

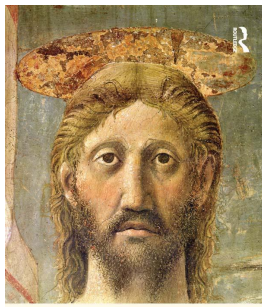
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THOMAS AQUINAS

John F. Wippel

Thomas Aquinas was born in 1224/25 in his family's castle at Roccasecca, Italy. After receiving elementary schooling at the nearby Benedictine abbey of Monte Cassino, in 1239 he began to study liberal arts and philosophy at the newly founded *studium generale* at Naples. While a student there, he joined the Dominican Order in 1244, much to the chagrin of his family who wanted him to become a Benedictine. At the request of his mother, he was forcibly taken from the Dominicans by soldiers and detained at the family castle for a year or more; but all efforts on the part of his family to persuade him not to become a Dominican failed. In 1245 his family permitted him to rejoin the Dominicans, who promptly sent him to Paris for further studies. There he came into contact with Albert the Great, and after some years in Paris, journeyed to Cologne with Albert, under whom he studied from 1248 until 1252. From 1252 until 1256 he studied theology at the University of Paris and fulfilled the requirements for becoming a *magister* in theology, including lecturing on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard, which resulted in his Commentary on the *Sentences*. At this time he also published his first two philosophical opuscula: *De ente et essentia* (On being and essence) and *De principiis naturae* (On the principles of nature). In 1256 he delivered his inaugural lecture as *magister*, and during 1256–9 served as Master in Theology at the University of Paris and produced some of his major writings including, among others, his Disputed Questions *De veritate* (On truth) and five public Quodlibetal Disputations. From 1259 until late 1268 Aquinas served as lecturer or as Regent Master in different Dominican houses of study in Italy and continued to write at a prodigious pace, producing his *Summa contra Gentiles* (begun in Paris and completed in Italy), the First Part of his *Summa theologiae* and many other writings too numerous to mention here. In late 1268 he returned to the University of Paris to resume his duties there as Regent Master in Theology. His writings during this period included many of his twelve commentaries on Aristotle, seven more Quodlibetal Disputations, other major Disputed Questions, subsequent parts of the *Summa theologiae*, and many other works (Torrell 2005: 330–59). In 1272

he was recalled to Italy to set up a Dominican *studium generale* in Naples, and continued to publish until December 1273, when he ceased writing. On his way to take part in a general Council of the Church at Lyons early in 1274, he became seriously ill and died on 7 March. Apart from four or five philosophical opuscula, his commentary on the *Book of Causes* and twelve commentaries on Aristotle, most of his writings are theological rather than philosophical in literary genre; but many of these are also important sources for his philosophical thought (Wippel 2000: xvi–xxii).

Viewed as a distinct discipline within its own right, the philosophy of religion was unknown in the time of Aquinas. While this discipline may be understood as the philosophical study of religious phenomena, many contemporary philosophers of religion focus heavily on examining and evaluating philosophical truth-claims that are pertinent to religion and religious belief. Much within the writings of Aquinas is relevant to such an effort. For Aquinas himself two human disciplines are dedicated to the study of God and his relationship to human beings. One is a theology based on revelation in which the motive for accepting something as true is religious belief in the authority of God revealing. The other is included within metaphysics and hence is strictly philosophical. The present chapter will concentrate on what, in Aquinas' eyes, metaphysics can contribute to truth-claims pertinent to religion and religious belief.

In accord with Aquinas' theory of knowledge, we discover the subject of metaphysics – being as being – by beginning with our experience of individual objects at the level of sense-perception. By freeing our understanding of being from restriction to any given kind of being through an intellectual process, a negative judgement known as separation, we can discover being as being and investigate whatever falls under this notion (*Super Boetium de Trinitate* [On Boethius' 'On the Trinity'] q. 5, a. 3; Wippel 2000: 35–62). As one of its tasks, indeed as its end or goal, metaphysics should ultimately arrive at knowledge of the cause of its subject, that is, at knowledge of God or divine being.

For Aquinas, like most of his thirteenth- and fourteenth-century contemporaries, divine being itself is not the subject of metaphysics (*Super Boetium De Trinitate* q. 5, a. 4). But unlike almost all of his contemporaries, Aquinas holds that divine being or God is not included under being as being: the subject of metaphysics (Zimmermann 1998: 210–33; Wippel 2000: 17–18). This means that purely philosophical knowledge of God can only be indirect, based on a process of reasoning from effects that are readily known to us, to knowledge of him as the cause of such effects. While this position effectively protects Aquinas from falling into what is currently referred to as 'ontotheology', at the same time it has important implications for his views about the kind of philosophical knowledge human beings can have about God's nature or essence, or about God as he is in himself.

Consequently, the following discussion will examine Aquinas' views concerning: (i) philosophical evidence for the existence of God; (ii) the possibility of quidditative knowledge of God, that is, knowledge of God's essence; (iii) analogical predication

of the divine names; (iv) God's goodness; (v) God's knowledge; (vi) God's will; and (vii) God's freedom to create.

PHILOSOPHICAL EVIDENCE FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

Regarding human knowledge of God, Aquinas distinguishes: (i) truths about God that unaided (philosophical) reason can discover, for instance, God's existence, God's unity (uniqueness), and other truths of this kind concerning God or his creation that, Aquinas says, are proved in philosophy and presupposed for faith, and which he refers to as preambles of faith (*Super Boetium De Trinitate* q. 2, a. 3); (ii) truths about God that are not accessible to philosophical discovery and proof but can be known only through revelation (e.g. the Trinity or the Incarnation); (iii) truths that, while open in principle to philosophical discovery, are also contained in revelation. For Aquinas knowledge that God exists is an illustration of the first type of truth concerning God, that is, a preamble of faith, but it also falls under the third type. He argues that even though this truth can be, and in fact has been, demonstrated philosophically, it was most fitting for God also to reveal it to human beings. Otherwise, the vast majority would never in fact arrive at knowledge of it; those who did succeed in this effort would do so only after a long period of time had elapsed; and even then, some error might be intermingled with the truth they had discovered (*Summa contra Gentiles* [hereafter SCG] I.3–4).

As regards philosophical argumentation for the existence of God, Aquinas maintains throughout his career that the fact that God exists is not self-evident (*per se notum*) to human beings. This follows from his theory of knowledge according to which all of our knowledge, even of immaterial beings, must be derived from our perception of sensible things. It is in his discussions of the more general claim that God's existence is self-evident to human beings that Aquinas also considers on several different occasions Anselm's argumentation as presented both in *Proslogion* c. 2 and in *Proslogion* c. 3.¹

In refuting various arguments in support of the claim that God's existence is self-evident, Aquinas makes an important distinction between propositions that are self-evident in themselves but not to us, and those that are self-evident in

1. Some recent critics of his treatment of Anselm's argumentation have not fully appreciated this, for instance, Hartshorne (1965: 154–64). In his earliest consideration of this in 1252 in his Commentary on *I Sentences* d. 3, q. 1, a. 2 (Aquinas 1929: vol. 1, 93–4), Aquinas presents the version from *Proslogion* 2 as a fourth argument in support of the claim that God's existence is self-evident. In *De veritate* q. 10, a. 12 (c.1257) he again presents reasoning based on *Proslogion* c. 3 as a version of argumentation in support of the same claim. In SCG I.10 (c.1259) he presents the argumentation found in *Proslogion* c. 2 and then in c. 3 as two versions of arguments intended to prove that God's existence is self-evident. But in *Summa theologiae* (hereafter ST) I.2.3 (1266) Aquinas considers only the version found in *Proslogion* c. 2.

themselves and to us. As for the proposition ‘God exists’, Aquinas holds that it is self-evident in itself because God’s essence is identical with his act of existing (*esse*). Hence anyone who could understand the essence of God would then also understand that he exists. But in this life human beings cannot understand God’s essence or quiddity. Therefore the proposition ‘God exists’ is not self-evident to us (*De veritate* q. 10, a. 12; *SCG* I.10; *ST* I.2.1). Human beings can only reason to knowledge that God exists by beginning with effects that are accessible to human cognition, and by reasoning from knowledge of them to knowledge of him as their uncaused cause (Wippel 2000: 388–99).

Not surprisingly, therefore, both in his earlier presentation of arguments for God’s existence and in his better known ‘five ways’ from *ST* I.2.3, Aquinas always proceeds from some kind of effect that is accessible to human beings to a knowledge of God as their cause (for earlier arguments see Van Steenberghen [1980: chs 1–7]; Wippel [2000: 400–41]). Among the earlier arguments, only that offered in Aquinas’ *De ente et essentia* (hereafter *De ente*) will be presented here, followed by the ‘five ways’ themselves.

In his *De ente* c. 4 (Leon. ed., 43.375–7), Aquinas proposes to examine how essence is realized in separate substances, that is, in the soul, in intelligences (separate substances other than God) and in the first cause. Against those who would attribute some kind of matter–form composition to intelligences and to the human soul, Aquinas argues that their nature as intelligences precludes their being composed of matter and form. But given this position, he must explain how such beings can be distinguished from the perfect simplicity of God. In his effort to show that such beings must still be composed of act and potency, he introduces argumentation in support of a distinction and composition in them of essence and *esse* (act of existing). It is in the course of developing a three-stage argument to make this point that he presents a metaphysical argument for the existence of God. In the first stage of the general argument, he reasons that whatever is not included within the intelligible content of an essence or quiddity comes to it from without and enters into composition with it. But every essence or quiddity can be understood without anything being understood about its actually existing. Thus one can understand what a human being is or what a phoenix is and not know whether it exists in reality. Therefore, he concludes this first stage of the argument by stating that in any such being *esse* is distinct from (literally, ‘other than’) essence or quiddity.

Perhaps because he realizes that this argument might be criticized for moving illegitimately from the order of thought to the order of reality, he immediately adds an all-important second stage: “Unless perhaps there is some thing whose quiddity is its very act of existing” (*ibid.*). But, he continues, such a thing can only be one and first. Here he does not assume that such a being exists, but argues that if such a being does exist, it can only be one. To prove this point he distinguishes three ways in which something might be multiplied: (i) by the addition of some difference, as a generic nature is multiplied in species; (ii) by the reception

of a given form in different instances of matter, as a specific nature is multiplied in different individuals; (iii) by the fact that in one case it exists in absolute and unreceived fashion in itself, and in all other cases it is received in some subject. But if there is something that is pure and subsisting *esse* (act of existing), it cannot be multiplied in either the first way (for then it would be *esse* plus some differentiating form) or in the second way (for then it would not be pure subsisting *esse*, but *esse* plus matter). He concludes stage two by accepting the third way and reasons that, by process of elimination, there could at most be one instance of subsisting *esse*. Hence, by contrast, in every other thing there must be a distinction between the nature or quiddity or form (i.e. the essence) of that thing and its act of existing.

In stage three Aquinas attempts to prove that the one possible exception – self-subsisting *esse* – does actually exist. Whatever pertains to something either is caused by the principles of that thing's nature (as the ability to laugh follows from the essence of a human being), or comes to it from some extrinsic principle. But *esse* (the act of existing) cannot be caused efficiently by the form or quiddity of a thing, for such a thing would then also be the efficient cause of its own existence, which is impossible. Therefore, everything whose *esse* (act of existing) is other than its nature (or essence) must receive its *esse* from something else. In other words, it must be efficiently caused. And because that which exists only by reason of something else must ultimately be traced back to something that exists of itself as to its first cause, some thing must exist that is the cause of existing for all other things by reason of the fact that it is pure *esse* in and of itself. Otherwise one would regress to infinity in caused causes of *esse*. The argument concludes by noting that whatever receives something from something else is in potency with respect to what it receives and, therefore, that even a pure form or intelligence is in potency to the *esse* that it receives from God, its uncaused cause. Hence in any such being there is a composition of *esse* and of essence as of act and potency.²

In this text there is a certain ambiguity in interpreting the Latin term *esse* because at times Aquinas uses it simply to refer to the actual existence of a thing, that is, to the fact that it exists. At other times he uses it to refer to an intrinsic principle of actuality present in every distinct entity by reason of which that thing exists, and which is the ultimate intrinsic source of its perfection, actuality and actual existence. In stage one of this argument Aquinas uses *esse* in the first sense (as facticity) when he refers to one's ability to understand what something is without understanding that it is. But then he quickly concludes to the intrinsic presence of *esse* taken in the second sense as an intrinsic perfecting principle (act of existing) that is distinct from the essence of every existing thing. Throughout

2. For some other interpretations, see Owens (1965, 1981, 1986), MacDonald (1984), and Wippel (1984, 2000).

stage two, however, he consistently uses it in the second way, thereby overcoming this weakness in the first stage.

In *ST* I.2.3, Aquinas presents his well known ‘five ways’ or arguments for the existence of God. The first “and more manifest” way is based on motion. It is certain and evident from sense-experience that some things in this world are moved. But whatever is moved is moved by another. Not content merely to cite this Aristotelian principle, however, Aquinas attempts to justify it by basing it on the distinction between act and potency. Something is moved only in so far as it is in potency to that to which it is moved. But something moves only in so far as it is in act, since to move is nothing other than to reduce something from potentiality to actuality. But something cannot be reduced from potency to act except by something that exists in actuality. Thus what is actually hot such as fire renders something that is hot only in potency actually hot, and thereby moves (alters) it. But, he continues, it is not possible for something to be simultaneously in act and in potency in the same respect but only in different respects. For instance, what is actually hot cannot simultaneously be potentially hot (with respect to the same degree of heat, one should understand), although it is potentially cold. Therefore it is impossible for one and the same thing by reason of the same motion to be both mover and moved, or to move itself. Therefore whatever is moved is moved by something else. But suppose that that by which something is moved is itself moved by something else, and that in turn by still something else. Here Aquinas rejects such a regress to infinity of moved movers as an ultimate explanation because then there would be no first mover and, consequently, no other movers; second movers (i.e. moved movers) do not move unless they are moved by something else. Hence one must arrive at some first (unmoved) mover which is not moved by anything else, which everyone understands to be God.³

Aquinas’ second ‘way’ is based on the nature of efficient causality. On the strength of sense-experience he concludes that we find that an order obtains between efficient causes. By this he means that certain efficient causes cannot produce their effects without themselves being caused by a higher cause. But it is impossible for something to be the efficient cause of itself, because it would then be prior to itself. Again he considers and rejects the possibility of a regress to infinity in caused causes without the admission of a first (or uncaused) cause. In the case of ordered efficient causes, that is, a situation in which one efficient cause

3. In *SCG* I.13, Aquinas had offered two much longer and more complicated versions of the argument for God’s existence based on motion, which he had developed from Aristotle’s argumentation in *Physics* VII and VIII. The present argument is more metaphysical, with its key principle justified by appeal to the distinction between act and potency. Even so, dispute remains concerning whether or not this same key principle has been undermined by Newtonian physics and the principle of inertia. For fuller discussion, see Kenny (1980: ch. 2); Weisheipl (1985: chs 4–5); MacDonald (1991); Kretzmann (1997: chs 2–3); Wippel (2000: 444–59, 413–31).

cannot produce its effect without itself being caused by a prior cause, the first is the cause of the intermediary (or intermediaries), and it/they are the cause of the last cause, that is to say, of the starting-point in the order of discovery. In light of Aquinas' remarks about intermediaries here and elsewhere, it seems that he would hold that even if the intermediaries are infinite, the same point will follow.⁴ He concludes that in such a series of ordered causes, if there is no first efficient cause, that is, no uncaused efficient cause, there will be no intermediary cause or causes, and hence no ultimate effect. Because this is false, a first efficient cause must be admitted, which is God.

Aquinas' third 'way' has generated much controversy on the part of Thomistic scholars, primarily because of two statements that appear in his presentation of it. The argument begins with a distinction between the possible and the necessary. Among the things we experience we find that certain things are possible (capable of existing or not existing), and this is because they are subject to generation and corruption. Hence, as Aquinas uses the term 'possible' here, he simply means that which is capable of being generated and corrupted and therefore, as he puts it, capable of existing or not existing. But, he continues in the first problematic sentence, it is impossible for all things that exist to be such because "what is capable of not existing at some time does not exist". (Many critics have asked why this follows: Could not something capable of not existing or capable of being corrupted actually never undergo corruption simply because another cause or set of causes keeps it in existence?) One may perhaps salvage this sentence by taking it to mean that a possible being by definition is capable of being generated and, assuming that it did arise by generation, it began to exist after having not existed. But the next problematic sentence states: "If all things are possible (capable of not existing), at some time nothing whatsoever existed". This is more difficult to defend because it seems to commit the fallacy of composition, that is, it moves from the claim that every possible being at some time was not existent to the universal claim that all possible beings would therefore have been non-existent at one and the same time (Wippel 2000: 462–9; Davies 2001 [who defends the argument]). If one grants the truth of this, then the rest of the argument's first part follows. If it were true that at some time nothing whatsoever existed, then nothing could have begun to exist and so now nothing would exist. Given the falsity of such a consequence, the argument concludes that not all things are possibles, and that there must be some necessary being, that is, a being not subject to generation and corruption.

In its second part the argument reasons that every necessary being either has a cause of its necessity from something else, or it does not. But regress to an infinite series of caused necessary beings will not account for anything, just as Aquinas

4. See his Commentary on *Metaphysics* II, lect. 3, 86–7, n. 303; Wippel (2000: 421–4, esp. n.63).

earlier reasoned about such a series of caused efficient causes. Therefore, Aquinas concludes, one must posit the existence of a being that is necessary in and of itself that does not depend on something else for its necessity. (In a somewhat parallel argument in *SCG* I.15, Aquinas establishes the conclusion of the first part of this argument in a less problematic way.)

Aquinas bases his fourth and most Platonic ‘way’ on the different degrees of perfection one finds among things in the external world. Some things are more or less good, more or less true, more or less excellent, and so too with respect to other perfections of this type. But more and less are said of different things in so far as they approach in differing degree something that is such to the maximum degree. Therefore there is something that is truest and best and most excellent, and which therefore is being to the maximum degree; for those things that are true to the maximum degree also enjoy being to the maximum degree. Here Aquinas appeals to the transcendental nature of ontological truth, that is, truth of being, and its convertibility with being. In referring to degrees of goodness, he is again referring to ontological goodness, not moral goodness.

In the second stage of this argument, Aquinas reasons that what is supremely such in a given genus is the cause of all other members of that genus. Therefore there is something (that which enjoys being to the maximum degree) which is the cause of being (*esse*) and of goodness and of every perfection in all other beings. While Aquinas clearly has efficient causality in mind in the argument’s second stage, the kind of causality he envisages in the first stage is disputed by his interpreters: is it solely exemplar causality or also efficient causality? It seems that, as the argument stands, its first part is based only on formal exemplar causality but, in order to be convincing, it needs to be rephrased so as to include efficient causality (Wippel 2000: 469–79).

Aquinas introduces his fifth ‘way’ by noting that it is based on the governance of things. He appeals to our awareness of the fact that certain things that lack any kind of cognitive power (natural bodies) nonetheless act for the sake of an end. In support he cites the fact that they always or at least more frequently act in the same way so as to obtain that which is best, and hence concludes that such consistent behaviour cannot be accounted for by appealing to chance. But things that lack cognitive ability cannot act for an end unless they are directed to it by some intelligent being (just as an arrow must be directed to its target by an archer). Therefore, he concludes, there is some intelligent being by which all natural things are ordered to an end. While this argument is sometimes presented as one based on order and design, its starting-point is really finality in nature.

It is sometimes asked whether Aquinas thought that any of the five ways, if taken individually, would suffice to establish the unity (uniqueness) of God. There is no doubt that he thought that this can be demonstrated philosophically since he has listed it as another preamble of faith (*Super Boetium de Trinitate* q. 2, a. 3). In the argument Aquinas presents in *De ente* c. 4, the fact that there can be only one instance of subsisting *esse* (God) is built into the second stage of his overall

argumentation. But in *ST I*, it is only somewhat later, in I.11, that Aquinas explicitly addresses and argues philosophically for the uniqueness of God.

THE POSSIBILITY OF QUIDDITATIVE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

In *ST I*, immediately after his presentation of the five ways, Aquinas introduces his discussion in I.3 with the comment that once we have recognized that a given thing exists, we must determine how it is in order to arrive at knowledge as to what it is. But in the case of God we cannot know what he is but only what he is not, and so we cannot know how he is, but rather how he is not. Given this, in the immediately following questions Aquinas endeavours to show by using philosophical argumentation how God is not by denying of him that which is incompatible with his very nature. And so he will establish God's simplicity by denying all composition of him (I.3), his perfection (I.4), his goodness as following from his perfection (I.5–6), his infinity (I.7), his presence in things as following from his infinity (I.8), his immutability (I.9), his eternity (I.10) and, as already noted, his unicity (I.11).

In his earlier discussion of this in *SCG I*, after offering a series of arguments for God's existence in I.13, Aquinas notes in I.14 that in thinking about the divine substance (essence) one must use the way of negation (*via negationis*). This is because the divine substance surpasses each and every form that the human intellect can grasp, thereby making it impossible for it to know "what God is". But we can arrive at some knowledge of him by knowing what he is not. And in so far as we negate more things of him, we advance in our knowledge of him. For example, by denying that he is an accident, we distinguish him from all accidents. By adding that he is not a body, we distinguish him from some substances. And so by negating more and more things of him, we can distinguish him from everything else. This knowledge will not be perfect, however, since what God is in himself will remain unknown.

In I.15–27 in this text Aquinas endeavours to show that God is eternal (not subject to time because he is immutable), that there is no passive potentiality in him, that there is no matter in him, that he is perfectly simple (not composed in any way), that he can undergo no violence, that he is not a body, that he is his essence because he is not distinct from it, that in him essence and act of existing (*esse*) are identical, that there is no accident in God, that nothing can be added to the divine being that would enable him to be defined, that he falls into no genus, that the divine existence is not the formal act of existing of other things, and that God himself is not the form of any body.

And then, while still using this method of succeeding negations, in I.28 Aquinas argues that God is completely perfect, that is, that no excellence of any kind is lacking to him. In the first of a series of arguments he reasons that if there is something to which the total power of existing (*virtus essendi*) belongs, no perfection

of any kind can be lacking to it. But this is true of that being which is identical with its act of existing (*esse*), which in I.22 he has shown God to be. Hence God is all-perfect. The conclusion that God is all-perfect, although reached by negating any lack of perfection of him, now opens the way for Aquinas to begin predicating certain names of God with positive content. As a necessary step in this development, in I.29 he argues that the vast difference between God and any and all creatures notwithstanding, there must still be some minimum degree of likeness between them and God. This is because a form found in any effect must in some way (i.e. either formally or virtually) be present in a cause that surpasses it in perfection, but in a different way and with a different meaning (*ratio*). This is expressed by the axiom that every agent produces something that is like itself.

ANALOGICAL PREDICATION OF DIVINE NAMES

This in turn leads Aquinas to take up the issue of the kinds of names that can be predicated of God (SCG I.30). Certain names that signify pure perfections without any deficiency may be predicated of God and of other things, such as goodness, wisdom, being (*esse*), and so on, although even in such cases this applies only to that which such names signify (their *res significata*), and not to the way in which they signify (their *modus significandi*). Their creaturely mode of signifying must be denied of them when they are applied to God. Moreover, such names cannot be predicated of God univocally (so as to have exactly the same meaning when applied to creatures and to God), or equivocally (so as to have completely different meanings when said of both), but only analogically (which names include some factor that unifies their diverse meanings).

In SCG I.34 and in ST I.13.5 Aquinas distinguishes between two kinds of analogical predication: that of many to one and that of one to another. In the first case a name may be applied to different things because each of them involves some kind of relationship to a first or primary instance (e.g. medicine, food and urine are all said to be 'healthy' because each has some relationship to the health of the body). In the second case the same name can be applied to two different things and yet have different meanings in the two cases because one of them is directly related to the other (e.g. 'being' is said of accident and of substance in different ways because of the relationship of accident to substance). Names cannot be applied to creatures and God in the first way because then something would be prior both to God and to creatures, for instance, being or goodness, in which both God and creatures would share. Only the second kind of analogy (of one to another) is appropriate in this case. In spite of the different meanings the name of a pure perfection has when it is applied to creatures and to God, the relationship of the created effect to God as to its cause provides sufficient unity to overcome purely equivocal predication.

Among the names of pure perfections Aquinas assigns to God, a few will be singled out here that are of special interest to students of the philosophy of

religion, namely, that God is good, that he is intelligent, that he wills and that he creates freely.

Divine goodness

In SCG I Aquinas connects his argumentation for God's goodness with his conclusion that God is all-perfect. Thus in I.37 he explicitly states that God's goodness can be shown to follow from God's perfection. In the first of a series of arguments he reasons that that by reason of which something is said to be good is its own excellence (*virtus*). As Aristotle says in *Ethics* II (1106a3), the excellence of each thing is that which makes that which possesses it good and renders its work good. But an excellence is a kind of perfection, since each and every thing is good in so far as it is perfect. Hence each and every thing desires its own perfection as its proper good. Since God is perfect, he is good.

In *ST* I, after showing in I.4 that God is perfect, Aquinas devotes I.5 to a general discussion of the nature of the good (see Aertsen 1996: ch. 7; Velde 1999). Then in I.6.1, he reasons that goodness pertains above all to God. Something is good in so far as it is an object of appetite. But every thing desires its own perfection. And the perfection and form of an effect is a certain likeness of its agent, since every agent produces something that is like itself. Therefore the agent itself is an object of appetite and has the nature of the good. What is desired of an agent is that its likeness be participated in by others. Because God is the first efficient cause of all things, it follows that the nature of the good and of that which is an object of appetite pertains to him. And so Dionysius attributes goodness to God as to the first efficient cause of everything else (see Vol. 1, Ch. 20, "Pseudo-Dionysius"). In a. 4 Aquinas writes that each and every thing is said to be good by reason of the divine goodness *as* it is good by reason of the first exemplar – and first efficient and final cause – of all goodness.

God is intelligent

Among a series of arguments Aquinas offers in SCG I.44, to show that God is intelligent, a brief but important one is based on divine perfection. Aquinas recalls that he has shown (in I.28) that God is all-perfect because no perfection present in any kind of thing can be lacking to him. The presence of perfection in God does not compromise the divine simplicity, as he has shown in I.31; for God is identical with his perfection. But among the many perfections found in creatures, the most powerful (*potissima*) is for something to be intelligent. This is so because by means of its intellect a cognizing being becomes, in a certain way, all things. Therefore Aquinas concludes that God is intelligent (Kretzmann 1997: 173–96). For a similar argument, see his *Compendium theologiae* (Compendium of theology), c. 28 (Leon. ed., 42.9:1–7).

God's will

In SCG I.72, Aquinas presents a number of arguments intended to show that the fact that God possesses will follows from the fact that he possesses intellect. In the first of these Aquinas reasons that because a good that is understood is the proper object of will, it follows that a good that is understood, in so far as it is understood as good, is willed. But what is understood implies one who understands. Therefore one who understands the good as good is one who wills. Since God understands perfectly (as Aquinas has shown in chapters 44, 45), it follows that in so far as he understands being he also understands it as good. (Implied here is Aquinas' view that the good is a transcendental property of being and therefore convertible with it.) Hence he concludes that God possesses will (literally, that God wills [*volens*]). (Also see *Compendium theologiae* I, c. 32.)

God's freedom to create

Basing himself on the metaphysically dependent and participated existence (*esse*) of every being other than God, Aquinas maintains that God is the creative and conserving cause of all things other than himself (*ST* I.44.1; *De potentia Dei* [On the power of God] q. 3, a. 5; q. 5, a. 2; Velde 2006: 125–46). Moreover, he argues at length that God freely creates such things. Some scholars have challenged Aquinas' success in defending this last point. Arguing from Aquinas' view that God necessarily wills and loves his essence and his usage of an axiom taken from Pseudo-Dionysius to the effect that the good is diffusive of itself, they maintain that Aquinas should have concluded that God necessarily wills and produces things other than himself (Lovejoy 1965: 73–81; Kretzmann 1983, 1997: 218–25, 1999: 120–26, 132–6). Aquinas does maintain that God necessarily wills and loves his own goodness and his own being and that this is the reason for his willing other things, that is, in so far as they are ordered to the end of imitating and manifesting his own goodness. However, because the divine goodness can be realized without the existence of anything other than God and receives no increase in perfection from the fact that other things are created, the divine will is not necessitated to will other things. Because no individual creature or totality of creatures could ever be equal to or add to the intensively infinite divine perfection, Aquinas argues that God does not need creatures in order for his goodness to be manifested. He is free to create or not create at all, and he is free to create this creature rather than that. As for the axiom taken from Pseudo-Dionysius, Aquinas insists that it should not be interpreted in terms of efficient causality (which would mean that the good had to diffuse its goodness by causing other beings as their efficient cause), but only that the supreme Good or God diffuses his goodness by serving as a final cause for his creating other beings (*De veritate* q. 23, a. 4; *SCG* I.81; Wipfel 2007: ch. 9, 218–39).

While much more could be said about Aquinas' philosophical discussion of the divine nature (see Further Reading), enough has been presented here to show that he maintains that sound philosophical reasoning can establish the existence of God, along with his unicity, simplicity, perfection, goodness, intellection, volition and freedom to create, and that all other beings depend on God for their very existence.

FURTHER READING

- Davies, B. 2002. *Aquinas*. London: Continuum.
- Montagnes, B. 2004. *The Doctrine of the Analogy of Being according to Thomas Aquinas*, E. Macierowski (trans.). Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press.
- Rocca, G. 2004. *Speaking the Incomprehensible God: Thomas Aquinas on the Interplay of Positive and Negative Theology*. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press.
- Shanley, B. 2002. *The Thomist Tradition*. Dordrecht: Kluwer.
- Stump, E. 2003. *Aquinas*. London: Routledge [chs 2–5].

On PREDICATION see also Chs 11, 16; Vol. 5, Ch. 18. On DIVINE UNITY see also Ch. 7. On EXISTENCE OF GOD see also Chs 5, 6, 14; Vol. 1, Chs 18, 19; Vol. 3, Chs 6, 12, 13, 14, 15, 21; Vol. 5, Chs 11, 16. On THOMISM see also Vol. 5, Chs 9, 20.

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