

ARISTOTLE'S APPRECIATION OF GOD'S TRANSCENDENCE

lifeless and inert. He rested after creation in the very life he lived before creation. And this is presented as the end and completion of creation.

89. Under the law, men are ordered to share in that rest. On every Sabbath, we must not labor. To labor is to imitate God in his creative action. Rather, we must, especially through the sacred liturgy, contemplate him and love him, as he has contemplated and loved himself from eternity, as he did for eternity before the creation of the world.

90. Again, we are promised by Christ, '... the son of man must be raised up so that everyone believing in him may have eternal life,' and 'This is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you sent.' Hence Scripture opens with creation in time to fix the mind of believers on that transcendence into which we are urged to enter by the letter to the Hebrews:

But there remains a sabbath for the people of God, since one who comes into God's rest also rests from his works, as God rested from his own works. Let us then strive to enter into that rest, [so that none may fall through the same example of unbelief. For the word of God is alive and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword].²⁹

²⁹ Hebrews 4:11-12.

THE TRUTH OF ARISTOTLE'S THEOLOGY

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In the beginning of the third section of the first book of the *Prior Analytics* (Ch. 32, 47a8-9) and in the first book of the *Nicomachean Ethics* after thinking out the first definition of the end of man (Reading 12, 1098a11-12), Aristotle makes the same statement about the true in somewhat different words. He says in the former that everything true should be in agreement with itself in all ways and in the latter that all that is should sing with or harmonize with the true while to the true the false is quickly dissonant.

And since wisdom is most of all the reasoned out knowledge of truth for the reason Aristotle gives in the second book of *Wisdom*, and, at last, of the truth about God, we should expect this harmony especially there.

In this paper, I aim to show a little of the harmony of truth in Aristotle's thinking of God as the first being and the first cause: the harmony of these two with each other and also with the end of our knowledge. But since we usually think of God more as the first cause than the first being (as when we reason to him as the unmoved mover and the first maker or efficient cause) and because of the limits of time, I shall develop this from the side of God being the first being.

The thinking in this paper began in my mind with seeing in

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Thomas that he spoke of having proved in the chapter demonstrating the existence of God in the *Summa contra Gentiles* and in the article on the existence of God in the *Summa Theologiae* that God is the first being as well as the first cause. But *first being* and *first cause* did not seem to me to be synonymous. But if both are true, but not synonymous, and especially if they are the same thing, these two truths should be in harmony.

Thomas says in the chapter immediately after the one proving the existence of God in the *Summa contra Gentiles* that it has been shown that there is some first being (*primum ens*) which we call God:

Summa contra Gentiles, Liber I, Caput XIV:

Ostenso igitur quod est aliquod primum ens, quod Deum dicimus, oportet eius conditiones investigare.

And in the next but one chapter, he speaks as if it has been shown that God is the first being and the first cause:

Summa contra Gentiles, Liber I, Caput XVI:

Adhuc. Quamvis id quod quandoque est in potentia quandoque actu, prius sit tempore in potentia quam in actu, tamen simpliciter actus est prior potentia: quia potentia non educit se in actum, sed oportet quod educatur in actum per aliquod quod sit in actu. Omne igitur quod est aliquo modo in potentia, habet aliquid prius se. Deus autem est primum ens et prima causa, ut ex supra dictis patet. Non igitur habet in se aliquid potentiae admixtum.

In the *Summa Theologiae*, Thomas also proceeds as if it has been shown in the article on the existence of God that he is the first being as well as the first cause and he reasons from both:

Summa Theologiae, Prima Pars, Q. III, Art. I, corpus:

Respondeo dicendum absolute Deum non esse corpus. Quod tripliciter ostendi potest.

Primo quidem, quia nullum corpus movet non motum, ut patet inducendo per singula. Ostensum est autem supra quod Deus est primum movens immobile. Unde manifestum est quod Deus non est corpus.

Secundo, quia necesse est id quod est primum ens, esse in actu, et nullo modo in potentia. Licet enim in uno et eodem quod exit de potentia in actum, prius sit potentia quam actus tempore, simpliciter tamen actus prior est potentia, quia quod est in potentia, non reducitur in actum nisi per ens actu. Ostensum est autem supra quod Deus est primum ens. Impossibile est igitur quod in Deo sit aliquid in potentia. Omne autem corpus est in potentia, quia continuum, in quantum huiusmodi, divisibile est in infinitum. Impossibile est igitur Deum esse corpus.

Perhaps, the third and fourth arguments in the *Summa Theologiae*, (Prima Pars, Q. 2, a. 3), show more the first being and the first two arguments, the first cause (the unmoved mover and first maker).

Consider also this statement of an argument for what is most of all a being:

Summa contra Gentiles, Liber I, Caput XIII:

Potest etiam alia ratio colligi ex verbis Aristotelis. In II enim Metaphysicorum ostendit quod ea quae sunt maxime vera, sunt et maxime entia. In IV autem Metaphysicorum ostendit esse aliquid maxime verum, ex hoc quod videmus duorum falsorum unum altero esse magis falsum. Unde oportet ut alterum sit etiam altero verius; hoc autem est secundum approximationem ad id quod est simpliciter et maxime verum. Ex quibus concludi potest ulterius esse aliquid quod est maxime ens. Et hoc dicimus Deum.

Thomas also does not regard them as synonymous, as can be seen from this text (where he also sees God being the first of beings in his perfection whence he is also the beginning of all other things):

Summa contra Gentiles, Liber III, Capitulum I, Proemium:

Unum esse primum entium, totius esse perfectionem plenam possidens, quod Deum dicimus, in superioribus est ostensum, qui ex sui perfectionis abundantia omnibus existentibus esse largitur, ut non solum primum entium, sed et principium omnium esse comprobetur.

And in this same text, Thomas would seem to say that from his perfection as the first being God is the beginning or cause of other things.

We must first bring out the distinction in meaning of *first being* and *first cause*, second that they are the same thing, and third, their order. And then we can outline the search for the first being which is not often laid out in order. And then assuming what is said of God as the first cause, show briefly the harmony of this with what the search for the first being has revealed and the harmony of both with the end of our knowledge. And in this way, we hope to make a small contribution to seeing the truth of Aristotle's theology.

The distinction in meaning of *first being* and *first cause* is seen first in the distinct meanings of the words *being* and *cause* and then in the meanings of *first* when said of each.

Being means *what is* or *that which is* while *cause* means *what is responsible for the being or becoming of another*, that other being called the effect.

Since *first* is defined by before and after which are words equivocal by reason, we must consider in what sense of *before* we speak of the *first being* and the *first cause*. Now in the twelfth chapter of the *Categories*, Aristotle has distinguished in order the four central senses of the word *before* and added the crowning sense for the demonstrator:

A Carrying over from Greek into English of Chapter Twelve

One thing is said to be *before* another in four ways.

First and most strictly according to time, by which one thing is older and more ancient than another. For something is said to be older or more ancient in that its time has been longer.

Second, that whose existence does not follow reversibly, as one is before two. If two exists, it follows right away that one exists; but if one exists, it is not necessary that two exist; so that the existence of the other does not follow reversibly from the one. Thus the *before* is such that from it, existence does not follow reversibly.

In a third way, *before* is said according to a certain order, as in the sciences and speeches. The order of before and after belongs to the demonstrative sciences: the elements are in order before the diagrams; and in grammar, the letters are before the syllables. Likewise, in speeches, the proemium comes in order before the narration.

Further, besides the aforesaid, the better and more honorable seems to be before by nature. For even the many say that those honored or loved by them come *before* with them. But this is perhaps the strangest of the ways.

Before would seem to be said in that many ways.

There would seem to be another way *before* is said in addition to the above. Of those things whose existence follows reversibly, the cause in whatever manner of existence to the other would reasonably be said to be before by nature. That there are such things is clear. The existence of a man follows reversibly in existence to the true statement about him. For if a man exists, the statement by which we say the man exists is true. But the true statement is in no way a cause of the thing being, but the thing being would seem to be a cause in some way of the statement being true. For the statement is said to be true or false as the thing is or is not.

Thus, one thing is said to be *before* another in five ways.

In the fifth book of *Wisdom*, Aristotle reduces the many senses to the second sense especially:

Thomas Aquinas, in V *Metaphysicorum*, Lectio XIII:

Deinde cum dicit modo itaque concludit, quod omnes modi prioris et posterioris possunt reduci ad hos ultimos modos, et praecipue ad primum, prout prius dicitur quod potest esse sine aliis, et non e converso. Quaedam enim possunt esse sine aliis secundum generationem, per quem modum totum est prius partibus: quia, quando iam totum generatum est, partes non sunt in actu, sed in potentia. Quaedam vero contingit esse sine aliis secundum corruptionem, sicut pars sine toto, quando est iam totum corruptum et dissolutum in partes. Et similiter etiam alii modi prioris et posterioris ad hunc modum reduci possunt. Constat enim, quod priora non dependent a posterioribus, sicut e converso. Unde omnia priora aliquo modo possunt esse sine posterioribus, et non e converso.

The first central sense of *before* is before in time as today is before tomorrow. The second sense is before in being. What can be without another, but that other cannot be without it, is before in this second sense. Aristotle gives as an example of this that one is before two. The third central sense is before in the discourse of reason or the movement of reason. Thus the premises are before the conclusion. The fourth sense of *before* is in goodness. The better is before in this sense. In addition to these four central senses, Aristotle adds the crowning sense for the demonstrator which is the sense in which the cause is before the effect. This fifth sense is not, I think, fifth in order for it is most like the second. Just as the effect depends upon the cause so likewise what is after in being depends upon what is before in being.

Now when we speak of the *first cause*, it seems that *first* is to be understood through the crowning sense of *before*, the sense in which the cause is before the effect. The first cause is the cause which is not an effect of some cause before it. It is before all other causes that are its effects.

But what sense of *before* is involved in speaking of the *first being*?

The second sense of before is clearly involved in the meaning of the first being. For this sense involves being or is explained using being. What can be without another, but not vice-versa is before in being.

The fourth sense of *before* is better and what is first in this sense of before would be the best or most perfect. Hence, Thomas in explaining which words signifying perfection are said only of God:

Summa contra Gentiles, Liber I, Caput XXX:

Quae vero huiusmodi perfectiones exprimunt cum supereminentiae modo quo Deo conveniunt, de solo Deo dicuntur: sicut summum bonum, primum ens, et alia huiusmodi.

Summa contra Gentiles, Liber I, Caput XXVIII:

Item. Omne imperfectum ab aliquo perfecto necesse est ut praecedatur: semen enim est ab animali vel a planta. Igitur primum ens oportet esse perfectissimum. Ostensum est autem Deum esse primum ens. Est igitur perfectissimus.

Summa contra Gentiles, Liber I, Caput XX:

Adhuc. Cognitio intellectiva certior est quam sensitiva. Invenitur autem aliquid subiectum sensui in rerum natura. Igitur et intellectui. Sed secundum ordinem obiectorum est ordo potentiarum, sicut et distinctio. Ergo super omnia sensibilia est aliquid intelligibile in rerum natura existens. Omne autem corpus in rebus existens est sensibile. Igitur super omnia corpora est aliquid accipere nobilius. Si igitur Deus est corpus, non erit primum et maximum ens.

If we attach to the fourth sense of *before* what is most so in any genus and not just the genus of good (I am using the word *genus* in the loose or broad sense where even Aristotle will call being a genus), then the first being could mean the being to whom to be belongs most of all. Hence, Thomas says:

Summa contra Gentiles, Liber I, Caput LXXII:

Illud quod consequitur omne ens, convenit enti in quantum est ens. Quod autem est huiusmodi, oportet quod in eo maxime inveniatur quod est primum ens.

Thus the first being is the being that can be without other things, but they cannot be without it and also the most perfect being, what is a being most of all, the being to whom *to be* belongs most fully.

The first being and the first cause should be the same thing, it seems. If the first being can be without other things, but not the reverse, how could it be so if something else is the first cause of all things. If something other than the first being were a cause of it, it could not be without this other thing. Thus Thomas says that nothing can be the cause of God if he is the first being:

Summa contra Gentiles, Liber I, Caput XXI:

Praeterea. Essentia rei vel est res ipsa vel se habet ad ipsam aliquo modo ut causa: cum res per suam essentiam speciem sortiatur. Sed nullo modo potest esse aliquid causa Dei: cum sit primum ens, ut ostensum est. Deus igitur est sua essentia.

Likewise, how could the first cause not be the first being? For if it were not the first being, it would depend upon the first being for its own being since the first being is the being that can be without all other things, but not they without it.

Although the same thing is the first being and the first cause, nevertheless it would seem to be the first cause because it is the first being. For something must be perfect in itself before it can be a cause of perfection in other things.

In the following text, Thomas says that God is the cause of all being because he is the first being:

Summa contra Gentiles, Liber I, Caput LXVIII:

Item. Sicut esse suum est primum et per hoc omnis esse causa, ita suum intelligere est primum, et per hoc omnis intellectualis operationis intellectualis causa. Sicut igitur Deus cognoscendo suum

esse cognoscit esse cuiuslibet rei, ita cognoscendo suum intelligere et velle cognoscit omnem cogitationem et voluntatem.

The search for the first being begins by seeing a distinction of being for order presupposes distinction as can be seen from the axiom of before and after. (Nothing is before or after itself.) Reason cannot see that this is before that if it does not already see that this is not that.

The first distinction of being is between being by happening (per accidens) and being as such or through itself (per se).

Taking the most accidental being such as a *white philosopher*, so called because white and philosopher can happen to the same thing, it is not difficult to see that being as such or through itself (which is first divided according to the figures of predication) can be without it, but not vice-versa, and that it is more being. There can be a philosopher without a white philosopher or something white without a white philosopher, but there cannot be a white philosopher without a philosopher and without something white. And so much less is accidental being being that there is no way it can come to be and nothing by which it can be. There is no white philosophy by which one could be a white philosopher and no way to become one (although there is a way to become white and another way to become a philosopher.) Hence, Aristotle in the sixth book of *Wisdom* says that Plato was not bad to say that sophistry is about non-being for it is about the accidental.

Already Thomas talks about the correspondence of the order of beings and causes when considering accidental being. In the seventy-fourth chapter of the third book of the *Summa contra Gentiles*, Thomas states the correspondence in order of beings and causes:

Summa contra Gentiles, Liber III, Capitulum LXXIV:

Quod non est, non potest esse alicuius causa. Unde oportet quod unumquodque, sicut se habet ad esse, ita se habeat ad

hoc quod sit causa. Oportet igitur quod secundum diversitatem ordinis in entibus sit etiam diversitas ordinis in causis.

And there in particular, he brings this out in regard to accidental being and its causes:

Summa contra Gentiles, Liber III, Capitulum LXXIV:

Ad perfectionem autem rerum requiritur quod non solum sint in rebus entia per se, sed etiam entia per accidens: res enim quae non habent in sua substantia ultimam perfectionem, oportet quod perfectionem aliquam consequantur per accidentia; et tanto per plura, quanto magis distant a simplicitate Dei.

Ex hoc autem quod aliquod subiectum habet multa accidentia, sequitur quod sit aliquod ens per accidens: nam subiectum et accidens, et etiam duo accidentia unius subiecti, sunt unum et ens per accidens; sicut homo albus, et musicum album.

Oportet igitur ad perfectionem rerum quod sint etiam causae quaedam per accidens. Ea autem quae ex causis aliquibus procedunt per accidens, dicuntur accidere a casu vel fortuna. Non est igitur contra rationem providentiae, quae perfectionem rerum conservat, ut aliqua fiant a casu vel fortuna.

But accidental being or being by happening cannot be the first being. Likewise, chance or luck or any accidental cause cannot be the first cause.

Just as the accidental being of *a white philosopher* cannot be without there being a philosopher and without there being something white, so the accidental cause presupposes the per se cause. Thus chance and luck presuppose the per se causes of nature and reason or will, as Aristotle shows in the second book of *Natural Hearing*.

Hence, we must look for the first being among the senses of being per se and likewise for the first cause among causes per se.

But to return to the search for the first being.

If we look for the first being in being through itself, we must first see if there is a distinction of such being before we can see a before and after in it.

The first distinction of such being pointed out by Aristotle is the distinction of being by the figures of predication, the *Categories*.

And indeed in one of these, there seems to be the first being. In the fourth book of *Natural Hearing*, Aristotle in discussing Hesiod on place is led to wonder if place is the first being because everything seems to be in place and it seems there must be a place for a thing to be before it can be. Thomas Aquinas unfolds this:

In IV Physicorum, Lectio I:

. . . inducit ad idem opinionem Hesiodi, qui fuit unus de antiquis poetis theologis; qui posuit primo factum esse chaos. Dixit enim quod primo inter omnia factum est chaos, quasi quaedam confusio et receptaculum corporum; et postea facta est terra lata ad recipiendum diversa corpora: ac si primo necesse esset esse receptaculum rerum quam ipsas res. Et hoc ideo posuerunt quia crediderunt, sicut et multi alii, quod omnia quae sunt, sint in loco.

Quod si verum est, sequitur quod locus non solum sit, sed quod habeat mirabilem potentiam, quae sit prima omnium entium. Illud enim quod potest esse sine aliis, et alia non possunt esse sine eo, videtur esse primum. Locus autem secundum eos potest esse sine corporibus: quod exinde coniciebant, quia videmus locum remanere destructis locatis. Res autem non possunt esse sine loco. Relinquitur igitur secundum eos, quod locus sit primum inter omnia entia.

When we wonder whether place is the first being, we are wondering whether an accident is the first being for place is in the genus of quantity in the *Categories* of Aristotle. But whoever understands the distinction between substance and

accident can see that substance is more the first being than any accident.

From the distinction of being by the figures of being said of, we are led to see substance as the first being. For to be belongs to substance by itself while accident only has being in another. Hence, to be belongs more fully to substance than to accident. Hence, when an animal is generated, we say that it has come to be. But when it becomes healthy or tall, we do not say that it has come to be except in a qualified way. Likewise, when an animal dies, we say that it has ceased to be. But when it becomes sick, we do not say that it has ceased to be.

And since accident exists only in another subject while to be belongs to a substance by itself, it seems that substance can be without accident, but not accident without substance.

Hence, we are led to the conclusion that substance is the first being, the being to which to be belongs most of all and which can be without other beings, but not they without it.

And thus in the *Seventh Book of Wisdom*, we learn from Aristotle that substance is indeed the first being.

Substance is said to be the first being because it is being per se and simpliciter both of which indicate perfection. (Per se is one of the three words that follow upon perfect in the Fifth Book of Wisdom and simpliciter opposed to secundum quid also indicates perfection.)

Aquinas, *In VII Metaphysicorum*, Lectio I:

Circa hoc autem duo facit. Primo ostendit, quod substantia sit primum ens. Secundo ostendit quomodo dicatur primum, ibi, multipliciter quidem igitur dicitur primum et cetera.

Circa primum duo facit.

Primo proponit intentum quod ens dicitur multipliciter, ut dictum est in quinto libro, in quo diviserat quoties dicuntur huiusmodi nomina, quia quoddam ens significat quid est

et hoc aliquid, idest substantiam; ut per quid, intelligatur essentia substantiae, per hoc aliquid suppositum, ad quae duo omnes modi substantiae reducuntur, ut in quinto est habitum. Illud vero significat qualitatem vel quantitatem, aut aliquid aliorum praedicamentorum. Et cum ens tot modis dicatur, palam est quod inter omnia entia, primum est quod quid est, idest ens quod significat substantiam.

Secundo ibi, nam quando probat propositum; et utitur tali ratione. Quod est per se et simpliciter in unoquoque genere, est prius eo quod est per aliud et secundum quid. Sed substantia est ens simpliciter et per seipsam: omnia autem alia genera a substantia sunt entia secundum quid et per substantiam: ergo substantia est prima inter alia entia.

But when Aristotle shows in what sense it is first, he uses the second central sense in the *Categories*, just as he did in wondering whether place is the first of all beings:

Aquinas, in VII *Metaphysicorum*, Lectio I:

Deinde cum dicit multipliciter quidem. Ostendit quomodo substantia dicatur primum; et dicit quod cum hoc quod dico primum dicatur multis modis, ut in quinto est habitum, tribus modis substantia est prima inter omnia entia: scilicet secundum cognitionem, et secundum definitionem et secundum tempus.

Et quod sit prima tempore aliis, ex hoc probatur, quod nullum aliorum praedicamentorum est separabile a substantia, sola autem substantia est separabilis ab aliis: nullum enim accidens invenitur sine substantia, sed aliqua substantia invenitur sine accidente. Et sic patet, quod non quandocumque est substantia, est accidens, sed e contrario: et propter hoc substantia est prior tempore.

Et quod etiam sit prima secundum definitionem, patet, quia in definitione cuiuslibet accidentium oportet ponere definitionem substantiae. Sicut enim in definitione simponitur nasus, ita in definitione cuiuslibet accidentis ponitur proprium eius subiectum; et ideo sicut animal est prius definitione quam homo, quia definitio animalis ponitur in

definitione hominis, eadem ratione substantia est prior definitione accidentibus.

Quod etiam sit prior ordine cognitionis, patet. Illud enim est primum secundum cognitionem, quod est magis notum et magis manifestat rem. Res autem unaquaque magis noscitur, quando scitur eius substantia, quam quando scitur eius quantitas aut qualitas. Tunc enim putamus nos maxime scire singula, quando noscitur quid est homo aut ignis, magis quam quando cognoscimus quale est aut quantum, aut ubi, aut secundum aliquod aliud praedicamentum. Quare etiam de ipsis, quae sunt in praedicamentis accidentium, tunc scimus singula, quando de unoquoque scimus quid est. Sicut quando scimus quid est ipsum quale, scimus qualitatem, et quando scimus quid est ipsum quantum, scimus quantitatem. Sicut enim alia praedicamenta non habent esse nisi per hoc quod insunt substantiae, ita non habent cognosci nisi in quantum participant aliquid de modo cognitionis substantiae, quae est cognoscere quid est.

Substance is the first being not only because it can be without accident, but not vice-versa, as it seems from their definitions, but it is also the first being because it is more perfect being than accident. Substance has being by itself, but accident only in another.

Thus, the search for the first cause must be among the causes of substance. Although there are per se causes of accidents, these cannot be the first causes for substance is before all accidents.

But in reaching substance as the first being, have we come to the end of our search for the first being? Well the first can be found only by looking before and after. And there is another before and after in being per se, just as there is another distinction of being per se. This is the distinction which Aristotle considers in the ninth book of *Wisdom*, the distinction between act and ability. There we learn that although ability is before act in the thing that goes from ability to act, simply act is before ability because something goes from ability to act

through something already in act, as the water goes from the ability to be hot to being actually hot by something already hot.

Thus when we take up the distinction of being by ability and act which is more universal than that by the figures of being said of, we realize that not just any substance is the first being. For act is before ability in most ways as is shown in the ninth book of *Wisdom* or *First Philosophy* and simply before even in time. Hence, the first being will be the first act and the first act will be pure act. For to be in act is more to be than to be in ability and pure act can be without passive ability, but not the reverse.

The first act, the pure act, can be without those beings in which there is an ability actualized or to be actualized. And since act is more perfect being than ability, it is also being most of all. The first act, the pure act, is therefore the first being.

There is another per se division of being which is into contingent and necessary.

Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles*, Liber III, Caput LXXII, 2nd argument:

Ens autem dividitur per contingens et necessarium: et est per se divisio entis.

This is perhaps involved in the distinction of being by act and ability, or based on that distinction, since the contingent is what is able to be and not be while the necessary is more in act not being able not to be.

And from this distinction we also see that not every substance is strictly speaking the first being. For the substances most known to us are able to be and not be. And such substances would no more be than not be if there were not before them some substances that must be or that are necessary to be and not able not to be. And substances that are necessary to be through another presuppose a substance that

is necessary to be through itself. Now clearly to be belongs more to the necessary than the contingent and more to the necessary through itself than the necessary through another. Further, the necessary can be without the contingent but not the reverse, and the necessary through itself can be without the necessary through another, but not the reverse.

Hence, we are led to the conclusion that the first being is the being necessary to be through itself. Aristotle touches upon this in the reading on necessary in the fifth book of *Wisdom*:

Aquinas, *Wisdom*, Book Five, Reading 6:

Deinde cum dicit horum quidem concludit ex praemissis tres conclusiones se invicem sequentes: quarum prima est, quod ex quo in demonstrationibus praemissae sunt causae conclusionis, et utraque sunt necessaria, sequitur quod aliqua sunt necessaria dupliciter. Quaedam quidem quorum altera sit causa necessitatis; quaedam vero quorum nulla sit causa necessitatis; et talia sunt necessaria propter seipsa. Et hoc est contra Democritum, qui dicebat quod necessario- rum non sunt quaerendae causae, ut habetur in octavo Physi- corum.

Secunda conclusio, quia, cum oporteat esse unum pri- mum necessarium, a quo alia necessitatem habent, quia in causis non est procedere in infinitum, ut in secundo os- tensum est, oportet hoc primum necessarium, quod etiam maxime proprie est necessarium, quia est omnibus modis necessarium, quod ipsum sit simplex. Ea enim, quae sunt composita, sunt mutabilia, et ita pluribus modis se possunt habere: quae autem pluribus modis habere se possunt, pos- sunt se habere aliter et aliter; quod est contra rationem nec- essarii. Nam necessarium est, quod est impossibile aliter se habere. Unde oportet, quod primum necessarium non aliter et aliter se habeat, et per consequens nec pluribus modis. Et ita oportet ipsum esse simplex.

Tertia conclusio est, quod, cum violentum sit quod move- tur ab aliquo exteriori agente praeter naturam propriam,

principia autem necessaria sunt simplicia et immobilia, ut ostensum est, necessarium est ut si sunt aliqua sempiterna et immobilia sicut sunt substantiae separatae, quod in illis non sit aliquid violentum nec praeter naturam. Et hoc dicit, ne deceptio accadat in nomine necessitatis, cum dicitur de substantiis immaterialibus, nec per hoc intelligitur aliqua vi- olentia in eis esse.

Is the being necessary to be through itself and the first act, the pure act, the same?

Aristotle reasons in the reading on necessary in the fifth book of *Wisdom* or *First Philosophy* that the necessary through itself is simple. It is also easy to reason from the first being being pure act that it is simple.

The nature of the being necessary to be through itself is to be and the nature of the being that is pure act is to be.

Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles*, Liber I, Caput XXII:

Amplius. Omnis res est per hoc quod habet esse. Nulla igitur res cuius essentia non est suum esse, est per essentiam suam, sed participatione alicuius, scilicet ipsius esse. Quod autem est per participationem alicuius, non potest esse pri- mum ens: quia id quod aliquid participat ad hoc quod sit, est eo prius. Deus autem est primum ens, quo nihil est prius. Dei igitur essentia est suum esse.

There can be only one being whose nature is to be. But we cannot enter the reasons for this now.

Having arrived at the conclusion that the first being is the first act and the first act is the pure act, is this in harmony with the first being being the first cause?

God is a cause in three ways. He is the first mover or maker, the last end, and the exemplar of all forms. He can be all three of these and still be simple because he is pure act. Thomas points this out in reply to an objection that God is composed because he is a cause in three ways:

Quaestiones Disputatae de Potentia, Q. VII, Art. i, Obj. 3 & Ad 3:

Praeterea, idem non se habet in ratione diversarum causarum. Sed Deus se habet in ratione diversarum causarum, ut patet XII Metaph. Ergo in eo oportet esse diversa; ergo oportet eum esse compositum.

Ad tertium dicendum, quod per unum et idem Deus in ratione diversarum causarum se habet: quia, per hoc quod est actus primus, est agens, et est exemplar omnium formarum, et est bonitas pura, et per consequens omnium finis.

One way, then, in which we can see the harmony of God being the first cause and the first being is through act. Act is more perfect than ability and the pure act can be without ability, but not vice-versa and end, mover or maker and exemplar are based on act.

We can consider the harmony of the perfection of God as the first being with his causality also in the three words following on the word *perfect*. These words are *end*, *through itself*, and *having*.

It is exceptional and significant that the word *end* should appear both in the names of causes and as one of the names following upon the word *perfect*. It begins to point to the harmony of the first cause as the end of all things and the best of all things for the end is the cause of the causality of the other kinds of cause and the end is better than everything which is for the sake of it.

In the following text, Thomas shows that God must be the last end of all things if He is the first cause:

Summa contra Gentiles, Liber III, Caput XVII:

Praeterea. Finis inter alias causas primatum obtinet, et ab ipso omnes aliae causae habent quod sint causae in actu: agens enim non agit nisi propter finem, ut ostensum est. Ex agente autem materia in actum formae reducitur: unde materia fit actu huius rei materia, et similiter forma huius rei

forma, per actionem agentis, et per consequens per finem. Finis etiam posterior est causa quod praecedens finis intendatur ut finis: non enim movetur aliquid in finem proximum nisi propter finem postremum. Est igitur finis ultimus prima omnium causa. Esse autem primam omnium causam necesse est primo enti convenire, quod Deus est, ut supra ostensum est. Deus igitur est ultimus omnium finis.

One could also reason that God is the first cause in the sense of end from his being the unmoved mover for as we are taught in the three books *About the Soul*, the good known and desired moves the animal to act.

And since the end is always better than what is for the sake of it, He must also be the best thing. Hence, there is a harmony of truth in the end of all our thinking being both a knowledge of the first cause and of the best thing. But there is disharmony in the thinking of those who say that matter is the beginning of all things.

If the first cause is an end and, of course, the first end, then it must be also the best thing since an end is better than what is for the sake of it. Hence, a knowledge of the first cause will also be a knowledge of the best thing.

But the thought that matter is the first cause is not in harmony with the thought that the first being is pure act. For matter is a cause through its undergoing or passive ability.

That the first cause is also the first being in the sense that it can be without other things, but not vice-versa, is in harmony with what we learn later that the first cause is a cause by its will rather than by natural necessity. For what is a cause by natural necessity is not without its effect, just as two is not without half of four.

We can also consider the harmony of the perfection of the first being and the first cause through the second word attached to the word *perfect* which is the word or words *through itself*. Although this word is not one of those about causes, it does fit with the word *necessary* among the words pertain-

ing to cause. In the Posterior Analytics, Aristotle had shown that necessary premises are through themselves and premises through themselves are necessary.

Moreover, the first being must be a being most of all through itself and likewise the first cause must be a cause through itself and not through another. This is why the first being must have to be the same as its substance and why the first mover must be an unmoved mover (for a moved mover is not a mover through itself).

We can consider the harmony of the first being and the first cause most of all in another way through the axiom of through itself and through another. Aristotle teaches us:

Eighth Book of Natural Hearing, 257a30-31:

The itself through itself being always before [and] a cause of the through another [and of its being.]

And Thomas also frequently states this beginning:

Summa contra Gentiles, Liber I, Caput XIII:

quod est per se, semper est prius eo quod est per aliud

Summa contra Gentiles, III, Caput 46:

In quolibet ordine, quod est per se est prius eo quod est per aliud, et principium eius.

The first being must be a being through itself. The first being is the being which is most of all a being through itself. What is a being through another cannot be the first being for this other is before it. We could also add that it must be perfect and good through itself. Otherwise, it would have something before it.

The first cause must also be a cause through itself. This is one reason why the first mover must be an unmoved mover.

The through itself is before the through another in being and perfection and is also a beginning or cause of it. What is

sweet through itself can be sweet without anything else, but what is sweet through another can be sweet only if there is something sweet through itself and because of it. And when the same belongs to two things, but to one of them because of the other, it belongs more to the cause. The moved mover is a mover through another and that other is, or must eventually be, a mover through itself and therefore an unmoved mover. Since something is a mover or maker through being in act and the pure act is not in act through anything else, it is not a cause through anything else but is a first cause. Thus the pure act is both the first being as we have defined that phrase and the first cause.

The through itself is before the through another in at least two ways before being a cause or beginning of it. These two ways are the fourth and second central senses of before. What is so through itself is more so than what is so through another. The through itself is more perfectly so than what is so through another. And what is so through itself can be so without what is so through another, but what is so through another cannot be so without what is so through itself. For example, let us say that sugar is sweet through itself and coffee only through another. Sugar is more sweet than coffee that has been sweetened through sugar. And sugar can be sweet without the coffee being sweet (if no sugar has been added to the coffee), but the coffee cannot be sweet without the sugar being sweet.

The first being then is the being which is most of all a being and the being which can be without all other beings, but they cannot be without it.

The first cause is a cause through itself while the caused cause or second cause is a cause through another. One of the arguments for concluding that God is not a cause by natural necessity in the *Summa contra Gentiles* is taken from the through itself being before the through another:

Summa contra Gentiles, II, Caput 23, Sixth argument:

Praeterea. Quod per se agit, prius est eo quod per aliud agit: omne enim quod est per aliud, reduci oportet in id quod per se est, ne in infinitum procedatur. Quod autem suae actionis non est dominus, non per se agit: agit enim quasi ab alio actus, non quasi seipsum agens. Oportet igitur primum agens hoc modo agere quod sui actus dominus sit. Non est autem aliquis sui dominus actus nisi per voluntatem. Oportet igitur Deum, qui est primum agens, per voluntatem agere, non per naturae necessitatem.

Now if the first cause is a cause by choice, if the first cause is free to cause or not cause, to cause this or that, it can also be without other things. What we know then about the causality of the first cause is also in this way in harmony with saying that it is also the first being. This is especially true also if the first being is perfect and good through itself since the good and end are the same. The end is the cause of the causality of all the other causes and the first end must therefore be good through itself as is the first being. They are the same thing.

God would be the first being even if He had not chosen to create the universe in that this would show that He can be without other things, but not them without Him, and to be would still belong most perfectly to Him. And it is because he is the first being that God can be the first cause. He can be the first being without being the first cause, but he could not be the first cause without being the first being, even though we would not perhaps call Him the first being if He had not created other beings.

The third word attached to perfect, *having*, which is opposed to *lacking*, also pertains to the perfection of the first being and its harmony with being the first cause.

Nihil dat quod non habet—nothing gives what it does not have. If the first being is the being necessary to be through itself and therefore must be the same as being or existence, it must have in a simple and superior way the perfection of

every genus or kind of thing. And therefore it can give or be a cause of everything else.

The harmony of the first being and the first cause is also in harmony with the two reasonings to what is the end of all our knowledge. In the Proemium to *Wisdom* at the beginning of the fourteen books of *Wisdom*, Aristotle shows that the end of our knowledge is to know the first cause. And in the Proemium to the three books *About the Soul*, and the Proemium to the *Parts of Animals* he shows that the knowledge of a better thing is better knowledge and, hence, that the best knowledge must be a knowledge of the best thing. And since the end is always better than what is for the sake of it, the knowledge of the best thing must be the end of our knowledge. But there cannot be two last ends of something (as can be seen from the axiom of before and after), so if the end of all our knowledge is both a knowledge of the best thing and a knowledge of the first cause, the first cause must be the best thing. Now if the first being which is the best thing is also the first cause, everything fits together. But in the main alternative opinion about the first cause, that matter is the first cause, the first cause would not be the best thing since act is better than ability as Aristotle shows in the ninth book of *Wisdom*. Since act is before ability both in time simply and in goodness, the first cause is the best thing. If ability is before simply, the first cause is not the best thing. Likewise, if one of the first causes was the bad itself, a knowledge of the first causes would not be a knowledge of the best, but of the worst. The harmony of truth is lost. The materialist and the Manichean positions both lack the harmony of truth with the end or goal of our knowledge.