

surpassed by Christian revelation, what he did come to by his reason is not negated. The two aspects of the human person, his sociability and his reasoning are both fulfilled in his loving union with God in the Beatific vision.

Aristotle's ethics are an important foundation for the later synthesis of a Christian ethics. And his image of God and human happiness are fulfilled in the Christian teaching of Christ's saving act, his grace and our eternal reward. Aristotle's ethics could almost be considered more Christian than current ethical trends called Christian; but which are deprived of the natural foundations upon which a true Christian ethics must be built. This can be seen from Pope John Paul II's introduction to his 1993 encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*, in which he says "It is no longer a matter of limited dissent, but of an overall and systematic calling into question of traditional moral doctrine, on the basis of certain anthropological and ethical presuppositions" (VS §4). A thorough renewal of Christian ethics today will include a recognition of the core teachings of Aristotle.

THE ACHIEVEMENT AND LIMITATION IN  
ARISTOTLE'S APPRECIATION OF GOD'S TRANSCENDENCE

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1. In the final books of his *Physics* and the twelfth book of his *Metaphysics*, Aristotle considers God's existence and nature. In doing so he reveals several ways in which God transcends natural beings and even other immobile movers. Yet Aristotle's appreciation of God's transcendence suffers some limitations by reason of its method. For this method, quite necessary to natural theology, considers the material world as if it always was and always will be. But the power of reason can in fact apprehend God's transcendence with greater distinction by a consideration of the possibility of the world's creation in time. Hence, the first sentence of sacred scripture, 'In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth,' goads human reason to such an investigation of the divine transcendence.

2. In the following remarks I propose to do three things. First, I will examine Aristotle's consideration of the 'eternity

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of the world'. (3-8) Second, I will discuss seven ways in which Aristotle argues from this to God's transcendence. (10-49) Third, I will show how consideration of the possibility of creation in time elevates the understanding of the divine transcendence. (50-90)

3. Aristotle's teaching in his *Physics* and his *Metaphysics* that motion and therefore the natural world has always been and always will be is a necessary consequence of his method in these sciences. In the *Physics* he takes sensible reality as his principle of judgment. Though argument is the principle of judgment in metaphysics, he recognizes an order natural to the human mind: one must proceed to the consideration of immaterial, intelligible beings through the consideration of material, sensible beings.<sup>1</sup> Starting where he does in each science, Aristotle argues, with the appearance of demonstrative force, that the mobile world is everlasting.

4. There are two arguments for the eternity of the world in his *Physics* and these are taken up in summary fashion in his *Metaphysics*. The first proceeds through movement, the second through time. The appearance of demonstration that attends these arguments, especially the first, arises, directly or indirectly, from the nature of matter and movement.

5. The first argument, summarized here, is not hard to follow. Movement is, by definition, the actuality of some moveable thing.<sup>2</sup> Something able to move must therefore exist, if movement is to exist. Either something moveable must come to be, after not existing, or moveable things are eternal. If any movable thing came to be, another change or movement must have preceded this movement, by which what was apt to bring about change or what is apt to suffer such a change came to be. If, however, moveable things have always existed, but did not move before a certain time at which they do move, some

<sup>1</sup> Cf. I Q. 50, a. 3, ad 3.

<sup>2</sup> *Physics* 202a7-8.

prior change or movement must bring about the difference in the disposition of the mover to move or of the mobile to be moved. From this and from an argument founded on the nature of time, Aristotle concludes that motion has always existed and will always exist.

6. Aristotle does prove here that movement and natural beings cannot come to be, after not having been, through any principle intrinsic to natural beings. In other words, he shows that eternity is a certain property of matter and movement, if matter is considered only according to its own intrinsic 'nature'. In the manner appropriate to it, matter too has an appetite 'to share in the always and the divine'.<sup>3</sup>

7. Within natural science, there is no principle by which Aristotle can rise to a higher consideration of this question. Though he discovers a first unmoved mover there, one that is of infinite power<sup>4</sup> and 'is indivisible, partless, and without magnitude',<sup>5</sup> he cannot continue to discuss such a being. The principles of natural science have revealed as much as they can about such a being.

8. In the higher science of metaphysics, which has as part of its object to understand this being, Aristotle resumes the discussion from the *Physics*. He presents abbreviated versions of both arguments used in the *Physics* to show that movement must always be. He also cites the argument proving the first mover 'can have no magnitude, but is partless and indivisible',<sup>6</sup> because it has infinite power.

9. Aristotle goes on to manifest the intellectual nature of the first unmoved mover. He discusses his creative power at least implicitly. Yet he never returns to the arguments about the eternity of the world to reconsider them in light of that

<sup>3</sup> *De Anima* 415a29. Cf. *Super de trinitate* Q. 4, a. 2, c.

<sup>4</sup> *Physics* 266a12-23.

<sup>5</sup> *Physics* 267b26-27.

<sup>6</sup> *Metaphysics* 1073a5-11.

intellectual nature and creative power. Hence, he never expresses the possibility that God exist while no creature exists.

10. Without such a consideration, Aristotle sees God's transcendence in several ways, which I count here as seven: infinite power (11-12), immobility both *per se* and *per accidens* (13-14), no intrinsic distinction as end and agent (15), act without potency (16-27), no distinction of being and operation (29-34, 29), no distinction of operation and object in his thinking (35-38), good to the universe as something extrinsic to it (40-49). I shall briefly speak about each of these in this order, though with some overlap.

11. Already in the *Physics*, Aristotle recognizes God's infinite power, understood as the power to move some body for an infinite time. This expresses at least God's transcendence of material conditions. For an infinite power cannot be proportioned to any finite size and an infinite body is for many reasons inconceivable. Hence, Aristotle concludes that such a being has no magnitude, is partless, and is indivisible.

12. Such transcendence may, however, be common to other 'gods', what we might call minds, geniuses, or angels. For even superficial consideration will suggest that such beings also move bodies for an infinite time. Again, considerations through natural reason show that such beings are capable of causing such movement, even if they do not in fact do so.

13. Nonetheless Aristotle can introduce a principle to distinguish such immaterial beings from God, even in the *Physics*. For the first unmoved mover which answers the demands of natural science must be unmoved both *per se* and *per accidens*.<sup>7</sup> This eminence is restated in the *Metaphysics* to distinguish God from other immaterial beings. In his famous counting of the gods or unmoved movers, Aristotle clearly states that 'the principle and first of beings is unmoved both *per se* and *per accidens*.'<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> *Physics* 259b22-24.

<sup>8</sup> *Metaphysics* 1073a23-25.

14. That God is in no way moved, while other immaterial beings are moved at least *per accidens*, can be gathered from Aristotle's claim that 'upon such a principle [as the first of beings] the heaven and nature depends.' He indicates here 'the heaven', which he will later determine to be moved not only by the first immaterial mover, but also by so many secondary immaterial movers. These movers are not distinctly moved with movement as defined by the natural philosopher. They move bodies from a desire to imitate the first immaterial mover who moves the whole world with the sort of movement described. Hence, these secondary immaterial movers are moved only insofar as they have an appetite or will to be like the first.

15. This leads to God's transcendence of agent and final causality. Now I do not want to suggest by this that these kinds of causality are not distinct in the effect. Rather, according to Aristotle, they are one in God himself. This can be seen by the fact that God is distinctly introduced into metaphysics as an agent cause. Significant attention is given to him precisely as something that acts rather than something able to act. But his place as the first of beings demands that he moves as something desirable and intelligible. Aristotle does not determine this as a condition to be added to the first unmoved mover, but as the very manner of his moving: 'there is something which not being moved moves, eternal, and being both substance and act. But it moves thus. The desirable and the intelligible move not being moved.'<sup>9</sup>

16. This allows for recapitulation of the first three aspects of God's transcendence in Aristotle's understanding. Infinite power is ascribed to God, though this may be conceived only in comparison with material powers. God is distinguished from other immaterial beings as an object of their thought and their desire. Through this he is utterly unmoved. If the meaning of movement is extended to include operations of

<sup>9</sup> 1072a25-27

intellect and will, then the understanding of power can be extended to allow for God's power to 'move' the intellect and will. God can then be seen as having infinite power even with respect to other immaterial beings and thus to be utterly immobile or immutable and these attributes can be defended through the identity of agent and final causality in him.

17. In the well-known formula of the *Metaphysics*, 'such a principle whose substance is act', God's transcendence of potency and his transcendence of the distinction of being and operation are touched upon. For the Greek word *energeia* clearly refers here to the action by which God moves things. Yet Aristotle uses it as an occasion to show the priority of actuality to potency, simply speaking. I shall discuss the transcendence of potency first. (18-27)

18. Aristotle introduces the difficulty that potency seems to be prior to act, since anything that acts can do so, though everything that can act need not act. He dismisses this with a statement reminiscent of Saint Thomas' third way: if this [is so], there will be nothing among beings. He defends this from the fact that potency must be led into act by some cause already in act.

19. Notable here, though I shall not probe the question, is the fact that this principle is taken here in so universal a manner. It is applied to a relation outside time, the relation between the everlasting generation and corruption of certain material substances to the first mover. Since the former is something in potency, the other must be a cause in act and utterly devoid of potency.

20. This lack of potency in God is the most problematic of the various aspects of transcendence discussed by Aristotle. For it involves the question of his recognition of God's creative power in *Metaphysics* 12. This difficulty is resolved, most fundamentally, to the sort of potency that Aristotle denies to God, the potency to be, the potency to act, or both.

21. Clearly Aristotle is denying that there is a distinction

of the power to operate from actual operation in God. For he says that 'if there will be something able to move and able to make, but not *doing* anything, there is not movement.'

22. But he also says 'Further, not even if it will act, while its substance is potency. For movement will not be eternal. For the being in potency is able not to be.' From this Aristotle draws the formula naming God, 'such a principle whose substance is act.'

23. Now I recognize that the force of these words allows us to consider the identity of essence and existence in God, insofar as existence stands to essence as act to potency. I also recognize that such a consideration manifests God's creative power. If Aristotle intends to speak of the potency to existence when he speaks of a 'being in potency' and says 'its substance is potency,' he may well be speaking of creation.

24. The strongest evidence I see that Aristotle is doing so are two references in this discussion to generation and corruption. He mentions movement many times, but this is subordinated to the principal claim, 'For substances are the first of beings, and if all are corruptible, all things are corruptible.' Again, when he concludes the consideration of the priority of act to potency, he describes the condition thus: 'if there is going to be generation and corruption. . . .'<sup>10</sup> Now this is a consideration of change insofar as existence is its principle or term. Hence, it is not impossible to consider the participation in existence on the part of corruptible sensible substances and their dependence upon what does not share existence as the formal beginning of this argument. Again the force of Aristotle's words allows such a reading.

25. If Aristotle intends to discuss that act of creation in this passage, he has certainly chosen the proper place to begin such a treatment in the science of metaphysics. For the fact that some things only participate in existence is best known

<sup>10</sup> 1072a10-11

to us through corruptible substances. If Aristotle does not insist that we attend to the creative act in distinction from the causality of local motion, he does nonetheless draw our attention to the coincidence of the effects in these corruptible substances. For he considers God not merely as bringing about local motion from which other changes result, but as the cause of movements insofar as they have existence as some term. In attending to the cause of an eternal cycle of corruptible substances coming to be and passing away, Aristotle may well be pointing out the first way in which one can attend to creation, without assuming some creation in time. He may well see the eminence of creative power without having the motive that we have for bringing that power into dramatic relief.

26. Nonetheless, there are some reasons to hesitate here. Aristotle's focus on generation and corruption may arise only from the fact that these changes involve a term that distinguishes corruptible beings from incorruptible beings, whether such incorruptible beings are sensible or intelligible. The distinction between the corruptible and incorruptible is a *per se* distinction with respect to being.

27. Again, the description of a being which, even 'if it will act, but its substance is a potency', may well speak of a power or potency to act or operate rather than the potency to existence. The formality of metaphysics allows this possibility, especially as the context clearly suggests operation. The following principle, 'For the being in potency is able not to be,' although expressed in more universal terms, would refer in this context to being an agent rather than to being a substance.

28. I do not intend to settle this dispute. I understand Saint Thomas' reading of the text and accept it as a possible understanding. Still I see the possibility of this other reading, in which Aristotle does not attend to the creative act that he approaches so nearly. On this reading, Aristotle's later consideration of God's transcendence of the distinction between

being and operation flows immediately from the more limited reading of the still beautiful formula, 'such a principle whose substance is his action.'

29. This transcendence, the identity of God's substance and operation, is developed most perfectly by Aristotle. Once he completes his consideration of the nature of the first of beings in relation to sensible beings with the statement that 'upon such a principle depend the heaven and nature,'<sup>11</sup> Aristotle immediately turns to the 'pastime' of such a being: 'Its course of life is such as is best to us for a little while. For it is thus always.'<sup>12</sup>

30. Aristotle goes on to discuss the impossibility of our enjoying the best course of life always. This arises because enjoyment or pleasure is an action or activity, in Greek, *energeia*. Even the highest of human operations involve the body, directly or indirectly, and thus they are, after a time, experienced as wearisome.

31. Of various activities Aristotle mentions, being awake, sensing, thinking, and so on, the last, 'thinking which is by itself is of what is best by itself and thinking most of all is of what is most of all.'<sup>13</sup> This is clear from the fact that of these operations only thinking has no matter. As such, it is (or at least is able to be) fully actual. As actual it is good and thinking which is 'by itself', involving no imagination or other bodily power, or perhaps concerning nothing other than thinking itself, will be best.

32. The phrase 'thinking by itself' may well refer to self-knowledge. For Aristotle goes on to refer to conclusions from his study of the soul that mind understands itself insofar as it shares in the intelligible. This resolves to the claim that what constitutes mind is receptivity to the intelligible, while

<sup>11</sup> 1072b13-14.

<sup>12</sup> 1072b14-16.

<sup>13</sup> 1072b18-19.

becoming the intelligible is to become active. 'Whence', Aristotle concludes, 'the latter rather than the former is the divine that understanding seems to contain and considering is what is most enjoyable and best.'<sup>14</sup>

33. Several claims already made, that God's substance is his action, that he has neither matter nor potency, that he is intelligible, prepare us for the magnificent conclusion to this discussion:

So if thus we, as it were, stand well for a time, God always, it is wonderful. But if better, it is yet more wonderful. But it is so. And clearly there is life in him. For the action of mind is life, but he is that action. But his action by itself is the best and eternal life. We say the God to be the best, eternal, living being, whence life and a continuous age and the eternal belong to God. For this is God.<sup>15</sup>

In this passage Aristotle gives us rare evidence of his title 'melifluous'.

34. Here Aristotle has given us a developed account of what it means to say that God's substance is his action. It is easy to see from the text that this transcends our possession of action. But I cannot see distinctly that Aristotle understands a distinction of operation from substance to exist in separated substances other than God without attention to the next manner in which God transcends other beings.

35. Considering God's operation in more detail, Aristotle recognizes that God transcends the distinction between operation and object. This was touched upon in the previous discussion, where the focus was on the identity of substance and operation. The fundamental difficulty here is that mind cannot be the most divine and most honorable of beings, if it must think of something else and so be subjected to something else.

<sup>14</sup> 1072b23-25.

<sup>15</sup> 1072b24-30.

36. The difficulty is resolved by the recognition that thinking and thought belong even to what thinks about the worst of things. Hence, what makes thinking and thought honorable is the object of thought, the understood. Aristotle concludes with another famous expression: 'He therefore thinks himself, if in fact he is the best thing, and his thought is a thought of thought.'<sup>16</sup>

37. Further on Aristotle compares God's thought with our own:

Just as human understanding or the understanding of composites stands in some passage of time (for the good does not exist in this or that [moment], but the best, being something other [than movement], is in some whole), so stands for all eternity thought itself [thinking] itself.<sup>17</sup>

This allows us to introduce some distinction between the thought of God and that of other separated substances.

38. For it follows immediately that God transcends these substances insofar as he is the object of his own thought. Aristotle stated earlier that God moves the whole universe as something intelligible, an object of thought. Lower substances move insofar as he is an object of intellect and will to them.

39. Some distinction of substance and action must exist in these immaterial beings, tied to the fact that they are moved *per accidens*. For insofar as these substances have a distinct object which exerts final causality in them, they are also moved to operation. Even if this operation occurs without beginning and end, it is distinct from their substance or power to the

<sup>16</sup> 1074b33-35.

<sup>17</sup> 1075a7-10. The phrase 'being something else' seems to refer to the manner in which 'the best', that is, immanent action, is another sort of actuality than the movement proposed in the previously mentioned objection. (1075a5-6) Any actuality attained in movement exists for a moment, but the actuality of immanent action exists for a time, with us, or for eternity, with God.

extent that it is drawn out from that substance or power by another.

40. In the final chapter of the twelfth book of the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle discusses 'in which way the nature of the whole has the good and the best.'<sup>18</sup> Here he teaches that God is not a good intrinsic to the universe but is the extrinsic good of the whole. He begins his rather terse discussion with consideration of the world's order. God is not part of that order: 'he does not exist through that order, but it exists through him.'<sup>19</sup>

41. The claim, that God does not exist through the order of the world, implies that there is no relation of God's goodness to goods within the world. If there were such a relation, he would enter into an order with other things such that a whole composed of God and the world would possess a goodness greater than the goodness of God. Precisely because his goodness has no proportion to any good within the order or even to the good that consists in order, God does not become a whole with the world but remains outside it as absolute goodness.

42. Aristotle then points out that all things are ordered and not in the same way. Yet they are ordered so that one has some relation to another and so that all are ordered to something one. The nature of each thing is seen as the principle by which this ordering is brought about.

43. His cryptic claim that 'the others say rightly that it is a principle, but how the good is a principle they do not say, whether as an end or as a mover or as form,'<sup>20</sup> recalls other complaints about the insufficiency of Plato's account of the good as a cause. This fact suggests that a proper understanding of this text should be drawn out through other teachings

<sup>18</sup> 1075a11-12.

<sup>19</sup> 1075a15.

<sup>20</sup> 1075a38-b1.

in which Aristotle touches upon his development of the Platonic doctrine of the good. Three seem most important to me. Aristotle understands form to be 'something divine and good and desirable'.<sup>21</sup> He thinks that insofar as nature inclines to such form, it acts for the sake of something and thus exhibits final causality.<sup>22</sup> He relates form and final causality to participation in the claim that everything natural does what it does by nature to share in the always and the divine.<sup>23</sup>

44. In light of such teachings, it is not difficult to see here a doctrine of participation by which the nature of each thing determines for that thing its share in the goodness of a being separate from the world and in no way depending upon the whole for its goodness. Thus, the measure of good shared in by each thing, through its intrinsic form, by actions and qualities attained by its actions, and by its order to other beings, arises from the order of each and all to this extrinsic and independent good. The order is manifested above all in the operations flowing from nature by which all things desire their proper share in that good.<sup>24</sup> This share will be for some, such as those studying this text, knowledge of that good.

45. Now Aristotle's mention here of three modes of causality tempts one to go beyond the obvious criticism of Plato's

<sup>21</sup> *Physics* 192a16-17.

<sup>22</sup> *Physics* 2.8.

<sup>23</sup> *De anima* 415a26-b2.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. *Summa Theologiae* 1-2 Q. 109, a. 3, c: Diligere autem deum super omnia est quiddam connaturale homini; et etiam cuilibet creaturae non solum rationali, sed irrationali et etiam inanimatae, secundum modum amoris qui unicuique creaturae competere potest. Cuius ratio est quia unicuique naturale est quod appetat et amet aliquid, secundum quod aptum natum est esse, sic enim agit unumquodque, prout aptum natum est, ut dicitur in II *Physic*. Manifestum est autem quod bonum partis est propter bonum totius. Unde etiam naturali appetitu vel amore unaquaque res particularis amat bonum suum proprium propter bonum commune totius universi, quod est deus. Unde et dionysius dicit, in libro de div. Nom., quod deus convertit omnia ad amorem sui ipsius.

description of Forms as some kind of extrinsic formal cause or paradigm. Perhaps Aristotle is encouraging us to draw from his principles an understanding of how God transcends the distinction found in these three causes. For me the discussion of Anaxagoras overcomes any hesitation.

46. Aristotle reports (as does Socrates in the *Phaedo*) that Anaxagoras makes the good a principle of movement: 'For mind moves, but it moves for the sake of something, whence it [that is, the good] is other, except as we speak. For medicine is somehow health.'<sup>25</sup> He seems to mean by this that, for Anaxagoras, mind moves for something other than itself. The only way to avoid this is to follow his teaching, which is summarized in the claim that 'medicine is somehow health.'

47. Here Aristotle clearly understands the art of medicine to have the form and definition of health as the principle from which it begins its reasoning. The conclusion of reasoning, for example, 'Bind that wound!' is the beginning of action which results in health. Health is both the form that makes the doctor an agent of health and also the end for which he acts. But health in the doctor's soul is also a paradigm of health produced in the body. As stated clearly in the seventh book of the *Metaphysics*, these two are related as health without matter and health in matter. This extrinsic formal causality can be seen most clearly, insofar as the doctor uses the same knowledge to heal many men.

48. This coincidence of three forms of causality agrees particularly well with another natural teaching of Aristotle, that these three causes coincide in many natural operations, such as reproduction.<sup>26</sup> There the form and end are one, even numerically, while the agent is one with them in species. In

<sup>25</sup> *Metaphysics* 1075b8-10.

<sup>26</sup> *Physics* 198a24-27.

*Metaphysics* 7, he extends this to artistic productions, though he is not as explicit.

49. Through his character as transcendently good, God thus transcends the modes of causality. He is the end at the likeness to whom all things aim. He is the pattern to which all things are conformed insofar as they are and are thus good. These notions are founded upon the utter lack of potency by which he is also able to move without being moved by another.

50. As stated above, though Aristotle touches upon certain aspects of creation and uses formulas and arguments through which one can distinctly conceive these aspects, he does not himself express an unambiguous conception of creation. Nor does he point us distinctly to the creation of incorruptible beings, whether sensible or intelligible.

51. The question did not obviously preoccupy Aristotle for many reasons. But his apparent demonstration that the world is eternal is certainly one of the most important. I say nothing here about whether Aristotle conceived existence in distinction from essence, though he obviously did not do so with the attention given it by later thinkers.

52. But had Aristotle or some pagan reader focussed his attention on these questions, he may well have seen the force of these formulas and arguments. This would allow such a philosopher to reframe his consideration, however unlikely such a reframing may seem. For the grasp of the world's dependence upon God attained through admitting an eternal world proves that God has such a character by which he is able to create a world in time.

53. For God has intellect and, insofar as he enjoys, he has will. As these are his very substance, he must cause through intellect and will. Though matter, and thereby movement and time, each have a nature apt to be everlasting, in his wisdom God might choose to limit his communication of existence



to matter. Again, immaterial beings have a yet higher aptitude to be everlasting and are not even subject to time. Still, God's wisdom might see some reason to impose some limit to the duration of such minds.

54. Now the principal claim of these remarks is that consideration of the possibility of a temporal creation allows the mind to see God's transcendence in greater relief. I shall attempt to show this in the seven aspects of transcendence discussed above: infinite power (56-65), utter immobility (66-67), identity as end and agent (68), pure actuality (69), identity of substance and operation (70-71), identity of operation and object (72-74), and goodness without proportion to the universe (75-76).

55. Note that I am not asserting here that God's *existence* should be manifested through considering the possibility of temporal creation. As Saint Thomas says, on the assumption of creation in time, God's existence is perfectly evident. This makes the assumption of another possibility, a world always in existence, more useful to the proof of God's existence. Yet once God's existence is manifested through such an assumption and his creative power is attended to, one can reconsider his transcendence in light of the possibility of temporal creation.

56. The first aspect of transcendence discussed above is God's infinite power. Here it is quite easy to see the greater profundity with which this attribute can be considered, by assuming the possibility of creation in time. For by this possibility every positive aspect of a creature is seen manifestly to arise from God, not only its existence, but its essence and its matter. All these must be founded in God's power.

57. One cannot propose a temporal creation until one has seen that God gives existence to all other beings. In this sense one does not see more by assuming creation in time. Yet one grasps more dramatically that everything that bears the notion

of being must come from God, especially the first matter of mobile beings and the essences of incorruptible things.

58. Thus we find in Saint Thomas' defense of the doctrine of temporal creation a description of 'the universal production of being' as manifesting the power of the 'first universal agent which is an agent of all being'.<sup>27</sup> Any particular production involves an agent with a finite active power proportioned to the passive potency of some patient. But the active power able to bring something into being from nothing, as is most manifest through creation in time, must be an infinite power.

59. Let me suggest two other considerations of God's infinite power far more easily seen through considering creation in time. First is his power to create another world rather than this one (for example, a world with more or less elements or one without me). Although an eternal world is no more necessary in this sense than a world created in time, God's power to create one rather than another is much more clear.

60. A sign that this is otherwise difficult to see is the necessity which Aristotle ascribes to the world. Admittedly, Aristotle recognizes real contingency. Further, he sometimes understands this necessity clearly to refer merely to the impossibility that the world not exist, granted that it is sensibly experienced. But it is difficult to see that he recognizes that this particular world might not exist or that another set of heavenly spheres might exist moved, apart from the first, by different gods.

61. Another consideration of God's infinite power is admittedly contentious, though I believe I follow Saint Thomas here. God's infinite power includes acts not in accord with his wisdom. Among such acts would be the creation of many worlds. Here 'many worlds' must be understood, so far as I

<sup>27</sup> *In Octos Libros Physicorum Aristotelis, Lib. 8, l. 2, p. 4: . . . primum agens universale quod est activum totius entis. . . .*

can see, as worlds that have to one another no relation in time or place.

62. Saint Thomas discusses this in his commentary on *De caelo*:

But it ought to be known that some prove many worlds are possible in other ways. In one way thus: The world has been made by God; but the power of God, since it is infinite, is not determined to this world only; therefore it is not reasonable that he cannot make even other worlds.<sup>28</sup>

The claim can be restated this way: God made the world. If he made one world, he can make another or several others or infinitely many others.

63. Now Saint Thomas does not accept this argument, since making many worlds would be against God's wisdom. But he does not conclude that God does not have such power to make many worlds. The impossibility of many worlds arises, *sine praeiudicio melioris sententiae*, from God's wisdom and not from his power.

64. Let me press further, along a tangent, to suggest that one theological problem suggests a solution close to many worlds. This is the present location of the resurrected body of Christ and the assumed body of his Mother. These bodies exist as the first parts of the new earth, to be completed at Christ's return. It seems difficult, though not impossible, to say that these bodies exist somewhere in the universe, especially in our modern cosmology.

65. Yet if they do not, they must constitute something very close to a second universe, one which does not have any spatial or temporal relation to this universe or to any of its parts. This would agree with the fact that through their bodies can-

<sup>28</sup> *Sciendum est autem quod quidam aliis modis probant possibile esse plures caelos. Uno modo sic. Mundus factus est a deo; sed potentia dei, cum sit infinita, non determinatur ad istum solum mundum; ergo non est rationabile quod non possit facere etiam alios mundos.*

not be affected by this universe we now inhabit. On the other hand, through the fact that they can affect this one in certain ways, they would not constitute a world utterly other and unrelated to this one.

66. The second aspect of God's transcendence is his utter immobility or immutability. For the consideration of a temporal creation makes clear that any other being must come into existence through God's agency. Hence he alone suffers no change whatsoever, while every other being must at least be brought into being. Even incorruptible substances must be given existence and held in existence by God, lest they return to the nothingness from which they were created.

67. This does introduce the fear that God must change when creation begins. It is not, however, difficult to resolve this to his intellect and will. This will be considered while discussing the identity of God's substance and action.

68. The third aspect of God's transcendence discussed above, the identity of final and agent causality in him, becomes clear in a unique way, if one considers the possibility of a beginning to all creatures. For the very fact that God exists in eternity prior to the existence of creatures shows that he possesses any necessary good apart from creatures. He exists in eternity without any need. Hence, when he is understood to act, this cannot be for the sake of any good apart from his intrinsic goodness, which must be identical with his power.

69. The pure actuality of God, the fourth aspect of transcendence mentioned, is likewise seen more distinctly. If God is understood to exist before time without creatures, no potency to be whatsoever, that is, no passive potency, can be found in him. For no passive potency is intelligible unless there is an active potency to lead it into act. But we are considering God to exist without any other being whatsoever.

70. The fifth aspect, the identity of God's operation and substance, might seem more difficult to see, since a change seems to occur in God when he begins to create. Note here

that Aristotle's consideration of this identity focuses on God's intrinsic operation, his life and thought, but it begins with the action by which he moves or creates the world. If this operation, taken actively, that is, as it is in the agent and not as it exists in the patient, then the identity of God's substance and operation will be seen yet more clearly.

71. For this operation is understood to proceed according to God's intellect and will, since these are the very substance of God. Hence, as Saint Thomas says, it does not follow from the fact that God has from eternity willed that the creature should exist, that the creature be eternal. For God wills from eternity that any creature should exist at a certain time. Hence, God's creative action, insofar as it is in him, need not be distinct in any way from the operation of his intellect or will.

72. The next aspect of God's transcendence discussed above, the sixth, is the identity of his operation of thought with its object. Again the assumption that God created the world in time, especially if one recognizes that God need not ever have created, implies that an object sufficient for God to think about must already have existed.

73. Yet one might be tempted to suppose that the very creation of the world, especially at a certain time suggests that God must have 'creatures' on his mind. This is paradoxically supported by the fact that many readers of Aristotle, even some who understand him to teach eternal creation, nonetheless suppose him to hold that God has no knowledge of creatures. Their confusion arises from this aspect of God's transcendence, that he is his own object of thought.

74. Now this difficulty can be solved by distinguishing the proper object of thought from what is understood through that proper object. If God's pure actuality is kept in mind, he must clearly see all the possibilities of sharing that actuality. What consideration of creation in time makes more manifest is that God must know creatures. For their beginning in time depends upon his thought in a more manifest way, insofar as

it is determined to begin at one moment rather than another.

75. The seventh aspect of transcendence is God's being an extrinsic good to the universe, lacking any relation to the world. This was also occasion for the elaboration of Aristotle's understanding of participation, which involves, in my understanding, the identity of final, exemplar, and agent causality in him. Already the necessity that final and agent causality are one in him has been shown.

76. There is little difficulty in seeing that consideration of God as existing in eternity before creation manifests more clearly that he is a final cause to the world as something extrinsic. Nor can creation introduce any relation to him, since he must remain utterly unchanged by creation. Again, the very fact that he has existed in eternity without creation shows yet more clearly that the goodness of the world adds nothing to his goodness. It cannot therefore make a whole with his goodness which would be something better than he is in himself though eternity.

77. Participation as a property of his extrinsic goodness is likewise more clear, especially if one considers this participation to involve the identity of three orders of causality. For he must more clearly be both the final cause and the agent cause of the world, as already shown. But that he is the paradigm of creatures is likewise more clear insofar as he has nothing else to look to in the original creation, while creatures quite obviously cannot depend merely for their natures upon those natures as they exist in preceding generations. Further, a temporal possession of form by the members of any species is more clearly a participation in God's eternity than an everlasting possession of form.

78. Let me conclude with a theological epilogue in which I shall answer three questions. First, why did God create the world in time? (79-80) Second, why did he tell us that he created the world in time? (81-84) Third, why did he tell us that he created the world in time first, in the opening verse

of Sacred Scripture? (85-90) Of course, I am not suggesting that any of these answers exhausts God's intention.

79. Clearly, one reason God created the world in time is that he did not intend the order we now experience to be the final order for the world. Above all, he intends the human race to grow in this world until all those souls he has cherished from eternity have been prepared in time to become members of the city of God. Like a wise artist, he has made a world only as old as he needed for these souls.

80. Perhaps it also deserves mention here that the investigations of the empirical sciences no longer suggest the existence of any nature capable of maintaining an eternal order. Everything we see seems to be of a corruptible nature. This absence of incorruptible bodies as principles of an eternal order is in keeping with God's intention that this order only last so long.

81. The second question is why God told us that he created the world in time. One general reason, in light of these considerations, is to urge us to a clearer appreciation of his transcendence. Anyone who accepts this revelation is immediately capable of reflecting upon God's utter independence of creation. One who has investigated the matter with his reason is able by such revelation to rise to a greater appreciation of God's transcendence by argument similar to those presented above. This is clear at least through those many Aristotelians, ancient and modern, who think God had to create, from his very nature.

82. Another reason is to confound the wise of this world. The arguments of Aristotle are so forceful that many use some version of them (at present together with the Big Bang) to deny and even to mock the teachings of revelation. The account of creation in Genesis seems to many the imaginings of a rude and unlearned mind. The learned man, if he would be saved, must recognize that this question surpasses his ken, and like a child, be taught by his father.

83. Had God revealed that he created the world from eternity, this might have puffed up the learned man. He would imagine that such a teaching, not merely believed but known by him demonstratively, manifests how much closer he is to God. Instead, what has in fact been revealed is a wisdom higher than his own.

84. Yet all God's ways are justice and mercy. Here too, the learned man who finds offense in the apparent vulgarity of sacred scripture can find an opportunity to recognize in what seems a childish myth the truth told from a divine, not human, vantage point. With such assistance, he might expect to learn from other passages that seemed at first too crude for wisdom.

85. Finally, why is creation in time the first thing revealed? Obviously creation in time is the beginning of the story. But it also forces the believer to attend to God in his transcendence before he created the world.

86. Let me underscore this by noting that even a revelation describing the interior life of God in his transcendence before mention of creation would not have put that transcendent life in such great relief. For only the strongest minds would overcome the inclination to conceive God's prior existence according to the conditions of material things. But the simple yet sublime statement, 'In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth,' urges upon our consideration God in distinction from these conditions, according to our abilities.

87. And this itself has a higher purpose. As we learn, first, in an image, then, through commandment, and finally, by the open teaching of our Lord, God intends that we should enter into his transcendent life.

88. In the first complete 'story' of sacred scripture, we learn of God's rest on the seventh day. This is the completion of creation, attention to God not as creator, but as he was from eternity, before creation. He rested, but he was not, of course,

## 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].<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Hebrews 4:11-12.