PSEUDO-DIONYSIUS AND THE METAPHYSICS OF AQUINAS

by

FRAN O'ROURKE

University of Notre Dame Press
Notre Dame, Indiana

Cloth edition published in 1992 by E. J. Brill, Leiden, The Netherlands

First paperback edition published in 2005 by the University of Notre Dame Press
Notre Dame, Indiana 46556
www.undpress.nd.edu

Manufactured in the United States of America

The Press gratefully acknowledges financial support from
The National University of Ireland for the publication of this paperback edition.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

O'Rourke, Fran.
Pseudo-Dionysius and the metaphysics of Aquinas / by Fran O'Rourke.—
1st pbk. ed.
p. cm.
Originally published: Leiden ; New York : E. J. Brill, 1992, in series: Studien und Texte zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters ; Bd. 32.
Revision of the author's thesis (Ph. D.)—Hoger Instituut voor Wijsbegeerte, Leuven.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 0-268-03724-8 (pbk. : alk. paper)
1. Thomas, Aquinas, Saint, 1225?–1274. 2. Pseudo-Dionysius, the Areopagite—Influence. 3. Metaphysics—History—To 1500. I. Title.
B765.T54O78 2005
186'.4—dc22

2005025288

∞ *This book is printed on acid-free paper.*

I noilċuimhne mo ċuismiċeoirí
Caoimhín agus Maireád

CONTENTS

PREFACE TO THE 2005 REPRINT

Shortly after *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas* was first published in 1992, the senior editor at E.J. Brill confidently stated that there were sufficient copies in stock to meet demands 'well into the next century'. He could not have been as surprised as the author, however, by the deletion of the title from the catalogue within half a decade. I am grateful to the University of Notre Dame Press for their willingness to issue a reprint, following many requests that it be made available again. I am most grateful also to those colleagues who reviewed the book on its appearance, or who critically engaged with it subsequently in the literature. It is not my purpose here to proffer a reply since I am, for the most part, happy to accept their criticism and comments as legitimate. Aside from some minor emendations the text remains unaltered. In lieu of revision I take the liberty of listing here some recent articles of mine on Plato, Neoplatonism, and Aquinas. Hopefully they will provide elaboration on aspects of the background against which Aquinas articulated his understanding of Dionysius.

'Via causalitatis; via negationis; via eminentiae', *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie,* Band 11 [U–V]. Basel: Schwabe Verlag, 2001, 1034–38.

'Plato's Approach to Being in the *Theaetetus* and *Sophist,* and Heidegger's Attribution of Aristotelian Influence', *Diotima* 31 (2003), 47–58.

'Aquinas and Platonism', *Contemplating Aquinas. On the Varieties of Interpretation,* ed. Fergus Kerr. London: SCM Press, 2003, 247–79.

'Jacques Maritain and the Metaphysics of Plato', in *Approaches to Metaphysics,* ed. William Sweet. Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2004, 229–48.

'Unity in Aquinas' Commentary on the *Liber de Causis', Pensées de l'<Un> dans l'histoire de la philosophie. Études en hommage au professeur Werner Beierwaltes,* ed. Jean-Marc Narbonne and Alfons Reckermann. Paris: Vrin, 2004, 230–71.

PREFACE

The sun, Aquinas remarks in his Commentary on the *Divine Names,* is itself too powerful to look at, and is best viewed as it is reflected upon the mountain peaks or fills the clouds with light. The Holy Mountain of Athos was resplendent in the first light of dawn and the clouds were filled with ochre rays from the sun which was not yet visible. The small caïque had left the pier below the Monastery of Megiste Lavra while it was still dark and made its way slowly southwards along the coast. Out of the shelter of the isthmus the craft was hit by the fury of a sudden storm, and thrown from the crest to trough by wave after wave which crashed with fury from the west. One recalled the fate of Xerxes' fleet as it sailed around this same promontory. Relieved to dock in the nearest harbour, we made our way up the steep and rocky—but altogether safe—path to the Monastery of Saint Dionysius, which was perched like a fortress some hundreds of feet above the ocean.

The reading at mealtime in the *Trapezaria* an hour later held no special significance at first, but on hearing the words *Ἅγιος Διονύσιος, ὁ Ἀπόστολος Παῦλος, Ἄγνωστος Θεὸς*, even the name of *Πρόκλος*, I was seized with excitement and curiosity—a frisson more overwhelming than the fear of the early morning. A friendly monk explained that the reading concerned the life of an ancient bishop of Athens who had been a disciple of St Paul; he was a sacred writer, renowned for his treatises on contemplation and the life of monks. The text explained that a writer of the fifth century had relied greatly upon these writings but lacked the grace to acknowledge his debt. Today the feast of this holy man was being celebrated.

But surely, I exclaimed, no one still believed that this writer was the disciple of St Paul! Had not modern research, with all its means of historical critique, shown beyond doubt that these writings belonged to a later writer who had indeed relied upon the work of Proclus. My question offended; 'Man of little faith!' I was guilty of blasphemy—whether by irreverence or disbelief I was unsure—and judged that courtesy to my host called for silence. I nodded in agreement that science is no measure in matters of belief. Reason must bow before the testimony of faith and tradition. Indeed, if proof were needed, I was

told, were not some bones of Saint Dionysius, including his skull, still preserved in another monastery on Athos, to be venerated on that very day?

I examined the lectionary as soon as I could.[1] The page was opened at October 3rd! Had I lost track of the days, thinking it was October 16th? I recalled the difference between the calendars of East and West. At the ceremony in the afternoon the monks intoned the life and ecomium of Dionysius, relating among other things his presence with the apostles at the dormition of the Blessed Virgin.[2] Listening to the monks chant the solemn hymns in praise of Dionysius, my appreciation of his work was transformed. The myth still survived in this remote haven of fervour and devotion, palpably attested to by the scent of incense and the glow of oil-lamps before the icons of this holy man. It survived, not as a myth, but as a history of love and veneration. For how many centuries had these hymns been sung in unbroken tradition? Dionysius assumed for me at that moment a new significance and actuality. I had a forceful appreciation of the significance of Dionysius for Aquinas, who was profoundly influenced by his writings and personality. Like the monks of Athos, whose veneration of Dionysius now seemed so strange, so Aquinas had also experienced the draw of the ancient writer. I saw that, regardless, of its authorship, the *Corpus Dionysiacum* was still a living tradition, with a power for truth and inspiration. Despite the falsehood of their apostolic authority, the works of Dionysius have a timeless message and a quiet power to draw those who read them closer to the divine secrets of the universe.

One of the many questions which I do not touch upon in the present study is the identity of the Pseudo-Dionysius. My interest is directed exclusively toward the philosophic vision of his writings and their influence upon Aquinas. Aquinas' interest in Dionysius is itself many-sided, extensive and profound. He refers to the *Corpus Dionysiacum* in his elucidation of many theological doctrines; his speculations both on evil and aesthetic beauty are largely derived from Dionysius. Most of the literature on Dionysius and Aquinas deals with the question of knowledge and language about God. Few deal with the global influence of Dionysius on the metaphysics of Aquinas; this influence, however, extends to such central questions as the very nature of existence, the hierarchy of beings, the nature of God and the theory of creation. It is my aim to show that, in the encounter of Aquinas with Dionysius, there emerges an integral and comprehensive vision of existence, a

[1] *Ὁ Μέγας Συναξαριστής τῆς Ὀρθοδόξου Ἐκκλησίας*, I, Athens, 1981, pp. 62–109.

[2] This is printed in *PG* IV, 577–84: *Βίος καὶ ἐγκώμιον τοῦ Ἁγίου Διονυσίου Ἀρειοπαγίτου. Ἐκ τῶν μηναίων τῆς ἐν Ἑλλάδι Ἐκκλησίας, μηνὸς ὀκτωβρίου τῇ γ'.*

vision embracing the finite and the infinite, depicting the universe in its procession from, and return to, the Absolute, allotting to each grade of reality its place in the hierarchy of being—and to man in particular a unique place of privilege.

Part I of this book also begins with the question of knowledge about God. In Chapter 1 we examine the value attached by Dionysius to philosophy in the discovery of the divine and establish that, within the horizon of revelation, he grants an autonomous role to philosophical reflection. This is based upon the relation of causality: God both reveals and conceals himself in creation; on this dual status of creatures is grounded the renowned distinction of positive and negative theology. Primacy is accorded to the negative path, since God is the transcendent Good beyond all reality. In Chapter 2 we study Aquinas' appraisal of this doctrine. Granting primacy likewise to negative knowledge, he refines Dionysius' apophatic doctrine by grounding it in the positive value of existence, which is capable of unfolding the reality of God, who—precisely as Being itself—is beyond the range of human thought.

Part II examines the nature and transcendence of God. For Dionysius, God is supreme goodness beyond Being and Non-Being. We study this doctrine in Chapter 3, and consider in particular his understanding of 'non-being'. In Chapter 4 we examine Aquinas' reaction to this, together with his arguments for the primacy of Being. Part III, 'Transcendent Causality and Existence', begins by examining Dionysius' influence on Aquinas in two doctrines: the immediacy and universality of God's causation (Chapter 5), and the primacy of existence as the first perfection of creation (Chapter 6). Aquinas' notions of *esse commune, virtus essendi,* and *esse intensivum* are considered at some length. All of these doctrines, which show the inspiration of Dionysius, are unified more profoundly in Aquinas' theory of God as subsistent and absolute Being. This is examined in Chapter 7, at which point we are in a position to review more adequately Aquinas' perspective on Being and 'non-being'.

Part IV deals with creation as the cyclic diffusion of the Good in Pseudo-Dionysius and St Thomas. Chapter 8 outlines Dionysius' vision of creation as a cyclic process, and in Chapter 9 we observe the importance of this motif as an inspiration for Aquinas' universal vision. Specific questions concerning creation are considered: the freedom of creation and the diffusion of goodness, the emanation and return of creatures, the relation of God to creation, and the hierarchic order and harmony of the universe of beings. In each of these aspects I seek to illustrate both the central influence of Dionysius and the originality of Aquinas' vision. An underlying motif, which provides a background to our enquiry, is the point at which the two writers diverge, namely, the

primacy accorded by each, respectively to the Good or to Being as the highest principle of reality.

The present work is a revised version of a doctoral dissertation, submitted to the Hoger Instituut voor Wijsbegeerte, Leuven, under the guidance of Professor Gérard Verbeke, who generously placed at my disposal his profound and extensive knowledge of classical and medieval philosophy. To him I express my warmest gratitude for his keen interest, constant support and encouragement. It is a privilege and pleasure to record my deep personal gratitude to Most Reverend Desmond Connell, Archbishop of Dublin, former Head of the Department of Metaphysics, University College, Dublin, for his many kindnesses while I was a member of his Department. Invited to be external member of the examination jury, he read my dissertation with the closest possible attention and subsequently made many valuable suggestions. I record my sincere thanks to Professor Urbain Dhondt, President of the Hoger Instituut voor Wijsbegeerte, for his kind attention in many ways. I thank his successor, Professor Carlos Steel, both for his expert advice during the early stages of my research and for his valuable comments as examiner.

Portions of my dissertation were developed and expanded into article form for the journal *Dionysius* (1991), and the volume *The Relationship between Neoplatonism and Christianity* (Dublin, 1992). I am grateful to the editors of these publications for permission to incorporate this material. I wish to thank Dr Deirdre Carabine, Dr John Chisholm, Dr Colm Connellan, Dr Gerald Hanratty and Dr Brendan Purcell, of University College Dublin, for their instructive comments. I record my grateful appreciation to Dr Koen Verrycken and Professor Andrew Smith for help with the printing of the Greek passages. My thanks are due in a special way to Professor Werner Beierwaltes, who showed keen interest in my work and facilitated me in many ways during the academic year 1984–85 which I spent at the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, Munich.

The opportunity of spending several years in Leuven was due to scholarships from the Katholieke Universiteit te Leuven and the Belgian Ministerie van Nederlandse Cultuur. I express my sincere thanks to these institutions. I am grateful to University College Dublin for sabbatical leave to complete this study. My stay in Munich was partly financed by the Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst. For financial support towards publication, I gratefully acknowledge grants from the National University of Ireland and the Faculty of Arts, University College Dublin. I express my appreciation to Professor Albert Zimmermann, who accepted the work for the present series. My thanks to Brunswick Press, Dublin, who prepared the text for press.

The dedication of this book, finally, is a very inadequate attempt to return the least repayable debt of all.

PART ONE

KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

CHAPTER ONE

KNOWLEDGE OF GOD IN PSEUDO-DIONYSIUS

Reason and Revelation

We begin our enquiry into the metaphysics of the Pseudo-Dionysius and Aquinas with the primary question of metaphysical knowledge, more specifically, knowledge of the metaphysical absolute. It is in this significant area that we first discover in Aquinas the deep-running presence of Dionysius' Neoplatonism. Aquinas appropriates from Dionysius the entire method of his natural philosophy of God, of knowing and not-knowing, while yet transforming and transfiguring, however subtly, certain elements in accordance with his own theory of knowledge and being. These modifications will emerge as we consider Aquinas' reaction and the measure of his indebtedness to the Pseudo-Areopagite.

Dionysius is keenly aware from the start of the humble value of his endeavour, yet the dutiful dignity of his task, to search out with the aid of reason and share with his fellow humans a deeper knowledge of God. Thus we may have, he believes, what he himself has called a *divine philosophy*, i.e. a 'reflection on the intelligible divine things'.[1] And while its fruits are meagre in view of the unfathomed mystery of the divine, or indeed even in comparison with the merits of mystical experience, it is incumbent upon us to exercise diligently whatever power has been given us to know God. This twofold aspect of the

---

[1] 3, 3, 93. References to Dionysius' *Divine Names* and to Aquinas' *In Librum Beati Dionysii De Divinis Nominibus* are distinguished by using Arabic numerals for chapter and paragraph of Dionysius' work, and Roman numerals for chapter and *lectio* of Aquinas' Commentary. When given, the third number (Arabic) refers to the paragraph of the author's text in the Marietti edition. Thus, for example, '4, 2, 108', refers to the second paragraph of Chapter 4, *Divine Names*, as printed in paragraph 108 of Pera's edition, and 'IV, ii, 295' to Aquinas' commentary on this passage (see Pera's edition, pp. 95–6). It is therefore normally not necessary to give the title of these works when referring to them in footnotes. References to other works of Dionysius are according to the Migne edition.

philosopher's vocation, the humility of his enquiry into the nature of God and the duty to seek him in the measure given to us, is an express command of God:

> The splendid arrangement of divine laws commands it. We are told not to busy ourselves with what is beyond us, since they are beyond what we deserve and are unattainable. But the law tells us to learn everything granted to us and to share these treasures generously with others.[2]

Dionysius begins his treatise the *Divine Names*, therefore, with a grandiloquent avowal of humility, professing his utter inability to speak of the divine nature. The truth of things divine, he tells Timothy, is not presented 'with persuasive words of human wisdom', but by giving witness to the inspiring power of the Spirit. Through this inspiration we become united to the ineffable and unknowable in a union more perfect than that of reason or intellect.[3] He will not dare, therefore, to speak or conceive of the divinity, hidden and transcendent, in any way other than has been divinely revealed in Scripture. To God alone pertains a true knowledge of himself, transcending Being (*ὑπερούσιον*)[4] and surpassing reason and intellect; it is more properly an 'un-knowing' (*ἀγνωσία*), when compared with human cognition. For our part, we may aspire to the splendour of the divine mystery only in so far as the ray of divine wisdom is imparted to us.[5]

We are wholly reliant on God, therefore, for all knowledge of himself. In his love for us, however, says Dionysius, the absolute and divine Good reveals himself, measuring out the divine truth according to the capacity of each spirit (*κατὰ τὴν ἀναλογίαν ἑκάστου τῶν νόων*), and separating from the finite that which in its infinity must remain unapproachable.[6] Dionysius provides an incisive insight into the participation both of being and knowledge:

[2] 3, 3, 93. Luibheid's translation, p. 71. When not otherwise stated, translations from Dionysius are mine. Luibheid's excellent translation does not always convey the full metaphysical sense which I wish to emphasise. Occasionally, in citing Luibheid, I have made minor changes to suit the context. While the aim of Jones' version has its merit, its neologistic language cannot be easily quoted outside its context. Rolt's translation, while faithful, is somewhat archaic and stylised. That published by the Editors of the Shrine of Wisdom is for the most part admirable for its accuracy and elegance. (A blatant omission is a major portion of *DN*, 7.) The translations by John Parker, who still accepted the authenticity of the works are generally very acceptable. For translations into other languages, those of Stiglmayr, de Gandillac, Scazzoso and Turolla can be recommended.

[3] 1, 1, 1.

[4] 'Being' is occasionally written in upper case in order to signify universal being, or being as the primary perfection of reality.

[5] 1, 1, 4.

[6] 1, 1, 6.

> The Good is not absolutely incommunicable to everything. By itself it generously reveals a firm, transcendent ray, granting enlightenments proportionate to each being, and thereby draws sacred minds upward to its permitted contemplation, to participation and to the state of becoming like it.[7]

We may observe how careful Dionysius is to situate the sure knowledge which we can have of God within a reverence and obediance to his unutterable mystery. While our response to God's self-revelation should be one of holy veneration, listening with 'pious ears',[8] and honouring with humble silence those things which remain unfathomed and unspoken—the mystery of divinity beyond thought and Being[9]—we must also be heedful to the rays of illumination as they are imparted to us, and allow ourselves to be guided by the light of revelation and so behold the radiance of the divine. In this spirit of piety and obedience we best praise and celebrate the principle of all light as it has revealed itself in Scripture.[10] Scripture affords, therefore, a secure guide: 'a most beautiful standard of truth'; it offers a 'divine wisdom' to which philosophy must concord.[11]

In Scripture, God has revealed himself as Cause, Principle, Being and Life of all things.[12] We notice how Dionysius first introduces on the authority of revelation itself even the positive knowledge we may have of God in relation to reality. This he undoubtedly does in his original spirit of piety and humility concerning the things of God. He will, of course, further develop the argumentation on philosophic grounds, specifically along Neoplatonist lines; but this occurs within the initial security of what is first laid open to revelation.[13]

Dionysius explicitly recognises indeed two distinct approaches within the tradition of theology itself: the one silent and mystical, the other open and manifest; the former mode is symbolic and presupposes a mystic initiation, the latter is philosophic and demonstrative. Dionysius notes, however, that the two traditions intertwine: the ineffable with the manifest.[14] Some truths about God, he states elsewhere, are unfolded 'according to true reason' (*τῷ ἀληθεῖ λόγῳ*), others 'in a manner beyond our rational power as mysteries according to divine

[7] 1, 2, 10; Luibheid, p. 50.

[8] 1, 8, 29.

[9] 1, 3, 11.

[10] 1, 3, 11.

[11] 2, 2, 36.

[12] 1, 3, 12.

[13] See René Roques, Introduction, *La hiérarchie céleste*, p. xxv: 'En réalité, si la plupart des attributs expliqués sont bibliques, ils sont aussi bien philosophiques; et, en tout cas, la manière dont ils sont sytématiquement expliqués est plus philosophique que biblique.'

[14] *Ep.* 9, 1105D.

CHAPTER TWO

DIONYSIAN ELEMENTS IN AQUINAS' DISCOVERY OF GOD

Reason and Revelation

From the outset Aquinas recognises the biblical background of Dionysius' endeavour to elucidate the divine names. He begins the introduction to his Commentary by stating that in order to understand these works, we must note that Dionysius artificially divides into four the things contained about God in the sacred writings:[1] he thus discerns Scripture as in a sense the subject matter of the entire body of Dionysius' writings. The division, while it coincides with the titles of four of Dionysius' works, derives from Aquinas and is significant for his interpretation of Dionysius. Through it he gives a hermeneutic of the principles which pervade and sustain the multiform vision of the Pseudo-Areopagite.

The first radical division in Aquinas' scheme of Dionysius' doctrine is that concerning the very nature of God's intimate unity and distinction, revealed as such only in revelation. For this, no sufficient similarity can be found in created things: it is a mystery which transcends every faculty of natural reason.[2] This subject matter has been treated by Dionysius, Aquinas states, in a book reportedly entitled *De Divinis Hypotyposibus*, i.e. *On Divine Characters*. The three remaining divisions which Aquinas enumerates are concerned in different ways with those names of God for which some similitude or likeness may be discovered in creatures. This is the work of natural reason in its investigation of created reality. Its aim, nevertheless, is to elucidate the names of God which are given in Scripture. To these three aspects of naming God through the power of reason we shall return. It will be

[1] *In DN Prooemium*, I: Ad intellectum librorum beati Dionysii considerandum est quod ea quae de Deo in Sacris Scripturis continentur, artificialiter quadrifariam divisit.

[2] Ibid.: Cuius unitatis et distinctionis sufficiens similitudo in rebus creatis non invenitur, sed hoc mysterium omnem naturalis rationis facultatem excedit.

useful to examine first how Aquinas, in his interpretation of Dionysius, relates the work of reason to the primacy of revelation.

A key notion which Aquinas introduces at the beginning of Chapter 1, and which governs the entire theory of human knowledge of God throughout his Commentary, is the principle of proportion and the participated nature of knowledge, i.e. the due and harmonious measure which must exist between a knowing subject and its object. He expresses the proportionate relation of subject and object in knowledge: *Semper enim oportet obiectum cognitivae virtutis, virtuti cognoscenti proportionatum esse.*[3] That is to say, the object of knowledge, in so far as it is to be known, must be in due proportion to the cognitive capacity of the knower. This proportionate relation of knowledge is further grounded in the participated nature of being. There is for St Thomas a close relation between the inherent perfection of an individual being, its cognitive capacity, and its degree of cognoscibility or intelligibility. There is, in other words, a correspondence on the ontological level between beings and (a) the objects which they may know and (b) the knowing subjects by which they may in turn be known. This is most clearly manifest in the distinction between finite and Infinite Being: 'Created substance is the object commensurate with created intellect, just as uncreated essence is proportioned to uncreated knowledge.'[4] Even when divine truths are revealed by God, they are bestowed in proportion to the measure of those to whom they are revealed: 'But it is beyond the proportion of finite intellect to know the infinite.'[5] Our knowledge is commensurate with finite reality,[6] bound to created things as that which is connatural to us.

Aquinas also considers the proportioned nature of the cognitive capacity and knowability of beings—both determined by their excellence of being—as restricting our ability to reason from one level of reality to another: 'A superior grade of beings cannot be comprehended through an inferior.'[7] Having given this principle himself, Aquinas repeats as examples the instances noted by Dionysius: intelligible realities cannot be understood 'perfectly' by means of the sensible (here he lightens the negative emphasis of Dionysius); the simple by means of the composite, or the incorporeal through the bodily. Applied to our

[3] I, i, 14.

[4] I, i, 14: . . . super ipsam substantiam creatam quae est obiectum commensuratum intellectui creato, sicut essentia increata est proportionata scientiae increatae.

[5] I, i, 19: Divina revelantur a Deo secundum proportionem eorum quibus revelantur: sed cognoscere infinitum est supra proportionem intellectus finiti.

[6] I, i, 29: Cognitio autem nostra commensuretur rebus creatis.

[7] I, i, 23: Superior gradus entium comprehendi non potest per inferiorem.

CHAPTER THREE

THEARCHIA: THE TRANSCENDENT GOOD

Having seen the approach which must be adopted in seeking a knowledge of God, namely through positive (causal) and negative (transcendent) attribution, let us ask what understanding of God Dionysius acquires through such twofold nomination. We shall note accordingly Dionysius' understanding of the divine principle,[1] firstly in positive terms as the transcendent and pre-eminent fullness of Being and, secondly, as superior to Being, i.e. viewed in a transcendent sense as 'Non-Being'. Both paths denote the divinity as absolute and unlimited perfection itself.

Ultimately, God is named both in a positive and negative manner as the primary Good. In the manner of our discovery, his goodness is most evident and understood most meaningfully through his diffusion of gifts to all creation; in the generosity which moves him to generate all beings and in the providence with which he foresees and cares for all, maintaining each and establishing in harmony the hierarchy of being. We observe the felicitous if not fortuitous agreement of Christian orthodoxy with Neoplatonist metaphysics; God is named in the first place and principally as very Goodness itself. This is all the more convincing since Dionysius is following the principle adopted at the beginning of his treatise: we may conceive of God and speak of him only as he is revealed in Scripture. On three occasions Dionysius appeals to the sacred writers to portray goodness as the first name of God. He introduces the theme emphatically in Chapter 2 of *Divine Names*, where he begins his quest in plain reliance upon Scripture: 'The absolute Goodness is celebrated by the Scriptures as revealing and defining the entire and essential divine essence.'[2] This is what is signified by the proclamation 'None is good but God alone'[3]—the total and exclusive identification of the nature of God with Goodness itself.

---

[1] For clarity and convenience, I retain in transliterated form the Greek word used by Dionysius: *Θεαρχία*, 'Thearchia'.

[2] 2, 1, 31.

[3] Luke 18: 19.

A noteworthy passage in which Dionysius speaks of 'Good' as the first name of God occurs in the penultimate paragraph of the *Divine Names*, where having treated of the many names given to the thearchy he places the entire enterprise in its total perspective. He sums up the value of the treatise and shows its accord with the holy writings:

> We do not attribute to it the name of Goodness as appropriate, but through a desire to know and say something of that ineffable nature we first consecrate to it this most sacred of names. In this we shall be in agreement with the sacred writers, although the truth of the reality transcends us.[4]

While Dionysius stresses that no name whatsoever is of itself adequate to reflect the transcendent divinity, he suggests that 'Goodness' is the most proper, even though we are still far from the truth.

The most important of the passages where Dionysius agrees with Scripture in naming God as Goodness is the opening paragraph of Chapter 4, a chapter which deals specifically with the Good, and which constitutes more than one fourth of the entire work. Dionysius begins by remarking that the sacred writers have given the name of 'Good' (*ἀγαθωνυμίαν*) to the 'supra-divine divinity' in a pre-eminent manner, separating him from all things, portraying him as transcendent to all. Significant is the sense which Dionysius, for his part, attributes to this teaching: 'They say, as I think, that the divine essence is goodness itself and that simply by its being the Good as the subsisting essence of the Good (*ὡς οὐσιῶδες ἀγαθόν*) extends its goodness to all beings.'[5] This is of course the language of Neoplatonism but we observe how Dionysius introduces and sustains this theory on the authority of Scripture. From the point of view of a metaphysics of being, it can be observed that Dionysius relies upon the very notion of being to express his stated primacy of the Good. We may summarise the Neoplatonist concept of the Good encountered in the writings of Dionysius: God is Goodness itself and merits in an exclusive way the honour of this singular name. Beings are 'good', but their goodness is not self-sufficient. It is a participation in essential goodness beyond good things.[6] God's divinity is identical with his very goodness; he is at once both God and Good (*ὁμόθεον καὶ ὁμοάγαθον*).[7]

In its first metaphysical significance, therefore, it is as its own infinite and subsistent plenitude, wholly autonomous and self-sufficient, that the Absolute is uniquely and exclusively called the Good. In the order of knowledge, however, the transcendent Good is disclosed only as

[4] 13, 3, 452.
[5] 4, 1, 95.
[6] 4, 2, 105-6: *ἀγαθὰ διὰ τὴν ὑπεραγαθότητα . . . ἐπὶ τὴν πάντων ἀγαθῶν ἀγαθαρχίαν.*
[7] 1, 5, 22.

origin of goodness in beings. It is superior to Being as its originating principle and as such embraces within its superabundance all the perfection of beings. For Dionysius God is the unlimited essence of Goodness, the One and Beautiful, who transcends all Being and embraces within his unity and simplicity the fullness of perfection manifested partially and disparately throughout the universe.

It is as the cause of beings, defined first in terms of their goodness, therefore, that the absolute is known philosophically as the subsisting Good. Beings *are* because of the value infused into them by the Good. It is at the heart of this realm of 'things made perfect' which share in varying degrees in the riches of goodness that, in the mind of Dionysius, we seek orientation towards ultimate significance, truth and value. It is because the universe manifests itself as a hierarchy of values that the absolute is praised as the unlimited presence of perfect goodness in itself. We will therefore seek indices throughout the work of Dionysius which may justify philosophically the doctrine which is stated at the outset on the authority of Scripture: that the Good is the name par excellence for the 'supra-divine divinity'. All knowledge regarding the goodness of God is grounded in the mediating role of reality. In accordance firstly with the positive approach of human discovery, God is affirmed to be Good as the plenary and pre-eminent perfection of Being itself. We shall treat specifically of this positive appreciation and examine in particular the Goodness of the thearchy as the plenitude of Being.

As we have seen, all naming is founded, according to Dionysius, upon the similitude which holds between cause and effect; the principle of discovery rests in turn upon the underlying principle of causal participation: 'what are in effects pre-exist abundantly and substantially in their causes.'[8] This universal principle is operative at its most profound in the bond whereby creatures inhere in God: a quality or perfection is present in a finite being only because it derives from and thus shares in the full presence of that perfection which is its source. The perfections of all finite things abide pre-eminently in God. Dionysius summarises this by pointing out that not only is God the cause of being for all things, constituting the source of life and perfection, but that he embraces all by anticipation 'simply and absolutely' (*ἁπλῶς καὶ ἀπεριορίστως*).[9] 'He precontains all things within himself in a unique and transcendent simplicity.'[10] Significant here is that all things are

[8] 2, 8, 58: *περισσῶς καὶ οὐσιωδῶς προένεστι τὰ τῶν αἰτιατῶν τοῖς αἰτίοις.*
[9] 1, 7, 26.
[10] 5, 9, 284: *πάντα μὲν ἐν ἑαυτῇ προέχει κατὰ μίαν ἁπλότητος ὑπερβολήν.*

considers indeed the possibility of the non-existence of matter as well as its existence, indicating that in either case matter cannot be a source of evil; he rejects, however the conclusion that matter does not exist. To the contrary, in the *Celestial Hierarchy*, Dionysius states that 'matter also has received existence from him who is truly beautiful'.[111] Thus, whereas for Plotinus, the last trace of divine power is to be found in living things,[112] Dionysius in this unique passage attributes existence to matter and refers it to the divine Good. More characteristic is the affirmation that matter is a remote echo, the most distant and most feeble of all the realities which proceed from God.[113]

We may note that Dionysius once uses the term *πρώτη ὕλη*,[114] not in the sense of Aristotle, but as referring to the objects in the material world which first receive the rays of the sun. He is using the image to illustrate the degrees in which the divine power is received by the angelic orders. In this analogy, Dionysius indeed suggests that there are degrees of nobility in the material world itself; sunlight passes easily 'through first matter' but diminishes when received and reflected by more dense and opaque matter. In accordance with this meaning, Corderius translates *πρώτη ὕλη* as *materia proxima.*[115]

This is, in brief, the meaning which Dionysius attaches to the notion of matter, which is significant for his understanding of the priority of Goodness beyond Being. Before reviewing Aquinas' response to Dionysius' theory of being and non-being, and the latter's affirmation of the priority of the Good, it will be of benefit to take a preliminary look at Aquinas' understanding of the nature of goodness.

---

[111] *CH* 2, 144B.
[112] de Gandillac, *La Hiérarchie Céleste* , p. 83, n.1.
[113] 4, 20, 198: *κατ' ἔσχατον ἀπήχημα πάρεστι τἀγαθόν.*
[114] *CH* 13, 3, 301A, ed. Heil, p. 151.
[115] *CH* 13, 301A.

CHAPTER FOUR

AQUINAS: BEING, NON-BEING AND THE GOOD

The Notion of the Good

In his understanding of the good, Aquinas is initially guided by the teaching of Aristotle. It is not surprising, therefore, that much can be learned from the first *lectio* of his Commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics*. To Aristotle's well-known phrase, 'The Good is what all things desire',[1] Aquinas adds valuable insight and elaboration. He begins with a remark which is important for the entire treatment, namely, that 'the good' is a notion which is ultimate or primary in itself. It is interesting that even within this context Aquinas allowed this as a reason why the Platonists could hold that the good is prior to being; he states summarily, however, that they are more properly convertible. Goodness, along with being, is one of those fundamental characteristics which cannot be analysed into concepts anterior to itself. It cannot be reduced to elements which are simpler or more ultimate; however, it becomes manifest through the things which derive from it, as a cause is revealed by its effects. Since the effect proper to the good is that it moves the appetite or will, this is how it may be described. The good is thus defined as that which all things desire.[2]

Desirability, however, is a consequence or result of goodness. To describe the good as that to which all things tend, Aquinas notes, is to indicate by means of a characteristic the presence of goodness rather than disclose its essence or ground. Aristotle's definition indicates what we may term the 'phenomenological' content of goodness—its

---

[1] *Nic. Eth.* I, i, 1094 a: *καλῶς ἀπεφήναντο τἀγαθὸν οὗ πάντα ἐφίεται.*
[2] *In Ethicorum*, 1, 1, 9: Considerandum est, quod bonum numeratur inter prima: adeo quod secundum Platonicos, bonum est prius ente. Sed secundum rei veritatem bonum cum ente convertitur. Prima autem non possunt notificari per aliqua priora, sed notificantur per posteriora, sicut causae per proprios effectus. Cum autem bonum proprie sit motivum appetitus, describitur bonum per motum appetitus, sicut solet manifestari vis motiva per motum. Et ideo dicit, quod philosophi bene enunciaverunt, bonum esse id quod omnia appetunt.

manifestation to the desiring subject—but does not penetrate to that which fundamentally constitutes it as such. In Plotinus' phrase: 'The good must be desired; but it is not good because it is desirable; it is desirable because it is good.'[3] It is thus necessary to go beyond the *ratio boni* which allows us to recognise goodness, to the *natura boni*, its ontological ground.[4] In question 5 of the *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas gives such a foundation to goodness by indicating its identity with being, more exactly with being conceived as actuality.

In this question Aquinas establishes that while *ens* and *bonum* are identical in reality they differ in their meaning for reason, i.e. in what they expressly signify to knowledge.[5] Being expresses the reality that something exists; goodness signifies its relation to the will and denotes being as desirable. Goodness thus adds to being the character of appetibility. Now Aquinas declares that each thing is clearly desirable in so far as it is perfect, since what all things desire is necessarily their own perfection.[6] We shall see that this is the case both where something is loved directly for its own sake, being perfect in itself, or desired as an indirect means for the perfection of another. Beings are desired, that is, either as fully perfect or as perfective of another. Perfection is thus the goal towards which desire is directed. The good is what as such is perfect; perfection is of the essence of goodness. This definition of the good as the desired contrasts with that of Plato, for whom the good is known primarily, not because of its desirability but through its generosity. *Τὸ ἀγαθόν,* for Plato, is at the summit of the intelligible world and is the source of all being and value. Moreover, Goodness, in the Platonist tradition, exercises efficient rather than final causality.[7]

Seeking the ground of perfection as such, Aquinas in turn states that anything is perfect only in so far as it is in act,[8] inasmuch as it is actually and really endowed with, i.e. determined or perfected by, the qualities or resources which constitute it as an object of desire. That which is in potency is lacking in perfection.[9] Actuality alone fundamentally endows or grants value. Only that which is real can be desired. What is only possible or merely potential cannot be in any way

[3] *Enneads* VI, 7, 25.
[4] See Joseph de Finance, *Connaissance de l'être*, pp. 161-2, *Essai sur l'agir humain*, p. 79.
[5] *ST*, I, 5, 1: Dicendum quod bonum et ens sunt idem secundum rem, sed differunt secundum rationem tantum.
[6] *ST*, I, 5, 1: Manifestum est autem quod unumquodque est appetibile secundum quod est perfectum, nam omnia appetunt suam perfectionem.
[7] See de Finance, *Connaissance de l'être*, p. 160.
[8] *ST*, I, 5, 1: Intantum est autem perfectum unumquodque inquantum est actu.
[9] *ST*, I, 5, 1 ad 1.

the term of tendency or desire, or be perfective of another. What grounds perfection is its very reality or existence itself. Now, the first and fundamental actuality of each being is its very act of existing (*esse*), i.e. the act whereby it really exists and in virtue of which all its determinations are made actual. *Esse* or the act of being is thus the actuality of every thing and something is good inasmuch as it exists.[10] A thing is perfect only because it exists and possesses in reality the determinations which are the modes of its being. In summary, therefore, being or existence is the source of goodness in all things. They have actuality to the extent to which they have being; to be actual is to be perfect, thus desirable, and this for Aquinas is precisely what is signified by goodness. It is clear, therefore, states Aquinas, that being and good are the same in reality, although *bonum* makes explicit the note of 'desirability' not expressly pronounced in the notion of *ens*.

Thus while Dionysius, in accordance with the Platonic tradition, defines goodness through its generosity or efficiency, and Aristotle describes it as the term of desire, we encounter in Aquinas an example of the masterly way in which these complementary points of view may be harmonised through a discovery of their common ground.[11] St Thomas succeeds in fusing the final and efficient viewpoints of Aristotle and Dionysius. This he does by deepening Aristotle's own notion of act so as to ground all actuality in the primary perfection of being. (We shall observe later how Dionysius' influence in this discovery is significant). The perfection of actuality is the foundation of goodness both as origin and end. Something is said to be good because it is desired; but it is desired only because it can further perfect the reality of that which seeks it. Now, this it can do only if it is itself in act—having the resources to actualise what is potential in the other, and more radically if it is *actu esse*, in actual existence. Furthermore, at their fundamental and universal level all beings seek God in so far as they strive towards their own perfection. The reason is that God is first cause, which is possible only if he is the pure and plenary actuality of Being, *Ipsum Esse Subsistens: purus actus absque permixtione alicuius potentiae.*[12] So, whether loved in a disinterested manner as fully perfect in itself, as is the case with God, or indirectly solicited as a means of perfecting another, goodness is grounded in the actuality of existence. The good is sought either as the perfect plenitude of actual being, or

[10] *ST*, I, 5, 1: Unde manifestum est quod intantum est aliquid bonum inquantum est ens: esse enim est actualitas omnis rei.
[11] See Heinrich Weertz, *Die Gotteslehre des Ps. Dionysius und ihre Wirkung auf Thomas von Aquin*, p. 15.
[12] *ST*, I, 9, 1.

CHAPTER FIVE

UNITY OF DIVINE CAUSATION IN DIONYSIUS

There are two closely related aspects of Dionysius' view regarding the relation of the Good to creatures which exerted considerable influence on Aquinas' understanding both of existence in general, and of divine being and goodness. The Good is, namely, the *unique and immediate cause of all beings*, and it causes, moreover, all things through the *first and primary perfection of being itself*. Being is thus its first effect and participation, and includes all subsequent perfections as particular determinations of itself. In contrast to the *Platonici*, who maintained a plurality of universal principles, Dionysius restores the exclusive causality of the universe to a unique and transcendent Good. The Good causes all things directly in their being; all that it produces is constituted as being, although he holds that the Good itself transcends the plenary perfection of Being. Aquinas exploits and deepens Dionysius' view of the primary role of being in creation and establishes in turn its universal and absolute priority. In the light of this deepened meaning of existence, he reinterprets the nature of the universal first cause as infinite *Esse* rather than as *Bonum*.

The unification by Dionysius of all separate and secondary causes into the one, singular and absolute thearchic cause is an advance towards the immediacy and simplicity of causality which is fully realised in Aquinas' theory of creation as the immediate gift by absolute Being of itself to beings. Dionysius clears the metaphysical regions of the diversity of divine principles which Plotinus and Proclus believed necessary for the gradual emanation and descent of creatures from the One. Dionysius unites all creative principles in the single transcendent Good which, he affirms, acts immediately and intimately at the heart of created reality. By affirming the unique and universal causality of God through the removal of all intermediary principles, he attains a purer and more transcendent notion of God. Moreover, by attributing the mediation of all created perfection to the unique though created perfection of *εἶναι*, Dionysius reaches a unique view of the immanent and intensive richness of being. With the intuition of being as the primary participation and first creature comes a radical transformation

in the relation of beings to God. Through *esse*, God is immediately active throughout each and every being at its most radical and interior origin. It remains for Aquinas to remove the distance between these two principles of perfection—finite and infinite—and proclaim the identity of the divine Good with the absolute fullness of Being itself.

Central to the formation and significance, moreover, of Aquinas' notion of *esse commune*, i.e. being as the intensity and fullness of finite perfection, which points beyond itself as participating in the simple plenitude and intensity of infinite Being, is Dionysius' doctrine of the immediate and total character of the causal relation between God and beings. Drawing a more profound conclusion, this radical causation of all beings, considered universally, reveals for Aquinas the nature of the first cause as infinite Being itself. As cause of all things, God must contain within his power the perfection of all. And since being (*esse*) is the primary perfection of all that is created, according to Aquinas the creator is most properly named as Being.

A number of themes must be distinguished in order to appreciate the integral inspiration of Dionysius in Aquinas' synthesis: the unity and immediacy of divine causation, being as the primary and all-comprehensive perfection, and God as infinite and subsisting in himself. I suggest that the unity and immediacy of creation, while not explicitly reflected upon by Dionysius, is itself an advance towards the primacy, universality and immediacy of Being. Dionysius' view of the unicity and immediacy of divine causality is repeatedly praised by Aquinas as a major correction to the theory of the multiple universal causes held by the Platonists. As Aquinas explains it, the *Platonici* had wished to 'reduce all composite and material things to simple and abstract principles',[1] i.e. to reduce 'universal effects to more intelligible causes'.[2] According to this view, the more universal a perfection, the more transcendent it is, i.e. the more separated from individual things, while it is also participated as cause by subsequent beings with greater priority. In the order of perfections they placed unity and goodness as the most universal, since these are also predicated of prime matter.

The 'Platonists', therefore, posited the separate One or Good as supreme and primary principle of all things. 'But after unity and goodness, nothing is found which is so common as being (*ens*) and thus they assumed separated being itself (*ipsum ens separatum*) as something created inasmuch as it participates goodness and unity; they ordered it, however, as the first among all created things.'[3] They also posited the

[1] *In DN, Prooemium.*
[2] V, i, 612.
[3] *In de Causis* IV, 98.

other universal forms of things to subsist separately in themselves. These principles they seem to have conceived, however, according to their strictly formal character, since rather than reduce all things to an all-embracing and universal unity, they attributed them to a diversity of ultimate causes:

> They believed that the same thing could not be the cause of many, i.e. of the proper natures in which they differ but only of what they have in common. They posited, therefore, certain secondary causes by which things are determined in their proper natures; these receive being in common from God and are called the exemplary causes of things. Thus the exemplar of man is *homo separatus*, who is cause of humanity in all individual men, and similarly with other natures.[4]

These exemplars, separate realities existing in themselves, are the source of unity and simplicity preceding the division and composition of participated things of a similar kind and in which composite things participate. 'Similarly, they said that prior to composite living things there is a certain separated life, by participation in which all living things are alive, and which they called life *per se*. Likewise with wisdom *per se* and *esse per se*.'[5] The Platonists placed all of these mutually diverse principles beneath the One or Good, which is their primary principle.[6]

In his Commentary on the *Liber de Causis*, Aquinas gives a clear outline of both positions: 'Plato posited the existence of universal forms of things which subsisted separately in themselves. And because such universal forms have, according to him, a certain universal causality over particular beings which participate in them, he thus called all forms which subsist in this manner "gods", since the name "God" expresses a certain universal providence and causality.'[7] Aquinas explains that Plato placed a certain order among these forms, whereby the more universal a form the greater its simplicity and priority as cause: it is participated by subsequent forms, as if we were to suppose that animal is participated by man, life by animal and so forth.

> But what is participated finally by all, while itself partaking of none, is the separate One or Good in itself which, he said, was the supreme God and first cause of all. Proclus, therefore, in his book introduces Proposition 116: 'Every god is participable except the One.'[8] Dionysius corrects this position which supposed an order of different separate forms called gods—as if

[4] V, iii, 664.
[5] V, i, 634.
[6] Cf. *Super Ep. S. Pauli ad Coloss.*, I, 4, and *In DN, Prooemium.*
[7] *In de Causis* III, 65.
[8] *In de Causis* III, 66. Here Aquinas explains *participabilis* as *id quod participat*, which is incorrect in light of the proposition referred to.

declaration of the unity or identity of Goodness, Being and Life in God, as stemming directly from Scripture:

> Accordingly it is said in Matthew 19, 'One is good, God'; and that he is being itself—therefore in Exodus 3, God answers Moses who asks what is God's name, 'I am who am'; and that he himself is the life of living beings—accordingly it is said in Deuteronomy 30, 'He is the life of the living.' And this truth, Dionysius most expressly teaches in the fifth chapter of the *Divine Names*, when he says that Sacred Scripture '. . . does not say that to be good is one thing and to be a being is another and that life or wisdom is something else'.[47]

At this point of our enquiry, we have seen that the unity of causation brings the primacy of being into focus as the first created perfection, and restores universal and absolute transcendence to God as unique creative cause. In the following chapters we take a closer look at the nature of being and its relation to God: firstly, the priority of being itself and its role within creation, as the primary creature of God, and as divine similitude par excellence. We shall then review the nature of God, understood by Aquinas as transcendent Being, and the process of creation itself. In each of these areas we shall observe the profound influence of Dionysius together with St Thomas' independence of thought.

---

[47] *De Subst. Sep.*, 17, ed. Lescoe, n. 93, p. 136: Unde dicitur Matth. XIX, 'Unus est bonus, Deus'; et quod sit ipsum esse, unde Exodi III Moysi quaerenti quod esset nomen Dei respondit Dominus, 'Ego sum qui sum'; et quod ipse est viventium vita; unde dicitur Deut. XXX 'Ipse est viventium vita'. Et hanc quidem veritatem expressissime Dionysius tradit V Capitulo De Divinis Nominibus dicens quod sacra scriptura 'non aliud dicit esse bonum et aliud esse ens, et aliud vitam aut sapientiam . . .' Spiazzi, p. 50, even includes *sacra scriptura* within the quotation from Dionysius. Aquinas also refers this doctrine of Dionysius to Scripture in *In de Causis* III, 73: Et hoc est quod dicit V cap. de Divinis Nominibus 'non aliud esse bonum dicit' scilicet sacra scriptura et aliud existens et aliud vitam . . .' It should be noted, however, that the word '*dicit*' in the line from Dionysius just cited refers, not to Scripture, but to his own discourse. (5, 1, 257: *τῷ λόγῳ σκοπός . . . ταύτας οὖν ὁ λόγος ὑμνῆσαι ποθεῖ τὰς τῆς προνοίας ἐκφαντορικὰς θεουμίας.*) In his Commentary, Aquinas reads the passage correctly: 'Hoc ergo excludit ipse Dionysius, dicens quod praesens sermo *non dicit . . . Neque dicit praesens sermo . . .*' (V, i, 613). It is interesting, however, that on two occasions he states that Dionysius was directly motivated by Scripture in naming God as Being.

CHAPTER SIX

DIONYSIAN ELEMENTS IN AQUINAS' NOTION OF BEING

Universal Being: the First Created Perfection

The most explicit statement by Dionysius on the nature and status of being is to be found in Chapter 5 of the *Divine Names*, where he treats of the name 'Being' as applied to God. While for Dionysius, in accordance with the Neoplatonist tradition, Goodness is the proper name of God, Being is primary among created perfections and is therefore the most excellent of names drawn from creation which may be pronounced in praise of God. For Aquinas, on the other hand, Being is not only the primary perfection of finite reality but also the very essence and proper name of God. In Dionysius' view, 'Good' is the universal and transcendent name which along expresses God's nature; 'Being' expresses what is globally and primarily the first gift of creation. Of inestimable interest, however, is the significance which Dionysius gives to the value of being in itself as constitutive of the perfection of finite beings. This is found in his exposition of being as God's primary effect and first participation. We shall examine Dionysius' view in the context of Aquinas' Commentary, since there is here a close unity of meaning regarding this central and fundamental doctrine. (Indeed, as Van Steenberghen remarks, we find here, 'dans le commentaire de S. Thomas comme dans le texte de Denys, l'aspect le plus original de la doctrine de la participation à l'être.')[1]

As Aquinas notes, Dionysius gives two reasons why the name 'Being' or '*Qui est*' is applied most fittingly to God. These are in fact two aspects of the one relation of causality. Firstly, God is to be named according to his primary effect, i.e. from the most sublime perfection which he produces. (Dionysius must thus prove the paramount excellence of being within creation, in order to attribute Being to God before all other names.) Secondly, the argument is raised to the level of

---

[1] Fernand Van Steenberghen, 'Prolègoménes à la *quarta via*', p. 104.

participation through an intensification of the value of being which has been disclosed in the first step of the argument: 'He says that God himself has prior and pre-eminent being in a prior and eminent way',[2] i.e. he possesses in the unity and abundance of his Being the unlimited measure of every perfection. This conclusion rests upon the first justification of the primacy of being.

Granted God's causality, and that he is most appropriately named from his primary and most noble effect,[3] it is a matter of discovering which is his most noble effect and primary participation. The question whether being is the highest perfection because it is the first participation in God or rather the first divine participation by virtue of its supreme perfection is an artificial one. The distinction is superfluous since by the very nature of God's perfection and his creative communication, it is evident that the highest perfection of reality should be that which participates most intimately in him. The question which is at once the highest perfection and first participation is to be solved, thus, by reflection.

We find in Dionysius a rational justification of the primacy of being, albeit in a less radical and profound form than in Aquinas. Dionysius establishes summarily the excellence of being and, once this position is attained, defends the priority of being on the ground of its divine origin and its immediacy as the causal presence of God within beings. He begins thus with a natural appreciation of the radical value of being and argues that for something to be wise or living, it must first of all be.

> Being is laid down (*προβέβληται, propositum*) or created before the other participations in God, and Being itself (*αὐτὸ καθ' ἀὐτὸ τὸ εἶναι)* is anterior to life itself, wisdom or divine likeness; and all the other principles in which beings participate, first participate themselves in Being. Moreover, all of the subsistent principles in which beings participate, themselves participate in subsisting Being; and there is no being whose essence and eternity are not Being Itself.[4]

Although the primacy of Being is attained by Dionysius through a natural insight and justified by reasoned reflection, this justification occurs within the context of creation. Being is the first perfection to be created and that which first participates in God.

---

[2] V, i, 636: Hoc ergo est quod dicit quod ipse Deus *praeesse et superesse* praehabet et superhabet. See *DN* 5, 5, 267: *καὶ γὰρ τὸ προεῖναι καὶ ὑπερεῖναι προέχων καὶ ὑπερέχων.*

[3] V, i, 633: Si qua causa nominetur a suo effectu, convenientissime nominetur a principali et dignissimo suorum effectuum.

[4] 5, 5, 266: *καὶ πρὸ τῶν ἄλλων αὐτοῦ μετοχῶν τὸ εἶναι προβέβληται καὶ ἔστιν αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτὸ τὸ εἶναι πρεσβύτερον τοῦ αὐτοζωὴν εἶναι καὶ αὐτοσοφίαν εἶναι καὶ αὐτοομοιότητα θείαν εἶναι καὶ τὰ ἄλλα ὅσων τὰ ὄντα μετέχοντα.*

Being is taken by Dionysius from the outset as the principal, most ancient and venerable of God's gifts. The priority of existence among all the participations of the Good stems from its privileged position as radix of all specific perfections, in which they must first participate in order to be and to effect their presence within beings. Not only is Being the plenitude of perfection from which all individual beings derive, but it is the source of all the perfections which they share. In Dionysius we re-encounter the Platonist concept of universal causes, i.e. transcendent principles of perfection in which finite beings participate according to the various qualities which they enjoy. For the Pseudo-Areopagite, however, it serves as a model of reflection in order to conceive of the causality of distinct perfections and their exemplary presence in the Creator. The so-called transcendent principles are not distinct from Being, separate and apart from it, as it were, but are themselves participations in Being itself. 'For, indeed, all the principles of beings through their participation in Being both are and are principles; they first of all are and are then principles.'[5]

Thus, according to Dionysius if we suppose, for example, that Life itself (*αὐτοζωή*) is the principle of living things, and Similarity itself the principle of all things which bear resemblance, and Unity and Order the principles of all things which are unified and ordered; and likewise if we call 'Participations *per se*' (*αὐτομετοχάς*) all the other principles in which beings participate, we will find that these participations first participate in Being; through Being they first of all subsist themselves and are subsequently principles of this or that. By participation in Being, therefore, they both subsist in themselves and permit things to participate in them. And if these principles exist through their participation in Being, much more so do those beings which in turn partake of them.[6] Through Being all things both are, and receive their determination as the kind of being which they are.[7]

This intensive unity of the qualities and perfections of a being in its very Being or its *to be*, and the superiority of Being, are illustrated by the reply to a hypothetical but interesting objection. If Being transcends life and life exceeds wisdom, why, it is asked, are living and intelligent beings superior to things which merely exist, i.e. beings whose highest perfection is their simple existence; and why do intellectual and spiritual natures surpass all others and come closer to God, rather than those

---

[5] 5, 5, 267: *καὶ γοῦν αἱ ἀρχαὶ τῶν ὄντων πᾶσαι τοῦ εἶναι μετέχουσαι καί εἰσι καὶ ἀρχαί εἰσι καὶ πρῶτόν εἰσι ἔπειτα ἀρχαί εἰσι.*

[6] 5, 5, 267: *εἶναι πρῶτον αὐτὰς μετεχούσας καὶ τῷ εἶναι πρῶτον μὲν οὔσας, ἔπειτα τοῦδε ἢ τοῦδε ἀρχὰς οὔσας καὶ τῷ μετέχειν τοῦ εἶναι καὶ οὔσας καὶ μετεχομένας.*

[7] 5, 7, 274: *τὰ ἄλλα ὅσα τῷ εἶναι ὄντα, τὰ ὄντα πάντα χαρακτηρίζει.*

CHAPTER SEVEN

GOODNESS OF GOD AS SUBSISTENT BEING

As we saw at the beginning of our enquiry, Aquinas greatly relied upon Dionysius in establishing his method of knowing and of naming God. We now turn to the influence of Dionysius on Aquinas' understanding of God's nature. Even though he interprets it according to his own priority of Being, Aquinas agrees with Dionysius that it is God's nature to be the very essence and plentitude of goodness itself. God alone is good exclusively and exhaustively; Aquinas repeats with approval the phrase from St Luke cited by Dionysius: *Nemo bonus nisi solus Deus.*[1] God is distinguished from all else by his goodness. It is his very nature: there is in God nothing more profound or proper. Goodness reveals and defines the whole divine essence. There is a consummate identity and reciprocity between God's goodness and his nature. All that God is, belongs to him through his goodness.[2] In his Commentary on the *Divine Names*, Aquinas advances two reasons for this identity of God's being and goodness. Firstly, the divine essence, unlike that of other beings, is goodness itself: God is good according to his essence, while other beings are good by participation. Aquinas explains this in the light of his own view of goodness as actuality and of being as fundamentally actual, not indeed to support the primacy of the good but to illustrate that God is goodness itself. Without pronouncing on the notional priority of either being or goodness, but because goodness and being are for Aquinas really convertible, he can establish the identity of God with his own goodness from the self-subsistence of his existence. He reasons: each thing is good in so far as it is in act; but as it is unique to God alone to be his own being, he alone is his own goodness.[3]

[1] *ST*, I, 6, 3, from Luke 18:19, although Aquinas attributes it both here and in *Contra Gentiles* 1, 38 to Matthew. In *In DN*, II, i, 112 and IV, i, 269 he cites the source correctly.

[2] II, i, 112: Per se bonitas laudatur . . . sicut determinans, idest distinguens ab aliis et manifestans totam diviam essentiam, quodcumque est, quia cuicumque convenit divina essentia, convenit ei per se bonitatem esse et e converso.

[3] IV, i, 269: Et hoc, propter duo: primo, quidem quia ipsa divina Essentia est ipsa bonitas, quod in aliis rebus non contingit: Deus enim est bonus per suam essentiam, omnia vero alia per participationem; unumquodque enim bonum est, secundum quod est res actu; Deo autem proprium est quod sit suum esse, unde ipse solus est sua bonitas.

The first argument bears upon the actuality of goodness and its foundation; Aquinas adduces secondly what could be called a reflection upon the order of the good and its finality. 'Other things, even though they are good in so far as they exist, nevertheless attain their perfect goodness only through something more which is added above and beyond their being; but God has in his own act of being the fullness of his goodness.' Moreover, other beings are good because they are ordered towards something else which is their final end. God is not directed towards any end other than himself. Aquinas thus concludes: 'The first characteristic of divine goodness is that goodness itself is the divine essence.' The second characteristic, he notes, following the order adopted by Dionysius, is that the divine goodness 'extends goodness to all things, which are said to derive through participation from him who is said (to exist) essentially.'[4]

God is affirmed as essentially good because he embraces within his existence in an infinite and unlimited power all the perfections manifest in finite beings. In creatures the perfection of being is limited and diverse, in God it is absolute and simple. The principles of intensity, participation and pre-eminent presence, determine the thought of both Dionysius and Aquinas. Aquinas emphasises the determination of perfection as act, universally grounded in the actuality of existence. God is known to be all-perfect because he is affirmed as cause of all things in their existence. It will be fruitful in this regard to have a closer look at these notions of causality and exemplarity in Aquinas' Commentary on the *Divine Names* and in other passages inspired by Dionysius.

Especially revealing of Dionysius' inspiration is Question 4 of *Summa Theologiae* I, where Aquinas considers the perfection of God; particularly article 2, where he reasons that God is universally perfect since in him are present the perfections of all things. Dionysius' influence is clear, firstly, from the appeal made to his authority in response to the objections which Aquinas advances against his own view. And considering in turn each of these objections, he again refers to Dionysius. God is perfect because, in Dionysius' words, he embraces all existing

[4] IV, i, 269: Item, res aliae, etsi inquantum sunt, bonae sint, tamen perfectam bonitatem consequuntur per aliquod superadditum supra eorum esse; sed Deus in ipso suo esse, habet complementum suae bonitatis. Item, res aliae sunt bonae per ordinem ad aliquid aliud, quod est ultimus finis; Deus autem non ordinatur ad aliquem finem extra se. Sic igitur, primum quod est proprium divinae bonitatis est quod ipsa bonitas est essentia divina; secundum proprium eius est quod extendit bonitatem ad omnia, quae per participationem dicuntur derivari ab Eo quod per essentiam dicitur.

CHAPTER EIGHT

PSEUDO-DIONYSIUS: THE CYCLE OF CREATION

Dionysius employs the classic Neoplatonic triadic scheme *μονή, πρόοδος, ἐπιστροφή* to express God as the origin of all things; their procession forth and their return to him. God is the *ἀρχή* or origin of all beings, embracing them prior to their existence in a transcendent unity and fullness. Through his goodness he causes creatures to proceed forth by way of emanation and establishes them in being. He remains their abiding support, and calls all things to reunion with himself. This universal panorama and cyclic scheme becomes in turn the organic and architectonic structure of Aquinas' vision of God and the world. In what remains, I wish to consider briefly this order of emanation and return as espoused by Dionysius and appropriated by Aquinas. A complete treatment of the many related themes would require a much lengthier investigation and is beyond our present scope. Our intention is to indicate some of the remaining themes in Dionysius' integral metaphysics which form part of the Neoplatonist heritage of St Thomas.

Dionysius repeatedly affirms God's causality of every aspect of the world. As efficient cause, he freely causes all things through his superabundant goodness while remaining himself transcendent to his effects. As exemplary source he contains in a unified manner all of the diverse perfections manifest in creation. And as final cause he imbues all things with a latent native desire to return to him as their ultimate goal. As universal and comprehensive cause, God is praised with the names both of Goodness and Beauty.

> The Beautiful is origin *(ἀρχή)* of all things as their productive cause (*ὡς ποιητικὸν αἴτιον*) which moves the whole, embracing it through a love for its own beauty. It is the goal of all things and is loved as final cause (*τελικὸν αἴτιον*) since all things come to be for the sake of the beautiful; and it is the exemplary cause (*παραδειγματικόν*) according to which all things are determined . . . Therefore the Beautiful is the same as the Good because all things seek the Beautiful and the Good with respect to every cause, and there is no being which does not participate in the Beautiful and the Good.[1]

---

[1] 4, 7, 140-1; see 1, 7, 26; 4, 4, 121.

Dionysius expressly states: 'Because of him and through him and in him are all exemplary, final, efficient, formal and material (elemental) causes (*καὶ ἐν αὐτῷ πᾶσα ἀρχὴ παραδειγματικὴ τελικὴ ποιητικὴ εἰδικὴ στοιχειώδης*).' God is the origin (*ἀρχή*), coherence (*συνοχή*) and end (*πέρας*) of all.[2]

In accordance with the method which he has adopted, already in Chapter 2 of the *Divine Names*, Dionysius cites Scripture in support of God's universal and creative causality.[3] However, he formulates his philosophic exposition of divine causality in the categories of the Neoplatonist tradition. Indeed there is concurrence in the Christian and Platonist traditions on the most profound reason for creation; things exist because God is good: *Quia bonus est*. God is wholly and entirely perfect; he enjoys in an infinite manner all the riches which are in any way possible. As exhaustively and exclusively good in himself, he is the proper and adequate goal of his own love. God loves himself: this is the highest act of divine goodness. Fully sufficient in himself he is in need of nothing, but loving his own goodness he wishes it to be enjoyed also by others. Out of love, therefore, for himself and for others, God calls creatures into a communion of love with himself. For God, to love something is to cause it to exist.[4] Thus we find again the Platonist doctrine of God's unenvious but zealous goodness as foundation of creation. God's goodness overflows in a superabundant gift of his own perfection which causes things radically to come into being. Not enclosed within his own transcendence, God communicates with creatures in a total act of liberality and creative largesse, with a generosity which is generative of all things. Dionysius expresses this in the following passage which summarises the total causality of God as origin, cause, support and end of all:

> The cause of all things through an excess of goodness loves all things, produces all things, perfects all things, contains and turns all things toward himself; divine love is good through the goodness of the Good. Indeed love itself which produces the goodness of beings, pre-subsisting super-abundantly in the Good, did not allow itself to remain unproductive but moved itself to produce in the super-abundant generation of all.[5]

[2] 4, 10, 154-5; see no. 153. Cf. Aquinas, *ST*, I, 44, 4 ad 4: Cum Deus sit causa efficiens, exemplaris et finalis omnium rerum, et materia prima sit ab ipso, sequitur quod primum principium omnium rerum sit unum tantum secundum rem. As Sheldon-Williams points out, the triad *μονή, πρόοδος* and *ἐπιστροφή* (triad of motion or rest) was also formulated: *οὐσία, δύναμις, ἐνέργεια* (triad of action or inaction). The latter was preferred by Christians after Dionysius, since it more clearly favoured creation (God acting freely) rather than an automatic process of emanation. (I. P. Sheldon-Williams, *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy*, pp. 430-1).

[3] 2, 1, 32: *τὰ πάντα ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ*.

[4] See *CH*, 4, 1, 177C; *Ep.* 8, 1085C.

Dionysius summarises this again when he declares: 'Divine love is ecstatic' (*ἔστι δὲ καὶ ἐκστατικὸς ὁ θεῖος ἔρως*).[6] God's love as creative is an 'outgoing' love, which Dionysius describes in the following manner:

> The cause itself of all beings, because of his beautiful and good love for all, in an excess of loving goodness goes out of himself (*ἔξω ἑαυτοῦ γίνεται*) in his providence for all beings; charmed, as it were, by goodness, affection and love he is drawn from his transcendence and separation above all into all beings by an ecstatic power beyond being, without departing from himself.[7]

The Good alone can cause what is good and can only cause that which is good.[8] 'It is the nature of the Good to produce and preserve',[9] just as it is the nature of fire to warm rather than chill. Moreover what is deprived of the Good cannot exist.[10] Existence is the first gift which pours forth from the abundance of transcendent Goodness.[11] God himself is perfect since he can be neither increased or diminished but pre-contains all things in advance within himself and overflows in a unique, unceasing, inexhaustible plenitude, filling all things with his own perfection.[12] God causes beings because he is entirely free of envy (*ἄφθονος*); and pre-containing all things according to a transcendent power he gives existence to all in a generous outpouring through an exceeding abundance of power.[13]

Divine causation is most frequently portrayed by Neoplatonism as a process of emanation. The being and perfection of creatures is an outpouring of God's superabundant goodness: an effusion (*χύσις*),[14] overflowing (*ὑπερβλύζειν*) or 'bubbling over',[15] outflowing or gushing

[5] 4, 10, 159.

[6] 4, 13, 168.

[7] 4, 13, 171. In a detailed study, C. J. De Vogel has pointed out the significance of Dionysius' innovation in attributing Love to God himself, the Cause of all things and giving to divine Love a central place in his theology. Cornelia J de Vogel. 'Amor quo caelum regitur', p. 31. Also 'Greek Cosmic Love and the Christian Love of God', p. 71.

[8] 4, 23, 214: *τὸ γὰρ ἀγαθὸν ἀγαθὰ παράγει καὶ ὑφίστησι*.

[9] 4, 19, 188: *φύσις γὰρ τῷ ἀγαθῷ τὸ παράγειν καὶ σώζειν*.

[10] 4, 23, 214: *τὸ γὰρ πάντῃ ἄμοιρον τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ, οὔτε ἐν τοῖς οὖσι ἔσται*. See 4, 20, 201-4; 4, 30, 237; 4, 30, 241; 4, 31, 242-3.

[11] 5, 8, 267; 6, 2, 289.

[12] 13, 1, 438.

[13] 8, 6, 343: *ὑπερέχοντα καὶ προέχοντα πάντα τὰ ὄντα κατὰ δύναμιν ὑπερούσιον καὶ πᾶσι τοῖς οὖσι τὸ δύνασθαι εἶναι καὶ τόδε εἶναι κατὰ περιουσίαν ὑπερβαλλούσης δυνάμεως ἀφθόνῳ χύσει δεδωρημένον*.

[14] 9, 2, 361.

[15] 9, 2, 361; 11, 2, 413.

Dionysius employs a number of metaphors to illustrate the relation of the created multiplicity to the transcendent simplicity and unity of God. God is shared by all things equally, as the point of a circle by all its radii or a seal by each impression. Here is expressed likewise the unity present in the various distinctions or perfections proceeding from God. The seal, moreover, is participated as archetype by all impressions in full and not merely in part; any differences are due to the nature of the material which receives it and not to the seal which gives itself fully and equally to all. Thus, though all participate in the divine perfection, this is according to the measure of each.

These illustrations safeguard, moreover, the imparticipability (*ἀμεθεξία*) of the divinity who is cause of all, since it neither has contact nor mingles with its participants in its communion with them.[58] He is participated wholly by all participants but in such a manner that none has any part of him.[59] All that they are, is a share in his infinite richness, but he is in no manner received within creatures. Beings are fully participations in God but do not participate in his fullness. The being and essence of the creature is to be a participation in God; without this sharing they would cease to be. They share the perfection created by him in a manner which in no way diminishes his transcendence or enters as a real relation into his nature. God's essence and Being are not participated. This is the mystery of creation: creatures participate exclusively and exhaustively in the infinite causal perfection of God who is in no wise participated according to his essence. We have thus, in summary, the following triadic scheme: 1, God as he is in himself, in whom nothing participates and who participates in nothing (*ἀμέθεκτος*); 2, God as efficient cause who is participated by the effects into which he proceeds (*μεθεκτός*); 3, Creatures which through participation proceed from God, abide within themselves and return to God as final cause (*μετέχων*).[60]

---

[58] 2, 5, 52.
[59] 2, 5, 49.
[60] See Sheldon-Williams, *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy*, p. 459. In the order of participation, Kern discerns the following schema: 1. God, 2. the paradigms reposing in him, 3, the *λόγοι* residing in the world, and 4, the world itself. (C. Kern. 'La structure du monde d'après le ps.-Denys', p. 209).

CHAPTER NINE

CREATIVE DIFFUSION IN AQUINAS

Divine Good as Origin of Creation

Cornelio Fabro remarks that while St Augustine presents Aquinas with a metaphysics *del Vero e del Verbo*, the Pseudo-Dionysius inspires him with a metaphysics *dell'Amore e del Bene*.[1] Despite the danger of the contrast, overstated for the sake of expression, this view points to a notable emphasis in Dionysius and a profoundly significant influence in Aquinas.[2] Under the inspiration of Dionysius, Aquinas presents within his philosophy a parallel to the sublime revelation '*Deus caritas est*.' According to both Dionysius and Aquinas, the ultimate key to the wonder of the world is the very mystery of the abounding love of God. The most fundamental and universal love of all is that with which God loves his own goodness.[3] Of necessity God loves his goodness[4] but communicates it freely to beings through creation. Divine love is the principle of the universe in its origin, its internal order and immanent dynamism, and its ultimate finality. In God alone is there fully perfect love; given, as it were, on loan by God and reflected throughout creation in the love which beings have for each other, it is returned through the native desire which all things have for total fulfilment.

The will, as Aquinas notes, tends naturally towards goodness. Now, in God alone are will and essence identical, since the good which is loved is wholly contained within the essence of him who wills. God wills nothing beyond himself except because of his goodness. God is himself the only proper object of his own love. To him, in its paramount

---

[1] Cornelio Fabro, *La nozione metafisica della partecipazione*, p. 88.
[2] Fabro declares indeed that the influence of Dionysius complements that of Augustine. (Ibid.) See also *Breve introduzione al tomismo*, p. 18. De Gandillac remarks on Aquinas: 'Or c'est Denys, tout autant qu'Augustin, qui lui sert d'autorité lorsqu'il corrige l'aristotélisme en substituant au Moteur impassible le Bien qui se diffuse par amour.' (*Oeuvres complètes du Pseudo-Denys l'aréopagite*, Introduction, p. 54).
[3] See X, i, 858; *Contra Gentiles* 4, 19, 3563.
[4] *ST*, I, 19, 3.

sense, can be applied Aquinas' principle: *ex hoc quod aliquid est unum secum, sequitur quod amat ipsum.*[5] Selfhood and identity are the universal roots of love. In the case of God, as plenary and subsistent being, there is no distinction between his powers and his essence. Divine will and intellect are identical with God's existence.[6] This does not signify that his nature is devoid of inner life or movement; his Being is the fullness of all actuality. There is within it an infinite and intimate exchange of love. His will has no limits and his infinite goodness alone is its adequate object. Now to will, explains Aquinas, is a kind of motion and it is by his own goodness that God's will is moved. God loves, therefore, through an immanent movement of his own which leads from himself to himself. It is God's own goodness which moves his will. God is himself, therefore, his own love, since the will with which he desires his own good is identical with his very being and substance. He is the essence of Love itself. There is in him identity between lover and beloved. The good he loves is none other than his own Being and the love with which he loves this good is the movement of his own will.[7] Whereas human will is moved by a good distinct from itself, the object of God's will is his own goodness, his very essence.[8]

The question which we wish to consider is why God, who is fully perfect in himself, calls into existence a universe of finite beings which cannot reciprocate the love which is their origin. Let us follow Aquinas' explanation of the origin of creation and its diversity. Although he is one in essence, in knowing his unity and power God knows all that exists virtually within himself, and knows that diverse things may proceed from him. He is capable of being imitated in an endless variety of ways. He knows himself as the infinite and universal exemplar of

[5] IV, xi, 449. See *ST*, I, 60, 4: Unumquodque diligit id quod est unum sibi.

[6] *ST*, I, 19, 1: . . . sicut suum intelligere est suum esse, ita et suum velle; *De Potentia* 3, 15, ad 20: Voluntas Dei est eius essentia.

[7] IV, xi, 444: Deus dicitur amor et amabilis quia Ipse amat motu sui ipsius . . . Deus est suus amor. See Etienne Gilson, *Spirit of Medieval Philosophy*, p. 275.

[8] *ST*, I, 19, 1 ad 3: Voluntas cuius obiectum principale est bonum quod est extra volentem oportet quod sit mota ab alio, sed obiectum divinae voluntatis est bonitas sua, quae est eius essentia; unde cum voluntas Dei sit eius essentia, non movetur ab alio a se, sed a se tantum, eo modo loquendi quo intelligere et velle dicitur motus. Et secundum hoc Plato dixit quod primum movens movet se ipsum. *Contra Gentiles* 4, 19, 3563: Quia proprium obiectum divinae voluntatis est eius bonitas, necesse est quod Deus primo et principaliter suam bonitatem et seipsum amet. Cum autem ostensum sit quod amatum necesse est aliqualiter esse in voluntate amantis; ipse autem Deus seipsum amat: necesse est quod ipse Deus sit in sua voluntate ut amatum in amante. Est autem amatum in amante secundum quod amatur; amare autem quoddam velle est: velle autem Dei est eius esse, sicut et voluntas eius est eius esse; esse igitur Dei in voluntate sua per modum amoris, non est esse accidentale, sicut in nobis, sed essentiale. Unde oportet quod Deus, secundum quod consideratur ut in sua voluntate existens, sit vere et substantialiter Deus.

endless participation, and loving and willing his own goodness loves the perfections which are pre-contained within himself. God does not wish, however, to produce in the natural world of existence all the things which he knows can proceed from him.[9] God does not necessarily will that all the things he loves within himself as possible participations should exist in reality. Only those which he wills to be, receive existence: *Si Deus aliquid vult, illud erit.*[10] Indeed Aquinas argues in the *Contra Gentiles* from the finite number of creatures which are in existence, to the freedom of the divine will in creation. God is infinitely participable, yet there is in existence a finite number of beings. If, however, God had willed by necessity all the participations which he loves within himself, there would exist an infinite number of beings, sharing his goodness in an infinity of ways, and in ways, moreover, different to those enjoyed by creatures now existing. God, therefore, must have freely willed the limited number of beings and modes of participation now in actual existence.[11] He cannot have been obliged to cause all or any of his possible participations. It is through a free choice of his will, therefore, that God desires through love to call into existence the universe of beings. The ultimate reason why God is free in creating is that he is himself the absolute perfection of Being. He can exist without other beings since they bring about no increase in his perfection. It is not absolutely necessary, therefore, for him to will them.[12] Furthermore, since he is not determined according to any limited mode of being, but contains within himself the total perfection of being (*totam perfectionem essendi*), he does not act by a necessity of his nature to cause any particular effect. In this he differs from beings which have a determinate being and a specific nature.[13]

[9] The things he knows can proceed from him are *rationes intellectae*; only those in whose imitation he wishes to create beings are exemplars proper. Cf. V, iii, 665: Deus enim, etsi sit in essentia sua unus, tamen intelligendo suam unitatem et virtutem, cognoscit quidquid in Eo virtualiter existit. Sic igitur cognoscit ex Ipso posse procedere res diversas; huiusmodi igitur quae cognoscit ex Se posse prodire rationes intellectae dicuntur. Non autem omnes huiusmodi rationes exemplaria dici possunt: exemplar enim est ad cuius imitationem fit aliud; non autem omnia quae scit Deus ex Ipso posse prodire, vult in rerum natura producere; illae igitur solae rationes intellectae a Deo exemplaria dici possunt, ad quarum imitationem vult res in esse producere, sicut producit artifex artificata ad imitationem formarum artis quas mente concepit, quae etiam artificialium exemplaria dici possunt.

[10] *Contra Gentiles* I, 85, 716.

[11] *Contra Gentiles* I, 81, 685: Cum autem divina bonitas sit infinita, est infinitis modis participabilis, et aliis modis quam ab his creaturis quae nunc sunt participetur. Si igitur, ex hoc quod vult bonitatem suam, vellet de necessitate ea quae ipsam participant, sequeretur quod vellet esse infinitas creaturas, infinitis modis participantes suam bonitatem. Quod patet esse falsum: quia si vellet, essent; cum sua voluntas sit principium essendi rebus. Non igitur ex necessitate vult etiam ea quae nunc sunt.

[12] *ST*, I, 19, 3: Unde cum bonitas Dei sit perfecta, et esse possit sine aliis, cum nihil ei perfectionis ex aliis accrescat; sequitur quod alia a se eum velle, non sit necessarium absolute.

[13] *ST*, I, 19, 4: Omne enim agens per naturam habet esse determinatum. Cum igitur