appreciate. This alone makes their attempts at understanding St. Thomas’ arguments short of satisfactory.

necessary to arrive at a first mover, put in motion by no other; and this everyone understands to be God.⁴³

Using the example of a thing becoming hot, which is to say that it is undergoing a change, we can say that it undergoes that change because it is caused to by another thing. But it may be that this change invoked in the first thing by the second is due to a process that is caused in our second thing by a third thing which may act upon the second thing because its process is caused by a fourth thing, and so on. In order to read St. Thomas properly here, Geach thinks we must lump together the second, third, fourth, and all the subsequent things and call it ‘the world’, and predicate of each one of our things *as well as* of the world the causal activity of producing change in our first thing. But each one of our things *and* the world are causing the process of change in our first thing only insofar as they themselves are in process of change, that is, only insofar as they are themselves being changed or caused. We need to ask then what keeps this process in the entire collection of things. The answer must be some thing which is *itself* not in the process of change and does not come to be in that process, for if it were, it would only be a part of the changeable system of the whole collection which we called the world, and as such it would not be the cause of the process in the world. “Thus we are led to a changeless cause of the change and coming-to-be in the world.”⁴⁴ This, Geach thinks, is what St. Thomas means by “that which all men call God.”

Our evaluation of Geach’s explanation should begin where he begins, namely, with the claim that what is central to understanding the argument of the First and three other Ways is the “lumping-together of things by which one would pass from particular things to the world as a whole.” The first point to note about this claim is that Geach makes it without any textual support from the writings of St. Thomas.

⁴³ *ST*, I, q. 2, a. 3.

⁴⁴ Geach, *op.cit.*, p. 65.

This calls his scholarship on the matter in question. Where, in the Five Ways, or anywhere else in related discussions, does St. Thomas even imply such a move? Certainly in the First Way we find nothing of the sort. Where in his other writings dealing with first causes and God does St. Thomas speak about “lumping together” the objects in the world into a great big object? Geach provides us with no textual evidence. I suggest that is because there is none.

What Geach does offer, however, are some reasons for making his claim, reasons that are at least his, if not St. Thomas'. The first of these is his insistence that in arguing for the existence of God St. Thomas is arguing for the Maker of the world; the First Cause is a maker, and the job it has as *the* cause is to make. Geach insists on this on the grounds that “since the world is of such-and-such a nature, there must be some being who made it and keeps it going; we give this being the name ‘God’.” What is it about the world which calls for its Maker? What is that *nature* which must be explained in terms of the Maker? Geach does not specifically say, but in his explanation of the argument in the First Way, for example, it is clear that he sees the world as *dependent*. It is this feature of *dependency* in the world which calls for its Maker.⁴⁵

Brian Davies, a contemporary scholar of St. Thomas, agrees with Geach on this point.

Philosophically speaking, God is required to account for what we can now observe, and he accounts for it in its presentness as we observe it. In this sense, P. T. Geach is right to say that Aquinas thinks of God as the Maker of a world which can, if you like, be viewed as ‘a great big object’ equally dependent on God at all times... our efforts to cope with certain causal questions like ‘Why is this thing changing?’, or ‘Why is this thing there at all?’, imply the need to raise further questions. We can ask why the water turned brown, or why there are donkeys, but this ought to lead us to ask why there is change at all or why there is a world at all.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ For my own view of the properly Thomistic understanding of *dependence* upon a cause, and of the difference between being made and created by the first cause, see pp. 61-66 below.

⁴⁶ Brian Davies, *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 39.

Geach would perhaps not appreciate Davies' help by way of questions like 'Why are there donkeys?' because for him the donkey's parents are a satisfactory answer, but a full answer to the question 'Why is this thing changing?' cannot be another thing which is also in some way undergoing change, as it moves another, and so on. But every single thing in the world is undergoing change which reveals the character of dependency of things in the world and consequently of the world as a whole. So we must posit the First Cause of change, or the Unchanged Changer.

The difficulty with this interpretation is that it does not sound like St. Thomas. More precisely, it does not sound like the metaphysics of St. Thomas; it looks like cosmology (world as a complete and total collection of things) of Leibniz and Wolff, but it in no way resembles the metaphysics of being as being of St. Thomas. To view the First Way as an attempt to "lump together" beings in the world into a whole or a "cosmos" is to operate at the level of cosmology. An interpretation of the First Way that is more faithful to the texts of St. Thomas would notice that all of his philosophical God-talk is inextricably tied up with his notions of *being*, *cause of being*, *actuality* and *potentiality*. But in Geach's explanation of how St. Thomas philosophically reaches God there is not even a mention of what St. Thomas means by *cause* nor what the notions of *potentiality* and *actuality*, which are clearly used by St. Thomas in the First Way, have to do with the argument for God's existence. An explanation and the context of these terms is indispensable for understanding the crucial second premise of the argument: "whatever is in motion is put in motion by another, for nothing can be in motion except it is in potentiality to that towards which it is in motion; whereas a thing moves inasmuch as it is in act."⁴⁷ Geach's explanation by way of the-world-as-a-great-big-object does not shed any light on

⁴⁷ It should arouse our wonder here that St. Thomas says a thing can be in act to some *extent*. What does that mean? What are the extents of actuality? Is that what calls for a cause—the actuality of things? We shall have to pay attention to that!

this premise. It does not help us understand the need for the First Cause of changing (moving) things conceived as actualised potencies, which is clearly St. Thomas' conception of them in the First Way.

Geach needs to make full use of the concepts of *potentiality*, *actuality*, and *cause*, because St. Thomas is obviously making use of them. Without such a use any interpretation of the Five Ways is incomplete, and therefore misleading. Furthermore, a discussion of *potentiality* and *actuality* invariably involves, within the Thomistic context, a discussion of *being* because for St. Thomas *act* and *potency* issue from *being*.⁴⁸ But Geach's metaphysics of totalities, his philosophizing about the world-as-a-great-big-object, is not in line with St. Thomas' philosophy of being, and therefore not in line with that from which issue two key concepts of the First Way.

The second point upon which Geach's interpretation depends is his insistence that St. Thomas could not possibly be "proving God's existence from the existence of some casually chosen thing."⁴⁹ St. Thomas could not be so proving God's existence because if, for example, a thing in question is a human being, the cause of his or her existence is the parents, and "the answer need not be 'God': the cause of a man's existence is that he was generated by his parents."⁵⁰ But a production of a newly generated human being is an instance of change in the world, which ultimately requires a First Cause. For Geach, God as the First Cause uses 'second causes' (parents) as instruments to produce an individual human being.⁵¹ In other words, the instrumentality of the parents, through their generative power, gives

⁴⁸ See the prologue to St. Thomas commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*.

⁴⁹ Geach, *op.cit.*, p. 61. This insistence is important to Geach because, if true, it eliminates an alternative to his approach.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.* p. 62.

their offspring existence, and God as the First Cause gives to the parents their generative power.

Two points can be made by way of response to Geach on this point. First, in order to understand what it means to say that “parents are like ‘second causes’ used instrumentally by the First Cause,”⁵² and in order to be sure whether St. Thomas would in fact say that, we need a fairly detailed account of St. Thomas’ conception of causality, and particularly his distinction between principal and instrumental causes.⁵³ Geach’s assertion about St. Thomas’ understanding of the causal activity of the First Cause is simply that, an assertion, which we can neither understand nor evaluate without an account of principal and instrumental causes.

Secondly, it is not clear that Geach’s insistence that for St. Thomas one’s parents can cause one’s existence through their generative power is correct. St. Thomas makes the following point which gives reason to doubt or at least to qualify Geach’s position.

Now all created causes have one common effect which is *being*, although each one has its peculiar effect whereby they are differentiated: thus heat makes a thing *to be* hot, and a builder gives *being* to a house. Accordingly they have this in common that they cause *being*, but they differ in that fire causes fire, and a builder causes a house. There must therefore be some cause higher than all other *by virtue of which* they all cause being and whose proper effect is *being*: and this cause is God.⁵⁴

Thus it is true that parents, as efficient causes of their offspring, produce a being, but they do so “by virtue of some cause higher than all other.” The offspring, therefore, is dependent for its being not only on its parents, but far more so on God. More important still is the fact that parents are not the cause whose “*proper* effect is

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ In chapter ten below I shall attempt to give such an account. That St. Thomas clearly distinguished between principal and instrumental causes can be seen by carefully considering *De Ver.*, q. XXVI, a. 1; *SCG*, II, 2; III, 13-14; III, 65; *De Pot.*, q. III, a. 11, ad 14; *In V Metaph.*, lect. 3; *ST*, I, q. 7, a. 4; I, q. 46, a. 2; I, q. 45, a. 5; I-II, q. 1, a. 4.

⁵⁴ *De Pot.*, q. VII, a. 2.

being”; only God is such a cause. This must be noted when we claim that one’s parents give one existence.

Why is this important for a critique of Geach? It is important because his understanding of how St. Thomas is conceiving the dependence of beings undergoing change in the world upon a cause is at best incomplete. St. Thomas speaks about a being’s dependence on a cause for its existence as something quite distinct from its becoming this or that thing. Geach seems to be blending them. When Geach argues for all the changing things in the world connected by the change they are undergoing and as such needing the Unchanged Changer, that connection is not conceived as having two aspects: a connection between things needing a cause of their becoming this or that kind of thing and a cause of their being. Geach lumps them together and makes no clear distinction between them when he reaches the First Cause of change: “Thus we are led to a changeless cause of the change and coming-to-be in the world.”⁵⁵

In order to understand how St. Thomas is conceiving the dependence of things in the world upon the First Mover, we shall have to include in it their dependence for their *being* as something in addition to their dependence for acquiring this or that change. This calls for a more encompassing conception of cause than we find in Geach. But in order to acquire a fuller conception we must not read St. Thomas as one who thinks that one’s parents can directly give one *being*. We shall have to inquire, by way of a proper Thomistic context, into the cause of being because such a cause is part of the dependence of its effect upon it, and in order to do that we shall obviously have to inquire into the Thomistic conception of *being*. To that end Geach’s interpretation is not only of no help, but a hindrance because it steers us in

⁵⁵ Geach, *op.cit.*, p. 65.

the direction of not distinguishing clearly enough between the cause of a thing's *becoming* and the proper cause of its *being*.

We can conclude then, that Geach's interpretation of St. Thomas' arguments for God's existence lacks textual support for the crucial moves on which it depends. The conception of the world's dependence in Geach's interpretation does not allow us to reach the Unmoved Mover conceived as the cause of being of changing things distinct from the cause of their becoming. Geach's interpretation fails to show how the argument of the First Way fits within the context of St. Thomas' metaphysics, which is a metaphysics of being as being rather than a cosmology. It also lacks sufficient explanation of some key concepts St. Thomas employs, concepts like *cause*, *potentiality* and *actuality*. In fact, it entirely ignores St. Thomas' use of the concepts of *potentiality* and *actuality* which are central to St. Thomas argument. It seems then that in our attempt to understand the arguments in the Five Ways we must proceed along very different lines than those suggested by both Geach and Copleston. We must proceed along the lines that give an explanation of key concepts and that show how the concepts are meant and used by St. Thomas to reach the existence of that which is God.

Anthony Kenny's Critique of the Third Way

Not long after Copleston and Geach offered their interpretations of St. Thomas' arguments for God's existence Anthony Kenny introduced his well known *The Five Ways*. I inquire into a part of it here because it represents, in a very pronounced way, an important approach to the Five Ways. His approach to the Five Ways consists in regarding them as dependent on data gathered by the science of *cosmology*. The direction of his approach and the context of his interpretation is clearly expressed in the following lines.

The Five Ways fail principally because it is much more difficult than at first appears to separate them from their background in medieval cosmology. Any contemporary cosmological argument would have to be much more different from the arguments of Aquinas than scholastic modernisations customarily are.⁵⁶

For Kenny, then, the Five Ways are *cosmological* arguments, which for him clearly means that they rest on, or have their groundwork in *cosmology* rather than *ontology* or metaphysics. It is within the context of that study, within its objectives and method, that we must, according to Kenny, understand St. Thomas' arguments for God's existence, and it is within that context that we must see them as failures.

Having already considered the first two Ways, I shall turn to Kenny's treatment of the Third Way. Here is St. Thomas' argument.

The third way is taken from possibility and necessity, and runs as follows. We find in nature things that are possible to be and not to be, since they are found to be generated, and to corrupt, and consequently they are possible to be and not to be. But it is impossible for these always to exist, for that which is possible not to be at some time is not. Therefore, if everything is possible not to be, then at some time there could have been nothing in existence. Now if this were true, even now there would be nothing in existence, because that which does not exist only begins to exist by something already existing. Therefore, if at one time nothing was in existence, it would have been impossible for anything to have begun to exist; and thus even now nothing would be in existence—which is absurd. Therefore, not all beings are merely possible, but there must exist something the existence of which is necessary. But every necessary being either has its necessity caused by another, or not. Now it is impossible to go on to infinity in necessary things which have their necessity caused by another, as has been already proved in regard to efficient causes. Therefore we cannot but postulate the existence of some being having of itself its own necessity, and not receiving it from another, but rather causing in others their necessity. This all men speak of as God.⁵⁷

Kenny sums up his understanding and criticism of the argument at the end of the chapter on the Third Way. It is a very helpful summary because it provides a badly needed map of his reasoning throughout the chapter.

The argument goes: there are everlasting beings; these must be caused or uncaused; they cannot all be caused; so there must be an uncaused everlasting being, which is God. In order to show that not all the everlasting beings can be uncaused, Aquinas refers back to his earlier regress argument, and we can refer back to its refutation. In order to show that the uncaused everlasting being must be God, he offers no proof, and we may ask why might it not be perpetual, indestructible matter? If the first part of the Third Way has any force at all, the matter of an everlasting world would be matter with a natural power of everlasting existence. And what better explanation could one want of an everlasting existence than a natural power for

⁵⁶ Anthony Kenny, *The Five Ways*, pp. 3-4.

⁵⁷ *ST*, I, q. 2, a. 3.

everlasting existence? In what way would God's general existence be more self-explanatory than the everlasting existence of matter with a natural indestructibility? A difference between the two, it seems, could only be made out by saying that God's perpetual existence would be logically necessary, that of Aristotelian matter would be only naturally necessary.⁵⁸

Kenny formulates and interprets the argument as he does on the basis of several reasons. First he appeals to scholarly authority and points out that Guy Jalbert "has shown that ... Aquinas was converted by the reading of Averroes to a doctrine of necessity ... [in which he] defined necessity not in terms of essence and existence, but in terms of unalterability," and that consequently "something is necessarily the case if it cannot cease to be the case, and a being has necessary existence if it cannot cease to exist."⁵⁹ Secondly, Kenny points out that St. Thomas held that some things are naturally incapable of ceasing to exist, things like angels, stars, and human souls. Based on this Kenny insists that the argument of the Third Way "does indeed start from contingent beings (things which 'have the possibility of being and of not being'), but it works through the existence of caused necessary beings, to the existence of a being whose necessity is uncaused, which alone, among necessary beings, can be called God."⁶⁰

Kenny finds the first premise of St. Thomas' argument a bit unclear: *We find in nature things that are possible to be and not to be, since they are found to be generated, and to corrupt, and consequently they are possible to be and not to be.* He notices that St. Thomas asserts the premise as a fact of experience: "shrubs spring up and wither away, animals and men are begotten and die," but Kenny finds that this fact does not shed enough light on the data of the Third Way, and so is not sure "exactly what entities are being said to have the possibility of being and not being, nor exactly what is meant by this possibility."⁶¹ After a lengthy exposition Kenny

⁵⁸ Kenny, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* p. 48.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* p. 49.

decides that the data of the Third Way, which can ultimately be explained only by positing God, are “generable and corruptible beings, i.e., bodies which consist of matter which has existed in other forms and which can survive in altered form their own destruction.”⁶² The possibility which these things have of being and not being is understood by Kenny as “a power of not existing.”⁶³ By this “power” Kenny takes St. Thomas to mean that “things have a power of not existing ‘if the matter in them is in potency to another form,’ i.e. if the stuff they consist of is such that they can turn into something else.”⁶⁴

This is how Kenny interprets the first premise of the Third Way. He thinks the premise is true and confirmed by modern science. But the rest of the argument does not sit well with Kenny.

Because Kenny thinks that necessary or everlasting beings are central to St. Thomas’ argument in Third Way, he sees St. Thomas arguing for necessary beings on the basis of the following claim: given that whatever has the possibility of not being at some time is not, not everything can have the possibility of not being. Kenny thinks the claim is false because he sees no reason why there cannot “be something which has the power not to exist, but as a matter of fact always does exist.”⁶⁵ His reason is that something could exist forever without having the power so to exist; it could, for example, continue existing indefinitely “by powers resident in a succession of external agents.”⁶⁶ In other words, there is no reason why, in theory at least, something could not be kept in existence forever by a continual

⁶² *Ibid.* p. 54-55.

⁶³ *Ibid.* p. 53.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* p. 56.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* p. 63.

succession of efficient causes or agents.⁶⁷ Furthermore, Kenny also sees no reason why corruptible things should not “overlap each other, so that each one comes to be and passes away, but there is never any time when nothing at all exists.”⁶⁸ In other words, the universe has not been proven by St. Thomas not to be both contingent and everlasting, and consequently Kenny thinks St. Thomas has not given us a reason why we must posit the cause of the universe; at least it does not seem that we must posit such a cause if we begin our inquiry from the first premise of the Third Way. As he puts it, “the Third Way quite fails to show it [the world] *must* be caused, and by a creator.”⁶⁹

Kenny’s main support for this claim rests on the following argument. Given that matter could easily be perpetual and indestructible, and if the possibility of not being means that “things have a power of not existing ‘if the matter in them is in potency to another form,’ i.e. if the stuff they consist in is such that they can turn into something else,” then the universe could consist in contingent beings that are forever changing from one kind of thing to another. Consequently, the only necessary, everlasting, and uncaused being can be matter and not God. The Third Way, therefore, in no way compels our minds even to seek God, let alone to admit that he exists.

What can we say about Kenny’s critique of the Third Way? Various responses to it are readily available in print.⁷⁰ But I wish to focus on what seem to me to be

⁶⁷ It is along these lines that Kenny criticises St. Thomas’ insistence on the impossibility of infinite regress. We shall discuss St. Thomas’ argument in chapter ten.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* p. 69.

⁷⁰ John F.X. Knasas, for example, has argued that a different understanding of *necessity* than Kenny, following Jalbert, employs is at work in the Third Way (see his “*Necessity* in the Tertia Via,” *The New Scholasticism*, 52 (1978), 373-394). Joseph Bobik has pointed out that use of the reasoning from St. Thomas’ commentary on Aristotle’s *De Caelo*, on which Kenny relies throughout his criticism, is not needed (see his “The First Part of the Third Way,” *Philosophical Studies*, 17 (1968), p. 150.) John Quinn has argued that St. Thomas does not need to prove that things which naturally have the

some of Kenny's major omissions or oversights. Let us assume that Kenny correctly identifies the data of the Third Way as "generable and corruptible beings,"⁷¹ i.e. bodies which consist of matter which has existed in other forms and which can survive in altered form their own destruction." Let us next ask whether his following statement is fair to St. Thomas.

If the first part of the Third Way has any force at all, the matter of an everlasting world would be matter with a natural power of everlasting existence. And what better explanation could one want of an everlasting existence than a natural power for everlasting existence? In what way would God's general existence be more self-explanatory than the everlasting existence of matter with a natural indestructibility?

Kenny's point here rests on an understanding of Aristotelian and Thomistic conception of matter that entirely ignores some key texts that pertain to this point. In his first question he seems to be conceiving of matter not only as a being of some sort (as possessing existence), but also as a being that is independent of something else, as something of which we may speak as a *this*. But Aristotle describes matter differently:

By "matter" I mean that which in itself is not stated as being the whatness of something, nor a quantity, nor any of the other senses of "being". For there is something of which each of these is a

possibility of being and not being are limited to a definite amount of time, as Kenny insists when he asserts that something which has the power not to exist, but as a matter of fact always does exist could continue existing indefinitely by powers resident in a succession of external agents. (see his "The Third Way to God: A New Approach," *The Thomist*, 42 (1978), p. 57.)

⁷¹ My immediate concern with an understanding of the data of the Third Way as generable and corruptible beings is that St. Thomas does not say so; he says that data are beings that are "found to be generated, and to corrupt." The difference between the *generated* and the *generable* is the difference between an actual child of an actual parent and some future child of an actual parent; it is the difference between the actual being and the possible being. This means that St. Thomas intends to reach the necessary being beginning with some actual being, not a possible one. But on what grounds can he argue for the cause of this actual being? Look at the data again! It is the generated being, which, because it is generated, is able to be, is generable. We know this because we see it come into being from another being—the parent. In other words, the actual being that is before us exists, but not of itself—it is a contingent *existent*, a being that is a recipient of existence. It is this fact about it that calls for a cause. The important question is this: is the child's parent the proper cause of the child's existence or does it require a much higher cause which all men call God? The best way to answer is to inquire first into what St. Thomas means by *proper cause*, and we shall do this in chapter ten. But Kenny does not look for a cause of a contingent existent. Perhaps the reason is his understanding of the data from which then issues the general direction of his criticism.

predicate, whose being is other than that of each of the predicates; for all the others are predicates of a substance, while a substance is a predicate of matter. Thus, this last is in itself neither a whatness nor a quantity nor any of the others; and it is not a denial of any of these, for even a denial belongs to something accidentally.⁷²

St. Thomas makes a similar point about matter when he says that it “cannot exist of itself, since of itself it possess no form. It does not exist in act, since existing in act occurs only through a form, but exists only in potency. Hence, whatever exists in act cannot be called prime matter.”⁷³

Thus what Kenny is proposing, in his second question, as a suitable substitute for God in the first part of St. Thomas’ argument in the Third Way is a potency. Matter as a pure potency could hardly serve as an explanation of an everlasting existence; it is a principle used in cosmology to explain generation, but it cannot by itself serve as a sufficient explanation of anything.⁷⁴

But Kenny seems to be arguing that matter can, within the context of St. Thomas’ thought, be considered a kind of necessary being, as something that does not by virtue of its nature come into being or possess the power to go out of being. In other words, Kenny seems to rely on the Thomistic conception of matter as something that is neither generated nor corruptible. St. Thomas does in fact regard matter that way, but he says more than that.

If matter should come to be, there would have to be something which is the subject from which it comes to be. But that which is the first subject in generation is matter. For we say that matter is the first subject from which a thing comes to be *per se*, and not *per accidens*, and is in the thing after it has come to be... It follows, therefore, that matter would be before it would come to be, which is impossible. And in the like manner, everything which is corrupted is resolved into primary matter. Therefore, at the very time when prime matter already is, it would be corrupted; and thus if primary matter is corrupted, it will have been corrupted before it is corrupted, which is impossible. Therefore, it is impossible for primary matter to be generated and corrupted. *But by this we do not deny that it comes into existence through creation.*⁷⁵

⁷² Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, trans. by H.G. Apostle, (Grinnell, Iowa: The Peripatetic Press, 1979), VII, 3, 1029a 20-26.

⁷³ St. Thomas Aquinas, *The Principles of Nature*, ed. cit., II, 17.

⁷⁴ The only reason I can see why Kenny could honestly fall into such error is his conception of the data of the Third Way as generable or possible beings rather than beings that are in act.

⁷⁵ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Aristotle’s Physics*, Bk. I, lect. 15, n. 139, (italics mine).

Clearly, then, even though matter is neither generated nor corrupted, and in that sense necessary, its necessity does not reside in itself because it still “comes into existence through creation,” it is still a recipient of existence, it is still a creature. This calls for a necessary existent whose necessity resides in itself and it in no way receives existence; it calls for a being that is not a creature. Therefore, Kenny’s attempt to invoke matter as a self-explanatory substitute for God’s eternal existence cannot be taken seriously as a formidable objection to St. Thomas. He simply ignores the text we quoted immediately above, as well as the following text.

Whatever is the cause of things considered as beings, must be the cause of things, not only according as they are *such* by accidental forms, nor according as they are *these* by substantial forms, but also according to all that belongs to their being (*ad esse*) in any way. And thus it is necessary to say that *even primary matter is created by the universal cause of things*.⁷⁶

It is clear from text in the *Commentary on Physics* that for St. Thomas to be generated is not one and the same as to come into existence. Some understanding of this difference seems necessary for a full understanding of the Five Ways in which St. Thomas argues for a being which is the cause of other beings coming into existence. This coming into existence on the part of the creatures is something different from their coming to be by generation. In the above text from the *Commentary on Physics* St. Thomas argues that matter does not come to be as this or that material being comes to be, but he nevertheless insists that matter comes into existence. What are these two sense of *coming to be*? It seems that St. Thomas differentiates between a being’s coming to be as this or that *kind* of thing, as having been generated, which is one kind of coming to be, from its coming into existence simply as an existent, which is another and most fundamental kind of coming to be.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ *ST*, I, q. 44, a. 2. (italics mine).

⁷⁷ For St. Thomas’ twofold understanding of generation and corruption, see his *Principles of Nature*, ed. cit., I, 3-7. Being generated or coming to be is understood here as acquiring a form or an essence which St. Thomas calls a thing’s “coming to be actually”. For his distinction between acquiring an essence and existence, see *ST*, I, q. 3, a. 4. Here, even though a thing comes to be, is actualised by its

Just as matter needs a cause of its existence even though it is neither generated nor corrupted, so do necessary beings like angels, souls, and heavenly spheres. Kenny thinks that the only argument St. Thomas has for showing “that not all everlasting beings can be uncaused... is his regress argument,”⁷⁸ which Kenny finds easy to refute. But here, too, Kenny is ignoring some relevant texts. St. Thomas describes these beings as “forms not existing in matter, so that there is no potentiality to non-being in them, but rather by their *forms* they are always able to be.”⁷⁹ Now even though these beings are necessary, that is, unable not-to-be, St. Thomas insists, in the above quote from *Summa Theologiae*, that they still need a cause of their being.⁸⁰ Why? Because although their forms do not exist in matter, are not inmattered forms, and so have no potentiality by their nature to stop being, nevertheless, when we consider them “as beings”, that is, not as angels, or souls, but simply as existents, we come to see their need for a cause of their being, we come to see them as creatures dependent on a creator, as dependent on a cause for “all that belongs to their being at all in any way.” Considered as “*these* by substantial forms” angels are in virtue of their forms necessary beings, but considered simply “as beings”, they are contingent beings whose necessary forms are created by a being whose necessity resides in itself and is not in any way received. The Third Way is

form, “existence is that which makes every form or nature actual.” (For a parallel texts see *ST*, I, q. 4, a. 1, ad 3; q. 8, a. 1; q. 44, a. 1.) It seems, then, that the way to understand the difference between two senses of coming to be is to understand them as two hierarchically ordered attainments of actuality: to come to be or to be generated is to become actual by way of acquiring a form, whereas to come into existence is to receive that which makes even the form actual. Thomist scholars vary on how the latter sense is to be understood. I shall mention some of their understandings in chapter seven. Nevertheless, there are in St. Thomas two senses of coming to be, or becoming actual.

⁷⁸ Kenny, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

⁷⁹ *SCG*, II, 30, 9. (italics mine)

⁸⁰ He insists on the same point in the first *Summa*. “Although intellectual substances are not corporeal, nor composed of matter and form, nor existing in matter as material forms, it is not to be supposed that they therefore equal to the divine simplicity. For a certain composition is found in them by the fact that in them *being* is not the same as *what is*” *SCG*, II, 52, 1. See chapter seven for a distinction between *being* and *what is*.

therefore an argument to God from the creaturely status of beings that are, by their forms, either capable or incapable of not-being. What gives them this creaturely status in the most pronounced way is the fact that they do not possess existence by their very natures or forms, but are recipients of existence. Another text that Kenny ignores, even as he considers angels and souls as necessary beings, is the following:

Existence (*ipsum esse*) is the most perfect of all things, for it is compared to all things as that by which they are made actual; for nothing has actuality except so far as it exists. Hence existence is that which actuates *all things, even their forms*. Therefore it is not compared to other things as the receiver is to the received; but rather as the received is to the receiver.⁸¹

The Third Way, therefore, argues to the giver of that which all things but one, whether generated and therefore contingent or ungenerated and therefore necessary, receive—existence (*ipsum esse*).

What is needed, however, is a more detailed account of this reception; what is needed is a Thomistic account of the proper cause before we even consider the Third Way. But to that end Kenny's interpretation is of no help, in fact it steers us in a direction in which we shall not even see the need for St. Thomas' account of the proper cause.

Our attempt, then, to establish the context of the Five Ways will have to proceed along quite different lines than we find suggested in Copleston, Geach, and Kenny. In order to do this it seems best to distinguish first between the intellectual activity in which, according to St. Thomas, one philosophises about God, and that activity in which arise questions that prompt our intellects even to begin seeking the First Cause which all understand to be God. The reason why this seems best is the data from which St. Thomas argues to God—things that belong to the realm of experience. We shall have to ask this question: How must things in our experience be seen, if they are to lead to God? For it is clear that the same things may be so considered by a variety of intellectual activities that questions regarding their

⁸¹ *ST*, I, q. 4, a. 1, ad 3. (italics mine)

dependence on a being that is radically different from them do not come up at all. In order to see how they must be viewed so that this dependence becomes apparent to us, we turn next to a discussion on the difference between *cosmology* and *metaphysics*.

CHAPTER III

The General Character and Place of Cosmology and Metaphysics in Scholastic Philosophy

All things are given their form by their boundaries.

Josef Pieper, *Scholasticism*

The Thomistic Spectrum of the Speculative Sciences

If we are to place the Five Ways in their proper context and provide a groundwork for them, and if we wish to begin to understand why there are so many conflicting interpretations of the arguments in them, we must have some understanding of scholastic cosmology and metaphysics. This is true, in my view, because all interpreters of the Five Ways differ from one another precisely in the extent to which they insist that the Five Ways are a medieval example of the so called *cosmological argument*, and the extent to which they read St. Thomas' reasoning as belonging to the area of study called *cosmology*. In order to defend this claim I must first give general outlines of the proper domains of scholastic cosmology and metaphysics. My task here is simply to give the outlines, not to defend them against any modern and contemporary objections.

Like ancient Greek philosophy scholastic philosophy is a rational investigation into full answers regarding the ultimate order and nature of things that are. A complete explanation of *scholasticism* would be out of place here because it would take us into a lengthy discussion. Maurice De Wulf who has developed such an explanation defines scholastic philosophy this way: “a *synthesis* or a *system*, wherein all the *questions* of philosophy are treated and all their *solutions* harmonised, coordinated and made to stand together.”⁸²

For a scholastic philosopher like St. Thomas Aquinas philosophy is a pursuit of knowledge which satisfies the human mind to the fullest. In its search for wisdom the human mind is not satisfied with knowing only a few things or a few classes to which some things belong, but with knowing all things and all classes of things. This search for wisdom is characterised by seeking to know the highest causes and reasons for what things are, where they come from, and why they are. Furthermore, the mind wants to know these causes as clearly and certainly as possible. The aim of a scholastic philosopher is to attain “clear, certain, evident knowledge of the ultimate reasons and causes, internal and external, of things, as far as this can be reached by the natural powers of the human mind.”⁸³

The object of philosophy was thought by the scholastics to have a formal and a material aspect. The formal object of philosophy is the highest reasons and causes insofar as evidence and certainty of them can be acquired by the powers of reason alone, that is, without the aid of supernatural revelation. The material object of philosophy is that in which the formal object is sought, namely *being*—that which all things are insofar as they are actual. Chapters five, six, and seven of this work are

⁸² Maurice De Wulf, *History of Medieval Philosophy*, (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1909), p. 116. Pages 101-116 of this work contain a helpful discussion of the many aspects of *scholasticism*.

⁸³ Michael Shallo, *Scholastic Philosophy*, (Philadelphia: Peter Reilly Publishers, 1918), p. 3.

designed to introduce us to the formal and material objects of St. Thomas' philosophy.

When a scholastic philosopher inquires into things in the world, he thinks he can do so in three ways: as they are in themselves, as they are in his mind, and as they are related to his will. Each of these considerations gives rise to three main areas of philosophical study: a study of *being*, or of things as they actually are, *logic* has the task of determining ways of thinking well, and *ethics* has the task of determining ways of directing one's will rightly or of acting morally.

It is the first area that interests us—the study of *being*, of things as they actually are. The entire area is theoretical or speculative, rather than practical,⁸⁴ in character. It has three main branches: 1) philosophy of nature, that is, philosophy of *being as mobile or changing*, which is the physical universe; 2) philosophy of mathematics, that is, philosophy of *being as quantified and extended*; and 3) metaphysics, that is, philosophy of being as such, as considered in itself.⁸⁵ Philosophy of nature has two branches of its own: *cosmology* or the science of non-living nature which has the non-rational world as its object, and *psychology* which studies living nature. Metaphysics on the other hand may be divided into general and special. General metaphysics is sometimes called *ontology* and sometimes *philosophy of being*, and it deals with *being as such*.⁸⁶ The two special aspects of metaphysics are *epistemology* or the study of knowledge, and *natural theology* or the study of God as he may be known by the power of human reason alone.

⁸⁴ Practical philosophy deals with human action. Insofar as it is concerned with individual human action it is called *ethics*, and insofar as it is concerned with social human action it is called *politics*. For a Thomistic distinction between speculative and practical knowledge see *ST*, I, q. 1, a. 4; I, q. 14, a. 6; *De Ver.* q. II, a. 8; q. III, a. 3. See also Jacques Maritain, *The Degrees of Knowledge*, (Notre Dame Press, 1995), pp. 330-333.

⁸⁵ For a more detailed description of the main branches of scholastic philosophy see Michael Shallo, *Scholastic Philosophy*, and Jacques Maritain, *The Degrees of Knowledge*.

⁸⁶ I shall explain this phrase in the section on scholastic metaphysics in this chapter, as well as in the first section of ch. VII.

One obstacle that stands in our way of understanding the scholastic thought of St. Thomas is the difference between our notion of *science* and his. For us scientific knowledge *par excellence* is to be found in sciences like *physics* where we employ methods governed by mathematics, experimentation, and the formation and verification of hypotheses. Given that philosophy does not employ such a method, we have divorced things philosophical from things scientific. But St. Thomas uses the terms *science* and *philosophy* interchangeably. For him the *philosophical* or the “*scientific* knower, if he is to know perfectly, must know the cause of the thing known.”⁸⁷ In the introduction to his translation of St. Thomas’ *Expositio Super Librum Boethii De Trinitate* Armand Maurer explains what that means.

[Knowledge] reaches its ideal, not simply when it records observable connections in nature and calculates them in mathematical terms, but rather when it accounts for observable phenomena and the properties of things by bringing to light their intelligible relations to their causes. Metaphysics reaches this goal when, for example, it explains the contingent universe through God, mathematics when it explains the properties of a triangle through its definition, natural philosophy [*cosmology*] when it accounts for change through efficient and final causes and the intrinsic principles of bodies, matter and form.

In other words, scientific inquiry for St. Thomas at its best is philosophical. It does not aim simply at empiriological knowledge through controlled observation and measurement of the physical world, but rather at knowledge of the very being and essential structure of things. Its goal is *ontological* rather than *empiriological knowledge*.⁸⁸

In order to bring us closer to the Thomistic equating of the scientific with the philosophical, and to prepare the ground for a clear distinction between metaphysics and cosmology, we must take a careful look at, what St. Thomas calls, “three kinds of distinction in the operation of the intellect.” He describes them this way:

⁸⁷ *In I Post. Analyt. (Commentary on the Posterior Analytics of Aristotle)* trans. by F.R. Larcher under the title (Albany, NY, 1970), lecture I, p. 15.

⁸⁸ *The Division and Methods of the Sciences*, trans. by A. Maurer, (Toronto: PIMS, 1986). pp. ix-x. In employing the terms *ontological* and *empiriological* knowledge Maurer is following Maritain who defines them this way: “*empiriological analysis deals with sensible being but first and foremost as observable and measurable; ‘ontological analysis at the first degree of abstraction deals with sensible being but deals with it first and foremost as intelligible.’*” Jacques Maritain, *Philosophy of Nature*, (New York: Philosophical Library, 1951), pp. 73-88.

There is one through the operation of the intellect joining and dividing which is properly called separation; and this belongs to the divine science or metaphysics.⁸⁹ There is another through the operation by which the quiddities of things are conceived which is the abstraction of form from sensible matter; and this belongs to mathematics. And there is a third through the same operation which is the abstraction of a universal from a particular; and this belongs to physics and to all the sciences in general, because science disregards accidental features and treats of necessary matters.⁹⁰

These three distinctions of the intellect's operation, sometimes referred to as three degrees of abstraction, give rise to three speculative sciences (in the Thomistic sense) which "are differentiated according to their degree of separation from matter and motion."⁹¹

In the first and second degrees of abstraction, or separation from matter and motion, the intellect studies objects which are dependent for their being on matter. St. Thomas calls these "natural things," by which he means things "that are bound up with sensible matter and motion both in existence and in thought."⁹² Because the dependence of natural things on matter and motion is twofold, it gives rise to two degrees of abstraction, and consequently to two speculative sciences. If the object's dependence upon matter and motion is such that it can neither exist nor be understood without it, the object is called *being as mobile* (being as subject to change). The science which studies this object is philosophy of nature or physics, to which belongs *cosmology*. If the object's dependence upon matter and motion is such that it cannot exist without matter but can be understood without it, "because sensible matter is not included in their definitions,"⁹³ the object is called *being as quantified and extended*. "This is the case with lines and numbers—the kind of objects with which mathematics deals."⁹⁴

⁸⁹ By "divine science" St. Thomas does not mean the science of Sacred Theology, but simply metaphysics or theology in the Aristotelian sense.

⁹⁰ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Division and Methods of the Sciences*, q. 5, a. 3. (Toronto, 1986).

⁹¹ *Ibid.* q. 5, a. 1.

⁹² *Ibid.* q. 6, a. 1.

⁹³ *Ibid.* q. 5, a. 1.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

The third degree of abstraction, which gives rise to the third speculative science deals with objects that do not depend upon matter and motion for their being. And they do not so depend because either they are never found realised in matter, or they are sometimes found to be realised in matter and sometimes not. To the former belong God and the angels, and to the latter substance, quality, being as being, potency, act, unity and multiplicity. To the science that studies these objects St. Thomas gives three different names: divine science or theology, metaphysics, and first philosophy.

Perhaps the most important point that we should note for the purposes of establishing the groundwork of the Five Ways is this: St. Thomas' division of the spectrum of speculative sciences does not allow for regarding philosophy of nature (and consequently *cosmology*) as *part* of metaphysics; the science of physics is not a compartment of the science of metaphysics. For St. Thomas, all speculative sciences do not share one same method, and one type of intelligibility. In the natural sciences the judgment of our intellect "must conform to what the senses reveal about [the nature of the object],"⁹⁵ while in mathematics "we must judge... according to what the imagination reveals."⁹⁶

But in metaphysics, where we do not study things dependent on matter for their existence and for their being understood, the intellect grasps its object according to a different type of intelligibility. In the divine science, the science where we encounter God's existence and attributes, and this includes the Five Ways, the intellect proceeds in the following way:

When we know things of this kind [being as such, act, God, etc.] through judgment, our knowledge must terminate neither in the imagination nor in the senses. Nevertheless we reach some knowledge of them through the objects of the senses and the imagination, either by way of causality (as when from an effect we come to know its cause, which is not proportionate to the

⁹⁵ *Ibid.* q. 6, a. 1.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

effect but transcends it⁹⁷), or by way of transcendence, or by way of negation (as when we separate from such beings whatever the sense or imagination apprehends). These are the means of knowing divine things from the sensible world ...

It follows that we can use the senses and the imagination as the starting points but not as the termini of our knowledge of divine things, so that we judge them to be the sort of objects the sense or the imagination apprehends. Now to go to something is to terminate at it. Therefore, we should go neither to the imagination nor the senses in divine science, to the imagination and not to the senses in mathematics, and to the senses in the natural sciences. For this reason they are in error who try to proceed in the same way in these three parts of speculative science.⁹⁸

In the next chapter I shall consider some of the implications this difference between metaphysics and philosophy of nature has on our attempt to develop a proper context for the Five Ways. For now let it suffice to note well that the science in which, according to St. Thomas, a philosopher encounters God is very different from *cosmology*; it is different because its object is different from the object of the other science, and the intellectual activity at work in it is also different from the intellectual activity at work in the other science. Let us now turn briefly to a consideration of the material and formal objects of *cosmology* and *metaphysics*.

Scholastic Cosmology

As one of two branches of the science of *being as mobile*, of the philosophy of nature, *cosmology* may be defined as the “philosophic study of the inorganic world.”⁹⁹ The material object of *cosmology* is all things that do not have life in any of its forms.

Given this, we in the twentieth century may be puzzled and say, ‘I don’t see the need for *cosmology* because the sciences like physics, chemistry, geology, and mineralogy are perfectly capable of investigating the inorganic world.’ But recall that a scholastic philosopher seeks to attain “clear, certain, evident knowledge of the

⁹⁷ Clearly, the Five Ways are an instance of this, and therefore an instance of the divine science or metaphysics and not of cosmology!

⁹⁸ *Division and Methods of the Sciences*, q. 6, a. 1.

⁹⁹ Cardinal Mercier, *A Manual of Modern Scholastic Philosophy*. Vol. I, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1960), p. 45.

ultimate reasons and causes, internal and external, of things.” The emphasis here is on *ultimate causes*. While the material object of *cosmology* and the other special sciences is the same, their formal object is not. The formal object of *cosmology* is the *ultimate reasons and causes*, both internal and external, of the inorganic world. Physicists, chemists, geologists, etc., as such, do not, in the course of their inquiry, ask questions regarding the ultimate origin of their material object. Their inquiry is such that there is never an occasion for raising such questions.¹⁰⁰

Mercier describes the threefold formal object of *cosmology* this way: “(a) The origin of the inorganic world or its first efficient cause; (b) its intrinsic constitution or its ultimate constitutive causes; (c) its destinies or its final cause.” He then points out that “the second of these problems belongs exclusively to cosmology and cannot be treated elsewhere.”¹⁰¹ The other two “problems” cosmology shares with *metaphysics*, that is, the two other “problems” originate in cosmological inquiry but their ultimate answers, as far man’s capabilities allow, are attained by way of metaphysical inquiry, which, according to St. Thomas is to be conducted according to a higher degree of abstraction from matter and motion.

Given that in cosmology a philosopher deals with *being as mobile* we need to say something about Aristotelian and Thomistic conception of *motion*. This will help us understand why the threefold formal object of cosmology is what it is. But considering that in the Five Ways St. Thomas reasons from moving or changing things and from their contingency and non-self-existence to the existence of God as their cause and as distinct from them, we need to ask ourselves whether, for him, a philosophical understanding of motion suffices for reaching the knowledge of God’s

¹⁰⁰ It is true that some of them do entertain questions regarding the ultimate origin of the universe, but they are then more properly speaking as philosophers rather than chemists, physicists, and geologists. However, many of these thinkers rarely entertain such questions in terms of efficient causality as separate from material causality.

¹⁰¹ Mercier, *op. cit.* p. 47.

existence. The answer depends both on how he, as a Christian theologian, understands God, and on the difference between cosmology and metaphysics and their respective formal objects.

Any philosophic inquiry can begin only when its first principles are discovered. Aristotle begins his inquiry into *being as mobile* by pointing out that “we think that we know each thing when we know the first causes and the first principles... clearly, in the science of nature [*being as mobile*] too we should first try to determine what is the case with regard to the principles.”¹⁰² In determining what the principles of nature are Aristotle follows ancient Greek philosophers who maintained that first principles must be some contraries or opposites like dry and moist, straight and crooked, hot and cold. His reason is as follows:

(a) neither must one principle be composed of another principle, (b) nor should they be composed of other things but the other things should be composed of them. Now the primary contraries possess both these attributes: (b) They are not composed of other things because they are primary, and (a) neither of them is composed of the other because they are contraries.¹⁰³

It will help us to understand the thinking going on here if we keep in mind that we are observing motion or change: the change of one thing's place and position, the generation of an oak from an acorn, the change of water from liquid to vapor, the building of a house, and the learning of some truth by a student. In all these cases, that from which a thing changed lacked the nature of that into which it was changed. If that were not so, that is, if the thing possessed the nature of that into which it changed, there would be no change, which is contrary to what experience tells us. In order that liquid water may become vapor it must first have been not-vapor. Thus every change involves a pair of *not-x* and *x*.

We want to know next how many principles there are; how many primary *not-x* and *x* pairs there are. It is plain, Aristotle points out, that there cannot be only two

¹⁰² Aristotle, *Physics*, trans. by H.G. Apostle, (Grinnell, Iowa: The Peripatetic Press, 1980), I, 1.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.* I, 5.

principles because the contraries, the *not-x* and *x* cannot act upon each other, but upon some third thing which is neither *not-x* nor *x*. Note also that by *not-x* and *x* we do not mean a *something* and its opposite; we are not saying water changes into not water. By *not-x* and *x* we mean an attribute of a *something*; liquid and vapor are always in something, are always predicated of something. But *somethings* and their contrary attributes do come and cease to be, that is, they are generated and corrupted. This means, according to Aristotle, that we must posit in addition to primary contraries (*not-x* and *x*) a primary substance.¹⁰⁴ We must conclude, then, that if natural things (moving and changing things) have principles of which they “are composed primarily and from which they come to be not accidentally, but come to be what each of them is according to its *substance*, then everything which is generated is generated from a subject and a *form*.”¹⁰⁵ Does this mean there are only two principles after all? The answer is yes and no, that is, the principles are two and three: “it is clear that there must be something which underlies the contraries and that the contraries are two. Yet in another sense this is not necessary, for one of the

¹⁰⁴ Aristotle defines *substance* this way: “A substance, spoken of in the most fundamental, primary, and highest sense of the word is that which is neither said of a subject nor present in a subject; e.g., an individual man or an individual horse. Secondary substances are said to be (a) those to which, as species, belong substances which are called ‘primary’, and also (b) the genera of those species. For example, an individual man comes under the species man, and genus of this species is animal; so both man and animal are said to be secondary substances.”

The most distinguishing mark of substance, Aristotle says, is that it is capable of admitting contrary qualities while remaining numerically one and the same. “In other words of all things other than [primary] substances, there is no one which, being numerically one [and the same], can be shown to admit of contraries. A colour, for example, being numerically one and the same, cannot be black and white; nor can an *action*, which is numerically one and the same, be both vicious and virtuous; and similarly with other things which are not substances. But a substance, being numerically one and the same, admits of contraries. An individual man, for example, being [numerically] one and the same, becomes at one time light but at another dark in colour, at one time warm but at another cold, at one time vicious but at another virtuous.” *Aristotle’s Categories and Propositions*, trans. by H.G. Apostle, (Grinnell, Iowa: The Peripatetic Press, 1980), I, 5.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, I, 7.

contraries is sufficient to produce the change by its absence or presence.”¹⁰⁶ In other words, the two contraries plus the underlying something (the substratum) make three principles, but because one of the contraries and the substratum is all that is needed for production of change, there are two principles.

The names that Aristotle gives to the principles reflect his thinking about them: that which underlies the contraries or the subject he calls *matter*, the contraries he calls *form*, and the lack of some form in matter he calls *privation*. Motion or change is consequently understood as an attainment of a form by matter, a form which it lacked. In other words, when a natural (moving) thing undergoes the process of becoming, it comes to be out of that which it lacked, or out of that which it is *potentially* but not *actually*.

This brings us to the next set of concepts operative in a cosmologist's thinking, namely, *potentiality* and *actuality*. Recall again that we are dealing with *being as mobile*. For some of Aristotle's predecessors like Parmenides dealing with *being as mobile* was an impossibility because the very phrase *being as mobile* was thought to be contradictory. For them *being* is, and *non-being* is not; no middle alternative is possible; change (movement) or *becoming* is an illusion or a trick the mind is prone to as a result of being immersed in the sensible realm.¹⁰⁷ But Aristotle noticed that *becoming* does not mean coming from *being* or from *non-being*, which would be absurd. Refusing to regard the sensible realm and the becoming or motion of things as illusory, Aristotle accepts change as real, as a fact given in experience. That fact is that everything in our experience of the natural realm comes to be from something else. In other words, the thing that changed was what it was, and was *able* to become something else. From this fact we can gather two important concepts. Given

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ See the collection of Parmenides' fragments entitled *The Way of Truth* in Philip Wheelwright's *The Presocratics*, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1966), pp. 96-99.

that every being capable of change is something *and at the same time* has the capacity for being something else, we can regard *being* not only as *that which is*, but also as *that which can be*. The first Aristotle calls *actuality* and the second *potentiality*.¹⁰⁸

The division of *being* into *actual* and *potential* has great significance for philosophizing since all philosophizing is of *being*: “For that which, before aught else, falls under apprehension, is *being*, the notion of which is included in all things whatsoever a man apprehends.”¹⁰⁹ Given that everything we experience, and therefore philosophise about, undergoes change, every natural object is a mixture of potentiality and actuality. Now insofar as potentiality belongs to actual things it is real and not a synonym for nothing (it is not non-being). Note that when we say that a being is potentially something else we do not mean that it is potentially *anything* else. An acorn can become an oak tree but never a chestnut tree. The reason is that an acorn is neither actually nor potentially a chestnut tree, that is, its potentiality for a chestnut tree is not real whereas its potentiality for an oak tree is.

With the concepts of matter, form, privation, potentiality and actuality, Aristotle is able to elaborate further on the principles of nature, or of *being as mobile*. His elaboration gives rise to two of his major doctrines: that of hylemorphism, and that of the four causes. Both doctrines are an extension of the primary principles of nature operating in the context of potentiality and actuality.

Hylemorphism is the name of his theory of the composition of every material substance, or of what Mercier calls the second aspect of the formal object of cosmology: the intrinsic constitution or ultimate constitutive causes of the material universe. According to Aristotle every material substance is a composite of two

¹⁰⁸ Aristotle's introductory discussion of *actuality* and *potentiality* may be found *Physics*, I, 9; *Metaphysics*, V, 7 and IX.

¹⁰⁹ *ST*, I-II, q. 94, a. 2.

intrinsic principles that make up its nature or essence. The first is a principle of potentiality and is called *matter* ('hyle' means *matter*), and the second is a principle of actuality and is called *substantial form* ('morphe' means *form*).

In this further elaboration of the primary principles of nature (moving being) the positive principles of matter and form receive a fuller treatment, while the negative principle of privation disappears from focus. In addition to the two intrinsic principles of change (*prime matter* and *substantial form*), Aristotle introduces two extrinsic principles which are the efficient or agent cause and the end or the final cause. Thus we have the four causes or principles of nature.¹¹⁰

We are now in a position to understand a more technical Aristotelian definition of *being as mobile* or motion. It should be clear by now that when Aristotle speaks of motion he is always speaking of moving beings; he does not separate motion from that which is moving. "Neither motion nor change will be anything apart from the things named, since there is, in fact, nothing other than the things named."¹¹¹ Now things or beings can be in one of three modes: (a) in a state of actuality only, (b) in a state of potentiality only, (c) in a state of both potentiality and actuality (although not at the same time and with respect to the same thing). Given that there are only beings, and that motion is not a being, "there are just as many kinds of motion and of change as there are of being."¹¹² For example, motion is not a quality like liquid or vapor, but is relative to liquid and vapor because it is the passage of some being from

¹¹⁰ The names of the four causes which Aristotle used are not the names scholastic philosophers gave them (material, formal, efficient, and final). He calls them (1) that from which, as a constituent, something is generated, (2) the form or the pattern, this being the formula or the essence, (3) that from which change or coming to rest first begins, and (4) the end, or 'the that for the sake of which.' See *Physics*, II, 3.

¹¹¹ Aristotle, *Physics*, III, 1, 201a 1, trans. by Joe Sachs, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995).

¹¹² *Ibid.*

liquid to vapor. The fact that in each category of being there is a distinction between the actual and the potential allows Aristotle to define motion this way:

the actuality of the potentially existing as existing potentially. For example, the actuality of the alterable as alterable is an alteration... the actuality of the generable or destructible [as such] is a generation or a destruction, and the actuality of the movable with respect to place [as such] is a locomotion.¹¹³

This means that the growth of an acorn into an oak is the actualizing of an acorn's potentiality to be an oak; the purely potential oak is not a motion because it is in potency only; the fully grown oak is not a motion because it is in actuality only; the acorn's *growing* is a motion because it is the actualizing of the acorn's potentiality for being an oak. In light of this, motion may also be defined as "the actuality of that which exists potentially when it is in *actuality* not as itself but as movable."¹¹⁴

Having defined motion this way, Aristotle was compelled to posit yet another principle: *whatever is moved is moved by something else*. Thus, if something is changing, at each interval of its change it is acquiring a new actuality because motion is the actualizing of the potentially existing as existing potentially. If, then, every motion is the actualizing of some potency, everything that is in motion is in potency in some respect.¹¹⁵ It follows that nothing can move itself; if it could, it would have to be in act and in potency in the same respect and at the same time, which is absurd. But if nothing can move itself, and it is in fact moving, motion or

¹¹³ Aristotle, *Physics*, III, 1, 201a 10-16, trans. by H.G. Apostle.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.* We have here a clear differentiation of levels of actuality. When a being is in actuality as movable, it is not thereby in actuality as itself. The causes of these two levels of actuality must be seen as distinct, and must not be blurred into one cause of motion. Consequently cosmology as the study of causes of motion must not be confused with metaphysics as the study of being. At any rate, cosmology is incomplete as a science of causes; there are higher causes than those cosmology is able to reach—causes reached in the divine science where God is encountered, for St. Thomas. This will prove very important for understanding the data of the Ways with respect to their dependence upon the First Cause. See pp. 61-66 below.

¹¹⁵ Consequently, if something moves another, if it is causing another be become actual in some respect, it must be in act exactly in that respect.

change must belong to it only in virtue of the action of an extrinsic cause, an efficient cause which exercises its action rather than not by virtue of the final cause.¹¹⁶

It is at this point that the sphere of cosmology proper touches its borders with metaphysics. If we ask whether the motion of natural or moving things is self-sufficient and self-explanatory, or whether it is moved from outside of nature, we are probing outside the realm of *being as mobile*, outside the realm of nature, and therefore outside the science of physics. We need a new science, which St. Thomas calls *metaphysics*, *first philosophy*, and *divine science*.

Scholastic Metaphysics

Parts two and three of this work are largely an exposition of Thomistic metaphysics, and so it will suffice here only to say something about the concept of *being*, and to give a general meaning of the object of metaphysics which is *being as such*. This will serve both as an introduction as well as the necessary prelude for establishing the general direction in which to seek the proper groundwork of the Five Ways.

Being, St. Thomas maintains,¹¹⁷ is the first principle of intellectual knowledge; it is what our intellect first conceives when we, by our senses, encounter some existing object. Our immediate intellectual response upon encountering an existing object is a judgment that the object *exists*, and that it is *something*. It is in this immediate judgment that we, although vaguely, already possess the concept of *being as such*. A metaphysician's task, as St. Thomas understands that task, is to make this concept explicit by distinguishing between *being* and that which the intellect pronounces a being. We shall do this in chapters seven and eight.

¹¹⁶ See *Physics*, VII, 1 and VIII, 4. We shall pick up this discussion again in Part Three.

¹¹⁷ See *ST*, I, q. 5, 2; *ST*, I-II, q. 94, a. 2.

The English language does not readily lend itself to expressing various meanings of *being* with which a metaphysician operates. The same term *being* functions in several different ways. It is, first of all, (A) the present participle of the verb 'to be'. A helpful way to distinguish it from other meanings would be to write it as *be-ing*. *Being* is also (B) a noun, as for example *painting* is a noun. This noun functions in at least three different contexts: (B') *a being* (like 'a painting'); (B'') a set of *beings* (like a collection of 'paintings'); and (B''') the common nature of all *beings* (or 'paintings'). In metaphysics sense (A), or *be-ing* means existence, or the actual exercise of the act of existing. But sense (B''') is used to express *being as such*, or that which is common to everything that in some way exists. St. Thomas uses the Latin word *ens* to express this meaning of *being*, and we may say that *ens* designates that by which whatever is real, is real. For sense (A) St. Thomas used the word *esse* ('to be' or 'be-ing'), and we may say that *esse* is that by which the real or *ens* is actual. For St. Thomas being (*ens*) is that whose act it is to exist (*esse*).¹¹⁸ Thus *ens* expresses the subject of existence, and *esse* expresses the act of the subject whereby the subject exists. We shall explain this in more detail in chapter eight.

Perhaps the best way to grasp the object of metaphysics, which is *being as such*, is to compare it to *being as mobile*. It will be helpful to recall the different degrees of abstraction from matter and motion by which the intellect attains the two different objects. If the object's dependence upon matter and motion is such that it can neither exist nor be understood without it, the object is called *being as mobile* (being as subject to change). By distinguishing individual marks and the individual matter of perceptible beings from their common and universal status as changeable (mobile) and sensible substances, the intellect attains the object of *being as mobile*.

¹¹⁸ In *SCG*, II, 54, 3 St. Thomas says that "being is the proper act of the whole substance" (*ipsum esse est proprius actus substantiae totius*)... and "the substance is called a *being*" (*substantia denominatur ens*). We can say, then, that existence (*esse*) is the proper act of a being (*ens*).

On the other hand, as we have already seen, in the third and highest degree of abstraction the intellect discerns an even deeper common trait belonging to all beings; whether they be mobile or not, quantified or not, they *are*, they are *beings*; they are objects that do not depend upon matter and motion for their being because either they are never found realised in matter, or they are sometimes found to be realised in matter and sometimes not. These, St. Thomas says, "are the objects of the science that investigates what is common to all beings, which has for its subject being as being."¹¹⁹

When abstracting in this highest degree, the intellect sees that mobility or changableness, quality, quantity, even materiality, are not necessary characteristics of being. That is, the intellect sees that *to be* is not synonymous with change (becoming), materiality, quantity, quality, etc. The fact that an object of our experience is material, moving, and so on, is different from the fact that it *is*, that it is a being. The intellect also sees that the

thing conceived by the intellect is being; because everything is knowable only inasmuch as it is in actuality. Hence, being is the proper object of the intellect, and is primarily intelligible; as sound is that which is primarily audible.¹²⁰

As primarily intelligible, *being* is prior to the *moving*, the *material*, etc.; if a thing's motion and materiality are mentally set aside, which is an act of the intellect St. Thomas calls the highest degree of abstraction, it is still understandable as a being. Conversely, *motion*, *materiality*, and all other concepts are not understandable unless *being* or *that which is* be understood with it and prior to it. When St. Thomas says that "everything is knowable only inasmuch as it is in actuality," he means that being is the proper object of the intellect, that being is what gives the intellect any content at all, it is what makes anything at all intelligible. Consequently, when as

¹¹⁹ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Division and Methods of the Sciences*, q. V, a. 4. ed. cit.

¹²⁰ *ST*, I, q. 5, a. 2.

metaphysicians we are looking at things in the world and inquiring into their highest cause, we are studying them as beings or existents first and foremost.

We can say, then, that metaphysics, as a science of *being as such*, studies the primary and most basic object of all thought, the object upon which all other objects depend for intelligibility. The truths of this object apply to everything that is or can be because nothing is or can be unless it is a being, for if it is not a being, it is nothing. Now just like the science of *being as mobile* has its principles, so does the science of *being as such*. They are principles of contradiction, identity, causality, and finality. We shall discuss these in chapter six. Because they are principles of *being as such*, of that which is prior to everything, they are absolutely and universally true, and we may reason in light of them about everything in reality. In addition to its principles, *being as such* possesses certain basic determinations. These are actuality and potentiality, existence and essence, substance and accident.

As a product of the highest degree of abstraction, *being as such* is synonymous with immaterial being because it is abstracted from materiality. This means that inquiries that study properties like mobility and quantity (cosmology and mathematics), that determine being in so far as it is affected by materiality, cannot be an inquiry that has *being as such* for its object, it cannot be said to be properly metaphysical, and therefore not the divine science. Proper metaphysics studies its object in separation from material conditions in which it may or may not be found. Both the cosmologist and the metaphysician work with *being, potentiality* and *actuality, substance* and *accident*, but the metaphysician works with them in their connection to the immaterial being, being abstracted to the highest degree possible for the human intellect from matter and motion.

With this we have said enough about cosmology and metaphysics to be able to ask and answer which science provides the more fitting context for an intellectual inquiry like the Five Ways. This is the subject matter of the next chapter.

CHAPTER IV

The *Five Ways* and the *Cosmological Argument*

"All who err concerning essence and being will err even more in other matters."

Thomas de Vio, Cajetan, *In De Ente et Essentia*

The need to establish a proper context of the Five Ways arises as soon as we begin making our way through several contemporary interpretations of them. What strikes a newcomer into the discussions as puzzling is the various and seemingly incompatible understandings of the data of the Ways, which are often stated very briefly and not clearly. Thus, for example, Peter Geach, says that "the first two 'ways' differ only in that one relates to the process of change and the other to things coming to be."¹²¹ Frederick Copleston, on the other hand, says that "in the first proof Aquinas considers things as being acted upon, as being changed or 'moved', in the second he considers them as active agents, as efficient causes."¹²² Perhaps, upon reflection and further explanation (which is lacking in Copleston and Geach), we may come to see Geach's and Copleston's understandings of the First Way as similar, but we certainly could not do so with respect to the Second Way, for to come to be and to be an efficient cause can hardly be thought of as the same. Richard Swinburne thinks the First Way is not properly speaking a *cosmological*

¹²¹ Geach, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

¹²² Copleston, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

argument “since it argues not from the existence of physical objects, but from change in them.”¹²³ What Swinburne means when he distinguishes change “in objects” from physical changing objects is difficult to ascertain, but the Aristotelian understanding of change or motion is such that it prevents us from imposing Swinburne’s distinction: “neither motion nor change will be anything apart from the things named, since there is, in fact, nothing other than the things named.”¹²⁴ In other words, for Aristotle motion is not something like magnetism whose properties can be studied apart from existing things. But Swinburne clearly differs from Geach and Copleston in his understanding of the data of the First Way. And still another understanding of the data of the First Way can be seen in Joseph Owens who identifies it as “motion that is actually going on in the sensible world. The integrity of the fact involves existential actuation.”¹²⁵ For Owens, moving things in the world can only be fully understood, as the data of the First Way, along the lines of what he calls “existential actuation.”

Differences in understandings of the data of the Third Way are also significant. Geach understands it as dealing “with contingent and necessary existence (Aquinas’s actual word is ‘*possibilia*’, not ‘*contingentia*’; but this does not signify).”¹²⁶ Anthony Kenny’s understanding appears significantly different: “generable and corruptible beings, i.e. bodies which consist of matter which has existed in other forms and which can survive in altered form their own destruction.”¹²⁷

All these varying and conflicting understandings of the data of the Ways call for a fresh look at them; a look that consults St. Thomas. A newcomer into these

¹²³ Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, (Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 118. n.2.

¹²⁴ Aristotle, *Physics*, III, 1, 201a 1, trans. by Joe Sachs.

¹²⁵ Joseph Owens, *St. Thomas on the Existence of God*, ed. by John Catan, (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1980). p. 190.

¹²⁶ Geach, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

¹²⁷ Kenny, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

discussions notices that many contemporary interpreters do not bother to consult St. Thomas in his other texts on how the data on the basis of which one can reach God are to be understood. Nor do they pay attention to texts where St. Thomas explicitly says how God is understood philosophically. A knowledge of how the Cause, which is understood by all as God, and its effects (the data) is to be understood seems indispensable as a prerequisite for a profitable reading of the arguments for such a cause. Such knowledge will give us a starting point from which every interpretation must commence if it is to be worth considering.

The First Cause of *the Five Ways* and its Effects

The following two statements of St. Thomas, one from a very early work and the other from a very late work, give us a clear indication of the direction in which lies the proper context of his philosophizing about God. “The first being, which is being in all its purity... is the first cause, or God.”¹²⁸ “It is evident that *mobile being*, with which the philosophy of nature deals, adds to *being* pure and simple, with which metaphysics is concerned.”¹²⁹ Based on these statements and on our discussion in chapter three, we can say that the difference between philosophizing as a cosmologist and a metaphysician consists, for St. Thomas, in philosophizing about *mobile being* or *being as changing* and about *being* pure and simple or *being as being*. Only in philosophizing about *being as being*, only in metaphysics, can one find “being in all its purity, the first cause, or God.”

This, I maintain, gives us a sufficient warrant to make and defend with further evidence the claim that the Five Ways are not an example of what Kant and the Wolffian tradition of Kant’s day, call the *cosmological argument*. We may put the

¹²⁸ *On Being and Essence*, ch. IV, 7.

¹²⁹ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, trans. by J.P. Rowan, (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1961), Bk. I, lect. 2. This work shall henceforth be referred to as *In Metaph.*

point another way: The Five Ways cannot be properly understood as St. Thomas meant them if they are interpreted within the context of cosmology, but must be interpreted as metaphysical arguments of the philosophy of *being as such*.¹³⁰

In his first *Summa* St. Thomas gives us a very valuable advice for understanding his philosophizing about God.

In order to know the things that the reason can investigate concerning God, a knowledge of many things must already be possessed. For almost all philosophy is directed towards the knowledge of God, and that is why metaphysics, which deals with divine things, is the last part of philosophy to be learned. This means that we are able to arrive at the inquiry concerning the aforementioned truth only on the basis of a great deal of labour spent in study. Those who wish to undergo such labour for the mere love of knowledge are few.¹³¹

This advice is largely ignored by interpreters and critics of the Five Ways because, as we have seen in chapter two, they do not pay attention to the Thomistic metaphysics required for knowing “the things reason can investigate concerning God.” We found in their readings of St. Thomas’ arguments very little or nothing from the divine science, or the philosophy of *being as such*. Their view seems to be that if we reach the First Mover, or the First Efficient Cause on the basis of motion or efficient causality in things in the world, we have shown how St. Thomas thinks he has reached “that which all men call God.” But this overlooks his insistence that knowledge of God is only attained in the context of metaphysics which for him, as we saw in chapter three, is philosophy of *being as such*. The interpretations of the

¹³⁰ I am aware that there is in the Thomistic scholarship a reference made to St. Thomas’ proofs for God as *cosmological* (see Cardinal Mercier, *A Manual of Modern Scholastic Philosophy*). The reference here is an attempt to distinguish St. Thomas’ proofs from the *ontological* arguments such as Anselm’s and Descartes’. The distinction is introduced to distinguish arguments that begin from objective reality from those that begin in thought. But within the last thirty years much of what passes for a *cosmological* argument is philosophised about without an understanding of causality within the context of *being as being*. It is within that context that St. Thomas’ understanding of the principle of causality must be viewed, and consequently his understanding of the First Cause which all men call God. The data, as actualised potencies, from which this Cause is argued to must also be seen within the context of *being as being*. That is why I propose that we view the Five Ways as metaphysical, as within the philosophy of being as being, rather than *cosmological*. The contemporary climate has, I think, made this necessary.

¹³¹ *SCG*, I, 4, 3.

three philosophers we met in chapter two are entirely bereft of any reference to the kind of thinking St. Thomas says, in *Commentary on the Trinity of Boethius*, must be operative in the science which deals with God, the thinking about *being as such*.

We cannot, then, but ask the following question: *What does philosophizing about being as such have to do with the reasoning and arguments in the Five Ways?* Unless we can answer that, my thesis is that we cannot approach properly and read profitably St. Thomas' demonstrations of God's existence.

It will not do to object by saying that there is no talk of *being as such* anywhere in the Five Ways because St. Thomas stresses enough in his other works that philosophical God-talk is to be metaphysical, and that metaphysical talk is of *being as such*; this concerns *all* philosophical God-talk, including arguments for his existence.

Perhaps the best way to put forth a compelling case for the claim that the Five Ways are not an instance of the *cosmological argument* but five metaphysical arguments developed in the context of the philosophy of *being as such*, is to consider some of St. Thomas' own statements regarding the first cause and its effects.

We have already encountered one of his descriptions of the first cause. In a very early work St. Thomas says that "the first being, which is being in all its purity... is the first cause, or God."¹³² In his late work, *Summa Theologiae*, we find St. Thomas making the same claim. "It must be that all things which are diversified by the divers participation of being, so as to be more or less perfect, are caused by one First Being, Who possesses being most perfectly."¹³³ Doctrinally, then, St. Thomas is consistent on this point throughout his life. The importance of this description of the First Cause who is First Being begins to emerge as soon as we ask these questions: To what extent are things in the world, as effects of some cause,

¹³² *On Being and Essence*, ch. IV, 7.

¹³³ *ST*, I, q. 44, a. 1.

dependent upon the cause? And what would it mean to say that they are dependent on the cause, which as their cause comes to be known as “first being in all its purity?”¹³⁴ St. Thomas explains this in a text crucial to our discussion of God as the first cause.

Effects correspond proportionally to their causes, so that we attribute actual effects to actual causes, potential effects to potential causes, and similarly particular effects to particular causes and universal effects to universal causes. Now the act of being is the first effect, and this is evident by the universal presence of this act. It follows that the proper cause of the act of being is the first and universal agent, namely God.

It seems then that effects depend on their cause first and foremost for, what St. Thomas calls, their act of being; not for their being moved or for moving other beings, or for being this or that *kind* of a being (*human*, for example). But if the act of being is the first effect,¹³⁵ the first cause must be *first* because it is a cause of that act first and foremost, and not because it is the cause of the act of motion, or efficiency, etc. This first and universal proper cause St. Thomas calls God. He further explains what he means by this dependence of effects on the cause of their act of being by distinguishing it from another kind of dependence.

Other agents indeed are not the cause of the act of being as such, but of being *this*—of being a man or being white, for example. On the contrary, the act of being, as such, is caused by creation, which presupposes nothing; because nothing can pre-exist that is outside being as such. By makings other than creation, *this* being or *such* being is produced; for out of pre-existent being is made this being or such a being. It remains that creation is the proper action of God.¹³⁶

So, to be caused *to be* is to be created, but to be produced or generated into this or that *kind* of being out of pre-existent being is to be made. Effects depend on a cause both for their being and for their being this or that kind of being. Only one cause is

¹³⁴ We have already seen that in *ST*, I, q. 104, a. 1, St. Thomas says that “every effect depends on its cause, so far as it is its cause. But we must observe that an agent [one causing another in some way] may be the cause of the *becoming* of its effect, but not directly of its *being*.” Clearly, then, we must look for levels of dependence upon a cause in things that are caused.

¹³⁵ In Part Two and Three of this work we shall examine in detail philosophical arguments for the character and priority of the act of being.

¹³⁶ *SCG*, II, 21, 4.

up to the job of the former cause, and such a cause is the creator and not a mere maker (as Geach understands the cause of the First Way).

But, we need to ask, why is there only one cause capable of being the First and universal proper cause of the act of being? St. Thomas' answer lies in the text we have already taken up, the early text where he says that pure being is the first cause or God, which on this point is consistent with the late text in *ST*, I, q. 44, a. 1.

Whatever belongs to a thing is either caused by the principles of its nature... or comes to it from an extrinsic principle... Now being itself cannot be caused by the form or quiddity of a thing (by 'caused' I mean an efficient cause), because that thing would then be its own cause and it would bring itself into being, which is impossible. It follows that everything whose being is distinct from its nature must have being from another. And because everything that exists through another is reduced to that which exists through itself as to its first cause, there must be a reality that is the cause of all other things because it is pure being. If this were not so, we would go on to infinity in causes, for everything that is not pure being has a cause of its being.¹³⁷

The reason, then, why only one cause is the first and proper cause of the act of being is that it differs from everything else with respect to the act of being, and this we know because everything else is not identically the act of being (for if, for example, to be a *human* being and *to be* were identical, only human beings would be, which is against the fact) and as such it must have that act by reception, or caused.¹³⁸

¹³⁷ *On Being and Essence*, ch. IV, 7. See also *ST*, I, q. 3, a. 4. Some Thomist scholars think this passage in *On Being and Essence* constitutes one of St. Thomas' demonstrations for God's existence, others disagree. What, in my judgment, stands in the way of our regarding it as a formal demonstration is first of all its absence in two main places where St. Thomas clearly offers a collection of arguments for God's existence (*SCG*, I, 13 & *ST*, I, q. 2, a. 3). Secondly, in this work St. Thomas does not explicitly offer this text as a demonstration of God; if he does not so offer it, we need not so take it. But he does offer the text as the context in which such a demonstration operates. It tells us how to view God as the first cause, and creatures as his effects. For that reason this is an indispensable text for establishing a proper context of the Five Ways.

¹³⁸ St. Thomas makes the same point in his later *Summa* in a text we already took up. "If the existence of a thing differs from its essence [as it does in all creatures], this existence must be caused either by some exterior agent or by its essential principles. Now it is impossible for a thing's existence to be caused by its essential constituent principles, for nothing can be the sufficient cause of its own existence, if its existence is caused. Therefore, that thing whose existence differs from its essence, must have its existence caused by another. But this cannot be true of God; because we call God the first efficient cause. Therefore, it is impossible that in God His existence should differ from His essence." *ST*, I, q. 44, a. 1. Again, this is no more a formal proof of God's existence than the text in *On Being and Essence*, IV, 7, but it is just as much an indication of the proper context for a formal proof,

Here we have a clear indication of what St. Thomas means by *first* when he calls God the First Cause. At the beginning of his first *Summa* (I, 1) we find another indication “First philosophy is the science of truth, not of any truth, but of that truth which is the origin of all truth, namely, which belongs to *the first principle whereby all things are*. The truth belonging to such a principle is, clearly, the source of all truth; for things have the same disposition in truth as in being.” Thus we may say that the first or highest cause means the cause of that in virtue of which an actual being is ultimately actual—is ultimately caused to be; it means “the first principle whereby all things are.”

Therefore, a proper understanding of St. Thomas’ philosophizing about God or of the highest cause must include an understanding of what, for him, in the final analysis makes an actual thing actual or what makes a being be. This, St. Thomas says, in a middle text, is *being*. “*Being* is the highest perfection of all. *Being* is the actuality of all acts, and therefore the perfection of all perfections.”¹³⁹ It is only when we have understood what he means by *being* that we can make sense of his inquiry into the first or highest cause of the being of things, or the proper cause of their act of being. And that is why St. Thomas says that much knowledge gained by a great deal of effort is required to begin philosophizing about God. The Five Ways are five different demonstrations of the first cause of the act of being. Therefore, *the context of the Five Ways is that of a philosophical activity in which one tries to reach the ultimate cause in an actual thing of that which ultimately makes it actual or gives it actuality, which is its act of being*. We shall begin to look in this direction only if we consider the effects of the first cause with respect to their most central need of being

that is, it tells us something about the data of the Five Ways and their dependence on the First Cause, and about the irrelevance of an infinite regress.

¹³⁹ *De Pot.*, q. VII, a. 2, ad 9.

caused—what primarily makes them an effect, an actual *something*. This, St. Thomas tells us, is their act of being.

What are some alternative ways of looking at the effects of the first cause; where other than in their act of being can we look for the center of their dependence on the first cause? In chapter two we saw three possibilities: Copleston looks for it in their efficiency (in their power to move something else) and the external conditions required for exercising the power of efficiency; Geach looks for it in their being changed or moved; and Kenny looks for it in their being generable (in their matter having the capacity to receive another form). All these fail to distinguish between a thing's dependence on a cause for its act of being and various other kinds of dependence, a distinction which we have seen St. Thomas make.¹⁴⁰ We shall fail to make this distinction whenever we fail to distinguish between *being as mobile* and *being as such*. But St. Thomas insists that we make this distinction when he says that “the movable does not owe its being to its mover, but only its movement,” or “the movable does not depend on the mover for its being, but only for its being moved.”¹⁴¹

Clearly, then, the proper cause of the act of being, the First Cause which all men call God, is not the *first* as the cause of *being as mobile* but as the cause of *being as such*. But if the First Cause is understood only as the cause of the change or movement in another, the effect is dependent on the First Cause only for the movement and only at the interval in which it receives the movement, and such a First Cause is inoperative when the thing is not being moved. Remember the Aristotelian definition of motion we encountered in chapter three: “the actuality of

¹⁴⁰ See *De Pot.*, q. III, a. 5; *SCG*, II, 52; *ST*, I, q. 44, a. 2; I, q. 45, a. 4, ad 1 and 2; I, q. 104, a. 1.

¹⁴¹ *SCG*, II, 57, 11&12. In *SCG*, III, 65, 5 St. Thomas says that “though motion may occur for any existing thing, motion is apart from the being of the thing.”

that which exists potentially when it is in *actuality* not as itself but as movable.”¹⁴² Clearly, the First Mover understood only as the cause of motion in a being is not a cause of its actuality as itself, but only insofar as it moves. Thus if water moves from cold to hot, it is dependent on the cause of that motion only during the change from cold to hot, but not when it is cold nor when it is hot, nor even for being water, and certainly not for being a being, which, for St. Thomas, water is before it is anything else. A dependence on such a first cause is not a dependence on that which all men call God. But no matter how elaborate our understanding of *being as mobile* and of its dependence on a cause may be, we shall never find in that understanding its need for the First Cause by which all men mean God unless we see its dependence for being, and we shall never see a dependence for being except by doing metaphysics or the science of *being as being*. The extent to which we have seen, in chapter three, St. Thomas makes the distinction between philosophy of nature and metaphysics is too clear and elaborate not to be employed in an interpretation of his philosophizing about God.

Furthermore, St. Thomas distinguishes between cosmology and metaphysics by different degrees of abstraction, and by saying that in the former we engage in rational thinking and in the latter in intellectual thinking. He points out “that rational thinking ends in intellectual thinking,” and that “all rational thinking in all the sciences... terminates in the knowledge of divine science.”¹⁴³ This means that the thinking and conclusions of cosmology, which is thinking about *being as mobile* come to their fruition in metaphysics or the thinking about *being as such*. If, then, by way of cosmology we arrive at the Unmoved Mover and the First Efficient Cause as the cause of *being as mobile*, we must bring it up into metaphysics and see it as a truly *first* cause, as a cause of *being as being*. Only that way shall we reach God as

¹⁴²Aristotle, *Physics*, III, 1, 201a 10-16, trans. by H.G. Apostle.

¹⁴³*Division and Methods of the Sciences*, q. VI, a. 1, ed. cit.

the proper cause of the act of being, as the cause of being pure and simple. In other words, we must see the Five Ways not as rational demonstrations, as belonging to cosmology, but as intellectual demonstrations operating in light of the principles which arise from being pure and simple.

But to engage in intellectual, metaphysical thinking in our interpretation of the Five Ways we shall have to view the data, the effects, as bearers of the act of being first and foremost. We shall have to engage in a higher degree of abstraction than is operative in cosmology and the study of *being as mobile*. Given that cosmology and metaphysics “are differentiated according to their degree of separation from matter and motion,”¹⁴⁴ the data of the Five Ways must be viewed metaphysically, which is to say in a higher degree of separation from matter and motion. Anthony Kenny finds this puzzling. In his interpretation of the First Way he considers the possibility that the first premise of the argument (“It is certain, and evident to our senses, that in the world some things are in motion.”) may be looked at metaphysically. When told by Joseph Owens that a metaphysical consideration of that premise must be done “ultimately in terms of the existential act [the act of being],”¹⁴⁵ Kenny replies in the following way. “The texts [Owens] quotes from St. Thomas do not seem to support the *nonsensical* view that when you have explained a particular motion at a particular time you have to explain also the occurrence of that motion.”¹⁴⁶

Kenny misses the point entirely. To say that we have explained a particular motion at a particular time is to say, in the Thomistic context, that we have as cosmologists said something about *being as mobile*. We have been natural scientists engaged in what St. Thomas calls rational thinking which operates in light of the

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.* q. V, a. 1.

¹⁴⁵ Joseph Owens, *St. Thomas on the Existence of God*, p. 166.

¹⁴⁶ Kenny, *op. cit.*, p. 11, n. 1. Emphasis mine.

principles of motion we discussed in chapter three. But as metaphysicians, as philosophers of the divine science, we also want to explain the *being* of *that which moves* (of *being as mobile*) because its act of being is its first effect, prior even to its motion. It is not nonsensical to look for the cause of the act of being of a moving thing, because “the movable does not depend on the mover for its being, but only for its being moved.”¹⁴⁷ Kenny completely misconstrues Owens when, by the act of being of a moving thing, he takes him “to mean the actual occurrence of a motion... [as] something different from the motion occurring.”¹⁴⁸ That a thing is moved, or that its motion occurs upon the action of a cause is one thing, but that a being which is moved also *exists* as moving is another and very different matter which also, according to St. Thomas, requires a cause. Because Kenny commits himself from the outset to an exclusively cosmological reading of the Five Ways, a reading at the level of *being as mobile*, he is unable to understand the meaning of the First Cause as the proper cause of the act of being. It is no wonder, then, that he finds St. Thomas failing to demonstrate God’s existence. He looks in the direction where St. Thomas does not place his arguments.

In one of St. Thomas’ less studied works he tells us how we are to understand the effects on the basis of which we can know that God exists. It is “through causality. For sensible creatures are imperfect and changeable, they must be reduced to some unchangeable and perfect principle. And from this we know that God exists.”¹⁴⁹ Now what is that unchangeable and perfect principle to which sensible creatures, the data of the Five Ways, must be reduced in order that *through causality* we may know that God exists? That principle must be their being, which, according to St.

¹⁴⁷ SCG, II, 57, 11&12.

¹⁴⁸ Kenny, *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ St. Thomas Aquinas, *In Epistolam ad Romanos* I, lect. 6 (in *Divisions and Methods of the Sciences*, ed. cit., p. 87, n. 27.)

Thomas, is “the highest perfection of all, the actuality of all acts, and therefore the perfection of all perfections.”¹⁵⁰ We must see the data of the Five Ways as beings, or existents, because St. Thomas tells us to.

It need not puzzle us that nowhere in the Five Ways St. Thomas explicitly mentions the act of being. He does not need to if we are well acquainted with his *Commentary on the Trinity of Boethius* and *On Being and Essence*. The Five Ways come after “a knowledge of many things already possessed..., and only on the basis of a great deal of labour spent in study.”¹⁵¹ St. Thomas, knowing that in the Five Ways he is doing metaphysics and that his readers, who were primarily *magistri* of Sacred Theology, know that to be so, simply assumes the pre-requisite knowledge of philosophy of *being as such* and argues for the first cause of the act of being from the sensible creatures, accessible to us by experience, viewed as bearers of the act of being which is not part of their nature and must therefore be owed to an extrinsic cause. St. Thomas’ employment of *actuality, potentiality, cause, impossibility of infinite regress*, is to be understood as belonging to the science of the highest degree of abstraction from matter and motion which is the philosophy of *being as such*. If, in looking at the data of the Five Ways, we lose sight of them as things whose first and most universal effect is the act of being, we shall not find our way to that which all men call God, but shall, by way of rational rather than intellectual thinking, get tangled up in the First Cause of motion, efficiency, generation, order, etc. It will then be impossible to see how, in St. Thomas’ mind, all these different causes are the same God; we shall not see what all these causes have in common which earns them the title “that which all men call God.”

¹⁵⁰ *De Pot.*, q. VII, a. 2, ad 9.

¹⁵¹ *SCG*, I, 4, 3. The reason why it must be metaphysical study, a great deal of which is required for philosophizing about God, is that we need to see things in the world as possessing an act of being as separate from all its other acts. Only after seeing it can we ask about its proper cause. Therefore, philosophizing about God comes on the heels of much metaphysical inquiry, which itself comes on the heels of much cosmological inquiry.

Thus, in order to understand the data of the First Way, for example, in a way that will lead to God as the proper cause of the act of being, we must see the data as beings first and foremost, but also, and in fact inseparably¹⁵² so, as beings that acquired an additional factor (in this case it is motion or change of some sort) and which exist as qualified by that additional factor. Recall St. Thomas' claim "that *mobile being*, with which the philosophy of nature deals, ADDS to *being* pure and simple, with which metaphysics is concerned."¹⁵³ In a much earlier text St. Thomas says: "Things are not distinguished from one another in having being, for in this they agree... Things differ because they have diverse natures, to which being *accrues* in a diverse way."¹⁵⁴ This addition, dealt with by natural philosophy, to which being accrues so affects the sensible being of our data that its way of being is *as qualified* by motion or change. Because this is so, the proper cause of the act of being reasoned to in the First Way must be the proper cause of the act of being of that being which exists as qualified by motion or change, as having acquired this or that addition. Hence the First *Mover*. But this is the First Mover not only of the acquired *qualification* of the being in question in the First Way,¹⁵⁵ but also of its *being* which is its first and most universal dependence on a cause. If we do not note well this twofold dependence on a cause, the God to which we shall arrive at the end of the First Way will not be more of a God than an Unchanged Changer responsible only for the changes going on in changing beings, and leaving untouched their dependence for their act of being.

¹⁵² But the data is separable by the intellect operating at the third level of abstraction, which, in the *Commentary on the Trinity of Boethius*, St. Thomas calls *separation*. See chapter three above.

¹⁵³ *In I Metaph.*, lect. 2, ed. cit., p. 20.

¹⁵⁴ *SCG*, I, 26, 3.

¹⁵⁵ One could arrive at such a First Mover only by way of the first degree of abstraction which operates in the realm of *being as mobile* and not in the realm of the divine science where God comes to be known philosophically.

Furthermore, it will be impossible to connect such a God to the cause of the Third Way, for example. There the data are beings that do not acquire this or that additional *factor* of being, like motion, efficiency and order, but acquire the act itself of being, and we know that they do acquire it because we see them going in and out of being. This is not the most manifest of Ways because to see a being existing as having acquired the act of being requires a more penetrating metaphysical reflection than to see it as having acquired the act of changing, and so its place is in the middle of the Five Ways. But, as I shall show in chapter eleven, here the cause to which our intellect arrives is immediately the proper cause of the act of being, and not the proper cause of the act of being of a being existing as qualified by some addition dealt with by the philosophy of nature. The cause of both the First and Third Ways will be seen to be what St. Thomas calls the proper cause of the act of being, and which all men call God, only if we understand the data of each of them as we have just described it. That we must see the data that way is clear as soon as we take seriously St. Thomas' insistence that philosophical God-talk, with all its related terminology first met in philosophy of nature and then elevated to a higher level of abstraction, must take place within the context of metaphysics or philosophy of *being as such*. We shall have to inquire into St. Thomas' metaphysics enough to be able to begin seeing the data in the way just described and to understand it that way. Parts two and three of this work are intended for that purpose.

The *Cosmological Argument*

I suggest that what stands in our way of reading and interpreting the Five Ways within the context of philosophy of *being as such* is our modern understanding of the so called *cosmological argument*. It is true that there is not only one understanding of the *cosmological argument*, but I maintain that all versions of it whether they issue from Leibniz, Wolf, or Samuel Clarke, are a serious impediment

to reading profitably and interpreting correctly the Five Ways if their context is imposed on the Five Ways. The reason is that in the *cosmological argument*, of any version nowadays entertained, the First Cause reasoned to is never seen nor mentioned as the cause of, what St. Thomas calls, the act of being. The reason why it is not so seen is that the effect of the First Cause of any version of the *cosmological argument*, or the data from which one reasons to the First Cause, is always gathered only by the kind of thinking operative in cosmology which has as its proper object, what St. Thomas calls, *mobile being*. All of the characteristics of *mobile being* are discovered and reasoned about by the thinking process St. Thomas calls “first degree of abstraction” from matter and motion. Beings considered by the mind operating at this degree of abstraction can only be conceived as dependent upon a cause for some qualification and factor of being like motion, efficiency, order, etc., but not for that act which St. Thomas calls “the highest perfection of all, the actuality of all acts.” In other words, unless we see the data of the Five Ways as requiring a cause of their being (*esse*) which is their proper act,¹⁵⁶ we will not understand properly the context of St. Thomas’ arguments for God’s existence.

The *cosmological argument* is sometimes referred to as an *a posteriori* argument because it is based on a premise that can be known through experience of the world. What is said to be experienced is the world as consisting in things that are caused to exist. So far that sounds very much like St. Thomas. But we must be very careful here to ask: Is the cause of them conceived as of that which we primarily see as moving or changing or of that which is first and foremost a being existing as having acquired or as acquiring some additional factor or qualification? Our answer depends on how we are viewing *them*. If we are viewing them as philosophers of being as being, we shall be on the same wavelength with St. Thomas; if we are not,

¹⁵⁶ See SCG, II, 54, 3, and n. 118, p. 55 above.

we shall misconstrue his argument in a variety of ways, most of which will betray our thinking as operating merely at the level of cosmology.

Consider William Rowe, a contemporary philosopher of religion who has published much on the *cosmological argument*. He says that “Aquinas put forth five distinct arguments for the existence of God, and of these, the first three are versions of Cosmological Argument.”¹⁵⁷ What the other two are Rowe does not say, but by seeing the first three Ways as different from the Fourth and the Fifth he obviously regards the *kind* of thinking St. Thomas is engaged in the Five Ways as in some way fragmented. Here is how Rowe, operating within the context of the *cosmological argument*, understands St. Thomas’ reasoning. He thinks that in the First and the Second Way St. Thomas

started from the fact that there are things in the world undergoing change and reasoned to the conclusion that there must be some ultimate cause of change that is itself unchanging. In the second he started from the fact that there are things in the world that clearly are caused to exist by other things and reasoned to the conclusion that there must be some ultimate cause of existence whose own existence is itself uncaused.¹⁵⁸

Rowe disagrees with Kenny and sees the data of the Third Way not as alterable things leading to the unalterable cause, but as things which need not have existed at all but nevertheless do, and as such need a cause that exists in a way that it could not fail to do so.

Rowe’s understanding of St. Thomas’ reasoning in the first two Ways is a good example of regarding the caused data only as changing things, because he reads St. Thomas as looking for “some ultimate cause of change.”¹⁵⁹ He fails to distinguish, as

¹⁵⁷ William Rowe, *Philosophy of Religion*, p. 17.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ That we ought not so regard the data or the effects of the proper cause of the act of being is clear from St. Thomas’ following point. “Accidents and forms and the like non-subsisting things are to be said to co-exist rather than to exist, so they ought to be called rather *concreated* than *created* things; whereas, properly speaking, created things are subsistent beings.” *ST*, I, q. 45, a. 4. In other words, the cause of the existence of things is not simply the cause of things as changing, or as having this or that characteristic, but of the cause of things as beings or existents.

St. Thomas does, between the cosmological study of *being as mobile* and the metaphysical one of *being as such*. In saying that St. Thomas' ultimate or first cause is a cause only of change, he misses St. Thomas' insistence that "the movable does not depend on the mover for its being, but only for its being moved."¹⁶⁰ In other words, he does not see that for St. Thomas the First Cause is *first* because it is the cause of the first and most universal effect which is the act of being. For that reason he reads St. Thomas in the Second Way as thinking that "there are things in the world that clearly are caused to exist by other things." But St. Thomas makes no such claim in the Second Way. We have pointed out above texts¹⁶¹ which show that, for him, a creature is incapable of directly making something to be, of giving something the act of being. If we fail to note this, we shall not be able to understand the data of the Second Way as St. Thomas offers it, and consequently not be able to see how he understands the First Cause of that data. Here again we must get out of that mode of thinking which is proper to cosmology and its consideration of being not yet highly enough abstracted from matter and motion to enable us to see it as belonging to all things, whether material or immaterial, and as separate from this or that qualification of it.

It follows that all of the modern and contemporary criticisms of the *cosmological argument* leveled at the Five Ways are misdirected, and as such only get in the way of our trying to understand St. Thomas' arguments. Such criticisms, stemming from an inadequate distinction between Thomistic cosmology and metaphysics, only cloud our view of St. Thomas' reasoning and steer us in the direction in which we shall never be able to see why he thinks he has successfully reasoned to that which all men call God.

¹⁶⁰ *SCG*, II, 57, 11&12.

¹⁶¹ *De Pot.*, q. III, a. 5; q. VII, a. 2; *ST*, I, q. 44, a. 2; I, q. 45, a. 4, ad 1 and 2; I, q. 104, a. 1.

But even though we may have been misdirected by the *cosmological* tradition of looking at the Five Ways, we are given advice to look at them differently by formidable scholars of St. Thomas. We cannot, in all intellectual honesty, which is indispensable for learning, ignore their advice. One such piece of advice, which I find very compelling, comes from Martin Grabmann.

The metaphysics of St. Thomas is not merely an arrangement of ideas, but stands in living relationship with reality. It is a basic conviction of his philosophy that the human mind, chiefly by abstraction, then also by intuition and inference, is able to discover *being* and the laws and relations of *being* in experienced reality. It can perceive an agreement between the laws of *being* and the structure of the mind, the *ratio* in both a subjective and objective sense, which has its ultimate foundation in God, the First Cause of *being* and thought.

The supreme laws of *being* in their transcendent validity, surpassing the limits of Empiricism, are similar to unshakable pillars upon which our knowledge of causes lays the bridge to a knowledge of God. The metaphysical doctrine of potency and act, of the real distinction between essence and existence in creatures, helps to bring out clearly and precisely, in the Thomistic system, the basic distinction between God and the world, the transcendence of God over the world. On the other hand, careful reflection upon the universal divine causality, embracing the innermost *being* and activity of creatures, gives a profound understanding of the immanence of God in the world ...

[From this follows an all important consequence.] One will never thoroughly understand the philosophy or the theology of the Angelic Doctor, nor be able to penetrate to the depths of his supernatural consideration of God and the universe, unless he has devoted himself through ceaseless study to the metaphysical concepts of his works.¹⁶²

In a line, Grabmann's advice is this: If we wish to study fruitfully the writings of St. Thomas, we cannot escape his philosophy of being, specially so if we wish to study his arguments for God's existence. A life-long effort spent in this study is well worth the trouble because one of the payoffs of reaching God with one's intellect is the ability to refute intellectual attacks, either in the many forms of skepticism, sophisticated relativism, or materialism, against claims to knowledge that God is real.

Another advice comes from James Collins whose authority, in this particular work, is not that of a Thomistic scholar but of one who has thoroughly studied

¹⁶² Martin Grabmann, *The Interior Life of St. Thomas Aquinas*, (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Co., 1951). pp. 22-26. Grabmann began his work and reached his conclusions before and independently of other well known scholars of St. Thomas like Etienne Gilson, Jacques Maritain, Joseph Owens, and Anton Pegis.

modern philosophy and its many positions on God, and concluded that the best and the only way to reach the truth of God's existence philosophically is through St. Thomas' metaphysics. He describes that way in his monumental *God in Modern Philosophy*.

The causal demonstration of the truth of God's existence is not grounded upon the analytic necessity of relation in logic or mathematics but upon a causal necessity found to be required for an actual, sensible existent within our experience ... The proposition which gives meaning and validity to our philosophical conception of God ultimately gets its causal foundation and inferential warrant from our analysis of composite, sensible beings. There is no more radically determinate and relevant a basis for assent than this one, since the inference is made and the assent given to God as a consequence of inspecting some given sensible things in their composing principles of being ... A humanly developed philosophy of God must examine the structure of the existing sensible thing of our experience, discover its intrinsic composition and causal dependence in being for its concrete act of existing, and in this way infer the truth of the proposition that there exists a first, purely actual cause of this being.¹⁶³

If we heed this advice of such formidable scholars, and are driven by the desire to learn, we shall find it impossible to avoid engaging in a life-long study of St. Thomas' philosophy of being as being. We shall also find it impossible to understand all his philosophizing about God apart from his metaphysics, including his arguments for God's existence.

The Theological Character of the *Five Ways*

It is all too easy to forget that St. Thomas' arguments for God come in two *theological* works: *Summa Contra Gentiles* and *Summa Theologiae*. St. Thomas is a theologian, a theologian who also philosophises. His *main* interest is not the truth of metaphysics, but of the Catholic faith. The works in which he puts his formal arguments for God are works of *Sacra Doctrina*, not textbooks in metaphysics.¹⁶⁴ When putting forth arguments for God, St. Thomas is expounding Holy Christian teachings. Therefore, as a theologian he is interested in demonstrating God who resembles as closely as possible the God of Holy Christian teachings.

¹⁶³ James Collins, *God in Modern Philosophy*, pp. 387, 394, 399.

¹⁶⁴ But many of St. Thomas' metaphysical insights are interspersed throughout the two *Summae*.

What is the God of the Christian teachings? In speaking of God as the first agent, or the first efficient cause, St. Thomas describes Him philosophically as being itself, which allows him to conclude that he has been describing the God of Judeo-Christian teachings: "Wherefore in Exodus (3:14) the proper name of God is stated to be 'HE WHO IS,' because it is proper to Him alone that His substance is not other than His being."¹⁶⁵ Having concluded that it is proper only to God to have His substance identical with His being, and this on the basis of considering the act of being of things other than God and its distinction in them from their essence and every other act,¹⁶⁶ St. Thomas reaches with his intellect the same God in Whom he puts his faith. In other words, the act of being of creatures is such that it requires a cause, and this cause is such that it can be said of it what Moses says of it: His name is 'HE WHO IS'. Reaching the God who fittingly bears this name is St. Thomas' primary goal in demonstrating God; he wants his arguments to reach as closely as possible the God of *Sacra Doctrina*. We must, therefore, view the arguments in this light.

In *Summa Theologiae* St. Thomas prefaces his Five Ways by saying, "It is said in the person of God [God says of Himself]: *I am Who am* (Exodus 3:14). The existence of God can be proved in five ways." Which God? The one whose name is I AM WHO AM. As a teacher of Holy Christian teachings St. Thomas has his eye on the God of his Holy Scriptures. We must then see his arguments as conducive to seeing the

¹⁶⁵ *SCG*, II, 52, 9. In this passage St. Thomas makes reference to his earlier argument for God in I, 13. Clearly, for him, the God reached in those arguments is the Christian God whose name is "I AM."

¹⁶⁶ Cf. *SCG*, I, 22, 9 & 10: "Every thing exists because it has being. A thing whose essence is not its being, consequently, is not through its essence but by participation in something, namely, being itself. But that which is through participation in something cannot be the first being, because prior to it is the being in which it participates in order to be. But God is the first being, with nothing prior to Him. His essence is, therefore, His being."

This sublime truth Moses was taught by our Lord [Who said]: "I AM WHO AM ... Thou shalt say to the children of Israel: He who is hath sent me to you" (Exod. 3:13, 14). By this our Lord showed that His own proper name is HE WHO IS. Now, names have been devised to signify the nature or essences of things. It remains, then, that the divine being is God's essence or nature."

God of *Sacra Doctrina*,¹⁶⁷ who, speaking both philosophically and theologically, is Being Itself, *Ipsium Esse Subsistens*, I AM.

When later in Q. 8, art. 1, St. Thomas considers whether this God who is Being Itself is in all things, he again makes theological use of his philosophizing about God. As his starting point for affirming that God is in all things he uses a quote from the prophet Isaiah: “Lord, You have completed all our works in us.”¹⁶⁸ St. Thomas knows by faith that all our works are God’s doing; he knows that it is God who acts whenever we act, that God is the agent when we are agents (this is what makes God the First Agent).

In the body of the article this truth can be seen philosophically as well. St. Thomas knows from Aristotle, “that the thing moved and the mover must be joined together.” But what is for St. Thomas the deepest source of the First Agent’s presence in His effects, which are themselves agents? Another way to put the question: what makes us agents? The answer: that which gives us actuality—“being (*esse*) is innermost in each thing and most fundamentally inherent in all things since it is formal in respect of everything found in a thing.” But because God is Being Itself, “created being must be His proper effect.” God, therefore, is the proper cause of our existing, and as such present to us as existing and constantly conserving us deeply and intimately because our act of existing is the source of all our reality

¹⁶⁷ For God is the object of the science of *Sacra Doctrina* (see *ST*, I, q. 1, a. 7). The first task, then, of a theological work like *Summa Theologiae* will be to demonstrate God’s existence. This demonstration has the following character: “Although we cannot know in what consists the essence of God, nevertheless in this science we make use of His effects, either of nature or of grace, in place of a definition, in regard to whatever is treated of in this science concerning God; even as in some philosophical sciences we demonstrate something about a cause from its effect, by taking the effect in place of a definition of the cause.” (*ST*, I, 1, 7, ad 1) This is precisely what we shall do in the first section of chapter ten.

¹⁶⁸ Isaiah 26:12. The verse appears in the *Summa* as “Omnia opera nostra operatus es in nobis, Domine.” The Vulgate omits “in” and reads, “omnia enim opera nostra operatus es nobis,” which may be translated as “You completed all our works for us.” But it is more to St. Thomas’ point to say that God completes all our works *in* us.

(including our actions); our act of existing, St. Thomas has already pointed out (Q. 3, art. 5), is that which makes our form or nature *actual*; and this makes all other acts (including motion and efficiency), in relation to the act of existing, only potencies.

We have good reason, then, to interpret the Five Ways keeping a close eye on the affinity between the First Mover or Agent and HE WHO IS. What will allow us to do this is a good understanding of the First Mover as Being Itself, and this means that we must engage in a thoroughly metaphysical interpretation of the Five Ways, which is the advice of scholars like Martin Grabmann and many others.

A Reply to an Objection

In spite of the textual evidence we have put forth in this chapter in support of the claim that St. Thomas' arguments for God must be seen in their entirety as metaphysical, there are scholars who maintain that a partly physical interpretation of St. Thomas' arguments is possible. The arguments which they find easiest to interpret this way are those of the First and Second Way. Many interpreters in fact see the first two Ways as more or less the same; they see them as arguing for the first efficient cause of motion, or the Unmoved Mover, and for the first efficient cause, or the Uncaused Cause. In other words, the premises and the inferences in the first two Ways are seen as established through the kind of thinking operative in cosmology; the principle "whatever is moved is moved by another" is regarded as cosmological rather than metaphysical. It is only at the point of the conclusion of the first two Ways that we plug in metaphysics, that is, once we have reached the Unmoved Mover and the Uncaused Cause we then proceed to argue for it as the being that is identically its existence (*Ipsium Esse Subsistens*). In other words, metaphysical thinking operates on the ultimate cause, not on the data from which we argued to the ultimate cause; the data is to be understood cosmologically. Thus in the First

Way, for example, the Unmoved Mover is the absolute principle of motion, not the absolute principle of being.

In my view there is nothing objectionable about seeing the first two Ways as arguing for the Unmoved Mover and the Uncaused Cause cosmologically. It is certainly a possible and a plausible reading. “Whatever is moved is moved by another” is certainly a principle of physics and can serve to reach the Unmoved Mover. But I do not think that this is how St. Thomas is intending the first two Ways. I think he is employing “whatever is moved is moved by another” as a metaphysician, and this in order to reach not only the Unmoved Mover of Aristotle’s *Physics* and *Metaphysics*, but also the God of the Christian Scriptures whose name is I AM. Recall that the Five Ways are given in a theological work.

My best line of defense, I think, is to show why we must read St. Thomas as employing “whatever is moved is moved by another” metaphysically if we are to understand how he argues for the existence of the God of Christian theology.

In the above mentioned objection it is suggested that St. Thomas is arguing for the Unmoved Mover understood as the absolute principle of *motion*, and that from there he later goes on to argue for the First Cause of Being. But the fact of the matter is that he does not do so. Before I address this more fully, I want to say something about St. Thomas’ understanding of motion and the bearing that understanding has on the principle “whatever is moved is moved by another.”

St. Thomas defines motion this way.

Motion is neither the potency of that which exists in potency, nor the act of that which exists in act. Rather motion is the act of that which exists in potency, such that its ordination to its prior potency is designated to what is called ‘act’, and its ordination to further act is designated by what is called ‘existing in potency’. Hence, the Philosopher has defined motion most adequately by saying that motion is the entelechy, i.e., the act of that which exists in potency insofar as it is such.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁹ St. Thomas Aquinas, *In III Phys.*, lect. 2, n. 285.

According to this understanding of motion, any case of it is a transition between two terms: potency ('can') and act ('is'); it is a process of actualizing a potency present in a being ("motion is nothing else than the reduction of something from potentiality to actuality"¹⁷⁰). Now the act of actualizing a potency in a being cannot be performed by the being in potency, for in that case it would have to give itself the act which it does not have ("nothing can be reduced from potentiality to actuality, except by something in a state of actuality"¹⁷¹). In other words, a "can-be" never comes to be an "is" on its own strength, because it does not have it. If a potency were self-actualizing it would not be a potency. Hence the maxim: "whatever is moved is moved by *another*." This means that whatever is reduced from potency to act (whatever undergoes some motion or change) does so only by the agency of something which *exists in act*. This is crucial, because in light of it the argument from motion in the First Way is an argument in which motion is understood as a reduction from *being potentially* (from that which exists as potential, as able to be in a way other than it is at present) to *being actually* (to that which exists here and now in a way it was earlier only able to be). The argument is from beings undergoing some motion, that is, beings which possess the "can" of that motion but require the agency of something which *exists in act* to bring them into the "is" of that motion. But, a proponent of the objection mentioned above will say, Why must you bring in here the talk of *being*; why must the reasoning proceed along metaphysical lines? We must because motion is here understood as a reduction from *being potentially* to *being actually* by that which *is actually*. Now that which here *exists in act*, and which reduces a being from potency to act (which moves it) is an agent or an efficient cause. "But it belongs to everything to have an efficient

¹⁷⁰ *ST*, I, q. 2, a. 3, the First Way.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

(*agentem*) cause, inasmuch as it has being (*esse*).¹⁷² Thus what the Unmoved Mover is responsible for, in St. Thomas' argument in the First Way, is the very existence (be-ing) of that which exists as undergoing some motion, as crossing from potency to act. St. Thomas' efficient cause goes all the way to the very be-ing of that which it causes. This is why, in the Thomistic context, "whatever is moved is moved by another" is a metaphysical principle.¹⁷³

¹⁷² *ST*, I, q. 44, a. 1, ad 3. For St. Thomas the efficient cause must, therefore, be defined as that which bestows being (*esse*) whenever it bestows anything. But, Joseph Owens points out, "In Aristotle, efficient cause was regularly defined in terms of motion. It was understood as the cause that originated motion [see *Physics*, II, 3]." *An Elementary Christian Metaphysics*, (Houston: Center for Thomistic Studies, 1985), p. 73. n. 12. For St. Thomas motion means every and all transition from potency to act; this includes every transition from non-being to being.

That for St. Thomas the activity of the efficient cause must be understood in terms of the act of being is clear from the following text. "Since every agent acts so far as it is in act, it belongs to the first agent, which is most perfect, to be most perfectly in act. Now, a thing is more perfectly in act the more its act is posterior in the way of generation, for act is posterior in time to potentiality in one and the same thing that passes from potentiality to act [the one that undergoes some motion]. Further, act itself is more perfectly in act than that which has act, since the latter is in act because of the former. [How do we know that the latter is in act because of the former? St. Thomas refers us back to his argument in *SCG*, I, 13. The argument must therefore be read as an argument for the cause which bestows on its effects this the most perfect of acts.] These things having been posited, it is clear from what has been shown in Book I of this work [ch. 13] that God alone is the first agent. Therefore, it belongs to Him alone to be in act in the most perfect way, that is to be Himself the most perfect act. Now, this act is being, wherein generation and all movement terminate, since every form and act is in potentiality before it acquires being." (*SCG*, II, 52, 7) Clearly, then, for St. Thomas a consideration of generation and motion is inextricably tied up with the act of being. Motion in St. Thomas receives a metaphysical treatment because it is understood as a reduction from *being potentially* to *being actually*.

¹⁷³ Note also the following text: "In a third sense cause means that from which the first beginning of change or of rest comes, i.e., a moving or efficient cause.... To this genus of cause is reduced everything that makes anything *to be* in any manner whatsoever, not only as regards substantial being, but also as regards accidental being, which occurs in every kind of motion." *In V Metaph*, lect. 2, nos. 765 and 770. Note that St. Thomas is here equating, in the way that Aristotle does not, the moving and the efficient cause as ultimately causing something *to be*. This is not to say that efficiency is creation; that parents, for example, produce in their offspring its actual *esse*. Recall the text from *De Pot.*, q. VII, a. 2 we quoted in our discussion of Geach in ch. 2: "There must be a cause higher than all the causes, a cause because of which they themselves cause being, and of which being is the proper effect. This cause is God." Creation, Etienne Gilson points out, "is the prototype of causal efficiency, and if they are to be conceived as contributing to the very being of their effects, finite beings are efficient causes only inasmuch as, in acting, they imitate the first efficient act, cause of all other beings as well as of their causal fecundity." (*Elements of Christian Philosophy*, Garden City, NY, 1960, pp. 189-190)

For even if we reach the Unmoved Mover as the absolute principle of motion, and then wish to “unpack” the Unmoved Mover so as to see that he is really *Ipsum Esse Subsistens*, or First Being, will we not have to make recourse again in our quest for *Ipsum Esse Subsistens* (First Being), as “proper cause of the act of being”, to the effects of this proper cause? The road to this cause is still through its effects, not through an understanding of it as the Unmoved Mover. Nowhere does St. Thomas speak of God as the proper cause of the act of being in the context of an already established absolute principle of motion. When in *De Ente et Essentia* IV, 7 St. Thomas argues that there must be “the first being, which is being in all its purity... the first cause, or God,” he does not say that we know this upon metaphysical consideration of the Unmoved Mover, but upon the consideration of beings that are not identically their act of being, but receive that act. In *SCG*, II, 52, 7, St. Thomas says that we know God as the first agent because the act of being belongs to him more perfectly than to everything else? What else? Beings undergoing motion (beings reduced from *being in potency* to *being in act*), beings moving others (beings reducing others from *being in potency* to *being in act*), beings going in and out of being, etc.—all these are in act because of the one who *is* act and from whom they have received their act of acts, or existence, which makes Him the *First* and therefore Unmoved and Uncaused.

Our knowledge of this *First* does not depend on knowing the Unmoved Mover as the absolute principle of *motion*, but as the absolute principle of *being* (which is prior to generation and movement, and from which every form and act receives its actuality, its “is”). Thus even though Aristotle’s Unmoved Mover of the *Physics* and St. Thomas’ First Unmoved Mover of the First Way may be the same God, it is not the same God in the same respect. Furthermore, even though both arguments contain factors belonging to the study of natural philosophy, St. Thomas takes the physically observed facts, like water getting hot, and analyzes them in terms of the

principles of *being*, because for him motion is always the motion of that which possess the act of existing, and *as such primarily* requires a cause. In this analysis he is not depending upon the prior establishment from the science of physics, that is, he considers the cause of things as the cause of beings as such and not as having a certain accidental or substantial form.¹⁷⁴

Whatever is the cause of things, considered *as beings*, must be the cause of things, not only according as they are *such* by accidental forms, nor according as they are *these* by substantial forms, but also to all that belongs to their being in any way. And thus it is necessary to say that also primary matter is created by the universal cause of things.¹⁷⁵

The universal cause of things, which is God, is therefore known in considering things as *beings*, and such a consideration, as we saw in chapter three, belongs to the divine science or metaphysics and not to natural philosophy.

We may strengthen our case further by pointing out that even when St. Thomas speaks as a philosopher of nature, that is, when he considers motion in any of its

¹⁷⁴ To insist that St. Thomas depends on prior establishments of physics in his metaphysical consideration of God is to ignore texts to the contrary. One such text is *ST*, I, q. 44, a. 2. In his article “*Ad Mentem Thomae: Does Natural Philosophy Prove God?*” *Proceedings of the American Catholic Association* 61 (1987), John Knasas makes the following observations on this point: “The universal cause of the second stage [of I, 44, 2] is not identifiable in any respect with the God of Aquinas’ religious belief. It is clearly a less than divine being.... philosophy advances further in its knowledge of truth not by further implications of natural philosophy principles. Rather, one must change to a new view point. It is the viewpoint of being as being. This expression designates the subject of metaphysics. In sum, the second stage exhausts the principle of natural philosophy.... Aquinas’ mention of Aristotle here does not mean that Aquinas holds that Aristotle fails to demonstrate God. The text ascribes this failure only to reasoning based on matter/form principles. Earlier in *De Potentia* III, 5c, Aquinas appears to give to Aristotle, as well as to others, a knowledge of the creator God. Yet, the ascription is done on the basis of Aquinas’ claim that Aristotle attains a view of universal *esse*. For Aquinas this is the viewpoint of metaphysics. *Prima pars* 44, 2c, then, is Aquinas’ unabashed admission that to his mind natural philosophy principles alone do not produce reasoning reaching God.

Secondly, if anything, what we find the Thomistic texts expressly and repeatedly asserting is that the philosophical knowledge of God is the privilege of metaphysics. The only other knowledge of God mentioned is not philosophical but theological. These texts are found at *In de Trin.* V, 4c, and in the proem to *In Metaph* and so, temporally speaking, bracket the *quinque viae*. These texts make perfectly clear that for Aquinas God is philosophically reached in metaphysics. There is no admission that any other philosophical science does the same.” p. 211.

¹⁷⁵ *ST*, I, q. 44, a. 2.

aspects, for him it is always the motion of an *existent*; motion is always *via ad esse*. Consider the following text: “generation is the way from non-being to being; and therefore that is generated absolutely which acquires being, to which the being of another is not presupposed.”¹⁷⁶ Generation, like every motion, is a reduction from potency to act—from existing as able to be something to existing as that something. Many an interpreter of the First Way, for example, does not consider it necessary to see motion as immediately involving being (*esse*), which is to say the perfect act. But this is not Thomistic. Consider yet another text.

For the intelligibility [*ratio*] of motion is completed not only by that which pertains to motion in the nature of things, but also by that which reason [*ratio*] apprehends. For in the nature of things motion is nothing other than an imperfect act which is a certain incipience of perfect act in that which is moved. Thus in that which is being whitened, something of whiteness already has begun to be. But in order for the imperfect act to have the nature [*ratio*] of motion, it is further required that we understand it is a mean between two extremes. The preceding condition is compared to it as potency to act, and thus motion is called an act. The consequent condition is compared to it as perfect to imperfect or as act to potency. And because of this *motion is called the act of that which exists in potency*.¹⁷⁷

By seeing motion as an act, we are well on the way to seeing that which actualises all acts. For St. Thomas motion is an act, it is an act we come to know before all others, but also an act that points us in the direction of all other acts, not least of all in the direction of the chief of them—*esse*: “Now of all acts which are perceived by us in a sensible way, motion is the best known and most evident to us; and therefore the word ‘actuality’ was first referred to motion, and from motion the

¹⁷⁶ St. Thomas Aquinas, *In De generation et corruptione*, I, 9. *Opera Omnia*, ed. Parmae, vol. XIX. (New York: Musurgia Publishers, 1949). p. 229. (My own translation) “...generatio est via de non esse ad esse; et id simpliciter generatur quid acquirit esse, cui non praesupponitur aliud esse...”

See also *The Principles of Nature*, ed. cit., I, 1-6, pp. 7-9 where St. Thomas speaks of two levels of being, act, potency, form, matter, and generation. In light of the text from *In De gen.*, it is clear that his discussion of motion in *The Principles of Nature* connotes some mode of be-ing (*esse*).

¹⁷⁷ *In III Phys.*, lect. 5, n. 324. ed. cit., p. 152. (emphasis mine) That for St. Thomas a consideration of motion is inseparable from a consideration of existence is evident also in *In IX Metaph.*, lect. 3, nn. 1805-1806: “motion is not attributed to non-existent things... since to be moved means to be actual, it follows that things which do not exist actually would exist actually; but this is obviously false.”

word has extended to other things.”¹⁷⁸ But “existence is that which makes every form or nature actual; for goodness and humanity [and everything else including motion] are spoken of as actual only because they are spoken of as existing.”¹⁷⁹ Clearly, then, for St. Thomas, if not for Aristotle, physical principles or the principles of motion entail metaphysical principles or principles of being (*esse*).

But perhaps the best way to see this is by reflecting philosophically on the data of the First Way. The data is, of course, changing things. The question is: why must we see them as changing *existents*? Our objector may ask: why must we separate a changing thing’s existence from its act of change? why cannot we simply take for granted that it is, of course, an existing thing that is changing? We can take it for granted if we wish, but not if we wish to understand St. Thomas who says, “though motion may occur for any existing thing, motion is apart from the being of the thing.”¹⁸⁰ In other words, a cause of motion is not as such the cause of a moving being: “the movable does not depend on the mover for its being, but only for its being moved.”¹⁸¹ We must, therefore, distinguish between motion and existence in a

¹⁷⁸ *In IX Metaph.*, lect. 3, n. 1805, ed. cit., p. 667.

¹⁷⁹ *ST*, I, q. 3, a. 4. As the basic actuality of things, existence is the act of all acts and the perfection of all perfections. It is there visible to the eye of the intellect, if not to the senses, whenever we encounter a being undergoing some motion. We cannot try and de-emphasise this by saying that *being* refers only to an ordinary verb in the claim that motion is a reduction from *being* potentially to *being* actually; we cannot simply say, “Why, of course the moving thing means an existing thing. No one ever doubts that.” This is to miss the point, the point of an act which actualises the moving being and its act of motion. Consider the following text. “And therefore Aristotle says that this verb ‘is’ consignifies composition, because it does not signify it principally, but by way of consequence; for it signifies primarily that which goes with the notion in the manner of actuality without condition. For ‘is,’ understood absolutely, signifies ‘to be in act’; and therefore it signifies in the fashion of a verb. But because the actuality which this verb ‘is’ principally signifies is in general the actuality of every form or act [including motion], substantial or accidental, it follows that when we wish to signify that any form or act whatsoever is actually in a subject, we signify it by this verb ‘is,’ either absolutely or in a certain respect; absolutely, in the present time, but in a certain respect in other times. And therefore this verb ‘is’ consignifies composition, by way of consequence.” St. Thomas, *In I Perihem*, lect. 5, n. 22, trans. by Joseph Owens in his *Elementary Christian Metaphysics*, p. 74, n. 15.

¹⁸⁰ *SCG*, III, 65, 5.

¹⁸¹ *SCG*, II, 57, 12.

moving thing, that is, we must see that the cause which causes the motion of a moving thing must, if it is the highest cause, also cause the existence of a moving thing. Seeing why this must be so requires a great effort. Gerard Smith has put forth such an effort, and I shall try to present it.¹⁸²

It is not difficult to see that when a change occurs, something is changing. It is a little more difficult to see that the addition which accrues to the changing something, or the subject of change, is not one and the same with the subject, and that, therefore, the addition comes from something else that accounts for the addition; it accounts for it because it *is* the addition and it imparts the addition to the subject of change. St. Thomas uses the example of fire heating a piece of wood. The wood becoming hot is the change occurring, the addition which accrues to the wood is heat. The heat is not identical with the wood, but it is identical with the fire which imparts it to the wood, for which reason fire accounts for the addition in the subject of change.

But it is much more difficult to see that the addition has such an impact on the subject of change that the acquiring of the addition, the very activity of becoming the addition (in St. Thomas' example, becoming hot), is the *existing* of that which receives the addition (namely, of the piece of wood).¹⁸³ Note well that our piece of wood can exist, prior to receiving the addition of heat, without becoming hot; but if it is in fact here and now becoming hot it cannot exist without becoming hot, nor can it become hot without existing. In other words, any way of being, any category of being in which something is, is for that something to exist.

From this follows an all important conclusion. Because what exists is the composite of the subject and its additions, we cannot but assert that it is the whole,

¹⁸² See his *Natural Theology*, (New York: Macmillan, 1951). pp. 110-112.

¹⁸³ In the Second Way the same thing is true, except that there the activity of causing another to receive an addition *is* the existing of that which imparts the addition.

the subject and its additions, which exists, without seeing that it is the *composite* which is being *caused* to exist. This conclusion points us in the right direction in which lies the true cause of a moving thing. That is to say, by looking in the direction of that which is able to cause the composite of *the subject* and *its accruing additions* to *exist* precisely as it is causing the composite to be a composite, we are on the right track to finding St. Thomas' *First Mover*. We shall not be looking in the right direction if we are seeking the cause of only the accruing additions of the subject which presupposes or takes for granted the existence of the subject and the whole composite. We shall miss St. Thomas' direction if, along with some contemporary interpreters of the First Way, we say that "each contingent thing exists because of the causal activity of other contingent things in the universe."¹⁸⁴

We need to shed more light on the direction. An actual piece of wood existing as heated did not exist prior to the change (prior to the addition of heat accruing to it), only a potential piece of wood existing as heated existed prior to the change. To say that the cause of existence need not be invoked here betrays our failure to see the point. The subject of actual reception of heat existed potentially prior to the actual change taking place. It was not only the additional qualifications which were potential; it was the whole composite of *the subject* of change *and its accruing additions*, it was the whole existent. But this means that the potential subject of the actual change taking place did not need a cause of its being a subject of actual change when it was in the state of potentiality, because, as potential, it was not an actual subject of an actual change taking place here and now; but it does need such a cause when it is here and now actually existing as changing. This is the heart of the matter! Our First Changer, then, lies in the direction of a cause able to cause the

¹⁸⁴ Michael Peterson, *et al.*, *Reason and Religious Belief*, p. 79.

actual subject of the change taking place to *exist*, because the subject is existing only as being changed and its being changed is caused.

Surely, we do not want to say that fire is a cause which does not take for granted the wood existing as heated, or which causes the wood to be *existing* as heated. That is, we do not want to say that fire is the cause of the existence of the composite of the subject of actual change and its additional qualifications—fire does not actuate the potential subject of actual change to exist as actual subject of that change. The contribution of fire to the change its subject is undergoing here and now does not sufficiently account for the full impact the change has on the actual composite. Fire which is identically heat can impart the *addition* (which is heat) of the subject of change, but unless it is identically existence, it cannot impart existence to the actual whole composite of the subject of change and its accruing additions,¹⁸⁵ and that is precisely what calls for a cause, that is, it clearly is caused. Nor do we want to say that the cause is some unmoved mover that is not identically existence, because that would simply postpone the answer to our question: What is able to cause the actual composite of the subject and its accruing additions to *exist* inasmuch as it is causing the composite to be an actual composite?

But it is clear that the answer to our question can only come if we are engaged in metaphysics, that is, in thinking about existence as the highest act. Physical proofs of an Unmoved Mover may demonstrate God, but they will not do so as a proof that accounts for a full understanding of potency/act relationship which is required in a reduction from potency to act of an actual composite of the subject of change and its acquired additions. The potency/act relationship always involves existence for St. Thomas, and that is why it is always a metaphysical relationship. We may wish to

¹⁸⁵ We may wish to dispute, on the grounds of twentieth-century natural sciences that fire is not identically heat. But that by itself would not ruin our argument, because something else may be identically heat which is not thereby identically existence.

stop with physics, that is, short of the act of existence, but I cannot see *why* we would wish to do so knowing full well that for St. Thomas it is there as the act of acts, and knowing, not only that it requires a cause, but also that for St. Thomas God is “the proper cause of the act of being.” If we shall ever reach God as such a cause, we shall have to see the act of being in that which is caused, namely, the moved being, the causing being, etc., which we know to be caused because we see it going from potentially *be-ing* something to actually *be-ing* that something. But, as we shall see when we turn to the Five Ways in chapter eleven, to reach such a cause is to reach a cause that must be identified with its operation of causing, that is, it must not only cause, not only exercise the action of causing, but it must *be* that action if a full account of the *highest* of causes is to be had.

Finally, we must consider our objection from another angle—that of textual procedure. It is an objection that Joseph Owens considers. The objection is as follows: “according to the order of presentation of the *Summa Theologiae* a primary movent is first demonstrated, and only several articles afterwards is it shown to be identical with its own existence. This is alleged to indicate that the order of procedure is first to establish a primary mover, and then, after further reasoning, to arrive at its identity with subsistent existence.”¹⁸⁶

We can safely assume that as a theologian St. Thomas is interested in arguing for God in a way that enables his readers to understand Him as closely as possible to the way He is revealed in the Holy Scriptures. This means that he wants to show that the Unmoved Mover is one with His existence and perfect in every way. The question is this: Is St. Thomas identifying the Unmoved Mover with the being who is His own existence in the First Way or does he argue for that identification later? We can restate the question this way: Does St. Thomas argue in later articles for the

¹⁸⁶ Joseph Owens, “Actuality in the *Prima Via*”, in *St. Thomas Aquinas on the Existence of God*, p. 196. I shall present here Owens’ reply to this objection because it seems to me to be very plausible.

being who is identically His existence *from* the Unmoved Mover, or does he understand the Unmoved Mover already in the First Way as supreme existential actuality?

In the article immediately after the Five Ways St. Thomas considers whether God is a body. One reason for a negative answer is as follows:

Secondly, because the first being must of necessity be in act, and in no way in potentiality. For although in any single thing that passes from potentiality to actuality, the potentiality is prior in time to actuality; for whatever is in potentiality can be reduced into actuality only by some being in actuality. Now it has already been proved that God is the First Being. It is therefore impossible that in God there should be any potentiality.¹⁸⁷

Where has it been proved that God is the First Being? In the proof for God's existence presented in five different ways.¹⁸⁸ First Being, then, can be equated with what has been established in the conclusions of the Five Ways. In the case of the First Way, Owens suggests,

why not remain within the context of the reasoning through actuality and potentiality? One would then regard the notion *primum ens* as understood in what follows in the *prima via* upon the principle "de potentia autem non potest aliquid reduci in actum nisi per aliquod *ens actu*." Every movent is a movent insofar as it is an *ens actu*. In this understanding of a movent in the *prima via*, the ensuing stages through the series of movents to the primary movent would require that the primary movent be regarded as the primary *ens actu*. Reasoning later in the setting of actuality and potentiality, St. Thomas could therefore readily refer back to the *primum movens* as the *primum ens*.¹⁸⁹

But what reason does St. Thomas give for asserting that there is no potentiality in the First Being, that He is pure actuality? In the first three articles of Q. 3 no reason is given, and then in the fourth article God is said to be *Ipsium Esse Subsistens* because "we call God the first efficient cause", and as such He does not have His existence caused, which has already been established in the Five Ways.

¹⁸⁷ ST, I, q. 3, a. 1.

¹⁸⁸ There are not Five Proofs, there are Five Ways. Nowhere does St. Thomas equate *probatio* with *via*. Therefore, in whatever Way God has been demonstrated, the First Being has been demonstrated. But let us reason further.

¹⁸⁹ Owens, *St. Thomas on the Existence...*, pp. 197-198.

A careful examination of Q. 3, a. 4, will reveal no reference to the ultimate principle of motion as a grounds for asserting that in God essence and existence are identical. All three arguments for asserting this identity in God are made along the lines of existence, and the second argument does so in terms of actuality and potentiality referring us to a ready conclusion (mentioned in a. 1) that in God there is no potency:

Secondly, existence is that which makes every form or nature actual; for goodness and humanity are spoken of as only because they are spoken of as existing. Therefore, existence must be compared to essence, if the latter is a distinct reality, as actuality to potentiality. Therefore, since in God there is no potentiality, as shown above (a. 1), it follows that in Him essence does not differ from existence.¹⁹⁰

We are here clearly in metaphysics because a principle that *something can be actual only if it is made actual by existence* is a metaphysical one. But this principle, like the principle that the first being must necessarily be in act and free of all potency, is nowhere argued for. In other words, nowhere in the *Summa Theologiae* did we receive a lesson in metaphysics preparing and establishing this principle. St. Thomas takes it for granted that we already possess it, and well he should given that we are reading a work in theology and not a work in metaphysics like *De Ente et Essentia*. This principle is at work whenever we are dealing with actuality, and we are dealing with actuality even when we are dealing with motion. Thus neither the Way to God from motion escapes this principle. Owens describes its role in the First Way:

The order in which the conclusions are drawn from the nature of the immobile movent established in the *prima via* is consequently clear enough. First, the immobile movent is found to have no potentiality at all, and accordingly is designated as pure actuality. Secondly, this absence of potentiality requires that the essence of the primary movent be its existence. The latter conclusion was drawn with the presupposition [not an argument] that existence is the actuality of every form or nature.¹⁹¹

In other words, we must see that for St. Thomas the Unmoved Mover is unmoved because it is the *First* mover, and it can only be the first if in it there is no

¹⁹⁰ *ST*, I, q. 3, a. 4.

¹⁹¹ Owens, *St. Thomas on the Existence.....*, p. 200.

potentiality, and therefore to be the *First* means to be pure actuality. But pure actuality is Being Itself (*Ipsum Esse*), therefore the First Way, even in its premises, is very much concerned with existence insofar as it is concerned with actuality and potentiality. The first premise of the First Way is clearly concerned with potentiality and actuality, a point to which Geach and many other contemporary interpreters pay too little attention or ignore entirely, and it is therefore concerned with existence (which is the domain of metaphysics) along with the rest of the argument flowing from it. We must, therefore, see St. Thomas arguing from moved existents existing *hic et nunc* as moved in the world of our sense experience, and to the Unmoved Mover causing both the nature and the existence of their motion. Who is the First Unmoved because His existence causes the existence of moved existents which actualises the very nature of their motion. In the rest of this work we shall argue for this in detail.

Part Two

AN ENCOUNTER WITH *BEING*

CHAPTER V

A Brief Look at the Character of *First Philosophy*

"Philosophy can take root only in radical reflection upon the meaning and possibility of its own project."

Edmund Husserl, *Ideas*

I said in the introduction that the main task of this work is to present the philosophical groundwork necessary for reading profitably St. Thomas' Five Ways; reading them with an understanding of why *he* thinks they successfully demonstrate God's existence. The first step in fulfilling this task is to say something about metaphysics as St. Thomas understands it. This is a necessary step because modern understandings of metaphysics are not only different from St. Thomas' but are often contrary to it. This will help us avoid making rash assumptions about the context of the Five Ways. We must, therefore, acquaint ourselves with his manner of philosophizing and make every effort to philosophise in the way he does, if we wish to profit from his thought.

Unfortunately, the philosophical tradition which St. Thomas inherited from ancient Greeks and medieval Christians, and which he himself greatly enriched during his short life, is made obscure to us by trends of modern and contemporary thought. For example, in our day the methods of empirical sciences are regarded as *the* paradigm for attaining knowledge. In order to profit from reading St. Thomas we

must set aside this narrow view of knowledge. The best way to do this is to approach the thought of St. Thomas in humility and with a vibrant sense of wonder.¹⁹² Such an approach is not necessarily reflected in our being in agreement with St. Thomas, but it is necessarily reflected in an attitude that does not dismiss St. Thomas' thought as nonsensical, as coming from the "Dark Ages", and as desperately in need of refinement and correction by methods of modern logic and empirical sciences.¹⁹³

But what is that before which we should humble our minds and hearts and approach it in childlike wonder without placing conditions before it? The answer is not St. Thomas' thought or the thought of anyone else.¹⁹⁴ The answer is: the object of St. Thomas' thought—the real, or that which is, or *being*. In order to understand St. Thomas' philosophical activity we must engage with him in the study of *being*.

The project of St. Thomas Aquinas, which consists in all of the available bodies of knowledge of his day headed by philosophy and in the service of sacred theology, is a structure that owes its foundation, frame, and much of the content to ancient Greek philosophy, notably to the philosophy of Aristotle. It owes it even more to his Christian faith. As a true philosopher, or a lover and seeker of wisdom, St. Thomas erected his entire project on two beams of truth: the truth of reason and the truth of the Christian faith. He did not see a dichotomy between these two beams because

¹⁹² Plato stresses the paramount importance of wonder in philosophy in his *Theaetetus*. "The sense of wonder is the mark of the philosopher. Philosophy indeed has no other origin." 155d

¹⁹³ We ought to avoid, for example, the sort of attitude a modern philosopher like Hegel exhibits toward medieval philosophy. "As late as the nineteenth century we find Hegel in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* declaring that in order to 'move on' quickly he will skip over the thousand years between the sixth and the seventeenth century, will 'put on seven-league boots.' And when he has at last sped successfully on to Descartes, he declares that now he can 'cry land like the sailor'; for it would 'be asking too much of anyone' to study the philosophy of the Middle Ages 'by autopsy', since 'it is as prolix as it is paltry, terribly written and voluminous'." See Josef Pieper, *Scholasticism*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1960), pp. 15-16.

¹⁹⁴ I am certain that St. Thomas does not value having disciples (Thomists) whose chief interest as thinkers is to acquaint themselves with the "thought of St. Thomas." For he says, "The study of philosophy is not for the purpose of knowing what men have thought, but to know the truth of things." (*Commentary on the Heavens*, Bk. I, lect. 22. Parmae Edition Vol. 19, p. 58.)

he saw both as having their source in God. His love of intellect and knowledge, and the consequent conviction that to cultivate the life of the mind through philosophy and the sciences is to be busy in God's vineyard, is expressed very clearly in one of his earlier works.

The knowledge of the principles that are known to us naturally has been implanted in us by God; for God is the Author of our nature. These principles, therefore, are also contained by the divine Wisdom. Hence, whatever is opposed to them is opposed to the divine Wisdom, and, therefore, cannot come from God. That which we hold by faith as divinely revealed, therefore, cannot be contrary to our natural knowledge.¹⁹⁵

Now even though St. Thomas holds that the naturally known principles (I shall say something about these in the next chapter) are divinely implanted, he does not mean that they are divinely revealed. To say that something is divinely implanted is not to say that it is divinely revealed. When St. Thomas says that something is naturally known he means that it is known by nature, that is, by our human nature which we owe to him who created us human, and in so creating us, implanted in us certain powers of knowledge and action.

What, then, are the naturally known principles or starting points of the truth acquired by the power of intellect? To answer the question we must first have a brief look at metaphysics as St. Thomas understood it. This will involve making a rough and very brief sketch of the rise of philosophy in the West with an eye toward expounding the naturally known principles which we shall need in order to do the metaphysics necessary for understanding the Five Ways. The question is: What kind of principles are we seeking to expound? Principles of what?

The Forerunners of Philosophy

Through Aristotle, St. Thomas inherited the philosophical tradition that has its beginnings in sixth or seventh-century Greece. Much of our knowledge of some of

¹⁹⁵ *SCG*, I, 7, 2.

the details of early Greek philosophy comes from Aristotle himself who thought it wise to begin his own philosophizing by surveying the accomplishments of his predecessors in order to make use of what is sound and to avoid what is not.¹⁹⁶ The beginning of western philosophy interests us insofar as it reveals how the human intellect comes to think about the nature and importance of that which gives rise to first principles and that which will eventually lead the mind to God.

It may be said that with the rise of philosophy in Greece we have for the first time the emergence of scientific thought developed apart from religious thought. It is true that throughout the empires of the Far and Middle East prior to the seventh century B.C. people used their reason to improve their understanding of the nature of everything around them. But their attempts have never been purely rational, never explicitly distinguished from their religious and mythical writings. The extant writings of their sages attest to this. It is also true that no Greek philosopher philosophised having his mind innocent of the religions of his day, nor were his works completely free of religious overtones. But Greek philosophy, at least as it was shaped by its greatest minds, differs from Oriental thought of Zoroaster, the Brahmans, Buddha, Lao-Tse, and Confucius in that it *begins* as distinct from religious appeals to popular myths and poetic symbolism, and ends up a product of pure reasoning.¹⁹⁷ In the writings of the Presocratics, of Plato, and of Aristotle we see the Greeks recognizing the boundaries of philosophy as an area limited to the scientific study of purely rational truths, of truths discovered by human reason operating on

¹⁹⁶ This he determined by looking at the real things about which he and his predecessors were philosophizing. Aristotelian sources of ancient Greek philosophy can be found in his *Physics* (Bk. I, chs. 2 and 4), *Psychology* (Bk. I, ch. 2) *Metaphysics* (Bk. I), and *On the Heavens* (Bk. I, ch. 2).

¹⁹⁷ Exceptions can, of course, be found in Pythagoras who established a religious sect, and Empedocles who was also a religious teacher and magician with a few miracles ascribed to him. (See Milton C. Nahm, *Selections from Early Greek Philosophy*, (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1964). pp. 47 and 112. Even Plato now and then turns to myth in some of his dialogues, particularly the *Timaeus* and *Phaedrus*. In Aristotle, however, we find a more purely rational philosophizing.

its own power and without reliance on any form of divine revelation, and as distinguished from the kind of intellectual activity at work in poetry and mythology.¹⁹⁸

The rational truths of what? The philosopher studies all things and events in the world, particularly the things that are not man-made, things that are natural, that is, not artificial, not produced by an art. Aristotle summed up the intellectual progress of his predecessors as follows: "... they wondered at the difficulties close at hand; then advancing little by little, they discussed difficulties also about greater matters, for example, about the changing attributes of the Moon and of the Sun and of the stars, and about the generation [genesis] of the universe."¹⁹⁹ Now what made the Presocratics philosophers *par excellence*, and therefore different from the sages of the Far and Middle East, is that they inquired into the "why" of things in front of them using only their reason, and pushed the "why" of them until they reached what they thought were the ultimate answers or the first principles of all things.

The surviving fragments of the Presocratics fully confirm the *fact* that interest in matters like the phenomena of the sun and the moon and the stars ended in the inquiry about the genesis of the whole universe. When, as Aristotle (*Metaph.*, A 1, 981b27-29) points out in this connection, inquiries concerning the "why" of happenings are pushed to the ultimate causes of things, and so arrive at causes about which one cannot ask a further "why," then one is already in the domain of wisdom or philosophy.²⁰⁰

In other words, the Presocratics wanted to know what makes all things real (actual), what it is that ultimately explains why anything is real at all; they tried "to understand all things in light of what is basic and ultimate from the standpoint of human reason."²⁰¹ This is the most basic of all philosophical questions, and the

¹⁹⁸ The activity of a geometrician and an astronomer inquiring into the nature and movement of the stars, and on the basis of that inquiry predicting eclipses of the sun and the moon is, if he is correct, an attainment a rational truth.

¹⁹⁹ *Aristotle's Metaphysics*, A 2,982b 13-17; trans. by H. G. Apostle.

²⁰⁰ Joseph Owens, *A History of Ancient Western Philosophy*, (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1959), p. 4.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*

answer to it determines one's entire philosophical project. Thales of Miletus, who is perhaps the first Greek philosopher, thought the answer is water. What he meant is that everything is in some way water, that water lies at the bottom of the nature of everything, not as the ingredient of everything, but as that which everything in some way is, or that from which everything in some way proceeds. Thales thought that water is the ultimate "why" of everything, and that in knowing water we know the highest cause and the first principle of everything.²⁰² Another philosopher proposed air as the ultimate "why", another fire, another the mind,²⁰³ until one of them, Parmenides of Elea, finally gave the right answer—*being*.

Ever since Parmenides philosophers have lived, in one way or another, upon the intellectual capital of his answer. Plato and Aristotle both accept Parmenides' answer but they differ radically on what *being* is. Their different understandings have given rise to two main positions in metaphysics and consequently in epistemology. St. Thomas rejects the main tenet of Platonic metaphysics, and adapts and amends the Aristotelian position. I shall say more about the two positions in chapter nine.

The ultimate answer, then, to the "why" of all things is technically called the first or universal principle which gives rise to other principles that are, as we shall see in the next chapter, also *first*, although in different ways, and therefore not ultimately first. The inquiry into this ultimate principle is consequently called *first*

²⁰²That Thales thought water to be the ultimate "why" of the first principle of things is first pointed out by Aristotle. "Thales, ..., says that this principle is *Water* (and on account of this he also declared that the earth rests on water), perhaps coming to this notion by observing that all nutriment is moist and that heat itself is generated from the moist and is kept alive by it (and that from which things are generated is the principle of all)." (*Metaph.* A, 3, 983b20-27)

I am relying on Aristotelian interpretation of the Presocratics' search for the first principle because I think St. Thomas accepts it.

Thales' answer may strike our modern ears as less strange if we remember that many are still on his side today when instead of water they propose "energy" as the answer to the ultimate "why" of things.

²⁰³This answer also has a modern counterpart in "evolution."

philosophy or *metaphysics*, and engaging into the inquiry is, according to Aristotle and St. Thomas, an intellectual activity that is most properly philosophical. If *being* is the universal principle of everything, then the study of *being* is the proper object of first philosophy or metaphysics. But is *being* the first principle? Why is Parmenides right and the other Presocratics wrong?

St. Thomas' Account of First Philosophy

We cannot, I think, make a better beginning in answering the question than to give St. Thomas' account of first philosophy which he lays out in the prologue to his commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. I shall translate the prologue and comment on a few of its points.

As the Philosopher says in his *Politics*, when several things are ordained to one, it must be that one of them is the regulator or the ruler, and the others the regulated or the ruled. This indeed is clear in the union of soul and body; for the soul naturally commands, and the body obeys. Similarly, even among the powers of the soul, the irascible and concupiscible are ruled in the natural order by reason. But all the sciences and arts are ordained to one thing, namely to the perfection of man, which is his beatitude. Therefore it is necessary that one of them be the governess of all the others, which rightly claims the name of wisdom. For it belongs to the wise to regulate the others.

It is possible to consider what this science is, and what kind of things it is concerned with, if that which is suitable to the ruler is carefully considered. For just as, according to the Philosopher in the aforementioned book, men of stronger intellect are naturally rulers and masters of others, so the men who are strong in body and weak in intellect, are naturally slaves: so that science must naturally be the governess of all the others which is most intellectual. But this is the science that is employed about the most intelligible objects.

We can, however, take [the meaning of] most intelligible objects *in three ways*.

First, indeed, is *from the order of knowing*. For the intellect receives certitude from those things which seem to be more intelligible. Therefore, since the certitude of science is acquired by the intellect from causes, a knowledge of causes seems to be the most intellectual. Therefore also, that science which considers first causes seems to be the governess of all the others in the highest degree.

We may at this point ask ourselves: Can this science be physics, or biology, or any other empirical science? A negative answer is already becoming clear, for physics, for example, does not study the first causes of all things but only the causes of motion, which does not, for example, include the causes of biological life. That is why the biological sciences are needed, which again do not study the first causes of

all things but only the causes of life of the living things, leaving out the causes of non-living things and other kinds of causes of all things. And so it is with all the empirical sciences—they each leave out not only *an* aspect of reality, but the aspect of reality which belongs to all real things, and this makes them undeserving of the title of the governess of all the sciences.

But what about all of the empirical sciences combined; can it be said that their joined effort reaches the first causes? The answer is a resounding *no* for the following reason. All aspects of real things studied by empirical sciences neither individually nor collectively reveal the aspect that belongs to all things that are. Let us ask ourselves this question: What kind of thing is every thing that is? The answer is not a *moving* thing, nor a *living* thing. Nor is it, as some Presocratics thought, a *water* or *air* or *fire*-thing. Why not? If the ultimate nature of all things were to be pitched on any one or all of these aspects, it would force us to regard reality as exclusively material. And what is wrong with that? Exclusively materialistic explanations leave out entire areas of reality unexplained—for example, human cognitive powers in its acts of conception, judgment, and reasoning (see n. 223, p. 115 below), and appetitive powers in its acts of willing and choosing are unsatisfactorily explained in terms of material causes alone. We need, therefore, an aspect of the real to which belong all things, both material and immaterial.

Even though most Presocratics were wrong about the thing which they picked as that which ultimately belongs to all things, they were absolutely right when they sought that which belongs to all things, namely, the ultimate “why” or the principle of all things. They were right because their entire philosophical activity rested on the true assumption that everything, absolutely everything, has something in common with everything else, namely that which makes them all actual and is their ultimate “why” or principle. In other words, everything is for one, and only one reason actual, or a *something* (*aliquid*), and consequently knowable. If this were not

true, we could not know many things or *any* thing. For if everything did not have something in common with everything else, that which makes it and all other things actual, or a *something*, after knowing one actual something we could not know another actual something, because *something* one and *something* two have nothing in common, that is, they do not share that which makes them a *something*, or actual, and consequently knowable, for only *somethings*, or *actual things* are knowable. But we do know many *somethings*. The question is what makes them knowable given that we do in fact know them? It is not, as we saw, water, because in knowing water we do not know all things, particularly the immaterial things. Nor is it any other material thing. It is rather that which, for lack of a better term, *realifies* or *actualises* all things; it is, as Parmenides rightly saw, *being*. In other words, everything that is has this in common with everything else: it is a *being* or an existent, and it is this fact that makes all things *somethings*, or actual, and therefore knowable. To know something, anything, is to know it, first and foremost as *being*.²⁰¹ Reality is, therefore, first and foremost a collection of *beings*, and each body of knowledge deals with one class of *beings*.²⁰⁵

But what kind of fact is *being*, and what is it to know *being*? The answer to both questions is philosophy of one kind or another. But as far as “pure” philosophic positions on the nature and knowledge of *being* are concerned, there are really only two: Plato’s, and all the positions in one way or another *essentially* akin to his, and Aristotle’s, and all the positions *essentially* akin to his.²⁰⁶ We shall say more about

²⁰¹ This is certainly Parmenides’ position, and, as we shall see later, St. Thomas’. In one of Parmenides’ fragments (8. 34) on *being* he says, “Knowing and the condition of knowledge are the same, for you will not find knowing without (that which) is.” This, Owens, points out, means “that without *being* as its object there cannot be any knowing.” (*A History of Ancient ...* p. 61. n. 9)

²⁰⁵ For a more detailed account of the intellect’s detection of what is common to all things see Francis Collingwood, *Philosophy of Nature*, (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1960). ch. 4.

²⁰⁶ The better known philosophers with essentially Platonic metaphysics and epistemology are Plotinus, St. Augustine, St. Anselm, Duns Scotus, Descartes, Leibniz, Kant, and Hegel. Albert the Great, St. Thomas Aquinas, and John of St. Thomas are the best known Aristotelians.

these positions in chapter nine where we shall compare them. At this point let it suffice to say that within the Platonic tradition to know *being* is to know *first* an essence, for example, it is to know *feline*, *human*, etc. In the Aristotelian tradition to know *being* is to know *first* an individual existent; not *feline*, but Fifi, not *human*, but Bob.

Second [meaning of the phrase “most intelligible objects”] *is from the comparison of the intellect to the senses*. For while sense perception is the knowledge of the particulars, the intellect seems to differ from sense perception in that it comprehends the universals. Therefore, that science is intellectual in the highest degree which is employed about the universals. These indeed are being, and those which follow being, such as unity, multiplicity, potency, and act. But principles of this kind ought not at all remain undetermined [we shall try to make our knowledge of being determined in the next chapter], since without these it is not possible to have the complete knowledge of principles which are proper to any genus or species. Nor again should they be treated in any particular science: because, since a knowledge of each genus of being requires these [principles], they would be treated with equal reason in every particular science. It remains, therefore, for one common science to treat principles of this kind; which, since it is intellectual in the highest degree, is the governess of all the other sciences.

It may be puzzling to our modern minds that someone would say that first principles “would be treated with equal reason in every particular science” unless a separate common science were to treat them. It is because this puzzles us that we do not nowadays see as clearly as St. Thomas did the need for first philosophy or metaphysics. St. Thomas is pointing out here a very important task of philosophy which has largely been lost to us, and to our philosophers; it is the task that elevates philosophy above the empirical sciences. He is saying that unless one common science were to treat the first principles, each science would have to treat them because “a knowledge of each genus of being requires [first principles].”

Another way to make the same point is this: one of philosophy’s main tasks is to tell us *what ultimately are* the various actual *somethings* that belong to every particular science. Philosophizing, as we are seeing St. Thomas describe it, is an intellectual activity that precedes all other scientific activities. It precedes them because it asks questions about *that which* underlies all branches of knowledge; and it asks such questions because it looks for the ultimate “why” or the first principle of

all actual *somethings*. The actual *somethings* are not what a philosopher, seeking the first principle, rests in; it is something beyond them, and in which they all share as actual *somethings*. For example, a biologist treats only a particular category of being, that is, a class of actual *somethings*. But what makes this class a separate class from other classes properly belonging to other sciences? We cannot give an answer without the knowledge of the first principle of all actual *somethings*. Now the kind that everything ultimately is, which makes it an actual *something*, and therefore knowable, is a *being* or an existent. Within this ultimate and largest class of actual things are different categories of *being*. We are not saying that *being* is a genus, but that *being*, as the principle of all actual *somethings*, resides, as their ultimate act, in all actual *somethings* which belong to various categories. To tell us what all the different subclasses or categories of actual *somethings* (like those belonging to biology) are, which are made actual by their first principle or *being* (and are for that reason beings or existents before they are anything else), is the task of philosophy, and this task cannot be fulfilled without the knowledge of *being*. Thus, without philosophy we can only know descriptions of various actual *somethings*, but not what kind each of them is, and to what category of *being*, and therefore to what valid field of knowledge it belongs (because knowledge is first and foremost of *being*, of that which makes the known actual, and therefore knowable). Without first philosophy we cannot see how different facts and the sciences that study them are related to one another and how they can work together. Philosophy, or better yet, metaphysics integrates and harmonises all the different aspects of our intellectual activity. This is why St. Thomas says that *first philosophy* governs all of the sciences.

In sum, what the Theologian is saying is that each science can know its own domain of inquiry only if the category of *being* it studies has been made known first. This knowledge is philosophical, and, St. Thomas maintains, can be acquired only if we engage ourselves in the study of causes that is intellectual in the highest degree,

namely the study of first causes. This study is *first philosophy* or metaphysics, and it should be sufficiently clear by now why St. Thomas, along with the entire ancient and medieval philosophical tradition, thinks that this study is the highest and the most authoritative.

I am aware that, up to this point, we have encountered the terms *first principles*, *first principle*, and *first causes* without having made it sufficiently clear what these are and how they are related. I shall give an account of them in chapter six.

Let us now turn back to St. Thomas' prologue.

Third [meaning of the phrase "most intelligible objects"] is from the knowledge of the intellect. For since each thing has intellective power [as opposed to perceptive power] by the fact that it is immune or free from matter, the most intelligible things must be those which are separate from matter.²⁰⁷ For the intelligible object and the intellect must be proportionate, and of one genus, since the intellect and the intelligible object are one in actuality. Indeed, those things are separate from matter in the highest degree which abstract not only from designated matter, "as the natural forms grasped universally, which the natural science [philosophy of nature] treats, but from sensible matter entirely. And not only according to *ratio* [that which is intelligible in them], as [are the objects] of mathematics, but also according to being, as God and the intelligences. Therefore, the science which considers such things seems to be intellectual in the highest degree, and a ruler or governess of the others.

But this threefold consideration ought to be attributed not to different sciences but to one. For the mentioned separate substances are the universal and first causes of being. However, it belongs to the same science to consider proper causes of some genus and the genus itself: as the natural science considers principles of a natural body. Therefore, it must be that it pertains to the same science to consider separate [intellectual] substances, and common being,²⁰⁸ which is the genus of which the mentioned substances are the common and universal causes.

²⁰⁷ This too may puzzle us. Why does St. Thomas say that the most intelligible things must be those which are separate from matter? He is not, I think, talking about things that do not have matter as part of their make up; he is not talking about angels, for example. He is talking about what is knowable about all things, including the material things. Now all material things have one thing in common, namely, that they are material. Therefore, we cannot know different *kinds* of material things by focusing on different aspects of their materiality; if we did, we would not know them as different, we would not know what makes one different from the other because their materiality is precisely what they all have in common. In order to know what kind each material thing is, which is what it is to *know* this thing as *this* thing, our intellects must grasp that which is separate from their matter and makes them the kind that they are, and therefore knowable. This is their *form* or essence, and their *esse* or act of being. The study of matter-form composition belongs, according to ancient and medieval philosophical traditions, to philosophy of nature (*scientia naturalis*). Aristotle's *Physics* is the prime example of this kind of study. The study of the act of being and its relation to other acts belongs to metaphysics.

²⁰⁸ By "common being" St. Thomas means, among other things, that which all material and immaterial things have in common, that which makes them actual, a *something*, and therefore

It appears from this that, although this science considers the three [classes of things] mentioned [namely, *common being*, *intellectual substances*, and *God*], nevertheless, it does not consider any of them as its subject but only common being itself. For this is the subject of a science whose causes and properties we are seeking, but not the causes themselves of some studied genus. For the knowledge of the causes of some genus is the end to which the consideration of a science extends. Now although the subject of this science is common being, nevertheless the whole of it is predicated of those things which are separate from matter according to being (*esse*) and that which is intelligible in them (*ratio*). For not only are those things said to be separated from matter according to being and *ratio* which are never able to be in matter, like God and the intellectual substances, but also those which are able to be without matter, like common being. But this would not happen, if they were dependent on matter for their being. [In other words, there could not be a science of being of all things, if the being of all things depended on matter.]

Therefore, according to the three [classes of things] mentioned [namely, *common being*, *intellectual substances*, and *God*], from which the perfection of this science is attained, three names arise. It is called the divine science or *theology*, inasmuch as it considers the mentioned substances; *metaphysics*, inasmuch as it considers being and those things which naturally follow being. For things that transcend the physical order are discovered by way of analysis, as the more common [are discovered] after the less common. It is called *first philosophy*, inasmuch as it considers the first causes of things. Therefore it is thus evident what the subject of this science is, and how it is related to the other sciences, and by which names it is called.²⁰⁹

This makes evident to us once more what science we must embark on in order to understand St. Thomas' philosophizing about God; it is the science of *common being* or *being as being*. For it seems that in this science, in which we consider first causes of things, that is *beings*, we also come upon God; but we do this not by setting out to find God, but rather by considering the nature and causes of common being, that is, *being* common to all things. Smart, Copleston, Geach, Kenny, and Rowe all look at the First, Second, and Third Ways of St. Thomas without telling us explicitly or implicitly how St. Thomas sees the data of those Ways as related to the ultimate *primary* cause of *being*. There is no talk of *being* anywhere in their interpretations, nor do they show that they understand *actuality* and *potentiality* as St. Thomas does, namely, as issuing from *being*. But St. Thomas clearly states that the science of *common being* is the same science where we come to philosophise about God.

knowable. Another expression of it is *being as being*, or *being as such*. See pp. 141-142 below.

²⁰⁹ In *Duodecim Libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis Expositio*, editio iam a M.R. Cathala, O.P., extrata retractatur cura et studio P.Fr. Raymundi M. Spiazzi, O.P.; Turin, 1950. pag. 1-2.

But before we proceed further in the direction St. Thomas points to them that would philosophise about God, we ought to heed the warning to stay clear of another path; the path, often taken by Neo-scholastics, of thinking that the object of metaphysics is the *concept* of being expounded with the aid of first principles. Etienne Gilson points out an undesirable consequence of taking such a path.

First, metaphysics does not treat of the concept of being as being any more than physics treats of the notion of becoming. If they did, these sciences would be turned into logics. Physics has to do with changing being itself, as metaphysics has to do with being insofar as it is being. We emphasise, with being itself and not only with the concept of being. Nothing can be inferred from the concept of being as being; everything can be said about being as being. But for that we must reach it, and if we do not comprehend it, at least we get in touch with it and then never lose contact with it, under pain of losing our way in any empty verbalism.²¹⁰

Philosophizing in this way will inevitably happen whenever, in our attempt to gain knowledge of actual *somethings* we try to reason *from* principles rather than in agreement with them and under the light they shed.²¹¹

Two other things remain for us to consider by way of preparing the first floor of the metaphysical groundwork of the Five Ways: a more detailed account of the first principles which we now know stem from *being* (the ultimate principle and the stuff of knowledge), and an account of intuition and knowledge of *esse*; that is, of a properly Thomistic conception of *being*. Such is the object of chapters six, seven, and eight. Much of modern philosophy disagrees with the content of these chapters, and that is fine. But this content is part and parcel of all of the Theologian's philosophizing. We may not wish so to philosophise, but we cannot convincingly argue that the Five Ways fail in their task, unless we first successfully refute the content of chapters six, seven, and eight, for in philosophy of the Theologian *being*, the cause of *being*, and God are inseparable.

²¹⁰ Etienne Gilson, *Christian Philosophy*, trans. by Armand Maurer, (Toronto: PIMS, 1993). pp. 67-68.

²¹¹ Aristotelian and Thomistic understanding of what it means to philosophise in agreement with and under the light of first principles may be seen in the final chapter of Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics* and St. Thomas' commentary on it.

CHAPTER VI

The Principles of Being and Knowledge

“The knowledge of truth is easy, namely inasmuch as the small amount of it is known through self-evident principles, which are evident to all.”

St. Thomas Aquinas, *In II Metaph.*, lect. I, n. 277.

It is surprising that even though St. Thomas says, that “the investigation of the human reason for the most part has falsity present within it, and this is due partly to the weakness of our intellect in judgment, and partly to the admixture of images,”²¹² he does not begin his intellectual enterprise in the manner in which Descartes and Kant do, namely with a grandiose attempt to establish all the ways in which error and falsity can be avoided. St. Thomas’ philosophy does not arise out of fear, the fear of falling into the abyss of error. He does not see the human mind as naturally seeking the illusions of the senses against which the philosopher must first devise *the method* of finding truth. The Theologian’s enterprise of discovering truth is not a search determined by doubt. Instead, he “entrusts the discovery of the truth principle which serves as starting point for acquiring all other truths ... [and] returns to the very sources of our acts of knowledge: the nature of man and the nature of his

²¹² SCG, I, 4, 5.

cognitive acts.”²¹³ It is important to have some understanding of how St. Thomas goes about discovering the truths of reason because it clearly points out the direction in which to seek the difference between Thomistic and modern conceptions of what it means to philosophise, and therefore what it means to philosophise about God. Any modern interpretation of the Five Ways must take account of the difference between philosophizing about God which depends on an epistemology built on principles of being and the philosophizing that does not. A modern criticism of St. Thomas’ conclusion that God does in fact *exist* must also be a criticism of his philosophizing to that conclusion by way of first principles.²¹⁴ In this chapter we shall acquaint ourselves with first principles of intellect by inquiring into the existence of natural or necessary judgments, and the causes of the evidence and infallibility of these natural judgments.

²¹³ Louis Marie Régis, *Epistemology*, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1959). p. 371. This work is a single most exhaustive and comprehensive study of Thomistic epistemology. No serious study of St. Thomas’ metaphysics and natural theology can afford to ignore it. I shall therefore make frequent recourse to it.

²¹⁴ Before attempting to criticise such philosophizing one would do well to ponder the following observations in order better to see what exactly he is setting out to criticise. “The obscurity surrounding the origin of principles is exactly the same as that which partly hides their nature. It is agreed that in the Thomistic epistemology the agent intellect [see n. 223, p. 115 below] immediately conceives the principles by way of abstraction from sensible experience, and that is correct. It is added, then, that the intellect suffices for this operation, that it accomplishes it by its own natural light ... And that too is correct, but it is not the whole truth. St. Thomas is the less scrupulous about not taking anything away from nature as, completely filled with the presence of God, like air with light, nature cannot be belittled without doing injury to the creator. Nothing can be denied to the essence of a being that God has made to be what it is ... The intellect is not the divine light; if it were, it would be God. But it is a created product of that light, and in a finite way it expresses it and imitates its excellence. Hence its capacity to discover in beings, which are also made in the image of the divine ideas, the intelligible forms in which they participate. The agent intellect in itself has the power to recognise outside itself the resemblance of the first cause, which is the source of all knowledge and intelligibility ... The universe we know is henceforth composed of things created in the likeness of a God whose essence, that is to say, the act of being, is at once their origin and model. The intellect that knows these things is itself the product and image of the same God. In this doctrine, in which everything in nature is natural, but in which nature is essentially a divine product and a divine image, it can be said that nature itself is sacred. It is not surprising that the first intelligible object an intellect of this sort discerns in such a real world is the primary notion of being, and that with this origin this notion surpasses in every way the mind that conceives it.” Gilson, *Christian Philosophy*, pp. 69-72

What is a Principle?

Principle means literally *beginning* ('principium'), or the starting point. In philosophy, as we have seen St. Thomas describe it in chapter five, this meaning of *principle* takes on the most fundamental meaning; here the beginning or the starting point is that of *all* reality because philosophy is that intellectual inquiry which seeks to attain "clear, certain, evident knowledge of the ultimate reasons and causes, internal and external, of things, as far as this can be reached by the natural powers of the human mind."²¹⁵ Other intellectual activities also seek reasons of things, but only philosophy seeks reasons that lie at the bottom of everything. These reasons are sometimes called *principles* and sometimes *causes*, and they are the answers to the last *why* the human mind asks. As such they are the ultimate explanations of everything every science inquires about, but they themselves are not explained by anything else. St. Thomas points out that first principles must satisfy at least two conditions: that it is impossible for us to be in error about them, and they be absolutely (as opposed to hypothetically) true.

[First principles] are not acquired by demonstration or by any similar method, but it comes in a sense by nature to the one having it inasmuch it is naturally known and not acquired. [They] become known through the natural light of agent intellect and they are not acquired by any process of reasoning but by having their terms become known. This comes about by reason of the fact that memory is derived from sensible things, experience from memory, and knowledge of those terms from experience. And when they are known, common propositions of this kind, which are the principles of the arts and sciences, become known. Hence it is evident that the most certain or firmest principles should be such that there can be no error regarding it; that it is not hypothetical; and that it comes naturally to the one having it.²¹⁶

Aristotle defines a principle as "the first from which a thing either exists or is generated or is known."²¹⁷ This divides principles into *ontological*, that by which a thing is or becomes, and *logical*, that by which a thing is known. To the former

²¹⁵ Michael Shallo, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

²¹⁶ In *IV Metaph.*, lect. 6, n. 599. The fact that, for St. Thomas, principles are indemonstrable and naturally known, points out that for him God is not a first principle. For if he were, St. Thomas would not exert the effort to *demonstrate* God in Five Ways.

²¹⁷ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Bk. V, 1 1013a 18-19, (Grinnell, Iowa, 1979). p. 73

group belong the four causes we encountered in chapter three. The latter group is divided into two subgroups: *formative principles of the sciences*, and *regulative principles of all thought*.²¹⁸ In this chapter we shall discuss in some detail the second group of *logical principles*.

Natural or Necessary Judgments

When ancient and medieval philosophers say that something does this or that by *nature*, or that something is *natural* to a thing, they do not have in mind the notion of “mother” nature; they are not talking about the not-artificial. To say that something is natural to a thing is to say that it belongs to it by nature, that is, by its own form or essence which makes it what it is. Thus for example to say that something is natural to a human person is to say that it belongs to him insofar as he is human, that he owes this or that characteristic to his humanity. Such a characteristic is for that reason also *necessary* to a human person, that is, he cannot not have it and be human; to say that he has it by necessity is to say that he has it by nature which belongs to him by virtue of his human form or essence.

And so St. Thomas says, “universal consent to first principles is caused by that likeness of nature in consequence of which we are all inclined toward the same thing; thus, for instance, all sheep agree in considering a wolf as an enemy.”²¹⁹ Our task in this section is to inquire into those human judgments which come from this natural inclination toward truth, an inclination that is a natural reaction of the human intellect in response to its primary object which we now know to be *being*, or that which all things have in common, that by which they are actual and knowable.

²¹⁸ For a discussion of these see Mercier, *A Manual of Modern Scholastic...* Vol. I, pp. 386-388.

²¹⁹ St. Thomas Aquinas, *De Spiritualibus Creaturis (On Spiritual Creatures)*, trans. by M.C. Fitzpatrick and J.J. Wellmuth, (Milwaukee: Marquette, 1951). 9, ad 14.

The main characteristics of the operation of this natural inclination and appetite are spontaneity, infallibility, and necessity. This operation of the human intellect is *determined* by human nature, and it differs from the *free* operation of the intellect, namely the operation of deliberating and of choosing, which is an operation that due to its *indetermination* is susceptible to error.²²⁰

But can our acts of knowing be said to include natural operations, that is, is part of our knowing non-deliberative or is all our knowledge a result of deliberation? In order to answer, St. Thomas thinks we must first notice that “each power of the soul is a form or a nature, and has a natural inclination to something. Hence, each power desires, by natural appetite, *that object which is suitable to itself*.”²²¹ The object of a power is nothing but its natural goal, that toward which it tends by virtue of its form. The intellect is a power that apprehends being and natures (essences) of things. In doing so it is simply obeying the law of nature according to which each power tends toward its natural goal. This natural tending of the intellect toward the being and essence of things is its act of simple apprehending, and no judgment is involved. In the same way sight simply apprehends the visible and hearing the audible, and all such apprehensions of the intellect and sense powers are infallible in grasping their objects because the objects are connatural with the powers.

I see no reason why we should disagree with St. Thomas on this point. Whenever we encounter a thing, our intellects immediately see, and without the possibility of deception, that it is a *being* and that it is this or that *kind* of thing. Sometimes, not very often, we are not sure what kind exactly the thing is; it may be living or non-living, animal or plant, and so on, but this we soon determine by further apprehension, (not by deliberation). But that any object of our intellect is a *being* is always and immediately apprehended.

²²⁰ See *ST*, I, q. 19, a. 10; q. 83, a. 2; q. 116, a. 1; I-II, q. 12, a. 5, ad 3; II-II, q. 18, a. 4.

²²¹ *ST*, I, q. 80, a. 1, ad 3. (italics mine)

Our main question, however, is whether this law of nature which the intellect obeys when it knows by simple apprehension, it also obeys when it makes judgments.²²² The Theologian says yes.

In every man there is a certain principle of knowledge, namely the light of the agent [active] intellect, through which certain universal principles of all sciences are *naturally understood as proposed to the intellect*.²²³

And he explains how it is that the intellect produces infallible and self-evident natural judgments.

First principles become known through the natural light of the agent intellect, and they are not acquired by any process of reasoning, but by having their terms become known. This comes about by reason of the fact that memory is derived from sensible things, experience from

²²² Scholastic medieval theologians regarded judgment in the following ways: “a. an act of the mind combining two objective concepts in an affirmation or separating them in a negation; an act of the mind assenting to the known objective identity or difference of concepts. b. an act of the mind asserting or denying existence of some subject (it is sometimes called an *existential* judgment). c. an affirmation or denial of some conclusion.” Bernard Wuellner *Dictionary of Scholastic Philosophy*, (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Co., 1956), p. 65.

²²³ *ST*, I, q. 117, a. 2. (italics mine).

A brief account of what St. Thomas, following Aristotle, means by agent and possible intellect should be given at this point because we shall often refer to them throughout this work. R.E. Brennan sums up the account in a way that pertains closely to our discussion. “Aristotle recognises in human intelligence a dual power: first the ability to abstract; second, the ability to understand. Aquinas takes over the Stagirite’s distinction and makes it the basis of his own ideogenetic theory. The ability to abstract he calls *agent intellect*. The ability to understand he names *possible intellect*. The functions of agent intellect are active or creative. The functions of passive intellect are passive or receptive. The proper object of sense is a sensible. But a sensible is only potentially intelligible. As a datum of sense, it is material. In order to be understood, it must be made immaterial. The datum of sense is presented to agent intellect in the form of an image of phantasm. It has all the concrete characters of a material object. It is the product of a material power, enveloped in material conditions. It belongs to the category of the here and now. It is, in short, individualised. The act of illumination, which is proper to agent intellect, is brought to bear on the phantasm. The concrete characters of the datum of sense are left aside. This is the movement of abstraction. Only the nude nature of the object represented in the phantasm remains. But a nude nature, or a nature stripped of its individuating notes, is something capable of being understood. The content of the phantasm is no longer material and determinate but has been raised to the level of intelligibility.

Thus, the work of agent intellect is to illumine and abstract, and, in very act of illuminating and abstracting, to change the object of sense into an object of intellect. The effect of its creative functioning is to produce a species which, by virtue of its immaterial action, can fecundate possible intellect with the germ of knowledge. The task of possible intellect, however, is not only to receive and be fecundated, but also to produce in its own right; and so it gives expression to its representational power by forming a species of its own. This species is the idea or concept.” *Thomistic Psychology* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1941). pp. 179-180.

memory, and knowledge of terms from experience. And when they are known, common propositions of this kind, which are the principles of the arts and sciences, become known. Hence it is evident that the most certain and firmest principle should be such that there can be no error regarding it; that it is not hypothetical; and that it comes naturally to the one having it.²²⁴

We see, then, that some of our judgments are natural operations, because they are the actualization of a power our intellect has by virtue of its nature or essence. This power of our intellect is called *agent* intellect, and its function is to shed light on whatever is real; in other words, it makes *being* known to us. But to what in the human mind does agent intellect make being known, on what does it shed the light of the real? To another natural power called the *possible* intellect.²²⁵

But the possible intellect which, like prime matter is of itself undetermined, *needs a habitus* to make sure that it follows its right rule: it needs a *natural* habit to grasp determinations like first principles, determinations which are the effects of the agent intellect which is its rule; and it needs an *acquired* habit for everything which may be derived from these principles.²²⁶

First principles are, therefore, determinations or first judgments, and they are the necessary consequence of the two natural powers of our mind, and because first judgments have the characteristics of natural operations, they are immediate or sudden, acquired without inquiry or investigation, indemonstrable, and necessary.

Next, we must see what are the causes of the first judgments of which our human nature is the immediate cause, that is, we must see the objects of these judgments, the concepts in which they consist, and how these concepts are linked which forces the intellect to unite them in judgment, which is its acquired habit.

The Number and Character of the Naturally Known First Judgments

Why are first judgments called principles or starting points, and how many are there? The phrase *first principles* is somewhat redundant because a *principle* is that which is first. "That is said to be a principle which comes first either with reference

²²⁴ *In IV Metaph.*, lect. 6, n. 599.

²²⁵ See n. 223 above.

²²⁶ Régis *op.*, *cit.* pp. 376-7. cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard*, book III, 23, 1, 1-5, 24, 1, 1-2.

to a thing's being (as the first part of a thing is said to be a principle) or with reference to its coming to be (as the first mover is said to be a principle) or with reference to the knowing of it."²²⁷ We thus have three orders of real things of which it can be said that they have a first principle: the being of things, the becoming of things, and the knowledge of things. Now it is in the order of the knowledge of things that we speak of judgments as first principles.

But how can there be several first principles, for first implies only one? In the order of knowledge "the expression *first principles* must be understood to mean a group of judgments by which the intellect observes the existence of necessary bonds between several primary concepts, bonds that oblige it to identify them in affirmation and separate them in negation."²²⁸ And what is the main characteristic of this group of natural judgments which are known to everyone before he even knows what a judgment is? To say that a thing is known to everyone is to say that it is self-evident in the sense that "its predicate is contained in the notion of the subject ... and such are those propositions whose terms are known to all, as, every whole is greater than its part."²²⁹ But before the human intellect apprehends any other notion naturally known and common to all, it apprehends the notion of *being*, which is a term "understood by everyone ... for *being* is the first concept in the intellect. Hence it is necessary that propositions of this kind [whose predicate is contained in the subject] be held as known in virtue of themselves [as opposed to demonstrated] not only as they stand but also in reference to us."²³⁰ On *being*, the first and most basic notion, other notions are based, notions like *one* and *many*. Furthermore, from this indemonstrable and first notion, which is for that reason a principle, and from

²²⁷ *In V Metaph.*, lect 1, n. 761. This entire lecture, and lect. 6 *In IV Metaph.*, serve as an excellent introduction to the Thomistic understanding and importance of principles, causes, and elements.

²²⁸ Régis, *op. cit.*, p. 378.

²²⁹ *ST*, I-II, q. 94, a. 2.

²³⁰ *In I Post. Analyt.*, lect. 5. (Albany, NY, 1970), p. 21.

the other universal and primitive notions which are consequent upon *being*, arise first indemonstrable principles or judgments.²³¹ This is a key point in the philosophy of St. Thomas; it is a point we may wish to dispute, or ignore, but without it we cannot understand why St. Thomas thinks his Five Ways demonstrate that God does in fact *exist*.

The principles comprise a list of ten: (1) It does not occur that the same thing is and is not.²³² (2) It is impossible for a thing both to be and not to be at the same time.²³³ (3) Each thing is one with itself.²³⁴ (4) One should not affirm and deny the same thing.²³⁵ (5) Every subject whatsoever must be either affirmed or denied.²³⁶ (6) Affirmation and negation are not simultaneously true.²³⁷ (7) It is impossible that contradictories be simultaneously true.²³⁸ (8) Whatever the subject, *either* affirmation *or* negation is true.²³⁹ (9) Every thing in motion is necessarily being moved by some thing.²⁴⁰ (10) Every agent acts for an end.²⁴¹

²³¹ For St. Thomas' more detailed account of this see *In IV Metaph.*, the entire lect 6.

²³² See *In I Post. Analyt.*, lect. 5, nn. 7-8; lect. 19, n. 1; *In IV Metaph.*, lect. 6, n. 606; *In I Phys.*, lect. 6, nn. 7-8.

²³³ See *In III Metaph.*, lect. 5, n. 387, 392; *In IV Metaph.*, lect. 600, 603, 605-606.

²³⁴ See *In VII Metaph.*, lect. 17, nn. 1652-1657; *In IV Metaph.*, lect. 2, n. 566; *In X Metaph.*, lect. 4, nn. 1997-1998, 2006, 2014-2017.

²³⁵ See *In I Post. Analyt.*, lect. 20, nn. 1-2; *ST*, I-II, q. 94, a. 2.

²³⁶ See *In III Metaph.*, lect. 5, n. 387; *In IV Metaph.*, lect. 7, n. 626; lect. 16, n. 720; *In XI Metaph.*, lect. 5, nn. 2221-2223.

²³⁷ See *In I Post. Analyt.*, lect. 5, n. 6; lect. 20, nn. 1-2; *In IV Metaph.*, lect. 7; *In XI Metaph.*, lect. 5-6.

²³⁸ See *In I Post. Analyt.*, lect. 5, n. 5; *In II Metaph.*, lect. 5-6. St. Thomas defines contradiction this way: "an opposition of affirmation and negation; hence one part of a contradiction is affirmation, which asserts something of something, and the other is negation, which denies something of something." *In I Post. Analyt.*, lect. 5, n. 5.

²³⁹ See *In I Post. Analyt.*, lect. 5, n. 5; lect. 20, n. 3; *In IV Metaph.*, lect. 16-17. This principle is often referred to as the principle of excluded middle. See *In X Metaph.*, lect. 6, n. 2041; *De Pot.*, q. I, a. 3.

²⁴⁰ See *In VII Metaph.*, lect. 7, nn. 1440-1446; *ST*, I, q. 2, a. 3; *SCG*, I, 13-15. That causality is a self-known evidence contained in every movement, see *In III Phys.*, lect. 5, n. 17.

²⁴¹ See *ST*, I, q. 5, a. 4; *De Pot.*, q. V, a. 5; *De Ver.*, QQ. XXI-XXII.

It is not difficult to see that neither the content nor the formulation of this list of judgments can be identified, that is, they do not point to this or that thing in reality. It is the job of the philosopher, not to provide proof of evidence and truth of the first judgments, which would be absurd, but to show their primacy and infallibility by considering closely their subjects and predicates. Régis maintains that they comprise four groups, that is, they can be understood as belonging to one or more of the four groups: (1) the principle of non-contradiction, (2) the principle of identity, (3) the principle of causality, and (4) the principle of finality.

Even though it would be beneficial to us to consider closely all four groups, we can afford the space to consider only the last two. The question, however, is whether causality and finality are principles, in the epistemological sense of a first principle that does not follow from a set of prior premises, or whether their necessity and universality must first be firmly established. Scholars like Régis, Renard, and Maritain think they are the former, while Owens, Klubertanz, and Smith take the other side. But neither side of the controversy denies that the truth of causality and finality can be established beyond doubt. In other words, the manner in which St. Thomas thinks the human intellect arrives at the truth of causality and finality may be disputed, but that it does arrive at it, and that this truth is an integral part of an argument for God's existence, is not a matter of dispute.

Causality

According to Régis causality is a principle which encompasses the last two of our ten axioms. The universality of these, and their function in human knowledge, is different from those that belong to the principles of non-contradiction and identity. They differ in that they are directly concerned with being in the process of becoming, and being as becoming is the first and proper object of the human intellect. It is by means of these two principles that our intellect is able to make

contact with the existence and intelligibility of that aspect of *being* which is not immediate to our reason, namely *being as becoming*. The axioms of the principles of noncontradiction and identity, which are immediate to our reason, deal with being and nonbeing, but to say that they “deal” with them is not to say that they help the human intellect to get in touch, so to speak, with either being or nonbeing; they do not help the intellect to grasp this or that object of reality. Through them the intellect contemplates being in its fullness and as absolutely universal. It is only by means of causality and finality that the human intellect gets in touch with realities that are remote from its immediate horizons—*being as becoming*, being that does not have in itself the ground of its existence, or being that does not exist of itself.²⁴²

Causality viewed as a principle, Régis maintains, can be restated in one general and all encompassing way: *Everything contingent is caused*, which can again be restated in three specific ways corresponding to three types of contingency that characterise *being as becoming*: “1) that of physical motion, in which the principle is stated thus: Everything moved is moved by another; 2) that of efficiency or metaphysical motion, and the principle here is stated in this way: Every efficient action which is a passage from potency to act, is caused; 3) that of existence, where we have the third statement: Everything that is not its own act of existing is caused.”²⁴³

As a first judgment or a principle, the statement *everything contingent is caused* must, according to Régis, have the characteristic of self-evidency and infallibility. To show that it does, a philosopher must show that its predicate is contained in the notion of the subject. In our statement of the principle of causality the-thing-as-contingent has the role of subject and the-thing-as-caused has the role of predicate.

²⁴² At least, this is how St. Thomas, following Aristotle, thinks the human mind gets in touch with the real (*being*) and the knowable. Plato thinks the way is the reverse, namely, that the mind begins really to know when it exits the realm of becoming. I shall say more about this in chapter nine.

²⁴³ Régis, *op. cit.*, p. 395.

If we are to show that the principle of causality is self-evident and infallible, we must show that the proposition *a thing is contingent* is the same as *a thing is caused*, or *it has a cause*. The point may be put another way: it must be shown that the notion of contingency is not intelligible without the notion of cause, and that therefore the existence of the contingent requires the existence of a cause. Let us therefore consider the correlation between *being as contingent* and *being as caused*, between the subject and predicate of the principle of causality. We shall do this by unpacking first the meaning of each phrase.

To say that something is contingent is to say that it *happened* or *came about*; consequently, it has not always been, it is that which can not-be. Philosophically speaking, the contingent is that which is able to be other than it is, and also able not to exist.²⁴⁴ The contingent may in fact be better understood as the mutable and as the opposite of the necessary.²⁴⁵

But a thing is contingent in three ways: in its movement, its substance or essence (along with its actions or operations, which is to say its efficiency) and in its existence. Thus the subject of the principle of causality is *being as movable* or *changing* insofar as it is moving or changing, or because its activity or efficiency can not-be, or because it comes in and goes out of existence. It is easy to see the contingency of a thing insofar as it moves or changes, but not so easy to see it in its essence (and action) and existence. To help us see it there we must note that the contingent is opposed not only to the necessary but also to *act*,²⁴⁶ that is, to that act which is autonomous, and not derived or received from another. An act is autonomous and not derived when it belongs to a thing's essence, when a thing acts

²⁴⁴ See *In VI Metaph.*, lect. 2, nn. 1182-1183.

²⁴⁵ The etymological meaning of *necessary* is clearer in Latin from which it comes. It is a negation, *ne*, of *cedo* which has several different but related meanings: *to go*, *to happen*, *to change*, *to become*. Thus for a thing to be necessary it must be immobile, unchanging; it must be, *not* become.

²⁴⁶ See n. 265, p. 131 below, for a definition of *act*.

because of what it is. Thus thinking is an act of a human being insofar as one is *human* or has a human essence. Flying, on the other hand, is an action a human being performs, not autonomously, but as derived from an aircraft. That is why the properties of essences are said to be necessary. However, the existence of essences and their properties is contingent because the essences have the properties they do only because they receive them. Another way to say that is this: even though it is necessary that an essence be the essence it is, it is not necessary that this or that essence *be* in the first place. Thus even though an act springing from a thing's essence is autonomous, a thing's essence is contingent, and that makes its act necessary only secondarily. And this brings us to the third type of contingency—the contingency of the act of existing of this or that individual essence. Realizing that an essence is contingent, that is, dependent upon another for its being at all, is to realise that the root of contingency of all being as becoming resides in the very act of existing. Thus in order to understand the principle of causality well (or as St. Thomas says, *properly*) we shall have to see that contingency appears first in the act of existing. That is why in chapter seven we shall attempt to get a glimpse of that act and to say more about its primacy. For now, let it suffice to note that the existence of everything our intellects encounter is contingent, that is, every *thing* we know can not-be.

In trying to understand the meaning of *being as caused*, the predicate of the principle of causality, we cannot make much use of the etymology of the word *cause* for it is historically largely undetermined.²⁴⁷ Philosophically, however, a cause of a

²⁴⁷ A.E. Taylor, however, may help us to begin understanding the meaning of *cause*. He says that the Greek word Aristotle used for “cause” is *aitia*, *aition*. *Aition* is properly an adjective used substantivally, and means “that on which legal responsibility for a given state of affairs can be laid.” Similarly *aitia*, the substantive, means the “credit” for good or bad, the legal “responsibility” for an act. Now when we ask, “what is responsible for the fact that such and such a state of things now exists?”, the answer or answers given is a “cause”. *Aristotle*, (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1955). p. 50.

being is one of four things, two of which refer to a thing's constitutive element, namely its matter and form, and two that express its origin, orientation, and various activities, namely the efficient and final causes. In all its uses and references the idea of cause always entails the notion of some sort of dependence. Given that we are dealing with the contingency of being (being as able not to be), rather than with the constitutive elements of this or that being, the principle of causality applies only insofar as it exerts its influence on efficiency and finality, and insofar as the intellect uses it to explain the contingency of things in the order of existing.

We are now in the position to state the meaning of *being as caused*: it is *being* or the *real* in its dependence upon that which is other than itself—that which does not belong to its inner resources (that which it *is* not but *has*) and which it therefore does not intrinsically possess but by which it is possessed, so to speak, and from which it continually receives, insofar as it is caused.²⁴⁸ But, as we have already seen, contingent being receives or is caused in the realm of its physical becoming (the realm of the changes that accrue to it as a composite of matter and form), in the realm of its passing from potency to act in order of action or operation, and in the realm of existing (the realm of coming into being and remaining in being for a time). Thus the principle of causality deals with all movement and mutability of everything that is dependent on another for its being and action (efficiency).

Let us now look more closely at the correlation between the subject and the predicate of the principle of causality. The meaning of the subject or *being as contingent* is this: Whatever is contingent (whatever is in process of physical or metaphysical becoming and whose act of existing does not arise from its own resources but receives it over and above its essence) is dependent upon another for

²⁴⁸ The importance of this point is pivotal for understanding how St. Thomas views the data from which he argues to God in the Five Ways. We shall stress the point several times throughout the course of our preparation for a profitable reading of the Five Ways.

its becoming and existing. But to be dependent amounts to being possessed by, being the property of, the one on whom we depend, because in sharing what belongs to the one on whom we depend, we have no claim to independence from him insofar as we participate in what belongs properly to him and which we lack. Thus, in the context of contingency, dependence on another entails having a borrowed being and a borrowed efficiency. But it is precisely here that the meaning of the subject is contained in the meaning of predicate, that is, to say that being is contingent is to say that it is caused. "To say that everything contingent is caused is to affirm immediate and *per se* evidence, for caused being is intrinsically contained in contingent; without each other they are unintelligible."²⁴⁹ It matters little what type of the contingency we are speaking of; the principle of causality (*everything contingent is caused*) is self-evident because in each case the same contingency is at work, namely, to receive from and to participate in another is to *be* and to be *intelligible* only in relation to the other, which is its cause.

Régis also insists on a two-fold epistemological self-evidency of the principle of causality. First, given that the bond between the subject and the predicate of the principle of causality is an essential bond, because the notion of contingency is defined in terms of the fact of its causal dependence, it is impossible, therefore, to think of contingency apart from its relation to its explanatory cause. To understand the principle of causality is to see the necessary and self-evident character of its truth, which is this: if something is contingent, it is necessarily caused; put more clearly, it is this: "it is impossible that everything contingent not be caused, for the contingent needs a cause just as potency needs act."²⁵⁰

The necessity of the truth of the principle of causality can also be seen in contrast to the principle of noncontradiction (*being is not nonbeing*). A denial of the

²⁴⁹ Régis, *op. cit.*, p. 398.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.* p. 399.

necessity of the truth of the principle of causality forces the intellect into an absurdity of denying the truth of the principle of noncontradiction. How so? If whatever is contingent is not *necessarily* caused, then that which is essentially potency, namely the contingent, is not necessarily potency. But this drives us into an absurdity, because if the contingent or that which is potency is not necessarily potency, then that which is not act is act, because potency is that which is not act; and if that which is not act is act, then nonbeing is being, because act is being. Therefore it is not only nonsensical to deny the principle of causality, it is also absurd.²⁵¹

But Régis' position on causality reveals only one side of a scholarly controversy. In his article, "The Causal Proposition—Principle or Conclusion?" Joseph Owens does not deny the truth of causality but calls into question its self-evident and analytic character. Owens argues that it is more authentically Thomistic to regard the causal proposition as a *conclusion* rather than a principle.²⁵² He insists on the following point: Even though we come to see that something has come into being,

²⁵¹ Henri Renard supports the claim that the principle of causality is analytical and absolutely certain in the following way. "Let us start with the first incomplex principle 'being. Our next step in the light of logical development will be the principle of contradiction, or, as it is sometimes called, the principle of identity: 'Being is being; non-being is non-being.' Now the first half of that proposition 'being is being' can be thus expressed: 'Whatever is, is' or whatever is must have a sufficient reason to be.' This is sometimes called the principle of sufficient reason. The subject of that proposition is every and all beings, and hence includes God and all creatures. We can omit the first half, for 'God who is subsisting *to be* is His own reason for existence [which is to say that He does not require a causal explanation].' The second half of the principle should then read: 'Creatures, on the contrary, who are not their *to be*, but have a *to be* really distinct from their essence are not a sufficient reason for existence to themselves. Consequently, they must have a sufficient reason for existing from another.' This is our principle of causality." *The Philosophy of Being*, (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1946), p. 126.

²⁵² George Klubertanz suggests that causality should be referred to as a *theorem* rather than a principle. Both he and Owens warn against a view of causality prevalent in modern philosophy and in neo-scholasticism of the twentieth century which regards it as "self evident" from the very analysis of the concepts or [as a deduction] from the principle of sufficient reason." Instead, Klubertanz insists, causality is "a proposition of a very general and inclusive character, whose truth can be established beyond a doubt. Such a proposition is called a 'principle,' 'law,' or 'theorem.'" *Introduction to the Philosophy of Being*, (New York: Meredith Publishing Co., 1963), p. 154, n. 11.

and have thereby established that it is contingent, we cannot *immediately* attach to the notion “contingent” the notion “caused.” But until we have joined “contingent” and “caused”, universally and necessarily, we cannot assert, by way of conclusion, that something contingent must as such be caused. “Before one can invoke such an application of the first principle of demonstration, one must have already established the contingent thing as *necessarily* a caused thing.”²⁵³

But we saw that Régis insists on the self-evident and analytic character of causality only *after* he restates it as *everything contingent is caused*. But Owens argues that the necessary and universal connection between the *contingent* and the *caused* must first be established. The two positions are therefore not reconcilable.

The reason why the connection between the *contingent* and the *caused* must first be established, at least in Thomistic philosophy, is that St. Thomas is not a rationalist who philosophises on the basis of clear and distinct ideas attained without recourse to sensible things. In other words, the notion *caused* cannot be seen as immediately evident in the notion *contingent*, because “this latter notion is taken from the things of the sensible universe. It is a notion considerably different from that of ‘contingent,’ and when used as a middle term²⁵⁴ it seems to make the process a strict *demonstration*. The causal proposition would become a *conclusion* from other premises instead of being epistemologically a first principle.”²⁵⁵

²⁵³ Joseph Owens, “The Causal Proposition—Principle or Conclusion?” *Modern Schoolman*, 32 (January, 1955), p. 169. In another of his works Owens explains a metaphysical understanding of the causal proposition this way. “The causal proposition in a metaphysical context is considerably different from what is understood by the principle of causality or the principle of causation in modern physical science, where it denotes the uniformity of nature. The meaning then is ‘same cause, same effect.’... Metaphysically, the causal proposition on the contrary bears upon the existence, not the nature, of the effect. It means that every finite thing or action, whether determined or free, has to have a cause of its being.” *An Elementary Christian Metaphysics*, p. 77, n. 19

²⁵⁴ For a definition of *middle term* see n. 373, p. 205 below.

²⁵⁵ Owens, “The Causal Proposition...”, p. 259.

Consequently, in the philosophy of St. Thomas, the causal proposition is formulated at its most basic metaphysical level at the very moment when we see that a being whose existence is not owed to its essence receives existence from another that lies outside of it. But because for a human being the data for knowledge, which is *being*, comes from sense experience, knowledge that efficient causality is actually here and now taking place is *a posteriori*, and therefore not analytic, and not a principle but a conclusion. To see that a being whose existence is not owed to its essence must receive its existence from another is for St. Thomas a conclusion of a demonstration. Only upon reaching this conclusion are we entitled to employ the causal proposition *everything contingent is caused* (which means *everything contingent is caused to exist*). Owens lays out the steps of the demonstration which reaches this conclusion.

The first step in that demonstration is to show that a thing abstracts from its being without prescinding from it. This itself is a difficult demonstration in which the nature of the thing is compared with its different ways of being. The being which is attained in the judgment and which is other than nature is used as the middle term. The second step is to show that the being of a thing is accidental to it, not in the sense of a property or a predicamental accident, which would be subsequent to the nature, but in the sense of an accident which is in its own way absolutely prior to the nature. The notion of accident in this sense is used as a middle term. The conclusion is that to be for such a nature is *ab alio* [from another]. This is the causal proposition. Further reasoning establishes the relation of act and potency and sets up the concept of all being except the primary being as “participated being.” In that concept, of course, the concept of “caused” is involved.... Where, in contrast [to modern rationalist background], sensible things are the origin of all human knowledge and where things are of a nature which is different from, but always open to, the act of being, they provide the basis for a rigorous demonstration in which the causal proposition follows as a conclusion from the accidental character of their being.²⁵⁶

Owens concludes that we ought stay clear of regarding the causal proposition as *analytic* in order to avoid confusion with the Kantian sense of that term. The proposition *the contingent is caused* is not like the proposition *all bachelors are single* because the term *caused* refers here to efficient causality, not formal causality. In the proposition *all bachelors are single* the universally accepted meaning of *bachelor* is presupposed. Not so in the order of efficient causality. That is, “the demonstration of

²⁵⁶ Ibid. pp. 335 and 339.

the causal proposition does not presuppose that the proposition has already been implicitly accepted through the use of syllogistic reasoning.”²⁵⁷ If, then, we wish to refer to causality as a principle, Owens points out, we must do so bearing in mind that it is a proposition whose necessity and universality are demonstrated, and therefore a principle in a non-epistemological sense, not a first principle like the principle of contradiction.

Owens is well aware that the concepts of *cause* and *effect* are immediately evident to the human intellect, that is, through internal experience. “They are generalised by an easy and habitual process, which becomes as it were a second nature, and so are extended to all contingent things.”²⁵⁸ Smith, who agrees that the causal proposition must be demonstrated, elaborates on the immediate evidency of the concept of *cause* or *causality*. Because this concept follows immediately upon internal experience, the following is necessarily true: *X must be either caused or uncaused; it cannot be neither*. Smith explains.

Causality is a principle, a source, a reason why there is an existent only when examination reveals that the existent examined *must* [that is, once the *necessary* connection between the *contingent* and the *caused* has been demonstrated] be caused. Causality is a principle of caused being, not a principle of being, and that a being be caused must be demonstrated. In short, “to be caused” is a predicate of a being when it is proved that a being is caused, pretty much as “odd” or “even” is a predicate of a number only after examination has shown whether the number is odd or even.²⁵⁹

In other words, the notion of causality does not have much traction, that is, it does not yield much knowledge, until a metaphysical examination has revealed that a being is in fact caused. Or, as Owens puts it, “the causal proposition has a very

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.* p. 337.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.* p. 336. On the inner experience of cause see J. Piaget, *The Child's Conception of Causality*, (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1930).

²⁵⁹ Smith, *The Philosophy of Being*, p. 13. Cf. “The fact that something is a nose does not show that it is snub; the fact that something is a number does not show that it is even. In a word, although the notion “caused” might not be found in anything other than the contingent, it would not immediately guarantee that everything contingent must be caused. That would still have to be demonstrated through peculiarly accidental character in the being of such contingent things.” Owens, “The Causal Proposition,” pp. 336-337, n. 95.

limited use in a philosophy which ... places the origin of human cognition in sensible things.”²⁶⁰ Nevertheless the meaning of the notion of causality is immediately known. If it were not, no one could see the absolute and indemonstrable truth of the following proposition: *X must be either caused or uncaused; it cannot be neither*. It simply is not an option to demand, with respect to that *proposition*, “Why can it not be neither?” It is no more an option than to demand a demonstration of a proposition saying that a number cannot be neither odd nor even. To speak of a number is to speak of an either odd or an even number. In the same way, to speak of a being is speak of an either caused or an uncaused being. To determine which we are speaking of requires a conclusion that issues only upon a demonstration. Smith merely points out that we cannot argue for causality itself. That is, it is impossible to demonstrate that a being cannot be neither caused nor uncaused, or that it *must* be one or the other, because causality issues upon being. The truth of that *proposition* is self-evident because causality, as a principle of caused being, is not and cannot be proved. This does not, however, lend credence to the rationalist principle of sufficient reason because it does not get us off the hook of having to *demonstrate*, through the steps we saw Owens outline above, that some sensible thing is *necessarily* related to its efficient cause. In another of his works Smith makes the point in more detail.

All proofs are from causality [that is, from the immediate, not *a priori*, notion of *cause* and *caused*]. No proof based upon causality proves causality. In fact, causality is not proved at all. If proof proves, there is no proof that it does. If, *e.g.*, this be proof: there is *x*, because there is *y*; nevertheless there is no proof of that. Causality is the basis of proof and an eduction from the principle of contradiction. The principle of contradiction is itself a natural induction from experience. Thus, causality [not the causal proposition] is not proved, it is seen as being the only explanation of a contingent existent, which existent, evidenced as it is by experience [and not by analysis], would be and not be at the same time unless it were caused. To prove is to see, in the light of the principle of causality, either that there must be the effect, because there is the cause; or that there must be the cause, because there is the effect. There is no demonstration by middle term of the principle of causality [that is, of the immediate notion of *cause*, not of the causal proposition]... The relevant point is that such principles *are* derived from the knowledge of being

²⁶⁰ Owens, “The Causal Proposition,” p. 339.

in such wise that if they were not so derived, then one must quit thinking, because anything to think about has quit being. No first principles are proved. It is in the light of unproved principles that conclusions are proved. As St. Edmund Campion remarked... 'Tobias had a dog, although the Bible says only that Tobias' dog wagged his tail.' That is,... you can prove Tobias had a dog if there is an unproved, but known waggle; or you can prove a waggle if there is an unproved, but known dog. You cannot prove anything without the datum of being and the principles derived therefrom.²⁶¹

This does not in any way contradict Owens who takes it as his task to show “how a thing necessarily contains a relation to an efficient cause which produced it, even though that efficient causality is not immediately evident,”²⁶² and argues that the *necessity* of the relation becomes evident only upon a demonstration, and not, as Régis argues, upon an analysis of the concept *contingent*. He does not argue, however, that the *relation* becomes intelligible upon a demonstration. Smith's point is that the intelligibility of the relation between the efficient cause and that which is produced by the efficient cause is indemonstrable, because it issues upon the already possessed and unproved notion of causality which itself issues upon the internal experience of *being*, the source of everything known and knowable.

At this point an important question arises. Why does a philosopher at all inquire whether an existent is caused? The short answer is this: being an existent is a status that belongs to many existents, each of which is not another existent, and we need to account for the multiplicity of existents, which, although they are all existents (and in that respect the same) are nevertheless many *existents*, that is, one is not the other (and in that respect they are different).²⁶³ In chapter eight we shall examine

²⁶¹ Smith, *Natural Theology*, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1951). pp. 58-59

²⁶² Owens, “The Causal Proposition,” p. 160, n. 1.

²⁶³ That St. Thomas insists on this is clear from the following text: “But being is predicated of everything that is. Hence, there cannot possibly be two things neither of which has a cause of its being, but either both of them must exist through a cause, or the one must be the cause of the other's being. Everything which is in any way at all must then derive its being from that whose being has no cause.... Again, everything that can be and not-be has a cause; for considered in itself it is indifferent to either, so that something else must exist which determines it to one. Since, then, it is impossible to go on to infinity, there must exist a necessary being which is the cause of all things that can be and not-be.” *SCG*, II, 15, 2 and 6.

this level of sameness and difference, unity and multiplicity, in the only way it can be examined, that is metaphysically.

Finality

Régis and Renard argue for an understanding of finality in the same way in which they argue for causality—that it is axiomatic or a self-evident principle. As their starting point they take St. Thomas' claim that "every agent of necessity acts for an end."²⁶⁴ This judgment may be translated *being as agent is finalised*, which gives us the subject of the proposition: *being as agent*, and the predicate: *being as finalised*. We shall examine them separately, and then show their correlation.

What for St. Thomas is an *agent*? We are not here concerned, as we were in the principle of causality, with being in potency, or as contingent, or as a recipient; we are interested here in being, not as receiving, but as giving or communicating whatever flows from its inner wealth, from a perfection that belongs to it.

I answer that it is in the nature of every act to communicate itself as far as possible. Wherefore every agent acts forasmuch as it is in act: while to act is nothing else than to communicate as far as possible that whereby the agent is in act.²⁶⁵

²⁶⁴ ST, I-II, q. 1, a. 2. See also *The Principles of Nature*, ed. cit., IV, 23: "The end is said to be the cause of causes, inasmuch as it is the cause of the causality of all the causes."

²⁶⁵ *De Pot.*, q. II, a. 1, c. See also *De Ver.*, q. XX, a. 4 and *SCG*, III, 10.

The Scholastic notion of *agency* presupposes a rather complex notion of *act*. As a verb, *to act*, meant for the Scholastics: 1) to do or to make something. 2) to cause something to be in act, whether by way of efficient, final, or formal causality. As a noun *act* can be understood in the general sense and as manifesting itself in many specific ways. Generally speaking *act* means 1) perfection or a perfection; what is fully real, finished, or fulfilling; an actuality. 2) *thought of as influencing potency in some way*, a determining principle; the intrinsic principle which confers a definite perfection on being; hence, a form. 3) the perfection resulting from an action. 4) activity, operation, action, or second act of a power. ANT. — *potency*. Some of the more important specific aspects of *act* are: **complete act**, an end or an operation that is an end; the ultimate act of a being (the last in a series of acts by which a being obtains its proper fullness of being). **entitative act**, existence; the act of being; *esse*. **first act**, 1) the intrinsic fundamental perfection of a being in any order. 2) the first actuality (in a series) that determines any passive potency to be or to be something specific. Hence, the same being may have several first acts, but each in different orders; existence will be first act in the order of being, substantial form will be first in the order of essence or nature, the power will be first in the order of activity. **second act**, a determination or perfection added to a being which already possesses

A technical definition of agent being is *being insofar as it is perfect or in second act*.²⁶⁶ To speak of a being's perfection is to speak of some good, some definite actuality which belongs to and is suitable to that being. To say that a perfection is a second act is to say that it is added to a being which already possesses first acts in different orders, that is, existence, form (for example, a soul in the case of a human being), and powers belonging to that form (for example, the intellect and the will which bear the fruits of knowledge and love respectively). To be an agent, therefore, is to be perfect, to be perfect in proportion to the intensity of the agent's act. Thus, the more intensely one is in act, that is, the less admixture of act and potency there is in him, the more he approximates the absolute agent or the agent in whom there is no potency (no capacity to receive existence, form, or a power). To act, then, is to express or communicate that perfection which belongs to a being's actuality.

The Thomistic meaning of the predicate of the principle of finality, *being as finalised*, can be seen in the Theologian's earliest work.

I answer that something acts for an end in two ways: either for the end of the work, or for the end of the worker. The end of the work is that to which the work is directed by the agent, and this is called the *ratio* of the work [that which is intelligible in the work; the reason or the 'why' of it]; but the end of the worker is that which the worker primarily intends: whereas the end of the work can be in another; the end of the worker is always in himself... It is known therefore that acting for an end is of two modes: either on account of the desire for the end, or on account of the love of the end: for one desires a thing he does not possess, but loves the thing he does possess... and for this reason it is fitting for every creature to act on account of the desire of the end, because every creature acquires from another the good which it does not have from itself; but it belongs to God to act on account of the love of the end, because nothing can be added to his goodness [perfection].²⁶⁷

From this we see that *to act for an end* has two meanings: 1) if the end is desired, the act implies an imperfection, namely the lack of that which is desired, 2) if the end is

the first act, whether of existence or of form or of a particular power; e.g., intellect and will with respect to the soul itself; acts of the will with respect to the will itself; accidents of a substance. Hence, a second act presupposes and perfects another act, and is usually an accident. *Dictionary of Scholastic Philosophy*, p. 3.

²⁶⁶ Régis, *op. cit.*, p. 400.

²⁶⁷ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum, In II Sent.*, I, 2, 1. (Paris: Mandonnet, 1929). (my own translation)

loved, the act implies a perfection because it is the act of giving entirely without an expectation of return or any interest. But both meanings contain the notion of a gift. In the first case the gift is the effect of an act that is received by the acting being, and in the second case the gift is an outpouring of a perfect actuality into effects that are themselves givers. To act for an end, therefore, means to be a being that gives or communicates itself, which is love. But that, as we have seen, is also the meaning of the subject of the principle of finality, *being as agent*.

We may thus restate the principle of finality in several different ways: “it is necessary that every agent act in virtue of an end; it is necessary that actuality communicate actuality; it is impossible that being as perfect communicate anything but perfection; it is impossible that perfect being act in view of a nongood or not be finalised.”²⁶⁸

As with the principle of causality, the necessity of the truth of the principle of finality can be seen when it is reduced to the principle of noncontradiction. To deny the necessity of an agent’s acting for an end is to deny that being is not nonbeing, or to affirm that being is nonbeing. How so? Being an agent means being in second act or perfect, and *end* means the perfection of the real (in Latin *perfectio* means a *completion*, therefore that which is finished or ended). Now, as we shall see in the next chapter, existing is the ultimate perfection of a being. From this it follows that if a thing is an agent on account of the fact that it is an existent, and if it is an end on account of the fact that it is a perfection (which is to say an existent), it must necessarily be the case that an agent acts for an end; for if not, we are forced to maintain that a perfect being is not a perfect being which contradicts the principle of identity, which again denies the truth of the principle of noncontradiction. We

²⁶⁸ Régis, *op. cit.*, p. 402.

can conclude, therefore, that the principle of finality, which is grasped upon an examination of its subject and predicate, is self-evident and necessary.²⁶⁹

George Klubertanz, on the other hand, argues that finality is, for St. Thomas, more of a conclusion than a principle, a conclusion of a real (rather than a logical) proof which rests on our direct experience of agents and their tendency. It is true, Klubertanz points out, that St. Thomas often asserts *every agent acts for a goal* simply as a premise without demonstrating it, but he also presents it as a conclusion of an argument.

First, in the sense that every agent acts for something definite, [St. Thomas] proves the axiom by showing its contrary to be impossible, and by treating it in terms of act and potency shows that every goal must be a definite one. Secondly, to show that an agent is ordered to a goal, he employs the notions of nature (when commenting Aristotle) and tendency as middle terms. (Though “agent,” nature,” “tendency,” and “goal” are terms which imply each other, they are distinct notions, not simply synonymous words. In this argument, St. Thomas insists that nature (and tendency) are known immediately in sense experience as well as in our experience of our own activity. [Thus] “Every agent acts for a goal,” is not a self-evident principle, nor a truth known from the logical implications of prior logical principles, but a conclusion of a real proof resting on the immediate experience of nature and tendency.²⁷⁰

All our commentators, however, agree that for St. Thomas *every agent acts for a goal* is indisputably true, and that agency (efficiency) carries with it finality. In chapter ten we shall consider final causality in its relation to efficient causality in a way that bears directly on the Five Ways.

²⁶⁹ Renard argues this way: “The expression of the universal law, that *every agent acts for an end*, is called the principle of finality. It is a principle of knowledge, and is a self-evident truth. Indeed it could not be denied without involving a contradiction. For if there were not final cause moving the agent, the agent simply could not act, and hence it would at once be an agent and a non-agent. Such a being would be unintelligible, because it is made fully intelligible precisely by the affirmation of the end. We must conclude, therefore, that the principle of finality is absolutely true, absolutely certain.” *The Philosophy of Being*, p. 146.

²⁷⁰ George P. Klubertanz, “St. Thomas’ Treatment of the axiom, ‘Omne Agens Agit Propter Finem,’” in *An Etienne Gilson Tribute*, ed. Charles J. O’Neil, (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1959), pp. 116-117.

CHAPTER VII

A Glimpse of the Act of Existing

"You see? said the Witch. When you try to think out clearly what this sun must be, you cannot tell me. You can only tell me it is like the lamp. Your sun is a dream; and there is nothing in that dream that was not copied from the lamp. The lamp is the real thing; the sun but a tale, a children's story."

C. S. Lewis, *The Silver Chair*

At the end of chapter four we were given advice on how best to attempt philosophizing about God, and how not to. Grabmann and Collins both point out that we must not think that God's existence can be reached by a mere arrangement of ideas and analysis of logical and mathematical concepts. The only way to reach God's existence with our intellects, they stress, is by seeing and understanding the best we can the act of existence in contingent beings encountered in our experience. This is what we shall try to do in this chapter.

But it will not be enough only to read this chapter. If we wish to read profitably the Five Ways we must personally attain the intuition of what St. Thomas calls the act of existing. Attaining it requires an effort on our part that consists in more than merely reading a few pieces of writing; we must try to see with our minds the act of existence which all actual things exercise. The only help I can offer is to reproduce written accounts of people's insights into this act of existing in hope that it will point out the direction in which to look and the direction in which not to look. But

the actual seeing of this act must be done on our own by each of us, whether we are metaphysicians or not. The accounts I offer below are not philosophical, but they are reflections on the data accessible to any of us on which a metaphysician like St. Thomas can go to work. Without it, I am afraid, we cannot hope to see why *he* thinks the Five Ways demonstrate God's *existence*.

Being and Be-ing

In chapter three we distinguished between various meanings of *being* that enter the philosophical activity of a metaphysician. We need to repeat them here so that we may give a fuller account of some of the meanings. *Being* is, first of all, (A) the present participle of the verb 'to be'. A helpful way to distinguish it from other meanings would be to write it as *be-ing*. *Being* is also (B) a noun, as for example 'painting' is a noun. This noun functions in at least three different contexts: (B') *a being* (like 'a painting'); (B'') a set of *beings* (like a collection of 'paintings'); and (B''') the common nature of all *beings* (or 'paintings'). In metaphysics sense (A), or *be-ing* means existence, or the actual exercise of the act of existing. But sense (B''') is used to express *being as such*, or that which is common to everything that in some way exists. St. Thomas uses the Latin word *ens* to express this meaning of *being*; and we may say that *ens* designates that by which whatever is real, is real. For sense (A) St. Thomas used the word *esse* ('to be' or 'be-ing'), and we may say that *esse* is that by which the real or *ens* is actual. For St. Thomas being (*ens*) is that whose act it is to exist (*esse*). Thus *ens* expresses the subject of existence, and *esse* expresses the act of the subject whereby the subject exists. Textual support for this may be found in two of St. Thomas' early works: "The existence of a thing is called a being, not because it has some existence other than itself, but because *by* that existence the

thing is said to be.”²⁷¹ In SCG, II, 54, 3 St. Thomas says that “be-ing is the proper act of the whole substance (*ipsum esse est proprius actus substantiae totius*)” ... and “the substance is called a *being* (*substantia denominatur ens*).” We can say, then, that be-ing, or existence (*esse*) is the proper act of a being, or the subject of existence (*ens*). This, then, is what we shall try to grasp in the present chapter: a being is said to be insofar as it exercises the act of existing. How can we see this act, and on what grounds can we affirm that it is a distinct act from a being’s essence?

Before we take on the main task of this chapter an explanation of some key terms is in order, particularly an explanation of *being* (*ens*) and *be-ing* (*esse*).²⁷² These two terms, it must be noted, are not terms for two different things but for two different features. All philosophizing, we noted in chapter five, is about *being*, or about that which in some way is. The terms *being* and *be-ing* are two features of an existent. Note first of all that an existent is that which exists, that is, anything whatsoever we come into contact with and which comes into contact with us. Note secondly that an existent, or *a that which is* has two features: (a) the feature we may call *that which* or *ens*; (b) the feature we may call *existing* or *esse*. Our two key metaphysical terms *being* (*ens*) and *be-ing* (*esse*) designate these two features of an existent or *a that which is*—the object of all philosophizing.

Two points must be noted about these two features. The first is simple: neither of these features can be except as related to the other. In other words, there is no *be-ing* (*esse* or *existing*) feature of a being unless that feature be the feature of *being* (*ens* or *that which*); there is no *existing* except the *existing* of *a that which*. Similarly, there is no *being* (*ens* or *that which*) feature of a being except as related to a *be-ing* (*existing*) feature.

²⁷¹ *De Ver. (Truth)*, trans. by R.W. Schmidt, (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1954). q. 21. a. 5, ad 8. vol. III. Henceforth *De Ver.*

²⁷² I am relying for my explanation on Leo Sweeney’s *Authentic Metaphysics in an Age of Unreality*, (New York, 1993), ch. V, and Gerard Smith’s *The Philosophy of Being* (New York, 1961), ch. XX.

The second point qualifies the first point. Even though it is always true that there can be no *be-ing* (*esse*) without *being* (*ens*), it seems that it is not always true that there can be no *being* without *be-ing*. It is not true with respect to future existents. A future existent is certainly a *that which*, but it has not the *esse* feature. It seems, then, that we must allow existents without existing, that is, we must allow that *to be* is to be a *that which* since it is possible to be without having the *esse* feature. But St. Thomas will not allow for the possibility of an existent without the feature of *esse*.

From the very fact that being [*esse*] is ascribed to a quiddity [*that which*], not only is the quiddity said to be but also to be created: since before it had being [*esse*] it was nothing, except perhaps in the intellect of the creator, where it is not a creature but a creating essence.²⁷³

“God at the same time gives being (*esse*) and produces that which receives being (*esse*), so that it does not follow that his action requires something already in existence.”²⁷⁴

The only way to posit existents that do not exist is by allowing that a future existent is possible *apart from the cause* which can make it to exist. But if we follow St. Thomas, we cannot allow this because for him the very possibility of a future, or a possible existent resides in the *be-ing*, not in its own *be-ing*, as in the case of an actual existent, but in the *be-ing* of its cause which can make it to exist. The *be-ing* of a future, or a possible, existent lies in the actual *be-ing* of its cause.²⁷⁵ The only way, then, in which we can sensibly speak about a future existent within a Thomistic context is in terms of an actually existing cause which has the ability to make the future existent to exist, and without which the future existent is nothing.

²⁷³ *De Pot.*, q. III, a. 5, ad 2.

²⁷⁴ *De Pot.*, q. III, a. 1, ad 17. See also *ST*, I, q. 44, a. 1, ad 1.

²⁷⁵ As we shall see in connection with St. Thomas' First Way, “something is not able to be reduced from potency to act [for example, to go from a possible existent to an actual existent] except through something which is in act.” *ST*, I, q. 2, a. 3, the First Way.

In light of this we can sum up our description of an existent (*a that which is*). An existent is *that which is* or *can be*; the *can be* of a future existent is the actual *esse* of the cause which is able to make the future existent to be. Any existent, whether actual or possible, has two features: the *being* (*ens*) feature, and the *be-ing* (*esse*) feature; the *be-ing* feature belongs to that existent which is present, or actual, or it belongs to the cause of the existent if the existent in question is a future, or a possible existent.

In the philosophy of St. Thomas two different words are used to describe the *being* feature of an existent (*a that which is*): *substance* and *essence*. The reason why there are two rather than only one is that a metaphysician thinks and speaks of a *that which* in two different ways: 1) as any *that which* whatsoever, for example a cat, a man, a fish; 2) as a *that which* of a particular kind, for example, feline, or human. The designated word for the first way of speaking of a *that which* is *substance*, and the word for the second way is *essence*, but both refer to the *that which* of an existent.

St. Thomas defines *substance* this way: “that which has a quiddity to which it belongs to be not in another.”²⁷⁶ *Substance*, therefore, is the subject of *esse*; it is that to which it belongs, that to which it is proper or fitting, *to be*. An example will make this clearer. It does not belong, or is not proper, to a wink to be as it belongs to the one winking that *he* exist. A wink exists only as a qualification of the one winking, whereas a winking man, for example, exists in his own right.

Essence, on the other hand, designates the name of the *basic* kind that a substance is. For example, *essence* is the name of the *human* kind of substance. Now, in addition to substance-kinds there are also accident-kinds. Thus, for example, *short* is a kind of *human*. Here, however, *essence* is an accidental, *nonbasic*,

²⁷⁶ SCG, I, 25, 10. See also Aristotle’s definition of *substance*, n. 104, p. 49 above.

qualification of substantial essence that a substance is. There can be no *short* without *that which* is short. Further qualifications of a basic essence are accidents, or accidental essences. We can say, then, that *essence* is the name of “that by which an existent is *what* it is,”²⁷⁷ either basically or accidentally.

Smith suggests that we can gain a deeper insight into the meaning of a *substance* if we rename it a *subsistent* because “subsistent” is derived from *sub-sistere*, meaning “to come to a stop at.”

And you must indeed “come to a stop at” a proper subject of “existing,” because there isn’t any proper subject of existing except it be one subject. Men are not made up of little men, nor houses of little houses. A *subsistent*, then, is a substance viewed as *one* thing which exists. It is too bad that this basic meaning of substance skidded past Hume’s mind. Substance, then, is that which (an actual or possible being) an *esse* achieves or can achieve, but the *esse* doesn’t achieve as accidents do, namely, as qualifying substance. *Esse* achieves so as by, in making substance to exist, making substance to be substance. (If its own *esse* does *not* achieve a substance, then we are confronted with a possible substance, which is not possible apart from the *esse* of a cause, able to cause it.)²⁷⁸

The *be-ing* (*esse*) feature of an existent, it seems, is its all important feature. It is the one feature without which all the other features, including *essence*, can have no claim to being real.²⁷⁹ It is on account of *be-ing* that any existent is a being because *existence* actuates everything. St. Thomas is unmistakably clear on this.

Existence [*ipsum esse*] is the most perfect of all things, for it is compared to all things as that by which they are made actual; for nothing has actuality except so far as it exists. Hence existence is that which actuates all things, even their forms.²⁸⁰

²⁷⁷ Sweeney, *Authentic Metaphysics*, p. 94.

²⁷⁸ Smith, *The Philosophy of Being*, p. 376.

²⁷⁹ Even though existence actualises essence, essence limits and determines existence. Sweeney makes this point in a very helpful way. “The act of existing is like the compressed spring, the essence it actualises is like the box [in which the spring is “located”]. Essence confines and limits existence to whatever size it is at any stage in its development. As an essence gradually “grows,” as it is perfected by accidental changes, it allows existence gradually to expand to where it would previously have been if the essence itself had then been that perfect. Existence gradually actualises what it would have actualised earlier had the essence then been what it is now. Of course, if existence is in no way confined by an essence distinct from itself, it is unlimited, and thus is infinitely perfect. God is such an existent. He is existence; He is a spring uncontained in any box whatsoever; He is pure actuality because He is subsistent existence.” *Authentic Metaphysics*, p. 97, n. 49.

²⁸⁰ *ST*, I, q. 4, a. 1, ad 3. See also *SCG*, I, 54; *De Ver.*, q. XXI, a. 5; *In IV Metaph.*, lect. 2, n. 558.

To sum up, then, *be-ing* (*esse*) is an act in virtue of which *being* (*ens*), conceived either as *substance* or *essence*, exists and is actual (real).

One more point of clarification remains. In chapter five we saw St. Thomas describing metaphysics, or the divine science, as the science of *universal or common being* (*ens commune*), or *being as being* (*ens in quantum ens*). Scholastic philosophers like St. Thomas refer to *being as being* as that which has the following feature: *a thing that has nothing added to it*. This feature can be one of two kinds:

Either its essence precludes any addition; thus for example, it is of the essence of an irrational animal to be without reason. Or we may understand a thing to have nothing added to it, inasmuch as its essence does not require that anything should be added to it; thus the genus animal is without reason, because it is not of the essence of animal in general to have reason; but neither is it to lack reason. And so the divine being has nothing added to it in the first sense, whereas universal being has nothing added to it in the second sense.²⁸¹

God is the divine being that has nothing added to it because his essence is such that it precludes any addition, that is, his essence is *be-ing*. Common being is created being, and it is variously described as being in general, or being, or the act of existing, or being as being. Now, created being, in any of its descriptions, unlike the divine being, possesses two features: 1) the feature of being a *subject* of the act of existing; 2) the feature of the *act of existing* of a subject. The first feature has the job of ensuring that the act of existing be an act of a *subject* because there can be no *be-ing* of a subject without that subject. The second feature has the job of ensuring that the subject exist because there can be no subject of the act of existing without *be-ing*. These two features and the performance of their jobs are simultaneous and inseparable.

Consequently, *common being* (*ens commune*), as well as *being* (*ens*), means any subject of *be-ing* (*esse*), and the *common act of existing* (*esse commune*), as well as *be-ing* (*esse*), means any act of existing of any subject of *be-ing*. The phrase *being as being* is thus a double emphasis which stresses the subject of metaphysics—that

²⁸¹ See *ST*, I, q. 3, a. 4, ad 1.

which exists. It is a sensible phrase because *being* (*ens*) is that which exists, and it can mean both *a that which*, when we are referring to a thing, and *esse*, when we are referring to the “exists” of *a that which*.²⁸²

With this we have sufficiently clarified and distinguished the meanings of *being* and *be-ing* to be able to understand a discussion that involves these concepts. We can now turn to the main task of this chapter: the attainment of the intuition and knowledge of the act of existing.

The Intuition of the Act of Existing

Perhaps the first step toward catching a glimpse of the act of existing by which a thing is said to be is to try to see a distinction, a distinction between the fact that a particular material thing *actually* exists and the fact that it is *this thing*. In other words, we want to see in an actual material being not only *what* it is, but also that it *actually exists*, and that these two facts are genuinely different. To get our own intuition of the act of existing we can follow the example of a woman whose account of it is picturesque and therefore easier to follow.

I remember walking that day under the elevated tracks in a slum area, feeling the thought, “I am an illegitimate child.” I recall the sweat pouring forth in my anguish in trying to accept that fact. Then I understood what it must feel like to accept, “I am a Negro in the midst of privileged whites,” or “I am blind in the midst of people who see.” Later on that night I woke up and it came to me this way, “I accept the fact that I am an illegitimate child.” But “I am not a child anymore.” So it is, “I am illegitimate.” That is not so either: “I was born illegitimate.” Then what is left?

²⁸² Cf. Jacques Maritain, *Existence and the Existent* (New York: Pantheon Books, Inc., 1948), p. 24: “This concept of existence, of *to-exist* (*esse*) is not and cannot be *cut off* from the absolutely primary concept of being (*ens*, that-which is, that-which exists, that whose act it is to exist). This is so because the affirmation of existence, or the judgment, which provides the content of such a concept, is itself the ‘composition’ of a subject with existence, i.e. the affirmation that *something exists* (actually or possibly, simply or with such-and-such a predicate). It is the concept of being (that-which exists or is able to exist) which, in the order of ideative perception, corresponds adequately to this affirmation in the order of judgment. The concept of existence cannot be visualised completely apart, detached, isolated, separated from that of being; and it is in that concept of being and with that concept of being that it is first conceived.”

What is left is this, "*I Am*." This act of contact and acceptance with "I am," once gotten hold of, gave me the experience "Since *I am*, I have the right to be."²⁸³

Let us pause here to consider a contrast with this last sentence. Beginning with Parmenides, and under a stronger influence of Plato, many philosophers have thought the matter to be precisely the opposite, namely, "Since I am this kind of thing, *human*, I have the right to be. It is primarily my humanity that gives me a share in being." Descartes does a similar thing when he says that he exists because he is a certain kind of thing, a thinking thing. We may call this position technically *the primacy of essence, essentialism*, or identifying being with essence.

A tendency to identify being with essence is very strong. Consider the following statement made by a journalist paraphrasing the musings of some contemporary scientists.

One of the weird aspects of quantum mechanics is that something can simultaneously exist and not exist; if a particle is capable of moving along several different paths, or existing in several different states, the uncertainty principle of quantum mechanics allows it to travel all along paths and exist in all possible states simultaneously. However, if the particle happens to be measured by some means, its path or state is no longer uncertain. The simple act of measurement forces it into just one path or state.²⁸⁴

The author of this statement is confusing different *states* in which a thing may exist with the existence of that thing. He seems to think that because a particle may be able to exist traveling along different paths simultaneously, that for that reason it is able both to exist and not exist at the same time. This runs contrary to the first of the ten principles of being and knowledge: *it is impossible for a thing both to be and not to be at the same time*. The importance of this principle is underscored by St. Thomas when he says that no one can make an intelligible judgment unless this firmest principle is understood.²⁸⁵ But the moment we slip into the tendency to

²⁸³ See Rollo May *et al.* (eds.), *Existence: A New Dimension in Psychiatry and Psychology* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1958 [Reprint. New York: Touchstone Books, 1967]), p. 43.

²⁸⁴ Malcolm Browne, "The Quantum Conundrum" (*The New York Times*, August 2, 1997).

²⁸⁵ *In IV Metaph.*, lect. 6, n. 605.

identify being with anything other than the act of existing, we run the risk of making claims that contradict the first principle.

But regardless of how strongly we may feel the inclination to identify being with essence, we must resist it if we are to make sense of St. Thomas' Five Ways. We must try to see that being this or that kind of thing is not the same as existing. The woman in our example above reached her experience of existence by cutting away from it all of the characteristics not essential to it, or all of the different modes or states of being. She describes her experience this way.

It is a primary feeling—it feels like receiving the deed to my house. It is the experience of my own aliveness, not caring whether it turns out to be an ion or just a wave. It is like, when a very young child, I once reached the core of a peach and cracked the pit, not knowing what I would find and then feeling the wonder of finding the inner seed, good to eat in its bitter sweetness... It is like a sailboat in the harbour being given an anchor so that, being made out of earthly things, it can by means of its anchor get in touch again with the earth, the ground from which it grew... It is my saying to Descartes, "*I Am, therefore I think, I feel, I do.*" It is like an axiom in geometry—never experiencing it would be like going through a geometry course not knowing the first axiom.... It is ceasing to feel like a theory toward one's self...²⁸⁶

Our next account of grappling with the act of existing is less insightful, but I am reproducing it here because it is an account, not of the insight into the act of existing, but of the felt force the act has on the mind and heart of a thinker. He is J.J.C. Smart whom we have met in chapter one. It is interesting that from a professional philosopher we get an account less valuable than from an "amateur" whose sense of wonder is alive. Smart's account points out an impediment that may stand in the way of our seeing the force of a demonstration of God's existence like the Five Ways.

As an argument it [the Third Way viewed as cosmological] cannot pass muster at all; indeed it is completely absurd, as implying the notion of a logically necessary being. Nevertheless it does appeal to something deep seated in our natures. It takes its stand on the fact that existence of you or me or of this table is not logically necessary. Logic tells us that this fact is not a fact at all, but is a truism, like the 'fact' that a circle is not a square. [Tell that to the woman whose account we read above.] Again, the cosmological argument tries to base the existence of you and me or this table on the existence of a logically necessary being, and hence commits a rank absurdity, the notion of a logically necessary being being self-contradictory. So the only rational thing to

²⁸⁶ Rollo May, *op. cit.*, *ibid.*

say if someone asks 'Why does this table exist?' is that a carpenter made it. We can go back and back in such a series, but we must not entertain the absurd idea of going back to something logically necessary. However, now let us ask, 'Why should anything exist at all?' Logic tells us that the only answer which is not absurd is to say, 'Why shouldn't it?' Nevertheless, though I know how any answer on the lines of cosmological argument can be pulled to pieces by a correct logic, I still feel I want to go on asking the question. Indeed, though logic has taught me to look at such a question with the gravest suspicion, my mind often seems to reel under the immense significance it seems to have for me. That anything should exist at all does seem to me a matter for the deepest awe. But whether other people feel this sort of awe, and whether they or I ought to is another question. I think we ought to. If so, the question arises: If 'Why should anything exist at all?' cannot be interpreted after the manner of the cosmological argument, that is, as an absurd request for the nonsensical postulation of a logically necessary being, what sort of question is it? What sort of question is this question 'Why should anything exist at all?' All I can say is, that I do not yet know.²⁸⁷

One cannot but feel compassion for a thinker like Smart, a thinker who embraces an epistemology that sets his mind against itself and its natural tendency toward grasping be-ing. Smart cannot deny the immense significance the question of existence has for him, yet his epistemology is such that it will not allow his intellect to look for the answer, calling it an absurd search. Perhaps this happens to all philosophical children of Descartes and Kant who admit the validity of first principles as necessary laws of thought, but then give them only a purely logical status and deny that the same principles are necessary laws of contingent being—as if a philosophy of being could not also be a philosophy of mind.

If we are free of the tyranny of such an epistemology, the following account whose author calls it *prephilosophic* will help us shed light on the act of existing. It is an account of the natural intuition of the act of existing which is also a natural awareness of the existence of God, that is, an awareness that proceeds by the "instinctive manner proper to the first apperceptions of the intellect prior to every philosophical or scientifically rationalised elaboration."²⁸⁸

Let us rouse ourselves, let us stop living in dreams or in the magic of images and formulas, of words, of signs and practical symbols. Once a man has been awakened to the reality of existence and of his own existence, when he has really perceived that formidable, sometimes elating,

²⁸⁷ Smart, *op. cit.*, p. 277-278.

²⁸⁸ Jacques Maritain, *Approaches to God*, trans. by Peter O'Reilly, (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1954). p. 3.

sometimes sickening or maddening fact *I exist*, he is henceforth possessed by the intuition of being and the implications it bears with it.

Precisely speaking, this primordial intuition is both the intuition of *my* existence and of the existence of *things*, but first and foremost of the existence of things. When it takes place, I suddenly realise that a given entity—man, mountain or tree—exists and exercises this sovereign activity *to be* in its own way, in an independence of *me* which is total, totally self-assertive and totally implacable. And at the same time I realise that *I* also exist, but as thrown back into my loneliness and frailty by this other existence by which things assert themselves and in which I have positively no part, to which I am exactly as naught. And no doubt, in face of my existence others have the same feeling of being frail and threatened. As for me, confronted with others, it is my own existence that I feel to be fragile and menaced, exposed to destruction and death. Thus the primordial intuition of being is the intuition of the solidity and inexorability of existence; and, second, of the death and nothingness to which *my* existence is liable. And third, in the same flash of intuition, which is but my becoming aware of the intelligible value of being, I realise that this solid and inexorable existence, perceived in anything whatsoever, implies—I do not yet know in what form, perhaps in things themselves, perhaps separately from them—some absolute, irrefragable existence, completely free from nothingness and death. These three leaps—by which the intellect moves first to actual existence as asserting itself independently of me; and then from this sheer objective existence to my own threatened existence; and finally from my existence spoiled with nothingness to absolute existence—are achieved within the same unique intuition, which philosophers would explain as the intuitive perception of the essentially analogical content of the first concept, the concept of Being.

Next—this is the second stage—a prompt, spontaneous reasoning, as natural as this intuition (and as a matter of fact more or less involved in it), immediately springs forth as the necessary fruit of such a primordial apperception, and as enforced by and under its light. It is reasoning without words, which cannot be expressed in articulate fashion without sacrificing its vital concentration and the rapidity with which it takes place. I see first that my being is liable to death; and second, that it is dependent on the totality of nature, on the universal whole of which I am a part. I see that Being-with-nothingness, such as my own being, implies, in order that it should be, Being-without-nothingness—that absolute existence which I confusedly perceived from the beginning as involved in my primordial intuition of existence. But then the universal whole of which I am a part is itself Being-with-nothingness, by the very fact that I am part of it. And from this it follows finally that since this universal whole does not exist by virtue of itself, it must that Being-without-nothingness exists apart from it. There is another Whole—a separate one—another Being transcendent and self-sufficient and unknown [*not* unknowable] in itself and activating all beings, which is Being-without-nothingness, that is, self-subsisting Being, Being existing through itself.

Thus the eternal dynamism of the intuition of existence, or of the intelligible value of Being, causes me to see that absolute existence or Being-without-nothingness transcends the totality of nature. And there I am, confronted with the existence of God.²⁸⁹

Here we have the first glimpse of the object which the metaphysician, though not yet as a metaphysician, encounters before he sets out to demonstrate philosophically the existence and attributes of his subject matter, which is what all men call God. It is an object that one encounters by first becoming aware of the existence of every being. Given that philosophical knowledge is a knowledge

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.* pp. 3-7.

through causes, a demonstration of God's existence will be a demonstration of the existence of a cause of the existence of contingent beings. But such a demonstration requires seeing why we must seek the cause of existence before we seek the cause of anything else, why the contingency of existence is primary, that is, comes prior to the contingency of anything else. In the last section of this chapter we shall move from a mere intuition of existence to philosophical knowledge of the act of existing. In coming to know it we shall see the need for its cause, and so prepare our minds for a demonstration of its cause.

The Role of Judgment in Apprehending Existence

The first two operations of the intellect are *simple apprehension* and *judgment*. *Simple apprehension* is an act of the intellect whereby it “seizes upon the essence of a thing; grasps an object or meaning.”²⁹⁰ *Judgment* is “an act of the mind combining two objective concepts in an affirmation or separating them in a negation; an act of the mind asserting or denying existence of some subject.”²⁹¹

As we saw above,²⁹² essences belong to an order different from the order of existence. Given that it is the role of simple apprehension to grasp essential concepts and, therefore, to operate in the order of essences, existence must be attained by judgment—that act of the intellect which either combines or separates objective concepts. Maritain explains what it means that existence lies outside the order of essential concepts and, therefore, outside the order of simple apprehension.

Existence is not an intelligible nor an object of thought [in the way that an essence is]. What are we to conclude if not that existence goes beyond the object strictly so called, because it is an act exercised by a subject, whose eminent intelligibility, we may say super-intelligibility, objectises

²⁹⁰ *Dictionary of Scholastic Philosophy*, p. 8. The third act of the intellect is *reasoning*.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.* p. 65. Owens warns against identifying this sense of *judgment* with a moral, deliberative, investigative process that “leads up to a *conclusion* in which something is judged to be or not to be, to be or not to be so, to be or not to be done.” *Elementary Christian Metaphysics*, p. 47, n. 8.

²⁹² See pp. 138-139.

itself in us in the very act of judgment? In this sense we could call it a trans-objective act. It is in a higher and analogical sense that it is an intelligible. The intelligibility with which judgment deals is more mysterious than that which notions or ideas convey to us; it is not expressed in a concept but in the very act of affirming or denying. It is the super-intelligibility, if I may put it so, of the act of existing itself, either possible or actually given. And it is on this super-intelligibility of existence that St. Thomas hangs the whole life of the intellect.²⁸³

The attainment of existence of some thing through judgment, therefore, does not occur through an intellectual *process* like reasoning, but is the immediate apprehension of the existence of an existent.²⁸⁴ This does not mean that the existence of a thing is not attained by the intellect in a complex way. On the contrary, even though judgment is an *apprehension* of being, it is “the complexity of an active composing.”²⁸⁵ This composition is understood in various ways by Thomist scholars. Maritain understands it as having three stages.

The first stage is that of ‘judgment’ (misnamed) of our external senses, pronouncing a sort of ‘blind’ assertion: ‘this exists.’

In the second stage an *idea* and a *judgment* are formed out of the intelligibility (still only in potency) available from the ‘judgment’ of the first stage in the realm of sense. The *idea* is ‘this being,’ and the *judgment* is ‘this being exists.’ The *judgment* occurs as a composition of the object of thought and the act (not *notion*) of existing. Maritain explains the formation of this judgment in the following way:

In forming this judgment the intellect, on the one hand, knows the subject as singular (indirectly and by ‘reflection upon phantasms’), and, on the other hand, affirms that this singular subject exercises the act of existing. In other words, the intellect itself exercises upon the notion of this subject an act (an act of affirming) by which it lives intentionally the existence of the thing. This affirmation has the same content as the ‘judgment’ of the aestimative and the external sense (but in this case the content is no longer ‘blind’ but openly revealed since it is raised to the state of intelligibility in act); and it is not by reflection upon phantasms that the intellect proffers the affirmation, but by and in this ‘judgment’ itself, and in this intuition of sense which it grasps by

²⁸³ Maritain, *Existence and the Existent*, pp. 18-19.

²⁸⁴ It is clear, therefore, that if all our philosophizing consists exclusively in the third act of the intellect, or reasoning, we shall not be able to understand what a philosopher like St. Thomas is doing when demonstrating the *existence* of God. If the act of existing is not grasped through reasoning, and our philosophizing is exclusively the activity of a logician, we are in no position to enter a meaningful dialogue with a philosopher for whom the act of existing plays the pivotal role.

²⁸⁵ Owens, *Elementary Christian Metaphysics*, p. 56.

immaterialising it, in order to express itself. It thus reaches the *actus essendi* (in judging)—as it reaches essence (in conceiving)—*by the mediation of sensorial perception.*²⁹⁶

The third stage is the formation of the idea of existence. After the intellect, together with first judgment of existence, has formed the idea of being ('that which does or is able to exist'), it grasps the *act* of existing which it already affirmed in the first judgment of existence. When this act is grasped, the intellect has made for itself an *object* of thought, a *concept* of existence.

Owens elaborates on this conceptualization of the *act* of existing by comparing it to the conceptualization of "whiteness." Even though in reality "existence", like "whiteness" does not exist in itself but in a subject, the intellect is able to conceptualise what it apprehends through judgment and apply it to any existent. Thus "as whiteness applies to any instance of a white body, so does being, when thus conceptualised, apply to anything whatever that exists. In conceptualizing anything the mind knows it under a universal aspect."²⁹⁷

The difference, however, between the conceptualization of "white" and of "being" is that the former is attained through simple apprehension of a body that is in fact white, and the latter in the act of composing which becomes lost when being is conceptualised. That is, the content of simple apprehension is retained when the notion of "white" is conceptualised, but the concept of "being" once attained does not contain in it the subject of being. Nevertheless, Owens says, the concept of "being" represents the characteristic that makes a thing to be. It does this just the way whiteness makes a body white, that is, as a "subject and characteristic possessed by the subject. Thing is conceived as a subject, and being is conceived vaguely as that which makes such a subject be, just as whiteness makes a body white."²⁹⁸

²⁹⁶ Maritain, *Existence and the Existent*, p. 27. n. 13.

²⁹⁷ Owens, *Elementary Christian Metaphysics*, p. 58.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

Owens explains how this metaphysical conceptualizing of that which makes a subject to be (existence), the conceptualizing of the relation of subject and characteristic, has roots in Aristotelian natural philosophy. In Aristotle's physics the fundamental subject of change in nature is matter, and this subject is characterised by form. The intellect attains and retains form by simple apprehension, that is, the act of judgment does not enter into the apprehension of form, and in this the apprehension of form and existence differ. Nevertheless, Owens points out, Aristotle understood form also as the *act* (*energeia*) and the *perfection* (*entelecheia*) of the subject. This means that the subject is a *potency* in regard to the *act* of the subject, and the *perfection* confers upon the subject that which it lacks. Consequently, *act* and *perfection* characterise the subject. The subject/character relation between the subject and its act and perfection lends itself to an extension beyond the order of matter and form, that is, beyond the sphere of physics or cosmology into the order of being, that is, the order of metaphysics. Owens explains.

They may be used to designate the function of the being that is apprehended through judgment. Without its being, the thing would not exist, would be nothing. *Being, therefore, may be regarded as a perfection that makes the thing exist and as an act that the thing is able to enjoy.*²⁹⁹

The concept which the intellect has of being is therefore that of an act or perfection of a subject. This allows the metaphysician to universalise *being* in the unalloyed concept of act or perfection. It is within this concept that the metaphysician speaks scientifically (in the scholastic sense of the word) of *being*, both as *ens* and *esse*, that is, as "the actuality of all acts, and therefore the perfection of all perfections."³⁰⁰

In the next section we shall attempt to make a more detailed stepwise attainment of the act of being, the act of *that which is*.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.* p. 59. (emphasis mine)

³⁰⁰ *De Pot.*, q. VII, a. 2, ad 9.

The Knowledge of the Act of Existing

At this point I can only assume that an intuition of the act of existing has been grasped and proceed to the realm of knowledge of that which has supposedly been intuited. If it has not been grasped, the rest of this work will seem very puzzling and unconvincing.

The content of this section is a brief epistemological account of the act of existing. Our goal is to see how as philosophers we can reach the act of existing. Reaching it requires going through several steps which are fully treated in some contemporary works on Thomistic metaphysics.³⁰¹ We shall treat them only briefly here, but with enough indication of their essential characteristics required for reaching the act of existing.

For St. Thomas, the first object of the intellect is being (*ens*) and its truth as it resides in a material thing. Given the place of residence of this object, our intellect encounters first that whose existence is measured by duration. In becoming aware of such an object it is inevitably conditioned by it; it is conditioned by the object's mixture of actuality and potentiality, which is to say that our intellect's knowledge of its first object is at first indistinct or unspecified, and only gradually becomes actualised. The Theologian explains the situation this way:

In our knowledge there are two things to be considered. First, that intellectual knowledge in some degree arises from sensible knowledge: and, because sense has singular and individual things for its object, it follows that our knowledge of the former comes before our knowledge of the latter. Secondly, we must consider that our intellect proceeds from a state of potentiality to a state of actuality; and every power thus proceeding from potentiality to actuality comes first to an incomplete act, which is the medium between potentiality and actuality, before accomplishing the perfect act.³⁰² The perfect act of the intellect is complete knowledge, when the object is distinctly and determinately known; whereas the incomplete act is imperfect knowledge when

³⁰¹ See Avery Dulles, et al., *Introductory Metaphysics* (New York, 1955), Robert Kreyche *First Philosophy* (New York, 1959), Gerard Smith *The Philosophy of Being* (New York, 1961), Joseph Owens, *An Elementary Christian Metaphysics*, (Milwaukee, 1963), and Leo Sweeney, *Authentic Metaphysics in an Age of Unreality*, (New York, 1993).

³⁰² Let us keep this incomplete act in mind when we consider the first of the Five Ways, for, as we shall see, in this act lies the key to seeing properly the data of the First Way.

the object is known indistinctly, and as it were confusedly. A thing thus imperfectly known is known partly in act and partly in potentiality ... as to know *animal* indistinctly is to know it as *animal*; whereas to know animal distinctly is to know it as *rational* or *irrational animal*, that is to know a man or a lion: therefore our intellect knows *animal* before it knows man; and the same reason holds in comparing any more universal idea with the less universal.³⁰³

Now we know that the most universal of all concepts is being (*ens*), however it be known at first. The act of existing (*esse*) which is inextricably tied up with *ens*, will be, according to our mode of knowledge, at first known only indistinctly. We must now see what steps the intellect must make before it can see a material thing's act of existing distinctly. Our question is this: How does the human intellect come to know being as being—a *thing that is as existing* (a *quod est* as *esse*, or *ens qua esse*)?³⁰⁴ The rest of the chapter is a long answer to this question.

To answer, we must go through several stages. Let us start at the beginning of the intellect's encounter with being as becoming or with a material being. Because this is an encounter of the *human* intellect, the intellect must first receive a group of sense images or phantasms on which it then goes to work. These contain forms of sensible things which, because they are sensory, are quantified, localised, and moving. Thus the intellect receives from sense powers material things as quantitatively unified, that is, as three dimensional, in this or that place, at such and such time, and as either mobile or immobile. As such, the objects in their

³⁰³ *ST*, I, q. 85, a. 3.

³⁰⁴ Maritain sums up the immediate and undifferentiated attainment of *esse* in the following way: "At the instant when the finger points to that which the eye sees, at the instant when sense perceives, in its blind fashion, without intellection or mental word, that *this exists*; at that instant the intellect says (in a judgment), *this being is* or *exists* and at the same time (in a concept), *being*. We have here a mutual involution of causes, a reciprocal priority of this concept and this judgment, each preceding the other in a different order. To say, 'this being is or exists,' the idea of being must be present. To have the idea of being, the act of existing must have been affirmed and grasped in a judgment. Generally speaking, simple apprehension precedes judgment in the later stages of the process of thinking; but here, at the first awakening of thought, each depends upon the other. The idea of being ('this being') precedes the judgment of existence in the order of material or subjective causality; and the judgment of existence precedes the idea of being in the order of formal causality." *Existence and the Existent*, pp. 25-26.

quantitative unity and becoming come to the intellect undifferentiated, but the intellect is still able to abstract from this undifferentiated unity the first universal:

For if many singulars are taken which are without differences as to some one item existing in them, that one item according to which they are not different, once it is received in the mind, is the first universal, no matter what it may be, i.e., whether it pertains to the essence of the singulars or not.³⁰⁵

This first undifferentiated aspect “according to which they [singulars] are not different” is their magnitude (size) as a whole. But magnitude is never by itself because it depends on nearness or distance which immediately implies movement:

Movement and rest are sensed according as the subject is affected in one or more ways in the magnitude of the subject or of its local distance, as in the movement of growth or of locomotion, or again, according as it is affected in some sensible qualities, as in the movement of alteration.³⁰⁶

Therefore, that according to which singulars are unified is their magnitude and their actual state of becoming (movement), which conditions their magnitude. The expression used by St. Thomas for this unifying aspect is *hic et nunc*, here and now, which refers to the measures of the movable and the movement, place and time. Now when the intellect puts aside the singularity of the singulars and considers only this unifying aspect (which is movement), it acquires an intelligible content which is *something in process of becoming*, a what is (*quod est*), or being, and that is its first universal.

It seems, then, that we identify a material object as moving with its act of existing (to be is to be moving).³⁰⁷ This identification enables the human intellect to affirm that the first universal is the apprehension of being or of what is, because it is an apprehension of an *actually* moving material thing. And this seems fitting since the proper object of the intellect is being as becoming which the intellect grasps by

³⁰⁵ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Posterior Analytics of Aristotle*, trans. by F.R. Larcher, (Albany, NY: Magi Books, Inc., 1970). Book II, lect. 20. p. 239.

³⁰⁶ *ST*, I, q. 78, a. 3, ad 2.

³⁰⁷ It is true, however, that we know of this identification only after we have reached the act of existing. We are now speaking with the advantage of a retrospective view point.

grasping that which characterises it, namely its movement. Thus movement serves to us as a substitute for the act of existing because it reveals to us the act of existing. The intellect, of course, does not see that this is so at this stage.

For since words are signs of intellectual conceptions, we first give names to those things which we first understand, even though they may be subsequent in the order of nature. Now of all acts which are perceived by us in a sensible way, motion is the best known and most evident to us; and therefore the word actuality was first referred to motion, and from motion the word was extended to other things. And for this reason motion is not attributed to non-existent things ... For, since to be moved means to be actual, it follows that things which do not exist actually would exist actually; but this is obviously false.³⁰⁸

We may restate the matter in another way in order to see more clearly that we do in fact identify a material object's act of existing with its movement which is to our intellect the best known and the most evident act upon the first encounter with contingent being. Given that being is the first universal and that it is *what is* (*something* in the process of becoming), an expression consisting in a pronoun and a verb, and, given that the verb must signify active and passive action, both of which constitute the essence of movement,³⁰⁹ it is fitting that being as becoming be known

³⁰⁸ In *IX Metaph*, lect. 3, nn. 1805-1806. Chicago, 1961. p. 667.

³⁰⁹ St. Thomas explains this in a way that makes clear the necessary connection between movement and causality, and our knowledge of them. This is very important for our understanding of his argument in the Five Ways. "For the intelligibility [*ratio*] of motion is completed not only by that which pertains to motion in the nature of things, but also by that which reason [*ratio*] apprehends. For in the nature of things motion is nothing other than an imperfect act which is a certain incipience of perfect act in that which is moved. Thus in that which is being whitened, something of whiteness already has begun to be. But in order for the imperfect act to have the nature [*ratio*] of motion, it is further required that we understand it is a mean between two extremes. The preceding condition is compared to it as potency to act, and thus motion is called an act. The consequent condition is compared to it as perfect to imperfect or as act to potency. And because of this motion it is called the act of that which exists in potency.

With reference to that which pertains to motion in the nature of things, motion is placed by reduction in that genus which terminates the motion, as the imperfect is reduced to the perfect. But with reference to that which reason [*ratio*] apprehends regarding motion, namely, that it is a mean between two termini, the intelligibility [*ratio*] of cause and effect is already implied. [**Again, this is important for a consideration of the first of the Five Ways.**] For a thing is not reduced from act to potency except by some agent cause. And in respect to this motion belongs to the predicament of action and passion. For these two predicaments are taken in respect to the intelligibility [*ratio*] of agent cause and effect, as was said above. (Insofar as a thing is denominated by the agent cause, there is the predicament of passion. For to be acted upon is nothing other than to receive something from an agent. And conversely, insofar as the agent cause is denominated by the effect, there is the

by a concept that at the same time encompasses being as *what* in *process of becoming*, or as a *what is*, that is, that a material thing's act of existing be a becoming or movement. For "*is* said simply, signifies *to be in act*,"³¹⁰ and for being as becoming that means being in movement, which, for the human intellect, is the first actuality of all subsequent acts.

So, when the intellect first knows being, it knows it as an actually existing corporeal thing, and it knows every sensible singular by this first and most universal (in the realm of being as becoming) of all concepts. However, this first and the most universal of concepts is also the poorest of concepts, poorest in the sense that it fails to provide the intellect with a distinct knowledge of any singular, of any specific nature or essence, and of being as being—being insofar as it is—(for the knowledge of *is* in *what is* is still indeterminate, still enmeshed in local movement, growth, or change inhering and arising from a corporeal whole). The concept gives the intellect only evidence that physical being is in its actuality in the state of becoming, that for it to be is to be becoming.

But this poor universal concept is the starting point for the intellect's quest for the knowledge of essential content of its concepts. It is a quest for the *quiddity* of everything it knows, the quest for the content of the *what* in *what is*, or being (*what is*) as a which (*quid*), as having this or that nature—as a *res* or thing. And this determination of the *what* element of being is the second stage in the intellect's quest for the real and knowable.

Now because the human intellect can know something distinctly only if it uses its body, because its proper object is being as becoming which is also material

predicament of action. For action is an act from the agent to another.)" *Commentary on Aristotle's Physics*, ed. cit., Book III, lect. 5, n. 324 (322). p. 152 (150).

³¹⁰ *Aristotle On Interpretation: Commentary by St. Thomas and Cajetan*, trans. by J.T. Oesterle, (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1962.) Book I, lect. 5, n. 22. p. 53.

(bodily) being, it will discover *res* or *quid* of *quod quid est* in the same place it discovered *what is*, namely in an organised group of images or phantasms.

The proper object of the human intellect, which is united to a body, is a quiddity or nature existing in corporeal matter ... Now it belongs to such a nature to exist in an individual, and this cannot be apart from corporeal matter: for instance, it belongs to the nature of a stone to be in an individual stone, and to the nature of a horse to be in an individual horse, and so forth. Wherefore the nature of a stone or any material thing cannot be known completely and truly, except inasmuch as it is known as existing in the individual ... And, therefore, for the intellect to understand actually its proper object, it must of necessity turn to the phantasms in order to perceive the universal nature existing in the individual.³¹¹

When the intellect turns to the phantasms of sensible being, it examines all its characteristic aspects and eliminates some which seem to it less typical in preference to those which seem more typical. The intellect thus arrives at a *this what* in place of the vague *what*; it arrives at a particular sensible with its distinctive elements called a *thing*. To know a being as a *thing* is to recognise that all the characteristics which surround that being are dependent on it (entitatively dependent on it, as an arm is entitatively dependent on the whole man), and that beyond them is their owner—being as *thing* or quiddity.

But analyzing the *what* of being, and finding its *res*, the intellect has not done away with its *is*, because it is still seeking *that which is*. Nor does it do away with the characteristics of *what is* which helped it to arrive at the quiddity. Properly placing these characteristics according to their hierarchy and place constitutes the third stage of the intellect's quest for the real in the order of being as becoming.

Instead of leaving being as only a composite of quiddity and the act of existing (which at this point it knows only as movement), the intellect takes everything the world offers it regarding sensible being and places it either under the heading of substance or accidents. This gives the intellect a whole new category in the attempt to deepen its knowledge of being. The category is technically called *intentiones*, and

³¹¹ ST, I, q. 84, a. 7. As we shall see in chapter nine, this position puts St. Thomas in direct opposition to any Platonic or essentialist understanding of being.

it allows the intellect no longer to have to consider the quiddity in its absoluteness, but as a central locus for many modifications that perfect it without altering its essence. This new category does not give the intellect the knowledge of new being but new and different knowledge of the same being. The intellect now begins to consider the relations between *that which is* and its characteristics, between substance (a new name for *that which is* within the category of intentiones) and accidents which are the effects of substance and which perfect substance. To use St. Thomas' expression, the substance is the final and the efficient cause of its accidents, and their material cause insofar as it receives the accidents.³¹²

The knowledge of substance and accidents gives the intellect new and different knowledge of already known being: the knowledge of the perfection of being which does not come to it through its quiddity but its accidents, because by means of its accidents a material being is able to enter into a communicative union with the rest of the world, to take there its place and fulfill its function, which is to say to be perfected.

Since being properly signifies that something actually is, and actuality properly correlates to potentiality; a thing is, in consequence, said simply [absolutely] to have being, accordingly as it is primarily distinguished from that which is only in potentiality; and this is precisely each thing's substantial being. Hence by its substantial being, everything is said to have being simply [absolutely]; but by any further actuality it is said to have being relatively. Thus to be white implies relative being, for to be white does not take a thing out of simply potential being; because only a thing that actually has being can receive this mode of being.

But goodness signifies perfection which is desirable, and consequently of ultimate perfection. Hence that which has ultimate perfection is said to be simply [absolutely] good; but that which has not the absolute perfection it ought to have (although, insofar as it is at all actual, it has some perfection), is not said to be good and perfect simply [absolutely], but only relatively. In this way, therefore, viewed in its substantial being a thing is said to be simply [absolutely], and to be good relatively (i.e., insofar as it has being), but viewed in its complete actuality, a thing is said to be relatively, and to be good simply [absolutely].³¹³

Accidents are, therefore, complements of quiddity: quantity gives being extension, qualities give it powers to act and to be acted upon and thus enter into relations and

³¹² See *ST*, I, q. 77, a. 6, ad 2.

³¹³ *ST*, I, q. 5, a. 1, ad 1.

contact with other beings, and to be the beginning and the end of movements. In a word, accidents perfect substance whose effects they are. Thus when St. Thomas says that “every agent acts according as it is in act,”³¹⁴ he means that substance is in act in so far as it has all its accidents because it attains actuality, and therefore perfection, through them. Accidents are in substance, and also by and for substance, they are the effect of the substantial being of substance, but are also the means by which substantial being attains its perfection.³¹⁵

But in none of these three steps have we made any progress in apprehending the *is* of *what is*. In other words, we have still not reached the center of the Thomistic notion of being; we have not yet moved beyond Aristotle. But neither have we been able to forget the *is* because every quiddity implies the act of existing.³¹⁶ Now because we are dealing with an act, a primary and simple aspect of being, we cannot define it. We can only, by way of induction, circumscribe it from proportion between the potential and the actual.³¹⁷ Apprehending the *is* of *what is* is the fourth step in the intellect’s quest for the real, and to reach this step we shall have to make use of the first three.

When the intellect first encounters being, it sees *is* as an act which it understands as motion. Thus it encounters existence in the motion of material things. (This is precisely why St. Thomas begins his demonstration of God’s *existence* with recipients of motion in the First Way and with finite movers in the Second Way.) But in identifying *is* with motion, on the pretext that they both mean *to be in act* (*in actu esse*), it is left with the poorest of concepts deprived of its mysterious character (the act of existing). Furthermore, when the intellect

³¹⁴ *SCG*, II, 16, 6.

³¹⁵ See *ST*, I, q. 77, a. 6.

³¹⁶ See St. Thomas’ *Commentary on the Posterior Analytics of Aristotle*, Book II, lect. 5-6.

³¹⁷ See St. Thomas’ *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, Book IX, lect. 5, n. 1826-1827.

discovers the quiddity or the *res* of being, *act* no longer means the mobile, and the intellect is forced to realise that its earlier identity of act of existing with motion, although valuable at the level of indistinctly known being, must disappear and be replaced by a concept of *act* as the stable and immobile element in being. Thus, for example, form as the act of matter at the level of quiddity means *that by which* a thing is *what* it is— a concept of *act* that is not immediately related to movement, but indicates that the indeterminate has been determined. The same is true of accidents which are acts of substance; they are the *that by which* a thing already constituted receives its actuality and perfection.

In light of the new meaning of *act* the intellect sees three possibilities for the meaning of *is*. First, existing could mean becoming a substantial form. But this would make the act of existing identical with becoming, and therefore mobile and unstable which is contrary to the nature of acts because it belongs to potencies, and it would also mean that only matter-form composites exist. A deeper problem with identifying *is* with becoming a substantial form lies in the fact that substantial form is an act that presupposes another act which has as its principle the act of existing.

... the nature of material things ... [contains] a twofold composition. The first is that of form and matter, whereby the nature is constituted. Such a composite nature is not its own existence [if it were, to exist would be identically to be that composite nature, which is false because there are other composite natures]; but existence is its act. Hence the nature itself is related to its own existence as potentiality to act.³¹⁸

Second, to exist could mean to be an accidental form, to be a *that by which* a substantial form receives some new actuality (perfection). But this too would make the act of existing mobile, and therefore unlike a true act. Also, *is* cannot mean an accidental form existing through the substance: "Since being is not a genus, then being cannot be of itself the essence of either substance or accident."³¹⁹

³¹⁸ *ST*, I, q. 50, a. 2, ad 3.

³¹⁹ *ST*, III, q. 77, a. 1, ad 2.

This leaves us with the meaning of *is* as the act of *that which is* that is entirely different from substance and accidents, and that has a special place among all acts. Early into his *magnum opus* the Theologian tells us its meaning.

Existence is the most perfect of all things, for it is compared to all things as that by which they are made actual; for nothing has actuality except insofar as it exists. Hence existence is that which actuates all things, even their forms **[It is precisely on this point that St. Thomas departs from Aristotle, and in light of it the Theologian's demonstration of God's existence differs from the Philosopher's.]** Therefore it is not compared to other things as the receiver is to the received; but rather as the received to the receiver. When therefore I speak of the existence of man, or horse, or anything else, existence is considered a formal principle, and as something received; and not as that which exists.³²⁰

We see from this that *is* signifies that which is shared by whatever is being, but that it itself does not share in anything. The act of existing is neither form, nor essence, nor substance, nor matter. It is *that by which* everything real is formally said to be and without which it cannot be: "From the very fact that being is ascribed to a quiddity, not only is the quiddity said to be but also to be created: since before it had being it was nothing, except perhaps in the intellect of the creator, where it is not a creature but the creating essence."³²¹

In reaching the *is* of being the intellect has reached that which is common to all being, that which unites each and every being into a distinctive totality called *being as being*. It is the peak of the intellect's awareness of the actual and the knowable.

The last thing we need to do is show, more carefully (for we have already given a rough outline), how the intellect forms the concept of *being as being*. Obviously, it is not the first thing known by our intellect. If it were, the Presocratics would have discovered it at the very outset of their philosophical adventures. When being first becomes known, it is the most indeterminate and potential of all the concepts the intellect constructs upon its encounter with what is (*quod est*) in the realm of

³²⁰ *ST*, I, q. 4, a. 1, ad 3. Thus the Five Ways are an inquiry into this reception of the act of existing on the part of a moving thing, an efficiently causing thing, and so on. That is, the Five Ways look into the cause or the giver of the act of existing by showing that it is required for a full explanation of being as becoming considered in five different aspects.

³²¹ *De Pot.*, q. III, a. 5, ad 2.

becoming. But the indetermination of being is the indetermination of the *quod* and not the *est*, because, at this level of the intellect's knowledge of the real, which is movement, the first *known* act, determines the *est* as its visible substitute. At the second stage—the definition of being as quiddity—this first determination of *est* disappears because the notion of *act* now broadens from movement to the substantial form whose function it is to be the *act* of matter. In the third stage the intellect encounters an even broader notion of *act* when, in dividing being into substance and accidents, it knows the accidents as the perfection of substance, that is, as a new *act* added to form which is the first act.

But a strange thing has happened. Through the first three stages of the intellect's quest for the real, it has achieved a greater determination of the *quod*, but at the same time the meaning of *est* as *act* has become increasingly indetermined (because the notion of *act* has so become). Thus at the end of the intellect's quest, *is* or the act of existing seems most undifferentiated, but the *what* or *thing* has achieved the highest degree of differentiation through a distinction of matter and form, substance and accidents, and essence and existence. "Things are not distinguished from one another in having being, for in this they agree [this shows the universality of being or the act of existing]... Things differ because they have diverse natures, to which being accrues in a diverse way."³²²

But we said that in knowing the act of existing we have reached the peak of our awareness of the real. It seems then that the end of our knowledge of being as being, which is the indetermination of *est*, is as indeterminate and undifferentiated (and therefore imperfect) as was the beginning of our knowledge which is the indetermination of *quod*. Are we then doomed to a very imperfect knowledge of the

³²² SCG, I, 26, 3.

act of existing, and are better off concentrating only on quiddities? Are many modern philosophers right in dismissing all claims to the knowledge of *is*?

To help us answer we must point out St. Thomas's distinction between two kinds of universality which will help us distinguish the first knowledge of being from the knowledge of being as being.

To know anything universally can be taken in two senses. In one way, on the part of the thing known, namely, that only the universal nature of the thing is known. To know a thing thus is something less perfect: for he would have but an imperfect knowledge of a man who only knew him to be an animal. In another way, on the part of the medium of such knowledge. In this way it is more perfect to know a thing in the universal; for the intellect, which by one universal medium can know each of the things which are properly contained in it, is more perfect than one which cannot.³²³

We see then that it is not because of the universality of the medium through which the universal knowledge is acquired that such knowledge is so poor, but through the confusion of its content. The universal knowledge of the intellect is imperfect insofar as that which is known is indistinct. But even though this knowledge is imperfect, it is knowledge nonetheless. Can we clear up the content of this imperfect knowledge? Can we know *est* as distinct? For the final verdict let us consider a text in *De Ente et Essentia*,³²⁴ one of St. Thomas' earliest works, where he explains the notion of distinctness or indistinctness of a thing, and our knowledge of it. By applying his definitions of confused and distinct knowledge to the concept of *being as being*, known both concretely and abstractly, we shall answer our question.

In the second chapter of *De Ente et Essentia* the Theologian brings out the difference between concrete and abstract knowledge of quiddity. The same difference, as we shall see, applies to the knowledge of *is*. As his example, he chooses the apprehension of the *that which is* of man.

³²³ *ST*, I, q. 55, a. 3, ad 2.

³²⁴ We are dealing with chapter two of this work, and I shall use Régis' exposition of it whereby he gives St. Thomas' accounts of concrete and abstract knowledge of quiddity.

In the realm of *concrete* knowledge, man can be known under three aspects of his human nature: as animal, as rational, and as *this* or *that* man (individual). When he is known as animal, the knowledge of his form or act is indistinct (for there are other animals that are not man). When he is known as rational, the knowledge of his form or act or nature is distinct, but the knowledge of him as an individual is indistinct (he is distinguished now from every other nature but indeterminate with respect to individuals). Finally, when he is known as this man, as Socrates, to use St. Thomas' example, the knowledge of his nature *and* individuality is distinct. Now the fact that a nature is individuated by quantified matter (as human nature is individuated by this particular man) indicates an imperfection in that nature, namely, the inability to stand on its own without having to go out of its realm to stand. Human nature is always found in this or that individual subject in whom it inheres; it cannot stand apart from this or that individual. This, according to Régis, points to the presence of both perfection and imperfection of our knowledge of quiddity (in this case man's quiddity).

The quidditative knowledge of man is therefore perfect knowledge of his nature's perfection, while individual knowledge is the perfect apprehension of the imperfection of this same nature that cannot exist in itself but must exist in a subject. Thus, the individual is a limitation of the perfection of human nature, whereas rationality is a limitation of the imperfection of animal nature.³²⁵

Thus to know man as rational is to know what is perfect in him, but to know him as animal and as an individual is to know what is imperfect in him, because as animal he is lacking act and as an individual his act is limited. And this is what it is to have a concrete knowledge of man's quiddity.

Abstract knowledge of man's quiddity is the knowledge of his *humanity*. The difference between *man* and *humanity* is the difference between that which determines and that which is determined (man is determined by his humanity—he is

³²⁵ Régis, *op. cit.*, p. 303.

what he is because his essence or *humanity* determines him to be a *human* kind of thing); it is a difference between the distinct and the confused, the pure and the mixed (the confusion and the mixture lie in his being both *human* and *animal*).

The essence of man is signified by the two terms 'man' and 'humanity,' but in different ways. The term man expresses it as a whole, because it does not prescind from the designation of matter but contains it implicitly and indistinctly, as the genus contains the difference. That is why the term man can be predicated of individuals. But the term 'humanity' signifies the essence of man as a part, because its meaning includes only what belongs to man as man prescinding from all designation of matter. As a result it cannot be predicated of individual man. Because of this the term 'essence' is sometimes attributed to a thing and sometimes denied of it: we can say 'Socrates is an essence' and also 'the essence of Socrates is not Socrates.'³²⁶

Humanity is therefore the formal element of the subsisting individual. To know humanity is to know the quiddity of man stripped of all that is not distinctly himself. In this consists the abstract knowledge of human nature.

Régis finds it helpful to apply the distinction between concrete and abstract knowledge of quiddity to the concrete and abstract knowledge of being as being, that is, to *quod est* as *esse*. To have a concrete knowledge of the act of existing is to conceive of *having being* (*habens esse*) as concrete knowledge of man is knowledge of *having humanity* (*habens humanitatem*). It is the knowledge of the subject that shares in humanity but does not contain it in its totality. In concrete knowledge of the act of existing the *having* is to *esse* (which is its form or act) as that which determines the form or act in the same way that the individual human subject determines the rationality (the human nature or form or act) in whom it inheres. Such determination or limitation always signifies imperfection. But abstract knowledge of the act of existing, like abstract knowledge of quiddity, strives toward a complete purification of its object, stripping away from it whatever does not belong to it, stripping away everything that belongs to essence, until it reaches its very identity, or absolute simplicity. Concrete knowledge involves determination of its object by limitation, that is, leaving in the object the mixture of potentiality and

³²⁶ St. Thomas Aquinas, *On Being and Essence*, ch. II, 13.

actuality. Abstract knowledge is a determination by distinction, a knowledge of the real only through its actuality, a process of distinguishing the object's actuality from all potency.

Such a process is long and complex; it is a quest for a being's pure actuality which involves elimination of everything in the being that contracts, limits, and differentiates, followed by the combining of this pure act with that whose act and perfection it is, namely, the essence. This intellectual process is known as *philosophy of being as being* or *first philosophy* or *metaphysics*. Through this long and involved process distinct knowledge of the act of existing becomes slowly clearer.³²⁷ We have said enough, however, throughout the course of chapters six and seven to give us a general overview of that process, and to establish the philosophical legitimacy of such a process. The four steps of the intellect's quest for the real constitute the main phases of the metaphysical enterprise. The more familiar we become with that enterprise the more comfortable we shall be with the Five Ways of St. Thomas. The main thing I wish to show here is that the act of existing is no less knowable than *humanity*, and both are knowable in the same way. Thus to deny the knowability of the act of existing involves the denial of the knowability of *humanity*.

With the knowledge of the act of existing man has attained the most perfect apprehension he can have, for the act of existing, unlike essence or quiddity, is *that by which* beings are acts and perfect; it shows him being in an aspect that is not a mixture of act and potency, but an absolute actuality.

It [the *is* of *what is*] primarily signifies that which is understood in the mode of actuality absolutely; for "is" said simply, signifies *to be in act*, and therefore signifies in the mode of a verb. However, the actuality which the verb "is" principally signifies is the actuality of every form

³²⁷ See again the works mentioned in n. 301, p. 151 above. See also Etienne Gilson *Thomist Realism and the Critique of Knowledge*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), ch. eight "Apprehension of Existence." This chapter is particularly important for a comparison between St. Thomas and Kant on the question of knowing existence, and the entire work is important for a comparison of Thomistic and Kantian epistemologies.

commonly known, whether substantial or accidental. Hence when we wish to signify that any form or act is actually in some subject we signify it through the verb "is."³²⁸

In knowing the act of existing we know being as being, we know *that which is* insofar as it *is*. The act of existing is that which makes every single thing a *something*, real (actual) and therefore knowable. Knowing that existing is the common act of all real things enables the human intellect to unite the multiplicity of distinct beings, and to consider each thing (*res*) not as an isolated and separate thing from everything else, but as a constitutive part of the unity of reality, a distinctive totality to which has been given the concept *being as being*. This concept unites all sciences because their respective objects are all beings exercising the act of existing. Without such a unifying concept, and without a science of being as being, we would have a multiplicity of sciences that are in no real way connected, leaving man's intellectual activity fragmented, confused, and divided within itself.

Finally, having reached the primacy of the act of existing, we have reached that which is the highest in the contingent being, which is to say the highest in *caused* being. Therefore, the contingency of being is most pronounced at the level of existence, and for that reason the need for a cause is most evident there. But that science which is concerned with the highest causes, the Theologian says, is the science of *being as being*, and in it the intellect encounters God as the highest cause of the most pronounced contingency—the cause of existence in a being that is not identically its existence but shares in it.

³²⁸ Aristotle *On Interpretation: Commentary by St. Thomas and Cajetan*, Book I, lect. 5, n. 22.

Owens, however, calls for caution in our attainment of the concept of the act of existing. It is true that for St. Thomas universal or common being is that "by which everything formally is" (see *On Being and Essence*, ch. V), and as such the subject of metaphysics. Nevertheless, Owens says, "extreme caution has to be exercised not to regard common being in the fashion of other common concepts. It represents a perfection that was not originally attained through conceptualization, a perfection that exhibits no special conceptual content. From the view point of original conceptual content it is the equivalent of nothing, it is empty. To be used in metaphysics it has to be kept trained upon being that is judged. Used in this way it retains existential content, a content that is the richest and most meaningful of all." *Elementary Christian Metaphysics*, p. 61.

We have not, however, succeeded in grasping *what* existence is. No one has succeeded in doing that, and we would search in vain through St. Thomas' texts for a definition of existence. We have acquired knowledge of existence by distinguishing it from essence, by showing that essence has an act by which it *is*, because, as we shall see in chapters eight and nine, nothing in the essence accounts for the being of that essence, and the identification of essence with existence lands us in positions contrary to facts. We affirm existence of individual existents by making existential judgments that we are able to make from our experience and from reasoning (in St. Thomas' sense of the word) about the data received in experience. We shall say more about this in chapter nine.

The need to reach that cause is precisely the point at which the intellectual activity called *natural theology* begins, and it has all along been an activity of philosophizing about *being as being*. As St. Thomas puts it, "the act of existing is the first effect, and this is evident by universal presence of this act. It follows that the proper cause of the act of being is the first and universal agent, namely God."³²⁹ When this *proper* cause is reached through demonstration, the natural theologian has reached the object of his science, but the science is not born at that point, it only reaches a higher phase.

Before we turn directly to the Proper Cause we need to have another attempt at understanding its effect, namely, the act of existing. In this chapter we have tried to reach it primarily in an epistemological way. In the next chapter we shall do so metaphysically. Another reason for making a different attempt at grasping more clearly the act of existing is that the account of it which we gave in this chapter is not accepted by all Thomist scholars.

³²⁹ SCG, II, 21, 4.

Joseph Bobik, for example, insists that “one cannot judge that a thing exists... unless existence has already (by an analytical priority) been conceived.”³³⁰ He argues the same point in the commentary on his translation of St. Thomas’ *De Ente et Essentia*.

The claim that existence is not an essence, and hence is not directly open to the intellect in simple apprehension, is an ambiguous claim. If it is taken to mean that the fact of the existence of a natural substance is not of the understood content of its essence,... then it is an acceptable claim. But if it is taken to mean that the intellect cannot *conceive* existence (or therefore *conceive being*) unless it has affirmed and grasped existence in a judgment, it is an unacceptable claim. For it is obvious that existence cannot be affirmed in a judgment unless it has been conceived, as it is that anything else cannot. For to judge is simply to pronounce *ita est* [thus it is] about a joining of concepts which are not conceived together, but which are nonetheless conceived prior (at least analytically) to the joining and to the *ita est*. It is the function of the intellect to conceive within itself all things...

To conceive being is also to conceive existence and essence, but it is to conceive all three in an undifferentiated and “unworded” way...

The object of the first operation of the intellect [simple apprehension] is anything and everything in things which is the source of any and every sort of actuality. It is things as actual which move the intellect to produce them within itself in a concept. Things as possessing the actuality which is existence (this is always some sort of existence) move the intellect to produce them within itself in the concept of being: *habentia esse*, which, when later explicitly unfolded, becomes *habentia esse et essentiam*. Things as possessing that actuality which is *human existence* move the intellect to produce them within itself in the concept of man: *habentia esse quae habent etiam corpus et animam rationalem*. The object of the second operation of the intellect [judgment] is to pronounce *ita est* about any proposition at all, including propositions in which the predicate concept is that of existence. The role of judgment is simply to join together that which is found together, but which the human intellect has not conceived together, whatever the concepts involved.³³¹

Bobik’s position, in a nutshell, amounts to giving the act of existence, both in reality and in knowledge, a much less pronounced and elevated status in an individual being than a scholar like Joseph Owens gives it.

For the metaphysician neither the nature predicated nor the subject of predication, as they are attained through simple apprehension is the prior constituent. From the metaphysician’s viewpoint the being of things, whether it is real or intentional, is always prior to the things themselves.³³²

³³⁰ Joseph Bobik, “Some Comments...” *New Scholasticism*, XXXIII (1959), 69.

³³¹ J. Bobik, *Aquinas On Being and Essence*, (University of Notre Dame Press, 1965), pp. 209-212.

³³² Joseph Owens, *An Elementary Christian Metaphysics*, pp. 241-242.

Now Bobik does not deny a *real* distinction between existence and essence, but he does argue for a sense in which they can also be seen as “*really the same*”.³³ This results in an understanding of a relationship between existence and essence where the two are less clearly distinguished than a scholar like Owens thinks they must be. We shall not be able, I think, to understand the force of this debate, unless we examine more closely the relationship between essence and existence. This is another reason behind the content of the next chapter.

³³ Bobik, *Aquinas On Being and Essence*, p. 170. Bobik also denies that the act of existing is an intrinsic cause of a given being. See his “Some Disputable Points Apropos of St. Thomas and Metaphysics,” *New Scholasticism*, 37 (October, 1963), pp. 428-430. This is difficult to square with some of the texts we have already encountered where St. Thomas insists that existence is most influential in producing an existent. See *ST*, I, q. 3, a. 4; I, q. 4, a. 1, ad 3.

CHAPTER VIII

The Act of Existing and Some Other Acts

"Being must be compared to essence, if the latter is distinct from it, as actuality to potentiality."

St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, 3, 4

Seeing the Problem

In chapter three we saw that for scholastics philosophizing begins with trying to understand the changing world containing a multiplicity of finite things.³³⁴ This is true both in cosmology and metaphysics because the principles of potentiality and actuality, which are indispensable for understanding the world of experience, are operative both in *being as mobile* and *being as such*. Our discussion of essence and existence will best develop in the context of act and potency.³³⁵

³³⁴ I am relying in this chapter on the following works in metaphysics: Henri Renard, *The Philosophy of Being*, (Milwaukee, 1952), sections I and II; Avery Dulles *et al.*, *Introductory Metaphysics*, (New York, 1955), part II; Gerard Smith, *The Philosophy of Being*, (New York, 1961), chs. I-IV (this is the work I shall rely on most); and Leo Sweeney, *Authentic Metaphysics in an Age of Unreality*, (New York, 1993), part II.

³³⁵ In n. 265 (p. 131 above) we gave a working definition of *act*. For the present purpose the following understanding of *potency* will suffice. "*Active potency*, which as a principle of action, is a capacity for doing. Generally, however, when we speak of potency we refer to passive rather than active potency; and passive potency is a principle which is acted upon—a determinable principle capable of receiving new forms. Active potency, on the contrary, is really act. *Passive potency* is called *pure potency* when it does not contain any act or perfection. Hence, *prime matter*, which is denominated solely in relation to the particular form to which it is ordered, is called pure potency.

Recall from chapter three (second section) the discussion of the fact that there are beings which change, and the fact that there are beings which are generated from other beings. A philosopher wants to know how it is possible that these facts be as they are. Aristotle, refusing the positions of Heraclitus and Parmenides, asserts that these facts are only possible if there be something common to the beginning and end of change and generation. To deny this is to deny both change and generation. In other words, change and generation are made possible by this common “something” which we shall call passive potency. Let us try to understand it first in change and then in generation.

Take as an example a tomato which changes from green to red. A philosopher wants to know how it is that the tomato can remain itself even though it differs as it changes from green to red. Aristotle and St. Thomas refuse to accept that *green* and *red* and the *motion* between *green* and *red* are necessarily given along with the tomato. They do not deny that the change is given. But in saying that it is given they do not want to say that it is given because *green*, *red*, and the *motion between* are one and the same as being a tomato. To be a tomato is not identically to be changing and to be the termini of change (*green* and *red*). The point that must not escape us is this: Tomato does not change into a tomato, but *is* a tomato at the start of change. What we are presently philosophizing about is not the generation of a tomato, but its change; we are looking at its becoming accidentally other than the kind that it is—becoming red after having been green. The reason why this is *philosophically* interesting is that the tomato as a tomato does not have to become red. As philosophers we want to know how it is possible that it so becomes given that its becoming and the termini of that becoming are not necessary features of

Passive potency is [also referred to as *natural potency*, by which] is meant that capacity which, being rooted in the very nature of a composite being, receives acts proportionate to that nature.” Henri Renard, *The Philosophy of Being*, pp. 29-30.

being a tomato. If they were, then *red*, *green*, and the *motion between*, would be identically tomato. Now the reason why our tomato cannot be identically the motion between red and green, or any other motion, is that there are in fact other things of different kinds, an apple for example, that are also moving from red to green, and other things undergoing different kinds of motion. Motion, and its various termini, therefore, are not tomato. How is it possible, then, that our tomato be in motion when it clearly is not identically motion? How can the same thing, the tomato, be both same and different—be a tomato and be in motion?

Aristotle's and St. Thomas' answer is that motion resided in the tomato as an actuation of what a tomato as a tomato is able to be; it resided in it both during all the actual intervals of the motion *and* at the termini of the motion, (before and after the motion) because a tomato is able to have motion reside in it as an actuation of what a tomato *can* be. Thus, insofar as the tomato is in potency, as the one that is able to move, it is the same as the one that does move. But when the tomato, as one able to move, does actually move, we can say that the same being (that which is a tomato) is different (that which is in motion). Insofar as the tomato is in act, the being which does move can be said to be different from the being which is able to move. But when the being which is able to move does actually move, we can say that the different being (in motion) is the same (tomato).

In the case of generation we philosophise along the same lines. We encounter in the world beings of different *kinds*, and we want to know how it is possible that there be different kinds of being. Let us take again as example our tomato and add a stone lying next to it in the garden. Both are beings, but one is organic and the other inorganic. Therefore, one kind is not another kind. But they also have something in common, not only as beings, but also as kinds. The tomato, which is organic, eventually turns into inorganic stuff. In fact all bodily beings eventually become inorganic. Therefore, there must be something common to all kinds of bodily being.

The important point to note here is that this common *something* cannot itself be a *kind* of bodily being because it is common to all kinds of bodily being. We have, then, in every bodily being a composite of the common *something* which is of no kind and that which makes it a particular kind—we have again a composite of potency and act. Now it is, according to Aristotle and St. Thomas, precisely the fact that all bodily beings are composites of this type which allows for the possibility of there being different *kinds* of being. This composite of potency and act helps us see how one kind of being is both same and different from a composite of another kind. The tomato shares a common feature with the stone because the potency (Aristotle calls it *prime matter*) which is in the tomato and the stone is able to be both organic and inorganic. Thus when the prime matter of one or the other is actuated into the tomato kind or the stone kind, then the tomato is different from the stone, and vice-versa, because what is said to *be* differing is that which is *able* to differ. We are then speaking from the order of potency. On the other hand, the tomato differs from the stone because different acts are actuating their prime matter. Thus when prime matter is actually there, then that which is *able* to differ in kind (that which is the same in both) is differing in kind. We are then speaking from the order of act.³³⁶

To speak, then, philosophically about beings that change and are generated is to speak about beings that are composites of potency and act. This is central to all Aristotelian and Thomistic philosophizing.

³³⁶ No one denies that the insight here is difficult to grasp. Aristotle is the first to admit this: "Motion is thought to be indefinite because of the fact that it cannot be placed in an unqualified way either under the potentiality or the actuality of things; for neither that which is potentially a quantity nor that which is actually a quantity is necessarily moved. And although motion is thought to be an actuality of a sort, yet it is incomplete; and the cause of this is the fact that the potential, of which this is the actuality, is incomplete. And it is indeed because of this that it is difficult to grasp its whatness; for it must be placed either under privation or under potentiality or under unqualified actuality, but none of these alternatives appears possible. What remains, then, is the manner in which we described it, namely, that a motion is a sort of an actuality—an actuality such as we have stated, difficult to grasp but capable of existing." *Physics*, III, 2, 201b 28 - 202a 1.

The Composite of Essence and Existence

In metaphysics, in that philosophical activity where we encounter the Proper Cause, we speak of beings not only insofar as they are changing and generated, but also as existents. Here we ask this question: How is it *possible* that many different existents (not *different generated beings*; not different according to their *kinds*) have the same status of being an existent? Unless we see why the question, the question of the possibility of this fact, has any force, we shall not sufficiently appreciate the answer. Keep in mind that in metaphysics, no less than in the science of *being as mobile*, we philosophise about composites of potency and act. But here on a higher level.

It is easy not to see the force of the question, that is, it is easy not to question the possibility of many different existents having the same status of an existent. The unity side of the equation is fairly straight forward—if there *is* one existent, there *must* be one existent. But we ought to be careful not to assume that it is also true that there *must* be many existents. There is nothing necessary about the multiplicity of existents. To say that there is, amounts to a claim that if one existent is given, then all existents must be given. What is wrong with such a claim? In short, it is contrary to our experience of the status of an existent which is the status of a contingent existent (an existent that is but need not be).

Let us briefly examine our experience of an existent to see what it reveals. I shall argue that it reveals something in addition to its features as a changing being and as a being of a kind. This additional revelation is such that it need not be given in the example of our one existent, and for the same reason it need not be given in any number of existents. In other words, we have good reason to inquire into the ground of the possibility of there being many existents.

Smith suggests we run the following test case: “a man is having his teeth pulled.” We can understand the meaning of that statement without knowing or being in the

situation in which teeth *are* being pulled. The meaning may not be *clear* unless we know a similar situation, but it is nevertheless possible to understand the meaning of any intelligible statement without knowing whether the situation which the statement expresses is also a situation that exists. This means that there are two situations to be known: 1) knowing *what* is going on (a man is having his teeth pulled), and 2) knowing that what is going on *is* going on. It is true that both situations are situations of the same existent, but they are *two* situations, and they are known as *two*.

We are not saying that the second situation adds something to the *intelligibility* of “a man is having his teeth pulled.” We are, however, saying that anyone who has ever been *in* such a situation knows more than the *intelligible contours* of that situation (which can also be known by anyone who has not been *in* it). What is that more? To answer is to say something about the difference between essence and existence. To try to answer is to reach for the very center of Thomistic metaphysics.

We can restate the question to make it clearer. Let us call the first situation an *essential* status and the second an *existential* status. We pointed out that there is no *essential* difference between there actually existing the situation “a man is having his teeth pulled” and it not existing. Nevertheless, there is an *existential* difference between it existing and not existing. What is that *existential* difference? The best way of stating the difference is to follow St. Thomas when he says that “being (*ipsum esse*) must be compared to essence, if the latter is distinct from it, as actuality to potentiality.”³³⁷ Thus we can say that the existential status is an actuation of the essential one: an existing status of “a man is having his teeth pulled” is a composite of essence (of *what* that status is) and existence (of *that* status *existing*) which makes the essence actual.

³³⁷ ST, I, q. 3, a. 4.

Before we explain how this twofold character of every existent is the ground for our claim that the multiplicity of existents is not necessary, we must say much more about the twofold character, about the composite of essence and existence.

Let us go back to our tomato. To say that our existent tomato is a composite of essence and existence is to say that a tomato in an essential status (the status of *Lycopersicon esculentum*) is also in an existential one; one status is different from another even though the existent which is in both of them is one existent. We must be careful here not to view the essential status as essential, that is, we must see that we are not talking about the essence *tomato*, but about an actually existing tomato. To speak of *essence* as a component of a composite of essence and existence is to speak of an essential status of this or that existent, of this tomato; we are not speaking about the *tomato* status of *tomato* but about the *tomato* status of *this here* tomato. Why is this important? It is important for seeing why it cannot be the case that if one existent is given, all existents must be given; it is important for seeing contingency as a philosopher of being as being sees it.³³⁸

Consider the matter further. It is possible that an essential status remain both the same (as it does in this and that tomato) and that it be different (as it does in *tomato*, *feline*, *human*). But whether it is the same or different, it always pertains to distinct existents. This means that an essence is a factor in a distinct existent because it is an essential status of a distinct existent, and not because it is an essential status of an essence. To know a composite of essence and existence is to know first some actual existent; actual existent is the immediate data of a metaphysical inquiry where a proper distinction is made between essence and

³³⁸ And this, of course, is of greatest importance for seeing the need a contingent being has of a cause, of its dependence on a cause. This dependence lies at the very heart of the matter we are dealing with in the Five Ways. The understanding of that dependence divides interpreters of the Five Ways into those who see the act of existing and its cause as central to St. Thomas' arguments, and those who do not.

existence.³³⁹ Gerard Smith points out a great difficulty that befalls an inquiry with a different immediate data.

A composite of essence and *esse* which would not be an existent to start with, would not allow for many existents, because the same essence doesn't distinguish between many existents, and different essences would distinguish many existents only in their kind.³⁴⁰

The only way, then, that we can make sense of the *multiplicity* of existents is to see the existential status of an essence. We must see beings as composites of existence and essence, which is to say as actual existents in some essential status. The alternative is either to deny reality to the multiplicity of existents, or to take the possibility of the multiplicity for granted. These alternatives, however, are not Thomistic, and St. Thomas' philosophizing (specially in the Five Ways) cannot be understood if we take these alternatives.

As we have already seen in chapter seven, the word which St. Thomas uses to describe the existential status of an actual existent, regardless of its essential status, is *substance*. He defines *substance* as "a thing whose quiddity is competent to have being not in a subject."³⁴¹ We can say, then, that, Thomistically understood, a substance names a subject of which we can say *it is*, for example, *a tomato exists*. Note that the same name *substance*, as a subject of *to be*, does not apply in the case of *a tomato's pedicle exists*, or *a tomato's colour exists*. In this case we are not speaking of the proper subject of *to be*, but of its part or a qualification. Pedicle and colour are not competent to have being not in a subject, therefore, they are not, properly speaking existents. Consequently, a proper existent does not consist in a bunch of subexistents, and it is not any of its parts or qualifications, nor is it all of its parts and qualifications "put together".

³³⁹ This, I shall argue below, is no less true in the Five Ways. There the immediate data must also be actual existents if we are to reach God as the proper cause of the act of being.

³⁴⁰ Gerard Smith, *The Philosophy of Being*, pp. 64-65.

³⁴¹ *De Pot.*, q. VII, a. 3, ad 4. In *SCG*, I, 26 St. Thomas defines substance as "a thing to which it belongs to be not in a subject."

Now even though an existent, as the proper subject of *to be*, is in some essential status, substance is not a name for that essential status. St. Thomas calls the essential status as such *essence*.

According to the Philosopher substance is twofold. In one sense it means the quiddity of a thing, signified by its definition, and thus we say that the definition means the substance of a thing; in which sense substance is called by the Greeks *ousia*, which we may call essence. In another sense substance means a subject or *suppositum*, which subsists in the genus of substance.³⁴²

Substance, on the other hand, is the name of an actual existent in some essential status understood as the subject of *to be*, and therefore essence is not the proper name of the subject of *to be*. We find support for this in the following text:

... some predicates may be said to add to being inasmuch as they express a mode of being not expressed by the term *being*. This happens in two ways. First, the mode expressed is a certain special manner of being; for there are different grades of being according to which we speak when we speak of different levels of existence, and according to these grades different things are classified. Consequently, *substance* does not add to a difference to being by signifying some reality added to it, but *substance* simply expresses a special manner of existing, namely, as a being in itself. The same is true of the other class of existents.... We can, however, find nothing that can be predicated of every being affirmatively and, at the same time, absolutely, with the exception of essence by which the being is said to be. To express this, the term *thing* is used; for according to Avicenna, thing differs from being because being gets its name from *to be*, but thing expresses the quiddity or essence of the being.³⁴³

This distinction between *being* and *thing* is later echoed in *ST*, I, 44, 2, where it is expressed within the context of causality, which is of direct importance for understanding the Five Ways. "Therefore, whatever is the cause of *things* considered as *beings*, must be the cause of things, not only according as they are *such* by accidental forms, nor according as they are *these* by substantial forms, but also according to all that belongs to their being at all in any way." Thus the cause of being is also the cause of the existence of individuation and substance. In light of this we can see clearly why, for example, parents are not directly the cause of the existence of their offspring, as I have argued against Geach in chapter two.

³⁴² *ST*, I, q. 29, a. 2.

³⁴³ *De Ver.*, q. I, a. 1.

The reason, then, why we are able to see in an actual existent a composite of essence and existence is that an actual existent, which is to say substance or a proper subject of *to be*, comes to us in experience always as being in some essential status, whether or not we know that status. But the reason, given the composite of both essence and existence, why we do not call its essence the proper subject of *to be*, but rather the individual existent, is that in our experience any essential status is the status of an actual existent.

But if essence is not the proper subject of *to be*, how are we to understand it within the composite of essence and existence? We must see it as a component,³⁴⁴ or as a factor in *many* subjects of *to be* each of which is always in an essential status. The difficult point to see here is expressed very well by Smith.

Yet it is because existents or substances or the proper subjects of "is" are themselves compounded (of the subject of "is" and its "is") that we can speak of composite of essence and *esse*. The distinction of "is" from each subject of "is" is as between the subject and its own "is" *in* each subject and *that* subject itself. If you will, the distinction is between a subject *in esse* and that subject's *esse*.³⁴⁵

The mistake we are too easily prone to is thinking that the composite of essence and existence is the composite of *man* (*homo sapiens*) and *to be* (*ipsum esse*). It is rather, using Sweeney's example, the composite of *Paul*, who is the proper subject of *to be* in an essential status (in this case *human*) and *to be*. The reason is that there is nowhere in our experience *homo sapiens*, but always only Paul and Mary from whom all our philosophizing about essence and existence comes. It is *in them* that we find an essential status. It is true that both essence and substance name the same existent (Paul and Mary), but they do so *very* differently. It is a difference we already saw

³⁴⁴ Leo Sweeney offers a helpful way of seeing essence and existence as components. In directly perceiving an actual material existent, he says, we perceive that it "(a) not only is *what* it is (Paul is this man), but (b) also *actually exists* (Paul is). But evidence #a is other than evidence #b. But diverse evidences indicate the actual presence within of diverse components. Therefore, such evidences indicate that an existent is actually made up of two real and distinct components." *Authentic Metaphysics*, p. 93.

³⁴⁵ Smith, *The Philosophy of Being*, p. 67.

St. Thomas making, namely between *thing* and *being*. Whenever we speak of a *tomato*, or of a being which is a *tomato*, *tomato* (the essence) designates the essential status of some actual existent; *tomato* is what makes this here existent a *thing*. But substance refers to that same existent insofar as it is a proper subject of *to be* regardless of its essential status, regardless even of the fact that it may be one of *many* different existents in the *same* essential status.

We have now placed ourselves in the proper position from which to understand St. Thomas' distinction between essence and existence,³⁴⁶ which is a distinction between a proper subject of *to be*, existing here and now, in some essential status, and its *to be*. It is in the context of that composite that we must see why the possibility of the multiplicity of existents considered metaphysically must not be taken for granted. Recall our earlier question: How is it *possible* that many different existents have the same status of being an existent? Restate the same question now in light of the understanding of the composite of essence and existence we just worked out: How is the following situation possible? Clearly all composites of the proper subject of *to be* (substance) and their *to be* are necessarily the same insofar as they are such composites, but each one differs from every other precisely at the point where all composites are the same, namely, in their existential status. They are all composites, they are all existents, yet what distinguishes one from another, what allows for the possibility of there being *many* existents, is not that they are such composites (which they all are), but that they are existents (which they also all are).

In order to understand this puzzling situation Thomistically we must not fail to notice first a very important point which may be gathered from several texts. In St. Thomas' first *Summa* we find a text that helps us see the point, and also contributes

³⁴⁶ St. Thomas, of course, is not the first to make the distinction between essence and existence. Many other medieval Christian and Islamic philosophers have made it. What we wish to see is why the act of existing is the highest act of every creature, and why it is precisely in reference to *it* that a creature's dependence on a proper cause is most clearly expressed.

toward our attempt to understand the context of the arguments for God's existence in that work.

Since every agent acts so far as it is in act, it belongs to the first agent, which is most perfect, to be most perfectly in act. Now, a thing is the more perfectly in act the more its act is posterior in the way of generation, for act is posterior in time to potentiality in one and the same thing that passes from potentiality to act. Further, act itself is more perfectly in act than that which has act, since the latter is in act because of the former. These things being posited, then, it is clear from what has been shown in Book I of this work that God alone is the first agent.³⁴⁷ Therefore, it belongs to Him alone to be in act in the most perfect way, that is, to be Himself the most perfect act.³⁴⁸ *Now this act is being, wherein generation and all movement terminate, since every form and act is in potentiality before it acquires this act.* Therefore, it belongs to God alone to be His own being, just as it pertains to Him only to be the first agent.³⁴⁹

The point we must see here is that the act of being precedes all other acts. Before out tomato becomes red, it must first exist; and before it turns into fertiliser for next year's crop of tomatoes, it must exist, and before the fertiliser turns into a new tomato, it too must first exist. Because "the act of being is wherein generation and all movement terminate,"³⁵⁰ change and generation are already given by the time we begin philosophizing about them; they are given in the preceding existential status of an existent in whom we find change and generation.³⁵¹

³⁴⁷ Reference here is to *SCG* I, 13 where St. Thomas gives various arguments for God's existence. Now where, we may well wonder, has it been shown in those arguments that God is the first agent? Have not those arguments simply been arguments for an Unmoved Mover and an Uncaused Cause? Yes, they have been, insofar as the arguments are understood in an exclusively Aristotelian way. But St. Thomas wants to say more, that is, he wants to say more about the *dependence* of the data on a cause than Aristotle says about it. St. Thomas' God is the God of Exodus 3:14, the "HE WHO IS", to whom he refers at the end of the text we are quoting. This is not Aristotle's Unmoved Mover, although Aristotle's Unmoved Mover may be seen to be that with a bit more philosophizing about the effects, or creatures, of this God. What more? We must see them as receivers of an act which they possess because they have been given it, and because it is an act above all of their other acts.

³⁴⁸ This is what makes St. Thomas' First Agent more than Aristotle's Unmoved Mover, namely, His way of being in act is most perfect because He is, and does not receive, that act. This act is the act of being or the act of existence, and Aristotle clearly does not speak this way of his God anywhere.

³⁴⁹ *SCG*, II, 52, 7. (italics mine) See also *De Pot.*, q. III, a. 5; *ST*, I, q. 44, a. 2; and I, q. 45, a. 1, ad 2.

³⁵⁰ As all cosmological thinking terminates in metaphysical thinking, rather than being a compartment of it (see *Division and Methods of the Sciences*, VI, 1).

³⁵¹ Smith points out that for this reason we can say that "it is not because things change or are generated [are begotten by their parents] that they exist; rather it is because they exist that they change and are generated." *The Philosophy of Being*, p. 69. We are now in a better position to understand why a thing can be dependent on a cause both for its becoming and being. We can now

As preceding all other acts (accident, substantial form, etc.), the act of existing has the job of adding the feature of existing to an essential situation of some actual existent. But note what follows from this: because the act of existing adds the feature of existing, it is the very reason why the existential status of an actual existent is the status of an actually existing *essential* status. Given that an essential status comes to be by the act of existing, the act of existing makes that essential status of some actual existent to be essential. Our tomato comes to exist by its act of existence, that is, the act of existence adds *existing* to the essential status of our actual tomato, but also by its act of existence our actual tomato is a being which is a *tomato*. The latter is a strong claim, but consider the following text.

God alone is altogether immutable; whereas, every creature is in some way mutable.³⁵² Be it known therefore that a mutable thing can be called so in two ways; by a power in itself; and by a power possessed by another. For all creatures before they existed, were possible, not by any created power, since no creature is eternal, but by the divine power alone, inasmuch as God could produce them into existence. Thus as the production of a thing into existence depends on the will of God, so likewise it depends on His will that things should be preserved; *for he does not preserve them otherwise than by ever giving them existence; hence if He took away His action from them, all things would be reduced to nothing.*³⁵³ Therefore as it was in the Creator's power to produce them before they existed in themselves; so likewise it is in the Creator's power when they exist in themselves to bring them to nothing. In this way therefore, by the power of another—namely, of God—they are mutable, inasmuch as they are producible from nothing by Him, and are by Him reducible from existence to non-existence....³⁵⁴

see better why Geach's insistence that one's parents can give one existence runs contrary to St. Thomas' view.

³⁵² Here we have a clue how St. Thomas differs from Aristotle in his deepest understanding of the Unchanged Changer, the Unmoved Mover, or the Immutable Muter, if you will. This is not a disagreement with Aristotle, but going beyond.

³⁵³ Creatures are not preserved by having been given acts other than existence (neither by substance nor accidents), and when that act is taken away the other acts disappear. Thus essence disappears into nothing if it is not being actuated by the act of existence. St. Thomas is making a very strong claim here about *esse*, and sharply distinguishing it from essence. This sheds light on the cause effect relationship between the God of the Five Ways and his creatures, because God's *action* of which St. Thomas speaks here is *causal* action, which is primarily that of *giving* existence—the act of giving that which the giver has himself not received from another (and this ultimately makes him the First Unmoved).

³⁵⁴ This, then, is how St. Thomas' Unmoved Mover, to whom he always refers to as *First* Unmoved Mover, or simply as First Mover, is to be understood. God is unmoved or immutable because he alone is not brought into existence nor preserved in it by the power of another nor by his own power— simply, HE IS, which, as Moses tells us, is His name.

Thus in every creature there is potentiality to change either as regards substantial being, as in the case of things corruptible; or as regards locality only, as in the case of celestial bodies; or as regards the order to their end, and the application to their powers to diverse objects, as is the case with the angels; *and universally all creatures generally are mutable by the power of the Creator, in Whose power is their existence and non-existence. Hence God is in none of these ways mutable, it belongs to Him alone to be altogether immutable.*³⁵⁵

It seems, then, that the act of existing actuates and preserves not only an actual existent in some essential situation, but the essential situation is made to be the essential situation it is by the act of existence.³⁵⁶ We need to see why that is because it will reveal most clearly the creaturely status of creatures—effects dependent on the first or the highest cause.

Keep in mind that we are still trying to account for the *possibility* of many existents. Recall that the reason why this is a question at all is that in the known existents does not lie the reason why there are many of them. They are not many because of their essence: essence may be one (*tomato*, for example), but there are many existents in that same essential status. They are also not many simply because they have the act of existing: one existent does not contain in it, as an existent, the reason for many existents. Recall also the Thomistic understanding of the composite of essence and existence. Essence denotes the essential features of an actual existent; in addition to having these features an actual existent also exists, and this fact is denoted by the act of existing. We are not saying, strictly speaking, that, what Sweeney calls “components,” exist. It is the whole composite that properly speaking exists, and it exists as the denominations of essence and existence indicate: through

³⁵⁵ *ST*, I, q. 9, a. 2. (italics mine) For earlier texts where St. Thomas makes the same point see *De Ver.*, (which is earlier than the arguments for God’s existence in *SCG*, I, 13) q. III, a. 6, and ad 3, 4; q. III, a. 3. See also the later work *De Pot.*, q. III, a. 1, obj. 17 and ad 17; q. V, a. 1, ad 1 and ad 12.

³⁵⁶ It is not clear from Bobik’s discussion, in his commentary on *De Ente et Essentia*, of the composite of essence and existence whether he in fact understands the composite this way. I suspect he does not, but neither does he say anything that calls in question this understanding. For that reason a more developed discussion between him and his opponents may be necessary before we can decidedly take sides.

its essence an actual existent is the *kind* of an existent that it is; through the act of existing a *kind* of existent actually does exist.³⁵⁷

We have already pointed out that the act of existing does not, by actuating it, make essence more essential than it would be without the act of existing. But St. Thomas does not thereby want to say, along with Kant,³⁵⁸ that existence does not add anything at all to the essence. He maintains that essence is not able to exist simply because it is essence, and also because in every actual existent there is an act which is able to make an essence to exist.

The point becomes clearer if we focus upon a *possible* existent. In speaking about a possible existent we are speaking about a composite of essence and existence, of the proper subject of *to be* (substance) and its *to be*. The essence component of a possible existent denotes *what* is able to be. But in the Thomistic context *what* is able cannot account for *whether* it is able. To deny this is to affirm that to be able to be something is identically to be a *this* or a *thing* (an existent in this essential status), or that the existent is identically the essential characteristics of the possible *something* in question. For St. Thomas this cannot be the case with respect to possible existents any more than it can be with respect to actual existents. And the reason why for an actual existent to be is not identically to be the essential status of that existent is that it would then be impossible to have a multiplicity of existents (both in different and same essential situations). But there are in fact many existents, and there must, therefore, be many possible existents. And given that possible existents are composites, they can *be*, before they *are*, not only because of the essential component (*tomato*, *human*), which is really the proper subject of *to be*

³⁵⁷ See Sweeney, *Authentic Metaphysics*, ch. 5.

³⁵⁸ See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. by N.K. Smith, (London: The Macmillan Press, 1992), B 623 - B 630. pp. 502-507.

in an essential status, but also because of the existential component, which, in this case, is a future act of existing.

If we now ask how a possible existent's substance component is related to its future act of existing, we come to the threshold of *natural theology*, one of two special branches of the more general science of the philosophy of being as being. The answer may be found in several of St. Thomas' texts. Consider first the following objection:

Since the cause is more powerful than its effect, that which is possible to our intellect which takes its knowledge from things [from existents considered through the component revealing their *essential* status] would seem yet more possible to nature. Now our intellect can understand a thing apart from understanding that it is from God, because its efficient cause is not part of a thing's nature, so that the thing can be understood without it. Much more therefore can there be a real thing that is not from God.³⁵⁹

This objection reveals a viewing of existents exclusively as things, exclusively through their essential component. When existents are so viewed, their dependence on an efficient cause is not clear, and any philosophizing about God on the basis of existents so viewed is impossible. This is a valuable lesson for viewing the data of the Five Ways. How must we view the data in order to see the dependence upon a cause that is first and highest? Here is St. Thomas' answer:

Although the first cause that is God does not enter into the essence of creatures, yet *being* which is in creatures cannot be understood except as derived from the divine being: even as a proper effect cannot be understood save as produced by its proper cause.³⁶⁰

A possible existent's substance component is related, therefore, to its future act of existing through the medium of a *cause* which enables an essence to exist. Therefore, the data of the Five Ways must be viewed as existents whose act of existing requires a cause and actuates their essence.³⁶¹

³⁵⁹ *De Pot.*, q. III, a. 5, obj. 1.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.* ad. 1. See also a later text in *ST*, I, q. 44, a. 1, ad 1. We shall consider this text in the second section of chapter ten.

³⁶¹ As that which actuates an essence, the act of existing would appear to be performing a causal function. In *ST*, I, q. 3, a. 4 St. Thomas says that "existence is that which *makes* every form or nature actual." But a scholar like Bobik denies that the act of existing is an intrinsic cause. This, as Sweeney

This reveals precisely the creaturely status of creatures; it reveals the status of possible existents as possible. The reason why a future tomato is a possible existent is not because it is a *tomato*, but because there is in fact that which generates a tomato. Without a generator a possible tomato is nothing. We often slip into thinking that a possible tomato is a future existent without a generator because we know *what* it would be; we have an *idea* of it, and think that on the basis of the idea we can infer its possibility of existing. But in fact, all we can infer from the idea is *what* a possible existent is, and a *what* does not reveal a *whether*, so to speak.

A generator or a cause is then also the reason for the *multiplicity* of existents. The idea, technically termed *exemplar*, of an existent defines it, but not as related to its cause, therefore an exemplar cannot be the source of our knowledge of *why* there are in fact many existents. The multiplicity of existents can only be accounted for through the cause of their being which is actually causing them or can cause them.

We shall obviously have to say more about causality than we did in chapter six, but it is clear from the foregoing discussion that in the Thomistic context causality must include the act of existing. This throws much light on the difference between Aristotle's and St. Thomas' First Uncaused Cause, and on the difference between interpretations of the Five Ways as *cosmological* and as metaphysical.

points out, "is unfortunate, for what other component is so influential in producing an existent?" *Authentic Metaphysics*, p. 236, n. 5.

Part Three

**FROM *BEING* TO GOD
THROUGH THE FIRST CAUSE OF BEING**

CHAPTER IX

A Preface to God-Talk

*A worried hippopotamus reflected with a sigh
How very strange that two of us make hippopotami
But if the hippopotami, how stands the matter thus
That any hippopotami are hippopotamus?*

Gerard Smith, *Natural Theology*

The aim of this chapter is to prepare further the context in which is situated the intellectual activity of St. Thomas' demonstration of God's existence.

At this point of our inquiry we must shift our focus. Since the fifth chapter we have been moving from the first philosophical question, the answer to which is *being*, to the heart of the Thomistic understanding of *being*, namely, the act of existing. We have encountered this act in a contingent being (a being that is but need not be), which as such requires a cause. We have said something about the causality in the context of first principles of knowledge of contingent being. But more needs to be said about it because we are now looking for a cause that must reside outside the realm of being as becoming, that is, outside the realm of human experience. It must so reside because every being in experience is contingent (requires a cause of its existence because it is not identically its act of existing). We must, therefore, say something about the manner of philosophizing about that which we cannot experience. This puts us on tricky ground. St. Thomas is well aware that

the ground is tricky, and that we must proceed carefully and clear of any illusions. The main difficulty we shall encounter is deriving a working definition of that of which we have no experience, namely, the cause of the act of existing that is itself in no way caused, or “that which everyone calls God.” Deriving at this definition requires a shift in focus to the philosophical context which can accommodate God-talk, that is, we want to see how the intellectual activity of a metaphysician leads into natural theology which properly commences with the proof for God’s existence.

This is the most difficult part of our quest for a good understanding of the Five Ways. The difficulty resides in our having to sustain a long and very attentive effort in grasping every key point and then moving on to the next point without losing a firm grasp of the previous one. The more points we shall make, the more difficult it will become to do this, but we must endure until we reach the conclusion of each of the Five Ways. Even though I have broken it up into sections, the content of the next three chapters is closely connected.

Before St. Thomas shows how God’s existence can be demonstrated he considers whether a demonstration is necessary at all, and once he shows that it is, he looks at some objections to the very possibility of demonstrating it. These are in his mind the strongest objections anyone has put forth to date. We must, therefore, consider some modern objections to our task of seeking God with our minds.

I shall follow the Theologian’s two-phase method for preparing the inquiry into God’s existence: the metaphysical phase where we consider why the existence of God needs proof, and the epistemological phase where we consider some objections to the possibility of the proof, and also begin to consider the nature of the proof.

Metaphysical Preface to God-talk

Either the proposition *God exists* does not need a proof because it is in some way self-evident or it does; if it does, we need an explanation of *how* it is to be proved. In

this section we shall look at reasons for holding these two positions. (In the next section we shall say something about the claim that the proposition *cannot* be proven.) But the two positions are not only a disagreement about the proposition *God exists*, the disagreement between them goes deeper. It is a disagreement over the nature of knowledge, and deeper yet, it is a disagreement over the nature of being, since all knowledge is of being. To say whether or not a proof, any proof, is required is to say what is required in order to know something (being). Thus all intellectual disputes are disputes over what beings are as beings (no one claims that knowledge is not of being). It will be remembered, for example, that Thales of Miletus suggested they are water. Plato suggested that they are essences or Forms. His position may be called *essentialism*,³⁶² and it gives rise to the claim that the proposition *God exists* does not need a proof. St. Thomas' position on the nature of being as being may be called *existentialism*, and it maintains that the proposition *God exists* does need a proof. By comparing these two positions on several points we shall better understand why for St. Thomas the proposition *God exists* needs a proof, why it is not entailed in some concept from which it only needs to be extracted.

The essentialism of Plato, amounts roughly to this: being is an essence or whatever can correctly be defined—*fish*, *feline*, *man*, and so on. Plato's essentialism is his answer to the problem faced by all philosophers of being, namely the problem posed by individual existents. The problem is this: how can the same essence-being, *fish*, be more than one individual, and why are two individual fishes the same essence-being, *fish*? Plato thought the only way out of this problem is to define

³⁶² In tagging a philosopher an "essentialist" we must be careful. James Collins offers good advice. "This division [of philosophers as essentialists or existentialists] can be misleading if by "essentialism" is meant ignorance or depreciation of the problem of existence. In this sense, the rationalists do not fit into this category; a concern for existence lies behind Descartes' view of the Cogito, Spinoza's theory of the production of the world, and Leibniz's principle of sufficient reason. But these thinkers do qualify as essentialists if by that is meant their systematic effort to award the primacy to essence over existence in the order of being, as well as of thought." *God in Modern Philosophy* p. 79.

being apart from the realm of individual existents. This means that all individual existents, as individual, reside more or less in the realm of unreality—the realm of change and becoming. Because being is *what is*, and nonbeing is *what is not*, being is one, immobile, and eternal; but individual existents are many, mobile (they change and come in and go out of existence), and temporal. To be, therefore, must mean to be an essence, and not an individual and an imperfect instance of essence. Plato thus defines being in terms of the *what* of *what is*, and assimilates the *is* of *what is* into the *what*—to be is to be a *what* or an essence.

But he realises that his position entangles the mind in some insurmountable difficulties. For if to be means to be an essence, our twofold problem—how can the same essence-being be more than one individual, and why are two individual fishes the same essence-being—remains. First, if to be is to be *fish*, for example, the mind cannot account for the difference between *fish* and several individual existents that are *fish*, and yet clearly there is a difference, the difference between one (*fish*) and many (individual fishes). Second, before we even approach the question of why several individual fishes are the same essence we notice that each individual fish may not even be *fish*. For the fact that there are several fishes cannot be accounted for by saying that all of them are one in their essence, for there is nothing in that essence to account for multiplicity. This means that one fish is *fish* and it is the *not other* fish. Therefore it must be made up of at least two essences: *fish* and the *not other* fish, and so what we call fish may turn out not to be a fish at all. The individual existents are therefore a very thorny problem for essentialism, and it seems necessary to deny them the status of beings or real things in order to preserve essentialism.³⁶³

³⁶³ For a more detailed account of difficulties with essentialism see Plato's *Sophist*, 242c-264b, and Etienne Gilson's *Being and Some Philosophers*, ch. I, (Toronto, 1952). For a more recent discussion with Prof. Chisholm see Henry B. Veatch, "Essentialism and Individuation," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association*, 48 (1974), pp. 64-73.

Aristotle saw this and other problems with Platonic essentialism, and decided it would be best to deny the assumption that to be is to be an essence or a form and to assert the assumption that to be is to be that which exists. The fact that existents can also be defined in terms of essences or forms is no ground for positing archetypal Forms or Essences outside the realm of individual existents. The fact simply means that we can properly locate essences, namely, in the things which exist, not outside of them, and thus preserve individual existents which are the data of our knowledge of being.

Nevertheless, the essentialism of Plato has pointed out correctly that our knowledge of individual things is knowledge, rather than mere perception or opinion, precisely because we know things universally. That is, we do not merely perceive Peter and John, Mary and Ann, we know them as human beings; to know Mary as human is to know her universally, as an individual instance of the universal concept *man* (*homo*). Plato is thus a very healthy antidote to Hume's empiricism. But we need not for this reason posit *man* outside of individual human beings; we need not say that things are universal or that there is a realm of universals; we can simply say that our knowledge of individual existing things is universal.

But how can it be that we have universal knowledge of things that are themselves not universal? And, how is it possible that things be both individuals and individuals of one particular kind? Aristotle answers both questions with two principles he himself discovered: potency and act. With respect to the question of the nature of human knowledge, the principles of potency and act give rise to the possible and agent intellect;³⁶⁴ with respect to the things of our knowledge the principles of potency and act give rise to prime matter; substantial form, and the

³⁶⁴ See above note 223. For a more detailed account of possible and agent intellect and its relation to potency and act, see Régis, *Epistemology*, Parts Two and Three.

cause of their union.³⁶⁵ Thus for Aristotle the multiplicity of individuals of particular kind is caused to be; individuals are caused to be by their formal, material, efficient, and final causes; they are caused to be known universally by the sense data they offer and the agent intellect which makes the data intelligible by abstraction.

But Aristotle's explanation of why there are many individuals of one kind is an explanation that takes existence for granted, that is, Aristotle does not explain how things come to be, he explains how they come to be generated. Aristotle's answer to the question: what is it to be an existent? is therefore not the answer of pure existentialism, for he answers that to be an existent is to be an individual composite of prime matter, substantial form, and accidents; he does not see them as composites of essence and existence.³⁶⁶ St. Thomas takes note of this when he gives a brief account of progress in philosophy on the question of origin of things. He sees the earliest philosophers as conceiving being and the causes of being exclusively in terms of matter. Others advanced further when they made the distinction between substantial form, and matter which they thought to be eternal or uncreated. But

³⁶⁵ To see how this occurs, consult the works mentioned in note 283.

³⁶⁶ Joseph Owens explains this point in his well known work. In discussing Aristotle's treatment of Being *per accidens*, he points out: "From the viewpoint of the much later distinction between essence and the act of existing, this treatment must mean that Aristotle is leaving the act of existence entirely outside the scope of his philosophy. The act of existing must be wholly escaping his *scientific* consideration. All necessary and definite connections between things can be reduced to essence. The accidental ones do not follow from the essence. They can be reduced only to the actual existence of the thing. There is no reason in the essence of the carpenter why he actually is a musician. The reason has to be explained in terms of the actual existence of the habits in the same man. Likewise, the results of free-choice cannot be explained in terms of essence. They form an existential problem. Aristotle readily admits free will and what follows from it. But he does not allow it to form the subject of scientific consideration. In a word, Aristotle does not for an instant deny existence. He readily admits it in Being *per accidens*. But he does not seem even to suspect that it is an act worthy of any special consideration, or that it is capable of philosophical treatment. To him it seems, 'as it were, only a name' and 'akin to non-Being.' The difference in viewpoint can readily be seen in the commentary of St. Thomas on this question. St. Thomas takes great pains to show that the contingent as well as the necessary must be immediately caused by the primary Being. For Aristotle, on the contrary, Being *per accidens* finds its ultimate explanation in matter." *The Doctrine of Being in the Aristotelian 'Metaphysics'*, (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1978). pp. 309-10.

they accounted for the transmutation of forms in bodies in ways that St. Thomas does not find acceptable.

Such transmutations they attributed to certain universal causes such as the oblique circle [the zodiac], according to Aristotle, or ideas, according to Plato ... Each of these opinions, therefore, considered *being* under some particular aspect, either as *this* or as *such*; and so they assigned particular efficient causes to things. Then others there were who arose to the consideration of *being*, as being, and who assigned a cause to things, not as *these*, or as *such*, but as *beings* [existents]. Therefore whatever is the cause of things considered as beings, must be the cause of things, not only according as they are *such* by accidental forms, nor according as they are *these* by substantial forms, but also according to all that belongs to their being at all in any way.³⁶⁷

The important question for us is whether Aristotle, with his substantialism, which is an incomplete existentialism, can demonstrate God's existence. Another way to put the question (and the reason for putting it this way will become clear in the next section) is this: What can Aristotle's God do? What is Aristotle's God a cause of? Given that Aristotle never treats philosophically the question of the existence of existents, he is not in the position to discover the cause of existence, and therefore not in the position to discover the *existence* of the First Cause. Nevertheless, Aristotle does talk (philosophically) about the Unmoved Mover—a deity different from a deity of any fourth-century Greek religion. He discovers the Unmoved Mover as the cause of the process whereby individual existents produce other individual existents of the same kind; the Unmoved Mover is the cause of the proliferation of individuals, not of their existence. But if the existence of individuals is not caused, two possibilities are open on the question of the origin of the existence of things: either their essence is in some way responsible for their existence (which would be a Platonic position), or the question is thought to be unimportant. Aristotle took the second option. He never asked why there is something rather than nothing, he took the existence of something, in whatever form, to be eternal (which is not to say causeless, but only that the contingent has always been in some

³⁶⁷ *ST*, I, q. 44, a. 2. See also *De Spir. Creat.* V where St. Thomas gives a more detailed description of progress in philosophy and within a different context.

form and will always continue to be, and always as dependent on a cause, but not on the cause of existence which he takes for granted and not worthy of scientific consideration).

How then did the question of God's *existence* come to be treated philosophically? It did because Christians began to ask philosophical questions. One question they asked is whether they could know scientifically, that is through an explanation of causes, what they accepted by faith, namely that the reason why something exists rather than not is that God created it.³⁶⁸ The Christians who first asked this question had as their philosophical apparatus Platonic essentialism. The best known of them is St. Augustine.

It does not, however, take a deep insight to see that the *existence* of God cannot be demonstrated within the essentialist context. Given that, in this context, to be is to be an essence and not an individual existent, to demonstrate God's existence requires that he be shown as the cause of the existence of essence-beings, that is, of *fish*, *feline*, *man*, and so on. But that is impossible because *man* or *feline*, which according to essentialism do not reside in the realm of existence, cannot be made to exist; only an individual thing which is *man*, Peter and Mary, or *feline*, Fifi and Felix, can be made to exist. This is not to say that essentialism denies that God can create that which is intelligible and therefore universal in individual existents, and in that sense to create essences. But any individual existent cannot be identically an

³⁶⁸ It is true that Plato and Aristotle have what we call "proofs for God's existence," but these "proofs" do not arise from the question: Is it possible to demonstrate that God exists? They seem to arise more from the question: What can be said about God? As an answer to this question we get God as the First Cause, (but not of the act of existence in his effects) the Prime Mover, and so on, but the *existence* of anything is for the Greeks never an object of a demonstration. This may have to do with the fact that the ancients did not wonder about the *existence* of anything, they only tried to explain how things are generated from other things. And so God is the *ungenerated* one, and the question of his existence does not come up. Christians do not see things as only generated from other things, but they see the world as having had a beginning, as having come from no pre-existing matter, which, philosophically gives rise to the question of the cause of the existence of things.

essence because that denies the possibility of existence to other individuals with the same essence; such possibility cannot be blocked because there are actually many individual existents with the same essence. Thus the inability of essentialism to deal satisfactorily (without sacrificing the reality of actual individual existents) with the problem of the one and the many disables it to prove the cause of the existence of things. Furthermore, because essentialism cannot begin its demonstration with the existence of anything, it cannot arrive at the existence of anything.

An essentialist conception of being has less than desirable repercussions on the understanding of the nature of human knowledge as well. Given that knowledge is of being, and being for an essentialist is an essence, all knowledge of being must come into the human mind apart from the workings of the senses and the formation of judgments by the agent intellect. This forces us to regard the presence of sensory powers in human beings as puzzling and perhaps not all that necessary for human beings as human beings. (Recall Plato's and Descartes' regard of sensory powers in man.) According to essentialism the human mind possesses unacquired and ready made knowledge of essence-being; it does not begin with Peter and Ann, or Fifi and Felix, but with *man* and *feline*. For an essentialist the knowledge of the universal, of the necessary, of the essential, and of the possible, is given. What must be shown is how we arrive at the knowledge of the singular, the contingent, the existent, and the actual; what must be shown is how the given (essence-being) is the source of the required (individual existents). Essentialism explains this by saying that the knowledge of the universal, the necessary, the essential, and the possible are *not caused* by the experience of an individual existent, but that the experience is merely an occasion which stimulates in the mind the knowledge of essence-being that is already there.

Consequently, the essentialist proof of God's existence, whether it be St. Augustine's, St. Anselm's, Descartes', or Leibniz's, is fairly straight forward. In fact

it is not really a proof because the knowledge of God's existence is contained in the given and is therefore not required; it does not have to be demonstrated (in the strict sense of demonstration) but only pointed out. What is given is an essence whose nature it is to exist. It is true that most people do not know this given, just as there may be some who do not know *spinster* which is also given and contains the predicate *unmarried*. But that is irrelevant because some people (essentialist philosophers) do in fact know the given essence whose nature it is to exist. So we cannot *not* know that there exists a special being radically different from all other beings because we must conceive an essence that in fact exists because its nature is to exist. Therefore, God, who is a being above all beings, exists. Obviously this is not a demonstration, but a mere unpacking of terms. For an essentialist, that is all we need to do with the proposition *God exists*.

But for an existentialist like St. Thomas the matter is not so straight forward. The main reason an existentialist disagrees with essentialism is that for him being cannot be an essence; it cannot because individual existents must be preserved, they are and we cannot make them not be. An existentialist wants to handle the problem of the one and the many better than by denying the status of being to individual existents, to *that which is*. Consequently he does not wish to deny the connection between his universal knowledge of being and individual beings. He maintains that our knowledge of essences *fish, feline, man* is not given but acquired by our knowledge of existents, which are given. For an existentialist this knowledge arises as a product of two things: a) apprehending an existent, and b) apprehending in an existent what he is, or his essence. We first know the singular, the sensible, the actual, and the contingent, which when combined by the operation of the agent intellect causes in us through abstraction the knowledge of the universal, the intelligible, the possible, and the necessary. We know universals like species and genus from the knowledge of a particular individual instance of them; we know an

essence like *plant* from knowing this plant in our back yard; we know what is possible from knowing a particular thing that is actual; we know the necessary by knowing that what we have first known to be cannot not be while it is. This process of acquiring knowledge has been described in a little more detail in chapters seven and eight.³⁶⁹

The existentialist who depends for all his knowledge on experience cannot find in his *knowledge* the existence of the one whose essence it is to exist. When an existentialist is told of an essence whose nature it is to exist, he is able to find in it only the knowledge that the one who *must* be *necessarily* must be, just as when he is told what a spinster is he knows only that a spinster must be unmarried. He does not know whether there *is* in fact a spinster. In the same way, when told about the essence of the one whose nature it is to exist, the existentialist knows only that such a one must be *thought* to exist, not that he does in fact exist.

What then are the requirements of an existentialist's proof for God's existence? The question can best be answered by seeing the contrast between essentialism with existentialism on the following point. In "proving" God's existence essentialism merely moves from knowledge to knowledge; it allows one knowledge to be the cause of another knowledge. In "proving" God, essentialism makes its knowledge of the one whose essence it is to be the cause of its knowledge of the *existence* of the one whose essence it is to be. Existentialism, on the other hand, while not opposing this, insists on a causality of being (of that which actually exists) because all its knowledge is caused by being (by that which actually exists). Gerard Smith puts the point this way: "Essentialism conceives proof only as a causality of subsequent knowledge by prior knowledge; existentialism conceives proof as an instance of the

³⁶⁹ See also *SCG* II, 76, 14 & 17 and *De Ver.*, q. X, a. 6.

causality of being [that which is or can be], because the caused sequence of knowledge is the caused sequence of being which is known."³⁷⁰

We must clarify this point in order to see the difference between essentialist and existentialist contexts of a proof, and so better to make up our minds between them, for they are not compatible and cannot both succeed in demonstrating the existence of God. At this point I ask the reader to sustain attention through a fairly lengthy clarification that involves a cluster of points. Let me, therefore, restate the point that needs clarifying. We wish to show that a demonstration or a proof is a demonstration of some instance of the causality of being, because, given that knowledge is of being (that which is or can be and not of essence-being), a caused sequence of knowledge must duplicate a caused sequence of being (not a mere sequence of knowledges as in the ontological or essentialist proof).

We shall take the example we used in chapter seven to show how the knowledge of the act of existing can become for us a distinct knowledge, the example of an existent man. Suppose that we do not know that man is an animal, but that we do know that a sentient being is an animal. What we are missing is the middle term: man is a sentient being. When we find it, we will know that man is an animal. Both the essentialist and the existentialist have this as their goal. Now, at first glance it would seem that we are dealing here exclusively with universal propositions: *man is an animal, sentient being is an animal, man is a sentient being*. And that suggests that the job of finding our middle term would be best accomplished by essentialism, without making reference to any individual existents. In fact such a reference would seem to be irrelevant and only a nuisance, for universal propositions are true regardless of the existence of individual beings (in this case individual human beings).

³⁷⁰ Gerard Smith, "Before You Start Talking About God", (*The Modern Schoolman*, 23 (1945) p. 30.) I am indebted to this article for my comparison of essentialism with existentialism.

I say it would *seem* because it is not true, at least there is no evidence to support it. It is true that universal statements deal with the relationship of essences, but because the universal statements express the relation of essences which are based on the very essences in question, we must ask what it means to grasp an essence. Here the essentialist and the existentialist are exactly opposed to one another. We have just seen the difference in their positions. Existentialist claims that the knowledge of universal statements is caused by existents and the agent intellect; essentialism claims that essence-being which is ready made in our minds comes to the forefront of our minds upon experience of an existent, in other words, it does not need to be grasped. But the existentialist will argue that essence-being is not being because individual existents are real (*actually* existing), and that consequently knowledge of essences cannot be the knowledge of being; thus to know an essence is not to know a being as it is, but only as it is known—*fish*, *feline*, *man* is not, does not exist, although it is how we *know* Fifi and Fluffy, Peter and Ann.

Which of them is right depends on whether being or that which exists or can exist is an essence. As far as I know, no proof can be offered for either a *yes* or a *no* answer, which to me indicates the deeply mysterious nature of being. However, we can make up our minds between them.

The essentialist, who says that being is an essence, at the same time denies that we know what exists or can exist, and claims that the object of our knowledge is that in which existence is not given, namely an essence. This leaves him with knowing not beings but that which has its home in a world no one has ever lived, a world of ideas rather than a world of individual existents like ours. Consequently, an essentialist does not know *what actually is*, he knows *what is* as known, he knows ideas but not being.

The existentialist cannot reply with a counter-proof which would show that being is not essence or that our knowledge is not disconnected from existents, nor

can he offer a *proof* that things exist or that we know existing things. However, no evidence of any kind can be put forth to support the essentialist's position. The existentialist has on his side at least the evidence of the senses. Our sense of sight, hearing, touch, and so on, and our sciences about things serve as evidence that there are things and that we know them; although that does not constitute a proof. On the other hand, no evidence has been found that being is essence or that we know essences apart from knowing existents. Furthermore, and this is where we as philosophers seeking to demonstrate the existence of God perk up our ears, there can be a proof that one being exists if another being exists and we know it to be so. But if being is an essence and knowledge is not of things, no proof that anything exists *can* (not just *isn't*) be offered—all that can be offered is a sequence of ideas logically connected.

We are now in the position to return to our example of demonstrating the proposition *man is an animal* in which all the statements are universal or essential: *sentient being is an animal*, *man is a sentient being*, and *man is an animal*. An existentialist will say that these essential statements are related because they are based on essences, but essences are known through experience of actual existents, and the proof that man is an animal is true in the realm of being (existents). Because essentialism severs the connection between essences and existents the proposition *man is sentient* is true in knowledge only, that is, in a world other than the world of existents, in an ideal world for which there is no evidence of any kind. Existentialism keeps the connection between essences and existents, and consequently is able to claim that the proposition *man is sentient* is true in knowledge because man is in fact, in the world of existents, sentient.

This reveals the requirement of a proof (we are still clarifying our point). In a proof of any sort offered by an existentialist, individual existents are presupposed, that is, their actual existence is not demonstrated. Furthermore, individual existents

bring objects into knowledge and maintain them there. If individual existents do not introduce an object of knowledge, as they do not in essentialism, we shall not be able to explain how it is that we know any actually existing thing, when in fact we do know actually existing things (in essentialism we know essences, not things). Finally, if individual existents do not introduce and maintain an object of knowledge, we cannot know what is possible and what is necessary because we cannot know what is actual. In other words, without individual existents we cannot have a science of any kind, but we do in fact have many sciences each studying its own aspect of being and with its own methods of demonstration. In essentialism there cannot really be scientific knowledge, but only recollection. This is as much as existentialism can offer in support of its position on being and knowledge of being.

We need to establish further the requirements of an existentialist proof of God's existence; this time in the context of an existentialist refutation of an essentialist proof of God's existence. The essentialist proof in question is that of St. Augustine. It is true that, strictly speaking, St. Augustine is not an essentialist. He is a creationist, but the beings which God creates are for him essences, and, as we have seen, essence-beings are incapable of being created because they do not come into existence. This is why for St. Augustine human knowledge is owed to God who puts into the mind essential truths. Accordingly, we do not participate by our own effort in the formation of our knowledge; we are divinely illuminated in all areas of our knowledge, and thus not really scientists, not really studying individual existents.

This picture is reflected very clearly in one of St. Augustine's proofs of God. In Book II of his *On Free Choice*, St. Augustine explains how we can see that God exists, better yet, how we cannot deny, as does the fool who says in his heart that there is no God, that God is real. Any essential truth will suffice for the demonstration: *five is five, seven and three are ten*, etc. It will suffice because it has a threefold characteristic: it is necessary, eternal, and immutable—seven and three

must be ten, seven and three are *always* ten, seven and tree can *only* be ten. When we ask ourselves what is the source of these characteristics of essential truth, we must admit that it is not any ten existents in the world because these are neither necessary, nor eternal, nor immutable. Neither can the source be our mind which only sees or recognises an essential truth, but does not make it. Therefore, an essential truth like *seven and three are ten* indicates a truth that transcends creatures because creatures do not possess the characteristics it possesses, and such a truth must be a participant in the Truth which itself does not participate in any other truth. That is God. But this is a recognised God, not a demonstrated one because in essentialism all knowledge is recognition or recollection, and not science, or demonstration.

But notice what we have here. We have God, creatures (individual existents), and an essential truth like *seven and three are ten* which is neither God nor a creature. From a Christian perspective this is dangerous, but fortunately it is also false. The falsity of it can best be seen in the following argument based on St. Thomas.

St. Thomas discusses the matter apropos of the number six because Augustine had remarked that if the creatures which God made in six days were not existent, nevertheless six would still be a perfect six. (*Quodlibet.*, I, 8, 1) St. Thomas first points out that if there were no existent sixes, there would not be—careful man—any existent sixes. Next, he remarks, six can be taken as an idea in God, where, because it is not a creature but rather a divine idea of a creature, it is the same as God Himself. Then comes the crucial point: what is six apart from its being a divine idea of a creature and apart from its being a creature, i.e., six existents? It is, he answers, an absolute consideration of number six. *Absolute consideration*, he explains, is a consideration in which six is viewed neither as six existents nor as the thought of six. In this absolute consideration six is not six existents, because six is six, whether there be six things or not; nor is six the thought of six, because six is six, whether we think six or not. Absolute thus means freed from the conditions of being six things and of being the thought of six. In that absolute state the only thing true of six is simply and solely that it is six **[not that it is a participant of anything above it, which it may be, but it cannot be known to be that when it is considered absolutely]**. *Absolute consideration* is knowledge which abstracts six both from the state of being six existents and from the state which six assumes in our knowledge of six, the state, namely, of being thought of. Now comes the delicate point: that absolute six, although it is *considered* as being neither in nature nor as being in knowledge, is nevertheless only in knowledge, precisely because it cannot be so considered except by *considering* it. The absolute six is thus in knowledge alone in the sense that it is never found outside its status of being understood, although the fact that it is understood is irrelevant

to the fact that it is six which is understood. Seven or eight or ten, etc., could be understood just as well.³⁷¹

The point of this argument, the one Smith calls *delicate*, is of utmost importance for a demonstration of God's existence like the Five Ways because it is a serious objection to the essentialist claim that essential truths come neither from individual existents nor the mind. The point, in showing that essentialism is mistaken in claiming the status of an absolute nature, brings out the need for a demonstration of truths that are not self-evident.

The alternative to essentialist position is this: absolute natures, the natures upon which we make absolute judgments (like the nature of six and the judgment that six is six) are from the mind and individual existents. According to St. Thomas the mind causes knowledge, that is, absolute natures and absolute judgments have their being in thought, they would not be what they are unless they were thought. But to say that we cause our knowledge, or that we make the truth of our knowledge is not to say that we could also unmake it so that *seven and three* would be something other than *ten*. The point is that unless the mind cause knowledge there will not be knowledge, that is, *we* shall not have knowledge. But this is not idealism because all knowledge is of being, that is, being is the content of knowledge even if it is of our making; the content of knowledge is not whatever the mind makes up, it is the content caused by being in our knowledge. In making this assertion St. Thomas does not, as do all the essentialists from Plato to Hegel, dissociate the knower from the known, the intellect which knows being from actually existing being. For St. Thomas knowledge can only be of being (that which is or can be), and in light of that he says that we cause our knowledge and the truth of our knowledge, and the effect of our intellect's cause is being which we feel, see, hear, and so on, and which

³⁷¹ Gerard Smith, "Before You Start Talking ..." p. 37. For a similar argument, although in a different context, see Darko Piskrač, "A Thomistic Reply to Logical Fatalism", (*The Proceedings of the PMR Conference*, vol. 19/20, 1994-1996. pp. 189-197.)

the agent intellect makes intelligible. Put briefly, being (that which is or can be) causes our intellect to cause knowledge.³⁷²

For an existentialist, therefore, a demonstration of knowledge, or a proof, is achieved by means of the middle term,³⁷³ which is an existential principle of known individual existents, and *not*, as in Augustine's "proof," of essence-being that comes neither from the mind nor from individual existents. It is true that the middle term is an essence of an individual existent, but the essence comes from the intellect which gets its content from being (that which is), and that content is the essence of an actual or a possible existent.³⁷⁴

But an essentialist may object on the grounds that truth of absolute judgments is eternal. The Theologian responds this way:

The eternity of the truth which the soul understands calls for a distinction. In one way, this eternity can be taken to refer to the thing understood; in another, to that by which it is understood. In the first case, the thing understood would be eternal, but not the one who understands; in the second, eternity would be on the side of the soul which understands. Now, the understood truth is eternal, not in the latter but in the former reference; since the intelligible species, whereby our soul understands truth, come to us repeatedly from the phantasms through the operation of the agent intellect.³⁷⁵

Now if St. Thomas admits that the content of truth is eternal, how is his existentialism different from essentialism? Does not the middle term of his demonstration still have to contain an eternal truth as it does in essentialism? The difference lies in their understanding of the content of the eternal truth. For an essentialist the content is an essence, or *what* things are, and one can understand an essence of a thing, like *fish*, *man*, *six* without bringing in any consideration of God's existence. One can do so because the efficient cause does not enter into an

³⁷² See St. Thomas' *ST*, I, q. 16, a. 7; I, q. 84, a. 5; *De Ver.*, q. I, a. 5; q. XI, a. 1; *De Pot.*, q. III, a. 5.

³⁷³ In an Aristotelian syllogism there are three terms: *major* which is the predicate of the major premise and of the conclusion, *minor* which is the subject of the minor premise and of the conclusion, and *middle* which is the subject of the major premise and the predicate of the minor premise, and it does not appear in the conclusion. *Dictionary of Scholastic Philosophy*, p. 123.

³⁷⁴ For a discussion of the middle term in the Five Ways see the first section of chapter ten below.

³⁷⁵ *SCG*, II, 84, 4

individual existent's essence. For St. Thomas, however, *being* "which is in creatures [that is, in the content of truth] cannot be understood except as derived from the divine being [and it is there that it is eternal]."³⁷⁶

The Theologian is here pointing out the difference between essence and knowledge of essence of a thing, and *being* (that which can or does exist) and knowledge of *being*. For him, essence is not being, it is something that has being, or the *what* of a being. Also, to know essence is not to know being, and even less is it to know another being like a cause. But to know that which is or can be is to know being, and because it is to know contingent being, such knowledge involves the real possibility of knowing the cause of contingent being.

Therefore, for St. Thomas the content of any truth is not an eternal essence, it is a creature or contingent being (that which is or can be). Regardless of whether the mind acquires the content of knowledge by inductive or deductive reasoning, the true conclusion of existential reasoning either affirms or denies that its content is or can be because the antecedent premises have to do with being (that which is or can be). Let us take again our example of the proposition *man is an animal*. When this proposition is known by an existentialist it is understood, not as identifying man-animal with being (which would prevent the possibility of a being that is not man-animal), but as associating actual or possible existence with an essence. The association is demanded by experience, whereas the identification is foreign to experience and there is no evidence for it whatsoever. Our proposition is true when it states the essence of an actual or a possible existent, but the source of its truth does not lie in identifying being with essence; the source of its truth is either induced from the data of experience or deduced from principles which also arise from experience. The data of experience is always contingent and therefore caused

³⁷⁶ *De Pot.*, q. III, a. 5, ad 1. See also obj. 1.

being; from the content of such knowledge we can never extract the knowledge of necessary or uncaused being by mere analysis of a concept of it.

With this we have finally shown why a proof or a demonstration cannot, for St. Thomas, be a mere sequence of knowledges (as it is for those offering the ontological proof, and for those who are offering a cosmological proof but pay no attention to the act of existing) but must be a sequence of knowledges which duplicates the caused sequence of being—the stuff of knowledge.

Let us with one last illustration dispense with the ontological argument (which, as should be clear by now, is much better termed *essentialist* argument because of the identification of being and essence that underlies it). Because every version of this argument takes as its starting point some “eternal truth”, we shall do the same: *seven and three are ten*. Now it is clear that there can be no proof of there being ten things because it is evident that there are ten things. Nor is there proof of the *possibility* of ten things because actual ten things make this possibility self-evident. However, that to be or to be able to be is to be ten or to be able to be ten is neither evident nor self-evident. If to be were to be ten, there would be nothing else but ten, but there is more than ten (flower, moon, two,). How then, if it is neither evident nor self-evident, is it that ten is or that ten is able to be? We may put the question another way: Why is it that being accrues to ten or that it can accrue to ten? Essentialism, if it is consistent, will answer: being does not accrue to ten, it is ten. But that is impossible because it prevents the possibility of flower, moon, two, etc., which are clearly actual. If, then, we admit that there is or can be ten, and that it is not ten only because it is *ten*, we must also admit that ten *is* or can be because it is made or caused to exist.³⁷⁷ To show, therefore, that being accrues to ten is to have a proof. In the order of contingent being, a proof shows cause and effect. In the order

³⁷⁷ We shall see below that existence has two modes. Thus ten does not exist in the same mode that the moon does.

of knowledge of contingent being, a proof shows that the knowledge of cause and effect necessarily involves us in knowing that there is a cause or effect of the *being* of that cause and effect. It seems, then, that our final step of preparation for a profitable reading of the Five Ways is a close consideration of causality as it is understood by St. Thomas, because a proof of God involves a relationship between effects and their proper cause. The question is: along what lines of that relationship can the *existence* of God be demonstrated? But before we take that step we must hear a few objections to the very possibility of a proof for God's existence which will help us establish the context for a proof that involves effects and their proper cause.

Epistemological Preface to God-talk

In this section we shall consider some objections to a demonstration of God's existence by those who say that it cannot be demonstrated. Also, we shall consider what for St. Thomas a proof of God's existence is, and what and how it proves.

We have said enough up to this point to be able to see how the object of *natural theology* arises; we have come to that which gives rise to the intellectual activity of a natural theologian. Since all knowledge is of being, and given that the human intellect begins its work in the experience of contingent being, which means caused being, and given also that the contingency of contingent being is most clearly pronounced at the level of the act of existing of contingent being, the natural theologian goes to work precisely at the moment when he seeks to discover the cause of the act of existing in contingent beings. But he cannot find this cause among the beings of his experience because all beings of experience are contingent, and therefore caused; all of them have a borrowed act of existing. The existence of the cause of the act of existing of all contingent being must, therefore, be inferred and concluded upon philosophical reflection of the beings that lend themselves to the natural theologian's experience.

But making such an inference and a conclusion means positing this cause as a necessary term of a demonstration. This requires evidence, and the human intellect can gather evidence only within the realm of contingent being where such a cause cannot be experienced. This evidence will have to be a knowledge of material sensible being that allows the mind to see the necessity of positing the existence of an immaterial supreme Being.

This is by no means easy, and objections to it are many. The first objection we shall consider is based on the nature of human knowledge. Philosophers like Aristotle and St. Thomas maintain that principles of demonstration are known by the human intellect through the senses. "He [Aristotle] says therefore first that if a person lacks any of the senses, say sight or hearing, then necessarily the science of the sensible objects proper to those senses will be lacking."³⁷⁸ But God exceeds every sense faculty and is above all sensible beings. It follows that a demonstration of God's existence dependent on principles known through the senses cannot succeed.

A short answer to the objection has already been given in what we have said in chapters six and seven. The principles of demonstration that come from sensible beings, are not for St. Thomas principles of *sensible* beings, they are not principles of their *essence*; they are principles of sensible beings insofar as they are *beings* (that which is or can be), which is to say, insofar as they share in the act of existence. Such principles are therefore valid for reaching by way of demonstration the supreme Being which, even though not sensible, nevertheless possesses existence.

But this objection is also an objection to the possibility of the science of being as being, or metaphysics, and as such it requires a longer answer. It is clearly a modern objection, stemming from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and it carries with it the connotation that much of the intellectual activity of ancient and

³⁷⁸ *Commentary on the Posterior Analytics of Aristotle*, Book I, lect. 30.

medieval philosophers was not really “scientific,” did not really have certainty on its side because certainty can be acquired only through mathematics and physics.

One strange characteristic of many modern philosophers is their occasional illusion that they have discovered something their predecessors did not know, that they have broken new and original ground which gives them a great advantage over the achievements of old philosophers. Was St. Thomas ignorant of the supreme certainty of mathematics and the empirical sciences? Do we owe the awareness of this certainty to modern philosophers? The illusion of supremacy in modern thinkers stems largely from their ignorance of the works of their predecessors. When we turn to St. Thomas we find him wide awake. Of mathematics he says, “it is clear, then, that mathematical inquiry is easier and more certain than physical and theological;” of physics he says,

demonstration takes place through extrinsic causes, [and there] something is proved of one thing through another thing entirely external to it. So the method of reason is particularly observed in natural science; and on this account natural science among all the others is most in conformity with the human intellect. Consequently, we say that natural science proceeds rationally, not because this is true of it alone, but because it is especially characteristic of it.³⁷⁹

St. Thomas is as impressed with the certainty of mathematics as is Descartes, and, had he known it, would be no less impressed with the physics of Newton than Kant. The difference between the Theologian and the two modern thinkers is that he sees no reason why we should want to make mathematical and physical methods of inquiry the paradigm for *all* inquiry. But Cartesian and Kantian criticisms of scholastic metaphysics amount to the claim that it is doomed to failure because it either lacks the certainty of mathematics or attempts to stretch methods of physics into metaphysics as if such a method is the only one it could possibly have. Kant is very proud of his discovery that metaphysical conclusions cannot be reached

³⁷⁹ *The Division and Methods of the Sciences*, VI, a. 1, ed. cit.

through physical demonstration; that speculative reason, bound to the realm of experience, cannot demonstrate the existence of God.

But St. Thomas could reply, "This has nothing to do with my attempt to demonstrate God's existence. Such criticism does not apply to my existentialist metaphysics." Why could he say so? The reason is precisely *reason*. St. Thomas and Kant give different accounts of *reason*. What is missing in Kant's account of human cognition is intellect. He talks about sensibility, imagination, understanding (*Verstand*), and at the top is reason (*Vernunft*). But from St. Thomas' standpoint Kant's account lacks *intellectus*, which is above reason and also its origin.³⁸⁰ I cannot here give a detailed account of St. Thomas' conception of human cognition in which can be seen the full impact of his claim that intellect is the highest in our knowledge and that it is the origin of reason. But his main point is that reason is the discursive, stepwise activity of the intellect in human beings.

The human intellects obtain their perfection in the knowledge of truth by a kind of movement and discursive intellectual operation; that is to say, as they advance from one known thing to another. But, if from the knowledge of a known principle they were straightway to perceive as

³⁸⁰ SCG, I, 57, 8. For an excellent study of Thomistic understanding of human cognition see Régis' *Epistemology*.

"Reason and intellect are not distinct powers of the soul; they are distinct acts of the same power. The act of intellect is 'to apprehend intelligible truth simply'; the act of reason is 'to advance from one thing understood [by the intellect] to another, so as to know an intelligible truth ... Reasoning, therefore, is compared to understanding (*intelligere*) as movement is to rest, or acquisition to possession.' St. Thomas, *Summa Theol.* I.79.8. Hence the act of intellect or understanding is a simple intuition (*intuitus*) or grasping of an intelligible object present to the intellect. See St. Thomas, *In I Sent.* d. 3, q. 4, a. 5." Armand Maurer's note 36 on p. 71 of his translation of *De ente et essentia*.

Upon hearing that, as according to Kant, we cannot know the essence of a thing (or as it is in itself) but only as it appears, St. Thomas may well reply that in such a philosophy *intellect* has lost its rightful place. "The word *intellectus* (*understanding*) implies an intimate knowledge, for *intelligere* (*to understand*) is the same as *intus legere* (*to read inwardly*). This is clear to anyone who considers the difference between intellect and sense, because sensitive knowledge is concerned with external sensible qualities, whereas intellective knowledge penetrates into the very essence of a thing, because the object of the intellect is *what a thing is*." ST, II-II, q. 8, a. 1. Of course, if one does not consider the difference between intellect and sense and get the story of their differences and proper relation straight, his philosophy may end up in any number of modern predicaments.

known all its consequent conclusions, then there would be no discursive process at all ... [human beings] would at once behold all things whatsoever that can be known in them.³⁸¹

Thus if we were not rational but purely intellectual, we could see (intellectually intuit) everything that follows from first principles; we would see the necessity of God's existence immediately and without demonstration entailed in the first principles, which, because they are of being, entail being itself. But as things are, we need to demonstrate, using reason, what follows from first principles. And this demonstration must have as its starting point the first principles of being and knowledge. Because Kant thinks that metaphysical attempts to demonstrate God's existence are instances of reasoning without dependence on intellectual conception of first principles, he condemns it as a rational activity of the physicist who unjustifiably transcends his domain. But St. Thomas sees the situation differently. "The certitude of reason comes from the intellect [not from what Kant says it does]. Yet the need of reason is from a defect in the intellect [which is its inability to see simply and immediately everything that follows from its principles]."³⁸² This difference is of utmost importance for answering whether God's existence can be demonstrated philosophically. For Kant reason is neither intellect nor a mode of intellectual knowledge; it is the mind's application of twelve categories to empirically given data, and that is why God's existence cannot be philosophically demonstrated. To St. Thomas human intellectual activity looks very different.

We can say that just as the method of physics is taken from reason inasmuch as it gets its object from the senses, and the method of divine science [metaphysics] is taken from the intellect inasmuch as it understands something purely and simply, so also the method of mathematics can be taken from reason inasmuch as it obtains its objects from the imagination ... just as we attribute the rational method to natural philosophy because it adheres most closely to the method of reason, so we attribute the intellectual method to divine science [metaphysics] because it adheres most closely to the method of intellect.³⁸³

³⁸¹ *ST*, I, q. 58, a. 3.

³⁸² *ST*, II-II, q. 49, a. 5, ad. 2.

³⁸³ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Division and Method of the Sciences*, q. VI, a. 1, ed. cit.

The Theologian is saying that natural sciences have reason as their main tool, but metaphysics has intellect. The import this has on the Five Ways cannot be better explained than Gilson does in one of his lesser known lectures.

In each of them [St. Thomas' arguments for God's existence], there is a dialectical reasoning about the cause (or causes) of certain mode of being such as motion, possibility, perfection and the like. This dialectical process is the work of reason, that is, of intellect proceeding in a discursive way. Without this discursiveness, there would be no conclusion; there would, therefore, be no demonstration, no proof of the existence of God. We reason when we say that whatever is moved is moved by another; then in explaining the cause of this assertion, namely, that the same thing cannot be at once in potency and in act in the same respect. Kant was right in observing that reason could go on indefinitely in thus accounting for a particular cause by another cause. Only, at a certain moment, Thomas Aquinas says that "this cannot go on to infinity." At that moment intellect is stepping in and, this time intellect is not speaking as reason, it is speaking as intellect. A faculty of the principles, intellect sees everything as related to the notions of being and of unity. Its contribution to the proof thus is a twofold one. First it moves reason (or itself *qua* reason) to ask the question and to investigate it. Left alone, reason as such would content itself with connecting particular causes to particular causes and do so indefinitely. It would not look for a cause of all causes. Science does not ask such a question, because science is the work of reason. Next, intellect answers the question; at least, it makes the answer possible. Itself seeking unity, intellect cannot fail to find at the term of its reasoning the very notion that released its mechanism. Of itself, reason could very well go on to infinity; in the case of Aristotle, it actually did. Intellect is that which stops the reasoning process, because it sees everything in the light of being and unity. Reasoning comes to an end as soon as intellect realises that the very principle that set the whole operation in motion is also the true answer to the problem. Asked by intellect, the question can be answered only by intellect ... the metaphysician is using the power of knowing in man which more closely resembles that of the angels and ultimately that of God who, since He is absolute Being, knows everything by knowing Himself. The metaphysician is a mere man; his only privilege, if indeed it is one, is to be a man interested in First Philosophy and thereby committed to the consideration of the First Principles known in the light of the highest cognitive human power, namely, intellect.

A proper understanding of this point discloses the true nature of the Five Ways. Those of us who do not find them conclusive are simply asking for a demonstration of the very principle of these demonstrations. We ask for proofs of that which makes proof possible. We forget that intellect is the proper instrument of metaphysical knowledge and that the proper function of intellect is not to demonstrate, but to see. This is why all rational demonstrations either go on to infinity and fail to demonstrate or, contrariwise, proceed from a principle and return to it, in which case they do not go on to infinity and are able to conclude ... Each and every one of the Five Ways, then proceeds, through rational argumentation, from the sight of a principle to the sight of the same principle. Without the dialectical discourse there would be no proof, without the intellectual intuition of the principle, the proof would never reach its conclusion.³⁸⁴

This does not make the Five Ways an instance of circular reasoning, which would be a vicious circle;³⁸⁵ it is circular intellection which is not vicious. In St.

³⁸⁴ Etienne Gilson, "Can the Existence of God Still Be Demonstrated?" in *The McAuley Lectures* 1960, (West Hartford: St. Joseph College, 1961). pp. 8-9. This article is a very helpful discussion of the differences between Thomistic and Kantian epistemologies which explain why St. Thomas can attempt a demonstration of God's existence and Kant cannot.

³⁸⁵ It would be vicious because it would run contrary to the very nature of rationality, which we have

Thomas' epistemology, reasoning, because it is a part of intellection, proceeds from principles (which it does not ask to have demonstrated because they are self-evidently true) and returns to them. Kant does not and cannot, with his purely dialectic reason, successfully explain why reason is tempted to produce transcendental Idea of *God*, which is an idea of that which transcends experience. But for St. Thomas reason, as the child of intellect, begins to look for a prime cause of motion, efficiency, necessity, and existing because the intellect tends by virtue of what it is to an absolutely prime cause, an unconditional necessity and absolute being. Thus it is not experience that gives rise to the mind's need to arrive at a necessary conclusion, rather the need arises from intellectual necessity, from the intellect's grasp of the first principles. The circle of intellection is not vicious because the beginning and the end are one, but to know that they are one, the human soul must have recourse to reasoning which it cannot perform without sense experience. That is why St. Thomas' proofs begin with an observation from experience, but the activity of proving is *intellectual*, (and therefore metaphysical) which is more than merely *rational*, although it includes it.

Maritain describes the opposing Kantian and Thomistic understandings of the human mind and of metaphysics this way.

Kant denied to metaphysics the character of science because for him experience was the product and the terminus of science, since science built it by applying to sensible data necessities which are pure forms of the mind. But St. Thomas recognised in metaphysics the supreme science of the natural order because for him experience is the starting point of science, which, reading within the sensible "given" the intellectual necessities that surpass it, can transcend it by following those necessities and thereby achieve a supraexperimental knowledge that is absolutely certain.

Being is, indeed, the proper object of the intellect; it is embowelled in all its concepts; and it is to being, wrapped up in the data of the senses, that our understanding is first of all carried.

Should it see this object of its concept free so as to look at it in itself, insofar as it is being, it sees that it is not exhausted by the sensible realities in which the intellect first discovered it; it has a supraexperimental value. So, too, have the principles based on it. In that way, the intellect, if I

seen explained by St. Thomas as a demonstration that takes place through extrinsic causes where something is proved of one thing through another thing entirely external to it. Thus if we attempt to prove something in terms of itself, we have not succeeded in giving a rational demonstration; we have simply been caught in a vicious circle.

may say so, "loops the loop," in coming back, to grasp it metaphysically and transcendently, to that very same *being* which was first given to it in its first understanding of the sensible.³⁸⁶

The next objection to proving God's existence is based on the nature of God. The complaint is that because all natural theologians claim that in God his essence is identical with his existence, asking what God is and whether he exists is the same question. But a natural theologian like St. Thomas says that we do not at present know what God is, therefore, neither should we be able to know whether God is.

This objection overlooks the distinction between two senses of "knowing existence." Maurice Holloway, following St. Thomas, explains.

Existence or "to be" can be taken in two senses. First, it can mean that intrinsic act or perfection of a being by which it exercises external actuality—the intrinsic possession of the *act of existence*. Or, secondly, "to exist" or "to be" can refer to the mind's *affirmation* of existence. Here the mind asserts or affirms that something is or exists, because it is moved by evidence to make this assertion.³⁸⁷

Accordingly the human intellect in its present state cannot know God's existence that is identical with his essence. To know it would be to know God as he is in himself. But the mind can formulate and affirm the proposition *God exists*. The point can be made another way; the intellect can demonstrate God's existence as a true *fact*, but not as a *perfection*. I shall say more about this in replying to the next objection.

Our last objection comes from logic. A proper demonstration requires a middle term (see n. 373, p. 205) that allows for a move to a conclusion; it allows it because it is a definition which serves as a *means* of demonstrating the thing in question. But the human intellect cannot formulate a real definition of God's nature (which at present it does not know), and therefore it cannot have the middle term necessary for a conclusive demonstration of God's existence; the intellect cannot say *this* exists because it cannot formulate a definition of *this*, which would give it a real definition.

³⁸⁶ Jacques Maritain, *The Degrees of Knowledge*, p. 71.

³⁸⁷ Maurice R. Holloway, *An Introduction to Natural Theology*, (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1959). p. 51.

In order to answer this objection we must make a fairly detailed account of the kind of proof that the Five Ways are, an account that will take us into the next chapter.

A demonstration of the existence of anything presupposes that knowledge pertains to existents rather than to essences ever-present and ready-made in our minds. So, proving that something exists is really an expansion of the knowledge of the existence of one thing to the knowledge of the existence of another on the basis that there could not be the former, which we know to be, unless there were the latter. If we deny the knowledge that the former does exist (as all idealism does because for it knowledge of being is knowledge of essences, not of existents), we cannot demonstrate that the latter exists; in which case we can, at best, have an analysis whereby we can show that knowing the former involves knowing the latter (that is, we can have a sequence of knowledges). Every demonstration, therefore, of the existence of something must begin with the knowledge of the existence of something else.

This is important for understanding the character of an existentialist demonstration of God's existence. St. Thomas describes the proof in several of his works always insisting on the same point.

It is not necessary to assume the divine essence or quiddity as the middle term of the demonstration. In place of the quiddity, an effect is taken as the middle term, as in demonstrations *quia* [we shall see what this means presently]. It is from such effects that the meaning of the name *God* is taken. For all divine names are imposed either by removing the effects of God from Him or by relating God in some way to His effects.³⁸⁸

We must *not* therefore try to read the Five Ways as an attempt to demonstrate a *this* or a quiddity. To do so would amount to regarding the Five Ways as a *propter quid* rather than a *quia* kind of proof which is what the Five Ways are; it would amount to trying to fit the Five Ways into the mold of a deduction which they are not. *Propter quid* (on account of which) is an *a priori* type of demonstration arguing

³⁸⁸ SCG I, 12, 8. See also ST, I, q. 2, a. 1-2, and *De Pot.*, q. VII, a. 3.

from cause to effect, and *quia* (because) is a *posteriori* type of demonstration arguing from effect to cause. We often use *because* and *on account of which* interchangeably, but here we must make a distinction between these terms.

Since we are far more familiar with *propter quid* type of proof, I shall explain the *quia* type. *Quia* proves a cause from an effect; it proves a cause which is prior in nature to its effect and is posterior in our knowledge from an effect which is posterior in nature and prior in our knowledge. But how can an effect have priority in our knowledge to a cause in our knowledge when a cause is prior in nature and its effect posterior?

The first thing we must note is that an effect which is prior in our knowledge is not prior in our knowledge as an effect, for if it were, it would be known as an effect of a cause, but a cause is precisely what we are trying to prove. The priority of an effect in our knowledge over our knowledge of its cause is the priority of that which is known before its cause is known and of that which is known as a given. This means two things: the knowledge of a given is an effect of some existent thing or a being which, as such, gives rise to knowledge, and the given is then proved to be an effect of some other existing thing.

Let us take as an example that a gopher is proved from a series of holes in the ground. The holes in the ground are not known as an effect of a gopher, for if they were, there would no need to prove a gopher; in that case we would know a gopher without a proof. We know the holes in the ground as a given which is given by the yard where the holes are. We know that the yard is dug up because the yard *is* in fact dug up. That is given in experience and we do not prove it (just as in the case of contingent being we do not prove that it is contingent, that is given in experience; what we demonstrate is the cause of contingent being). We prove that the holes in the dug up yard, which we know without proof, come from a gopher. It does not matter at this point how we prove the cause because we are only interested in what

quia proof is; the *how* of the proof will interest us in the next chapter. To sum up, in a *quia* proof we have knowledge of a given, and from that knowledge of a given we also know that it would not be given to our knowledge unless some actual being, not in our experience, were giving off what we receive as given (the data, literally *things that are given*). Given these two things we are in the position to acquire knowledge by way of proof that there *is* in fact that being giving off the data which is not in our experience. Again, the *how* of the proof will be explained in the next chapter.

Having said this, we can already hear the murmurs from contemporary philosophers saying that this is nothing more than a case of begging the question. They will charge St. Thomas with question begging when he claims to have proved the existence of a cause by arguing that if there is a caused being, there is a cause; because if there were not the cause, there would not be a caused being. Now, if this were a well placed charge, it would reveal an uncharacteristically careless St. Thomas. But he is not careless because he is not trying to prove that being is caused (contingent) but the cause of some caused being (we need to see where precisely he thinks a cause is called for). St. Thomas is not confusing a proof *from* causality with a proof *of* causality. Causality is a natural induction from experience,³⁸⁹ which, because it is experience of being (not essence-being) and the consequent knowledge of being, allows us to formulate, without arguing for, *all* of the principles, *from* which we may then argue.³⁹⁰ The first principles, being self-evidently true, are neither proved nor provable, and in light of *them* the conclusions of the *quia* proof is reached.

³⁸⁹ See *In Post. Analyt.*, II, lect. 20.

³⁹⁰ See *In IV Metaph.*, lect. 6, specially notes 605 and 606. Recall our discussion of causality in ch. VI, pp. 127-130. St. Thomas is not begging the question because he is not confusing a demonstration of a causal proposition with a demonstration of causality; he is not invoking a principle of causality where he should be offering a demonstration of *X is caused*.

This, I think, escapes many a reader of the Five Ways influenced by the modern, *intellectus*-free philosophical tradition. The result is a number of commentaries on the Five Ways concluding that either God's existence has not been demonstrated or that something other than God's *existence* has been demonstrated.

A denial or a disregard of the first principles necessarily amounts to a denial of the very possibility of an intellectual activity (of demonstrating) like that of the Five Ways, namely, an activity of philosophizing about *being as being*, which is to deny the legitimacy of scholastic existential metaphysics. But perhaps we do not wish to deny the first principles but only assert, along with Kant, that existence is merely a category of the mind (and not of the thing in itself) to which the first principles do not actually apply. In the context of such a position there is no perceivable difference between the *exercised* existence of each individual existent and the existence that is part of the *signification* of a conceived being. In other words, *existence* is not a real predicate, but is contained in the *idea* of an existent in question, and consequently nothing is added to that idea by saying that conceived being exists.³⁹¹ Thus to know anything is for most modern thinkers to know an

³⁹¹ Consider the following argument against Kant. "The status of existing adds nothing to the intelligible contours of what would and does exist if it exists. Yet the status of existing adds something... for, \$100 are \$100 whether they exist or not. In this Kant was dead right. So also the process of acquiring \$100 is a process of acquiring \$100, whether you are acquiring \$100 or not. Nevertheless, the status of existing adds something to the \$100 which you have: it adds the status of *having* \$100, and as certainly that added feature is subtracted from the \$100 which you do not have. The same holds as between the actual process of acquiring \$100 and the meaning of that process. In this Kant was dead wrong. Anyone who ever had, or is acquiring, \$100 knows the difference.... If you say that \$100 can exist solely because they are \$100, you have said that to be a possible existent is to be \$100. Against the fact. There are many other possible existents besides \$100. Hence to be 100 possible dollars is to be a subject of *posse* ['to be able'], not solely upon the score that \$100 is \$100, but also because there is a cause (whose essence the possible \$100 mimics) able to make \$100 to be, and *there* lies the complete *posse* of \$100. In all cases of *esse*, whether accidental, specific, or the *esse* of an existent as multiple existent, *esse* need not be given at all. But it can be given, because there are subjects to which it can be given, because there are causes which can give *esse* to these subjects, and this makes all multiplicity possible." Gerard Smith, *The Philosophy of Being*, pp. 62 and 78-79. See also chapter eight above.

essence. For St. Thomas nothing could be further from the truth. I have tried to show in chapters five through nine why he thinks this. My effort is an attempt to get us at least to stop trying to understand the Five Ways through modern conceptions of being and the knowledge of being, which are in one way or another Platonic or essentialist conceptions.

The difference between the essentialists and St. Thomas is irreconcilable. It is a matter of the evidence of the difference between thinking that something *is* because it *is*, which we see and feel (as I tried to show with examples in the first part of chapter seven), and only *thinking* that something is. The opponents of St. Thomas will not allow that we know, in the order of being, that something is because we see and feel it, that because it is contingent (either in the order of motion, efficiency, or existence) there must be a cause of its contingency, or else it would be necessary. They will say that these things are true in the order of knowledge, but that we cannot know whether it is true in the order of being. St. Thomas cannot *prove* to his opponents the truth of his position, but whatever evidence there is it is all on the side of St. Thomas; and that evidence is the evidence of individual existents, the evidence of the data they give off, which is the very stuff of our knowledge of being.

Finally, St. Thomas is not saying, in contradiction to Kant, that existence is known in addition to an essence; we do not know *fish, fowl, man* plus or minus their existence. We first experience a sensible individual existent, and then we form knowledge of it; we grasp its essence by conceptually abstracting it from sense data, and its existence we either affirm or deny through judgment, *not* an argument. If the judgment of existence is mediated by a middle term (which in the case of God is his effect), it is a demonstrated existence. Let us now see how such a demonstration must unfold.

CHAPTER X

Causality and the *Five Ways*

At present we are men looking at puzzling reflections in a mirror. At present all I know is a little fraction of the truth.

St. Paul, *The First Letter to Corinth*

We have established that God's existence is not self-evident and must be proven if it is to be known by the human mind scientifically, that is, through a causal demonstration. We have also established that this proof cannot be a deduction or a *propter quid* kind of proof in which the mind moves from a cause to its effect, or, as St. Thomas says, in which we argue from what is prior absolutely and not from what is prior relatively only to us. This is because we do not scientifically know *what* God is. For that reason we can formulate only a nominal definition of God rather than a real definition (I shall explain these terms below), and our demonstration of his existence must be a *quia* kind of proof. The object of the present chapter is to provide the final stage of preparation for reading the Five Ways by showing how God is defined as the middle term of a proof of his existence, and by showing how a cause is proved from its effects in a *quia* kind of proof (the latter requires a more detailed consideration of the Thomistic understanding of causality).³⁹²

³⁹² *ST*, I, q. 2, a. 2. I am relying in this section on this part of *Summa Theologica*, on Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*, I, 13 and St. Thomas' commentary on that text, and on Maurice Holloway's, Gerard Smith's, and Henry Renard's books on natural theology.

The Nominal Definition of God

A discussion of *propter quid* and *quia* kinds of proof that pertains to our main purpose can be found in Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics* Bk. I, ch. 13, and in St. Thomas' *Commentary on the Posterior Analytics of Aristotle*, I, lect. 23. In this discussion we find an example that I think is very important for understanding the nature of an existentialist proof of God's existence with respect to the problem of the middle term and how a *quia* proof proves.

In this text Aristotle points out that we can prove whether some planets are relatively near to the Earth, if it can be shown that they do not twinkle. The point to see is that "planets are not near because they do not twinkle, but, because, they are near, they do not twinkle."³⁹³ The point may seem not be a point at all because it seems to be saying the same thing twice. It isn't. It is a point that expresses a difference between "knowledge of the fact and knowledge of the reasoned fact."³⁹⁴

When we conclude that some planets are near to the Earth we do so on the basis of two things: the knowledge that they do not in fact twinkle (which is a knowledge of the fact acquired by sense experience), and the knowledge that the not-twinkling thing is near. St. Thomas explains how we acquire the latter, which is knowledge of the *reasoned* fact, when he says "the fixed stars twinkle because in gazing at them the sight is beclouded on account of [among other things] the distance,"³⁹⁵ and consequently the not-twinkling thing is not beclouded on account of as great a distance as is the twinkling thing. What we do not know, however, is whether the near and the not-twinkling are one and the same, or, to put it another way, whether

³⁹³ Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, I, 13, 78a 38, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. by Richard McKeon, (New York: Random House, 1941). p. 129.

³⁹⁴ *Ibid.* One can be said to know a fact when he observes how things are in nature connected and when he expresses this connection in specific terms. Knowledge of the reasoned fact is acquired when one explains that which one observes and the properties of things in terms of intelligible relations to the causes of the things.

³⁹⁵ *Commentary on the Posterior Analytics of Aristotle*, Book I, lect. 23.

the nearness of the planets is the cause of their not-twinkling. If we knew that, we would be able to muster a *propter quid* kind of proof and show that planets do not twinkle *on account of the fact* that they are near. But as the matter stands, we are able to know the not-twinkling, *not* as the cause of the nearness of planets, but as the effect of something (a planet) which is near, and that very thing which is near is the cause of not-twinkling (not necessarily the cause of nearness).

This is very important for a proper understanding of the philosophical character of the Five Ways. Many modern interpreters read the Five Ways as if in them St. Thomas were doing precisely the opposite of what he is doing, namely, to use our analogy with planets, proving the cause of the nearness of the planets. This is why people like Kenny conclude that this is all just outmoded cosmology and that we can demonstrate a different cause of the nearness of the planets with the aid of modern science. In fact, the Five Ways, although making use of the cosmology of their day, are nevertheless an instance of a different and higher science which we examined in chapters three and five.

To sum up, in knowing that planets are near because we know that they do not twinkle, we have only a reason, or the *because (quia)*, why *we know* they are near, we do not have the reason, or the *that on account of which (propter quid)* the planets *are* near. The latter requires further examination, the examination into the essence, which in the case of God is not open to us. But once we have proved that planets are near (or that God exists) because they do not twinkle (or because God is the proper cause of the act of being of contingent existents), we may go on to see what it really means to be near (or what God really is). But we cannot at present go on to such an inquiry without finding out first whether something *is* really near (if God really does *exist*). But something, namely planets, really is near because we know by sense experience that this very something does not twinkle, and we know, using our intellects, that the not-twinkling is near. In the same way we know individual

contingent existents through sense experience (which gives rise to our intuition of their act of existing first), and then in light of the indemonstrable principle of causality seen by the intellect demonstrate their dependence for existence on a cause beyond them, or that they are in fact caused.

We can now understand better what St. Thomas means when he says,

When the existence of a cause is demonstrated from an effect, this effect takes the place of the definition of the cause in proof of the cause's existence. This is especially the case in regard to God, because, in order to prove the existence of anything, it is necessary to accept as a middle term the meaning of the word, and not its essence, for the question of its essence follows on the question of its existence. Now the names given to God are derived from His effects; consequently, in demonstrating the existence of God from His effects, we may take for the middle term the meaning of the word "God."³⁹⁶

Our nominal definition of God, or the middle term of our proof, will be what the Theologian calls the meaning of the word God rather than that which signifies his essence which we cannot at present know any more than we can know the cause of the nearness of the planets from knowing only the not-twinkling. The middle term of our proof of the planets is the *not-twinkling*. It is the *effect* of something that is near (planets) but also the *cause of our knowing* that this something is near. The middle term of the *quia* proof, or the nominal definition, is not a *real* definition because we are not assuming that *the not twinkling* is the cause of the near (we are taking it only as the cause of our *knowledge* of the near, but this knowledge is of an existent, not of an essence, as in essentialism). If we were so assuming the term, we would not be proving a cause from its effect, but an effect from its cause; we would not have a *quia* proof, but a *propter quid* proof or an ontological proof.

It would not be profitable here to get stuck on seeking an etymological meaning of "God." This, although of interest to philologists, will not help us in understanding the Five Ways. A nominal definition in this case means a definition of "the meaning of the word God", that is, a definition to which a word is related as a sign is related

³⁹⁶ ST, I, q. 2, a. 2, ad. 2.

to that which it signifies. In our example of the planets the meaning of *the near* is *the not-twinkling*; the latter is the nominal definition of the former, that is, the former describes the latter to which it is related as a sign is related to that which it signifies. But here is the important point: this *relation* between the sign and what it signifies is real, not nominal, it is real because *the near* does not *in fact* twinkle (just as an individual existent does *in fact* exercise its contingent act of existing).³⁹⁷ The *not-twinkling* is an effect of *the near* (which of course has to be shown, as it has to be shown that the act of existing of individual existents is an effect of that which all men call God [not that which is God], and that is why we have astronomy and natural theology), but whether God is in fact his own act of existing is a question for further consideration, a question we can raise only after we have established the *existence* of that which may or may not be existence itself (*Ipsum esse*). In other words, we are inserting a necessary step that must come before any essentialist kind of thinking about God can begin; before St. Anselm's kind of proof can begin to be formulated, that is, before we can talk about the connection between God's essence and existence.

Now this gives us the license for a nominal definition of God as *the cause of the existence of things* which is the middle term of the *quia* proof of God's existence. But we have not thereby proven that God does in fact cause the existence of things. That is the work of the Five Ways. We have only established the name of that the existence of which we shall demonstrate. Furthermore, it is not that God exists because things exist, it is the other way round: things exist because God causes them to exist. The important point is that *we know* the cause of the existence of things (God) exists because we have demonstrated by proof that the cause of the existence

³⁹⁷ This, of course, will not be acceptable to idealism and essentialism. The relation will only be regarded as real within Aristotelian and Thomistic metaphysics and epistemology. We must choose how we shall begin thinking about the real!

of things (God) causes things to exist; but God causing things to exist is not the cause of *his* existence (if it were we would demonstrate his existence by way of *propter quid* kind of proof), it is, rather, the cause of *our knowledge* of his existence.

We can form, then, the following syllogism: God (Z) is the cause of the existence of some existent (Y); the cause of the existence of some existent (Y) does exist (X), therefore God (Z) exists (X), or Z is X. The first premise is the nominal definition of God serving as the middle term of our *quia* proof. The second premise must be demonstrated. But when it is demonstrated, we are not yet in the position to say God exists (any more than Geach and Copleston are in the position to conclude from their interpretation of the premises about the cause of change and efficiency to the *existence* of that cause); we are only in the position to say that God is the cause of the existence of some existent.

We must see the reason for this! The proof of God's existence in our syllogism above is where we say that God is the cause and that the cause does in fact exist. To understand the relationship between the cause and the existence of cause *properly* we must take a closer look at causality as St. Thomas understands it. It is precisely the understanding of the *properly* Thomistic notion of causality that is missing in so many modern and contemporary interpretations of the Five Ways. The importance of this cannot be over stressed! I am emphasizing the word *properly* because of the following text in the *Summa* where the Theologian speaks of *proper* cause.

When an effect is better known to us than its cause, from the effect we proceed to the *knowledge* of the cause. And from every effect the existence of its *proper* cause can be demonstrated, so long as its effects are better known to us; because since *every* effect depends upon its cause, **if the effect exists, the cause must pre-exist**. Hence the *existence* of God, insofar as it is not self-evident to us, can be demonstrated from those of his effects which are known to us.³⁹⁸

Let us ask here a question of enormous importance. When St. Thomas says that God's existence "can be demonstrated from those of his effects which are known to

³⁹⁸ ST, I, q. 2, a. 2. (italic and bold emphases mine) See also SCG, II, 16, 4.

us," what aspect of God's effects will help us reach the *existence* of God? Their motion? Their causal activity? The subatomic structure of their particles? These, understood to perfection, can never yield the existence of anything. Furthermore, when these things are studied scientifically, they are always encountered in individual existents which are the true data of our knowledge. St. Thomas gives the answer to our question when he says "if the effect exists, the cause must pre-exist." It is therefore the existence of effects that yields the knowledge of the existence of their cause. Thus, in the Five Ways, we must see the Theologian arguing for the existence of the cause of the existence of things (God) through the act of existing of some effect of that cause encountered by us more easily as moving, causing, and so on. A good preparation for the reading of the Five Ways must, then, include an answer to this question: what does St. Thomas mean by proper causality? Is his understanding of it different from Aristotle's? We can be certain that it is different from Hume's and from much of the modern and contemporary understanding of causality. It is also certain that if we abandon the notion of cause entirely, as much of the modern philosophical tradition has done, we shall not be able to see why St. Thomas thinks the Five Ways prove God's existence.

But one more point regarding the nominal definition of God as the middle term of the *quia* proof must be established and clarified before we turn to causality. We seem to be contradicting ourselves. On the one hand, we are saying that the middle term in the *quia* proof of God's existence is the cause of the existence of things. But on the other hand, in the *quia* proof the middle term is not a cause (as in the *propter quid* proof) but an effect substituted for the real definition of the cause. How can the middle term be both a cause and effect? That is, how can *the cause of the existence of things* (God) as an effect substituted for the real definition of the cause (as the middle term), be the effect of the cause we are trying to prove (the effect of God's causality)? Should it not be the very cause? The philosophical children of

Hume are by now certainly convinced that all this scholastic talk of causality “can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion.”

Causing is an activity, and an activity is understood by St. Thomas as either immanent or transitive. Immanent activity is an “activity which has its principle and term within the agent and which is a perfection of the agent itself, not of an external patient.”³⁹⁹ Transitive action is an action that is not a perfection of the agent but an action that perfects something external to the agent, as for example the action by which a hand moves a stick, or the action by which Beethoven plays his *Moonlight* sonata. We are therefore interested in God’s causal action which is somehow transitive. The reason why we are not interested here in the immanent action of God should be clear by now: such an action is not an effect of God and can be used only in a *propter quid* kind of proof which requires the knowledge of the nature or essence of the cause whose effect we are demonstrating, and we do not yet have any knowledge of God’s essence. But we are also interested in a relevant character of a potency actualised by causal activity. Again following Aristotle, St. Thomas maintains that some potencies (those that generate something else, such as the act of building which in addition to that act also produces a building) have their act in the thing which they produce, as the act of building is in the thing that is built.⁴⁰⁰ The full impact of this fact is utilised by St. Thomas in analyzing the relationship between God and his creatures where causal activity of God (his transitive action) is the effect as related to its cause. Consider the following text.

Creation is not a change, but the very dependency of the created act of being [*esse*] upon the principle from which it is produced. And thus, creation is a kind of relation ... Nevertheless, creation *appears* to be a kind of change from the point of view of our understanding only, namely, in that our intellect grasps one and the same thing as not existing before and as existing afterwards. But, clearly, if creation is some sort of relation, then it is a certain reality; and neither is it uncreated nor is it created by another relation. For, since a created effect depends really upon its creator, a relation of real dependency, such as this, must itself be something real. But

³⁹⁹ *Dictionary of Scholastic Philosophy*, p. 5. See also *In IX Metaph.* lect. 8, n. 1865.

⁴⁰⁰ See Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, Bk. IX, ch.. 8, 1050a 24 ff., and *In IX Metaph.* lect. 8, n. 1864.

everything real is brought into being by God [if there is one]; it therefore owes its being to God.⁴⁰¹

In other words, because God's action by which he causes the existence of things is in the effects of that causal action (it is in their contingency, in them as their dependence of a contingent existent on that which gives it existence), that causal action is something real, a real thing "not created by another relation". And this is what it means to say that the cause of the existence of things is an effect in the middle term of the *quia* proof. In another place the Theologian calls it "passive creation" which is in the creature and is the creature.⁴⁰²

Now if *the cause of the existence of things* is taken to mean God as he is in himself, it cannot serve as the middle term of the *quia* proof. But if it is taken to mean *things in their dependence on God* (which is what it is to say that they are effects of God's causal action), then it is the meaning of the middle term and the cause of our knowledge that God is the cause of things. But we seem to be trying to do the impossible: to identify in some way a cause with its effect. And yet we have two options before us. We can either abandon the possibility of scientific knowledge—knowledge through the causes—and opt for complete unintelligibility of effects, of contingent being as contingent and therefore as an effect. Our other option is to settle for a partially intelligible (and partially unintelligible) explanation of effects explained *through* their causes.⁴⁰³ This option is the subject matter of the next section.

⁴⁰¹ *SCG* II, 18, 2-4. See also, *De Pot.*, q. III, a. 5.

⁴⁰² See *ST*, I, q. 45, a. 3, ad 2.

⁴⁰³ The scholastic notion of efficient causality is, therefore, not without difficulties. But we need not on that score pronounce it absurd. In fact, there does not seem to be much of an argument for rejecting it except that we do not fully understand it. But there does seem to be too much evidence in the world to reject it. John Wild argues this way: "Causal efficacy is a *relational* concept. What it means is the diffusion of something from one being (the cause) to another which is able to receive it (the effect). To the atomic analyst such relational potencies and powers [active and passive potencies] are sheer nonsense. Reality is made up of perfectly actual atomic capsules which are entirely insular and self-enclosed. Nature however is constantly confronting us with evidence of

Causality Considered Further

Philosophical inquiries into causes begin with an attempt to understand change. But change is only intelligible if we possess *intellectus*; if we do not along with Hume deny the human mind the faculty of conceiving (and insist that it is capable only of perceiving), nor if along with Descartes we understand human intellectual activity as starting out with purely mathematical truths and innate ideas, and then call God to help us establish the truths in the sensible realm. Change will be intelligible through causality only if we inquire into the knowable, that is, *being*, as we have seen Aristotle do in the first section of chapter nine. We must now say a bit more about this inquiry in the context of causality.

According to Aristotle, to experience change is to experience simultaneously both continuity and discontinuity. To make this dichotomy intelligible he introduces his understanding of causality. Let us take as an example again a green tomato becoming red. We have a new thing (a red tomato) coming from an old thing (a green tomato). In noticing this we must not make the mistake Heraclitus made when he concluded from this a discontinuity between a green and a red tomato; he maintained that it is not the same tomato which was both green and then red. We must, as our experience tells us, see the continuity; we must see that it is the same tomato that is now green and then red. On the other hand we must not deny the same share in reality to both the green and the red tomato; we must not go against our experience which tells us that green tomato is not identically red tomato. Now the only way to make sense of both the continuity and discontinuity of

causal efficacy. The colourless gases O and H act on one another in certain ways to bring into existence a new fused substance quite distinct from any mere juxtaposition of O and H. Stones break windows, and murderers slit their victim's throats. No one who really disbelieved in causal efficacy would ever read a detective story." ("Realistic Defence of Causal Efficacy," *Review of Metaphysics*, 2 (June, 1949), pp. 6-7). See also Paul Weiss, *Modes of Being*, (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1958), p. 40: "To deny causation is thus to deny current evidence, to ignore an omnipresent category, to be faced with an inexplicable world, and to have an inexplicable belief that it is a mistake to say there is a causation in fact."

a changing thing is to see that the green tomato becomes red in virtue of something which is in some way red, or which possesses within itself redness (whatever redness may be; we shall leave that question to physicists, chemists, and biologists), and communicates redness to the tomato. We know this to be sunlight. (A light other than that of the sun can also do the job of communicating redness, but let us suppose that the tomato in our example is a tasty one). Therefore, the sunlight which communicates redness to the tomato is a cause of the tomato becoming red.

Let us sum this up in the context of Aristotle's famous maxim that "every thing in motion is necessarily being moved by some [other] thing."⁴⁰⁴ Only one possible scenario can make this claim false. Either that which appears to be changing (the tomato) is not really changing, or it is. If it is not really changing, then the subject of change is identical with the determination (in our example, the tomato is identical with its redness), and in that case not every thing is moved by another. But if the subject of change is really changing, then it is not one and the same with the determination brought by change, then the subject of change is not responsible for the change that accrues to it. The green tomato does not by itself become red, and given that it does in fact become red, it must so become by an activity of another, namely, sunlight. In other words, we cannot both admit that there is change and deny the cause of change. Essentialists deny that the real, or being, resides in the realm of change and thereby pronounce change unreal or illusory. But that, at least, is consistent with their position. Many modern philosophers admit change but at the same time deny the reality of causes. Aristotle and St. Thomas insist that change must be made intelligible, and it can only be so made in terms of a cause outside the subject of change.

⁴⁰⁴ *Aristotle's Physics*, (trans. by H.G. Apostle), Bk. VII, 1, 241b 24.

In the same way limited acts or achievements cannot be made intelligible without the necessary condition of causality. What are limited acts? St. Thomas says that “it is the business of an agent limited to some determinate species to produce its effect from pre-existing matter by bestowing a form upon it in any manner whatsoever.”⁴⁰⁵ This claim and the text from which it comes is important for good scholastic understanding of causality. We can take note in it of the character of limited act. As *act* it is any actuality that is achieved and is no longer in the state of being achieved (it is not a potency, for if it were, we would still be talking about change, the green tomato would still exist as *becoming* red and not as limited *act*, not as a tomato *being* or existing as red); as *limited* it is an act of an agent that is determined by some species, that is, it is not an act of something that is everything being can be. Our example will shed light on this. The tomato existing as a plant (of the species *Lycopersicon esculentum*) is a limited act because its being a plant is not all being can be; being can also be a non-tomato plant, and there are beings other than plants.

Aristotle's maxim applies and can be tested in the case of limited acts as well. Let us ask if it is possible to posit a limited act like the tomato's being a plant without positing the cause of that act. To do so amounts to making a sort of identification we encountered in the case of change. If the tomato's limited act of being (existing as) a plant has no cause, then there is no reason outside this particular tomato for its existence; it is identical with existing, and its act is not limited. But that is against the facts, because there is also Felix the cat, Fido the dog, my neighbour Bill, etc. It is impossible, therefore, that to exist is to be this tomato; it is impossible in the case of a limited act of existing to identify the subject of existing with the act of existing, impossible because no other existent could exist, and our tomato could not *not* exist,

⁴⁰⁵ SCG II, 16, 3.

which are two insurmountable difficulties opposing such an identification. We must, therefore, posit a cause of both change and limited act, if they are to be intelligible to us.⁴⁰⁶

This, roughly, is how the need for intelligibility through causality in the realm of contingent being arises; a need which, unless it is fulfilled will leave change and limited being completely unintelligible. However, this intelligibility of change and limited acts through causality is less than complete. Seeing that it requires an insight, and I have not been able to find a better expression of it than in one of Gerard Smith's works where he illustrates it with an example. We have already hinted at this difficulty when, in formulating a nominal definition of God at the end of the last section, we saw the curious identification of cause and effect.

Assume that a germ is the cause of a given disease. Three problems are thereby solved: (1) The problem why there *is* a disease rather than not is solved, since the efficient cause, the germ, is such a reason; (2) The problem why the efficient cause "ups and causes" rather than not is solved, because the final cause, which is the disease-to-be, determines the efficient cause to act rather than not to act; (3) The problem why the disease is of *this* sort and not of *another* sort is solved, since in the efficient cause is preinscribed the intelligible contours of the effect ... [all these] are explained by efficient, final, and exemplary causality respectively. There is lacking to such an explanation of an effect only the complete intelligibility of the effect in itself. In itself an effect is only partially intelligible, precisely because its explanation lies partly outside itself, namely, in its cause.

We are thus confronted with the intelligible mystery of causality: cause and effect must be one, else there is no explanation of change [the light must be *in* the tomato making it red] and achievement [the cause of the tomato's existence must be *in* the tomato]; cause and effect must be different, else there is no effect and therefore nothing to explain [the *identification* of the subject of change with the change accruing to it and the agent with its limited act of being nullifies the need to explain change and contingency because it nullifies change and contingency which our experience tells us is there].⁴⁰⁷

Thus the real problem of causality, the problem that scholastic philosophers are well aware of and are not trying to shroud in sophistry and illusory solutions is the following. Change reveals a composite of the subject of change and the determination of change; limited acts also reveal a composite of their act and the

⁴⁰⁶ This clearly points out that change cannot be made intelligible if we identify being with essence. Essentialism for that reason allows for intelligibility only in the realm where there is neither change nor individual existents.

⁴⁰⁷ Gerard Smith, *Natural Theology*, p. 80.

reason for their act. The unity of the composite in each case is explained by a cause that is *both* separate from and united with the composite. The disunion of the cause from its effect in the case of both change and limited act consists in the fact that the change and the reason for the act are *from* the cause; the union consists in the fact that the change and the reason for the act are *in* the subject of change and *in* the agent whose act is being explained.⁴⁰⁸

We must now finally say something about what St. Thomas means by *proper* cause. He defines cause as “that from whose *existing* another follows.”⁴⁰⁹ Henri Renard restates St. Thomas’ definition by saying that “a cause is a principle having a direct influx on the *to be* of another, and this definition is true of all four types of causes.”⁴¹⁰ The Thomistic notion of cause will, therefore, reflect the Thomistic notion of *to be* which, as we have seen, is not the notion of essence, as in Plato, nor is it the notion of substantial form, as in Aristotle, but of existence. In this context we must understand the Theologian’s commentary on the following text of Aristotle which points to the mystery of causality.

Causes which are in *actuality* and are taken as individuals exist, or do not exist, at the same time as the things of which they are the causes, for example, as in the case of this doctor who is healing and this man who is being healed, and this builder who is building and that building which is being built.⁴¹¹

If this is how the matter stands with the relationship between causes and effects, and if God is the cause of the existence of things, does God then cease to exist when his effects cease to exist? No. The middle term of the proof is not a real definition, we do not know *what* God is nor do we prove what he is when we prove that he is. We are simply saying that God’s causal power ceases to cause (not that it ceases to

⁴⁰⁸ For Aristotle’s account of this see his *Physics*, Bk. III, the entire ch. 3; *Metaphysics*, II, 2. For St. Thomas’ account see *De Ver.*, q. II, a. 10; *SCG*, II, 16; *ST*, I-II, q. 1, a. 4.

⁴⁰⁹ St. Thomas Aquinas, *The Principles of Nature*, ed. cit., p. 17 (italics mine)

⁴¹⁰ Henri Renard, *The Philosophy of God*, (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1951). p. 19.

⁴¹¹ *Aristotle’s Physics*, Bk. II, ch. 3, 195b 17.

exist) the being of its effects, when the being of the effects ceases. Let us consider St. Thomas' commentary on the Philosopher's text we just read.

Causes in act and causes in potency differ as follows. Causes operating in act exist and do not exist simultaneously with those things of which they are the cause in act. For example, if we take singular causes, i.e., proper causes, then this healer exists and does not exist simultaneously with him who becomes healed, and this builder exists simultaneously with that which is built ... so also the divine agent, which is the cause of existing in act, is simultaneous with the existence of the thing in act. Hence if the divine action were removed from things, things would fall into nothingness, just as when the presence of the sun is removed, light ceases to be in the air.⁴¹²

A proper cause in the realm of contingent being, therefore, is that upon which a contingent existent is dependent for its act of existing; the existence of a contingent being is continually being caused by an agent outside of it. We do not know this from a scientific analogy, and it would be foolish to look to the Five Ways for such an analogy. We know this from the indemonstrable and self-evident principle of causality, and from the definition of cause which we derive from the data of sense experience and the work of making the data intelligible by agent intellect.

What then does it mean to demonstrate that a cause *exists*? It does *not* mean to show an analytic dependence of a being that can not be, of a being that exists on borrowed existence, on the cause of that existence. That is to show what it is to have a cause; it is not to prove the *existence* of that cause. As St. Thomas puts it, "the reason why a cause is required is not merely because the effect is not necessary, but because the effect might not *be* if the cause were not."⁴¹³ This is what we need to look for in the Five Ways: why would the effect in question considered in each of the Ways not *be* (exist) if its cause did not exist; what is St. Thomas' argument for that claim? The interpretations offered by Copleston and Geach and by a host of contemporary *cosmological* readings of the Five Ways do not touch the core of this question, and for that very reason fail to show us why St. Thomas thinks he has answered it.

⁴¹² *Commentary on Aristotle's Physics*, Bk. II, ch. 3, lect. 6, n. 195.

⁴¹³ *ST*, I, q. 44, a. 1, ad 2. (*italics mine*)

The circular intellection which we mentioned in the previous chapter does not amount to giving us a proof by stating and restating the principle of causality. That would be no proof to an existentialist! It is not because individual existents are *contingent* that a cause of them is required; they are not caused because they are contingent. Such a proof would be an essentialist proof, like the proofs from a necessary or a perfect being of St. Anselm and Descartes. Although the first premise would not be of God but of creature, it would still be a premise of something other than of *existence* of a being, and as such it could not lead to the existence of another being. A cause of contingent being is needed because they *exist*, and they would not exist unless they were caused to exist by a cause that exists.

Though the relation to its cause is not part of the *definition* of a thing caused [of a *contingent* being], nevertheless it [the relation to its cause] follows from what is bound up in a *being* by participation*; because from the fact that a thing is** *being* by participation [not because it is a *contingent* being], it follows that it is caused. Hence, such a being cannot *be* without being caused [not that it cannot be *contingent*] ... But, since to be caused does not enter into the essence of being as such, therefore it is possible for us to find a being uncaused [whose essence we do not know].⁴¹⁴

A proof, therefore, is *knowledge* that the cause, to which testifies the existence of a contingent being and the intellect's inference that a contingent being would not be unless it were caused to be, is the cause of the contingent existence revealed by an existent itself. In other words, it is not enough to say that contingent being is caused to exist because it is contingent, and that therefore its cause must exist; the existence of God as the cause of the existence of things is proved when it is shown that *only* a cause of *existence* explains the existence of a contingent existent.

⁴¹⁴ *ST*, I, q. 44, a. 1, ad 1. *I have replaced the rendering of the standard translation of *tamen sequitur ad ea quae sunt de ejus ratione* (still it follows, as a consequence, on what belongs to its *essence*) with the rendering of the Blackfriars edition because *ejus* refers to *entis* which for St. Thomas is not *essence*, and consequently the expression *de ejus ratione* must be translated simply as *being*; **also, *est ens* should be translated *is being*, not *has being* which confirms that St. Thomas is not saying that essence is the reason why a being must be caused. See also the following texts where St. Thomas makes the same point: *De Pot.*, q. III, a. 1, ad 17; q. III, a. 5, ad 2; *De Ver.*, q. IV, a. 6, *Resp.* and ad 3.

***Per Se* and *Per Accidens* Causes**

Before we finally take a look at the Five Ways themselves, we ought to consider a few more points pertaining to causality. What is called a proper cause has as its corollary a secondary cause, and proper and secondary causes are known as *per se* and *per accidens* causes. We must now look at these more closely, as well as the instrumental cause, and the series of *per se* and *per accidens* causes. Our inquiry into all these “causes” is really an inquiry into the principle of causality, that is, we want to see manifestations of the need to make being as becoming (changing) intelligible. It is not an inquiry into this or that thing, that is, the descriptions of all these “causes” are not the descriptions of individual existents but of a single principle applied to different aspects of the need to make change intelligible.

Any talk of causality, then, is closely tied up with change. In trying to understand proper or *per se* causality, let us go once more to our example of the green tomato becoming red. Under Parmenidian, essentialist understanding of being the tomato is not *becoming* red, there is no such thing as a changing tomato, nor is there such thing as change because being is and non being is not, and there can be nothing between being and non-being. Aristotle says there is change, but he does not go along with Heraclitus in maintaining that being is change because change is only possible if there is *that which* changes; the notion of pure change is unintelligible. Let us ask, why does the green tomato become red? The answer cannot be, the tomato became red from nothing, because nothing yields nothing. Nor can the answer be, the red tomato is the green tomato, because clearly the tomato came into existence as red after it existed as green, and if it already did exist, it could not come to exist. The only answer is that in the tomato there is something which is not red, and which is not nothing; this is what Aristotle and his medieval interpreters call primary or passive potency, which in our example is *green tomato*

*able to be red.*⁴¹⁵ This ability or potency of the green tomato to be red must not be understood neither as being in some way red, for it is not red at all, nor as a complete negation of the red tomato, in the sense that it both is not and is not able to be red. The only way that a green tomato becomes a red tomato is because *green tomato is able to be red*.

This is passive or primary potency and it is accompanied with active potency also known as efficient causality. We must make clear this communion of the two potencies. It is clear that passive potency, *green tomato able to be red*, is not by itself able to bring about movement (make the change) in the tomato of going from green to red. To be *able* to be in some way is not *to be* in that way. We must account for this additional difference. It is clear that our green tomato will not be caused to become red unless it is *able* to be so caused. But neither will it become so caused if it is *only* able to be caused and is not actually caused to become red. Again, that which will actually cause the tomato to become red cannot be the tomato itself (that would deny change), nor can it be nothing because nothing yields nothing. It must, therefore, be a something which accounts for the additional difference, namely that which is that addition. It must be the “some thing” Aristotle mentions in his axiom “every thing in motion is necessarily being moved by *some thing*.” In our example of the tomato, this is the sunlight. Technically the sun is in this sense called active potency which reveals to us the notion of the proper or per se causality—a notion that deepens our understanding of the principle of causality.

This “some thing,” which accounts for the difference between a thing’s ability to be caused to become in some way and actually being so caused, and which is that additional difference, cannot be such an explanation nor that difference unless it be

⁴¹⁵ See Aristotle *Physics*, Bk. I, ch. 2; *Metaphysics* Bk. V, ch. 12. See also St. Thomas’ *Commentary on Aristotle’s Physics*, Bk. III, lectures 2-5.

predisposed to act precisely so as to bring about the *very effect* that it does bring about rather than some other effect. In other words, the effect is of the *kind* that it is because the action that brought it about is of the same *kind*. For example, the redness in our tomato is redness rather than blueness because the action of the light which caused the redness is the action of reddening the tomato. The nature of the action reflects the nature of the effect. This characteristic of proper or per se causality is a subprinciple and is called the principle of proper causality: *omne agens agit sibi simile*, every agent produces its like.

Another characteristic of proper causality brings to light a principle we have already encountered in chapter six: *omne agens agit propter finem*, every agent acts on account of an end. It is the principle of finality. The central point is this: the “some thing,” or the efficient cause would not rise up and do the action it does, unless it were predisposed to rise up and act. In other words, there would *be* no action unless the agent were predisposed to act before it does in the way that it does, unless it had an end, goal, or purpose (not necessarily a conscious or premeditated purpose) which it set out to achieve. A purposeless action cannot exist any more than a thing of no kind can exist.

We may illustrate both principles of per se causality with our example. Why do we have a red tomato rather than ketchup? The reason is that the work of sunlight is involved rather than the work of a cook. The *kind* that the effect will be and the *essential* characteristic of the agent’s action is determined by the *kind* or *nature* of the agent. If we ask, why is there a red tomato rather than no tomato, we must answer that an *existential* predisposition to communicate redness rather than not to communicate it explains why there *is* a red tomato. Thus a twofold predisposition of a proper cause explains: first, why the effect and the causal action that brings it about are the kind that they are (every agent produces its like, for it cannot bring about what it does not have to give), and second, why the effect *exists* rather than

not (every agent acts or is predisposed to act to bring about the effect). The latter is obviously more important both in the order of being and knowledge. This brings out most clearly the existential character of causality as it is understood by St. Thomas. For Aristotle the substantial form is responsible for both predispositions of a proper cause.

Accidental causality, on the other hand, can be seen in contradistinction to proper causality, a contradistinction required by the fact that change occurs in more ways than we mentioned in discussing proper causality. A *per accidens* cause differs from a *per se* cause in that it is either not like an effect, or not predisposed to act rather than not to act. In other words, a *per accidens* cause lacks either a principle of proper causality or a principle of finality.

To illustrate the work of an accidental cause to which the principle of proper causality does not apply, let us suppose that our reddening tomato has on it some dew drops that are being dried up by the sun which is also at the same time reddening the tomato. The reason why the dew drops are being dried up is not because the sun is communicating redness. The sun's characteristic of communicating redness merely happens to be conjoined with the causal characteristic of drying up the dew drops. (Biologists, physicists, and chemists will explain this conjunction better than I can.) The *per se* cause of the dew drops being dried is properly the sun-as-hot; the *per accidens* cause of the dew drops being dried is the sun-as-communicating-redness.

The difference between accidental causes and their effects can also be seen in situations where they are not conjoined to *per se* causes but are conjoined to *per se* effects. For example, the gardener may, when he goes to work on his tomatoes, put on sunglasses because he finds the sun too bright. The sun is the *per se* cause of the *per se* effect, which is the gardener squinting his eyes. To this *per se* effect is joined another effect, namely, the putting on of sunglasses, which is an accidental effect.

The sun is the accidental cause of the accidental effect of the gardener putting on sunglasses.

A change taking place through an accidental cause to which cannot be attributed the principle of finality must also be pointed out. Let our gardener find a small ruby as he digs out the weeds around the tomato plants. He did not dig in order that he may find the gem; finding the gem does not account for his digging because his digging can be completely accounted for without any reference to finding the ruby, that is, he was not predisposed to finding the ruby. Thus a lack of intention or the principle of finality in a causal activity makes that activity accidental rather than proper or *per se*.

Next, we must make clear the meaning of an instrumental cause in preparing for a profitable reading of the Five Ways. Again, in doing so we are simply saying more about the principle of causality which makes change intelligible. Instrumental cause may be defined this way: "a tool serving as a subordinate cause [rather than a principal cause]; a cause without initiative in the start of action, but applied and directed as a help to its efforts and purpose by a principal agent, and influencing the product chiefly according to the form and intention of the principal."⁴¹⁶ For example a gardener's spade determines the essence of the gardener's action (digging rather than pruning) by the *kind* of instrument that it is. This determining kind of an instrument is its power. But an instrument's power is not by itself sufficient to bring about the complete essence of an action. What is lacking is the application of the instrument to its activity. The application of the instrument, as we saw in the above definition, is owed to another cause called the principal cause. Thus, a spade which will dig (due to its power), will not dig this or that garden, unless the gardener is

⁴¹⁶ *Dictionary of Scholastic Philosophy*, p. 19. See also St. Thomas' *SCG*, II, 21.

the principal cause of the action of digging. Instrumental causality consists, therefore, in two factors: the instrument's power, and the principle agent's power.

The instrument explains the essence of an action, but it does not explain why an action takes place rather than not; it does not explain the *existence* of an action. It is the principal cause *alone* that determines the existence of action because in it both principles of per se causality are present.⁴¹⁷ This may puzzle someone like Anthony Kenny who finds it nonsensical "that when you have explained a particular motion at a particular time you have to explain also the occurrence of that motion." It is clear that by "explain" Kenny means explaining the *kind* that a motion is, that is, accounting for the instrument's power and the principle agent's power. The principle agent's power *and* intention will explain both why this or that *particular* job the instrument is actually doing, AND the *actual doing* of that particular job. These are not identical! The principal agent's power explains the former, his intention to exercise that power rather than not to exercise it, explains the latter. Kenny overlooks, or takes for granted, the *existence* of the effect, which makes all his scientific explanations of it incomplete. But the principle of finality is very much a part of the principle of causality, as has been shown in chapter six. A denial of both or either is a denial of the principle of noncontradiction.⁴¹⁸

⁴¹⁷ "An instrument performs its instrumental activity inasmuch as it is moved by the principal agent and through this motion shares in some way in the power of the principal agent, but not so that that power has its complete existence in the instrument, because motion is an incomplete act." *De Ver.*, q. XXVI, a. 1, ad 8. ed. cit.

⁴¹⁸ The disappearance of final causality in modern philosophy is largely due to Descartes' denial of substantial forms, to its identification with God's purposes by Robert Boyle, and to modern ignorance of the scholastic philosophy which is more ignored than effectively criticised. St. Thomas' position is summed up in the following text: "There is this difference between the efficient and the final cause: the efficient is investigated as the cause of the process of generation and corruption [becoming], but the final is investigated as also the cause of being... for inasmuch as the thing is directed to its goal by means of its form, it is also a cause of being... Now the Philosopher is speaking of natural substances. Hence his statement must be understood to apply only to a natural agent, which acts by means of motion. For the Divine agent, who communicates being without motion, is the cause not only of becoming but also of being." But modern philosophy is largely not a philosophy of being as being, and so final causes are in it poorly understood. *In VII Metaph.* lec. 17, n. 1660-1661.

We should point out that the power of the principal cause in the instrument responsible for the actual doing of a particular job cannot remain in the instrument permanently; if it did the instrument would no longer be an instrument but the principal agent. A spade would become a digger.⁴¹⁹ This is an important point because it further clarifies the point that the instrumental and the principal cause are not identical. It is true that they are both efficient (a robot, for example, may be as efficient as a human being), but they are efficient in different ways. The action of efficient principal causes comes from a power that is its own, whereas the action of an instrumental efficient cause comes from a power it has received (passively) from another and it must continue to receive it while it is performing its action. The efficient principal cause acts on another through the power of which it is its own source.

A very important question arises at this point. If principal causes are their own source of causal power, what need is there to posit God as the First Cause? St. Thomas' answer escapes most critics of the Five Ways.⁴²⁰ As we shall see, the answer lies in the fact that even though the causal power of principal causes is their own, they are not identically that power. They receive that power, and when they do, it becomes their own (as a man's knowledge becomes his own when he acquires it—a soul, says Aristotle, is “in a way all things”, not only that it *has* all things), in a way that the passively received power of instrumental causes does not become their own but is removed from them as soon as the principal causes remove it, that is, as soon

⁴¹⁹ It is true that the modern man is continually attempting to make a digger out of a spade with his computerised robots, but he has so far succeeded in making only a very sophisticated spade that still needs the activity of its engineers to keep it running.

⁴²⁰ Recall a typical contemporary criticism of the Five Ways: “the contemporary exponent of the [Thomistic] argument probably should concede that this traditional defense of 5 is unsuccessful—that indeed each contingent thing exists because of the causal activity of other contingent things in the universe.” Michal Peterson, *et al.*, *Reason and Religious Belief*, p. 79.

as the principal causes stop causing through them. This gives us a very focused direction for understanding the Five Ways.

The final stage of preparing the groundwork of the Five Ways involves a discussion of *per se* and *per accidens* series of causes. To say that causes are in a series is to say, first of all, that they are in some order related to one another and to their common effect. An order in any series of causes may be proper or accidental.⁴²¹ In a proper order all the causes are *per se* causes: the principles of proper causality (which may be called its essential determinant) and finality (its existential determinant) apply to them. In other words, they possess and retain the possession (either as principal or instrumental causes) of the essence and existence of their causal action both during the exercise of that action and after its exercise. In accidental order of causes, the causes do not possess both the essential and existential determinants of their causal actions. We must now explain both these orders in more detail. We can do this simply by thinking a little deeper about what we have said so far about *per se* and *per accidens* causes.

Given the two chief characteristics of a *per se* cause, and therefore of a *per se* series of causes, all the causes in that series must be engaged in the action of causing their effect at the same time. It is a series of equal causes, which is to say that they all do what each one of them does, namely determine by the nature of their action and the nature of the agent as a whole, the kind the effect will be, and by the actually present causal activity determine the actuality of the effect.

However, not every cause in a *per se* series of causes determines the nature of causal action in the same way. The reason why there is a series of causes rather than only one cause is that many causes are needed to produce the effect. Even though, as

⁴²¹ Henri Renard calls the proper order *existential* order because the principle of proper causality in St. Thomas' philosophy is the principle of existential causality: "in the order of existence, every effect depends upon its existential cause here and now." Renard, *The Philosophy of God*, p. 22.

a total agent, they together have the same essential determination, each *per se* cause (whether as an instrument cause or principal cause) is different in kind or nature. For example, the gardener digging with a spade, using his legs and arms, is a series of different causes all of which act from the proper power of the principal agent; the power of each cause participates as an instrument in the power of the principal agent.

But how many causes can there be in a *per se* series? Can there be an infinite number of them? Another way to put the question is this: Can the number of causes in a *per se* series be an indeterminate number? Henri Renard gives a reason for an emphatically negative answer. "Since the dependence of all the members of the series is in the existential order, and, therefore, simultaneous, in an infinite series there should exist simultaneously an infinite number of causes. Now, an *actual* infinite number is clearly a contradiction."⁴²² In other words, because operating causes *actually* exist, their number must be determined or fixed; their actuality fixes that number. Now an infinite number is precisely an indeterminate number. Note that we are not arguing against the possibility of an *actually* infinite number. St. Thomas is the first to say that "God knows infinities," and he attempts to show how God knows them.⁴²³ But we cannot use the premise that God knows infinities in

⁴²² Renard, *The Philosophy of God*, p. 23.

⁴²³ See *De Ver.*, q. 2. a. 9, c. vol. I, ed. cit. The following text explains very well the difference between human and divine knowledge of the infinite: "For, since, 'the character of infinity fits quantity,' as the Philosopher says, and quantity of its very nature has an order of parts, an infinite would be known by way of its infinity if it were known part by part... Thus it is possible for our intellect in some manner to know an infinite continuum perfectly; but it cannot know an infinite number of things taken one by one, since it cannot know many things by means of one species. [Thus, for the human intellect to know the existent or the actual as infinite it would have to know existence as it is in itself; it would have to know the one whose existence is identical with his essence, or whose essence is existence, but clearly the human intellect does not know such a one. Our knowledge of the actual is inseparable from the knowledge of individual contingent existents.] Hence, if our intellect has to consider a number of things, it has to know them one after another [not in an instantaneous grasp, which is required for knowing an actually infinite set]. Consequently, it knows discontinuous quantity only through continuous quantity. Therefore, if it were to know a multitude that is actually infinite, our intellect would be knowing an infinite according to its infinity, but that is impossible.

support of an argument for the possibility of an actually *existent* or actually infinite number. If we have existents, we have a fixed number of them, and whatever is fixed in number cannot be *both* infinite and existent (which is to say actual and, therefore, determinate), it can only be one or the other, either determinate or not.

Renard gives another reason why an infinite per se series of causes is a contradiction.

In a series of existentially subordinated causes, the influx of the first cause looks to the “to be” (that is to say, it has an influx on the “to be”) of all the intermediate members, reaching even to the last effect. [As St. Thomas says, “all lower (or secondary) efficient causes must be referred to higher causes, as instrumental to principal agents.” *SCG*, (II, 21, 5)] The reason is that the intermediate causes are actuated here and now by the first cause. If, then, there were no first cause, these intermediary causes would not be able to act. Now in an infinite series there is no first cause and, therefore, no sufficient reason for the actuation of the intermediate cause, no causing of the last effect, and therefore no effect. This is contradictory, since the effect is there: it exists. Therefore, the series cannot be infinite.⁴²⁴

This argument for the impossibility of an infinite regress is really an argument *for* the irrelevancy of the number of per se causes in an existential series. It is an argument for the claim that only one of these causes can be a cause that is not also an effect. The argument relies on an insight about the nature of an effect that is actually present here and now (*hic et nunc*). That insight is this: there can be no explanation of an activity which *is* in fact originated (a caused activity) if it were not originated by a source that itself was not originated (the number of originators between the first unoriginated one and the effect is irrelevant). The insight will not

The divine intellect, however, knows all things through one species [Himself]. Hence, simultaneously and with one intuition, God has knowledge of all things. Consequently, He does not know a multitude according to the order of its parts, and He can know an infinite multitude, but not according to its infinity; for, if He were to know it according to its infinity so that He would be grasping part after part of the multitude, He would never come to its end and never know it perfectly. I simply concede, therefore, that God actually knows infinities absolutely. These infinities, however, are not equal to His intellect in the way in which He Himself as known equals His intellect; for the essences of created infinities are, as it were, intensively infinite as whiteness is in an infinite body. God’s essence, however, is infinite in all respects, and because of this all infinities are finite to Him and can be comprehended by Him.” All of this, of course, presupposes the knowledge of God’s existence and some of his attributes.

⁴²⁴ Renard, *The Philosophy of God*., p. 23.

be grasped if, like Kenny, we think it nonsensical to differentiate between the essential and existential determinants of causal activity, that is, if we disregard the existential determinant. It is in seeing the contingency in the order of existence or actuality of each of the secondary efficient per se causes that we see the need for one that is not contingent with respect to his existence or actuality. The need becomes apparent when we see the bankruptcy of the explanation of causal activity in terms only of caused causes, even in terms of an infinite series of caused causes. Each of the caused causes is causing with the borrowed act of existing; if the entire series, regardless of how long, is a series of causes that is in debt with respect to its existence, the entire series exists as still in need of being originated or given existence, which is to say that it does not exist. But that is false because we do see the effect of that causal series existing here and now. It is on the basis of this certainty that we are warranted in drawing the conclusion that the first in the causal series is one who is not causing with a borrowed act of existing. We can see here again how the denial of the supremacy of the act of existing in contingent being is responsible for our missing how St. Thomas arrives at the First Cause of motion, efficiency, or existence, etc.

Let us now look at a series of accidental causes. Recall that an accidental cause is one that does not possess both the essential and the existential determinant of causal action (that is, in accidental causality we cannot see both the principle of proper causality and the principle of finality which explains why something is rather than not). Recall also our example of an accidental cause: a gardener digging out a small ruby while cultivating his tomato plant. It is true that the gardener is a cause of the ruby being dug out, but he is an accidental cause because his causal action lacks one of the two necessary determinants of causal action, namely, the existential determinant (he did not *intend* to dig out the gem). Consequently, an action of an accidental cause has neither the first nor the last proper agent that are operating in

unison as proper causes; in other words, there is no operative series, no actual or existent causal operators. It is true that the gardener's spade is actual, but it is not an actual proper causal operator, but only an accidental operator. A series of such causes could certainly be infinite in number because it would not be a number of operative existents, which as actual must be fixed or finite. St. Thomas explains the difference between an infinity of a *per se* series and an accidental series:

An infinite series of efficient causes properly subordinate to one another is impossible, that is causes that are *per se* required for the effect, as when a stone is moved by a stick, a stick by a hand, and so forth: such a series cannot be prolonged indefinitely. All the same an infinite series of efficient causes accidentally subordinate to one another is not counted impossible, as when they are all ranged under causal heading and how many there are is quite incidental [accidental]. For example, when a smith picks up many hammers because one after another has broken in his hand, it is accidental to one particular hammer that it is employed by another particular hammer. And likewise it is accidental to this particular man as generator to be generated by another man, for he generates as a man, not as the son of another man. For all men in begetting hold the same rank in the order of efficient causes, namely that of being a particular parent. Hence it is not out of the question for a man to be begotten by a man and so on endlessly. This would not be the case were this begetting to depend on another man or on material elements and the sun; such a series cannot be indeterminable.⁴²⁵

The main point to take away from all this into our reading of the Five Ways is that the pivotal question is not whether an infinite series is possible (we have shown that it is not), but whether the causal series is caused by a cause that is only a cause and not also an effect. It is irrelevant whether the caused series started or not. What matters is that the number of causes (accidental or *per se* causes) is irrelevant because that shifts the question of causality to: *How* did it get started? If it turns out that each member of a series does not have within itself an explanation of a factor present in it that needs explaining, no explanation of *actual* causal activity is possible. But an effect is still present before us and “telling” us it *is* and it is an *effect*, and both these things call for an explanation; it is saying, “Look, I *am*, and I *am contingent*.” And this is precisely where lies the nature of the proper

⁴²⁵ *ST*, I, q. 46, a. 2, ad 7. I have used a mixture of the translation of the Dominican Fathers and the translation of the Blackfriars edition because it seemed to me that in places one was clearer than the other.

philosophical question: Why does the contingent, that which is but need not be, in fact *exist*? The natural theologian's problem is not: Why does God exist? The properly philosophical proof is not a *piece* of philosophizing that begins by saying, "God exists because ..." God's existence can be demonstrated only when we begin to take seriously the mystery of existence of contingent beings.

Owens advises that, if we wish to understand properly the Five Ways we must not place them "in the setting of nonexistentialist metaphysics like that of Aristotle, nor on the abstract plain of modern logic. It has to be examined according to the function of metaphysics in the procedure of St. Thomas himself."⁴²⁶ The Theologian explains the difference between the job of the logician and the philosopher.

The logician considers the way in which terms are predicated and not the existence of a thing. Hence he says that whatever answer is given to the question "What is this thing?" pertains to the quiddity. [**In other words, to a logician a thing is never an existent as existing but always a thing in some formal aspect of it.**] But the philosopher, who inquires about the existence of things and their final and efficient cause, does not include them under the quiddity since they are extrinsic [**that is, they do not at all belong to the *formal* notion of the thing in question.**]⁴²⁷

A glimpse of God, therefore, will be grasped, although very faintly, only by the metaphysician when he makes an attempt to make intelligible the contingency *and* the existence (*esse*) of *that which is but need not be*. The danger of trying to do metaphysics as a logician is that one can easily slip into philosophizing about mere concepts and never about that which actually *is* here and now. It is a bit like being hungry and coming for a meal to a chef who tells you everything about his great new recipe but never prepares the food. Just so, the work of a logician cannot feed the hungry mind like the work of a philosopher of being can, because the mind wants knowledge and knowledge is of being, not of concepts. Let us now try, as metaphysicians, to catch a glimpse of God by looking in the direction St. Thomas is pointing, which is toward a real, not a merely conceived, act of being.

⁴²⁶ Joseph Owens, *St. Thomas on the Existence of God*, p. 230.

⁴²⁷ *In VII Metaph*, lect. 17, n. 1658. Vol. II, p. 613.

CHAPTER XI

The Ways

"Look! Look! The Lion!" cried Lucy. "Where did you think you saw him?" asked Susan. "Don't talk like a grown-up," said Lucy, stamping her foot. "I didn't think I saw him. I saw him."

C. S. Lewis, *Prince Caspian*

Five Ways To See the Same Thing

One advantage of having taken such a long and arduous way to prepare the proper context of the Five Ways is that we shall avoid a number of false approaches to them. The most persistent of these in our day is a *cosmological* approach to the Five Ways, particularly to the First Way which has to do with motion. Much of what St. Thomas has to say about motion he owes to Aristotle and some of it we now know to be false. How much of it is false can be seen more clearly in the long exposition of the way from motion in the thirteenth chapter of *Summa Contra Gentiles* because there St. Thomas reveals more of the thirteenth-century physicist's understanding of motion. It is not surprising then that someone like Kenny, who insists that the Five Ways are an attempt at a *cosmological* demonstration of God's existence and that the First Way deals exclusively with the motion of a moving thing, will concentrate more on the proof from *Summa Contra Gentiles* to point out the shortcomings of such an understanding of motion and conclude from them that they are responsible for the failure to prove God's existence. But we have seen in the

preceding chapters that St. Thomas makes a clear distinction between cosmology and metaphysics, and that the latter is the science of the highest cause. We have also seen that for him metaphysics or first philosophy is the science of being as being where the act of existing is the first and highest act. If then God, as the highest and proper cause of the act of being, is encountered by the intellect in metaphysics rather than physics, and if metaphysics is first and foremost concerned with *existence*, a proof for God's existence must for St. Thomas be an existential proof. The First Way will therefore not be concerned primarily with the physicist's understanding of motion, but with the existence of an existent in motion; the cause we are seeking is not the cause of the *nature* of motion but of the *existence* of a moving being (for, remember, the intellect first comes into contact with contingent being when it comes into contact with a being in motion). If this were not so, St. Thomas would not say that the way to God from motion is the more manifest way because the physicist's understanding of motion is hardly manifest without a great deal of insightful reflection and experimentation. He calls it more manifest because *anyone* can see its starting point. Causality and being which are the second and third ways are not so manifest, and we shall better see these ways having first been prepared by the first and more manifest way. The light that the way of motion shines is not from motion itself, for really, there is no such *thing*; there are only moving beings, which is to say contingent beings, which is to say contingent existents. The light of the First Way is the light of the cause of a moving thing's *existence*, which is also the cause of the existence of a secondary efficient cause, and so on. It makes little difference, then, that in the argument in *SCG* I, 13 the Theologian is more explicit about his understanding of motion than in *ST*, I, q. 2, a. 3, because even from a perfect understanding of motion we cannot arrive at the *existence* of anything, let alone the *existence* of God who cannot move, that is, cannot go from potency to act.

Thus the difference of the Ways consists in their different starting points which are all effects and as such must have their own proper cause which is either a First Mover, a First Efficient Cause, a First Being, and so on. But we must see an important point that flows from this: To conclude to a First of each category of effects and to stop there is to leave that First within a category of effects, and then move on to a next category and leave its First in it once we found it; this still leaves us in the dark with respect to the cause of multiplicity, although now not with the multiplicity of contingent beings but with the multiplicity of First causes. This would make the Five Ways five different proofs of five different Firsts which still need to be connected somehow to “that which all men call God.”

But the Five Ways are not only different, they are also the same. They are not the same in that they all reach the *existence* of the First of each category; in this they are still different because the categories or modes of being of which these are the First are different.⁴²⁸ Therefore, each of the Firsts must be brought to the final step, the step where we see that all these existing Firsts are not many but one existent who is not qualified so as to account for the qualification of its effect in terms of which we discovered it, namely that they are that which all men call God. Remember, God does not exist because he is the cause of the existence of contingent beings. St. Thomas puts the point similarly when he says,

*if the words, *God is good*, signified no more that, *God is the cause of good things*, it might in like manner be said that God is a body inasmuch as he is the cause of bodies ...

**these names are applied to God not as the cause only, but also essentially. For the words, *God is good*, or *wise*, signify not only that He is the cause of wisdom or goodness, but that these exist in Him in a more excellent way.⁴²⁹

Thus if *good*, *wise*, AND *being* did not apply to God “in a more excellent way,” they would express the claim that God’s goodness, wisdom, and more importantly for our purposes, *existence*, is like the creature’s existence, which is to say contingent. A

⁴²⁸ St. Thomas speaks of different categories or grades of being in *De Ver.*, q. I, a. 1.

⁴²⁹ *ST, I, q. 13, a. 2. **ST, I, q. 13, a. 6.

proof for God's existence would then be only a proof of a being that is very powerful indeed, but still only a creature, and therefore an effect whose cause we have not found.

Furthermore, St. Thomas' use of the word *via* is not a poetic substitute for *probatio* or *demonstratio*. Nowhere does he speak of a way as proof and vice versa. He begins the Five Ways by saying, "there are five ways by which it can be proved that God is." He does not say there are five different proofs! What, then, is this five to one relationship—five ways to one God? It is the relationship of five ways of reaching the First Cause, and in each way the First Cause is the one God. The Five Ways of St. Thomas are five routes to reaching the First Cause, but "over and above the conclusion in each way there must be a reflection upon that existent to which we have come, in order to see that it is the *Ipsium esse*. If such a reflection were not necessary, St. Thomas should obviously conclude, not the 'there exists one whom everyone understands to be God,' but: God exists."⁴³⁰

Smith notices another interesting point. "The middle term of all demonstrations concerning the nature of God, the *Ipsium esse* or its equivalent, is constantly plucked from its source in Quest. 2, art. 3, *utrum Deus sit*. Surely, the *Ipsium esse* could not be drawn from art. 3 unless it were there."⁴³¹

Let us see then how each of the ways reaches to that being who is identically his own act of existing, who is God and not *a* god. We are now in good position to do this by considering different expositions offered by a host of interpreters who take seriously the Theologian's existential metaphysics. The best known of these are

⁴³⁰ Smith, *Natural Theology*, p. 88.

⁴³¹ *Ibid.*

Mortimer J. Adler ("The Demonstration of God's Existence," *The Thomist*, V (1943), 193) points out the following text in support of the claim that there is only one *demonstratio* worked out in five different ways: "In speculative things the medium of demonstration, which demonstrates the conclusion perfectly, is one only; whereas probable means of proof are many." *ST*, I, q. 47, a. 1, ad 3.

Etienne Gilson, Jacques Maritain, Joseph Owens, Henri Renard, Gerard Smith, Maurice Holloway, and E.L. Mascall. In my estimation, the most helpful and convincing is the interpretation of Gerard Smith whose many insights I have tried to unpack in chapters nine and ten by employing texts from St. Thomas and my own reflections on them. I shall, therefore, continue to rely on him, as well as on the other mentioned philosophers.

The First Way

St. Thomas' most manifest way to the First or *Proper* Cause of the act of being is as follows:

The first and the more manifest way, however, is that which is taken with respect to motion. For it is certain and established by sense that some things in this world are in motion. Now everything that is moved [is in motion] is moved by another. Indeed, nothing is moved except insofar as it is in potency to that toward which it is moved. But something moves inasmuch as it is in act; for to move is nothing other than to lead out something from potency into act, but something is not able to be reduced from potency into act except through something which is in act: thus the actually hot, like fire, makes wood which is potentially hot be actually hot and through this moves and alters it. Now it is not possible that the same thing be simultaneously in act and in potency in the same way, but only in a different way:⁴³² that which is actually hot cannot simultaneously be potentially hot; but it is simultaneously potentially cold. It is impossible therefore that the same thing in the same way be moving and moved or that it should move itself. It is necessary therefore that everything that is moved be moved by another. If therefore that by which it is moved is itself moved, it is necessary that it itself be moved by another, and that by another. But this cannot proceed into infinity, because in this way something would not be moving first [there would not be a first mover] and consequently no other mover, because second movers do not move except insofar as they are moved by the first mover, just as a stick does not move except insofar as it is moved by the hand. Therefore it is necessary to arrive at some first mover which is moved by nothing, and this all understand to be God.⁴³³

St. Thomas does not find it necessary to explain here in any detail what sort of motion or change we are to think about. Nor is the scientific (in the modern sense)

⁴³² In the Blackfriars edition of *Summa Theologiae* Timothy McDermott elaborates this point by englishing the Latin this way: "the same thing cannot at the same time be both actually *x* and potentially *x*, though it can be actually *x* and potentially *y*."

⁴³³ ST, I, q. 2, a. 3, my own translation. My source of the Latin text for each Way is the edition of *Commissio Piana* of the Institute of Medieval Studies in Ottawa. Compare the argument of the First Way to ST, I, q. 105, a. 2-4; I-II, q. 9, a. 4; SCG, I, 13; I, 22; II, 6; II, 54; *In Metaph.*, XII, lect. 3

understanding of motion to the point; Newton's and Einstein's insights are welcome, but nothing depends on them. The only data we cannot do without is the data, established by sense (not by experimentation of a physicist), of motion or change of some things in the world. We have already discussed in some detail a deeper reason for the need of this data:⁴³⁴ the first thing we notice about an existent is that it is moving or changing; the knowledge of an existent is first of all the knowledge of that which is moving, and this makes an ideal starting point for a proof of an existent who is identically his own act of existing.

Thus the motion or change of an actually existing thing is the subject matter or the data of the First Way, and it is this that must be philosophically, that is, *metaphysically*, explained. Now because we are, as metaphysicians, interested in ultimate causes, it will not suffice to have the meaning of a moving thing provided only by physicists, that is, by the sort of causes that fall into their field of inquiry, which are only a series of intermediary causes whose causal power needs explaining. We need the understanding of the philosopher of being; in this case, the philosopher of a moving or changing being considered as *being*. Much of what we have said in chapters five through ten has prepared us well for a metaphysician's understanding of a being undergoing change, and the causes of such a being. What remains now is to apply that understanding to the argument St. Thomas is making.

The argument of the First Way may be laid out in several ways. In surveying the different layouts offered by different interpreters, I find that those who are well equipped with metaphysical groundwork lay it out differently than those who are not. The reason is that they differ in their understanding of what precisely is the data of the First Way which must be explained. Those paying little attention to the primacy the act of existing has in the Theologian's metaphysics concentrate on his

⁴³⁴ See above pp. 152-155.

Aristotelian understanding of intermediary causes of motion.⁴³⁵ I have argued enough already against such interpretations: the mind in its present state cannot get to God by doing physics any more than by doing biology, sociology, or economics, and St. Thomas knows it well.

I shall therefore follow the layout of the argument understood in the context of existential metaphysics. As such the argument has four propositions: 1) Some things in the world are moving or changing. 2) Everything that is moved (changed) is moved (changed) by “some other.” 3) Because “some other” is a per se or proper or existential cause, it must be unmoved if motion (change) is to be explained in a properly *philosophical* way. 4) There must be a mover (changer) that does not move (change), and this all understand to be God. The same layout of the argument applies to the text in *SCG* I, 13.

The first three propositions have been established in chapter ten where we considered further the principle of causality. In explaining the propositions I shall occasionally recall relevant points. The first proposition calls for only one insight. We are speaking here of subjects of change which as such are not necessarily also changing something else. All that interests us is a being that is, in some way, undergoing change. We have already come across the insight required here: everything proceeding from potentiality to actuality comes first to an incomplete act, which is the medium between potentiality and actuality.⁴³⁶ It does not matter whether we are talking about that which is doing the changing or that which is

⁴³⁵ I do not know if anyone has attempted to recast St. Thomas’ argument from motion in light of the most recent and better understanding of its intermediary causes. But if the sciences of physics and metaphysics are as different as St. Thomas says they are, and given that for him any philosophical God-talk must be conducted in the context of philosophy of being as being, any modern attempt to recast the argument could not have a significant affect on a successful arrival at the conclusion that God *exists*. Either St. Thomas has successfully demonstrated the conclusion as a metaphysician or he has not.

⁴³⁶ See *ST*, I, q. 85, a. 3, and above pp. 151-152.

being changed.⁴³⁷ The point is that whatever goes from potency to act (either as the mover or the moved) comes first to an incomplete act. A properly philosophical explanation of motion or change is an explanation of being in this incomplete act; a being which is no longer only in potentiality and not yet in actuality. In other words, we need to explain a being in the process of being actualised, or more technically, a being's passive potency (which of course requires an act) or the actuation of passive potency. Renard says that, in considering motion, "the First Way considers the passivity of beings, their becoming as they are moved."⁴³⁸ Recall our example of the changing tomato. A properly philosophical explanation of its change is an explanation of how the tomato, which is able to be red, and is no longer quite green nor yet quite red, is here and now becoming red.

The second proposition needs one clarification⁴³⁹ and it concerns living beings insofar as they move themselves. The principle *whatever is moved is moved by another* is clear enough when we are talking about a transitive operation: an operation where one thing moves another (a gardener digging the soil), or an operation of a thing that is moved by another (the soil being dug up; this too is an operation because without the soil's *being able to be dug up* it could not be dug up). It is, however, more difficult to see the principle at work when operations are the perfection of an actual operator which do not bring about a change in another; for example, a human being's act of willing, knowing, and feeling are all operations which neither move nor are moved. They are immanent operations of living operators and are not movements, but they imply change. St. Thomas explains:

For to understand is not a movement that is an act of something imperfect passing from one to another, but it is an act, existing in the agent itself, of something perfect. Likewise that the

⁴³⁷ That is, it does not matter whether the data are that of the First Way (that which is being changed) or of the Second Way (that which is doing the changing).

⁴³⁸ Renard, *The Philosophy of God.*, p. 37.

⁴³⁹ The proposition has already been established on pp. 235-238.

intellect is perfected by the intelligible object, *i.e.*, is assimilated to it, this belongs to an intellect which is sometimes in potentiality; because the fact of its being in a state of potentiality makes it differ from the intelligible object and assimilates it thereto through the intelligible species, which is the likeness of the thing understood, and makes it to be perfected thereby, as potentiality is perfected by act. On the other hand the divine intellect, which is no way in potentiality, is not perfected by the intelligible object, nor is it assimilated thereto, but is its own perfection, and its own intelligible object.⁴⁴⁰

The last sentence helps to clarify the matter. The reason why an immanent action implies change is that the operator is not identically that action, not "its own perfection," but nevertheless receives the action; the operator still moves from potency to act, still has its potencies actuated. God, who does not have any potentiality in him, and therefore no change (is unmoved), performs the immanent operations of knowing and loving without any implication of change because he is identically truth and love (if he were not, he would not be God but only another creature whose acts are actuated potencies). Thus the principle, whatever is moved is moved by another, applies to everything except God; everything but God is subject to the causal power of "some other". Even though a human being, for example, is not in motion with respect to the immanent operation of knowing when the operation is taking place, that operation is still actuated by the intelligible species known.⁴⁴¹ And so the properly philosophical explanation of motion calls for an explanation of the being of even this incomplete act of immanent operation; we still need to account for the being which is no longer only in potentiality and not yet in actuality; we still need to explain the actuation of passive potency.

⁴⁴⁰ ST, I, q. 14, a. 2, ad 2.

⁴⁴¹ Another text may be considered. "When it is said that something is moved by itself, it is considered to be moving and moved; but when it is said that something is moved by another, one thing is considered to be moving and another moved. But it is clear that when something moves another, it does not follow from the fact that it is moving another that it is considered the first mover. Whence something moving another does not exclude the fact that it itself may be moved by another and similarly have from this other the fact that it is a mover. In the same way, when something moves itself, this does not exclude the fact that it may be moved by another, and have from this other the power to move itself." St. Thomas Aquinas, *De Malo*, q. 3, a. 2, ad 4, in *Opera Omnia*, ed. Parmae, vol. VIII. (New York: Musurgia Publishers, 1949). p. 262. (My own translation)

I know that this looks like a very narrow window of being, and it is very narrow, but it is the window of the moved being insofar as it is being achieved. Being which is not yet moved (is purely in the state of potentiality with respect to some act; it is the not x), or which is already moved (is no longer in potentiality with respect to some act; it is here and now x) is a much wider window through which we see being.⁴⁴² But it is not the window through which we can see the moving or changing being; only by seeing it where it is can we properly, that is, philosophically, account for its cause.

The third proposition requires a good understanding of why and how the need for a cause arises when we try to make change intelligible.⁴⁴³ Remember that we said that if the change of a green tomato turning red is to be a change and not merely a succession of completely new unconnected entities, the tomato cannot both *be* green and red at the same time and *become* green and red. Given that the tomato does not have redness from itself and does in fact have it, it must receive it from some red thing like the sun. Thus to be changed is to be changed by “some other.”⁴⁴⁴

⁴⁴² It is precisely into this wider window that Newton is looking when he says: “Every body continues in a state of rest, or of uniform motion in a straight line, unless it is compelled to change that state by forces impressed upon it.” This principle treats motion and rest as two states; the state of being before it moves, and the state of being already in motion. And of course, Aristotle’s maxim “every thing that is being moved is necessarily being moved by some thing” if applied to either of these states, is a false maxim. But that is not where it should apply. If the Philosopher and the Theologian wanted to apply it there, they were wrong, but that does not mean the maxim is wrong, it only means that it is misapplied. The maxim claims that whatever is moved from the state of potency to actuality is moved by that which is already in actuality, and Newton’s principle does not contradict that.

⁴⁴³ Recall the discussion on pp. 228-232.

⁴⁴⁴ The third proposition is stated and explained by St. Thomas in the First Way thus: “Now it is not possible that the same thing be simultaneously in act and in potency in the same way, but only in a different way: that which is actually hot cannot simultaneously be potentially hot; but it is simultaneously potentially cold. It is impossible therefore that the same thing in the same way be moving and moved or that it should move itself. It is necessary therefore that everything that is moved be moved by another.”

But we must see that this principle holds true not just before the tomato is red (when the need for "some other" can be seen from the complete lack of the new characteristic), nor after the tomato is completely red (when it is again obvious that the new characteristic is indeed new and not due to the changed thing), but we must see it in that narrow window of changing being. I mean, we must see the "some other" at that interval between the purely potentially *red* actual tomato and the actually *red* actual tomato; we must see the cause as *hic et nunc* causing that which is *becoming* actual to *be* actual. Smith says, "this is more difficult to see, because here the presence of the actual and the potential in the same subject is simultaneous."⁴⁴⁵ I say, unless we see it, we must grant Hume's account of causality as mere constant conjunction, and consequently his skepticism. But this "seeing" is not perceiving; for Hume it can only be that because the mind is exclusively a perceiving faculty; for St. Thomas the "seeing" is an act of the intellect. But for Hume there can be no explanation of change because there is no change, properly speaking, taking place; there is only that which we see after change took place, in which case we can say that *perhaps* there *was* a cause and *perhaps* not, but the knowledge of the cause is not required for the perception of that which now is perceived and before was not perceived. This is why we need to see that St. Thomas is "looking" at change while it is taking place for it is only there that there can be that which calls for an explanation through a cause, namely, the changing being. An explanation which says that a cause gave the subject of change the stimulus and left it to itself is no explanation at all, because it is not an explanation of change in that narrow window where change is in fact taking place. If change is in fact taking place, it must be taking place because the changer is doing the changing *hic et nunc*.⁴⁴⁶

⁴⁴⁵ Smith, *Natural Theology*, p. 106.

⁴⁴⁶ "That some things *are* in motion—for example, the sun—is evident from sense. Therefore, it is moved by something else that moves it [**not by something which at one time moved another thing.**]" SCG, I, 13, 3 (italics mine).

Now it is precisely in the context of this point that the question of the number of actual changers doing the changing is irrelevant, because any number of them (even if it be infinite, which is impossible) which were themselves being caused to do the changing while the change is taking place, would not explain the change taking place here and now; such causes only postpone the explanation.⁴⁴⁷ But given that the explanation is needed because the change is actual (not because our intellectual curiosity has to be satisfied, as J.J.C. Smart maintains), which is to say that an *actual existent* is changing, there must actually be a changer (mover or cause), which is to say a changer that *exists*, that is itself not changed and from which the actual change is here and now proceeding. In other words, the cause of actual change is the cause of the *existence* of an existent-as-changing, whereas the other, intermediary causes (no matter how many of them there be) are causes only of the *becoming* of that existent. We may group all the intermediary causes and call them *second cause* or an instrument of the change of the unchanged changer. The point to see, and we shall explore it further below, is that the sun and perhaps also water, soil, and a host of other causes are responsible for the tomato *becoming* red, but they are not responsible for the tomato *existing* while becoming red. For St. Thomas, to arrive at an actuality of something is to arrive at an actual existent, not at an essence, not at a *that which* (a changer or the cause of change), but at one who exercises an act of existing.⁴⁴⁸

⁴⁴⁷ Consider the following point. "When investigating the nature of anything, one should make the same kind of analysis as he makes when he reduces a proposition to certain self-evident principles. Otherwise, both types of knowledge will become involved in an infinite regress, and science and our knowledge of things will perish." St. Thomas, *De Ver.*, q. I, a. 1. In Hume's conception of causality as constant conjunction an infinite regress is quite possible, because there is no such thing as an *actual effect*, there is only that which succeeds another which is itself preceded by still some other, and so on. We need not stop anywhere because there is no need to in Hume's picture. But neither is there in Hume's picture a proper explanation. Thus skepticism, whether Hume's or that of our contemporaries, is quite at home with an infinite regress.

⁴⁴⁸ This will puzzle someone like Anthony Kenny because he does not take seriously enough the

With this we have reached the fourth proposition which is really a conclusion: therefore there exists a first unchanged changer or a first unmoved mover. But the fourth proposition contains another part: and this all understand to be God. We must ask ourselves: Why does everyone understand this to be God? or What does it mean to understand the First Mover as God or as not God? We have already touched upon the answer in the introduction to this chapter. Let us look again at what St. Thomas says, but this time in different words.

If, for example, 'God is good' meant the same as 'God is the cause of goodness in creatures, the word 'good' as applied to God would have contained within its meaning the goodness of the creature; hence 'good' would apply primarily to creatures and secondarily to God.

But words of this sort do not only say how God is the cause, they also say what he is. When we say he is good or wise we do not simply mean that he causes wisdom or goodness [and, we may add, motion, efficiency, being, and so on], but that *he possesses these perfections transcendently*. We conclude, therefore, that from the point of view of what the word means it is used primarily of God and derivatively of creatures, for what the word means—the perfection it signifies—flows from God to the creature. But from the point of view of our use of the word we apply it to creatures because we know them first. That is why it has a way of signifying that is appropriate to creatures.⁴⁴⁹

If, then, we had a First Mover that was not God, it would be a First Mover of whom it could be said that it is a mover that moves without being moved, but it could not be said that it possesses this power of moving by its very nature. In other words, the name *mover* could not be applied to it "in a more excellent way," or, it could not be said that it is *identically* its power of moving but has the power as a result of having received it, which betrays its characteristic of potentiality. Note, however, that we are not seriously considering the possibility that there could be a First Mover that is a creature, and one that is not. We are only trying to ascertain the meaning of the First Mover as a creature in order that we may see a little more clearly from that meaning why the First Mover cannot be a creature, that is, why he

importance of the act of existing in St. Thomas philosophy. And because he does not take it seriously, he will pronounce this kind of interpretation of the Five Ways nonsensical. It should be clear by now that such an interpretation is not nonsensical. It will also puzzle Peter Geach because for him it is enough to explain the existence of a child, for example, by the generative causal act of the parent.

⁴⁴⁹ ST, I, q. 13, a. 6. (Blackfriars translation. Emphasis mine.)

must be that which everyone understands to be God. Note also that our claim that the characteristic of the First Mover as the First Mover must apply to him in a more excellent way does not arise from our knowledge of the essence of the First Mover, but from a reflection on the nature of a contingent being, even if, by hypothesis, that being is a First Mover.

What, then, does it mean to say that everyone understands the First Mover to be God? At this point it will be helpful to recall the above section on the nominal definition of God, and to keep in mind the reason why a regress (infinite or not) is irrelevant. We shall not be able to answer the question so long as we think the answer must come from a comparison of the philosophically reached First Mover and an otherwise understood God; the answer will not come from recognizing the latter in the former or vice versa. The reason why everyone *understands* the First Mover to be God is to be found in the reflection upon the First Mover. The reason why there must *be* a First Mover is not owed to the fact that he moves other things. That he moves (here and now) other things, which we know because we know that a thing which is moving (here and now) exists and also know that it could not exist unless it were being caused (here and now) to exist, is the reason why *we know* that there is a First Mover. We do not want to make the mistake of an essentialist proof for God's existence where we conclude the reason for his existence from our knowledge of his essence. We do not want to say that God would not exist if there were no First Mover; if there were no First Mover, there would be no First Way, nothing more. We say that God exists, not because he moves another, although that is how *we know* that he exists, but because his activity or perfection of moving another is "possessed by God transcendentally," that is, he possesses this act or perfection as one who *is* that act.

Now the reason why we know that God must be his perfection or activity of moving another is the same reason why we know that there must be a First Mover,

namely, the *irrelevancy* of a regress. The irrelevancy of which we are speaking here does not have to do with movers but with possessors of the power of motion. The moment we reach the First Mover we ask: How does it stand with his power of motion? Is his possession of that power received or not? If it is, we have not yet reached a true First, a truly *Unmoved* Mover, because to receive something is to be moved, as we saw above in connection with the motion of living things. Therefore, to be the First Mover must mean that he is his own perfection of moving another, that he does not receive this perfection but *is* that perfection.

But if this is so, have we not got ourselves into a serious trouble? Are we forced to conclude that God as the cause is identical with the effect, because to be a cause is to be a cause of something, and this would make God's being dependent on that which he as a cause causes? If God *is* his activity of moving another, and if we "see" the motion of the effect, which is to say the effect existing as moving, how do we "take" God out of the different modes or categories of being? How do we separate God, as the activity of moving another, from that which he as that activity must move? Note that we are not asking how to see God as outside being, but how to speak of him so that a category of being does not *apply* to him, but that rather he *is* that category, which is a "more excellent way" of *applying*.

At this point I hear an objection: What do you mean when you say that to "see" the motion of the effect is to "see" the effect *existing* as moving? Recall that any change is really a move from potency to act. This move is the point of our focus now.⁴⁵⁰ Recall also our discussion of change. If change is real, that is, if there is in

⁴⁵⁰ Consider what St. Thomas has to say about the composition of act and potency. "Whatever is present in a thing from an agent must be act, for it belongs to an agent to make something in act ... substances have being [existence] from the first agent; and the substances themselves are caused by the fact that they have being [existence] from another. Therefore, being [existence] is present in caused substances as a certain act of their own. But that in which act is present [as opposed to that which is its own act] is a potentiality, since act, as such, is referred to potentiality." *SCG*, II, 53, 3.

"Being [which is to say existence and not an essence] itself is the *proper* act, not of the matter,

fact simultaneously change and that which is not change, namely the subject of change, then the perfection acquired by the subject through change is not identically that subject. The redness is not the tomato, or else it could not receive it from the sun. This is the point Heraclitus stressed. But there is another side to the story of change; it is the side from the standpoint of the acquired perfection. This is the side Heraclitus did not see. The first point is this: there can be no change—there can be no *becoming red*, unless there be the subject of change—unless there is the subject which becomes red. The essentialists see this point very clearly. But there is yet another point we must see. We shall only see it if we ask: what is the relationship between the perfection acquired through change and the subject which is *becoming* that perfection? Smith answers this way: “the becoming-of-a-subject is for that subject to exist ... We must see that the surplus [the acquired perfection] so affects the subject of it that for that subject to-be-becoming-the-surplus [which is that very narrow window of changing being] is, for the subject, to-be-existing.”⁴⁵¹

Let us make sure we do see. We do not want to make the mistake of forgetting that a changing being cannot *be* unless it is in fact changing, and that it can only change if it is in fact existing. But we do forget this, very often. We see that this thing which is here and now has changed; the green tomato has become red. We then think that we have explained the change by invoking the sun’s power of communicating redness to the tomato. We have not! We have left out entirely the explanation of the tomato-existing-as-*becoming*-red! To-be-becoming-red is for the

but of the whole substance; for being is the act of that whereof we can say that it *is*. Now this act is predicated not of the matter, but of the whole. Hence, matter cannot be called that which *is*; rather, the substance itself is that which is.

In substance composed of matter and form there is a twofold composition of act and potentiality; the first, of the substance itself which is composed of matter and form; the second of the substance thus composed, and being [existence]; and this composition also can be said to be of *that which is* and being, or of *that which is* and *that by which a thing is*.” *SCG*, II, 54, 3 and 9.

⁴⁵¹ Smith, *Natural Theology*, p. 109-110.

tomato to exist, no less than to-be-red is it for it to exist. We see the latter but forget the former.

Consider again the following text of St. Thomas:

In substance composed of matter and form there is a twofold composition of act and potentiality; the first, of the substance itself which is composed of matter and form; the second of the substance thus composed, and being [existence]; and this composition also can be said to be of *that which is* and being, or of *that which is* and *that by which a thing is*.

The main point of this text is that as long as we have a composite of any sort, we have a composite of potentiality and actuality. But any composite of potentiality and actuality still needs to be explained through a cause which is not a mixture of act and potency but a pure act.

The composite which lies before us now is the composite of the subject of change being caused to be the acquired perfection of that change (the tomato-being-caused-to-be-red), and the act of existing of that subject (not of the subject before it is being caused to acquire the perfection, nor after it has already acquired it). The composite calls for an explanation because the act of existing of the subject *becoming* the acquired perfection needs a cause. Smith puts the question this way: "What is causing the composite to exist inasmuch as it is causing the composite to be composite?"⁴⁵²

Only one candidate is up to the task. In our example the green tomato could not be this cause because it would have to *be* changed before it *is* changed, in which case there would be no change. Nor could it be the red tomato because at one time it was merely potentially red having no actuality of redness in it. The sun is also not able to do the job because it is only the second mover, and as such a cause only of the redness of the tomato and not of the tomato existing-as-becoming-red. The sun, we may say, presupposes the existence of the changing subject; it in no way accounts for it. We may, along with Kenny, object at this point and say: But isn't change or

⁴⁵² *Ibid.*

motion really in question here rather than existence? If it is, the sun is a good enough explanation. The answer is that change alone is not in question, but the *subject* of change is (which is to say *substance*, or the proper subject of *to be*, in this case the subject of *to be* undergoing a change from green to red⁴⁵³). The red tomato was not in existence before it became red. It will not do to retort, "But the *tomato* was!" There is no such thing as *tomato* except in Plato's world of Forms. The tomato we may have in mind at the point of our objection is either a potentially existing red tomato (which is precisely what calls for a cause) or an actually existing not-red tomato. In either case the red tomato was nonexistent as an actual (*hic et nunc*) subject of actual (*hic et nunc*) change. To put the matter bluntly, it will not do to try and dodge causality as it is understood by St. Thomas by refusing to look through the narrow window of changing being and seeing there not just change or motion but the existence of the subject as changing. The window is still there whether we wish to look through it or not because the effect existing as effect is here and now revealing openly both its contingent act of existing and its contingent essence. We cannot turn a blind eye to the need to account for the existence of the subject of change and posit as the explanation of that change a cause that presupposes the existence of the subject to which it is communicating a new perfection. The existence of a thing and the fact that it is changing are not identical. "Though motion may occur for any existing thing, motion is apart from the being of the thing."⁴⁵⁴ We need a cause that causes the subject's existence precisely at the point at which it is existing as receiving the new perfection, which is what it means to say that it is in motion or changing, but the *it* is an existent existing here and now as moving. And "the movable does not depend on the mover [some intermediary or

⁴⁵³ Recall our discussion in chapter eight about the composite of essence and existence.

⁴⁵⁴ SCG, III, 65, 5.

secondary cause of its motion] for its being, but only for its being moved."⁴⁵⁵ The aspect of being moved is not the only thing that requires explanation in the First Way. We need, therefore, a cause of being of that which is being moved. This is what the first mover does. How do we know that? St. Thomas answers:

Whatever belongs to a thing is either caused by the principles of its nature (as the capacity for laughter in man) or comes to it from an extrinsic principle (as light in the air from the influence of the sun). Now being itself [*esse*] cannot be caused by the form or quiddity of a thing (by 'caused' I mean by an efficient cause), because that thing would then be its own cause and would bring itself into being, which is impossible. It follows that everything whose being is distinct from its nature must have being from another. And because everything that exists through another is reduced to that which exists through itself as to its first cause, there must be a reality that is the cause of being for all other things, because it is pure being [*esse tantum*]. If this were not so, we would go on to infinity in causes [which is both impossible and irrelevant], for everything that is not pure being has a cause of its being, ... from the first being, which is being in all its purity; and this is the first cause, or God.⁴⁵⁶

This shows very clearly that God as the cause of the existence of the moving thing as moving is not that effect and is radically different from it. Further support for this claim can be found in both *Summas*.

If a thing's existence differs from its nature, that existence must be externally caused. But we cannot say this about God, whom we have seen to be the first cause [St. Thomas is referring to the article of the Five Ways which indicates that he thinks the pure being is there to be found. And how shall we find it there except as the cause of the existence of moving, efficient, etc. being?]. Neither then can we say that God's existence is other than his nature.

Anything that exists either is itself existence or partakes of it. Now, God, as we have seen, exists. [St. Thomas is again referring to the Five Ways, and this time he says that in them we saw the God exists, not just that which all understand to be God.] If then he is not himself existence, and thus not by nature existent [but caused to be existent], he will only be a partaker of existence. And so he will not be the primary existent. God therefore ... is his own existence.⁴⁵⁷

In the context of the First Way this amounts to saying that God as the First Cause of the subject existing as changing does not have his act of existing from that causal activity but from himself. If he did not have it in such a way, he would not be the First and Proper Cause. Is this circular reasoning? No! We can recast the last sentence to show why it is not: If God did not have the act of existing from himself,

⁴⁵⁵ *SCG*, II, 57, 12.

⁴⁵⁶ *On Being and Essence*, ch. IV, 7, ed. cit.

⁴⁵⁷ *ST*, I, q. 3, a. 4. (Blackfriars translation.)

there would be no First and Proper Cause of the existence of the subject of change while changing. There is only one First Cause. What makes him *first* is that he is identically that which he does; what makes him the *only* is that everything else in reality is not identically its own act of existence. THIS everyone understands to be God, which claim we can *now* see to be the same as: therefore God exists.

We can drive home the point even harder. In his first *Summa* the Theologian says: "Each thing is through its own being. Hence, that which is not its own being is not through itself a necessary being. But God is through Himself a necessary being. He is, therefore, His own being [*esse*]." ⁴⁵⁸ This can also be expressed by saying that all things in the realm of contingent being differ from one another by being beings of one sort or another, or by belonging to some categories of being and not to others. But God is different from every other being not in virtue of some category of being, but in virtue of *be-ing* which is an act of existing. Now the act of existing applies to everything regardless of the category of being that applies to it. Therefore, act of existing is not a category. And if God is identically the act of existing, which he must be if a changing existent, at least, is to be *completely* accounted for, then he is outside all categories or genus of being, he does not exist *in some way* but *is* existence. Therefore we really do *know* that God does in fact *exist*!

The objections to all this will be legion. All of them, however, will miss, or ignore, or inadequately appreciate the legitimacy and autonomy of the act of existing over all other acts which realify a contingent existent and call for a cause. Until their authors see this act for what it is, any attempt at a reply to their objections will be futile.

⁴⁵⁸ SCG, I, 22, 5. We can see from this that St. Thomas is not asserting a *logically* necessary being, as Smart sees such assertions.

The Second Way

Just as the First Way is concerned with the passivity of beings, the Second Way is concerned with their activity. Both ways are concerned with causality; the First with the *recipient* of causal action, the Second with the *agent* of causal action. What gives rise to the inquiry of the First Way is the fact that there *is* actually, in existence, an effect whose actuality as an effect here and now needs explaining. What gives rise to the inquiry of the Second Way is the fact that there *is* actually, in existence, a cause whose actuality as a cause here and now needs explaining.

St. Thomas' states his argument this way:

The second way is from the nature [*ratione*] of the efficient cause. For we find in the sensible things that there is an order of efficient causes; for we never observe, nor is it possible, that something is the efficient cause of itself, because in that case it would precede itself which is impossible. But it is not possible that in efficient causes [the order] should proceed to infinity. [This is so] because in all ordered efficient causes the first is the cause of the intermediate and the intermediate is the cause of the ultimate (whether the intermediate be many or only one), but if a cause is removed, the effect is removed. Therefore if there was not the first in the order of efficient causes, there will not be the ultimate nor the intermediary. But if in efficient causes the order proceeds to infinity, there will not be the first efficient cause, and in this way there will be neither the ultimate effect nor the intermediary efficient cause, which is openly false. Therefore it is necessary to posit some first efficient cause, to which all give the name God.⁴⁵⁹

This argument has three propositions: 1) We find in sensible things an order of efficient causes. 2) An order of efficient causes is such that it requires the first efficient cause. 3) Therefore it is necessary to posit some first efficient cause, to which all give the name God.

We shall proceed in the same manner as in the First Way, namely, by unpacking each proposition. The first proposition reveals the data from which we shall conclude to God: it is an order or a series of *per se* causes. As we saw in chapter ten, a *per se* cause is one to which apply both the principle of proper causality and the principle of finality; a *per se* cause possesses both the essential and the existential determinants of causal activity. Again, if we overlook the existential determinant of

⁴⁵⁹ See also *ST*, I, q. 46, a. 2; *SCG*, I, 13; II, 21; *In Metaph.*, II, lect. 2.

a per se cause, through it we shall not arrive at the existence of anything; at best we shall have a partial description of *what* the First Per Se Cause looks like, *if* it exists.

A series of per se causes is one in which all of its members act together at the same time and in one definite way rather than another to produce an effect that is of one kind rather than another. For example, our gardener, his spade, etc., are a series of per se causes of a particular intelligible activity, namely digging rather than pruning, and producing a dug garden rather than a pile of soil.

All of the causes in a per se series differ from one another with respect to their essence: man, the spade, etc., are all different in nature. This difference of essence reflects the need for the series, for if they did not differ, there would be no need for more than one cause. This difference is so vital that if one of the per se causes in a series were removed, the rest would be powerless to produce the particular effect of the series. Now, even though each per se cause of a series differs from the others, they all resemble the effect, that is, they all give the effect its essence because they all comprise the essential determinant of the causal activity which produced the effect.

All commentators of the Second Way seem not to have difficulty seeing what we have pointed out so far about the series of causes, although they may wish to express it differently. Frederick Copleston's explanation of causal activity may perhaps be seen in line with our explanation so far. But very few commentators unpack the first proposition further and in such a way that it is clear how St. Thomas connects it to the second proposition, and how *he* sees the third following from both of them, and what exactly it means.

Let us, then, further unpack the meaning of the *series* of per se causes. That is, let us again think deeper about efficient causality under the light of the principles of proper and final causality (under the essential and existential determinant of causal

activity). Let us see the implications these principles have on efficiency as we did with motion.

The point that escapes many a commentator is that the whole series is predisposed to producing *actually* the effect it produces rather than another effect. It is not enough that the series have the essential determinant because that only provides the *ability* to produce the effect, it does not provide the actual producing of the effect. To put the matter poetically: the essence says *I can*, but not *I will*. Thus even though the whole series is responsible for the essential determinant of the causal activity, the instrumental causes are not responsible for the existential determinant; only the principal cause is responsible for that. In our example, the gardener is only partly responsible for the garden being *dug up* in the way that is conducive for a good growth of his tomato plants, rather than there being a pile of soil (the other causes in the series are also necessary for the production of the dug up garden). But the gardener is entirely responsible for the particular effect *actually* being the effect it is rather than a different effect. As Smith puts it, “the particularity of the job which instruments perform is due to its particularization by the principal cause [which] also stiffens into their operational existence the activity of the instruments.”⁴⁶⁰

Clearly, then, efficient causality cannot do without final causality. This is not to identify the two, for the Second Way is “from the nature of the efficient cause” not the final cause. But we are pointing out that the actual causing of the efficient causes cannot be explained solely in terms of efficiency. That is to say, we need to account for why efficiency is here and now actually exercising itself rather than

⁴⁶⁰ Smith, *Natural Theology*., p. 117. This is a point that is missing in Copleston’s account of the hierarchy of efficient causes in the Second Way. In his account the crucial difference between the instrumental and the principal cause, the difference that points out the *hierarchy* which leads to the First Cause, is absent. It is absent, I think, because his account is far too *cosmological* and not nearly enough *metaphysical*.

remaining still. St. Thomas makes this point when he says, “for the end [the tendency (conscious or not) of the agent] is a cause in so much as it moves the efficient cause to act; and so just as it has the nature [*ratio*] of a mover, it pertains in a way to the genus of efficient cause.”⁴⁶¹

But not every efficient causal activity is like our example of the gardener, that is, not every series consists in a mixture of instrumental and principal causes. Our example of the tomato becoming red is one where all the causes are principal: sun, soil, water, etc., are principal causes of the tomato turning red. In this case the effect is not brought about by the instrumentality of the causes, but by the essential determination of the causal action of all the causes. In both cases, however, the causes are causing, although somewhat differently.

This brings out the precise point to be explained by the Second Way: the fact that there *is* actually, in existence, a cause whose actuality as a cause here and now needs explaining. In the First Way we had beings as patients, or recipients of causal action, here we have beings as agents, or doers of causal action. The patients are becoming something, while agents are causing another to become something. We could, of course, point out again the narrow window of being where the agent becomes active *before* it is active, but that is more like the data of the First Way rather than the Second.⁴⁶² It is also true, for example, that the gardener’s spade insofar as it is being used is not a patient the way the garden is a patient as it is being dug, and yet the spade is a recipient of the gardener’s causal action. For the

⁴⁶¹ St. Thomas Aquinas, *In Librum De Causis Expositio*, lect. 1, prop. #39, (Rome: Marietti Editori Ltd., 1955), p. 7. (My translation.)

⁴⁶² Perhaps the following point can make the data of the Second Way clearer. Consider Aristotle’s maxim: every *thing in motion* is necessarily being moved by *some other thing*. The data of the First Way is *a thing in motion*, the data of the Second is *some other thing*. But in both cases the data may be gleaned from the same instance of change or motion. The difference in the Ways is the different subjects on which the metaphysician is focusing: either the subject of change or the subject causing change. But both subjects are subjects of *to be*, of the act of existing.

sake of clarity we shall not call such things patients but instruments of a principal agent. We are here concerned with the causes causing, or agents as agents, which insofar as they are acting are not in any way being changed or moved but are producing change in another.

An agent as an agent, which is called a principal agent (and differs from a patient and an instrument of a principal agent) possesses within itself the power by which it produces an effect essentially like itself. For example, the light of the sunlight gives the tomato its red colour. The power by which instruments of the principal agent produce the effect is not entirely their own; that power is partly their own and partly the power of the principal agent. In other words, instrumental causes do their causing not entirely of their own act, but partly by the act of the principal agent.

This raises a question. Are the causal acts of the principal agents *entirely* their own acts? Again, as we have seen in the First Way, the question is really asking whether the principal agents are identically the power of their agency. It is true that they possess their causal power permanently, the way instrumental causes do not. But the question is: do they in any way owe their own permanent act of causing to another; are they themselves in any way caused with respect to the power of their act of causing? We may put the question another way: do the principal causes possess of their own essence their causal power; does the ultimate reason why their efficiency “up and causes” lie within their very natures?

With this question we are clarifying the link between the first and the second propositions of the Second Way. The second proposition says that an order or a series of efficient causes is such that it requires the *first* efficient cause. Why does it require it? First of all, every principal agent is not identically its act of causing. Sometimes it does not cause and sometimes it does; the gardener and his spade are not always gardening; the man is not identically the gardener. Therefore, we ask this question: Given that the gardener and his spade do not by themselves explain why

they dig a garden when they do, there must be a reason outside of them why they *actually* do dig when they dig. What is that reason which is the cause of their *actual* causing?⁴⁶³

Again, no natural science can give us the answer. Why? Because natural sciences deal with causes that are themselves not identically their own causal activity; they are causes that sometimes cause and sometimes do not and we still need an explanation of why they do cause when they *actually* cause. Natural science can only tell us what the causal power of a cause is like; it can describe it. But even if the description be much more accurate than Aristotle's and St. Thomas', it will not help us in answering why the power is being exercised here and now. Nor will it do to postpone the answer by offering as the reason another cause which has the actual exercise of its causing a principal agent's causing caused. In other words, infinite regress is again both irrelevant and impossible.

Consider St. Thomas' argument. It is impossible that anything should be its own efficient cause, because that would mean that it would have to be and not-be at the same time which is impossible. It would have to exist, if it is to be a cause, before it is an effect. But, we may say, that is clear enough when it comes to causing its own existence, but the matter may be different with the causing of one's own causing. To say this, however, would be to make again Kenny's oversight we encountered in the reading of the First Way. The reason is this: if something is the cause of its own causing, it must be the cause of itself. We must see this better! To be causing is to *be* in the act of causing, and to cause its own causing is to cause its own act of causing, which means that a thing in causing its own act of causing must *be* in the act of

⁴⁶³ Note that we are not asking about that interval in the being of an agent *before* it receives the causal power and *after* it has received it. We are talking about the cause causing while permanently possessing the power of causing. But we are noticing that this possession of the power, although permanent, does not account for the *actual* exercise of it, that is, there is nothing in that power that explains why it is being used. The *I can* does not explain the *I do*.

causing before it causes it. Now this lands us in the same impossible predicament as the scenario of causing one's existence, namely the scenario where that which is caused must pre-exist itself, or, as Holloway puts it, "the same efficient cause could not at the same time both give and receive the power of causing."⁴⁶⁴ Therefore, causal acts can only cause effects but not themselves nor their own permanent act of causing. But if a causal act of a being is not identically that being (even though its possession of that act is permanent), its causal act must be caused by another which must be uncaused, if we are to reach an explanation of the causal activity that is going on here and now on this actual effect.

Given, then, the necessity of the uncaused cause which we have just shown, this cause, says Smith, must have as its effect "such a juncture of the act of causing to some principal agent as will allow the agent, now constituted in its act of causing, to be the immediate cause, not of its causing [which is impossible because that agent is not identically its act of causing] but of the effect of its causing."⁴⁶⁵ What Smith means, I think, is that the uncaused cause in causing a principal agent to exercise its own proper causal activity does not thereby immediately cause the effect which that agent causes. In other words, the uncaused cause does not dig the garden with the gardener the way the gardener digs it with a spade. The uncaused cause only causes the agent to cause, and nothing more (although, as we shall see, that is plenty). Recall the question that steered us in the right direction of explaining the precise data of the Second Way which is *causes causing*. Given that the gardener and his spade do not by themselves explain why they dig a garden when they do, there must be a reason outside of them why they *actually* do dig when they dig. What is that reason or the cause of their *actual* causing without which there would not *be* the effect? The question is not why is the garden dug up, because we know the answer:

⁴⁶⁴ Holloway, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

⁴⁶⁵ Smith, *Natural Theology*, p. 122.

the gardener digging with a spade. The question is, Why is that activity going on here and now? and the answer is the *uncaused cause*.⁴⁶⁶

With this we have touched the third proposition which is the conclusion. Now, in positing the answer to an actually present need for an uncaused cause, we have posited the *existence* of that cause because actuality for St. Thomas is not an essence but existence. But at this point we only have the existence of that “to which all give the name God,” and we do not yet know *why* they give it that name. The point needs insistence. In knowing that a principal agent is not identically its causal power, and in knowing that it is in fact here and now exercising its causal power, we know that here and now it is being caused to cause rather than not to by an uncaused cause. But our knowledge of the existence of the uncaused cause is at this point still inseparable from its act of causing the exercise of the principal agent’s causal power which we see being exercised, that is, our knowledge of the existence of the uncaused or first cause is dependent on that which is not the first cause. We do not, however, want to say that the first cause is so qualified by his act of causing that he exists because he is causing and would not exist if he were not causing. For if that were the case, he would not be the first or uncaused cause but would have his existence dependent or caused on his own act of causing, which, as we saw above, is a contradiction. But how do we make the separation known to ourselves? For us, to

⁴⁶⁶ See *In II Metaph.*, lec. 3, n. 302-304, and *ST*, I, q. 46, a. 2, ad 7 in connection with the Second Way.

We should at this point consider a Kantian objection. Kant argues that all beings in the realm of phenomena are contingent, that is, they all have a cause. But *cause* is one of twelve categories and as such can only be applied to phenomena. The principle of causality is valid only within the realm of sense-experience. Any attempt to apply the principle beyond that realm to reach an uncaused or a necessary cause is neither possible nor logical.

Holloway responds to this objection according to the philosophy of St. Thomas: “The principle of causality does not have its origin in sensible beings insofar as they are sensible, but insofar as they are or exist. Thus this principle is founded in being as such and its application is valid beyond mere sensible being. Moreover, although this principle originates from contingent beings, there is in these beings some necessity; namely, these contingent beings have a *necessary relation* to a cause. Therefore, by applying this principle of causality, we are able to posit ... a first cause.” Holloway, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

know a being is always to know it as belonging to certain categories and as not belonging to others, or as actually being something and potentially being something else. So, how can we who know things this way come to know the one whose existence does not depend on the relation in which we know him, that is, how do we apply “causing” to him in a “more excellent way” where his causing is truly uncaused? The answer is this: we shall know God as radically different from everything that belongs to some category of being, when we know that which is not a category of being but which belongs to all beings regardless of which category of being they are in. That something is the act of existing.

We have already encountered that act, but we had no occasion to mention it. Let us do so now. We encountered the act of existing when we encountered the principal agent (the gardener) actually exercising his causal power of digging. In encountering an agent of efficient causality we encountered a subject, which is to say an existent. Thus what the first or uncaused cause causes when it causes the causing of an agent is an *agent existing as causing*. At this point we simply repeat the question we raised with respect to the actual exercise of the principal agent’s act of causing: What is the cause of an *agent existing as causing*? We know the uncaused cause is the cause of its causing. But can that same cause while causing the causal activity of a principal agent take for granted its existence? The answer is a resounding *no*. The reason for the answer becomes immediately clear when we shift that narrow window of being, through which we peeked in the First Way, to the data of the Second Way. When we do, we see that the actual subject which is being caused to exercise its act of causing exists precisely as exercising its causal act. This means that the first cause is causing it not only to exercise its causal power but also to exist, because the agent’s exercise of its causal power and its existence at the interval in which it is in fact exercising its power are in reality inseparable (they can be abstracted only conceptually in all cases of composites of essence and existence,

as we saw in chapter seven). But if they are inseparable, the first cause cannot take for granted the existence of the agent while it is causing the agent's exercise of its causal power, but must cause it (for if not, it is not a cause of an *actual* agent).

Therefore, the First Efficient Cause really is that to which all give the name God because he is God. We can say this now because we have taken God out of the category of "causing the exercise of efficiency of efficient causes" and see him to be the cause of the act of existence of the *efficient cause existing as causing*. Because we now *know* the First Efficient Cause this way, we no longer have to say that we know the existence of that cause as inseparable from his act of causing. We can now say that we know him as the First Cause of *any efficient cause existing as causing*, and the knowledge of the *first uncaused cause of the existence of an efficient cause's causing* makes his existence, as known by us, independent of any category of being. As the First Cause of the act of existing he is identically that act, as every first cause of some act is identically that act because that is what it means to say that it is the *first*.⁴⁶⁷

And so, once more, we have demonstrated God's *existence* by way of causality. If at this point we wish to go on and ask *what* is that whose existence we have demonstrated, we are asking *what* is the First Cause or, according to St. Thomas, *what* is the act of existing in itself. And to that question all medieval philosophers responded, each in his own way, by following the unknown author of the *The Book of Causes* who says:

The First Cause is above all description. And tongues fail to describe it only because they are unable to describe its being, since the First Cause is above every cause and is described only through the second causes that are illuminated by the light of the First Cause. This is because the First Cause does not cease illuminating its effect but is not itself illuminated by any other light, because it is pure light above which there is no light.⁴⁶⁸

⁴⁶⁷ See *ST*, I, q. 3, a. 4.

⁴⁶⁸ *The Book of Causes*, trans. by Dennis J. Brand, (Niagara University Press, 1981). pp. 19-20.

The Third Way

The Third Way also takes its starting point from a fact of experience, although not from the experience of passivity and activity of existent things, but of the experience of the generation and corruption of beings. Our task here is to reflect philosophically (in the *proper* sense of that word, which is to say metaphysically) on the beings' going in and out of existence. The reason, I think, why St. Thomas does not present the argument of the Third Way first is that its data is not as immediately apparent to us as the data of the first two Ways; it requires a more penetrating reflection. But it is easier to see in the Third Way why the being to which we conclude through the argument is indeed that which all men call God, or *Ipsum esse*. It is perhaps understandable how one might mistake the first two Ways for *physical* proofs, that is, proofs tightly enmeshed in the science of cosmology. But how someone can continue reading, if he is reading very carefully, the next three Ways in the cosmological context is most puzzling.

The argument of the Third Way may be translated this way:

The third way is taken from the possible and the necessary, and it is as follows. We find among things those which are possible to be and not to be, since they are found generated and corrupted, and consequently able to be and not to be. It is impossible, however, that all which are such always exist, because that which is possible not to be at some time is not. If, therefore, all things are possible not to be, at one time there was nothing. But if this is true there would be nothing even now, because that which is not does not begin to be except through something that is. If, therefore, nothing was existing, it was impossible that something began to be, and in this way nothing would be, which is openly false. Therefore, not all beings are possible, but it must be that something among things exists necessarily. However, every necessary thing either has the cause of its necessity from another or it does not. But it is not possible to proceed to infinity in necessary things which have the cause of their necessity, just as it is not possible in efficient causes, as was proved. Therefore, it is necessary to posit something whose necessity is through itself not having the cause of its necessity through another, but which is the cause of the necessity of others. This all say to be God.⁴⁶⁹

The argument consists in four propositions. 1) Among things in the world we find those for which it is possible both to be and not to be, and we find this because they are generated and corrupted. 2) Among things that are, not all can be possible

⁴⁶⁹ See also *ST*, I, q. 19, a. 8; *SCG*, I, 15; II, 15.

(generated and corrupted); there must be something that exists necessarily. 3) Every necessary thing either has the cause of its necessity from another or it does not. 4) Therefore there exists that whose necessity is through itself, a necessary being *par excellence* whom all say to be God.

The immediate point to note about the first proposition is that it concerns the things that are at present in the world and not the things that may be in the future. We are not talking about the next year's crop of tomatoes, but about the tomatoes that are in the garden right now. It is about these that we notice that they do exist but need not exist, or, that their actual existence does not arise from themselves. The data of the Third Way is things that *are* generated and therefore corruptible (not those that *can* be generated and corrupted), and because they are both these things, they possess the ability to be and not to be.

In the first two ways we sought the cause not only of that which is changing and that which is causing something else to change, but also of that which exists as changing and that which exists as causing something else to change. In other words, we had to seek the first cause of a category of being *and* of being itself, or the act of existing. Here we go straight to the cause of being or the existence of things whose existence we judge to be contingent (existence which is not of itself but is caused). An interpretation of this data does not require, in order to be understood, anything from medieval physics.

The point of the data, which is contingent existents, that we must see is the point of the *reception* of the act of existing which occurs when a contingent existent is generated and loses it when it is corrupted. We must see that the subject of the contingent act of existence becomes such a subject precisely because it receives this act and did not in any way actually possess it before it received it. Note that this is indeed the most special instance of *reception*. In every other instance it is possible to

speak of a subject as already *actual* before it receives whatever it receives.⁴⁷⁰ But it is not so here where the reception constitutes the subject's coming into existence. Note also that in speaking about a possible being we are not speaking about that which receives an essence; we are not saying that what brings it into being is that it became this or that kind of thing. In other words, a possible being is not a subject of an essence but of existence. Thus, what makes a possible being possible is that it did not at one time exist *and* it did come into existence, and while it exists it has the potency not to be. The narrow window of being this time is that ontological interval at which a being comes into existence, the point at which its potentiality for existence is actualised (as opposed to a potentiality to receive or to impart on another this or that form).

We can now consider the second proposition whose point shows most clearly the radical difference between the act of existing and everything else. When St. Thomas says that there must be something that exists necessarily, he is not saying that there must be a thing of this or that kind whose act of existing is not received; he is saying that there must be that which is identically the act of existing.

In order to see why there must be that which *is*, and not only *has*, the act of existing, let us unpack St. Thomas' claim that not *every* being can be such that it is possible for it to be because it is generated and corrupted. In other words, we want to see why it is that the possible (able not to be) at some time is not, and that therefore, if all things are possible not to be, at one time there was nothing. Smith explains the point this way:

⁴⁷⁰ One may at this point wish to object and say, "Is it not the form which makes a thing be?" It is true that a form makes a thing to be *this* or *that kind* of thing (the form actualises it as a *this*), but it is the act of existence that makes this or that kind of thing *be*. To deny that St. Thomas holds this is to have to explain away a text like this: "Therefore whatever is the cause of things considered as beings, must be the cause of things, not only according as they are *such* by accidental forms, nor according as they are *these* by substantial forms, but also according to all that belongs to their being at all in any way." *ST*, I, q. 44, a. 2.

If an antecedent subject of a present act of existing did not exist by *any* previous act of existing, obviously it would not have existed at all; and if *no* antecedent subject of the present act of existing existed at all, before their present existence there was a time when *nothing* existed. But if once there was nothing, there would be nothing now, because from nothing there comes nothing. Clearly, then, since there are presently existent things, *some* antecedent subject of a present act of existing *must have* existed before this present [act of existing]. To say this is to say that some being is necessary.⁴⁷¹

In other words, a possible being (existent) is one that can both be and not be (exist and not exist). But if the complete set of all existents were possible, were able both to exist and not to exist, nothing would come into existence, because from the merely possible there could never come the actual—the possible does not have in itself what it takes to actualise, either itself or anything else. But as a matter of experience we know that beings that are able to exist and not to exist beings do exist here and now. It follows that not all existents can be existents that are able to exist and not to exist, but there must be a necessary existent whose necessity is such that it sets it apart from all other beings.

I find it helpful to see this point by considering more closely the special act of receiving existence. Because to receive existence is identically to *become* the subject of the act of existing, the set of subjects of the act of existing cannot be made up entirely of possible beings or receivers of the act of existing. Such a set could never *be* because it is made up entirely of receivers, which is to say comers, which did not receive or become anything, and they did not receive or become anything because there is no being that *gives* or *is*. Therefore, the set must include a giver or a non-comer, which is to say a necessary being. It is most clear here why a regress is completely irrelevant.

The moment we ask about the source of the necessity of the necessary being, which brings us to the third proposition, we come to see that it cannot lie outside the necessary being. That it cannot so lie is clear from the specialty of receiving and

⁴⁷¹ Smith, *Natural Theology*, p. 126-127.

possessing unreceived this the most special of things, namely the act of existing. The reason why the giver (or the cause) of the act of existing could not himself have received it is that he would not then be the giver. This is so because *in this case* the giver is identically the non-becomer. If the giver were a becomer he would be a receiver, and we would still need to account for the giver preceding that receiver. Again, regress here is just as irrelevant as it was in the first two Ways because it postpones our accounting for the giver.

Keeping in mind that the giving of existence is an act of the one who has it without having received it, we see that the giver is identically being or existence itself (*Ipsum esse*). Now *this* is in fact what everyone calls God because there is only one such and he is radically different from all others, and in no way dependent on them.

Interpreters like Henri Renard see the Third Way as offered within the context of the hypothesis of an eternal world. Such a hypothesis is open to anyone that denies the existence of God. In the context of the hypothesis of an eternity of successive changes, all possibilities eventually occur. This includes the corruption of what is able to be corrupted because such a being has a potency for ceasing to exist. For if the world is eternal, generation and corruption have been taking place in it in an infinite duration of time. But if the world consisted exclusively in corruptible beings, that is, if everything possessed the potency to go out of existence, then in the course of an infinite⁴⁷² time this potency to non-existence in everything would occur leaving nothing in being. According to such a scenario, all beings would have at one

⁴⁷² It seems that the hypothesis of an eternal world is really a hypothesis of an infinite world; that is, *infinity* and *eternity* seem to be used interchangeably here. But according to the most famous medieval definition of eternity, that of Boethius, eternity *contains* infinity and is not one and the same with it, because infinity suggests motion and duration whereas eternity suggests rest and containment: "eternity is the whole, simultaneous and perfect possession of an infinite life." *The Consolation of Philosophy*, Bk. VI, (Harvard University Press: Loeb Classical Library, 1973). My translation.

time ceased to exist, and nothing would now exist, which means that nothing would ever become because from nothing comes only nothing. Against the fact, for something does in fact exist now. Therefore, there must exist some incorruptible or necessary being.

Renard suggests the following syllogism for the above argument:

If all existing beings were corruptible, in the supposition that this world is eternal, at a given moment everything would cease to be and nothing would exist today.

But the conclusion is false.

Therefore, the antecedent must be false. Consequently, we must posit a necessary being whose necessity does not depend upon another.⁴⁷³

Maurice Holloway, on the other hand, thinks that any difficulty we may have with this argument (many interpreters have pointed out difficulties) would go away if we read it in the following context.

It is impossible that there should be in existence only corruptible beings... not because they had all gone out of existence, but because they could never have existed in the first place. If we suppose a moment at which only corruptible things existed, at that very moment nothing would be existing. In other words, the supposition is quite impossible. For by supposition we would have beings which *qua* corruptible need a cause why they do not corrupt and at the same time do not have that cause, since by supposition only corruptible beings are existing. But since *de facto* corruptible beings do exist, it follows that here and now there must also be existing other beings that are incorruptible.⁴⁷⁴

In other words, to say that only corruptible beings exist is to say that what exists is only that which receives existence, that is, what exists is only that which does not have existence of itself and is therefore in potency to losing it (is able not to be). If everything is a receiver with respect to existence, if there is no giver of existence that is itself not a receiver, then nothing exists, because receivers without a giver cannot be said to have received.

The difficulty I have with Renard's understanding of the argument is that in St. Thomas' words, the situation is not that nothing would exist because sooner or later

⁴⁷³ Renard, *The Philosophy of God*, pp. 39-40.

⁴⁷⁴ Holloway, *op. cit.*, pp. 115-116.

all corruptible beings would *cease* to be, but rather nothing would exist because nothing would have *begun* to exist in a world of only corruptible beings.

But if this is true there would be nothing even now, because that which is not does not begin to be except through something that is. If, therefore, nothing was existing, it was impossible that something *began* to be, and in this way nothing would be, which is openly false.

That is, the reason why something exists now is that it began to exist, and it could only have begun to exist through something that already exists. Now the world cannot consist exclusively in a set of beings that began to exist, even going back infinitely, because their existence is not in and of themselves, that is, they are distinct from their existence and, therefore, must have received it, which we know because we see them going in and out of it. Thus even a world of receivers stretching back infinitely requires a giver. This giver is a necessary being whose necessity is that of a being that does not only *have* the act of existence, but *is* that act.⁴⁷⁵ This being is God.

In light of this, we can restate Renard's syllogism whose premises must be understood metaphysically (not merely logically):

If all existing beings were corruptible, (if they all received existence and as distinct from their existence are in potency to losing it), in the supposition that this world is eternal, then nothing began to exist and nothing would exist today.

But the conclusion is false.

Therefore, the antecedent must be false. Consequently, we must posit a necessary being whose necessity is such that he in no way depends upon another. This being is one that everyone understands to be God.

The Fourth Way

The argument of the Fourth Way presupposes a familiarity with a principle we have not yet explicitly considered. It is the principle of participation, also referred to as the principle of exemplarity. St. Thomas expresses this principle in different ways.

⁴⁷⁵ For various kinds of necessity of being that belong to creatures and not to God see *SCG*, II, 30.

Whenever something is found to be in several things by participation in various degrees, it must be derived by those in which it exists imperfectly from that one in which it exists most perfectly: because where there are positive degrees of a thing so that we ascribe it to this one more and to that one less, this is in reference to one thing to which they approach, one nearer than another: for if each one were of itself competent to have it, there would be no reason why one should have it more than another.⁴⁷⁶

For what is such by participation, and what is mobile, and what is imperfect always requires the pre-existence of something essentially such, immovable and perfect.⁴⁷⁷

The principle of participation may accordingly be formulated this way: "*Every limited perfection of the existent is a participation of the absolute which must exist.*"⁴⁷⁸

It is clear that this principle does not reveal the self-evident and necessary truth of the existence of an absolute being. It is a principle that is rooted entirely in participated beings. St. Thomas sees no need to try to establish the participation of things. It is enough to note that what things have as part of their essence they are not identically that, but *more or less* have it. This *degree* of possession implies a perfection, "something essentially such" which does not possess only a degree of that essence but possesses it perfectly, which is to say that it *is* essence because that is what a perfect possession means.

But it is important to note that the reason why a proper cause is called for in reference to participated beings is not the fact that they are participated beings but the fact that they *exist* as participants of some essence. To deny this is to get tangled up again in the insoluble difficulties of essentialism with respect to the problem of the one and the many. It is also to miss the point of what precisely is needed when a proof of the existence of a cause is needed.

Why *are* there participated beings? To answer the question by saying: there are participated beings because they are caused, and therefore there exists a cause of such things, is true enough. Nevertheless that answer does not fully reveal the existence of God unless and until it is seen

⁴⁷⁶ St. Thomas Aquinas, *De Pot.*, q. III, a. 5, ed. cit.

⁴⁷⁷ *ST*, I, q. 79, a. 4.

⁴⁷⁸ Renard, *The Philosophy of God.*, p. 42.

that nothing short of a cause of *existence* will account for the existence of that whose *existence* is caused.⁴⁷⁹

Let us therefore turn to yet another way of reaching the cause of existence. St. Thomas states his argument this way:

The fourth way is taken from the gradations which are found in things. For among things some are found more and less good, true, noble, and in the same way concerning others. But “more” or “less” is said of different things according as they approach in different ways to that which is the maximum; just as a thing is more hot the more it approaches that which is most hot. Therefore, there is something which is truest, best, noblest, and consequently being in the highest degree; for those things which are the truest are being in the highest degree, as is said in book II of *Metaphysics*. But *that is said to be the greatest in some genus which is the cause of all things which are in that genus*, just so *fire which is the most hot is the cause of all hot things*, as is said in the same book. Therefore, there is something which is the cause of being and goodness and of whatever other perfection is in all things, and this we call God.⁴⁸⁰

The argument may be divided into three propositions. 1) Among things some are found more and less good, true, noble, and so on. 2) The things which are more or less some perfection approach that perfection in its highest degree and are caused by it with respect to that perfection. 3) Therefore, there is something which is the cause of being and goodness and of all other perfections, which we call God.

As in the first three Ways, the first proposition reveals the data of the Way. In this case the data is transcendental perfections, or perfections that are possessed by different things in differing gradations. The data of the fourth way is not a perfection like *humanity*, *animality*, and others which are not transcendental. In other words, the data is not the perfections that belong only to some beings. The data is those perfections which are predicated of every being (of all that is but need not be), and which every being possess to a degree (it is not important for the present purpose to determine how much a being possess a transcendental perfections). The transcendental perfection with which the Fourth Way is particularly concerned is the first of them, namely *being*. This may be contested on the grounds that it is never explicitly stated by St. Thomas in the Fourth Way. But

⁴⁷⁹ Smith, *Natural Theology*, p. 83.

⁴⁸⁰ *ST*, I, q. 2, a. 3. See also *ST*, I, q. 44, a. 1; I, q. 65, a. 1; *SCG*, I, 13; I, 28; II, 15; *De Ver.*, q. XXII, a. 2.

the medieval readers of the *Summa* will have been well acquainted with the following point. That *we* are not so acquainted is irrelevant.

Now, as Avicenna says, that which the intellect first conceives as, in a way, the most evident, and to which it reduces all its concepts, is being. Consequently, all the other conceptions of the intellect are had by additions to being. But nothing can be added to being as though it were something not included in being ... for every reality is essentially a being.⁴⁸¹

Furthermore, in the argument itself, we see this statement, "Therefore, there is something which is truest, best, noblest, *and consequently being in the highest degree.*" It seems, then, that for St. Thomas all transcendental perfections culminate in the first transcendental—*being*. We shall therefore read the Fourth Way in light of it.

In fact the second proposition read in light of *being* rather than through any other transcendental leads most quickly to the conclusion; the others lead to it as well, but the road is a bit longer. The truth of the first part of the second proposition can be seen in light of the following point. The fact that there are grades of transcendental perfections in beings means that none of them, insofar as they possess only a grade of a perfection, possess it fully. Now it requires some metaphysical thinking in order to see exactly why some beings have more *being* than others; it requires some thinking about their natures (particularly, about their forms) which would show that, for example, a *man* has more being than a *cat*, and a *cat* has more being than a *tulip*, because the nature of the first is more truly being than the nature of the second, and so on. But even if, under the influence of Hindu thought, we want to insist that *man*, *cat*, and *tulip* all possess being to the same degree, we must still admit that none of them possesses it fully, that is, that none of them is identically being. Therefore, however much they possess the perfection of being, they still only approximate that perfection and do not exhaust it. For if any of them did exhaust it, the *cat* for example, to be would then mean to be *cat*. But there

⁴⁸¹ *De Ver.*, q. I, a. 1.

is in fact also *tulip* and *man*, therefore to be cannot mean to be identically neither *cat*, nor *tulip*, nor *man*.

If, then, none of them is identically *being*, they must be recipients of *being*, which is to say that their *being* is caused or owed to another, and that is what the second part of the second proposition states. All that remains is to inquire into this cause, which brings us to the conclusion.

In the technical language of scholastic philosophy the cause in question here is called the *exemplar cause*. It is not really a new cause, that is, not a cause added to the four fundamental causes, but an aspect of the efficient cause.⁴⁸² The function of an exemplar cause is to make its effect the kind that it is, which gives the effect its intelligible contour or likeness, and an exemplar does this in one of two ways: by its nature and/or by its knowledge.

The form of anything existing apart from the thing itself can be for one of two ends; either to be the type of that of which it is called the form, or to be the principle of the knowledge of that thing, inasmuch as the forms of things knowable are said to be in him who knows them. In either case we must suppose ideas, as is clear for the following reason:

In all things not generated by chance, the form must be the end of any generation whatsoever. But an agent does not act on account of the form, except insofar as the likeness of the form is in the agent, as may happen in two ways. For in some agents the form of thing to be made pre-exists according to its natural being, as in those that act by their nature; as a man generates a man, or fire generates fire. Whereas in other agents (the form of the thing to be made pre-exists)

⁴⁸² Aristotle says this about the exemplar cause: "Indeed, it is evident in some cases that that which generates another is like that which is generated, not numerically one and the same but one in species, as in natural generations; for a man begets a man, unless something is generated contrary to nature, as for example a mule by a horse ... So it is evident that there is no need at all of setting up a Form as a pattern (for we should have looked for such forms [or Forms] in physical substances above all, since these are substances in the highest degree), but that which begets is sufficient to produce and to be the cause of the form in the matter." *Metaphysics*, Book VII, ch. 8 1033b 30-1034a 5, (trans. by H.G. Apostle). See also Aristotle's *Physics*, Book II, ch. 3, 194b 30.

St. Thomas agrees with Aristotle when he says, "The form of a thing can mean that *according to which* a thing is informed. This is the exemplary form in imitation of which a thing is made. Hence, the idea of a thing is the form which a thing imitates... This, therefore, seems to constitute the character of an idea: It must be a form which something imitates because of the intention of an agent who antecedently determines the end himself." *De Ver.*, q. I, a. 3, ed. cit. The last sentence points out that St. Thomas' notion of exemplarity is not purely Platonic where the exemplar is the universal idea or Form which is not an efficient cause of an imperfect individual instance of that idea. For St. Thomas, the exemplar is the agent, say God, who creates or efficiently causes a creature by willing (intending) it to be. We shall say more about this presently.

according to intelligible being, as in those that act by intellect; and thus the likeness of a house pre-exists in the mind of the builder. And this may be called the idea of the house, since the builder intends to build his house like to the form conceived in his mind. As when the world was not made by chance, but by God acting by His intellect, there must exist in the divine mind a form to the likeness of which the world was made.⁴⁸³

We said above that the data of the Fourth Way is *gradated* transcendental perfections. This implies a point we must see. To say that a perfection is *gradated* is to say that there is that which is the standard or the exemplar according to which the gradated is gradated. Now this standard and the gradated are related to one another in a one-way relation, that is, the relation flows from the gradated to the exemplar but not the other way round. The reason is the difference between a *transcendental* perfection and the absolute and limitless perfection of the exemplar; the perfectly good is radically different from the transcendently good. Nothing is added to or taken away from the perfection of the exemplar by the fact that transcendental perfections approximate it or flow from it, whereas it makes all the difference to a transcendental perfection how much it approximates the exemplar—the difference of its very essence and existence.

Therefore, if the gradated exists, the exemplar must also exist. We have just seen that it *must*. The gradation we are speaking of is being. We find that in different things the possession of being varies, that is, none of them possesses it fully, or exhausts it (for if any of them did, there could not be many of them, and there are in fact many). The actual existence of exemplified being points to the actual existence of the perfect exemplar.

At first glance this seems like essentialism, and it does because we think of examples and the exemplar as essences. We thus tend to think of things which possess gradations of being as possessing gradations of a *what*. We even said that the data of the Fourth Way is those perfections which are predicated of every being,

⁴⁸³ ST, I, q. 15, a. 1. The Fourth Way is therefore implicitly based on efficient causality because from it flows the existence of transcendental perfections that we find in contingent existents.

and which every being possesses to the degree that it does possess it. Now it seems to us much easier to predicate essences than being, and when we do predicate being to a thing we are in fact pointing out a conceptual relation of being to that which possesses being, and this is true of everything, including God. This necessary conceptual relation is true even of things that do not yet exist but can exist, like a future child: we know that whatever else she will be, she will certainly be a being. But we need not, as we saw in the second section of chapter five, remain at the level of conceptual relation of being (existence). That point may be summarised this way:

Once anything is known to exist [**that is, once our future child is no longer only conceived of but known as an existent**], then the conceptual relation of being to its possessor stiffens into an assertion of that relation of being to the given case, stiffens into the judgment, *this thing is a being or exists*. Thus we move from a transcendental concept of being, which involves its inferiors indeterminately, to a judgment which involves an inferior determinately. Here we have not a concept of the relation of being to an indeterminate inferior, but that relation given in fact and our judgment upon that fact, *this thing exists*.⁴⁸⁴

Our knowledge, therefore, of beings whose existence is a transcendental perfection, or gradated, is not a knowledge of a mere concept but of an actual existent existing as gradated with respect to its act of existing. We therefore know that there are grades of being because we know a gradated being.

But a gradated being which we know, and which we know as gradated cannot exist unless there exists a being which is not gradated. We must here resist the temptation to sink into mere conceptualism, for if we do, we shall not have the knowledge of the existence of the ungradated being, or the exemplar of being. It is certainly true that our conception of a gradated being is closely tied up with an indeterminate conception of the ungradated being. But to invoke this fact is not to have a demonstration of God's existence. Many contemporary *cosmological arguments* formulated within the context of modern philosophical traditions amount to no more than very reserved claims to a certainty of God's existence for the very

⁴⁸⁴ Smith, *Natural Theology*, p. 133.

reason that they never make contact with anything real but remain inside a concept. But the point is not how our concepts are related; the point is not the concept of being. We shall not understand the Fourth Way unless we see that we cannot make a judgment that there exists a gradated being unless we also make the judgment that there exists the being on whose existence the existence of the gradated being depends. In the Third Way we saw that contingent beings are receivers in a special sense insofar as they receive their being which they must receive because they are not identically their being. Here we note that contingent beings not only receive their being, but receive a gradated share of it and of every other transcendental perfection. Now because there exist beings which share something (to a greater or lesser degree), there must also exist that which they share.⁴⁸⁵ But that which they share cannot itself share or receive and at the same time be that which all other beings share. This is most clearly and most immediately evident with the first transcendental—being. Therefore, there exists the ungraded possessor of being, which, as ungraded, is being itself and outside all categories of being.⁴⁸⁶ This we may certainly call God.

⁴⁸⁵ Note how different this point is from the following: Because we possess the concept of beings which share something (to a greater or lesser degree), we also possess the concept of that which they share. This is certainly a true point, but it is not the point of the Fourth Way.

⁴⁸⁶ One possible objection to this is that we have all along been supposing God, and so did not really prove his existence. If the gradated is dependent upon the ungraded in order to be intelligible, then we must first grasp the ungraded before we can see that the gradated is gradated. This objection will be raised only by them that deny that the principles of intellect are principles of being as well as logic.

Holloway suggest we reply this way: "If one means that degrees of perfection are not intelligible to us unless we first know the supreme degree, this must be denied. But if one means that these degrees of perfection are not intelligible in themselves unless some supreme degree exists, the statement is true. It is a fact that we have knowledge of these degrees of perfection; hence, they are intelligible to us. And the intellect also understands that in themselves these degrees would not be intelligible unless there existed some supreme degree. Hence, for our intellect, the knowledge of this supreme degree constitutes a necessary *term*. But in itself this supreme degree is the first cause of the intelligibility of the other degrees and, indeed, of the very being of the graded perfections." Holloway, *op. cit.*, pp. 129-130.

This argument will appear to us Platonic or essentialist only if we fail to see that the idea of being is not being; we must see that being is not only conceptually related to an existent, but “is determinately related to an act of existing both in itself and in our predicative knowledge of it.”⁴⁸⁷ To see this we do not need argument but open and uninhibited contact with actual existents. Perhaps the best place to begin making contact with the act of existence of actual existents is our very selves, because we are most reluctant to think of ourselves and to know ourselves merely conceptually. This way we shall avoid attempting an essentialist or ontological argument for the existence of anything, and place ourselves in a far better position to understand that “there is no analysis of the concept of God in the Fourth Way; there is only an affirmation of the existence of the perfect exemplar from the known fact of the existence of the exemplar.”⁴⁸⁸

The Fifth Way

The last Way is concerned with ends, or goals of natural agents as agents. The causality that is involved here is final causality.⁴⁸⁹ The argument of the Fifth Way presupposes an understanding of the principles of causality and finality which we discussed in chapter six. It consists in three propositions that need not be restated but only thoroughly unpacked:

⁴⁸⁷ Smith, *Natural Theology*, p. 134.

⁴⁸⁸ Renard, *The Philosophy of God*, p. 45.

⁴⁸⁹ But final causality is not separate from efficient causality. “The efficient cause is the cause of the final cause inasmuch as it makes the final cause be, because by causing motion the efficient cause brings about the final cause. But the final cause is the cause of the efficient cause, not in the sense that it makes it be, but inasmuch it is the reason for the causality of the efficient cause. For an efficient cause is a cause inasmuch as it acts, and it acts only because of the final cause. Hence the efficient cause derives its causality from the final cause.” St. Thomas, *In V Metaph.*, lect. 2, n. 775.

“The end is a cause only for as much as it moves the efficient cause to act, since it comes first not in existence, but in the intention. Consequently, there is no action where there is no final cause.” *De Pot.*, q. V, a. 1.

The fifth way is taken from the direction [or governance, literally *steering*] of things. For we see that some things that lack intelligence, namely natural bodies, operate on account of an end, and this is apparent from the fact that they always or frequently operate in the same way and they obtain that which is best, therefore it is clear that they arrive at an end not by chance but by intention. But those things that do not have intelligence do not tend toward an end unless directed by another with knowledge and intelligence, like an arrow by an archer. Therefore, there is an intelligent being by which all natural things are ordered to their end, and this we call God.⁴⁹⁰

Again, the first proposition reveals the data from which we shall conclude to God's existence. The first thing to note about it is that in saying that we see some bodies acting for an end we are not saying that some bodies do not act for an end. The point is that all bodies always *tend* to act for an end whether we see them acting for an end or not. For example, all stones always tend to fall; they do not always fall. The point is that they tend to act along definite lines, toward some definite operation, like falling, and this definite operation is the goal or end of their tendency. Furthermore, they have this tendency before they actually do act; they possess it in virtue of their nature which is a principle of their action, and consequently is necessarily ordered to its end.

That this is so we have already argued in the second section of chapter nine when we discussed active potency, and the two sub-principles of the principle of causality: the principle of proper causality—every agent produces its like, and the principle of finality—every agent acts on account of an end. We can now transpose the discussion to the question of acting for an end.

Every action, like every proper cause, possesses both essential and existential determinants. Thus every action is a definite action, and never indefinite, that is, it is a specific kind of action different from all other kinds of actions: a man philosophises, a gopher digs, a humming bird hums. But a an agent's action will only be a definite action (which is to say that it will only be an action) if the agent is by its nature predisposed to act in one way rather than another. In order that an action

⁴⁹⁰ See also *ST*, I, q. 18, a. 3; I, q. 44, a. 4; *SCG* I, 13; II, 23-24, III, 1-2; *De Ver.*, q. V, a. 1-2; *De Pot.*, q. III, a. 15; *In Phys.*, II, lect. 4, 7, 8; *In Metaph.*, XII, lect. 9.

be a humming action which a bird does, it must be that the bird, before its action, will hum rather than crow because it is a humming bird rather than a crow that is acting. This reveals the essential determinant of actions.

The existential determinant, on the other hand, ensures that an agent does in fact act (in a definite or specific way) rather than not act. This reveals that in addition to the preordination of the nature of an agent, there is in it an inclination or a bent to act rather not to act in a definite way, which is an altogether different preordination.

Now the essential and existential determinants within an agent must, before it acts, be located in its knowledge and appetite or tendency. That it must be so located needs explaining. In saying that things act for an end, we are saying that they act in a definite way; the end of activity is the specific nature of the activity. Before an agent acts it is inclined toward the end of its act, which is an act along certain lines. But even though this is true (to deny this is to deny that there is an activity, because an activity without a goal is an activity of no kind, and therefore no activity at all), it is also true that before an action takes place there is no actual goal of action, no actual definite lines of action. In the same way, although it is true that an agent will not in fact act unless it is so inclined before it acts, an inclination is not an act preceding the inclined act; there is no act before an act. It seems, then, that before an action does in fact take place, there is neither an actual essential nor an actual existential determinant. We shall not see the point of the first proposition, nor the point of the Fifth Way, if we deny the truth of both these seemingly contradictory aspects of an action. The problem lies in preserving the first aspect which we cannot deny if we affirm at the same time that there is an action. The only way to preserve the reality of an end of action is to place it in knowledge and appetite or tendency of the agent. The need to do this becomes clear the moment we note that to be disposed toward an end demands knowledge of the end; a thing

cannot be disposed to something unknown. (We are not hereby saying that it must be known by the agent. It may or may not be known by the agent, but it must be known.)

In order to do this we must first distinguish between different modes of being or existing. Only two modes are possible: actual existence and cognitive or intentional existence (existence in knowledge).⁴⁹¹ An actual existent exists by reason of *is* or act of existing, and an intentional existent exists by reason of *is known*;⁴⁹² more technically, the act of physical being is *esse*, the act of intentional being is *esse intentionale*.

We must not, however, think of physical and intentional being as two subjects of the act of existing, as two existents. Recall our discussion of the knowledge of the act of existing in chapter seven. There we philosophically unpacked *that which is*. If we now consider *that which is* or *is known*, we shall see the proper place of intentional being. The subject of existence is *that which*. Existence affects *that which* in two ways: it affects the physical subject of *that which* exists or can exist by the physical being (*esse*), and the intentional subject of *that which* is known to exist or known to be able to exist by intentional being (*esse*).

Our difficulty in seeing the point of this is our tendency toward essentialism. If we conceive of being as essence, we shall understand St. Thomas' talk of intentional

⁴⁹¹ Scholastic philosophers distinguished between three different senses of *intention*: ethical, logical, and metaphysical. In metaphysics *intention* means "the direction or application or causal power to an effect; the influence of the principal cause on the instrument. This may be the principle meaning of intention as it best shows the notion of directing or tending on the part of a being or power." *Dictionary of Scholastic Philosophy*, p. 63.

⁴⁹² St. Thomas distinguishes between two senses of intention in *De Ver*. "When the end is called prior in intention, intention is taken as the act of the mind which is to intend. But when we compare the intention of good [as in the Fifth Way] with that of the true, intention is taken as the essential character which is signified by a definition." q. XXI, a. 3, ad 5.

For a discussion of the meaning and application of *cognitional* or *intentional being*, as well as of its historical development, and modern objections to it, see Joseph Owens, *An Elementary Christian Metaphysics*, pp. 30-37.

being as an essence and, therefore, as a subject of being; we shall try to make of it a subject of existence separate from the *that which*. For St. Thomas to be is *not* to be known, and there is, therefore, a distinction between physical and intentional being. For him to be known is a separate act of a *that which* from its act of physical *esse*; both are acts of the same subject of existence, but in different ways. Furthermore, whatever is actual and contingent was at one time potential. But what was its mode of existing while potential? The answer is intentional mode, and it is tied up with the nature of the human intellect.

Consider that the intellect, having been informed by the species of the thing, by an act of understanding forms within itself a certain intention of the thing understood, that is to say, its notion, which the definition signifies. This is a necessary point, because the intellect understands a present and an absent thing indifferently [hence our tendency toward essentialism]. In this the imagination agrees with the intellect. But the intellect has this characteristic in addition, namely, that it understands a thing as separated from material conditions, without which a thing does not exist in reality [but does exist intentionally].⁴⁹³

Thus, because to be is not identically to be known, there are two realms: realm of actual existing things and the realm of knowledge. Everything contingent both is (has physical *esse*) and is *known* (has intentional *esse*), and these are not identical. St. Thomas, as a thorough existentialist, will not deny an act of existing to things in the realm of knowledge where they are not actual but potential. The potential has its own act; if it did not, it could not be known because it could not be, it would be nothing. Therefore, it must have some way of being, and that way is intentional. Every something (a thing of intelligible species which is a subject of existence) is also known. Therefore, that which is physically actual, is also intentionally actual or else it could not be known, for it is not known in virtue of being physical, whereby it is only what it is. Smith makes the point this way:

Once the fact that we know things is admitted, it then becomes apparent why we do. We know things because the way they have of existing is by an act of being, an *esse intentionale*, by which what is common to both knowledge and to things [the known] ... is known to be so common [to separate knowledge from the known things is to destroy knowledge as such, and to posit in its

⁴⁹³ SCG, I, 53, 3.

place recollection or something else]. In short, grant that there is knowledge and you must grant that the act of knowing and the act of being known must be one and the same act: the sensible in its act of being sensed *is* sensation, and the intelligible in its act of being understood *is* the very act of understanding ... The whole function of intentional being is to make the knower the things he knows without prejudice either to the knower's physical being or to the physical being of the known.⁴⁹⁴

We are now in a better position to understand the first proposition of the Fifth Way which reveals its data. The end of every action (which is the specific nature of an action) must reside in an agent's knowledge if there is to be an action at all, because a determination toward an end demands knowledge and to be an agent is to be determined toward an end. As we just saw, there are only two modes of being: actual and intentional. What is the mode of the end of an action of an agent not acting? The answer: intentional mode. Just as the act of knowing and the act of being known are one by virtue of intentional being, so an agent is one with (or like) the end of its nonexistent operation by virtue of the end's intentional being; an agent is one with the end in its knowledge, for it is there that the end has its being in absence of its actual being. To separate an agent from its knowledge of the end of its nonexistent action is to destroy his agency and to make him entirely passive, or a non-agent.

The end must also reside or exist in an agent's appetite or tendency precisely because an agent is an agent, that is, it is inclined to act, inclined to being a final cause. Now in absence of an actual final cause there still must be an intentional final cause (because we have an agent, although an inoperative one), and there is: it exists intentionally in the agent's appetite or tendency.

⁴⁹⁴ Smith, *Natural Theology*., pp. 196-197. Many modern and contemporary philosophers will, of course, disagree. But they will do so because for them to know does not mean to know an actual thing that has its own act of existing. Note that many contemporary philosophers are more comfortable with using an expression like "justified or supported belief" than they are with *knowledge*. What is it they are afraid of? Epistemology is most certainly dependent on metaphysics (philosophy of being). If our metaphysics is devoid of be-ing, it will be reduced to a mere shifting of concepts that are not seen as directly tied up with actual existents. Metaphysical knowledge will in that case not amount to a knowledge of actually existing things, but will consist merely in solutions to puzzles arising from "philosophizing" about mere concepts.

We must conclude, then, that knowledge is at the root of every action because an action, whether actual or potential, must have some way of existing, and as an action it is determined toward an end, which demands knowledge. Now, even though the activity of some agents does not arise from their own knowledge (because they do not have any), nevertheless it must come from knowledge or else there could be no intelligible connection between the agent and its specific operation (that is, it would not be a specific operation at all, but an operation of no kind; it would be nothing). The data of the Fifth Way is the role of knowledge in every action; the role of that which makes the action what it is and knowable (consisting in both the essential and existential determinants). If this were not the data, the only alternative would be the data of the Second Way, but the Theologian is not repeating himself but is offering five different ways.

We must now consider different kinds of agents, some of which do not possess knowledge. In his argument St. Thomas mentions only agents that do not have knowledge. But in *ST*, I, q. 18, a. 1-3 we find a more detailed discussion of all natural things. The discussion will shed more light on the Fifth Way. A brief summary of it may be given.

First, instrumental agents, insofar as they are instrumental, have no knowledge at all. Their activity is guided by the knowledge of principal agents (efficient causes). Secondly, different kinds of agents are differently related to their actions. Their different natures are responsible for the kind of activity they perform, for their tendency to perform it, and for actually performing it rather than not to. Sometimes natural activity of natural agents are hindered by unnatural occurrences, but that does not affect the argument because we are dealing only with natural operations. The first group of agents is the non-living, and these are the cause of neither their performance of operations nor the execution of their performance. A rock, for example, does not fall by its own causality (although it does perform the operation

of falling). The next group of agents is the living non-sentient. These cause only the execution of their operations but not the kind of operation they perform. Plants, for example, grow by the causality of their growth. Brute animals or living sentient agents cause both the execution and to some degree the kind of their operations. They are not, for example, the cause of some inactivity like not eating; when they are not eating but are hungry that is never because they are fasting or on a hunger strike. Finally, rational agents cause both the execution and the kind of their operations to the degree that they act in a specific way or not act at all because their knowledge distinguishes between the goods of both activity and inactivity. With this we have sufficiently explained the first proposition and prepared the ground for the second proposition.

The force of the second proposition is clearer now that we have so extensively unpacked the first one, that is, now that we have seen that activity resides partly in knowledge of the agent (which it must if there is to be a union between the nature of the agent and *its* yet only potential operation), and that not all agents possess knowledge. The reason why in the argument of the Fifth Way the Theologian mentions only the agents that do not possess knowledge is that *all* agents are to some degree inclined to their action non-cognitively. This is the first point to note about the second proposition.

Currently in the West there is much talk about cosmic consciousness present in all things; we can, we are told, be “in tune” with everything and everything can be “in tune” with us via the same “energy” that is in all of us. According to this doctrine everything in some way “thinks” or is cognitive. For the purposes of the Fifth Way it is not necessary to argue that rocks cannot be in any way cognitive or that of all things on earth only human beings are strictly speaking cognitive. It is enough to point out that no agent is identically its act of knowing (the mode of an agent’s act of knowing is irrelevant), and to that degree it is inclined to its action non-

cognitively. Now if no agent is identified with its acts of knowing, and there are in fact here and now acts of knowing, there must be a first act of knowing.

The precise point of the Fifth Way, which is the second point to note about the second proposition, will be grasped when we see that the cause of every action is the first act of knowing. How can we see that? First, we must recall the argument of the Second Way. There we proved the existence of an uncaused cause of agents existing as causing change in another. Therefore, any action with which the Fifth Way is concerned is an action of a cause whose causality is caused by the uncaused cause. Now in the Fifth Way we see that the uncaused cause's act of causing is a *cognitive* act, because the causal act of every agent that is not identically its own agency (and to that extent is inclined to its action non-cognitively) is inseparable from knowledge (whether its own knowledge or the knowledge of another). Therefore, the causing of the uncaused cause must be uncaused causal knowing.

This point is more easily seen when dealing with agents that do not possess knowledge because their action cannot be traced to their knowledge, and the non-cognitive character of their inclination to action is more evident. But there must be knowledge which connects the agent with the specific character of its action prior to the actual existence of that action. Therefore, this knowledge must be traced to the uncaused causal act of knowing which causes the non-cognitive agent *to exist* as determined by knowledge, which is not their own, toward the end of its action. For this reason the Theologian deals with such agents in his argument. But the point applies also in the case of the action of an agent that does possess knowledge and whose action can be traced to its knowledge. Even though cognitive agents possess the knowledge wherein resides the intentional being of the ends of their actions, they are not identically that knowledge, that is, their existence as knowing agents is not due to their essences but is caused. If they did exist because they are a particular essence of a knowing agent, to exist would mean to be that essence. But, clearly,

there are other essences, therefore, the cause of a knowing agent as a knowing agent lies outside of it. Such a cause is itself either caused or not. If it is, it requires a cause. We have, therefore, again the case of irrelevant infinite regress, and again the uncaused cause. An uncaused cause of what? Of the same as in the case of entirely non-cognitive agents, with one difference: the uncaused cause of the cognitive agent *existing* as determined by knowledge that is its own (and this is the difference) toward the end of its action.

The concluding proposition properly concludes to the existence of God precisely because we have reached the act of the one whose uncaused causal *knowing* is identically the knower (he is also identically the cause, but we already know that from the Second Way). And he is identically the knower because he is the *first* knowledge-cause of agents existing as determined toward an end by the knowledge that may or may not be theirs. As the *first* his knowledge of the end is the knowledge of himself because he *is* his own end (if he were not, he would not be the *first*). Therefore, we can say for the fifth time, God does exist.

Objections to this interpretation of the Fifth Way will, of course, be many. All of them, again, will be in some way disconnected from the autonomy and supremacy of the act of existing in a creature, and, therefore will not see the autonomy and supremacy of the *first* act of existing.⁴⁹⁵ Until the discussion about the Five Ways is centered on God's actual existence, and the real possibility of our knowledge of that existence on the basis of the act of existence of creatures, the issue between the disputants will not be joined. But neither will it then be understood why St. Thomas says that God is the proper cause of the act of being.

Thus, for example, for William Paley the issue at the core of a proof for God's existence is not the existence of the one who is his own end, but the one responsible

⁴⁹⁵ See *ST*, I, q. 3, a. 4.

for the design of the world. Paley gives us a being, by way of only a probable argument, that may or may not be God, that is, may or may not be identically its own causal activity because it may or may not be its own act of being (it may owe these acts to another), which can only be made known by way of a metaphysical demonstration in the context of *being as being*. St. Thomas, on the other hand, argues as a metaphysician of *being as being*, and is for that reason able to reach with his mind all the way to the God whose name is I AM.

Concluding Note

Our interpretation of the Five Ways has shown them to be an unfolding of a single thing, *Ipsium Esse*, through varying degrees of the actuality of existent contingent beings. They are five different attempts to reach *Being Itself*, beginning with that which is most immediate to the human intellect, namely a being in motion, and ending with that which is most removed from it, namely the end of beings and of their actions. The Five Ways are a gradually increasing plunge into the metaphysical insight of the mystery of being which for St. Thomas is primarily the mystery of the act of existing. To miss this point is to open oneself to a disjointed reading of what the Theologian has put into a single article of a three-part question of his *magnum opus*; it is to open oneself to seeing, through the eyes of modern philosophical tradition, the First and the Second Ways, for example, as a *cosmological* kind of argument and the Fifth as *teleological*. But St. Thomas knew of only two ways of trying to prove God's existence: the way of essentialism and the way of existentialism. He saw these as the only possible ways because they are the only ways in which metaphysical activity, or the *philosophical* study of being, can be conducted. But modern *cosmological* arguments are formulated apart from the context of a philosophy of being; the question of God's existence is largely approached in modern philosophy as an isolated *problem* or a logical puzzle to be

solved rather than the *mystery* of being at its deepest. Therefore, St. Thomas' Five Ways are one kind of argument: the argument of a philosopher of existence. They cannot be profitably read nor correctly interpreted, if we try to make them fit into any modern classification of a proof for God's existence. Many of our contemporaries do not see the Five Ways as leading to *Ipsum Esse Subsistens* because they are in one way or another held by essentialism.

It is because of this essentialism that [they] place the first constitutive note of the essence of God in various other perfections [other than existence] such as immutability, aseity, infinity, eternity, and the like. These philosophers, having failed to understand that existence is the supreme perfection, cannot realise that any perfection which we attribute to God is divine because identical with the Subsisting "To Be."⁴⁹⁶

The philosophical difficulties of essentialism and St. Thomas' alternative of pure existentialism based largely on Aristotle's substantialism will become clear to us only after engaging, as we have tried to do, in the philosophy of being as being in the way that St. Thomas does. I have tried to make sufficiently clear the need to do this if we wish to understand why St. Thomas thinks he has demonstrated God's *existence*. I think I have shown that a philosophical claim that St. Thomas has not demonstrated God's *existence* must be an objection to the philosophy of being as being—of *that which is as existing*. But modern and contemporary criticisms of the Five Ways, which treat them (or at least some of them) as instances of the *cosmological* argument, fail to see the role and the importance the act of existing has in St. Thomas' philosophizing about the highest cause. This failure makes such criticisms irrelevant to a discussion prompted by a desire to understand why St. Thomas thinks he has successfully demonstrated that God exists.

⁴⁹⁶ Renard, *The Philosophy of God.*, pp. 49-50. See Aristotle's *Physics*, Bk. II, 3, 194b 23-24; *Metaphysics*, Bk. I, 3, 983a 30; Bk. V, 2, 1013a 25.

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