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## AQUINAS'S *SCIENTIA DIVINA*

According to St Thomas Aquinas, God is not the direct subject of metaphysics. However, metaphysics must be concerned essentially or ultimately with proving the existence of God, the ultimate cause or principle of all beings, and determining his attributes.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, *scientia divina* — the metaphysical science of God or divine science — or, to use contemporary terminology, natural theology, belongs in Aquinas's metaphysical enterprise or even constitutes its crucial or ultimate aspect. This article will be my attempt at a reconstruction of some of the key points of Thomas's natural theology from both metaphilosophical and analytical perspectives.

### I. THE ARISTOTELIAN WAYS

St Thomas's presentation of natural theology is most commonly introduced with his lecture on *Five Ways*, which are arguments for God's existence in *Summa Theologiae*.<sup>2</sup> However, it ought to be noted that three of these arguments (the first, the second and the fifth) are but interpretations or modifications of Aristotle's philosophy of nature and, as such, do not convey any of the original thought of Aquinas.<sup>3</sup> The first way (*ex parte motus*) paraphrases Aristotle's argument from motion or change without getting involved in questions concerning the eternity (or time infinity) of the world and motion, which Thomas allowed on the condition that we regard it as a series ordered *per accidens*. The second way (*ex ratione*

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. J.F. WIPPEL, *Metaphysics*, in: *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas*, eds. N. Kretzmann and E. Stump, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 85-127 (esp. pp. 85-87).

<sup>2</sup> THOMAS DE AQUINO, *Summa Theologiae*, I<sup>a</sup> q. 2 a. 3 co.

<sup>3</sup> E. FESER (among others) proposes a different approach. He regards all ways (esp. the second one) as original and essentially connected with the original parts of Aquinas's system. See: E. FESER, *Aquinas*, Oxford: One World, 2009, pp. 74-120.

*causae efficientis*) generalizes the first, and replaces the concept of motion with the notion of a causal relationship. Thus, a sequence of efficient causes — in order to avoid the regress *ad infinitum* of a causal series ordered *per se* — finds its end in the First Cause, which has a prominent ontic status in relation to the other causes. Both ways have the same structure,<sup>4</sup> which can be presented as follows:

- (1) There is a relationship of moving or causing in the world.
- (2) This relationship, based on the principle of causality, constitutes a series ordered *per se* that cannot go *ad infinitum*.
- (3) The relationship of moving or causing must terminate in the first being with a special ontic status, which Aristotle's terminology described as the Unmoved Mover, the Uncaused Cause or *Actus Purus*-Pure Act.

The fifth way (*ex gubernatione rerum*) is not so much cosmological but teleological: St Thomas uses in it the Aristotelian concept of the immanent and non-anthropomorphic teleology of nature. Yet, while doing so and as if in contrast to Aristotle, he does not consider teleology as an indispensable and yet inexplicable trait of nature. This is because he believes that its existence requires an explanation in relation to the special being that not only constitutes the ultimate end of all substances and their activities in the world, but also defines their natures and ends, leading them toward their accomplishment. This being — according to Aquinas — is of a mental or intellectual nature and everyone calls it God.

## 2. THE ORIGINAL WAYS

Both the third way (*ex possibili et necessario*) and the fourth (*ex gradibus*), studied in light of some other works of Thomas Aquinas, such as *De ente et essentia*, allow one to grasp the main idea of his metaphysics and natural theology. The opposition between this area of Thomas Aquinas's philosophy and the ways discussed previously demonstrates the eternal tension within natural theology between a more abstract and a more empirical approach. The latter seems to be more convincing for contemporary readers but prone to fallacy, whereas the former, which cannot be falsified, may be perceived by its critics merely as a distant set of notions.

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<sup>4</sup>Its critical analysis is conducted by B. LEFTOW, *Introduction*, in: THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae. Questions on God*, eds. B. Davis, B. Leftow, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2006, pp. vii-xxxii.

Let us introduce Aquinas's original thought with an analogy that he himself had taken from the naive Aristotelian physics. Still, the analogy can be helpful, provided we keep in mind its limits:

- (4) In some set warm things are found.
- (5) None of these things are warm in themselves but only as a result of being heated up by another thing.
- (6) The relationship of heating up is possible, provided there is a source of warmth for a given set, or something somehow warm in itself, at least from the point of view of the set in question.
- (7) For a given set, there exists a source of warmth (fire, for instance); something which is somewhat the warmest or, in some way, constitutes warmth itself.

Let us now paraphrase the theses (4)–(7) by forming analogous metaphysical theses about beings in the world:

- (4') There are things in the world, and each one of them has *esse* (existence).
- (5') None of these things exist (have *esse*) by themselves; they exist through another thing or other things. In other words, each of these things is contingent (has *esse* through an external attribution) and not necessary (it does not consist its own *esse*). The characteristic trait of the contingency of things is their being generated and (earlier or later) perishing as well as their limits in their perfection to a lesser or greater degree. Just as warm things are such for a shorter or longer time and to a greater or lesser extent.<sup>5</sup>
- (6') The relationship of attribution of or causing existence is possible, provided there is a source of existence for all things in the world (and for the world as a whole), i.e. something what is most existent, the plenitude of existence, being-existence in itself. Thomas calls it a thing that (or whose essence) is only its own existence or constitutes existence itself ("*res, cuius quidditas sit ipsum suum esse*"; "*res quae sit esse tantum*").<sup>6</sup>
- (7') There exists a source of existence for the world as a whole, a necessary being, existence itself; something which does not so much have *esse* but is *esse* itself; the being-itself or subsistent being (*esse subsistens*).

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<sup>5</sup>The third way is based on the contingency and the fourth one on the limitations or grades of perfections of things. If transcendentals (esp. existence/being and perfection/goodness) are interchangeable or convertible with one another, both ways lead to a being which is pure or full in terms of existence and perfection. Cf. FESER, *Aquinas*, p. 99-109.

<sup>6</sup>THOMAS DE AQUINO, *De ente et essentia*, cap. 4.

The above argument, or rather a contrast-based conceptual explication, presents Thomas not only as an Aristotelian, but as an original thinker capable of conducting highly abstract conceptual analysis which breaks through the standard grammar of common language. Some scholars reproach Thomas for this: do phrases like ... *has existence* (... *esse habeat*) or ... *is existence* (... *sit esse*) make sense in languages such as Latin or English? Regardless of our doubts, let us bear in mind that it is not the only time we may witness a philosopher reforming a given language, at least locally, in order to express his or her deepest insights concerning reality.

Some philosophers, including an anonymous reviewer of this article, report some objections to Saint Thomas's argumentation, arguing that it suffers from some kind of fallacy of composition. In their opinion, the fact that the world is made of contingent things alone does not have to result (in contrast to Thomas's arguments) in the fact that the world, as such, is contingent. However, if the world is not contingent, the absolute is not of a transcendent nature. Therefore, those thinkers who defend Thomas's reasoning have three ways to avoid the aforementioned error:

- the name 'world' is an illusionary name (or an useful fiction), therefore there is no thing to which one can attribute or not attribute the traits (or properties) of worldly things; everything that exists is either a contingent worldly thing, or a beyond-worldly necessary being;
- the modal-ontological traits of worldly things (such as contingency), unlike its other properties such as quantitative traits, come to the world as a whole; it would be hard to conceive of a set of even a large number of things imperfect that would form something perfect together;
- even if the world does not inherit the contingency of its elements, it still has some traits (such as complexity) that do not allow one to define it as 'absolute' (see 5 below).

I think that Thomas chooses the last of these three ways, for his distinction between two types of necessary beings in his *third way* is far from accidental: the necessary being *per se* (necessary out of itself) and necessary beings *aliunde* (whose reason or cause for their necessity is external). Since the first one is identified with God, as the ultimate cause of beings contingent and necessary alike, the second type could include the world. In philosophical cognition, one cannot exclude the possibility of the world being eternal, i.e. being necessary in a sense. Still, we have to bear in mind that the world is complex in multiple ways, including different aspects of actuality and potentiality. Therefore, the

world cannot be necessary out of itself, a pure and simple act. This is why it needs a transcendent factor to exist, it needs a real absolute.

### 3. THE BENEFITS OF THE THEOLOGY OF AQUINAS

What did Thomas accomplish by naming God (the absolute) *esse subsistens* and demonstrating his existence as that of a being radically different from all other things that merely have *esse*?

First of all, Aquinas, using abstract philosophical terminology, expressed the fundamental idea of mature monotheistic religions, which is the idea of the creation out of nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*). The idea of creation can be summarized as follows: God, without any pre-existing matter or tool, only with His own power of intellect and/or volition, causes (and sustains) the existence of things. This idea assumes a radical abyss between God (capable of creating) and created beings: He alone *exists* in the proper sense, and everything else exists through his attribution. The existence of God differs from the existence of creatures. The first is inherent to the creator's nature and fills it to the brim; the second is not, and its status is somewhat secondary and separable.<sup>7</sup>

Secondly, in Thomas's system, God, a creator and *esse subsistens*, is granted a more prominent ontic status in comparison to Aristotle's First Agent. It is on the creator that the existence of things depends, things depend on him not only for their motion, but also ultimately for everything else: they owe him the fact of existence and that they are what they are. What is more, if — as Thomas said — *esse* is the act of all acts and the perfection of all perfections ("*esse est actualitas omnium actuum, et propter hoc est perfectio omnium perfectionum*"),<sup>8</sup> then God, as the pure *esse*, is the absolute plenitude of being and perfection, and in his very existence possesses all perfections ("*Deus in ipso esse suo omnes perfectiones habet*").<sup>9</sup> This means that he does not lack any axiologically positive quality that can be found in creatures. He does not experience any privation because he contains every perfection in himself and there is no limit to it.

Thirdly, God, according to Saint Thomas, appears as someone worthy of absolute religious praise. God, an entirely non-conditioned plenitude of perfection, is also (or, above all) the plenitude of personal perfections. As I have already pointed out, motion is not the only thing that we owe him; we also (and above

<sup>7</sup>In a way, because without *esse* a given thing is nothing. There is no such thing in reality as something that accepts (or receives) and gives up *esse*. That something (*essentia*) can be at most identified in abstraction in each thing. It is hinted by the potentiality based on transformations we notice in nature: generating of some things on the basis of perishing of other things.

<sup>8</sup>THOMAS DE AQUINO, *De potentia*, q. 7 a. 2 ad 9.

<sup>9</sup>THOMAS DE AQUINO, *De ente et essentia*, cap. 5.

all!) owe him the fact that we exist and that we are what we are. Therefore, this God is not so much an unconscious initiator of activity which occurs in the world, but rather a conscious sovereign who directs and accomplishes the order of this world. His attributes seem to correspond to those of the God of the Biblical revelation. Thomas went so far as to investigate the Biblical appellation of God *I am who I am* (Ex 3.14) and find in it the revelation of His metaphysical nature as self-existence or subsistent being.<sup>10</sup>

#### 4. A THEOLOGICAL SYNTHESIS

It is noteworthy that St Thomas, while transforming Aristotle's system, maintained its basic scheme (e.g. the actuality–potentiality distinction) and did not lose sight of the Aristotelian concept of God. The God of Thomas Aquinas, the pure and unlimited actuality of *esse*, possesses all the Aristotelian attributes: immutability, eternity, transcendence, perfection, goodness and, in addition, simplicity, infinity, unity etc.<sup>11</sup> In the act of creation, God is an agent in a sense, but his activity is that of the First Agent — he is perfect, does not undergo change, does not lack or gain anything, and causes effects solely outside of himself, not intrinsically. The Scholastic principle *operari sequitur esse* requires that a given activity reflects the mode of existence of a given being. Since God exists in an exceptional (absolute) way, the exceptional and absolute aspects also define His activity. A consistent interpretation of this principle allows Thomas to view God as an immutable efficient cause, and not only as a final cause, as did Aristotle. Furthermore, Thomas's consistency goes as far as to state that the relationship of the world to God is real, even if the relationship of God to the world is only a kind of (non-real) relation of reason. Some scholars find in this statement the irreducible trace of the Aristotelian concept of the absolute as a latent and closed being. Some others detect in it a radical consequence of a rethinking of the asymmetry between God and the world. Such an asymmetry does not necessarily eradicate the value of what we owe to God, or undermine his being worthy of gratitude.

Nowadays, thanks to scholars such as C. Fabro, we know well that Thomas can be read not only through Aristotle. We can interpret Aquinas's system as a more refined version of Platonism. In his system, the relationship of creatures

<sup>10</sup>For Thomas, natural theology is not so much a separate discipline of philosophy but a horizon or the end of metaphysics. It needs to be completed by *sacra doctrina*, or theology based on revelation. Most likely, without the influence of the latter, Thomas's philosophical concept of God would have not become so radical.

<sup>11</sup>Thomas explains precisely different attributes of God, among others, in: *Summa Theologiae*, I<sup>a</sup> q. 3-11. At least some of them preclude the identification of God with the world or its matter. See also the point 5 of this article.

to God is analogous to that of things of a given species to their respective ideas or forms.<sup>12</sup> According to Plato, these things participate to some extent in the idea by imitating it or making themselves like it in content. For example: particular people are people (imperfectly) through their participation in the (perfect) idea of *being human* or *humanity in itself*. In Thomas's mind, participation has a more general and existential character: all things, beings with various degrees of imperfection and limits, participate in the perfect plenitude of being, i.e. in God. It is this participation that makes them beings. Thanks to it, they imitate God (to a different extent) as the being-in-itself. What is imitated, however, is not primarily the species or kind-content as in Plato, but the divine *esse subsistens*. Each small *esse* of an contingent being is, in a way, a copy of the absolute *ipsum esse*. In this dynamic, each perfection of a contingent being is a copy of the absolute perfection as a whole. This copy — let us emphasize! — is made in the act of creation.

Contemporary philosophers of religion distinguish between perfect-being theology and creation or first cause (or primary-being) theology.<sup>13</sup> The former is Plato's legacy, and the latter comes from Aristotle.<sup>14</sup> As we can see, the dynamic presented above confirms our hypothesis that Thomas seems to embody a deep synthesis of both theologies. Thomas's system clearly testifies to the fact that the first of these theologies leads to the second, and *vice versa*. Thomas demonstrates that the First Cause, the creator, is perfection as a whole in which all perfections of things participate. In turn, this participation can be conceived *via* the concept of creation and the concept of the divine plenitude of perfection *via* the concept of the divine existential priority. This makes the concept of participation simple, in contrast to that of Plato and neo-Platonists: things participate in the perfection of the absolute directly, and not through the hierarchical system of sub-participation and emanation. This simplicity also lies in the fact that — in Aquinas's approach — the participation of things in one absolute (*ipsum esse subsistens*) explains both the fact of their existence and what they are. On the other hand, Plato had to introduce two elements to explain reality — the Demiurge to explain the fact of things' existence, and ideas to explain their contents — because the ideas that explain why things are what they are would not be enough to explain the fact of existence of any particular thing.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. J.F. WIPPEL, *Metaphysics*, p. 93-107.

<sup>13</sup> M.J. MURRAY, M.C. REA, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 7.

<sup>14</sup> It is noteworthy that contemporary Thomists can be divided into more Aristotelian (cf. B. ASHLEY OP, *The Way toward Wisdom. An Interdisciplinary and Contextual Introduction to Metaphysics*, Houston: University of Notre Dame Press for the Center of Thomistic Studies, 2006) and more Plato-oriented camps (c.f. W.N. CLARKE SJ, *The One and the Many. A Contemporary Thomistic Metaphysics*, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001).

5. SIMPLE *ipsum esse*: DELVING INTO A MYSTERY

A mere acknowledgement of St Thomas's originality, apparent in his synthesis of perfect-being theology and creation theology, is far from sufficient. We ought to give him due credit for his meaningful philosophy of God. We can venture the statement that, for Thomas, God is the perfect and the first (creating) substance, but the key is the original, and radical concept of God as a being who escapes all categories (or categorizations) that we are familiar with. Within this concept of God, if we accept the specific and sometimes extremely non-standardized terminology of Aquinas, as well as the speculation based on it — subtle, yet extravagant to some readers — the process of establishing God's attributes becomes an exceptionally clear path, even if distant from our tendency to categorize divine matters and measure them by our human standards. This effort prepares us for a radically apophatic reading of Thomas, although this is not our destination.<sup>15</sup> Below is my reconstruction of such an anti-categorical and mystery-oriented, even if not radically, discourse about God.

As we have seen previously, the conceptual opposition between contingent (created) beings and the divine being can be expressed as an opposition between a being whose nature or essence (*essentia*) is distinct from its existence (*esse*) on the one hand, and a being whose nature (essence) is the same as its existence on the other. God, i.e. a self-sufficient being, the absolute, therefore, is not simply existence of some thing or another, but it is existence itself (*ipsum esse*).<sup>16</sup> In order to exist, created or dependent beings need, in the ultimate metaphysical perspective, such a self-sufficient being, for a thing whose existence is distinct from its essence receives its existence from an external cause (“*illud cuius esse est aliud ab essentia sua, habeat esse causatum ab alio*”).<sup>17</sup> It is because no thing

<sup>15</sup> See T.J. WHITE OP, *Wisdom in the Face of Modernity. A Study in Thomistic Natural Theology*, Ave Maria: Sapientia Press of Ave Maria University, 2016, p. 260. T.J. White discusses, among others, with such Thomists as H. McCabe, B. Miller i D. Turner. Cf. also R. SOKOŁOWSKI, *The God of Faith and Reason. Foundations of Christian Theology*, Notre Dame — London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982, ch. 5.

<sup>16</sup> Some Thomistic or post-Thomistic thinkers, particularly those influenced by modern philosophers, prefer to say that it is not the absolute (God) who is existence itself, but, rather, God's essence contains existence. Thomas, however, who supported the former, more radical option, would have been likely to emphasize that this way alone guarantees unlimited existence for any essence (*natura*) and makes the inferiority of existence to essence impossible. Any distinction between existence and essence (or properties contained therein) would enable the two to separate, thus making the non-existence of God possible. Should anyone object that the notion *ipsum esse* is unclear, we can respond that it becomes clearer in the context of the whole Thomistic system, in which existence is regarded not merely as a fact, but, above all, as an act (as opposed to potentiality).

<sup>17</sup> THOMAS DE AQUINO, *Summa Theologiae*, I<sup>a</sup> q. 3 a. 4 co.



or things of this kind, as well as even an infinite number of them, possesses existence by its own nature, contrary to the self-sufficient being. God alone possesses existence by his own nature, for he is his own existence (“*est igitur Deus suum esse*”).<sup>18</sup> God alone, therefore, is and can be the real giver of existence, or the creator.

If we consider God as *ipsum esse*, it yields a number of serious consequences. Such a being has to be simple, exactly one, and transcend all categories. Let us look more closely at these three characteristics of God in our effort to define divine attributes.

What is noteworthy in Thomas’s discussion of God’s attributes is that he starts with simplicity.<sup>19</sup> In the strict sense of the term, simplicity is not an attribute, but a formal and negative characteristic of God: since God is existence itself (*ipsum esse*), he is nothing different from existence; that, in fact, means that we cannot detect any complexity in him. We need to keep in mind that the Thomistic simplicity is absolute. The simplicity of God, in opposition to the simplicity of things considered simple, such as fundamental elementary particles,

- is not relative to the current state of empirical knowledge;
- cannot be characterized by divisible physical quantities;
- is not weakened by potential relationships with other beings;
- does not allow any composition, even metaphysical (such as subject and properties, matter and form, essence and existence).

In further steps, Thomas excludes the possibility of God’s being composed of physical and metaphysical parts or elements. Essentially, however, the thesis stating the radical non-complexity of God derives from his definition as *ipsum esse*. If, in turn, this definition (formed as an existential thesis) were to be regarded as the conclusion of Thomas’s argument for God’s existence (see section 2 above), we could consider the thesis affirming God’s simplicity as an indispensable element of theistic argumentation. E. Feser, in his discussion of different types of theistic cosmological arguments, points to the neoplatonist argument from complexity or composition.<sup>20</sup> I think that this argument is also present, albeit *implicite*, in the thought of St Thomas. This argument can be reconstructed in the following way:

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<sup>18</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>19</sup> Ibidem, I<sup>a</sup> q. 3.

<sup>20</sup> E. FESER, *The New Atheists and the Cosmological Argument*, in: E. FESER, *Neo-scholastic Essays*, South Bend: St. Augustin’s Press, 2015, pp. 118-146 (see: II.2. *The simplicity/composition approach*, pp. 130-133).

- (8) In science, philosophy and common sense knowledge, the existence and the activity of complex objects is explained in reference to the existence and activity of simpler objects which compose them.
- (9) In order to avoid the regress *ad infinitum*, the effort to explain the existence and activity of complex objects must be accomplished in reference to the existence and activity of simple objects.
- (10) Simple (physical or non-physical) objects that we detect or postulate, and are composed of metaphysical parts, cannot constitute ultimate explaining factors: while referring to them, we can inquire why they are such-and-such, due to their being composed of both subject and properties, and both matter and form, and ask why they exist at all, because they are composed of essence and existence.
- (11) The final factor (or reason) that explains the existence and activity of physically or metaphysically complex objects must be absolutely metaphysically simple.
- (12) The only factor that meets the requirement (11) is something that is existence itself. Only existence itself is absolutely simple and can cause existence of anything outside of itself, as well as the activities derived from it.
- (13) A simple self-existence is exactly one, for two distinct self-existences could not constitute existence itself, as the factor distinguishing them from each other would have to be something else than existence, resulting in a composition of existence and something else.

As we can see, the reasoning (8)-(13) also leads us towards the uniqueness of God. God is exactly one, just as things are distinct from one another by their natures — by being-such or being-different — whereas he is existence itself, unlimited by any nature. If there were two self-sufficient beings, they would have to be distinguishable by their natures, which is impossible in their case, for they are characterized only by existence. The self-sufficient being, therefore, is something unrepeatable and — in opposition to things in the world — has no variety with regards to kind, species or number. Such a being has to be radically different from the world or any part of it, for everything in the world is complex and multiple. This quality results in his being's infinity, immutability and non-physicality, or lack of body.

In the presented model, the divine being is undoubtedly eternal and necessary. It is impossible for existence itself (provided it exists) not to exist; equally, it is impossible for it to be different from what it is, as it is pure existence and does not depend on anything. Such a being is perfect for two reasons. First, as

a being unlimited in existence, it constitutes a plenitude, something than which nothing greater can be conceived. Secondly, since it is the existential cause of everything beyond itself, the following scholastic rule applies: all perfection of an effect must be found (in one way or another) in its efficient cause. As St Thomas wrote, "*Cum ergo Deus sit prima causa effectiva rerum, oportet omnium rerum perfectiones praeexistere in Deo secundum eminentiorem modum.*"<sup>21</sup>

The simplicity and uniqueness of God as *ipsum esse* results in more than the aforementioned attributes. It is also the reason behind its problematic status that surpasses all categories. *Ipsum esse* cannot be defined or classified in any way, in other words, we cannot say what it is or of what kind it is, or what units it exemplifies. Therefore, it is not surprising that Thomas states clearly, "*Deus non est in genere substantiae*"<sup>22</sup>, "*Deus non est species, nec individuum, nec habet differentiam, nec definitionem*".<sup>23</sup>

As demonstrated, and contrary to a popular view held by many theists and atheists alike, God

is not 'a being' alongside other beings, not even an especially impressive one, but rather Being Itself or Pure Actuality, that from which all mere 'beings' (including gods like Zeus [...]) derive the limited actuality or existence they possess. He is not 'a cause' who is like other causes [...]. Rather, he is [...] the metaphysical precondition of any possible causality [...].<sup>24</sup>

## 6. IS GOD A PERSON?

This concept of God presented above invalidates the objections of atheists based on a conceptual anthropomorphization. While doing so, however, it generates new questions, such as the following:

- what is this being itself which "*is not 'a being' alongside other beings*"?
- can (or how can) pure existence be a person?
- how can simplicity itself create or do anything? etc.

Thomas, as well as different types of Thomistic thinkers, offers a number of interesting responses both to these questions and related ones. We have to keep in mind, however, that good responses have to steer clear of two pitfalls. First, they cannot say too much, in the sense that they cannot reduce God to a being

<sup>21</sup> THOMAS DE AQUINO, *Summa Theologiae*, I<sup>a</sup> q. 4 a. 2 co.

<sup>22</sup> Ibidem, I<sup>a</sup> q. 3 a. 5 ad 1.

<sup>23</sup> THOMAS DE AQUINO, *De potentia*, q. 7 a. 3 co.

<sup>24</sup> E. FESER, *Why McGinn is a Pre-theist*, in: FESER, *Neo-scholastic Essays*, pp. 193-199 (the quotation — p. 197).

of a certain particular category; responses of this type would deny the fact that God “*is not ‘a being’ alongside other beings*”. Secondly, they cannot say too little, justifying their laconic character by the unfathomable mystery of the divine essence; in fact, the statement that God is (for example) a person is incoherent with the statement that we do not really know what or who he is.

Surely, Thomas’s theory of transcendentals and analogy, particularly his conception of the analogical predication of the divine names, serves as an essential tool of formulation and verification of responses to the aforementioned questions that ensures that we stay away from the two extremes. Still, the use of this tool requires a great metaphysical skill or subtlety. Let us humbly take it into account and, leaving other questions aside, simply ask whether (or how) God is a person.

As I have pointed out previously, according to Thomas God as *ipsum esse* is also the plenitude of perfection. For, since the existence and perfection are somewhat interchangeable, or the latter can be derived from the first, then full and original existence is the plenitude of perfection. In this case, in God, as a self-existent or subsistent *esse*, there cannot be any lack of perfection (“*cum Deus sit ipsum esse subsistens, nihil de perfectione essendi potest ei deesse*”).<sup>25</sup> And because — let us add — a person or his/her attributes or powers are (supreme) perfection or perfections, God cannot be short of these. They are virtually or eminently present, secondarily mentally distinct to us, in himself as the simple *ipsum esse*.

As we can see, the above approach allows us to reasonably talk about God as a person. On the other hand, it avoids the risk of classifying God by including him in the (sub)category of person. From this perspective, God is a person not in the sense of being such a person or another person, but in the sense of being the basis and source of all personal substances or perfections. The same can be said of substance as such (and its main varieties), or of any pure perfection or positive quality. God is their principle or measure. As Aquinas wrote,

licet Deus non pertineat ad genus substantiae quasi in genere contentum, — [...], — potest tamen dici quod sit in genere substantiae per reductionem, sicut principium, [...] et per hunc modum est mensura substantiarum omnium [...].<sup>26</sup>

In Thomas’s works we can find at least a few other arguments, either direct or indirect, for the thesis that God is a person. These arguments are, at the same time, explanations of the content of this thesis. The most important arguments in this group can be reconstructed in the following way (with some complementary remarks):

<sup>25</sup> THOMAS DE AQUINO, *Summa Theologiae*, I<sup>a</sup> q. 4 a. 2 co.

<sup>26</sup> THOMAS DE AQUINO, *De potentia*, q. 7 a. 3 ad. 7.

First, since God assigns the ends of all natural substances, especially those devoid of reason, and leads them towards their ends, he cannot be conceived of differently but as an intellect (and will), and therefore as a person. This argument is related to the components of *the fifth way*, discussed in the first part of this paper.

Second, since in the light of the aforementioned *first way* God is the first unmoved cause of motion, he cannot move differently but in a way characteristic of an intellect and/or the will. In any case, it would be difficult to comprehend a pure form, completely devoid of matter, as something perfect in any other way.<sup>27</sup>

Third, the necessary condition for something to possess within itself all perfections of other things is *to be an intellect*. For if (according to Aristotelian and Thomistic epistemology) *to know something* means *to have intentionally its form and perfections in itself*, only the intellect, intentionally containing within itself the forms of things conceived of, can *have or possess* them in some way. Therefore, the absolute, as an intellect intentionally containing all forms and perfections, along with the will correlated with it, is a person.<sup>28</sup>

Fourth, God, as a being *per se*, acts in a way which is unconditioned. The only available analogy to the way such a being acts can be found in the acts of free persons. Therefore, God is an absolutely free person.<sup>29</sup>

Fifth, existence in itself as the plenitude of perfection and source of everything must constitute a good, i.e. the ultimate end of a conscious or unconscious activities or inclinations of anything that exists, including inclinations of persons. It would be difficult to think of personal beings who could be satisfied in their deepest desires by a non-personal being.<sup>30</sup>

I think that, regardless of the possible accuracy of the above arguments, the task of examining which falls beyond the scope of this study, these arguments ought to be regarded as secondary, for they use categories and comparisons to other contingent (created) beings. These arguments, as well as the explications they require, enable us to construct certain models of God through which we can reach an approximate understanding of the personal nature of God *via* his similarity to human persons or his efficient and final priority over remaining beings. What we do know about God as a person boils down to developing

<sup>27</sup> Cf. THOMAS DE AQUINO, *Contra Gentiles*, lib. 1 cap. 44 n. 2-4, 8.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. *ibidem*, lib. 1 cap. 44 n. 5-6. Cf. also N. KRETZMANN, *The Metaphysics of Theism. Aquinas's Natural Theology in Summa contra Gentiles I*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997, pp. 184-196.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. THOMAS DE AQUINO, *Contra Gentiles*, lib. 1 cap. 72 n. 8. Cf. also N. KRETZMANN, *The Metaphysics of Theism*, p. 208.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. for instance THOMAS DE AQUINO, *Summa Theologiae*, I<sup>a</sup> q. 6 a. 1-3. co.

a concept of the plenitude of existence and perfection, or (also, or above all) the source and principle of existence and perfection of persons.

### CONCLUSION

The present article has been my attempt to present the natural theology (*scientia divina*) of St Thomas Aquinas in a more analytical and metaphilosophical way. The collected material allows us to distinguish Aquinas's two approaches, categorical and beyond-categorical (transcendental), both in the demonstration of God's existence and the procedure of establishing His attributes. This distinction becomes apparent in *the five ways*. I interpreted *the first, second* and *fifth* as simple modifications of some Aristotelian ideas, whereas the third and the fourth represented, at least to me, some original conceptual speculation. The speculation takes us to an interesting concept of God as *ipsum esse*. This concept, which constitutes an exceptionally mature synthesis of perfect-being theology and creation theology, is greater than the concepts of his predecessors and can be used as a tool for expressing essential elements of Christian doctrine. The most interesting component of this concept is the idea of God's simplicity, which requires us to get rid of any categorical-anthropomorphic habits in our way of thinking. According to it, we can state that God is a person, but not in the sense of being such-or-such a person (as some being among other beings), but in the sense of being a mysterious source and principle of the existence and perfection of persons.

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## AQUINAS'S *SCIENTIA DIVINA*

### S U M M A R Y

The present article was my attempt to present the natural theology (*scientia divina*) of St Thomas Aquinas in a more analytical and metaphilosophical way. The collected material allows us to distinguish Aquinas's two approaches, the categorical and beyond-categorical, both in the demonstration of God's existence and the procedure for establishing His attributes. This distinction becomes apparent in *the five ways*. I interpreted *the first, second and fifth* as simple modifications of Aristotle, whereas *the third and the fourth* represented, to me, original conceptual speculation. The speculation takes us to an interesting concept of God as *ipsum esse*. This concept, which constitutes an exceptionally mature synthesis of perfect-being theology and creation theology, is greater than the concepts of his predecessors and can be used as a tool for expressing essential elements of the Christian doctrine. The most interesting component of this concept is the idea of God's simplicity, which requires us to get rid of any categorical-anthropomorphic habit in our way of thinking. According to it, we can state that God is a person, but not in the sense of being such-or-such a person (as some being among other beings), but in the sense of being a mysterious source and principle of existence and perfection of persons.

KEYWORDS: Aquinas, God, natural theology, *five ways*, mystery of *ipsum esse*, simplicity of God, God as a person

SŁOWA KLUCZE: Akwinata, Bóg, teologia naturalna, *pięć dróg*, tajemnica *ipsum esse*, prostota Boga, Bóg jako osoba