

## A NOTE ON NAMING GOD

*Glen Coughlin*

God has revealed Himself to us in human language, in a language compatible with the knowledge we can have of Him through reason alone. We must acknowledge therefore that we are able somehow to speak of God intelligibly. Our speech may take many forms: we sometimes name God through negation, as when we say He is immaterial, and we sometimes name Him as a principle, as when we say He is the first cause.

We may, however, also speak of Him as He is in Himself: "God is a rock" or a "a burning fire." When we so speak of Him, we use metaphors, which seems appropriate to the naming of God because it tells us what He is like, rather than presuming to tell us what He is. It is common for us to use metaphorical language to express things barely intelligible to us, such as our emotions, and so we also use it to express things which are too far above us to be well understood.<sup>1</sup>

When, however, we explain our metaphors, we are forced back to what St. Thomas calls "proper" language. When we say, for example, that God is a fire, we may be thinking of His intellect and will and their likenesses to the light and the warmth of the fire. If we intend, however, to understand the metaphors as such, we will do so through the use of ordinary, non-metaphorical language. This proper language, neverthe-

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R. Glen Coughlin graduated from Thomas Aquinas College in 1981. He completed his Ph.D. in Philosophy at Université Laval in 1986 and began teaching at Thomas Aquinas College in 1987. He served as Dean of the College from 1996 to 2004.

<sup>1</sup> *In I Sent.*, Prologue, Q. 1, a. 5 ad 3.

less, though desirable as the best way of understanding, is not without its own problems, and it is those problems which demand our attention in the naming of God.

I wish, in this note, to do three things. First, I will explain the distinction between proper and improper language. Next, I will explain how the names said of God properly are, as St. Thomas argues,<sup>2</sup> said of God before they are said of creatures. Finally, I will show why this implies that creatures "participate" in God.

While St. Thomas sometimes uses the expression "improprie" to signify the non-metaphorical, it is clear that in the following text he uses "proprie" precisely as the non-metaphorical.

Videtur quod nullum nomen dicatur de deo proprie. Omnia enim nomina quae de deo dicimus, sunt a creaturis accepta, ut dictum est. Sed nomina creaturarum metaphoricè dicuntur de deo, sicut cum dicitur deus est lapis, vel leo, vel aliquid huiusmodi. Ergo omnia nomina dicta de deo, dicuntur metaphoricè.<sup>3</sup>

To be said "proprie" is opposed to being said "metaphoricè:" proper is opposed to metaphorical. The reason he speaks in this way might be that, when we use metaphors, we are comparing one thing to another, but doing so with a sort of shorthand by which we use the name of one thing for another. One might think that naming one thing by another is just an error, but consider the following examples:

- (1) George is a triangle.
- (2) George is a pig.
- (3) George is a man.

<sup>2</sup> *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, Q. 13, a. 6, c. Hereafter, references to the *Summa Theologiae* will be by part, question, article, etc., only.

<sup>3</sup> Ia, Q. 13, a. 2, obj. 1. Other texts where the expression is used this way are, e.g., *In III Sent.* D. 9, Q. 2G, c.; *Quaestiones Disputatae de Potentia Dei*, Q. 7, a. 8, c.; *In Boethii De Trinitate*, Q. 5, a. 4, ad 2.

In the first case, we are simply wrong. George is not a triangle, and using the name triangle of George doesn't bode well for our success in mathematics. In the third case, we are simply right. The name "man," even if it applies to some things other than George, is a "proper" name of George, not in the sense that it applies to him alone (that would be proper as opposed to common) but in the sense that the nature named by the word "man" is really in George. The middle case is ambiguous. If I mean that George is a member of the family *Suidae*, I am wrong. But I probably mean that George acts like a pig, he eats without manners or is overly devoted to the life of the flesh. I have used the name of one thing for another, not due to error, but to make a certain point by "metaphor," i.e., "carrying across" or "transferring" the name. The name is "carried across" from one thing to another. Here, we do not even change the definition, though of course we do not intend that the definition be predicated of the subject. We do not mean by "pig" something *other* than we mean when we say "Porky is a pig," but in this latter case we intend that the definition be said of the subject, whereas in the metaphorical case we do not intend that the definition be said of the subject. If we look at the figures of speech we normally call metaphors, we see this same thing over and over.

For example, in Shakespeare's *Sonnet 73*, we have, to take a single quatrain:

That time of year thou mayst in me behold  
 When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang  
 Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,  
 Bare, ruin'd choirs, where late the sweet birds sang.

There is not really a "time of year" in the narrator during which yellow leaves hang upon boughs, etc. And within this metaphor, there are two others: tree boughs are not "bare, ruin'd choirs," nor are the birds who had recently sung in their boughs really monks who had sung in the choirs before the despoiling of the monasteries by Henry VIII. Shakespeare

does not intend to predicate the definitions of the words he is using, nor does he use them with altered meanings. In each case, we see that the name used metaphorically is not the proper name of the thing of which it is being said; so there is an "improper" usage.

On the other hand, we can have proper names of various sorts as well. Most obviously, there may also be proper naming when we name two things by one name using only one definition. If I say, "Porky the Pig is an animal and my dog Fido is an animal, too," I mean the same thing in both cases, and in both cases the name is used properly. I am using one name of two things with the same definition in both cases, and I intend that the definition of the name be understood of the subject of predication. (I might also use a name improperly in two cases: "George is a pig and his brother Peter is an even bigger pig." Here I have one name and one definition and two subjects, but I do not intend that the definition be understood of either of the subjects.)

On the other hand, if I say, to use Aristotle's famous example and the one constantly recurred to in St. Thomas' writings, "the animal is healthy" and "the medicine is healthy," I do not mean the same thing in the two cases. It is no longer a case of saying one thing and meaning another; here we say what we mean but we mean two different things by the same name. In these cases of proper naming, we have one name said of two things with two definitions, but the definitions are related deliberately.<sup>4</sup> There are, then, at least two cases of proper naming. St. Thomas calls the first sort "univocal" and the second sort "analogous."

The importance of analogical naming, not only in theology but throughout the life of the human intellect, cannot be overstated. It arises not only from ubiquity but from ne-

<sup>4</sup> There are also cases in which one name has two unrelated definitions, like "bat" said of the mammal and of the club, but these cases have little interest for us.

cessity. Since we know some things through other things, and we name things as we know them<sup>5</sup>, we will name some things in virtue of others. "Healthy" as said of the animal is presupposed to "healthy" as said of the medicine, since the former is in the notion of the latter. Our order of naming follows this order of knowledge. Because of this characteristic of our naming, we can often use the order among analogous names to better perceive the natural order in our knowing.

From the example of healthy said of the medicine and of the animal, we can see that one of the meanings of the analogical name will be present in the others. The healthiness of the animal must be understood to understand the healthiness of the medicine. So too, the way that substances exist must be understood to understand the way accidents or properties exist, so that the word "being" is said first of substances and only afterward of accidents. The good which is found in a final end is in the definition of the good which is found in a means to an end—the latter is good only because it is oriented toward the former. The word as used to convey that meaning which is found in the other meanings I will call the "primary" analogate, the others are "secondary" analogates. This language seems appropriate because the meaning of the primary analogate must be grasped before the meanings of the secondary analogates.

There is an interesting question here, namely, what is the appropriate division of analogical names. Much ink has been spilt on this topic, primarily because the greatest of St. Thomas' commentators seems to have gotten the doctrine badly wrong. Cardinal Cajetan, in his book "De Nomine Analogia," makes a division of analogical names which takes as its foundation a set of metaphysical distinctions.<sup>6</sup> But the doctrine of analogy concerns names and their meanings, which, however much they have metaphysical import or background, are not them-

<sup>5</sup> Aristotle, *Peri hermeneias*, Ch. I, 16a3-4.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas de Vio, Cardinal Cajetan, *De Nomine Analogia*.

selves subjects for metaphysical discussions. Whenever St. Thomas speaks of analogous naming, he invariably does so in terms of words and definitions, which are subjects not of metaphysics but of logic, since they are works of reason.<sup>7</sup> This does not mean that the name "analogy" and its cognates cannot be used in other, perhaps metaphysical senses, but that this doctrine of analogical names is a logical doctrine.

Discussing the entire notion of analogy and the appropriate divisions of analogous names is not my intent, but one division, which St. Thomas very often adverts to (and in particular in Ia, Q. 13, a. 5) is that between what we might call "two to one" and "one to one" analogies. The word "healthy" serves St. Thomas to exemplify both cases. When I say the animal is healthy and the medicine is healthy, the definition intended by one usage is in the definition intended by the other usage, as we have seen. This is what I am calling "one to one" analogy. The one usage is referred to one other usage. But we can also say, "medicine is healthy and so is urine." In the former case, we are noting that medicine causes health; in the latter, that the urine is a sign of health. Here two names are analogous because both their definitions are referred to another third definition, that of healthy as said of the animal. This is what I am calling the "two to one" analogy. Here, there may be no order among the two called "analogous." There is no more reason to say that healthy is said first of medicine than that it is said first of urine. Rather, both are said in reference to the health of the animal. Thus, in "two to one" analogy, the primary analogate is simply not included among the uses being compared.

In every case, there must, in the last analysis, be a primary analogate. In the texts before us, St. Thomas is at pains to say that, when words are used analogously of creatures and

<sup>7</sup> *In libros de generatione et corruptione*, L. I, l. 10, n. 8; *In libros posteriorum analyticorum*, L. I, Proemium, nn. 1-2; *In metaphysicorum libros VIII*, L. I, n. 1; *In Boethii de trinitate*, Q. 6, a. 1, c.

God, we are dealing with a one to one analogy. For if there were a two to one analogy, we would have to say there is something which is prior to God and creatures and which is better known than either, and so is included in the definition of the word as said either of God or of creatures.

At this point, we are able to state clearly a difficulty in the text of the *Summa*. In Ia, Q. 13, a. 6, St. Thomas says that names said properly of God and creatures, like "good" or "wise," are said analogously, and primarily of God.

Cum enim dicitur deus est bonus, vel sapiens, non solum significatur quod ipse sit causa sapientiae vel bonitatis, sed quod haec in eo eminentius praeexistunt. Unde, secundum hoc, dicendum est quod, quantum ad rem significatam per nomen, per prius dicuntur de deo quam de creaturis, quia a deo huiusmodi perfectiones in creaturas manant. Sed quantum ad impositionem nominis, per prius a nobis imponuntur creaturis, quas prius cognoscimus. Unde et modum significandi habent qui competit creaturis, ut supra dictum est.<sup>8</sup>

St. Thomas says this after having said, at the beginning of the same article, that a name said of two things analogously is said primarily of that which is in the definition of the other.

... dicendum quod in omnibus nominibus quae de pluribus analogice dicuntur, necesse est quod omnia dicantur per respectum ad unum, et ideo illud unum oportet quod ponatur in definitione omnium.

Et quia ratio quam significat nomen, est definitio, ut dicitur in IV metaphys., necesse est quod illud nomen per prius dicatur de eo quod ponitur in definitione aliorum, et per posterius de aliis, secundum ordinem quo appropinquant ad illud primum vel magis vel minus, sicut sanum quod dicitur de animali, cadit in definitione sani quod dicitur de medicina, quae dicitur sana in quantum causat sanitatem in animali; et in definitione sani quod dicitur de urina, quae dicitur sana in quantum est signum sanitatis animalis.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Ia, Q. 13, a. 6, c.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

Thus, he seems to be saying that, of the words said properly of God and creatures, the meaning used in speaking of God is first. But this would mean that the definition of the name as said of God is in the definition of the name as said of creatures. But what is in the definition must be better known than what is defined, since the definition is meant to explain what a thing is. Thus, contrary to all his teaching<sup>10</sup>, St. Thomas seems to be saying that we know God before we know creatures. Is this really what he is saying, and, if so, why would he say such a thing?

There is an answer which is appealing at first, but finally unsatisfactory. It is this: St. Thomas is simply saying that, though we obviously know God through creatures and so name him from creatures, we come to see that those characteristics of Him which we name properly and with names common to Him and creatures are more perfectly present in Him. With regard to the thing signified, the name is first in God, since the thing signified is in God preeminently, the proof of which is that the perfection signified flows from God into creatures. With regard to the temporal order of the imposition of the name, clearly the creatures come first, since all our names of God are derived from creatures.

This answer fails to note, though, that the entire discussion in this article is about names, not beings. Though the former discussion cannot simply be cut off from the latter, the position amounts to saying that the question, contrary to the clear indications in the text is about being rather than about knowing. For the question posed is whether "nomina per prius *dicantur* de creaturis quam de deo."<sup>11</sup> In the introduction to the question, the issue is put thus: ". . . supposito quod *dicantur* analogice, utrum *dicantur* de deo per prius, vel de creaturis. . ."<sup>12</sup> And the conclusion of the article is in

<sup>10</sup> Cf., e.g., Ia, Q. 2, a. 2, c.

<sup>11</sup> Ia, Q. 13, a. 6, obj. 1. Emphasis added.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, Q. 13, Introduction. Emphasis added.

terms of names *said* of creatures *per prius* in one sense, but *said* of God *per prius* in another way.<sup>13</sup> However much the first of these claims is clearly compatible with other claims by St. Thomas, the second does not seem to be, because, one way or another, he is saying that some names are said of God before creatures, and the only sense he has given to the expression "*per prius*" or "before" in this article is that the definition of the name used in the secondary sense includes the definition of the name used in the primary sense.

The immediate motivation for the conclusion of the article seems to be a text from the *Letter to the Ephesians*. In his "Sed Contra," the following text is cited: "flecto genua mea ad patrem domini nostri iesu, ex quo omnis paternitas in caelo et in terra nominatur."<sup>14</sup> One might think that St. Thomas, faced with this text, is merely making do, or even contradicting his own usual positions about the order between our knowledge of creatures and our knowledge of God, only because his faith forces him to. I would like to propose a solution which, I believe, neither contradicts his usual claims nor is based on faith, but follows from what he has earlier said about naming God, claims which themselves seem to be knowable by reason. The solution will also help us understand how we can speak of creatures participating or sharing in God.

Returning to Article 4, we find the following argument that names said of God properly are not synonymous with those names as said of creatures. Here is the text:

Ratio enim quam significat nomen, est conceptio intellectus de re significata per nomen. Intellectus autem noster, cum cognoscat deum ex creaturis, format ad intelligendum deum conceptiones proportionatas perfectionibus procedentibus a deo in creaturas. Quae quidem perfectiones in deo praeelegantur unite et simpliciter, in creaturis vero recipiuntur divise

<sup>13</sup> Ia, Q. 13, a. 6, c.

<sup>14</sup> *Ephesians* 3:14-15. "I bend my knee to the Father of our Lord Jesus, from whom every paternity in heaven and on earth is named."

et multipliciter. Sicut igitur diversis perfectionibus creaturarum respondet unum simplex principium, repraesentatum per diversas perfectiones creaturarum varie et multipliciter; ita variis et multiplicibus conceptibus intellectus nostri respondet unum omnino simplex, secundum huiusmodi conceptiones imperfecte intellectum. Et ideo nomina deo attributa, licet significant unam rem, tamen, quia significant eam sub rationibus multis et diversis, non sunt synonyma.<sup>15</sup>

The names said of God, though He is one and simple, still are not synonyms, for they have different definitions. In God Himself, in the order of being, goodness and power are the same thing, still, the definitions of goodness and of power are not the same. The goodness and the power of God are same *in re*, but differ *in ratione*. This latter distinction is enough to make the names non-synonymous. It is therefore not redundant, for example, to say that God is infinitely good, or substantially wise. "Infinite," "good," "wise," and "substance" do not signify the same thing, in the sense of the same notion, though they do here signify the same thing outside the mind, namely, the essence of God. Since names name things insofar as they are understood, or, in other words, names signify things through concepts, the names are said not to signify the same thing if they have different definitions, even though the subject of the predicated names is the same in all cases, the simple nature of God.

Having shown that two different names said of this one thing, God, do not mean the same thing, St. Thomas goes on to show in the next article that neither does one and the same name when said of these two things, God and creatures, i.e., he shows that the names said of God and creatures are not univocal. For example, when I say "Socrates is wise" and "God is wise," the word "wise" does not mean the same thing. This is easy enough to see in some cases, and harder in others. "Wise" said of Socrates is not what he is, it does not

<sup>15</sup> Ia, Q. 13, a. 4, c.

name his nature or substance, but is only a quality of Socrates; said of God, however, it does signify His nature or substance, since there is no complexity in God.<sup>16</sup> Though it is harder to see what the differences in meaning are when we say something like "Socrates is a being and so is God," St. Thomas gives what purports to be a universal argument:

. . . dicendum quod impossibile est aliquid praedicari de deo et creaturis univoce. Quia omnis effectus non adaequans virtutem causae agentis, recipit similitudinem agentis non secundum eandem rationem, sed deficienter, ita ut quod divisim et multipliciter est in effectibus, in causa est simpliciter et eodem modo; sicut sol secundum unam virtutem, multiformes et varias formas in istis inferioribus producit. Eodem modo, ut supra dictum est, omnes rerum perfectiones, quae sunt in rebus creatis divisim et multipliciter, in deo praeexistunt unite. Sic igitur, cum aliquod nomen ad perfectionem pertinens de creatura dicitur, significat illam perfectionem ut distinctam secundum rationem definitionis ab aliis, puta cum hoc nomen sapiens de homine dicitur, significamus aliquam perfectionem distinctam ab essentia hominis, et a potentia et ab esse ipsius, et ab omnibus huiusmodi. Sed cum hoc nomen de deo dicimus, non intendimus significare aliquid distinctum ab essentia vel potentia vel esse ipsius. Et sic, cum hoc nomen sapiens de homine dicitur, quodammodo circumscribit et comprehendit rem significatam, non autem cum dicitur de deo, sed relinquit rem significatam ut incomprehensam, et excedentem nominis significationem. Unde patet quod non secundum eandem rationem hoc nomen sapiens de deo et de homine dicitur. Et eadem ratio est de aliis. Unde nullum nomen univoce de deo et creaturis praedicatur.<sup>17</sup>

The names of perfections as said of creatures signify these perfections "ut distinctam secundum rationem definitionis ab aliis." So "wisdom" signifies a perfection distinct from

<sup>16</sup> Ia, Q. 3, esp. a. 7.

<sup>17</sup> Ia, Q. 13, a. 5, c.

essence, power, being, etc. But, when said of God, "non intendimus significare aliquid distinctum ab essentia vel potentia vel esse ipsius." And so, when wisdom is said of a man, "quodammodo circumscribit et comprehendit rem significatam, non autem cum dicitur de Deo, sed reliquit rem significatam ut incomprehensum, et excedentem nominis significationem."

So the names are not univocal according to St. Thomas because as said of God they indicate something not distinct from His other attributes, while when said of creatures they do signify something which is so distinct. But why, given that the sameness *in re* of the perfections is indifferent to the univocity or equivocality of the name, as we just saw in Ia, Q. 13, a. 4, is this even a pertinent point? The crux is rather the sameness or difference of the definition. St. Thomas must be speaking, at least implicitly, of the definitions. How can this be?

The wisdom said of Socrates includes, even in its definition, distinction from the other perfections said of him because it is a quality, a quality by which, say, he knows the highest cause.<sup>18</sup> Insofar as it includes the accidental genus of quality in its definition, it implicitly includes a distinction from certain other perfections like size or fatherhood, which fall into other genera, and from his essence or his existence, which belong to no accidental genus.<sup>19</sup> So too, to consider the rest of the examples which St. Thomas gives in his text, Socrates' essence is that in which and by which he has being<sup>20</sup>; and his power is an accidental quality which permits him to do something<sup>21</sup>; and his being is what is related to his essence as form to matter.<sup>22</sup> Because creatures are composites, the perfections

<sup>18</sup> Cf. *Metaphysics* I, Ch. 1, 981a24-982b10.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. *Categories*, Ch. 4, 1b25-2a10. For a discussion of the divisions of the categories, Cf. *In octo libros physicorum Aristotelis*, L. III, l. 5, n. 15.

<sup>20</sup> *De ente et essentia*, Ch. 1.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. *Categories*, Ch. 8, 9a14-27.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Ia, Q. 3, a. 4, c.

they have exist by being together with others, i.e., by being in a composite; in order to be what they are they depend on other principles and therefore those other principles are either explicitly or implicitly in their definitions. For example, shape can only exist in magnitude and magnitude is always shaped, though magnitude and shape are not the same thing or the same perfection. Essence is not intelligible except as correlated to *esse*, *esse* as correlated to essence, the qualities of knowledge and power as being in a substance; each perfection is defined by inclusion of other aspects of the creature, because the creature is perfect through composition, as the etymology of "perfection" (from Latin *per* and *facere*) indicates.

Thus, created perfections, since they are what they are by being related to other aspects of the creatures of which they are said, include in their notions a reference to other aspects of the creature. The other may or may not be explicitly in the definition, but it seems that for a complete understanding, the other would always be included. Shape, for example, is always defined as being something of a magnitude, though the definition of magnitude does not obviously require shape. Still, if it is right to say that there cannot be an actually infinite magnitude, then every magnitude does have shape, and, if we can argue that this is so, there must be an intrinsic relation between the two such that the notion of magnitude implies the presence of shape even if the latter is not in the definition of the former.

So too with all other created perfections. For they are all either accidents, and so depend on substances to be what they are, or they are substances or principles of substances. But created substances depend on matter and form as principles or at least on being and essence as principles,<sup>23</sup> and the principles themselves of created substances, like matter and form or being and essence, are mutually involved. Matter is the potency for form and form is the act of matter; essence is that through

<sup>23</sup> *Summa Contra Gentiles* II, Ch. 54.

which and in which a being has *esse* and *esse* is that by which an essence exists.

In God, however, wisdom is not distinct from His other perfections, as the various perfections are distinct in creatures, though, in both cases, the notions of the various perfections are distinct.<sup>24</sup> Yet, in God, as opposed to creatures, the definitions of the perfections do not include other aspects of God's nature as principles of a more complete composite. Said of God, what is perfect or formal in the name is kept while what implies imperfection or composition is simply left aside. The wisdom of God is not a quality, and does not include this genus in its definition. Here wisdom is not understood as being a perfection which implies any composition with other aspects of God. So too, His being is not formal with respect to His essence, since His being is His essence, and His essence is not that in which and through which He has being, for His essence is His being. His power, too, is not a quality, but His very substance.

God's wisdom, then, is not understood in reference to any other perfection, but in a sort of abstraction. Certainly it is not understood as a quality of God, for that would imply composition in Him. But neither is it understood by reference to any of His other attributes. We do not understand His wisdom by looking to His power, nor do we do the opposite. The predicates said of God do not bespeak any composition, but rather express perfections as abstract or simple or absolute.

So the way we predicate of God is in some ways the same as the way we predicate of creatures. The predicate "good" when said of God does not include the notion of wisdom, nor does the predicate "wise" include the notion of goodness. Neither, of course, do they exclude each other. In both cases, too, the definitions of the predicates would include a complex of names. For every definition makes known what is defined by "locating" it within through an interconnected set

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

of words, much as Cartesian geometry locates points through an interconnected set of coordinates. But there end the similarities between words as said of God and words as said of creatures. For while in both cases the complex of names given as the definition is intended to express the conception of the perfection in question, in the one case (that of the created perfection), there will be some words in the definition which denote a correlated principle of the perfection in question, while in the other case (that of the uncreated perfection), these will be lacking. To take a clear example, created wisdom will be defined perhaps as "knowledge of first causes" and so will include in its definition its genus, knowledge, which will in turn be defined by its genus "quality." This in turn would have to be "defined"<sup>25</sup> by reference to substance. But uncreated wisdom will be defined simply as "knowledge of first causes" without any notion of being a quality inhering in a substance.

It may be urged that we do understand, for example, His justice by reference to His wisdom, since we understand His justice to be a rendering of what is due to each created person, but that requires knowledge of what has been done, of what ought to be done, and of appropriate recompense. Here, though, we do not understand one predicate as naming something which is inherent in the other or as in any way limited by another, but we are seeing that the perfect justice of God contains, even in our imperfect grasp of it, something of intellect. (The same could even be said of human justice.) We are not denying, certainly, that that justice and that intellect are in the end identical, despite our use of many words to indicate that the perfection of the one thing called God far

<sup>25</sup> Strictly speaking, the supreme genera could not be defined, but there may still be some expression intended to make known what they are, and this might more loosely be called a definition. Thus in Ia, Q. 28, a. 2, c., St. Thomas says that "qualitas vero dispositio substantiae." Cf. also *In I Sent.*, D. 2, Q. 1, a. 3, c.

transcends the perfections which we seize through this word or that, or even through all our words put together.

We may also be puzzled by the fact that in the definition of wisdom as said of God, "knowledge" is still expressed as a genus, the difference being "of first causes." Here we find the genus as a requirement of our human mode of knowing, not of the thing itself:

Apprehensio autem fit secundum potestatem apprehendentis; et ideo ea quae sunt simplicia intellectus noster enuntiat per modum cuiusdam compositionis; sicut e contrario deus intelligit res compositas modo simplici: et inde est quod intellectus noster de deo format propositiones ad modum rerum compositarum, a quibus naturaliter cognitionem accipit.<sup>26</sup>

For our minds know by going from the confused to the distinct, never losing sight of the confused, but recognizing the more refined understanding of things precisely as a refinement of, not a replacement for, the original confused knowledge.<sup>27</sup> In order to do this, we use a generic (or quasi-generic) name, which represents our original confused knowledge, and specific differences (or quasi-specific differences), which represent our refinements of the original knowledge. Even when expressing our knowledge of God, this exigency of human reason must be respected, precisely because it belongs to human reason as such and so is a demand independent of any particular object of knowledge, even one transcending our natural mode of knowing so greatly as God.

A plausible explanation of St. Thomas' claim that the names said analogously of God and creatures are said of God first now comes to light. Since the names as said of God do not include the words which express those aspects of creatures which are required for the perfections expressed by the former names when said of creatures, as "quality" is not included in the def-

<sup>26</sup> *In I Sent.*, D. 4, Q. 2, a. 1, c.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *Physics* I, 1, 184a16-b15.

inition of wisdom said of God, though it is included in the definition as said of creatures, and since the simple is before the complex, the name as said of God is prior to the name as said of creatures. For while wisdom said of God does not include quality, as said of creatures it does include "knowledge of first causes", and this, taken by itself in a sort of abstraction, is the notion used when the name is said of God. And it is prior in just the sense required by the text of St. Thomas, that is, prior by being included in the definition of the secondary analogate. Thus, the names said of God are said of God primarily.

Though the definition of the predicate as said of God does not include everything which is included in the definition of the same name when said of creatures, neither does it negate it. If it did, there would be a manifest contradiction in the definition of any created perfection. Created wisdom, for example, since it includes wisdom as said of God, as we have seen, would be defined somehow as "a quality which is not a quality, and by which first causes are known." For, if as said of God, wisdom included the negation of quality, then it clearly would lead to contradiction to include such a negation in the definition of that created wisdom which is a quality. Moreover, if "wise," as said of God, included "not as a quality," then "substantially wise" would be redundant.

Rather, what is not included is simply not included; St. Thomas refers to it as "secluded,"<sup>28</sup> that is, neither included nor negated. This is not so odd as it may sound at first. If we say Socrates is married, this does not include or exclude his being a cobbler. If being a cobbler were included in the meaning of husband, every husband would be a cobbler; if, on the other hand, it were excluded, no husband could be a cobbler. The two predicates are simply not related in this way; they are just other and carry no implication of inclusion or exclusion.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Ia, Q. 14, a. 1, ad. 1.

So too, "wise," when said of God, does not *mean* "not as a quality," nor "as a quality," but simply bespeaks the knowledge of the first cause without further elucidation. What is kept in the name is only the most formal element, which is what we most of all intend to indicate by the word. For example, even when we say Socrates is wise, what we most of all intend is that he has some sort of perfect knowledge; that knowledge is for him a quality is, though understood, not particularly attended to. When we say he is powerful, we mean he can do a lot of work, and are not so concerned about the fact that such power is for him a quality. When we say he has an essence, we mean to point out that he is some sort of thing, not that his sort of thing depends on an act of existence distinct from itself in order to have real existence. Because what is formal in the name is at the forefront of our minds when we use words, even those who are not learned can speak intelligibly and coherently of God. They probably do not recognize how wonderful a thing they are doing, but they can do it because the subtleties of exact definition are not required for the grasp of the formal element of definitions. When the schoolboy says, "God is wise," he knows well enough what he means, and he means what is true. The difficulties we have been discussing do not arise for him because the formal element of the name is all that he pays much attention to.

By neither excluding nor including such additional elements, the name as said of God leaves the formal element signified as if in abstraction—wise means "knowing the first cause," without any further implication. Thus, whatever else belongs to what we call wise is beyond the signification of the word as so used, and so the thing itself named in this way, the nature of God, is left "uncomprehended." In God, what is wise is powerful, but the perfection expressed by the latter, though identical in reality with the thing called wise, is not expressed by the word wise and thus the thing signified

is left "ut incomprehensam et excedentem nominis significationem."

The argument which St. Thomas gives is a little different from this, however. What he is arguing is that even what is named by the word "wise" as said of God is uncomprehended because we cannot grasp a wisdom which is not a quality, or an essence which is not distinct from its *esse*. The name as said of the creature is "circumscribed" and "comprehended" because it is set off and limited by the notions of those aspects of the creature which are included in its definition. "Quality," e.g., limits, circumscribes, and makes comprehensible human wisdom, "quodammodo circumscribit et comprehendit rem significatam." But such limitations are absent from the name said of God, and so what is expressed by the name is "uncomprehended and exceeding the meaning of the name." Wisdom said of creatures is, by its very definition, limited wisdom, that said of God is limitless, not only in its being but in its definition.

That this is the intention of St. Thomas' argument is apparent because he concludes that the name said of creatures and of God is equivocal, i.e., that their definitions are distinct. This can only mean that the limited and unlimited natures of the names are not merely verified by reference to the thing outside the mind about which they are said, but even about the conceptions which the mind forms and expresses through these words. The unlimited wisdom of God is reflected in the unlimitedness of its definition.

And so, because what is first among analogous words is that which is in the definition of the others, the name as said of God is the first because it names the perfection apart from anything else while the name as said of creatures names the perfection as inhering or inhered in or in some other way entering into composition.

When St. Thomas says "quantum ad rem significatam per nomen, per prius dicuntur de Deo quam de creatures," then,

he is not speaking simply of the metaphysical fact that God is before creatures, but of the logical fact that the name is said *per prius* of God. This is the question being asked—"supposito quod dicantur analogice, utrum dicantur de deo per prius, vel de creaturis."<sup>29</sup>

While the issue in the text we have been considering is naming, not being, since we name things as we know them, and we know them, if at all, as they are, there must be some connection between the way things are and the way we name them. We have seen that the understanding of the primacy of the analogous name when said of God is rooted in just such considerations about the way things are, in particular, the way that perfections are first and simpler in God. Having seen this, we can say something about that much vexed subject, participation.

In his commentary on the Letter to the Ephesians, St. Thomas discusses again the text of the *Sed Contra* of the article we have been looking at.

... nomen alicuius rei nominatae a nobis dupliciter potest accipi, quia vel est expressivum, aut significativum conceptus intellectus, quia voces sunt notae, vel signa passionum, vel conceptuum qui sunt in anima, et sic nomen prius est in creaturis, quam in deo. Aut in quantum est manifestativum quidditatis rei nominatae exterius, et sic est prius in deo. Unde hoc nomen paternitas, secundum quod significat conceptionem intellectus nominantis rem, sic per prius invenitur in creaturis quam in deo, quia per prius creatura innotescit nobis, quam deus; secundum autem quod significat ipsam rem nominatam, sic per prius est in deo quam in nobis, quia certe omnis virtus generativa in nobis est a deo. Et ideo dicit: ex quo omnis paternitas in caelo et in terra nominatur, quasi dicat: paternitas quae est in ipsis creaturis, est quasi nominalis seu vocalis, sed illa paternitas divina, qua

<sup>29</sup> Ia, Q. 13, Introduction.

pater dat totam naturam filio, absque omni imperfectione, est vera paternitas.<sup>30</sup>

The doctrine here is clearly that of the *Summa*. However, he adds an expression which is noteworthy: "quasi nominalis seu vocalis" is used to describe the perfections of creatures, "vera" those of God. It as if he were saying that the perfections of creatures are mere images or imitations of those of God, something he does indeed say elsewhere.<sup>31</sup> The fatherhood in God is pure, "abstracted" while that of creatures is composed, shared. The shared is imperfect by the fact of being only an aspect of the whole participant, for whenever two things come together to form one, either both must be in potency to the third thing they become (like two elements forming a compound) or one must be in potency to the other (like a surface which can be shaped).<sup>32</sup>

But when the same name is given to the imperfect and to the perfect according to intrinsic denomination, that is, because of some quality present in what is named (as opposed to extrinsic denomination, according to which a thing is named from its relation to something merely external, in the way in which medicine is called healthy), then what receives the perfection receives it imperfectly, while what has the perfection in an unshared, unreceived way has it perfectly.

Igitur si aliquid est cui competit tota virtus essendi, ei nulla nobilitatum deesse potest quae alicui rei conveniat. Sed rei quae est suum esse, competit esse secundum totam essendi potestatem: sicut, si esset aliqua albedo separata, nihil ei de virtute albedinis deesse posset; nam alicui albo aliquid de virtute albedinis deest ex defectu recipientis albedinem, quae eam secundum modum suum recipit, et fortasse non secundum totum posse albedinis. Deus igitur, qui est suum esse,

<sup>30</sup> *Super Ad Ephesios*, L. III, l. 4.

<sup>31</sup> Cf., e.g., Ia, Q. 33, a. 3, c.

<sup>32</sup> Ia, Q. 3, a. 7, c.

## A NOTE ON NAMING GOD

ut supra probatum est, habet esse secundum totam virtutem ipsius esse.<sup>33</sup>

What has the perfection in composition with something else, then, as wisdom is had by creatures as a quality inhering in a substance, is had only imperfectly. It is shared in or participated in, because what shares or participates takes something of what it shares or participates in, but does not exhaust it, as the name “participate” indicates, deriving as it does from “partem capere,” “to take part.” What is had not by reception, but is removed from all composition, is therefore had as a whole or perfectly. Thus, the way we name God and creatures arises from, and is a sign of, the fact that creatures participate in God.

<sup>33</sup> *Summa Contra Gentiles* I, Ch. 28. Cf. also Ia, Q. 50, a. 2, ad 4; *In I Sent.*, D. 3, Prologus; D. 48, a. 1, c.; *De substantiis separatis*, Ch. 14.

## THE PLACE OF METAPHYSICS IN THE ORDER OF LEARNING

*Michael Augros*

The idea that metaphysics comes first in the teaching and learning of philosophy, while rarely defended in writing, is frequently implemented in practice. When called to account for this policy, its advocates are in no short supply of reasons for it. Despite the fact that Thomas Aquinas holds the opposite view, the proponents of “metaphysics first” are usually Thomists of a kind, probably because few besides Thomists believe in any such thing as metaphysics anymore. This opposition between Thomas and many contemporary Thomists is the occasion for this article, which I have chosen to present in the form of an isolated Thomistic inquiry:

Quaestio Unica:

*Is Metaphysics the Part of Philosophy that is  
First in the Order of Learning?*

It might appear so for many reasons . . .

(1) The axioms—that is, the self-evident principles which are common to many disciplines—are first in our knowledge. Therefore the science which studies the axioms must be the first science for us to learn. But the science which studies the

Michael Augros graduated from Thomas Aquinas College in 1992 and obtained his Ph.D. in Philosophy from Boston College in 1995.