

THE AQUINAS REVIEW
OF
THOMAS AQUINAS COLLEGE

Vol. 22, 2017–2018

ISSN 1076–8319

EDITOR

Christopher Decaen

EDITORIAL BOARD

Michael F. McLean

John J. Goyette

Kevin D. Kolbeck

R. Glen Coughlin

John Francis Nieto

The Aquinas Review is published annually by the Office of the Dean, Thomas Aquinas College, Santa Paula, California; Michael F. McLean, President; John J. Goyette, Dean. Unsolicited articles, reasoned criticisms of articles, and letters are welcome.

Correspondence should be addressed to: Editor, The Aquinas Review, 10,000 Ojai Road, Santa Paula, CA 93060. A subscription form follows the final article.

Editor's Statement

In his Editor's Statement for the first issue of *The Aquinas Review*, issued in 1994, Dr. Ronald P. McArthur, the founding president of Thomas Aquinas College, said that the success of this college aroused in it a desire

to begin the publication of a review which would speak to those off the campus who share the same concerns as the teachers, alumni, and students who have, over the years, participated in the life of the college community. ... We hope it will stimulate a continuing conversation with an ever widening audience about some of the important topics which should concern us as men and as Christians, topics which we ignore at a risk which is much too dangerous for the health of our souls.

In August of 2019, the Dean of the College, Dr. John Goyette, asked me to take over the duties of Editor of *The Aquinas Review*. I am grateful to the Dean for entrusting me with this task, and to my predecessor, Dr. Jared Kuebler, who shepherded this issue to near completion before turning it over to me. My goal as Editor is to remain faithful to the original aim of *The Aquinas Review* and to continue the work Dr. McArthur began in drawing more readers to contemplating the perennial truths to which Thomas Aquinas College is devoted—central among which is the Truth Himself. For addressing Him, St. Thomas Aquinas said, upon receiving viaticum for the last time, “I receive Thee, price of my redemption, for love of Whom I have watched, studied, and labored.”

Christopher A. Decaen
Thomas Aquinas College,
November 2019

Preface

At Thomas Aquinas College we often say that the education we provide is only a beginning. For the most part, our students are reading the important works in our program for the first time, and the class discussion, while certainly helping them to better understand the principal arguments and themes in the readings and to acquire the intellectual virtues, only introduces them to the profoundest truths and deepest questions that have engaged mankind for centuries.

Accordingly, it is fitting that the College publish *The Aquinas Review* to honor its patron and to provide a forum for deeper consideration of those matters which constitute its curriculum and are central to genuine Catholic liberal education. Consistent with the nature of the College itself, this review is marked by fidelity to the *Magisterium* of the Catholic Church and a respect for the great tradition of liberal learning which is our common heritage.

The essays in *The Aquinas Review* reflect positions taken by their authors and not necessarily by the College itself. The editor – in collaboration with the editorial board – determines the contents of each issue. Any interested person may submit an essay for consideration or letters or comments on articles already published.

It is our hope that *The Aquinas Review* will be a source of wisdom to its readers and contributors.

Michael McLean
President, Thomas Aquinas College

Contents

SAME RATIO: FROM INTUITION TO EUCLID'S DEFINITION.....	1
<i>Michael Augros</i>	
ST. THOMAS AQUINAS ON THE FAMILY AND THE POLITICAL COMMON GOOD.....	21
<i>John J. Goyette</i>	
THE FIRST TWO MEANINGS OF SUBSTANCE AND THEIR ORIGINS IN HUMAN KNOWLEDGE.....	51
<i>Fr. Sebastian Walshe, O. Praem.</i>	
JOSEPH, THE GENTILES, AND THE MESSIAH	83
<i>Christopher A. Decaen</i>	

**SAME RATIO:
FROM INTUITION TO EUCLID'S DEFINITION**

Michael Augros

Euclid's famous definition of *same ratio* is a mouthful:

Magnitudes are said to be *in the same ratio*, the first to the second and the third to the fourth, when, if any equimultiples whatever be taken of the first and third, and any equimultiples whatever of the second and fourth, the former equimultiples alike exceed, are alike equal to, or alike fall short of, the latter equimultiples respectively taken in corresponding order.¹

Any unsuspecting reader of the *Elements*, coming upon this definition for the first time, is bound to wonder what all this fuss is about. Why is this definition so cumbersome? Does it have to be that way? And even if it does, how in the world did Euclid come up with it? How does it connect with the things we intuitively consider to be in the same ratio? We all have an idea of sameness of ratio before we learn Euclid's definition. Is there any way to define it that is easier than Euclid's way?

Michael Augros is a tutor at Thomas Aquinas College. Having taught for many years at the California campus, he joined the first team of tutors to teach at the New England campus in Northfield, Massachusetts. He holds a Doctorate in Philosophy from Boston College.

1 Euclid, *Elements*, Book V, Definition 5, translation by Thomas L. Heath.

SAME RATIO: FROM INTUITION TO EUCLID'S DEFINITION

In this little essay, I will try to explain one possible way of arriving at Euclid's definition from more intuitive ideas we have of things that are in the same ratio. This will not be an attempt to reconstruct Euclid's own personal mental history, nor do I intend to offer a method for explaining the definition to students who are new to it. Rather, I hope to show that his definition, strange as it appears when we first encounter it, is in fact a refinement and development of our natural understanding of what it is to be in the same ratio.

Prior to any study of Euclid, what do we mean by "things in the same ratio"? What do we mean by saying that two ratios are "the same"? The most obvious case is when the two ratios are exactly the same, as in

$$2 : 3 = 2 : 3$$

In this most intuitively obvious case of ratios being equal²

² In my proportions I prefer to use an equals sign (=) rather than four dots (: :) to signify the sameness of ratios. If I may digress for a moment, I would like to present my reasons for adopting this practice, which is not my own innovation but just another traditional notation. First, Euclid himself does not use either notation, but spells out everything in words. We ourselves introduce a notation for convenience, and so we should adopt whatever notation is most helpful, clear, and brief. I find the equals sign easier to write than the four dots, and I find it less distracting than the four dots, making the ratios easier to pick out. Second, since Euclid speaks of one ratio being greater than another, hence also of one ratio being less than another, it seems perfectly reasonable to speak also of one ratio being equal to another, and not only to speak of one ratio being the same as another. The use of the equals sign thus becomes quite natural. This convention surely does not oblige us to say that two equal ratios and two equal quantities are called *equal* in the same sense; after all, calling one ratio *greater* than another does not oblige us to say that it is greater in the same sense in which three is greater than two. If one's students are in danger of taking ratios for quantities, one might insist on their using the four-dots notation, but it is even more necessary to get them to think again about what a ratio is. In the three sides of a triangle there are only three quantities (three lengths), but there are six ratios.

or the same, the antecedents are equal (in the ordinary sense of *equal*) and the consequents are also equal. On the other hand, if the sameness of ratios is ever to be particularly interesting, it cannot always consist in the mere repetition of the very same ratio expressed in the very same way. That means that ratios must also be able to be “the same” even though they are somehow different, and not in all ways the same. Is there, then, a pair of ratios that we intuitively believe to be the same even if the numbers in the first pair are not the same as the numbers in the second pair? Absolutely. For example, we can say

$$2 : 2 = 3 : 3$$

Not much more exciting, perhaps, but we have here a slight broadening of our notion of sameness of ratio. The ratio on the left is the ratio of equality, of course, and it is expressed in twos. The ratio on the right is also the ratio of equality (hence we intuitively grasp that the ratios are the same), this time expressed in threes. Now, can we perform any operations on these numbers in such a way that we will produce four entirely distinct numbers, while remaining intuitively certain that the two new ratios will be the same as each other? Our first instinct should be that we can, so long as we do “the same thing to both sides.” This strategy is intuitively right, but unfortunately it is also expressed too vaguely. Can we, for example, add the same thing to both sides and maintain what we call the same ratio? Let us try. We will add 5 to both consequents:

$$2 : 2+5 = 3 : 3 + 5$$

or

$$2 : 7 = 3 : 8$$

Is that the same ratio? Perhaps it is, although in quite

SAME RATIO: FROM INTUITION TO EUCLID'S DEFINITION

another sense than the one Euclid intended, and therefore in a sense other than the one we are trying to explain. The difference between the antecedent and consequent is the same in each ratio. And notice that the sum of the means is equal to the sum of the extremes, since the sum in each case is 10. That is analogous to the product of the means being equal to the product of the extremes in a proportion in Euclid's sense. Indeed, for many of the properties of Euclid's proportions there are analogous properties in proportions such as the one above. One may call the type of sameness of ratio above an *additive proportion*. But this little exercise has only made it quite clear that we are not interested in a proportion or sameness of ratio that is based on addition. We want one that is based on multiplication (one might call it *multiplicative proportion*). That is the sort of thing Euclid is talking about, and the sort of thing one finds in similar figures. With that in mind let us again try "doing the same thing to both sides," only this time we will *multiply* both consequents by 5:

$$2 : 2 \times 5 = 3 : 3 \times 5$$

or

$$2 : 10 = 3 : 15$$

We now have four distinct numbers, no tiresome repetition, and we are also intuitively certain that we have the same ratio on each side. Why? Because, thanks to the multiplication of the corresponding terms by the same number, we see that, on the left side, 2 is one fifth of 10, and again, on the right side, 3 is one fifth of 15, and so in each case the ratio is that of 1 to 5. In other words, lurking beneath the admirable variety that we have discovered is the simple sameness of

$$1 : 5 = 1 : 5$$

Michael Augros

which is “the same ratio” in the most obvious way. If we now multiply the antecedents by the same number, say 7, then we have

$$2 \times 7 : 10 = 3 \times 7 : 15$$

or

$$14 : 10 = 21 : 15$$

Thanks to the multiplication of corresponding terms by the same number, we know, on the left side, that 14 is seven fifth-parts of 10, and so too on the right side 21 is seven fifth-parts of 15. In other words, lurking beneath the dizzying diversity of numbers in this proportion lies the humble and repetitive sort of sameness of ratios from which we began:

$$7 : 5 = 7 : 5$$

I do not suppose any of this is news. But if we are on the hunt for a definition of same ratio, these elementary exercises are extremely suggestive. The method we have used of taking ratios that are obviously and repetitively the same and then multiplying corresponding terms in them by the same number would seem to be capable of producing any amount of variety we please. Any proportion in whole numbers can be produced by this method. And whenever we use such a method, our confidence in the sameness of the ratio lies in the possibility of reducing it to a pair of ratios that are obviously the same, such as the repetitious pair of ratios written above. The way that we extract such a repetitious pair from a given pair of ratios that are the same is by dividing each given ratio by the greatest common measure of the terms in it. For example, take the last pair of ratios: 14 : 10 and 21 : 15. If we divide both 14 and 10 by 2, their greatest common measure, the result is 7 : 5. And if we then divide both 21 and

15 by 3, their greatest common measure, the result is 7 : 5 once more, assuring us that the two given ratios were the same as each other all along. All of this suggests a very easy, intuition-friendly definition of same ratio, such as this:

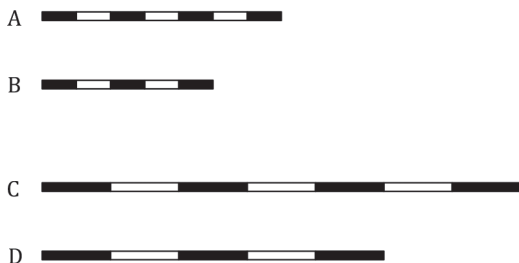
Four numbers are in the same ratio if, when those in the first ratio are divided by their greatest common measure, and those in the second ratio are divided by their greatest common measure, there results in each case the same pair of numbers in the same order.

The numbers 14, 10, 21, and 15, taken in that order, are in proportion, since dividing the first two by their greatest common measure gives us 7 and 5, and dividing the last two by their greatest common measure again gives us 7 and 5.

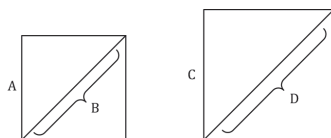
In Book 5 of the *Elements*, however, Euclid is trying to define same ratio for magnitudes, not for whole numbers. But we need only replace the first occurrence of the word *numbers* in our definition with the word *magnitudes*, and we will have our first attempt at a definition of same ratio for magnitudes:

Four *magnitudes* are in the same ratio if, when those in the first ratio are divided by their greatest common measure and those in the second ratio are divided by their greatest common measure, there results in each case the same pair of numbers in the same order.

For example, let A , B , C , D be four straight lines, and suppose the greatest common measure of A and B fits into A seven times and into B five times, and that the greatest common measure of C and D fits into C seven times and into D five times. Then the sameness of those numbers means that A , B are in the same ratio as C , D .



This definition is both simple and intuitively appealing, which raises the question: why did Euclid make things so much more complicated in his definition of same ratio? The answer is that our definition of same ratio is too simple to cover every instance of same ratio. It assumes that any two magnitudes that can have a ratio, and can thus have the same ratio as two other magnitudes, must have a greatest common measure. Alas, that simply is not so. Suppose, for example, that the straight lines A and B are respectively the side and diagonal of a square, and that the straight lines C and D are respectively the side and diagonal of a larger square. Then, intuitively, we want to say that



$$A : B = C : D$$

and yet our definition will not apply, since A and B do not have a greatest common measure for the simple (albeit shocking) reason that they have no common measure at all. Any length L that fits exactly into A will go into B some number of times but eventually leave a leftover that is less than L itself, and so it will not go

into B exactly. Euclid of course proves this sort of thing in Book 10 of his *Elements*. But we can here prove in a quick and easy way that the side and diagonal of a square share no common measure, or in other words, that they are incommensurable.

To proceed by way of reduction to the absurd, we may begin by assuming that A , the side of the square, and B , the diagonal of the same square, do have a common measure. Hence they will also have a greatest common measure, and we may call that q . So this greatest common measure will go into A some whole number of times, m , and into B some other whole number of times, n . Because the common measure q is the greatest, it is clear that the numbers m and n are the least numbers produced by any measure common to A and B . So far, then, we have

$$A = mq$$

$$B = nq$$

Elementary facts of geometry and arithmetic now assure us that the square on A equals m^2 times the square on q , and the square on B equals n^2 times the square on q . And any reader of Plato's *Meno* knows that the square on B , the diagonal, is equal to twice the square on A , the side. Hence

square on $B = 2$ (square on A)

or n^2 (square on q) = $2(m^2$ (square on q))

so $n^2 = 2m^2$

so n^2 is even (since it is equal to twice a whole number, namely, m^2)

so n is even (since its square is even)

so m is odd (since m and n are in least numbers)

Then again, we just got through saying that n is even, so we may say that $n=2p$, where p is some whole number. But we also said

$$n^2 = 2m^2$$

and therefore

$$(2p)^2 = 2m^2$$

$$\text{so } 4p^2 = 2m^2$$

$$\text{so } 2p^2 = m^2$$

so m^2 is even (since it is equal to twice a whole number, namely, p^2)

so m is even (since its square is even)

and yet we just proved a moment ago that m is odd! The only way out of this contradiction is to deny the initial supposition, namely, that the side and diagonal of a square can have a common measure.³

We have now discovered the reason why Euclid's definition of same ratio is not as neat, clean, and intuitive as the one that we proposed. Our definition was wonderfully intuitive, simple, and clear, and yet it is no good, since there are infinitely many magnitudes that are in the same ratio but to which our definition cannot apply. What new definition can accommodate all these proportions that our first definition leaves out?

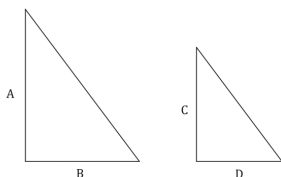
³ A corollary to this proof is that no square integer is double any other square integer.

Our first attempt to define same ratio was admirably intuitive, but it was also rather arithmetical. We were using numbers, whereas now it is clear that we need to define same ratio in a special way for magnitudes. We might try, then, to take full advantage of our geometrical intuitions. What is it, after all, that convinces us that the side and diagonal of one square must have the same ratio as the side and diagonal of any other square? Surely not anything having to do with common measures, since they have none. Instead, it is the sameness of shape. Every square is the same shape as any other, and the isosceles right triangle formed by the side and diagonal of one square is the same shape as the isosceles right triangle formed by the side and diagonal of any other square. This suggests a very simple way to define same ratio for any four straight lines at all:

Four straight lines are in the same ratio if the right triangle having the first two as its legs is the same shape as the right triangle having the last two as its legs.⁴

Now if someone should object that “the same shape” should be defined by “the same ratio” among the sides, and not the other way around, we can instead say

Four straight lines are in the same ratio if the right triangle having the first two as its legs is equiangular with the right triangle having the last two as its legs.



That definition is intuitively sound, and furthermore it is immune to the problem of the incommensurability of the side

⁴ We also have to be sure to take the terms in the ratios in the proper order, so that the antecedents subtend equal angles in the triangles, and the consequents do as well.

and the diagonal, since it makes no assumption whatsoever about any two of our straight lines sharing a common measure. Moreover, it beautifully reduces the idea of sameness of ratios to equality of angles.

One more thing we must say about this second attempt at a definition of same ratio, however, is this: it is a complete failure. One fatal flaw is that it works only for straight lines, whereas we want to define sameness of ratio for all magnitudes, including angles themselves, and perhaps even such things as lengths of time. Nor can we define the sameness of ratio among other kinds of magnitudes by representing them with straight lines, since that assumes the straight lines are in the same ratio as the other magnitudes—something to which we have yet to assign an exact meaning. This definition, therefore, runs into the same problem as the first insofar as it applies to some instances of magnitudes that are in the same ratio, but not to all. We need to define same ratio for magnitudes without omitting any of the ratios they can have.

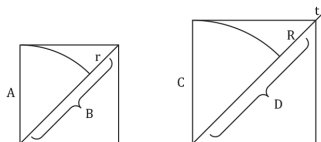
In order to go forward, let us look back at our failed attempts, and extract from them those elements that we are still confident must be right. First, we should be confident that the sides and diagonals of our two squares are in the same ratio. We found no fault with that geometrical intuition. Second, we should be confident that the essence of sameness of ratio is quantitative, indeed numerical, and that it has to do with measure, even if no single thing exactly measures both the side and the diagonal (a ratio, after all, is a relationship of the size of one thing to the size of the other, of the how much of one to the how much of the other). Third, we should be confident that “doing the same thing to both sides,” that is, multiplying the corresponding terms in two ratios that are the same by the same numbers, preserves the sameness of the ratios.

SAME RATIO: FROM INTUITION TO EUCLID'S DEFINITION

If we hold fast to these remnants of our first attempts, a new idea suggests itself: why not use any measure we like for our side and diagonal, even if it is not an exact measure? So long as we then use a corresponding measure for the side and diagonal in the second square, we should get the same pair of numbers as we did for the first square. We might then take this procedure as the general test for magnitudes being in the same ratio.

There is one difficulty with this suggestion: how can we be sure that we are using a corresponding measure on each side? The easiest way to be sure is to use the smaller magnitude in each ratio to measure the larger. Side A fits into B exactly once, for example, and then leaves a remainder smaller than A , and C likewise fits into D exactly once, leaving a remainder smaller than C . The correspondence is lovely, and is surely somehow distinctive of ratios that are the same. But is it enough to serve as a precise definition of what it means for our four magnitudes to be in the same ratio?

Not quite yet. Extend diagonal D by just a tiny bit, t . Side C fits into $D + t$ also exactly once, leaving a leftover less than C . So by our definition (as it stands so far) we would have to say not only



$$A : B = C : D$$

but also

$$A : B = C : D + t$$

and if we want sameness of ratio to be transitive (which is certainly what intuition demands), then we would have to admit that

$$C : D = C : D + t$$

which is quite ugly and anti-intuitive. It does horrible violence even to the very vague and general “same thing to both sides” idea associated with things that are in the same ratio. This is clearly unacceptable. But it is also easily fixed.

The problem arose from the crudeness of our corresponding measures, namely, the sides of the squares. To remedy that, we simply allow the process to continue. The remainders themselves (r and R) are also corresponding magnitudes, and they are smaller than A and C respectively. So now we can use these remainders as more refined measures to measure the respective sides (A and C). Since there is no common measure of the sides and their respective diagonals, the result of this second measurement will be new, smaller remainders. These new remainders can then be measured back into the diagonals, producing a third pair of remainders, and so on, back and forth, as often as we like. If the numbers we get from such corresponding measurements are always and forever the same on both sides, then the magnitudes are in the same ratio. So we can define the sameness of ratio thus:

Four magnitudes A, B, C, D are in the same ratio if, after measuring A into B as many times as it will go in without exceeding, and likewise C into D , the number of times is the same on both sides, and either there are no remainders, or else there are alike remainders on both sides, and these remainders, measured into A and C without exceeding, produce numbers that are again the same, and so on, so that the same numbers always result so long as the measuring process can continue.

This definition is certainly an improvement.⁵ It is perfectly

5 In fact, it seems to be the definition of same ratio that Aristotle has in mind in his *Topics*, Book 8, Chapter 3, 158b29–158b36.

universal, applying to all magnitudes whatsoever, and it makes no assumption about the magnitudes being commensurable. Furthermore, it does not define sameness of ratio in terms of something consequent upon it (as did the definition in terms of sameness of shape).

Nevertheless, we have not yet arrived at Euclid's definition, which is what we set out to do. Moreover, the definition at which we have arrived, for all its virtues, leaves some things to be desired. For one thing, it seems to cling to the idea that the ratio of two magnitudes should be compared to the ratio of two others by measuring the two magnitudes. If any two magnitudes had a common measure, then that would make sense. But since that is false, it would appear that measuring the two magnitudes is not essential to the sameness of their ratio with some other ratio.

This definition is also cumbersome, insofar as it requires us to keep shifting units in our measuring process. In the case of the sides and diagonals, for instance, we first use a side to measure the diagonal, then use the remainder to measure the side, then use the new remainder to measure the diagonal again, and so on. In this case, since the side and diagonal are incommensurable, the multitude of units that our measuring process will use is infinite. Can we discover an equally universal definition that instead uses always the same units in measuring?

We cannot choose a fixed set of units for measuring our four magnitudes, since in that case we will have only one measurement for each of them (or at any rate a finite number of measurements), and so the measurement will not be exact if we happen to have incommensurable magnitudes in any one ratio. That is why we had to introduce ever-finer units of measurement and an unending measuring process. But if measuring our magnitudes is itself unnecessary, and is even in some sense undesirable (because it seems to tie sameness of ratio in magnitudes to an often hopeless search for a common measure), then perhaps

we should not look for things to measure them at all. On the other hand, if sameness of ratio has to do with measurement, since ratio is a relation of things with respect to their quantities, what are we to do? Well, if we are not to use other things to measure our four given magnitudes, then perhaps we should use them to measure other things.

In the definition we are now trying to improve upon, we start with our given magnitudes, then produce the same numbers by measuring corresponding units into each pair. For example, if we take a hundredth of the side of a square as our measure, this will go into the side 100 times (exactly), and into the diagonal 141 times (with a remainder), and we get this same pair of numbers if we do the same thing with a larger square. If we are instead to define sameness of ratio by using our four magnitudes to measure other things, we must do the opposite, and start with a pair of numbers and from them form corresponding multiples. We might, for example, take 100 times the side and 141 times the diagonal in one square, and do the same in the other square.

But we can take corresponding multiples like this of any four magnitudes whatsoever, not just those that we suspect to be in the same ratio. What special relationship among the resulting multiples will be the tell-tale sign that the four original magnitudes, our “units,” are in the same ratio?

We might be tempted to say that A, B are in the same ratio as C, D if $100A, 141B$ are in the same ratio as $100C, 141D$. That might be true, but as a definition of *same ratio* it is circular. We must look to some other quantitative correspondence among the multiples to define the sameness of ratio between A, B and C, D . But what sort of quantitative correspondence?

A possible answer emerges if we consider the new definition we are trying to form as something like the reverse of the one we are trying to improve upon. When we chose to measure the diagonal by the side, that was not arbitrary. We could not

instead have chosen first to measure the side by the diagonal, since the diagonal is greater than the side. Although the side does not fit exactly into the diagonal, it does fit in, since it is less than it. And the same goes for the side and diagonal in the second square. So too the remainder of the diagonal after the side has been measured into it is less than the side, and so it can be used to measure the side (though not precisely). In this process, we begin with corresponding things that are alike less than the things they are to measure, and end with the same numbers. Since forming multiples is the reverse of measuring something with a given unit, and requires that we begin with the same set of numbers for both pairs of magnitudes, the “multiples definition” of same ratio that we aim now to discover must somehow reverse this procedure. We must begin with a pair of numbers by which to multiply each of the two magnitudes in each ratio, and expect that the products of the antecedents will turn out to be alike less than the products of the consequents (or else that the products of the antecedents will turn out to be alike greater than, or equal to, the products of the consequents, depending on the numbers by which we choose to multiply). If we now spell all that out in the form of a definition, we have:

If, for any whole numbers we please m and n , the four magnitudes A, B, C, D are such that

if $mA > nB$,	then $mC > nD$
if $mA = nB$,	then $mC = nD$
if $mA < nB$,	then $mC < nD$

then A has to B the same ratio that C has to D .

And that, of course, is just Euclid's definition, worded slightly differently. This definition works for all magnitudes, not

just commensurable ones. It does not involve a potential infinity of different units in measurement, but always uses the given magnitudes A , B , C , D themselves as units. It is not circular, since it does not define the sameness of ratio among the original magnitudes by the sameness of ratio among the products we have formed, but only by their corresponding order of inequality (or else equality). It has also preserved our original intuitive idea that sameness of ratio consists in a sameness of results when we “do the same things to both sides.” The definition makes us “do the same thing to both sides” insofar as it instructs us to multiply the terms of both ratios by the same pair of numbers. And it defines the sameness of ratio by the sameness of the results, that is, by the sameness in the resulting order of inequality in the corresponding multiples.

Finally, this definition has also given us a test for determining whether given magnitudes are in the same ratio. If, for a given set of magnitudes, we can show that the three “if-then” statements in the definition are true, then the magnitudes must be in the same ratio.⁶ One might worry that each if-then statement would require an infinity of tests, since we have an infinity of numbers m and n to choose from. The worry is unfounded, however. To prove any one of those statements, we simply assume that the “if” part of the statement is true, and then prove that the “then” part must also be true on that supposition, which is enough to prove the whole if-then statement. Euclid does that sort of thing all the time. If an angle is drawn inside a semicircle, then it must be a right angle, and that can be proved just from

⁶ Actually, if any one of the three if-then statements is convertibly true, the four magnitudes in question must be in the same ratio. But we cannot define same ratio by the products turning out to be alike equal, since that can happen only in the case of commensurable magnitudes. Nor would it make much sense to define same ratio by the products turning out to be “alike greater than,” while leaving out “alike less than,” since neither one is more intrinsic than the other to the sameness of the ratios.

the fact that it is inscribed in a semicircle—it does not matter that there is an infinity of different ones in any given semicircle, so long as we assumed nothing special about the one we were working with beyond its being an angle inscribed in a semicircle. So too, it does not matter that there is an infinity of different numbers m and n to choose from; if it is given that $mA > nB$, and from that general information alone it is proved that $mC > nD$ as well, then the magnitudes are indeed in the same ratio.

Euclid's brilliant definition goes beyond our intuitive grasp of the sameness of ratio, but is also tied to it, founded on it, and does no violence to it. There is a general philosophical lesson in that. Euclid's definition of same ratio is the fruit of refining our first intuitive ideas about same ratio in light of the counterintuitive idea of incommensurability, and is itself neither intuitive nor counterintuitive, but only more refined than our first intuitive ideas, while staying in tune with them. Philosophy and science require us to go forward from our intuitive ideas, sometimes correcting them (as when we correct the intuitive idea that all magnitudes are commensurable with the counterintuitive truth that some are not), other times refining them without correcting them (as when we turn our preliminary and unrefined idea of "doing the same thing to both sides" into a perfect definition of same ratio).

The effort required to arrive at Euclid's definition of same ratio is itself another lesson. If developing our understanding of something as accessible to us as same ratio requires this amount of labor and care, and brings us to a definition so different from the one that first occurs to us, how much more should we expect difficulty and an unexpected result when we set out to define things that are deeper and less accessible to us, such as the soul or eternity. More specifically, we should observe that even an abstract mathematical thing such as the sameness of ratios among magnitudes can turn out to be metrically intelligible

Michael Augros

only in an unexpected way. All the more should we expect the things of nature, which are not only somehow continuous (as are abstract magnitudes), but are also subject to motion and change of various kinds, to be metrically intelligible in unexpected ways.

ST. THOMAS AQUINAS ON THE FAMILY AND THE POLITICAL COMMON GOOD

John J. Goyette

There is a growing tendency among Catholics to adopt a quasi-libertarian view of human government: government should not be concerned with making its citizens morally virtuous, but should instead concern itself with a more limited and instrumental common good, one ordered to the good of families and individuals who privately pursue their own notion of happiness.¹ This view, that human law and government are concerned only with peace, security, and economic prosperity, is contrary to the teaching of Aristotle and St. Thomas, and to Catholic social teaching. I will argue that for St. Thomas the political

John Goyette is the Dean of Thomas Aquinas College, where he has taught since 2002. From 1994–2002, he was Professor of Philosophy at Sacred Heart Major Seminar in Detroit. He received his Doctorate in philosophy from the Catholic University of America in 1998.

1 See, for example, John Finnis, *Aquinas: Moral, Political, and Legal Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), Chapter 7; Germain Grisez, *The Way of the Lord Jesus*, vol. 2 *Living a Christian Life* (Quincy, IL: Franciscan Press, 1993), 844–858; Robert George, “Law and Moral Purpose,” *First Things*, January 2008, available online at <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2008/01/law-and-moral-purpose>. For a detailed criticism of Finnis’s view of the political common good as limited and instrumental, especially his claim that such a view agrees with St. Thomas, see my essay, “On the Transcendence of the Political Common Good: Aquinas versus the New Natural Law Theory,” *National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly* 13.1 (Spring 2013): 133–155.

common good transcends the private good of individuals and families, that it consists in the virtuous life of the political multitude (what St. Thomas calls “communal happiness”), and that the family, without the guidance and assistance of law and the *civitas*, is insufficient to lead men to virtue.

The tendency to embrace a libertarian view is due in part to the fact that our own opinions about human government have been largely formed by our political institutions, and those institutions have been largely shaped by classical liberalism, especially the writings of John Locke. Classical liberalism, like libertarianism, emphasizes individual freedom and limited government; and it also views the political common good as limited and instrumental.² The recent trend toward a libertarian view is

2 John Locke’s view of the political common good as instrumental is plain from his *Second Treatise of Government*. In that work he defines political power as the “right of making laws with penalties of death, and consequently all less penalties, for the regulating and preserving of property, and of employing the force of the community, in the execution of such laws, and in the defense of the commonwealth from foreign injury; and all this only for the public good” (*Second Treatise*, Chapter 1, sect. 3). He says, moreover, that “[t]he great and chief end...of men’s uniting into commonwealths, and putting themselves under government, is the preservation of their property” (Chapter 9, sect. 124). Thomas Jefferson, in his first inaugural address in 1801, espouses a Lockean view of limited government: “A wise and frugal government, which shall leave men free to regulate their own pursuits of industry and improvement, and shall not take from the mouth of labor the bread it has earned — this is the sum of good government.” The influence of Locke on Jefferson and the American founding can also be seen in the *Declaration of Independence*, of which Jefferson is the primary author. The Declaration asserts that all men are endowed by the creator with certain natural and inalienable rights—the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, that government is instituted among men to secure these rights, and that political authority derives from the consent of the governed. The reference to happiness might suggest an older view of government, one that identifies the political common good with some form of communal happiness; but the *Declaration* does not say that human government directs man to happiness, it only secures the individual’s natural and inalienable right to pursue it. It’s also worth noting that the original draft of the *Declaration* had a more characteristically Lockean flavor. The original draft

also a reaction to progressive social policies that have steadily undermined the institution of marriage and the importance of family life. The family is a fragile institution, and the desire to safeguard it from whatever threatens it is natural. Nonetheless, there is an opposite danger in settling for an impoverished notion of political life, or perhaps even in abandoning altogether political life, in the belief that the great task of the family, raising children to be morally virtuous human beings, can be achieved without the help of human law and government.

This paper has several parts. In the first part I will outline St. Thomas's understanding of the political common good which he identifies as happiness, or the life of virtue. In the second, I will focus on the need for human law as a guide to the life of virtue and the insufficiency of the moral training proper to the family. In the third, I examine the virtue of legal justice, which St. Thomas describes as the most perfect of all the moral virtues and the virtue by which man participates in the communal life

says that government secures the right to "life, liberty, and property"; it was at the urging of Benjamin Franklin that "property" was changed to "the pursuit of happiness." Among the founders, James Madison articulates what might be taken to be a contrary view of the political common good in *Federalist* 62: "A good government implies two things; first, fidelity to the object of government, which is the happiness of the people; secondly, a knowledge of the means by which that object can be best attained." While Madison evidently thought that good government ought to contribute to the happiness of the people, this does not mean that he thought it the role of good government to articulate or promote a particular view of happiness. Indeed, his discussion of faction in *Federalist* 10 suggests quite the opposite. Madison, like most of the founders thought that a government whose function was limited to safeguarding individual rights and liberties was most likely to contribute to the happiness of the people by allowing individual persons to pursue their own view of happiness unimpeded by government or majority faction. The US Constitution and Bill of Rights, of which Madison was the primary author, embodies such a notion of limited government. For a fuller discussion of the influence of Locke on the American founding, see Thomas L. Pangle, *The Spirit of Modern Republicanism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988) and Michael P. Zuckert, *The Natural Rights Republic* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996).

of the *civitas*. Finally, I turn to the society of the family and its role within the political community. In this last part I will show how the notion of subsidiarity—a key element of the Church’s social teaching—is found in the writings of St. Thomas. Without the teaching on subsidiarity one will likely mistake St. Thomas’s notion of the common good as totalitarian or collectivist.

St. Thomas on the Political Common Good

To understand the nature of the common good we must understand the nature of the good simply. St. Thomas is fond of quoting the Aristotelian formulation, “The good is what all things desire.”³ The formula manifests that the good as such has the notion of an end or final cause since it is the goal of some kind of appetite.⁴ The first thing to notice about the common good, then, is that it is common precisely as a good. The common good is a common end, not a good that is common by predication.⁵ I might be tempted to describe health as a “common good” since everyone desires to be healthy. When I desire to be healthy, however, I am not seeking the same thing that you are when you seek to be healthy; what I seek is the health of my body whereas what you seek is the health of your body. Of course, when you and I say that we seek to be healthy, the predicate “healthy” shares something in common in both cases, but what is common here

3 The formula is taken from the opening lines of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. See *Summa theologiae (ST)* I, q. 5, a.1 for an example of how St. Thomas makes use of the formula.

4 One should note that to speak of the good as the goal of appetite should not be taken to mean that appetite makes the good to be good. Rather, it is of the very nature of the good that it be a terminus of appetite, that it is the sort of thing that incites desire. Something is good not because it is desired, it is desired because it is good. See *De veritate*, q. 21, a.1.

5 For a helpful discussion of this distinction, see Gregory Froelich, “The Equivocal Status of the *Bonum Commune*,” *New Scholasticism* 63.1 (Winter 1989): 38–57.

is only specifically the same. But for St. Thomas, the common good is “common, not by the community of genus or species, but the community of final cause.”⁶ A common good, then, is a single end—one in number—that is able to be pursued or enjoyed by many.

When we say that the common good is able to be pursued or enjoyed by many, however, we mean that the common good as such is not diminished by being shared. Although we speak about sharing a bottle of wine, it is not strictly speaking a common good, since the wine in my glass is not the very same wine that is in your glass—my glass of wine and your glass of wine differ numerically. Consequently, the more wine you take the less there is for me. I do not mean to say that sharing a bottle of wine is not a good thing for friends to do. Indeed, it might greatly contribute to the pursuit or enjoyment of some higher good that is truly shared in common, such as the good of truth—thus the phrase *in vino veritas*—but the wine as such is not a common good. Or, to take another example, the books in the library are meant for common benefit, but if I borrow a book from the library, that precludes you from using the book at the same time. A truly common good, however, is as able to be pursued and enjoyed by many at the same time because as such it is capable of common enjoyment. Thus, the bottle of wine and the library book are not strictly speaking common goods.

The common good, then, is a single end pursued and enjoyed by a multitude of individuals. What are some examples of genuine common goods? Common goods are most readily seen where we find many individuals working together for the sake of a single end or goal. The soldiers in an army all work together for the sake of victory. Or the sailors on a ship all work together to bring the ship safely to port. Or to use an example

6 *ST I-II*, q. 90, a. 2, ad 3. This and all other translations of St. Thomas in this article are my own.

closer to home, children are a common good of the family. In these examples we have a single end that is pursued and enjoyed by many. The soldiers delight in victory, sailors delight in the ship's safe arrival, and parents delight when their children grow up into healthy and mature adults. We might add that insofar as many individuals work together for the sake of a common goal they can be said to form a community and to act in common. To sum up: *The common good is a good that is one in number and is able to be shared by many without being diminished.*⁷

Having arrived at a working definition of the common good, let us now turn to the political common good. We have noted that the notion of a common good is applicable to the common goal of any kind of community, but St. Thomas also has a more restrictive notion of the common good as the end of a perfect community. Thus, although in one sense we can speak of the common good of an army, or of sailors on a ship, or of the members of a family, the common good of the political community is higher and more perfect. Indeed, the political community is the only perfect human community in the natural order. I add this last qualification because St. Thomas will speak of other perfect communities, such as the community of the whole universe ordered to God as a final end and the community of God and the blessed otherwise known as the City of God. What, then, does Thomas mean by calling the political community a perfect community?

Thomas, following Aristotle, argues that the city is the perfect human community because of its self-sufficiency:

[Aristotle] says that the city is a perfect community; and this he proves from this, since every association among

7 For a general treatment of the notion of the common good, see Marcus R. Berquist, "On Common Goods and Private Goods," in *Learning and Discipleship: The Collected Papers of Marcus R. Berquist*, edited by Anne S. Forsyth (Thomas Aquinas College: Santa Paula, California, 2019), 411-428.

all men is ordered to something necessary for life, that community will be perfect which is ordered to this, that man have sufficiently whatever is necessary for life. Such a community is the city [*civitas*]. For it is of the nature of the city that in it should be found everything sufficient for human life ... for it is originally made for living, namely, that men might find sufficiently that from which they might be able to live; but from its existence it comes about that men not only live but that they live well, insofar as by the laws of the city human life is ordered to the virtues.⁸

The perfect human community, then, is self-sufficient not only because it allows men to flourish materially, but, more importantly, because it makes the good life possible by ordering men toward the life of virtue. This is one among many passages where St. Thomas faithfully represents and endorses Aristotle's view that man by nature is a political animal, that he reaches his natural perfection by participating in the *civitas*.⁹

St. Thomas presents this same teaching in the *Summa theologiae*. We can see from the very beginning of the treatise on law—where St. Thomas aims to give a definition of law—that St. Thomas is explicitly following the teaching of Aristotle. Having argued in q. 90, a. 1 that law is a work of reason because it is proper to reason to order things toward an end, he then asks in q. 90, a. 2 whether law is always ordered toward the common good. Here is the key part of his reply:

Now the first principle in practical matters—those things pertaining to practical reason—is the ultimate end. The ultimate end of human life is happiness or beatitude, as stated above. Whence it is necessary that law most of all [*maxime*] should look to the ordination toward

8 Aquinas, *Pol.* I, lect. 1, n. 23.

9 See, for example, *Ethic.* I, lect. 1, n. 4.

beatitude. Moreover, since every part is ordered toward the whole as imperfect to perfect, and since one man is a part of the perfect community, it is necessary that law properly [*proprie*] should look to the ordination toward communal happiness [*felicitem communem*]. Whence, the Philosopher, in the definition of legal matters, mentions both happiness and the political community. For he says, in *Ethics* V.1, that “we call those legal matters just that produce and preserve happiness and its parts for the political community,” since the *civitas* is a perfect community, as is said in *Politics* I.1.¹⁰

So we see that by definition law must be ordered toward the ultimate end, happiness. When St. Thomas says that law properly looks to communal happiness he is identifying happiness as the *proper end* or *purpose* of law. And when he asserts that law most of all looks to the ultimate end, to happiness, he is clearly asserting that the ultimate end is the principal concern of law, not a matter of remote or secondary interest.

St. Thomas also makes a second point in the text of this article: not only is happiness the ultimate end of law, it is an end that can be attained only by participating in the political community. Man is ordered to the city as part to whole, because it is only by participating in political life that he can be happy. The end of law is communal happiness because the good life, the life of virtue, is a life shared in common by the political community. This is why St. Thomas will later say that “the principal intention of human law is to establish friendship between man and man.”¹¹

One might be tempted to say that “communal happiness” is something common *by way of predication*, that the common good is simply the greatest good of the greatest number. As we have previously shown, however, what St. Thomas means by the

¹⁰ *ST* I-II, q. 90, a. 2.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, q. 99, a. 2.

term “common good” is a single end pursued and enjoyed in common. Indeed, it is in response to one of the objections in this very article that St. Thomas makes clear that a common good is “common, not by the community of genus or species, but the community of final cause.”¹² Thomas can only mean that man achieves happiness as a part of the *civitas*, by participating in the political common good precisely as a common end, not as an instrumental good ordered toward the private pursuit of happiness. The *civitas* does more than simply provide security and material prosperity. It is ordered toward the good life, the life of virtue lived in common with other members of the city.

The Need for Human Law

Having shown that the common good is shared happiness, or the virtuous life of the political multitude, let us turn to St. Thomas’s treatment of the need for human law. One might be tempted to say that law is not needed as a moral teacher or guide, since this can be provided by the family, but is necessary only as a safeguard against violence and crime.¹³ But St. Thomas repeat-

¹² Ibid., q. 90, a. 2, ad 2.

¹³ The modern notion of law as something necessary in order to prevent violence and crime, and thereby secure individual rights or liberties, can be traced to Thomas Hobbes and John Locke. For Hobbes, both natural law and human positive law aim at self-preservation, not moral virtue and the common good (see *Leviathan*, especially chapters 14, 15, and 17). We find a similar view in the political philosophy of John Locke. The natural law, according to Locke, is principally concerned with the preservation of life, health, liberty, and property (see *Second Treatise of Government*, Chapter 2, especially sect. 6); and civil law is concerned with safeguarding liberty from the threat of force or violence: “the end of law is not to abolish or restrain, but to preserve and enlarge freedom: for in all the states of created beings capable of laws, where there is no law, there is no freedom: for liberty is, to be free from restraint and violence from others” (see *Second Treatise*, Chapter 6, sect. 57). Of course, whereas Hobbes emphasizes the need for human law and government in order to escape the “continual fear and danger of violent death” that characterizes the state of nature (*Leviathan*, Chapter 13, section 9), the emphasis in Locke’s

edly insists on the role of human law as a guide to virtue.

To see this we have to understand that law functions in different ways depending on the persons on whom it is imposed. St. Thomas points out that law is imposed on two kinds of men and moves them in different ways. Consider the following texts:

Every law is imposed on two kinds of men. For it is imposed on certain men that are obstinate and proud, who are restrained and tamed by the law; it is also imposed on good men who, instructed by the law, are helped to accomplish what they aspire to do.¹⁴

Every law is given to some people. But in the people are contained two kinds of men: some prone to evil, who must be coerced by the precepts of the law, as stated above, some having an inclination to the good, either from nature, or from custom, or rather from grace; and such men must be taught and moved toward better things, by the precept of law.¹⁵

In addition to restraining those who are unruly, the law serves as a moral teacher to those who are well disposed. One might be tempted to put the emphasis on the need for the coercive power of law to restrain the violent or unruly. This is obviously important and necessary, but for St. Thomas law is *principally* a work of reason: it belongs to the very definition of law to be a work of reason, whereas coercive power is something secondary, made necessary by those who do not cooperate with the intention of the legislator.¹⁶

political philosophy is on safeguarding property rights: “The great purpose for which men enter into society is to be safe and at peace in their use of their property; and the great instrument by which this is to be achieved is the laws established in that society” (*Second Treatise*, Chapter 11, sect. 133).

14 *ST* I-II, q. 98, a. 6.

15 *Ibid.*, q. 101, a. 3.

16 Coercive power is not included in the very definition of law, but is a kind

St. Thomas stresses the rational character of human law when he first discusses human law in q. 91, a. 3, where he draws a parallel between the speculative and practical reason in order to manifest the nature and necessity of human law:

Just as in the speculative reason, from naturally known indemonstrable principles are brought forth the conclusions of the various sciences, the knowledge of which is not imparted to us by nature but discovered through the efforts of reason, so also from the precepts of the natural law, as from general and indemonstrable principles, it is necessary that human reason proceed toward certain more particular arrangements. These particular arrangements [*particulares dispositiones*], devised by human reason, are called human laws, provided the other essential conditions of law be observed, as stated above.

Just as the sciences develop over time as a work of human reason, so is human law a work of reason. No science is developed, no art perfected, in a single generation, by one man alone. The development of the arts and sciences requires the cooperation of a multitude of men working together, each man passing on what he has learned to the next generation. It also requires the efforts of those who are wise to synthesize the collective experience of prior generations so that the arts and sciences can be perfected. The collective effort required for the development of the arts and sciences is, for St. Thomas, one of the reasons why man is a political animal.¹⁷ But the same is true of human law:

of per se property belonging to the person with the authority to make law. See *ST* I-II, q. 90, a. 3, ad 2; q. 92, a. 2; and q. 96, a. 5.

¹⁷ “It is natural for man, more than for any other animal, to be a social and political animal, living in a multitude....other animals are able to discern, by inborn skill, what is useful and what is injurious, even as the sheep naturally discerns that the wolf is an enemy. Some animals also recognize by natural skill certain medicinal herbs and other things necessary for their life. Man, however, has a natural knowledge of those things which are necessary for his life

it is a collective effort requiring experience and time, and the wisdom of the wise. Just as men perfect the arts and sciences as part of a community, so do men perfect their knowledge of the natural moral law by participating in the *civitas*.

Human law is essential for living the good life because it makes the general precepts of the natural law more specific. Moreover, the specifications of the natural moral law that human law provides are by no means obvious or self-evident, but are the work of experience and time, and are perfected by the prudence or practical wisdom¹⁸ of the legislator. Indeed, St. Thomas asserts that law is the work of a special kind of prudence, what he calls “regnative prudence,” and this virtue is the most perfect kind prudence.¹⁹

only in a general way, inasmuch as he is able to attain knowledge of the particular things necessary for human life by reasoning from universal principles. But it is not possible for one man to arrive at a knowledge of all these things by his own individual reason. It is therefore necessary for man to live in a multitude so that one man may be helped by another, and different men may be occupied by their reason with discovering different things, for example, one in medicine, another in this, and another in that” (*De regno*, I.1).

18 By “prudence” and “practical wisdom” I mean the same thing, viz., the intellectual virtue concerned with deliberating wisely about practical matters, which Aristotle calls *phronēsis* and St. Thomas calls *prudentia*. Although Aristotle and St. Thomas distinguish this virtue from wisdom (*sophia* in Greek and *sapientia* in Latin), which is concerned with things unchanging and divine, the Greek *phronēsis* and Latin *prudentia* is often translated into English as “practical wisdom” because the English word “prudence” is often taken to mean mere good sense, or cautiousness in spending money, rather than signifying the intellectual virtue concerned with deliberating about the whole of human life. It is also worth noting that although St. Thomas usually names this intellectual virtue *prudentia*, he does call prudent legislators wise (*sapiens*). See *ST* I-II, q. 96, a. 1, ad 2; q. 100, a. 1, a. 3, a. 11.

19 “Now it is manifest that in him who has to govern not only himself but also the perfect community of a city or kingdom there is found a special and perfect kind of governance; because a government is more perfect to the degree that it is more universal, extends to more matters, and attains a higher end. Therefore prudence according to a special and most perfect sense belongs to a king to whom it belongs to govern a city or kingdom. And because of this a species of

The prudence embodied in the law can be easily overlooked, and this is where the parallel between human law and the development of the arts and sciences is especially helpful. We tend to take for granted many of the moral precepts of the natural law as if they were self-evident, but we fail to notice that these precepts came to be known slowly over time by the development of human law. Most men now consider it evident that slavery, polygamy, and infanticide are morally wrong, but these very things were almost universally accepted and practiced in the ancient world. This is similar to the way we now accept as obvious scientific conclusions that were centuries in the making, for example, that the earth revolves around the sun and is not at rest at the center of the world, that the motion of the tides is caused by the moon, and that light travels. Hence, it may seem that the moral law is sufficiently evident that individuals and families can pursue the life of virtue on their own, but this view fails to consider that the moral principles adopted by individuals and families are largely the result of the moral direction provided by human law. Indeed, the insufficiency of the family to live the virtuous life apart from the *civitas* is perhaps most apparent when we consider the harmful consequences that result from the corruption of human law. The deleterious effects of no-fault divorce and legalized abortion show that the family cannot sustain itself without the direction provided by rightly ordered human law. It is often said that the family is the building block of society, and so it is, but the family on its own is not sufficient to live the good life apart from the moral foundation provided by human law.

One might object, however, to this conclusion. If, as we have argued, the knowledge of the natural law depends on human legislators, have we not vitiated the natural law? Is not the whole point of natural law that the practical principles of the moral life are available to everyone and that those who are

prudence is deemed regnative" (*ST II-II*, q. 50, a. 1).

well-intentioned can simply be guided by the natural law in their own private lives and have no need for human law and government as a moral guide?

According to St. Thomas, most men left to themselves are capable of seeing only the most general precepts of the natural law and must rely on others, those who are prudent, or practically wise, to know the remote conclusions of the natural law. Most men, for example, are capable of knowing the precepts of the Decalogue, for example, *Honor thy father and thy mother*, *Thou shalt not kill*, and *Thou shalt not steal*, since the reason of everyone judges at once that these sorts of things should be done, or not done, and St. Thomas says that these things “belong to the law of nature absolutely.”²⁰ But some moral matters are more difficult to see, and require wisdom and careful reflection: “The judgment of some matters requires much consideration of diverse circumstances, and not just anyone can carefully consider these things, but only the wise, just as it does not belong to everyone to consider the particular conclusions of the sciences, but only to the philosophers.”²¹

Hence, these more remote conclusions of the natural law derived by the wise must be taught to the less wise: “There are certain precepts which the wise, after a careful consideration of reason, judge should be observed. And these things belong to the law of nature, yet they require teaching, the wise teaching the less wise, such as *Rise up before the hoary head, and honor the person of the aged man*, and other such things.”²² For St. Thomas, it is part of God’s providence that men are instructed in the natural law by means of the wise, by human legislators.²³ The natu-

20 *ST I-II*, q. 100, a. 1.

21 *Ibid.*

22 *Ibid.* For Aquinas, Moses is the paradigmatic example of the wise human legislator.

23 *Ibid.*, q. 100, a. 3.

ral law is *in principle* knowable by reason even though the more remote conclusions can only be grasped by the wise after careful reflection, and are then communicated to the rest of mankind by means of human law. And since the natural law is “nothing other than the rational creature’s participation in the eternal law,”²⁴ we might say that the highest function of human law is to enable every member of the *civitas* to participate more fully in the divine government. Indeed, this explains why St. Thomas insists that human law and government would have been natural to man even apart from original sin, since even in his prelapsarian state men would have been unequal in knowledge and virtue and those who were wiser would have ruled their inferiors.²⁵

While the role of law as a moral teacher is essential to law, it is not the only or even the most obvious reason why men need human law and government. This is why St. Thomas also emphasizes the need for law to restrain the passions of those who are unruly. In q. 95, a. 1, he argues that parental authority is insufficient to lead men to virtue because some juvenile children are beyond the disciplinary power of their parents and need to be restrained by the coercive power of law:

As to those young men [*iuvenes*] who are inclined to acts of virtue by a good natural disposition, or by custom, or rather by a divine gift, paternal discipline suffices, which is by admonitions. But because some are found to be depraved, and prone to vice, and not easily moved by words, it was necessary that they be restrained from evil by force and fear, in order that at least they might desist from doing evil, and grant others a quiet life, and that

24 Ibid., q. 91, a. 2.

25 See *ST I*, q. 96, a. 4. One might object that the kind of rule that Aquinas envisions in an earthly paradise is not specifically political in its nature. It is not clear, however, why the rule of the wise would not consist principally in framing laws, since law is essentially a work of reason and only secondarily and derivatively an exercise of coercive power.

they themselves, by being habituated in this way, might be led to do willingly what before they did from fear, and thus become virtuous. Now this kind of discipline, which coerces through fear of punishment, is the discipline of laws [*disciplina legum*]. Whence it was necessary for peace and virtue that laws be framed since, as the Philosopher says (Polit. I, 2), “as man, if he be perfect in virtue, is the most noble of animals, so, if he be separated from law and justice, he is the worst of all.”²⁶

According to St. Thomas, the discipline of laws is necessary to address a problem internal to the family, the insufficiency of paternal power to restrain the passions of youth. The young not only have strong concupiscible appetites inclining them to pleasure, they also have intense irascible appetites that incline them to be insolent or rebellious.²⁷ Therefore, there needs to be some authority that inspires a kind of awe beyond paternal authority to restrain the passions of youth and to move them toward virtue.

St. Thomas will note later that because the majority of men are imperfect, human law must move men toward virtue *gradually*, focusing especially on restraining or prohibiting those vicious actions that harm others and threaten to disturb the peace.²⁸ The discipline or moral training provided by human law is a lengthy process and the necessity of the coercive power of law to restrain the young, or those moved by their passions, is not a temporary or limited problem. The battle with concupiscence and the irascible appetite begins with puberty, but it does not disappear once children pass through the teenage years.

²⁶ *ST* I-II, q. 95, a.1.

²⁷ On the need for law to regulate concupiscible appetite, see *Ethic.* X, lect. 14, n. 13. On the need for law to restrain irascible appetite, see *Ethic.* I, lect. 1, n. 4; and *ST* I-II, q. 105, a. 4, ad 5.

²⁸ *ST* I-II, q. 96, a. 2.

Thus, the need for human law stems from the nearly universal difficulty of taming the passions, and the insufficiency of paternal discipline to cope with this problem. Hence, we see that the family is not self-sufficient with regard to living the life of virtue since paternal power is incapable of directing all men toward virtue.

Granted the insufficiency of paternal power to restrain the passions of youth, one might be tempted to place the emphasis in this passage on the need to use coercive power to maintain peace. St. Thomas certainly makes that point, but his main point is that the moral training within the family is insufficient, and that the fear of civic punishment is necessary to lead the young toward virtue. The discipline of laws, therefore, has a twofold purpose. The ultimate end is to produce virtue, but it is also ordered toward a more proximate or intermediate end, to maintain peace.

We have shown that for St. Thomas the wisdom and experience embodied in human law functions as a moral teacher for those who are well-intentioned, communicating a more detailed knowledge of the natural moral law that is necessary for the perfection of virtue; and the discipline of law restrains and tames those who are passionate and unruly, moving them gradually toward virtue and keeping the peace. The well-being of the family, then, depends on the existence of law and the larger more complete community of the *civitas*.

Justice and the Common Good

We have shown that St. Thomas identifies the political common good as the virtuous life of the *civitas*, and have shown the indispensable role of law as a guide to virtue, but we have yet to see how the exercise of the moral virtues is essentially political in nature. To do this we need to turn to the virtue of justice, the

virtue by which a man is disposed to act well in relation to other men within a political community.

St. Thomas begins his treatment of justice in the *Summa theologiae* by noting that justice, unlike the other moral virtues, perfects a man's relations to other men: "It is proper to justice, compared to the other moral virtues, to order a man in those things that are toward another. . . The other virtues, however, perfect a man only in those things that belong to him according to himself."²⁹ Since justice perfects a man in relation to others it has a special ordination toward external actions and external things, e.g., paying a man his wage, or performing a civic duty. Hence, "justice is properly distinguished from the other moral virtues according to its object, which is called the just [*iustus*], and this indeed is right [*ius*]."³⁰ Accordingly, St. Thomas defines justice as "the habit by which a man gives to each one his right [*ius*] by a constant and perpetual will."³¹ St. Thomas's point in defining justice in terms of its object—namely, *ius*—is not that the virtue of justice is exclusively concerned with external actions (as opposed to interior operations), but that justice is ultimately ordered toward, and defined by, the good of another, and this represents an additional perfection beyond the other moral virtues. Note, however, that because justice is concerned with the good of another, justice simply speaking is not found within the family or household because there is not sufficient otherness: a son is to a certain degree (*quodammodo*) a part of his father, and

29 *ST* II-II, q. 57, a. 1.

30 *Ibid.*, q. 57, a. 1. Note that the Latin *ius* is often translated with the English word "right," but this translation can be misleading since it does not necessarily imply the modern notion of rights, the notion of rights that we find enshrined in the Declaration of Independence or the Bill of Rights to the US Constitution. "Rights" in the modern sense are fundamental, or inalienable, liberties that belong to the individual. For Aquinas, *ius* simply means what rightly belongs to someone, his due. If a man works his shift, wages are his due, his right.

31 *Ibid.*, q. 58, a. 1.

a wife also belongs to her husband because she is compared to him as his own body, as St. Paul says in Ephesians 5:28.³² This is not say there is not a right way and a wrong way to treat one's children or one's wife, but this is to speak of justice in a qualified way. Hence, the additional perfection that belongs to justice as a moral virtue is found most fully in one's relation to others beyond the family, in the political community.

For St. Thomas, all the moral virtues (as opposed to the intellectual virtues) are perfections of some appetitive power of the soul, and justice is no exception. The virtue of justice is a moral virtue because it is a perfection of the rational appetite, the will. This is why St. Thomas's definition of justice includes the phrase "by a constant and perpetual will." It is because the *rational appetite* follows the apprehension of reason that the will can desire the good of another. Hence, although the virtue of justice is principally concerned with the good of another, and therefore with external action, it presupposes a rectitude in the rational appetite. Justice perfects the will. It perfects the will, however, not simply because the just man chooses the just action, but because he chooses it for its own sake. He rests in it as an end. The just man, the man who acts out of the virtue of justice, not only renders to each his own, but delights in doing so and this delight belongs to the will.³³

We have spoken so far of justice in very general terms, as ordered toward the good of another, and perfective of the will. St. Thomas will argue that for both of these reasons the virtue of justice is superior to the other moral virtues. On the part of its *subject*, justice is in the more excellent part of the soul, the rational appetite; and on the part of its *object*, justice is superior because it does not simply perfect a man in relation to himself

³² *Ibid.*, q. 57, a. 4.

³³ *ST I-II*, q. 59, a. 5.

but orders him toward the good of another.³⁴ But there is an added complexity in St. Thomas's account of justice. Following the teaching of Aristotle, Thomas divides justice into two kinds. One kind of justice, which he calls "particular justice," directs a man in relation to individual men, especially with regard to external goods that can be exchanged or distributed.

Particular justice is the virtue that inclines a man to pay his debts, or to sell something at a fair price. It is also the virtue by which a public person exercises restorative justice or makes a fair distribution of the benefits and burdens of public life, e.g., distributing honors, dispensing monies from the public treasury, levying taxes, or conscripting soldiers. We usually call those who exhibit the virtue of particular justice "honest" or "fair" because they are concerned with a just exchange or distribution rather than in securing their own profit. This virtue is called "particular justice" because it has a restricted or limited focus: it is concerned with the distribution or exchange of external goods, not with the full range of human activities that relate to other men.

There is another kind of justice called "general justice" or "legal justice" that is comprehensive or all-inclusive because it orders the acts of all the virtues toward the political common good. This kind of justice orders a man's actions toward the good of another not as an individual but as a part contained within a whole, as a member of the political community:

Justice, as stated above, orders a man in relation to another. This can happen in two ways: in one way, to another considered as an individual, in another way, to another in common, insofar as he who serves some community, serves all the men who are contained in that community. In both of these ways, justice is used in its proper sense. Now it is manifest that all who are contained in some community are compared to that community as

34 *ST* II-II, q. 58, a. 12; and I-II, q. 66, a. 4.

parts to a whole. But a part is that which belongs to the whole, so that whatever is the good of a part is orderable to the good of the whole. It follows therefore that the good of any virtue, whether it orders a man toward his very self, or orders him toward some other individual persons, is referable to the common good, to which justice is ordered. And according to this the acts of every virtue can belong to justice insofar as it orders a man toward the common good. It is in this sense that justice is called “general virtue.” And since it belongs to law to order to the common good, as stated above, whence it is that such justice, said in a way to be “general,” is called “legal justice,” because through it a man harmonizes with the law ordering the acts of all the virtues to the common good.³⁵

The virtue of legal justice aims at the good of the whole political community and thereby serves all those who participate in that whole. Because it orders or directs all the other moral virtues, legal justice is called “general virtue” (*virtus generalis*), and the actions of all the other virtues are said to belong to justice, to become in some sense acts of justice. While the virtue of “particular justice” is limited or restricted to certain kinds of actions, “general justice” pertains to the full range of human actions by ordering the actions of all the other virtues to the common good. It is also called “legal justice” because it harmonizes with the law, and the intention of the legislator, in aiming at the political common good. This is an important point because it manifests that “general justice” is a specifically political virtue.

St. Thomas goes on to compare legal justice to charity, both of which are described as general virtues. The parallel between justice and charity is a sign of the excellence of legal justice as a moral virtue since justice is the closest equivalent

35 Ibid., q. 58, a. 5.

to charity in the natural order. Justice and charity are general virtues because they order the acts of all the other moral virtues toward a higher end: “Just as charity can be called a general virtue insofar as it orders the acts of all the virtues to the divine good, so also is legal justice insofar as it orders the acts of all the virtues to the common good. Therefore, just as charity, which regards the divine good as its proper object, is a special virtue according to its essence, so also legal justice is a special virtue according to its essence insofar as it regards the common good as its proper object.”³⁶ Just as legal justice directs the acts of all the virtues toward the communal happiness of the *civitas*, so charity directs the acts of all the virtues toward the divine good, which is nothing other than God as the supernatural common good of the heavenly *civitas*.³⁷ Charity as a special virtue is defined by its proper object, the supernatural common good, in the same way that legal justice is defined by its ordination to the political common good; and both justice and charity direct the acts of the other moral virtues by a movement of the will, by a command.

Not only does St. Thomas make clear that legal justice is an all-round virtue, a comprehensive virtue, he also argues for the superiority of justice in relation to all the other virtues. As we have already seen, the virtue of justice, whether general or particular, surpasses the other moral virtues because it perfects a higher power of the soul, the will, and because it is ordered toward a more perfect object, the good of another. But legal justice is “foremost among all the moral virtues insofar as the common good transcends the singular good of one person.”³⁸ The virtue of legal justice is the moral virtue par excellence because it perfects man’s rational nature by ordering the rational appetite toward the common good, and it perfects his social nature

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid., q. 26, a. 3; Aquinas, *De caritate*, a. 2; a. 4, ad 2.

38 Ibid., q. 58, a. 12.

by ordering him toward the perfect human community of the *civitas*.

One might raise an objection, however, to the position of St. Thomas that legal justice is the perfection of all the moral virtues. We have already noted in the previous section that human law must move men toward virtue gradually because the majority of men are imperfect, and that human law should not attempt to forbid every vicious action, but should focus on forbidding those actions that are most hurtful to other men.³⁹ Given this prudential limitation of human law, one might wonder about St. Thomas's assertion that *legal justice* is an all-inclusive virtue, or that it is the highest of all the moral virtues in the natural order. Can it really be that the perfection of the moral life is attained precisely by participating in the directive or ordering power of human law? To answer this objection we need to make an important distinction between the *letter* of the law, the precepts of the law that prescribe or forbid particular acts, and the *intention of the legislator*, especially his intention of the common good. As St. Thomas notes, the perfection of legal justice includes *epikeia*, the virtue by which one corrects or supplements the letter of the law by looking toward the end intended by the legislator.⁴⁰ The perfectly just man sees the end intended by the legislator and is moved by a love for the common good to perform acts of virtue that go beyond what is strictly required by the *letter* of the law.

Although the law does not prohibit every act of vice or prescribe every act of virtue by an obligation of precept, the very end intended by the legislator has the power to oblige a man to avoid vicious actions and pursue those virtuous actions that are required by the common good. This is because, as St. Thomas notes, the very ordination toward the common good is law to the

39 See *ST I-II*, q. 96, a. 2, ad 2.

40 *ST II-II*, q. 120, a. 2, ad 2.

maximum degree.⁴¹ So when a soldier on the battlefield risks his life in an act of courage that goes above and beyond the call of duty, he is acting according to the virtue of legal justice because he recognizes that the common good in some sense obliges him to act. In a similar way, an unjust human law in itself lacks the power to bind a man in the forum of conscience, but the common good may require him to obey such a law to prevent scandal or social unrest.⁴² Or, to take another example, the common good may require a man to act contrary to the letter of the law when, by some extraordinary circumstance, following the letter of the law will be extremely harmful to the common good.⁴³ The point is that the truly just man not only follows the letter of the law, but looks especially toward the common good.

It is only by participating in the *civitas*, by ordering himself toward the political common good, that man can live the good life. This is why St. Thomas asserts that man by nature is a political animal, and why he calls the moral virtues that are in man according to the condition of his nature “political virtues,” because they are ordered by the virtue of legal justice toward the political common good.⁴⁴ Note, however, that we are speaking of what belongs to man by nature, not what belongs to man according to the order of grace. Through grace, and the supernatural virtue of charity, the moral virtues are further ordered toward a more perfect common good, the divine good as the end of the City of God. The virtue of legal justice, then, is the most perfect of all the moral virtues in the natural order and serves as a model

41 *ST* I-II, q. 90, a. 2. See also I-II, q. 96, a. 6; and I-II, q. 99, a. 5.

42 *Ibid.*, q. 96, a. 5.

43 *Ibid.*, q. 96, a. 6.

44 *Ibid.*, q. 61, a. 5. The virtues that are in man according to the condition of his nature are the virtues acquired by habituation rather than infused directly in the soul by the grace of God. For a discussion of the distinction between the acquired and infused moral virtues see *ST* I-II, q. 63, aa. 1–4.

and foundation for the virtue of charity.⁴⁵

Family and Subsidiarity

One might object at this point that St. Thomas's position threatens to undermine the natural authority of parents over their children, and to minimize the importance of the family in the moral formation of children. Indeed, one might wonder whether the very idea of subordinating the family to the political community threatens to weaken, perhaps even destroy, the family, a society that is older than any city, and instituted in the beginning by God Himself. To answer this objection, we need to turn to the principle of subsidiarity, one of the key principles of the Church's social teaching that developed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in response to communism and the modern state.⁴⁶

What is the principle of subsidiarity? The simplest description of "subsidiarity"—which comes from the Latin word *subsidium*, meaning "help" or "aid"—is found in Pius XI's social encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno*: "The true aim of political life is to help individual members of the political community, not to destroy or absorb them."⁴⁷ Subsidiarity is the principle that the higher order, i.e., political order, is meant to *help* individuals and families (and other associations within the *civitas*) to participate in the common good in a way that does not absorb or destroy these lower orders. At the very least, this means that functions that can be done more efficiently at a lower level should not be absorbed or taken over by a higher level, by a higher authority.

45 *ST II-II*, q. 26, a. 3; *De caritate*, a. 2.

46 On the development of the principle of subsidiarity as part of the Church's social teaching, see Russell Hittinger, "The Coherence of the Four Basic Principles of Catholic Social Doctrine: An Interpretation," in *Pursuing the Common Good*, edited by Margaret S. Archer and Pierpaolo Donati, Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, *Acta 14* (Città Del Vaticano, 2008), 75-123.

47 Pius XI, *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931), no. 79.

Again, I quote from Pius XI: “it is an injustice, a grave evil and a disturbance of right order for a larger and higher organization to arrogate to itself functions which can be performed efficiently by smaller and lower bodies.”⁴⁸ Still, this description of subsidiarity can be misleading insofar as it suggests that *efficiency* is the governing principle. It is better to say that subsidiarity entails the recognition that the political community contains individual members and smaller communities that have their own proper goods, their own proper functions, that cannot be performed by a higher order. This is especially pertinent to the family. It is not just that the family can raise children more *efficiently* than the political community; raising children is *proper* to the family. So the principle of subsidiarity presupposes that there is a graded hierarchy among human communities or associations, and that the lower communities are subordinate to the higher in a way that does not deprive the lower communities of those functions that are proper to it.

Hearing this summary of the principle of subsidiarity, one might wonder whether one can find the principle of subsidiarity in St. Thomas. I argue that we can find a fairly robust notion of subsidiarity in both Aristotle and St. Thomas even though they do not use the term “subsidiarity.”⁴⁹ First, both Thomas and Aristotle insist that the family exists prior to the *civitas* and that man is more naturally a conjugal animal than a political animal.⁵⁰ This is one reason why St. Thomas will often describe

48 Ibid.

49 For a discussion of the principle of subsidiarity in the thought of St. Thomas Aquinas, see Nicholas Aroney, “Subsidiarity, Federalism and the Best Constitution: Thomas Aquinas on City, Province and Empire,” *Law and Philosophy* 26.2 (March 2007): 161-228 and Michael J. Sweeney, “Aquinas on Limits to Political Responsibility for Virtue: A Comparison to Al-Farabi,” *Review of Metaphysics* 62.4 (June 2009): 819-847.

50 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1162a16-19; Aquinas, *Ethic.* VIII, lect. 12, n. 19.

man as a “social animal” rather than simply a “political animal.” Of course, the pre-political family—the family as it is found in primitive human societies—is imperfect because it exists apart from human law and government. The model of the pre-political family for St. Thomas, as it was for Aristotle, is that of the Cyclops in Homer’s *Odyssey*.⁵¹ The cyclops were savages—cannibals—who lived with their own families apart from any larger community, the father exercising unlimited authority over his own wife and children. Once the city comes into existence, however, the family is elevated by its participation in the political community, by being ordered towards the life of virtue. It becomes civilized. But because man by nature is a political animal, because he is perfected by participating in the *civitas*, the civilized family is the truly human family, it is what the family was meant to be all along.

Second, the natural priority of the family in some sense remains even after the city comes to be, insofar as the natural authority of parents over their children remains. For St. Thomas, the authority of parents over their children is natural because it flows from the reality that parents are causes of the coming into being of the children, and children are therefore an extension of their parents. According to St. Thomas, before a child reaches the age of reason, he is governed solely by parental authority because a child is by nature an extension of his parents.⁵² It is through the medium of the family that children enter into and participate in the political community. St. Thomas suggests that after the age of reason parental authority is qualified to some degree, but he still regards parents as the principal agents in the moral formation of their children. Indeed, St. Thomas argues that fornication is against the natural law, and that marriage is natural, because raising human offspring requires moral

51 Aristotle, *Politics*, 1252b22-23; Aquinas, *Pol.* I, lect. 1, n. 15.

52 *ST* II-II, q. 10, a. 12.

instruction and discipline and this is a task that requires both a mother and a father.⁵³ Indeed, St. Thomas suggests that the moral training and instruction provided by parents is in some sense more natural than the discipline of laws because “children love their parents and are readily obedient out of natural affection.”⁵⁴ Hence, “although the royal decree is more powerful by way of fear, nevertheless the paternal precept is more powerful by way of love.”⁵⁵ So for those children who are inclined to virtue by a good natural disposition, or by divine grace, paternal authority is the better way, the more natural way. Human law still functions in this case as a moral teacher and guide, but its instruction is *mediated* by the parents. Indeed, this is why raising children is considered by St. Thomas to be a public office, a civic duty. One might say that morality is legislated by human government, but the execution or administration of the law is carried out by the family. For St. Thomas, the recognition of the priority of the political common good is not meant to suggest that human government replace, or absorb, the traditional role of the family. The point is to see that law and government are a necessary aid to the family.

Conclusion

If St. Thomas is right that the life of virtue can be achieved only through participation in the *civitas*, then the primacy of the political common good, at least insofar as it pertains to temporal happiness, should caution us against diminishing the importance of virtue as the ultimate end of political life. The deficiencies of our own political order, or of any other political order, should not lead us to overlook the transcendence of the political common good, or to withdraw from the *civitas* in

53 *Summa Contra Gentiles* III, ch. 123, n. 8.

54 Aquinas, *Ethic.* X, lect. 15, n. 5.

55 *Ibid.*

John J. Goyette

pursuit of a private happiness that will ultimately fail to satisfy our natural inclination to live in society with other men.

AQUINAS ON THE FAMILY AND THE POLITICAL COMMON GOOD

**THE FIRST TWO MEANINGS OF *SUBSTANCE*
AND THEIR ORIGINS IN HUMAN KNOWLEDGE**

Fr. Sebastian Walshe, O. Praem.

I. Introduction

In the fourth book of his *Metaphysics*, Aristotle argues that the wise man ought to consider the axioms. In itself, it seems unlikely and counter-intuitive that it is the proper office of the wise man to consider the axioms, since any fool knows them. Who could fail to see that the whole is greater than the part, or that the same thing cannot be and not be? Yet what the fool and even the ordinary man on the street do not often see is the order of the axioms. For example: which is the most self-evident statement of all? It takes a wise man like Aristotle to see that of all the axioms, the one about contradiction is first.

Here I am setting out to do something similar to this. Any fool knows what substance is. Even if he doesn't have a name for it, he has a concept of it, since it is the foundation of all his other concepts. But not everyone distinguishes the various meanings

Fr. Sebastian Walshe is a Norbertine Canon of the Abbey of St. Michael in the Diocese of Orange, California. He received his Licentiate in philosophy from the Catholic University of America, and a Masters and a Doctorate (in theology and philosophy, respectively) from the Angelicum, where he also taught as a visiting professor from 2003-2005. He has been a professor of Philosophy in the seminary program at St. Michael's Abbey since 2006, and is currently the dean of studies.

of substance, nor does everyone know which of these meanings is first.

It is natural to expect that the search for the first meaning of substance will lead us back to a single concept much as the search for a first axiom led Aristotle back to a single true statement, or like the search for the first cause leads us back to one God. But there is something stubborn about the first meaning of substance: it doesn't seem inclined to reduce back to a single univocal concept: there seem to be two first meanings of substance which are not easy to reduce to one another. This is especially troubling because Aristotle is very insistent that the category of substance is a genus in the strict sense.

In this essay I hope to manifest that there are two first meanings of substance: 1) an ultimate subject or underlying; and 2) the "what it is" of a thing. I will first distinguish various senses of the term substance, giving an account of each meaning of substance. Next, I will argue that these two meanings of substance are somehow first in our knowledge, and that the meaning of one does not wholly reduce to the other. Third, I will investigate the reasons why these two meanings are not reducible to each other. In this third part, I will first show that the reason for the irreducibility in their notions is because each takes its origin from a different knowing power: the meaning of substance as an ultimate subject arising from the cogitative power, which senses substance *per se*; and the meaning of substance as the "what it is" of a thing arising from the understanding, which understands substance *per se*. After this I will reconsider the same question from the perspective of final causality.

II. The Many Meanings of Substance

A brief survey of the texts of Aristotle and St. Thomas makes it abundantly clear that the term "substance" has many

different, yet related meanings. Within the first five chapters of the *Categories*, Aristotle uses the term substance in at least four senses. In Book V of the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle lists six meanings of substance. In Book VII of the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle lists four meanings of substance. Finally, in question 29 of the prima pars of the *Summa Theologiae*, St. Thomas distinguishes seven meanings of substance. None of these distinctions of the meanings of substance are identical (for example, the four meanings of substance given in *Metaphysics* VII are not identical to the four meanings of substance found in the *Categories*, though there is some overlap). Trying to sort through all these meanings of substance can get quite confusing. The chart on the following page gathers these various texts together in summary fashion. Because the two texts from the *Metaphysics* and the text from the *Summa* explicitly list out the distinct meanings of substance, there is no need to argue that each of the meanings is distinct from one another. However, a brief explanation will be helpful to manifest the various meanings of substance found in the *Categories*.

As I already said, the *Categories* mentions at least four meanings of substance in its first five chapters. In chapter one, Aristotle says that a name is used univocally when the same name is said of many things, with the same account of the substance (οὐσία). In chapter 4, he lists substance (οὐσία again) as the first of the ten categories. This meaning differs from that in chapter 1, for it is clear that each of the nine accidents can be said univocally, and hence each has a “substance” in the sense given in chapter 1, while they are excluded from the meaning of substance given in chapter 4. In chapter 5, Aristotle adds two more meanings of substance (οὐσία again): first and second substance. These senses obviously differ from one another. But they are also different from the first two meanings. They differ from substance in chapter 1 because they are restricted to the category

THE FIRST TWO MEANINGS OF SUBSTANCE

<p>A) Aristotle: <i>Categories</i> 1-5 1) The essential “what it is” [οὐσία] (signified by univocal names common to all the categories) 2) That which is not present in an underlying [ὑποκείμενον] (the Category of Substance) 3) That which is neither present in an underlying [ὑποκείμενον] nor said of an underlying [ὑποκείμενον] (1st substance) 4) That which is not present in an underlying [ὑποκείμενον] but is said of an underlying [ὑποκείμενον] (2nd substance)</p> <p>Correspondence (=) and Likeness (≈):</p> <p>A1=B6=C1=D1 A2≈D2&D4 A3≈B1&B2&D7 A4≈C2&C3</p>	<p>C) Aristotle: <i>Metaphysics</i> VII.3 1) the “what it was to be” [τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι] (in the category of substance) 2) the universal [καθόλου] 3) the genus [γένους] 4) the ultimate subject [ὑποκείμενον] of predication</p> <p>Correspondence (=) and Likeness (≈):</p> <p>C1=A1=B6=D1 C2&C3≈A4 C4=B3=B7=D3</p>
<p>B) Aristotle: <i>Metaphysics</i> V.8 1) Simple bodies 2) Bodies in general 3) The ultimate subject [ὑποκείμενον] of predication 4) What is in something not said of a subject [ὑποκείμενον] and is the cause of its being 5) The limits or parts of a thing which, when destroyed, the whole is destroyed 6) The “what it was to be” [τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι] of a thing, as signified by the definition</p> <p>These six reduce to:</p> <p>7) an ultimate subject [ὑποκείμενον] ἔσχατον (1-3) 8) a “this something” [τόδε τι] which is separate [χωριστόν] (4-6)</p> <p>Correspondence (=) and Likeness (≈):</p> <p>B1&B2≈A3&D7 B3=B7=C4=D3 B6=A1=C1=D1 B8≈D6</p>	<p>D) St. Thomas: <i>Summa Th.</i>, Ia, q.29, a.2 1) the whatness of a thing, as signified by its definition 2) the ultimate subject which subsists in the genus of substance, of which there are two: 3) the supposit (the ultimate subject of predication); and 4) the ultimate subject in being, of which there are three: 5) that which stands under a common nature (res naturae) 6) that which exists through itself and not in another (subsistence) 7) that which stands under accidents (hypostasis)</p> <p>Correspondence (=) and Likeness (≈):</p> <p>D1=A1=B6=C1 D2&D4≈A2 D3=B3=B7=C4 D6≈B8 D7≈A3&B1&B2</p>

of substance, and so cannot belong to accidents. But they also differ in meaning from the sense of substance given in chapter 4 because the meaning in chapter 4 must cover both first and second substance, and so must prescind from what is proper to each of them. First substance is neither said of nor present in an underlying. Second substance is said of but not present in an underlying. Substance in the list of the ten categories must mean simply whatever is not present in an underlying, without considering whether it is said or not said of an underlying. So overall, we find four senses of substance:

- 1) The essential “what it is” [οὐσία] (signified by univocal names; common to all the categories)
- 2) That which is not present in an underlying [ὑποκείμενον] (the category of substance)
- 3) That which is neither present in an underlying [ὑποκείμενον] nor said of an underlying (1st substance)
- 4) That which is not present in an underlying [ὑποκείμενον] but is said of an underlying [ὑποκείμενον] (2nd substance)¹

St. Thomas lists the same four meanings of substance in a text from his *Commentary on the Sentences*:

Substance is said in four ways. In one way, substance is the same as essence, and thus substance is found in all the genera, just as essence is: and this is signified when it is asked: ‘what is white?’ Color. In another way, [substance] signifies an individual in the genus of substance, which is called ‘first substance’ or ‘hypostasis.’ In a third way, substance is called ‘second substance.’ In the fourth

1 As we shall later see, even second substances are said to be more or less substance, so several other senses of second substance are implied by Aristotle in chapter 5 of the *Categories*.

way, substance is said commonly insofar as it abstracts from first and second substance.²

So far so good. Let's compare these senses to the senses Aristotle distinguishes in the *Metaphysics*. The first place to begin a consideration of the various meanings of substance is naturally the entry in Book V. There, Aristotle distinguishes and orders six different senses of substance:³

- 1) Simple bodies
- 2) Bodies in general
- 3) The subject [ὑποκείμενον] of predication which is not predicated of others
- 4) What is in something not said of a subject [ὑποκείμενον] and is the cause of its being
- 5) The limits or parts of a thing which, when destroyed, the whole is destroyed
- 6) The “what it was to be” [τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι] of a thing, as signified by the definition

2 *In I Sent.* d. 25, q. 1, a. 1, ad 7. Note that all translations will be my own.

3 *Metaph.* V.8 (1017b10-27): “Substance means: [1] simple bodies, for example, earth, fire, water and the like; and in [2] general bodies and the things, living and divine, including their parts which are composed of [simple] bodies. All of these are called substances because they are [3] not said of any underlying, but other things are said of them. In another sense [4], [that is called substance] which, as something intrinsic, is the cause of the existence of such things as are not said of an underlying, for example, the soul is the cause of the existence of an animal. Also [5], [that is called substance which are] parts within things which limit and determine their individuality, and whose destruction cause the destruction of the whole: for example, as the plane is essential to the body (as some hold) and the line to the plane, and number in general is thought to be of this nature, for if it is destroyed nothing will exist and it limits all things. Again [6], the “what it was to be” whose verbal expression is the definition also seems to be the substance of each thing. It follows that “substance” has two meanings: [7] the ultimate underlying, which cannot be further said of another; and [8] whatever is a “this something” and is separate. The shape and the form of each determinate thing is said to be of this nature.”

These six senses Aristotle reduces to two: senses 1-3 reduce to 7) the ultimate subject [ὑποκείμενον] which cannot be said of something else and senses 4-6 reduce to 8) whatever is a “this something” [τόδε τι] and is separate [χωριστόν]. But sense 7 seems to be identical to sense 3, so that leaves us with a total of seven senses.

In this list, the sixth sense seems to correspond neatly with the first sense from the *Categories*: the “what it is” of a thing.⁴ However, there is not an obvious correspondence among the other senses. There is some likeness between the third sense here and the second and third senses from the *Categories*. Again, there seems to be some likeness between the first and second senses here and the third sense from the *Categories* (first substance).

Aristotle gives another distinction of substance in Book VII of the *Metaphysics* where he lists four meanings of substance⁵:

- 1) the “what it was to be” [τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι]
- 2) the universal [καθόλου]
- 3) the genus [γένος]
- 4) the ultimate subject of predication [ὑποκείμενον]

Here again, there seems to be an overlap with the previous distinctions, yet not a one-to-one correspondence with either of them. For example, the “what it was to be” seems to be identical with the first sense from the *Categories* and the sixth sense from Book V (though in context Aristotle seems to be restricting himself to the “what it is” in the category of substance, which

4 Though perhaps this sense of “what it is” is restricted to the category of substance.

5 *Metaph.* VII.3 (1028b33-1029a1): “The term ‘substance’ is used in at least four chief senses, if not more. For the [1] ‘what it was to be’ and [2] the universal and [3] the genus are held to be the substance of the particular, and fourthly, [4] the underlying. The underlying is that of which the rest are said, while it is not itself said of anything else.”

is narrower than the sense of substance found in the first chapter of the *Categories*). The second and third senses here are like the fourth sense from the *Categories* (second substance). The fourth sense here seems identical to the third sense from Book V.

Last of all, I want to set St. Thomas' distinction of the meanings of substance from the *Summa* side-by-side with these others. St. Thomas distinguishes substance into seven meanings:⁶

1) the whatness of a thing, as signified by its definition⁷

6 *ST, Ia*, q. 29, a. 2, c: "According to the Philosopher in Book V of the *Metaphysics*, substance is said in two ways. In one way, substance is said as [1] the "whatness" (*quidditas*) of a thing, which the definition signifies, according as we say that the definition signifies the substance of a thing. This [sense of] substance the Greeks call *ousia*, which we can call "essence." In another way, substance is said as [2] the subject or supposit which subsists in the genus of substance. And this, commonly taken, can be named either [3] by a name signifying an intention [of reason] (and in this way it is called a supposit), or by three names signifying a thing (*rem*) [4], which [three names] are: [5] a thing of nature, [6] a subsistence, and [7] a hypostasis, according to a three-fold consideration of substance thus called. For according as it exists through itself, and not in another, it is called subsistence. For we say that subsists which, not in another, but in itself exists. But according as it is put under a common nature, thus it is called a thing of nature, just as 'this man' is a thing of human nature. But according as it is put under accidents, it is called a hypostasis or substance. What these three names signify commonly in the whole genus of substances, this name 'person' signifies in the genus of rational substances."

7 The notion of substance as the "whatness" should not be confused with second substance, or the universal: "It is clear that the division of substance set down here is almost the same with that put down in the *Categories*. For through 'subject' is understood here first substance. That which he calls the 'genus and the universal,' which appears to pertain to genus and species, is contained under second substance. But the 'what it was to be' set down here is passed over there, since it does not fall in the order of the categories except as a principle. For it is neither a genus, nor a species, nor an individual, but it is a formal principle of all of these" (*In Metaph.* VII, n. 1275). The text of *Metaphysics* VII.3 agrees with this as well, since there Aristotle distinguishes the "what it is" from the universal. The meaning of substance corresponding to the "what it is" of a thing is therefore not the same as second substance as described in *Categories* chapter 5. It prescinds from the notion of universal or singular.

- 2) the ultimate subject which subsists in the genus of substance, of which there are two:
- 3) the supposit (the ultimate subject of predication); and
- 4) the ultimate subject in being,⁸ of which there are three:
- 5) that which stands under a common nature (*res naturae*)
- 6) that which exists through itself and not in another (subsistence)
- 7) that which stands under accidents (hypostasis)

Once again, we find overlap but not total correspondence. The first sense here seems to correspond to the first sense from the *Categories*,⁹ the sixth sense from *Metaphysics* V, and the first sense from *Metaphysics* VII. The third sense here corresponds to the third sense from *Metaphysics* V and the fourth sense from *Metaphysics* VII. Again, there seems to be some likeness between the second and fourth senses here and the second sense from the *Categories*. There also seems to be a likeness between the seventh sense here and the third sense from the *Categories* (first substance).¹⁰

III. Ordering the Meanings of Substance

Among these senses, which is first? And in what sense is

8 The notion of substance as an ultimate subject in the order of being can be traced from a logical notion as that which underlies predication to a metaphysical notion of that which underlies existence. For the logical notion of an ultimate subject is that which is neither present in nor said of another. But since that in which something is present is the cause of the being of that thing, it follows that this notion of an ultimate subject can be expressed as “that which has being through itself, and not through another.” (Cf. *In I Sent.*, d. 23, q. 1, a. 1; *SCG* I, c. 25, n. 9; *ST II-IIae*, q. 23, a. 3, ad 3; *In Metaph.* XI, lect. 12, n. 6).

9 Though perhaps St. Thomas is restricting himself to the “what it is” in the category of substance.

10 For the sake of convenience, in the table not only are the various meanings of substance listed, but also their correspondences and likenesses. In any case, it is sufficiently clear that there are many meanings of the term substance, and that it is not easy to see which among them is first.

it first? Aristotle makes a clear statement about the primacy of first substance:

That is called substance most properly, and first, and most of all, which neither is said of something underlying nor is in something underlying, for example, this man and this horse.¹¹

This seems to be an unequivocal assertion that 1) there is only one principal meaning of substance, and 2) that this meaning is “that which is neither said of nor present in an underlying.” This does not bode well for my thesis. However, this is not the only place Aristotle speaks of a first meaning of substance. In *Metaphysics* VII.3 (at 1029a2), Aristotle says that the ultimate subject of predication is “considered to be substance in the truest sense.” Yet this sense is not identical to first substance, which adds to “not said of another” the notion of “not being present in another.” Add to this the fact that in his treatment of substance in *Metaphysics* V.8, Aristotle reduces the six senses to two. This is notable, since in Book V he usually reduces all the senses to one primary sense which contains the others as a kind of kernel, but here he decides not to reduce these six senses to one.¹²

11 Aristotle, *Categories* 5. Here a question arises: is first substance really “defined” by a double negation? Not present in, not said of? That’s like defining a car by the phrase “horseless carriage,” which is really what it is not, rather than what it is. Wouldn’t a positive account be better? Remember, Aristotle is approaching substance through our way of speaking about it. As something simple and not immediately sensible by our external senses, it seems to be first known through negations, something like the way a point is known in Geometry through negation. Later on Aristotle will consider substance from the perspective of being and will render a more positive account of substance as that which exists through itself.

12 The two senses are: 1) An ultimate subject (senses 1-3 distinguished in Book V reduce to this sense); and 2) a “this something” which can exist separately, and is a form (εἶδος) or shape (μορφή) (senses 4-6 distinguished in *Metaphysics* V reduce to this sense). St. Thomas (*In Metaph.* V, nn. 903-904) reads this differently from the text we now have of Aristotle. He has the

So Aristotle is not exactly clear on which sense of substance is first.¹³

Besides these texts, there are also reasons to think that second substance is prior to first substance. For example, what is more universal is better known, but second substance is more universal than first substance. Animal is better known than man, and body is better known than animal. What could be better known than the highest genus of substance itself, which is clearly a second substance? Therefore, it seems that second substance is prior to first substance.

To resolve these difficulties, a few distinctions are in order.

(1) The first distinction is among the meanings of the word “before.” Recall that Aristotle lists five senses of before in chapter 12 of the *Categories*: before in time; before in being; before in knowledge; and before in nobility. To these he adds a fifth which is like the second: before in causality.

(2) The second distinction is between sense knowledge and intellectual knowledge.

(3) The third distinction is between what is more known to us, and what renders a notion more perfectly known according to the nature of the thing signified.¹⁴

ultimate subject together with a “this something” and separable. But in *Metaphysics* VII (at 1029a20-30), the above reading seems to confirm a different division than the one given by St. Thomas. Perhaps he had a bad translation or a defective Greek text.

13 St. Thomas, in his text from the *Summa*, also reduces all the senses of substance to two: whatness and ultimate subject.

14 This distinction is similar to the distinction made by Aristotle at the very beginning of the *Physics*. However, it is not the same distinction. There, Aristotle is distinguishing between what is more known to us and what is more knowable by nature. Here, I am distinguishing between what is more known to us, and what more perfectly renders an account of the thing signified.

Let us apply these three distinctions in order. After stating that first substance is “called substance most properly, and first, and most of all,” Aristotle adds:

If the first substances were not, it would be impossible that any of the others would be.¹⁵

From this it is clear that first substances are first in being. Yet, are first substances first in knowledge? Here the distinction between sense and intellectual knowledge may be applicable. The examples he gives of first substance: this man, this horse, are clearly well known to us. They are in some way accessible to our senses. On the other hand, examples of second substances are man and animal: universals understood by the intellect. And since sense knowledge is before intellectual knowledge, it follows that first substances are better known than second substances.

But the question here is not only whether this or that first substance is better known than this or that second substance (for example, is “this horse” better known than “horse”). Aristotle also implies that the very concept of first substance is better known than the concept of second substance since he defines second substance in terms of first substance:

Those are called second substances in which, as species, the first substances are, both these and the genera of these species, as this man is in the species man, but the genus of the species is animal.¹⁶

So it is clear that first substance is prior to second

Aristotle’s distinction seems more concerned with things; my distinction is more concerned with notions of things.

¹⁵ *Categories* 5.

¹⁶ *Categories* 5. Here another question arises: Why doesn’t Aristotle define second substance as “what is said of but not present in an underlying”? This “definition” of second substance would not depend upon first substance. Perhaps to make clear that the meaning of first substance is prior to the meaning of second substance.

substance not only in being but in knowledge. Yet it must also be true that the category of substance is prior in knowledge to the concept of first substance. For first substance is less universal than the category of substance. One could not understand first substance without understanding substance, just as one could not understand a particular kind of man without first understanding man.¹⁷

Let's summarize our findings so far. In the *Categories*, Aristotle distinguishes four senses of substance:

- 1) The “what it is”
- 2) The category of substance
- 3) 1st substance
- 4) 2nd substance

Of these, 1st substance (the third sense of substance) is prior to 2nd substance and the category of substance in being. But in knowledge, the category of substance is prior to 1st substance, which is prior to 2nd substance. But how does the “what it is” relate to the other senses of substance?

17 Someone might object that because the category of substance is among second substances, it would seem to follow that second substances are better known than first substances, contrary to our conclusion above. This is a good example of the fallacy of the accident. The fact that the highest genus of substance happens to be an instance of a second substance does not contradict the fact that the concept of first substance is known before the concept of second substance. The highest genus of substance does not include in its notion the concept of second substance, but vice versa. The fact that the highest genus of substance happens to be a second substance is accidental to the notion signified by the category of substance. To think that a second substance must be understood after a first substance because “what a second substance is” is known after knowing “what a first substance is” is the fallacy of the accident. Similarly, it would be wrong to think that a false statement must necessarily be known after a true statement because what a false statement is, is known after what a true statement is, since falsity is defined in terms of truth. Or again, it would be false to think that every good must be known before every evil, since evil is defined in terms of good.

*Judging one Substance to be More Substance
than Another Substance*

Above we distinguished between the senses of “before,” and between sense and intellectual knowledge. Here we must apply the third distinction. It is one thing to say that one account of substance is better known to us than another account of substance. It is another thing to say that one account of substance renders what substance is more perfectly than another account of substance.¹⁸

In chapter 5 of the *Categories*, Aristotle begins to compare substances and he concludes that first substance is more truly and properly substance than second substance, and that among second substances, the species is more truly substance than the genus. He reaches the same conclusion through two different middle terms.

Of second substances, the species is more substance than the genus. For it is closer to first substance. For should someone give what a first substance is, he will give what is more known and more proper in giving the species than the genus. For example, one would render “this man” more known in giving “man” than in giving “animal.” For the one is more proper to this man,

18 Some examples of the distinction I am using can be found in St. Thomas: “Names are imposed by us according as we take cognition from things. And since those things which are posterior in nature, are for the most part more known to us, it happens that frequently, according to the imposition of the name, some name is found first in one of two things, in which the other of the two signified through the name exists before [the first]; as is clear of names which are said of God and of creatures, as being and good and [names] of this kind, which were first imposed upon creatures, and from these carried over to divine predication, although to be and good are found first of all in God” (*De Veritate*, q. 4, a. 1, c). “Person is said of God and of creatures not univocally, nor equivocally, but according to analogy. And with regard to the thing signified, it is found in God prior to creatures, but with regard to the mode of signifying, it is the reverse, as it is in all other names which are said analogously of God and creatures” (*In I Sent.*, d. 25, q. 1, a. 2, c). Also see: *ST, Ia*, q. 13, a. 6, c.

the other more common. And rendering this tree, one will render it more known in giving “tree” than in giving “plant.”

Moreover, the first substances, because underlying all others and all others being said of these or being in these, are most of all called substances. But as the first substances are to the others, so the species is to the genus. For the species underlies the genus. For the genus is said of the species, but this cannot be turned around and the species said of the genus. Whence, the species is more substance than the genus also from these.¹⁹

Species is more properly substance than genus because it more properly says “what it is.” This means that the more something gives the “what it is”, the more truly it is a substance.

Again, species is more substance than genus because it is more of an ultimate subject. This means that the more something is an ultimate subject the more truly it is a substance.

In other words, when Aristotle judges among meanings of substance, he uses these two meanings (the “what it is” and the ultimate subject) to show that one is more properly substance than another. But that in virtue of which a substance is more properly called substance is substance most properly. This is an instance of the principle, if an attribute belongs to two things, but to one because of the other, it must belong more to the cause. If the name and notion of substance belongs to something to the degree that it is an ultimate subject, then the notion of an ultimate subject must most of all have the notion of substance. If the name and notion of substance belongs to something because it more expresses the “what it is,” then the notion of “what it is” must most of all have the notion of substance.²⁰

Now we can understand better why Aristotle calls first substance “most properly” and “most of all substance.” First

19 *Categories*, 5.

20 Even the first two marks of substance given at the end of chapter 5 of the *Categories* seem to fall back upon the notion of an ultimate subject (1st mark) and the “what it is” (2nd mark).

substances are not only ultimate subjects, they also have the full “what it is” of a determinate, existing form or species.²¹ Yet just as the category of substance is better known to us than the meaning of first substance, so also that which belongs most perfectly and properly to the notion of substance is prior in knowledge to the concept of first substance.²² In other words, taking “first” to mean “first in expressing the full notion of substance in intellectual knowledge,” there are two first meanings of substance: namely the “what it is” and the ultimate subject. By these two notions, the degree to which something can be properly called a substance is measured and judged.

Let’s see whether this conclusion is confirmed by the other texts in which Aristotle and St. Thomas distinguish the meanings of substance.

21 Once again, the “what it is” should not be confused here with the universal. Often, since we associate the “what it is” with definition, and definitions are universal, we conclude that the “what it is” of a thing is universal. But the “what it is” is not the definition, but rather that which is signified by the definition. As such, the “what it is” of a thing is neither universal nor particular, but pre-scinds from either. See for example: *De Anima* I, lect. 1, n. 13: “But if we regard the nature of animals from a different point of view, i.e., not as a universal, then indeed it is something real, and it precedes the individual animal as the potential precedes the actual.” See also *De Ente*, ch. 3, n. 5: “It cannot be said that a nature thus considered has the character of a universal, because unity and community are included in the definition of a universal, neither of which belongs to human nature considered absolutely. If community were included in the concept of man, community would be found in everything in which humanity is found. This is false, because there is nothing common in Socrates: everything in him is individuated. Neither can it be said that human nature happens to have the character of a genus or species through the being it has in individuals, because human nature is not found in individual men as a unity, as though it were one essence belonging to all of them, which is required for the notion of a universal.”

22 It would be the fallacy of the accident again to conclude that because first substances happen to possess the full notion of substance, therefore the concept of first substance expresses the first notions in which the full *ratio* of substance is found.

In *Metaphysics* VII, Aristotle distinguishes four meanings of substance. However, he rules out the universal and the genus as being substance only in the opinion of Plato, but not in reality. This leaves only the “what it was to be” and the ultimate subject (senses 1&4).

In the text of the *Summa Theologiae*, the first distinction St. Thomas makes is between the whatness (essence) of a thing and the ultimate subject (senses 1&2).

In the text from *Metaphysics* V, Aristotle reduces all six senses to two: the ultimate subject and the “this something which exists separately” (senses 7&8). On the face of it, a “this something which exists separately” does not seem identical to the “what it is.” However, when Aristotle comments upon what he means by a “this something which exists separately,” he adds: “the shape and form of each thing is such.” In other words, he is thinking of a formal principle of existence, not a material principle. Now how does a formal principle of existence differ from an ultimate subject? Not insofar as it is the ground of existence, for this is true of an ultimate subject as well.²³ Rather, it differs in being a principle of what something is. And therefore, Aristotle implies that this sense of substance is like the “what it is” of a thing. This seems to be St. Thomas’s reading of the text as well, since in his account of the two principal meanings of substance in the *Summa Theologiae* (*Ia*, q.29, a.2), he specifically references this text in *Metaphysics* V as the authority for his distinction. In fact, they both refer to the same reality, but defined in the mode of the logician in the one case, and defined in the mode of the metaphysician in the other.²⁴

23 See *Metaph.* VII.3 (1029a27-34).

24 St. Thomas seems to approach the notion of essence or the “what it is” in three steps: first, the answer to the question “what is it?” (cf. *In VII Metaph.*, lect. 3, n. 1309); second, what is signified by the definition (Cf., *Metaph.* VII.5, 1031a13; *In Metaph.* VII, lect. 5, n. 1378); third, since the definition gives the principles of a thing’s existence, essence means that in which and by which a

According to this reading, all four texts agree in reducing substance to two first senses: the ultimate subject and the “what it is.”²⁵

The Univocity of the Category of Substance

There is a problem with the thesis that there are two first meanings of substance. The problem is that there would seem not to be a single, highest genus of substance predicated univocally of all substances. This problem is easily solved if we remember the distinction between what is known first in relation to us, and what renders some nature more perfectly known.

Substance as a highest genus is the most universal among second substances, and hence, best known to us. Genera are said univocally of both the species under them and also of the individuals under the species. Just as animal is said univocally of man and horse, so it is said univocally of this man and this horse. Similarly substance, as a genus, is said univocally of all the other second substances and the first substances.

The fact that first substance is more substance than second substance, or that some second substances are more substance than other second substances, does not destroy the univocity of the category substance. For the notion of substance signified by the highest genus is the same for all, even if what is signified by the highest genus does not contain the most perfect notion of

thing has existence (cf. *De Ente et Essentia*, ch. 1, n. 4; and *In I Sent.*, d. 23, q. 1, a. 1).

25 Here is an objection: Since sense knowledge is prior to intellectual knowledge, isn't substance in the sense of “what it is” dependent upon substance in the sense of an ultimate subject? Answer: This is true. All our intellectual knowledge depends upon sense knowledge as for the materials from which intellectual knowledge is taken. Also, the “what it is” of something is a kind of ultimate subject insofar as *per se* predication terminates in the “what it is.” But substance in the sense of “what it is” does not depend formally upon sense knowledge, since the senses as such do not know the universal.

substance.²⁶ The category of substance, applicable to both first and second substance, means simply “that which is not present in another.” Thus St. Thomas says that substance signifying the category of substance in the list of the ten categories “is called substance commonly insofar as it abstracts from first and second substance.”²⁷ This is a kind of “lowest common denominator” for the meanings of substance. (Paradoxically, it follows from this that the category of substance least of all has the notion of substance!) On the other hand, the most perfect notion of substance belongs to first substance.²⁸

26 For example, demonstration according to its most perfect and proper definition is a syllogism causing someone to know a conclusion perfectly. This most perfect notion of demonstration is not present in a *quia* demonstration. Yet, if we take as our definition of demonstration a syllogism which causes someone to know a conclusion with certitude, this definition of demonstration is said univocally of both *quia* and *propter quid* demonstration. Again, the name “species” (meaning the name of one particular kind of thing placed under a genus) is predicated univocally of animal and of man. Both animal and man are names of one particular kind of thing placed under a genus. Yet, it can also be said that man is more perfectly a species than animal, since the perfect notion of species includes not only being under a genus, but also being predicated only of individuals.

27 *In I Sent.* d. 25, q. 1, a. 1, ad7. Recall that first substance means what is neither said of nor present in another. Second substance means what is said of but not present in another. Therefore, they have in common the notion of not being present in another.

28 What is this most perfect notion of substance? After the analysis of first substance in chapter 5, perhaps we can render a more perfect definition of first substance. First substance is not only “that which is not present in nor said of another”, it is also “that which is not present in nor said of another because its being and ‘what it is’ underlies all others.” Do either the notion of the “what it is” or the notion of “ultimate subject” somehow reduce back to the other? In some sense we can say that the “what it is” reduces back to substance as an “ultimate subject.” The “what it is” is the ultimate basis of our understanding of anything. So it stands as an ultimate subject in our understanding of other things. This is even reflected in the word “under-standing” which is identical in etymology to “*sub-stans*”. What do I understand? What something is. What stands under all my knowledge of a thing? What something is. The proper object of the human mind is the “what it is” of sensible substances. Yet to be

IV. *Why Are there Two Irreducible Meanings of Substance?*

So far we have established: 1) that the many meanings of substance reduce back to two first meanings; and 2) that this does not destroy the unity of the category of substance. It remains to be seen why there are these two first meanings of substance. And since there are many kinds of causes, there are many ways to answer the question “why?” First, I shall give an answer to why there are two first meanings of substance from material and agent cause: namely, the distinct knowing powers of the human soul. Second, I shall attempt to answer why there are two first meanings of substance from final cause.²⁹

St. Thomas notes in his commentary on the *De Anima* that “the intellect alone perceives substance.”³⁰ Yet this statement is likely to be misunderstood. One might conclude that only the intellect knows substance *per se*, while the senses only know substance *per accidens*. Yet St. Thomas mentions in other places that substance is also *sensed per se*. The apparent contradiction is resolved by appealing to the two senses of substance outlined above. St. Thomas first points out that if something is sensed accidentally, this implies that it is known *per se* by another knowing power:

It ought to be known that in order that something be sensible accidentally, first it is required that it happens to belong to what is sensible through itself, just as it happens to belong to white that it is a man, or that it is sweet. Second, it is required that it be apprehended by one sensing: for if it were to happen to belong to a sensible thing

the ultimate basis of knowledge and the ultimate basis of existence are not the same: they are ultimate bases in an analogous sense, not univocally. To stand under in reason and being are not identical.

²⁹ We have already answered the why according to formal cause by distinguishing their meanings.

³⁰ *In De Anima* II, lect. 10, n. 354.

which was hidden from a sentient being, it would not be said to be sensed accidentally. Therefore, *it is necessary that [the accidental sensible] be known through itself by some other cognitive power of the one sensing. And this is either another sense [power], or it is understanding, or the cogitative or estimative power.*³¹

St. Thomas then goes on to argue that while substance is known only *per accidens* by the external senses, yet it is sensed *per se* by an internal sense, namely the cogitative power:

Something is sensed by the bodily senses in two ways: in one way, through itself, in another way, accidentally... Something is sensed accidentally which does not bring about an undergoing in the sense [power], neither inasmuch as it is a sense [power] nor inasmuch as it is this sense [power]. But it is conjoined to that which through itself brings about an undergoing in the sense [power], *just as Socrates, and the son of Diarus, and a friend, and other things of this kind, which are known per se in the universal by the intellect, but in particular in the cogitative power in man, or the estimative power in other animals.*³²

31 *In De Anima* II, lect. 13, n. 395 (also see nn. 396-398). (Italics have been added.)

32 *In IV Sent.*, d. 49, q. 2, a. 2, c: “Sensu corporali aliquid sentitur dupliciter: uno modo per se, alio modo per accidens... Per accidens autem sentitur illud quod non infert passionem sensui neque in quantum est sensus, neque in quantum est hic sensus; sed conjungitur his quae per se sensui inferunt passionem; sicut socrates, et filius diarii, et amicus, et alia hujusmodi: quae per se cognoscuntur in universali intellectu; in particulari autem in virtute cogitativa in homine, aestimativa autem in aliis animalibus. Hujusmodi autem tunc sensus exterior dicitur sentire, quamvis per accidens, quando ex eo quod per se sentitur, vis apprehensiva, cujus est illud cognitum per se cognoscere, statim sine dubitatione et discursu apprehendit; sicut videmus aliquem vivere ex hoc quod loquitur. Quando autem aliter se habet, non dicitur illud sensus videre, etiam per accidens.”

We are sensibly aware of substance, not merely intellectually aware. Yet it is not substance in the sense of a “what it is” that we sense, but substance in the sense of an ultimate subject. Thus, the reason why there are two irreducible notions of substance is due to the fact that substance is known through two irreducible knowing powers: the intellect and the cogitative power.³³

33 Since substance as an ultimate subject is known by the senses, and substance as a “what it is” is known by the intellect, does that mean we have a concept of the what it is, but only a sense experience of substance as an ultimate subject? No. Aristotle considers this in the *De Anima*, III.4. There he argues that we know both the essences of things and the things in their individuality by the intellect and by the senses, respectively, but also by the intellect itself, yet as related to the thing known in a different way (see *De Anima* III.4, 429b10-14 together with St. Thomas’ commentary: *In III De Anima*, lect. 8, nn. 712-13). Hence, both concepts of substance as a “what it is” and as an ultimate subject are known in the intellect. See *ST, Ia*, q. 86, a. 1: “Our intellect cannot know the singular in material things directly and first. The reason for this is that the principle of singularity in material things is individual matter. But our intellect... understands by abstracting the intelligible species from matter of this kind. But what is abstracted from individual matter is universal. Therefore, our intellect is only directly cognitive of universals. Indirectly, however, and as if through a kind of reflection, it is able to know singulars because... even after it abstracts the intelligible species [our intellect] cannot understand them according as they are in act except by turning itself towards the phantasms in which it understands the intelligible species. Therefore, [our intellect] directly understands the universal itself through the intelligible species. But indirectly, it [understands] the singulars whose phantasms they are. And in this way it forms this proposition: ‘Socrates is a man.’” The response to the third objection is also to the point: “To be singular is not repugnant to intelligibility inasmuch as it is singular, but inasmuch as it is material, since nothing is understood except immaterially. And therefore, if there be some immaterial singular, such as the intellect, this is not repugnant to intelligibility” (*ST, Ia*, q. 86, a. 1, ad 3). Also see *In Post. Anal.* I, lect. 38, n. 8: “Demonstration of the universal is intelligible, that is, it is terminated in the intellect, since it is ended at the universal, which is known by the intellect alone. But demonstration of a particular beginning in the intellect is terminated in the sense, since it concludes to the particular, which is known directly through sense. And through a certain application or reflection reason demonstrating is able to arrive even at the particular.” Finally, see *In II De Anima*, lect. 13, n. 398: “The cogitative faculty differs from natural instinct. The former apprehends the individual thing as

This answers the question “why?” through material and agent cause. It remains to be seen why there are two irreducible notions of substance in human knowledge through final cause.

V. *The Good which Explains Why there Are
Two Meanings of Substance*

At the beginning of the third book of the *De Anima*, Aristotle asks why we have many senses. St. Thomas comments:

[Aristotle] asks why there are many senses. Since this question is about the species as a whole, it must be answered in terms of final causality... So here he introduces the idea of purpose. The question might arise, he says, why we have many senses instead of only one. And he answers that it is to enable us to discern such things as movement, size, and number, which are at once accompaniments of each distinct and proper sense object and also common to them all. For suppose there were only the sense of sight, whose proper object were simply color. Then, since the impression of color on the sense organ immediately involves an impression of size so that the two objects are inseparable, we should never be able to distinguish between color and size: they would appear to us as exactly the same. But the fact that size is also perceived by a sense other than sight, while color is not, is enough to show us that size and color are not the same. And the same holds good for the other common sensibles.³⁴

existing in a common nature, and this because it is united to intellect in one and the same subject. Hence it is aware of a man as this man, and this tree as this tree, whereas instinct is not aware of an individual thing as in a common nature.”

34 *In De Anima* III, lect. 1, n. 582.

Just as having two external senses makes it possible to distinguish between common and proper objects of sensation, so also having two knowing powers for substance (sense and intellect) makes it possible for us to distinguish between the “what it is” of a thing and the ultimate subject which possesses this what it is.

It is this distinction between nature (or essence) and the thing itself which makes it possible for us to understand something of the nature of separated substances. It also makes it possible for us to approximate angelic knowledge of substances.

A) So that we can know of the existence and nature of separated substances

At many places in the seventh and eighth books of the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle makes the claim that for material substances, the “what it is” of a thing and the thing itself are not identical, but in separated substances these are the same:

For a soul and the essence of a soul are the same, but man and the essence of a man are not the same...and in some things essence and the thing are identical, and in others not.³⁵

Such an understanding of the nature of separated substances would not be possible unless we were to distinguish in our knowledge between substance in the sense of a “what it is” and substance in the sense of an ultimate subject.

Aristotle goes on to show how these two notions of substance, the “what it is” and the ultimate subject, in some way are brought together in separated substances. In considering the ultimate subject in Book VII of the *Metaphysics*, he argues dialectically about whether matter, form, or the composite are most properly an ultimate subject. He ultimately excludes matter and

35 *Metaph.* VIII.3, 1043b1-4 (cf. St. Thomas, *In Metaph.* VIII, lect. 3, nn. 1709-1711). See also, 1045b22, and *De Anima* III.4, 429b10-18.

the composite, since both stand upon form for their existence, so that they cannot be an ultimate subject of existence.

To exist separately and to be a “this something” seem to belong chiefly to substance. And for this reason, it would seem that the form and the thing composed of form and matter are substance to a greater degree than matter. Yet that substance which is composed of both (I mean of form and matter) must be dismissed: for it is subsequent and open to view.³⁶

While form seems to correspond to the notion of substance as a “what it is”, since form is the cause which makes a thing to be what it is, nevertheless, the form of a material substance cannot be identified with the “what it is” of a material substance, since the essence of material substances includes matter and individuating accidents, while form is distinguished against matter.³⁷ However, in separated substances, there is a convergence of the two senses.

So while the two meanings of substance do not converge in a single univocal meaning, nevertheless, they do find their fullest notion applied to the same being in reality: the separated substances, especially God. The first Philosopher comes to the conclusion that the disunity between these two senses of substance is something that is overcome in higher beings.³⁸

36 *Metaph.* VII.3, 1029a27-a31.

37 See *De Ente* ch. 2: “Neither can the form alone of a composite substance be called its essence...the essence is what is signified through the definition of a thing. Now the definition of natural substances includes not only form but matter... It is evident, therefore, that essence embraces both matter and form.”

38 *Metaph.* VIII.3 (1043b1-4): “For a soul and the essence of a soul are the same, but man and the essence of a man are not the same...and in some things essence and the thing are identical, and in others not.” (Cf. St. Thomas *In Metaph.* VIII, lect.3, nn. 1709-1711); *Metaph.* VIII.6 (1045b23): “All those things which do not have matter are simply one.”

B) *So that we can approximate angelic knowing*

Because the mode of acting follows upon the mode of being, it follows that the disunity between these two ways of knowing substance is also overcome in the knowledge of higher beings.

The human intellect is the lowest in degree of intellectual substances. And, therefore, it is in the maximum potentiality with respect to the other intellectual substances. And because of this it receives intelligible light from God most weakly, and less like the light of the divine intellect. Hence, the intellectual light received in it is not sufficient for determining the proper knowledge of a thing except through species received from things, which must be received formally in it according to its mode. And therefore, from them the singulars which are individuated by matter are not known, except through a certain reflection of the intellect to the imagination and sense, when the intellect applies the universal species, which is abstracted from the singulars, to the form of the singular kept in the imagination. But in an angel, from the very light itself the species is determined by which it forms a proper knowledge of things, without receiving from another. And, therefore, since that light is a likeness of the whole thing inasmuch as it is handed on by way of exemplar by God, it is able to have a proper knowledge of singulars through species of this kind. And so it is clear that according to the degree of intellectual nature, there is also a diverse mode of understanding.³⁹

39 *In II Sent.*, d. 3, q. 3, a. 3, ad 1: "Ad primum ergo dicendum, quod intellectus humanus est ultimus in gradu substantiarum intellectualium; et ideo est in eo maxima possibilitas respectu aliarum substantiarum intellectualium; et propter hoc recipit lumen intelligibile a deo debilius, et minus simile lumini divini intellectus; unde lumen intellectuale in eo receptum, non est sufficiens ad determinandum propriam rei cognitionem nisi per species a rebus receptas, quas oportet in ipso recipi formaliter secundum modum suum: et ideo ex

Later in the same article, St. Thomas argues:

A superior power is able to do that which an inferior power can do but in a more eminent way. Hence that which the sense knows materially and concretely (which is to know a singular directly), this the intellect knows immaterially and abstractly (which is to know the universal).⁴⁰

Here it is clear that the knowledge of separated substances unite what is divided in human knowledge. Human knowledge needs both modes of knowing in order to approximate what is known through a single knowing power in separated substances. Thus, the reason for the natural union of the body with the intellectual soul is not only so that the intellectual soul can come to know things, but also so that it can know them in their determinate being with some degree of individuality. St. Thomas teaches that even when the human soul is separated from its body, it still lacks some of the perfect actuality found in the knowledge of separated substances:

For we said above that the efficacy of intellective power that is in the angels is proportionate to the universality of the intelligible forms existing in them. And therefore,

eis singularia non cognoscuntur, quae individuantur per materiam, nisi per reflexionem quamdam intellectus ad imaginationem et sensum, dum scilicet intellectus speciem universalem, quam a singularibus abstraxit, applicat formae singulari in imaginatione servatae. Sed in Angelo ex ipso lumine determinantur species quibus fit propria rerum cognitio, sine aliquo alio accepto: et ideo cum illud lumen sit similitudo totius rei in quantum est exemplariter a deo traductum, per huiusmodi species propria singularium cognitio haberi potest: et ita patet quod secundum gradum naturae intellectualis, est etiam diversus intelligendi modus.”

40 Ibid., ad 4: “Ad quartum dicendum quod virtus superior potest illud quod potest virtus inferior, sed eminentiori modo. Unde id quod cognoscit sensus materialiter et concrete, quod est cognoscere singulare directe, hoc cognoscit intellectus immaterialiter et abstracte, quod est cognoscere universale.”

through such universal forms, they know all the things to which these forms extend. Wherefore, just as they know all the species of natural things existing under their genera, so they know all the singulars of natural things that are contained under the species. But the efficacy of intellectual power of the separated soul is not proportionate to the universality of the forms that flow into them [at the moment of death], but rather it is proportionate to forms received from things; and for this reason it is natural for the soul to be united to the body. And therefore, it was said above that the separated soul does not know all natural things determinately and completely, not even as regards the species, but in a certain generality and confusion.⁴¹

Thus, in another place he states briefly:

The separated soul, having a universal knowledge of all natural knowable things, *is not perfectly reduced to act*, since to know something in general is to know it imperfectly and in potency. Wherefore, *it does not even attain to natural happiness.*⁴²

41 *Q.D. de Anima*, a. 20: "Diximus enim in superioribus quod efficacia virtutis intellectivae quae est in Angelis, est proportionata universalitati formarum intelligibilium in eis existentium. Et ideo per huiusmodi formas universales cognoscunt omnia ad quae se extendunt. Unde, sicut cognoscunt omnes species rerum naturalium sub generibus existentes, ita cognoscunt omnia singularia rerum naturalium quae sub speciebus continentur. Efficacia autem virtutis intellectivae animae separatae non est proportionata universalitati formarum influxarum, sed magis est proportionata formis a rebus acceptis; propter quod naturale est animae corpori uniri. Et ideo supra dictum est quod anima separata non cognoscit omnia naturalia, etiam secundum species, determinate et complete, sed in quadam universalitate et confusione."

42 *Ibid.*, ad 14: "Anima separata, habens universalem cognitionem scibilium naturalium, *non est perfecte reducta in actum*; quia cognoscere aliquid in universali, est cognoscere imperfecte et in potentia. *Unde non attingit ad felicitatem etiam naturalem.* Unde non sequitur quod alia auxilia, quibus pervenitur ad felicitatem, sint superflua." Emphasis mine. Cf. also *In IV Sent.*, d. 50, q. 2, a. 2, qc. 1.

Sense knowledge, while less perfect than intellectual knowledge, still adds something important to intellectual knowledge for human beings. The soul and body together know substance better than the soul alone.

C) *So that we can know the Trinity and Incarnation better*

Divine revelation provides an even higher finality for the irreducibility of the two meanings of substance in human knowing: a good beyond the causes knowable by reason alone. These causes become apparent once reason believes in the mysteries of the Trinity and the Incarnation and seeks to understand this belief.

In the mystery of the Trinity, human reason is confronted with an apparent contradiction: God is one substance and not one substance. God is one substantial divine nature and three substantial Persons. But this apparent contradiction finds its resolution precisely in the two first and irreducible meanings of substance. The Persons of the Trinity are consubstantial as regards substance signifying a “what it is”, since all share the same determinate divine nature. But the Persons of the Trinity are not the same substance in the sense of the same ultimate subject. Each Person stands under the divine nature, which is communicated equally to each. Hence, there are distinct hypostases, ultimate subjects. It turns out that these two meanings of substance remain irreducible even in God.

Moreover, these distinct notions of substance help reason to see how it is possible for a relation to be an ultimate subject, how the Persons in God can be subsisting relations. All the categories have a “what it is”, yet the “what it is” of the category of “toward another” does not, in itself, demand that it have existence in another.⁴³ The “what it is” of relation is not to be in (*esse*

43 See *De Pot.*, q. 9, a. 4, obj. 12 and ad 12: “Opposites are not able to be verified of the same thing. But to exist through itself and toward another are

in) another but to be toward (*esse ad*) another.

The converse difficulty confronts reason in seeking to understand the mystery of the Incarnation. How can two substances, God and man, be one substance, one Person? Once again, it is the distinction between substance as a “what it is” and substance as an ultimate subject which provides reason with the light to understand how this is possible. In the Person of Christ there is one ultimate subject, but two answers to the question “what is it?”

I cannot do justice to this final point here. However, I do want to point out an interesting corollary to this: just as there is an axiom that the highest in a lower order touches upon the lowest in a higher order, so also there seems to be an axiom that in some respect, the lowest in a lower order touches upon the highest in a higher order. The lowest kind of intellectual knowledge in some way reflects God’s knowledge of Himself better than the higher modes of created knowledge. This makes some sense if one considers that the purpose of God making different things is to better reflect his perfections. And the lowest things would not contribute to this end unless they somehow reflected perfections of God not reflected by the higher things.

VI. Conclusion

The knowledge of substance comes both at the beginning and at the end of reason’s journey. Substance as the vague, most common notion of being exists as a seed from which all human knowledge derives its origin. Substance as God, the first of all beings, is the perfect fulfillment of our knowledge of substance, containing in complete actuality what the first seed of substance

opposites. Therefore, if what is signified by the name ‘person’ is substance, which is a being through itself, it is impossible that it be something toward another.” Response: “What exists through itself is opposed to what does not exist through itself, but not [opposed] to that which is toward another.”

Fr. Sebastian Walshe

contained in complete ability. But throughout this passage from an imperfect understanding of substance to a perfect understanding of substance, there remain two meanings of substance which are indispensable companions along the road from ignorance to wisdom.

THE FIRST TWO MEANINGS OF *SUBSTANCE*

JOSEPH, THE GENTILES, AND THE MESSIAH¹

Christopher A. Decaen

Contrary to common practice among modern English speakers, the ancient Jews were exceedingly attentive to the significance of someone's name. They seemed to expect a name in some important way to reveal its bearer. Thus, Sacred Scripture regularly calls the reader's attention to the meaning of the name of an important figure—think of Adam, whose name signifies the soil (אָדָמָה, *adamah*) from which God molds him, or Isaac, whose name signifies the laughter (יִצְחָק, *itsak*) of his parents at the prospect of his birth, or Moses, whose name means “the one drawn forth” (מֹשֶׁה, *mosheh*; מֹשֶׁתוּחַ, *moshetuh*) from the Nile. Sometimes a name's meaning is stressed when that name is altered—think of Abram becoming Abraham, Sarai becoming Sarah, or Jacob becoming Israel. Most frequently, however, the meaning of a name is noted at the original christening. Thus, in

Christopher A. Decaen received his Doctorate in philosophy from the Catholic University of America in 1999, and has been a tutor at the California campus of Thomas Aquinas College since 1999. He recently became the general editor of *The Aquinas Review*.

1 This essay is an expanded version of a lecture entitled, “Joseph is a Fruitful Bough’ (Gen 49:22): The Patriarch, His Seed, and the Messiah,” given as a part of the St. Vincent de Paul Lecture Series at Thomas Aquinas College on January 19, 2018. I would like to thank all of the students, tutors, and visitors involved in the discussion period after for their questions and insights, several of which figured into the final version of this essay.

Genesis alone nearly two dozen people receive quasi-etymologies for their names, etymologies that are somehow reminiscent of a circumstance of their birth. In addition, to the Jew many other Old Testament names which Scripture does not explicitly interpret also look significant. Some of these are obvious: Elijah means “Yahweh is my God,” and Joshua means “Yahweh is the savior”; others are subtle but fitting: David seems to mean “the beloved,” and Solomon means “man of peace”; and still others are almost disturbing: Saul is spelled the same as Sheol (שאול), the Hebrew the name for Hell or Hades, the underworld of the dead. Yet Scripture for some reason is restrained here, and takes no note of these particular names’ meaning. Perhaps the Sacred Author’s silence in these instances indicates that these name-meanings are too obvious to need mentioning. Or maybe commentary is absent because these particular names contain mysteries to be wondered at, rather than discoursed upon. Regardless, when Scripture *does* explicitly note a name’s meaning or the things in connection with which the character’s identity is associated, manifestly the reader is being called to attention.

The Patriarch Joseph is one such case—when he is born, his name is elucidated by his mother Rachel. Although this elucidation is not explicitly emphasized again in the Joseph story, I will show in this essay that it is there just under the surface of the text. Indeed, I will argue that this name bears significance not only for Joseph’s entire life, but also for that of his sons and for the whole house of Israel. However, Joseph is one of those fascinating Genesis characters who nevertheless is mentioned again only on the rarest of occasions in the rest of the Old Testament. Although his tale spans 14 chapters of Genesis, the rest of the Hebrew Scriptures refer to Joseph by name only a dozen or so times; one might contrast this with allusions to David and Solomon, whose lives are leitmotifs throughout the books of the prophets and wisdom books, or allusions to Moses, whose life

dominates the entire Old Testament.² In the following, I will further argue that despite this relative silence, Joseph too embodies, albeit in a subtle way, a spirit or theme that runs throughout the Old Testament, and even into the New, and that this spirit is related to the identity and purpose of the messiah.³

The Joseph Story

The story of Joseph is full of puzzling elements, some of which this essay will unfortunately gloss over,⁴ while others are

2 “Joseph” as the name of a tribe (or tribes) is mentioned many times, but only rarely is the man or anything about his life brought up explicitly. Indeed, sometimes one has the impression that the life of Joseph has been forgotten; thus, in Sirach’s seven chapter song about salvation history—spanning chapters 44 through 50, mentioning by name everyone from Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, down to Zerubbabel, Nehemiah, and Simon Maccabeus, and everyone in between—the reader finds no reference to Joseph.

3 The basic thrust of this essay is not novel. Joseph’s association with and prefigurement of Jesus has a significant pedigree among the Fathers of the Church, most notably: St. Ambrose, St. Ephrem the Syrian, St. Caesarius of Arles, St. Quodvultdeus of Carthage, and St. Rufinus of Aquileia. St. Caesarius even spoke of Christ as “the true Joseph” (*Sermon* 89.2). Notably, St. Ambrose had an entire treatise entitled, “On Joseph.”

4 Some of these peculiarities are obvious: Why are the brothers imagined as wheat sheaves and celestial bodies in Joseph’s dreams (if they are indeed the ones symbolized in the dreams)? Why does Joseph put his siblings (including his father and the innocent Benjamin) through such peculiar tests when they come to Egypt seeking grain, and why in particular does he choose Simeon as the pledge (or hostage) for Benjamin (42:24)? Or why does the Judah/Tamar story (ch. 38) interrupt the Joseph story? Other idiosyncrasies of the narrative are more subtle or literary. For example, why does there seem to be a careful attention to Joseph’s clothing?: the many colored robe that triggers the envy (37:3), the same robe being dipped in blood and offered to Jacob (37:23, 31-33), the wife of Potiphar grabbing his garment and holding on to it when she tries to seduce him, and then presenting it to her husband (39:12-18), Joseph’s being cleaned and dressed in new robes when brought before Pharaoh (41:14), and Pharaoh’s arraying him in fine linens for his new post as viceroy (41:42), which is perhaps part of the reason his brothers do not recognize him (ch. 42). Another literary oddity: Why are there so many events that happen

crucial to my thesis. Thus I will begin with a brief overview of the Joseph narrative, especially noting the relevant details.

Joseph is the second to last child born to Jacob, and the first to be born to Rachel, the woman Jacob preferred over her sister Leah, whom Jacob was duped into marrying by his uncle Laban. As the son of the beloved Rachel grows, Jacob openly comes to show signs of his preference for the boy over his ten older brothers, demonstrating it in part by giving Joseph the long colorful cloak, the very cloak that Jacob will one day look upon with panicked despair. But in these youthful days Joseph finds himself dreaming a pair of cryptic dreams about sheaves, and later stars, bowing before him, and he naively and eagerly shares these dreams with his brothers and father, who recognize them as claiming a future dominion over them all. The brothers are particularly contemptuous of these dreams—whether because they believe them to be fraudulent and merely signs of Joseph’s arrogant ambitions, or because they fear them to be prophetic and yet, like Oedipus, refuse to accept their destiny and want to frustrate it. So they bide their time and then one day turn on him, casting him into a dry cistern, and even consider killing him, though finally they agree merely to sell him to Ishmaelite slave traders heading toward Egypt;⁵ they then soak his cloak in

in pairs? Alter gives the following list of doublets (Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses: A Translation with Commentary* [New York: W.W. Norton, 2004], 208): 1) Joseph’s, the prisoners’, and Pharaoh’s dreams all come in pairs, 2) he is cast into a “pit” twice, 3) the brothers make two trips into and out of Egypt, 4) their offerings to Egypt with goods and silver mirrors that of the merchant caravan that bought Joseph from them. To that we might add others, such as Reuben and Judah twice offering competing strategies about how to treat a son of Rachel (Joseph first, Benjamin second), and in both instances Judah’s plan prevails where Reuben’s is rejected. On the meaning of doublets, however, Joseph himself has a suggestion; see Gen 41:32.

5 One could add to the aforementioned puzzles Genesis’s ambiguity about to whom Joseph is sold, the Midianites or the Ishmaelites. Leon Kass has a plausible reconstruction of the incident, suggesting that the brothers plan to sell him

a ram's blood and tell their father he'd been torn apart by a wild beast.

In Egypt Joseph is first purchased as a slave to Potiphar, captain of Pharaoh's guard, where he serves his master admirably. Potiphar's wife, however, becomes enamored with him, and tries to seduce him; upon his rebuff, she tells her husband he had tried to rape her. Thereupon Potiphar has Joseph cast into Pharaoh's prison, apparently for life. (If you pay careful attention, you'll notice that he languishes in the prison for more than ten years before Providence takes a hand.)⁶ While in prison, he both wins the favor of the keeper of the prison and interprets still another pair of prophetic dreams, those of his two cellmates, Pharaoh's baker and cupbearer. Joseph's interpretation of these dreams proves true, which eventually leads to his being tasked with interpreting Pharaoh's own pair of surreal dreams about cannibalistic cows and ears of grain. Thereby, having been invested with plenipotentiary powers over Egypt, Joseph undertakes a massive grain storage enterprise during the fat years, so that when the lean years strike, Egypt is preserved.

At this same time the Land of the Promise is on the cusp of desolation, so Jacob sends the ten elder brothers to Egypt to buy

to the Ishmaelites, but the wandering Midianites beat them to it; see Leon R. Kass, *The Beginning of Wisdom: Reading Genesis* (NY: Free Press, 2003), 523-524. Besides harmonizing the text, this reading has the merit of explaining why shortly thereafter the brothers truly seem to think that Joseph has been killed by a wild animal, and still think of him as dead when they go to Egypt two decades later.

⁶ He is 17 when he is carried into Egypt (37:2), and 30 when he is pulled out of the prison (41:46). Assuming that the wife of Potiphar didn't waste more than a year before trying to seduce Joseph, his incarceration would have lasted perhaps 12 years. The stretch of time in the dungeon is emphasized when it says that "some time later" Joseph interprets the dreams to the baker and butler (40:1), and that "two whole years" elapsed between this and Pharaoh's dream (41:1).

grain. Joseph is now in his late thirties,⁷ and twenty years have passed since the sons of Israel had betrayed the one they had sarcastically called “that master dreamer” (37:19),⁸ and now they do not recognize him, though *he* recognizes them. After several interviews with his brothers, and subjecting them to some rather puzzling tests, apparently to discern the state of their soul, Joseph finally reveals himself, effusively forgives them, and is reunited with his beloved father Jacob and younger brother Benjamin. The family of Israel is then saved from the famine, and welcomed to Egypt with high honors, thanks to Joseph. Then, by way of epilogue, upon the death of their father Jacob, the eleven worry that Joseph’s forgiveness was just a show put on for their father’s sake, and they beg for mercy as they bow before Joseph like the sheaves. Just as they had doubted his innocence when he shared with them his dreams as a youth, so late in life they doubt the sincerity of his forgiveness, so he joyfully expounds to them the blessings that came out of the convoluted chain of events: although your intentions were evil, Yahweh’s were good. Thanks to their happy fault, the God of their father had saved them. Again like Oedipus, the prophecy was fulfilled through the very acts intended to undermine it.

“May he add”

Let us now look more closely at these episodes through the lens of Joseph’s name, starting with Joseph’s christening.

7 He should be about 38, because he is 30 at the beginning of the 7 fat years, and at his revelation to his brothers it is the second of the lean years; see Gen 41:46, and 45:6.

8 This verse is typically translated as “this dreamer,” but Alter points out (*Five Books of Moses*, 210) that this misses the reference to mastery (*ba’al*); it could also be rendered, “master of dreams,” which might be interpreted as a “dreamer of mastery,” or one who is master (of us) only in his dreams. This is congruent with their irony-rich words that “we shall see what will become of his dreams” (v. 20).

When her long-awaited son is born, Rachel picks a name that doubly echoes her joy:

Then God remembered Rachel, and God hearkened to her and opened her womb. She conceived and bore a son, and said, "God has taken away my reproach," and she called his name Joseph, saying, "May the LORD add to me another son!"⁹ (Gen 30:22-24)

The two verbs "take away" (or "take up") and "may he add" (or "he will add") are respectively *aseph* and *yoseph* (הָסַח and הָיַט), the first of which is closely related to the latter, though not quite identical in meaning,¹⁰ while the latter is itself a perfect homonym with the name "Joseph," meaning "He adds." *Yoseph* also has the sense of "grow," "increase," or even "repeat," while *aseph* can also mean to "gather up" or "collect." Apparently Rachel intends the name of her firstborn to call to mind both words, and therefore to suggest both (partially overlapping) ranges of meaning, the LORD's giving and the LORD's taking away being represented in one name.¹¹ Although her first etymology expresses

9 Except when noted otherwise, translations will be from the Revised Standard Version.

10 Indeed, they seem almost like antonyms, the way addition and subtraction are opposites. The source of this is that *aseph* has a very broad scope, meaning to take to oneself (and therefore take away from another), or draw together, or gather (which obviously is closer to the meaning of addition). Indeed, its more common usage in Genesis and the rest of the Old Testament suggests not so much removal as putting together, as will be shown later.

11 As Alter puts it, the difference between the two origins (or "double puns") for the name suggests that "the naming etymologies may not have figured so literally in the ancient Hebrew imagination as moderns tend to imagine: the name is taken as a trigger of sound associations, releasing not absolute meaning but possible meaning, and in some instances, a cluster of complementary or even contradictory meanings" (*Five Books of Moses*, 161; cf. 162). Besides Joseph, only three other sons of Jacob (Reuben, Zebulun, and Issachar) receive *two* name etymologies or aetiologies. E. A. Speiser (unconvincingly, in my view) interprets the double accounts as competing, originating from politically

her gratitude to God for the child, her second and more perfect etymology takes Joseph not so much as the fulfilment of her fertility, but as merely a down payment on it, the first fruit of a greater harvest to come.

Recalling Psalm 127, which compares sons to “arrows” in a father’s “quiver,” we might even say that Rachel and Leah are in a sort of arms race of begetting children to Jacob, and Leah is winning handily. For she has already given Jacob seven children on her own, and two more through her handmaid, Zilpah, while through her own handmaid, Bilhah, Rachel has borne Jacob only two, and none on her own. Indeed, after these maybe ten years of marriage, Rachel has probably begun to fear that she is barren. Still, the competition with Leah may not be her only motivation, for Rachel also knows about God’s promise to her husband’s father and grandfather that they would bring forth a multitude more numerous than the stars of the sky and sands of the sea. Thus, at the birth of Joseph, she may be declaring her faith or hope that this is just the beginning, and that she will now become the chief matriarch through which the great promise will be fulfilled.

She will be largely disappointed in this dream, though; in the end Rachel herself “adds” or “gathers” only one more to Jacob, apparently many years later. Jacob will name this final son “Benjamin,” overruling the name Rachel herself had given him with her last breath as she died shortly after childbirth. That name had been “Benoni,” which means “son of my sorrow” (Gen 35:18). It is a profoundly tragic irony that this same woman whose first recorded words in Scripture, addressed to her husband, were “Give me sons, or I shall die!” (Gen 30:1) will die at the nominal fulfillment of this desperate plea. One suspects that Rachel was in fact grieving not only at realizing that she was

and theologically opposed sources, the Yahwist and the Elohist; see *The Anchor Bible Genesis* (NY: Doubleday, 1964), 232.

about to die, but also because she believed her dream of great fecundity, of her adding a great multitude to Israel, was about to be crushed.

But is Rachel right about her hopes being dashed? Should the name she had picked for her *firstborn* (Joseph) be taken as merely presumptuous optimism, a confidence to which hard stubborn reality just would not conform? Or did Rachel, like that same son, for a moment unknowingly possess the gift of prophesy, and sing out a dream that would indeed come true, but only after her own death, and in ways she could not even begin to imagine? Put another way, is it likely that the inspired text would, as it were, emphasize the meaning of Joseph's name merely to record a piece of biographical trivia, that having more children was on Rachel's mind when Joseph was born? Or might the name be more important than that?

The pressure to give more weight to Joseph's name can be increased from a different perspective. For regardless of any particular theory about Joseph's name, Scripture itself seems keen to keep the name at the front of the reader's mind throughout the Joseph story. In the Hebrew text of these chapters one finds a regular occurrence of Joseph's name, Rachel's two etymological source words, and a few phonetically and semantically connected words. Here are a few examples. At the beginning of the story, in chapter 37, when Joseph recounts his dream about the older brothers' wheat sheaves bowing before his own, the text recording the brothers' reaction is usually rendered as something like "They only hated him *the more*" (37:5),¹² but literally it says that the brothers "added to" (וַיִּסְפוּ, *ioseph*) their hatred of him. A few verses later, this is repeated: they "hated him *yet more*

12 Note that here (and in subsequent quotations) I am adding italics to indicate exactly which words correspond to the relevant Hebrew word. Young's Literal Translation is the only traditional translation of which I know that has tried to capture the "addition" language for this verse and 37:8.

[*lit.* they added to (יִסְפּוּ, *iosephu*) their hatred], for his dreams and for his words” (37:8). They *josephed* their hatred for Joseph; they grew and cultivated their hatred until it reached its mature form. Rachel had declared him a pledge of future additions to the house of Israel, but the sons of Israel added only to their hatred for a member of that same house.

Likewise, other words that are phonetically and semantically cognate with Joseph’s name turn up several more times in the narrative. In the middle of his story when, as viceroy of Egypt, he is gathering grain throughout the land to store for the lean years on the horizon, we are told that “Joseph stored up grain in great abundance, like the sand of the sea, until he ceased to number it [לִסְפֹּר, *losepher*], for it was without number [מִסְפָּר, *mosepher*]” (41:49).¹³ The *seph*- (סֵפֶה) particle of the word *sepher* (סֵפֶר) is the core of the name “Joseph,” and obviously there is only a shade of difference between the notions of addition and numbering. It would be a slight stretch, but one might retranslate the passage as “... until he ceased to add to it, for it could not be added to further.” Indeed, the very act of gathering might suggest *aseph*, one of Rachel’s two source words for the name “Joseph,” whose typical meaning is “gathering” or “taking up.”

We see something similar at the end of Joseph’s story, when the dying Jacob calls the brothers together to prophesy over them: “Gather yourselves together [הִסְפּוּ, *hasephu*], that I may tell you what shall befall you in the days to come” (49:1). Again another version of *aseph*, Rachel’s first meaning of the name “Joseph,” sounds a significant echo. And after announcing these prophecies, Jacob concludes with this same word: “I am about to be gathered [נִסְפָּה, *naseph*] to my people” (49:29). Indeed, the chapter ends with “Jacob gathered [יִסְפָּה, *yaseph*]¹⁴ his feet into

13 This is a literal translation; the RSV reads “until he ceased to measure it, for it could not be measured.”

14 Again, this is a more literal translation; the RSV renders this as Jacob “drew

the bed, and breathed his last, and *was gathered* [יָסַף, *yaseph*] to his people” (49:33). Again, one could almost hear these verses as “Joseph yourselves together,” and “I am about to be josephed to my people.”

Still, one should not overstate the significance of the repetition of these “joseph” cognates within the Joseph story, since these words are not exceedingly rare in Scripture. In the rest of Genesis the word appears regularly, if less frequently than we find it in these chapters.¹⁵ Most of these other uses are unremarkable, as when Abraham “adds” another wife after Sarah dies (25:1), or when Abraham and Ishmael, and then later Isaac, are “gathered” to their people on their death (25:8, 25:17, 35:29). But in one of these contexts, the “Joseph” cognate seems particularly resonant with the usage of the same or similar words within the Joseph story. When the LORD makes his promise to Abraham, he commands him to “Look toward heaven, and *number* [לְסַפֵּר, *usepher*] the stars, if you are able to *number* [לְסַפֵּר, *losepher*] them... So shall your seed be” (15:5). Again, with a little imagination: “Add up,” or even “*joseph* the stars, if you can joseph them.” This same usage is repeated when Jacob prays,

up his feet,” but obviously it is the same word as “gather,” or “take up.”

15 The “Joseph” words, by my count, occur 16 times within the 36 non-Joseph chapters, but 9 times within the 14 Joseph chapters (roughly 50 percent more frequently in the Joseph chapters). Surprisingly, they are not the words typically used for increase or grow, e.g., when the LORD tells Adam and Eve, and later Noah and his family, to “increase and multiply” (1:28, 9:1), or when the LORD tells Abraham on several occasions that he would “multiply him exceedingly” through Isaac (17:2, 22:17, 26:4). This seems to suggest a certain restraint in using the Joseph words outside the Joseph story. Fittingly, at the beginning of the book of Exodus, in the last reference to Joseph, we see another reminder of the name and its meaning: “Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. And he said to his people, ... ‘Come let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and, if war befall us, they join [add to; *ioseph*] our enemies and fight against us” (Ex 1:8-10). Thus, Pharaoh’s ignorance of Joseph and the import of his “adding” leads him to misconstrue it as not the adding of Egypt to Israel, but Israel to those opposed to Egypt.

recounting this promise where his descendants will be as “the sand of the sea, which *cannot be numbered* [לֹא-יִסְפָּר, *lo-usepher*] for multitude” (32:12).

Notice that most of these phonetic echoes of the name “Joseph” within the Joseph narrative (and even to some extent in the pre-Joseph chapters) have two elements in common. They frequently belong to a prophesy or its fulfillment, and/or they usually signify an addition that in a way augments or draws together members of a family or something like a family:¹⁶ Abraham is told to add up the stars, and Jacob the sand of the sea, thus signifying the vast seed of Israel to come, Rachel herself predicts Joseph adding to her line, Joseph adds up the grain of Egypt to prepare for the fulfillment of Pharaoh’s dream, and Jacob collects his sons together to hear his prophesy, then gathers his members together and adds himself to the souls of Abraham and Isaac in Sheol. Even the exception to this model seems to fit in an ironic way. When the ten brothers of Joseph are described as adding to their hatred, they are not prophesying, but are *rejecting* a prophesy, and they begin not to think about adding to, but about *subtracting* from Israel, by slaying their brother. One is reminded of Rachel’s paradoxical double-etymology: her firstborn’s name will suggest both adding (*yoseph*) and taking away (*aseph*).

“Joseph is a fruitful bough”

Although this wordplay proves little by itself, when combined with Genesis and the rest of the Old Testament’s frequent association of Joseph himself with the *growth* and *fecundity* of

16 Even with the usages of these words in the other parts of Genesis, the meaning tends to be associated with collecting people together, whether Laban or the Shechemites gathering together (29:21, 34:30), or Abraham, Ishmael, and Isaac being gathered with their dead ancestors in Sheol (25:8, 17, 35:29), or even the sheep or goats of a flock being gathered (29:3, 7, 8).

the people of Israel, a pattern seems to emerge. When Joseph saves his family by bringing them to settle in Egypt, he grows Israel by adding or grafting it to Egypt. Indeed, before this happens Joseph himself prefigures this union by marrying Asenath, the daughter of an Egyptian priest (41:45), and then incarnates it still more profoundly in the fruit of their union, their two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim (41:50). And finally, Jacob at his twilight elevates each of these Egyptian Israelites to the status of being full tribes (48:16). Thus, both Jacob and Joseph have together forever introduced Egyptian blood into the line of Israel, choosing to incorporate the non-chosen people into the chosen.

Further, this idea of fecundity, so central to the promise made to Abraham, Jacob in a special way applies to Joseph at the end of Genesis when he gives his deathbed benediction to the twelve brothers. Most of the sons of Israel receive a brief and mysterious one-verse prophesy, and none of them receives more than two verses—except Judah and Joseph, each receiving five.¹⁷ The prophecies for eleven of these sons are sometimes frightening, or ambiguous, or just plain weird—for example, “Issachar is a big-boned donkey” (49:14).¹⁸ Even the prophesy to Judah, containing the celebrated promise that “the scepter shall not depart” (49:10), ends with the further declaration that Judah’s “eyes shall be red with wine, and his teeth white with milk” (49:12). Yet only Jacob’s prophesy to Joseph is undeniably positive throughout, and it begins with an emphasis on fruitfulness:

Joseph is a fruitful bough, a fruitful bough by a spring;
his branches run over the wall. The archers fiercely
attacked him, shot at him, and harassed him sorely; yet
his bow remains unmoved, his arms were made agile by
the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob (by the name of the

17 In fact, if we count the words in Hebrew, Joseph’s blessing is significantly longer than Judah’s, 71 vs. 55.

18 This is Alter’s translation in *The Five Books of Moses*, 286.

Shepherd, the Rock of Israel), by the God of your father who will help you, by God Almighty who will bless you with the blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that couches beneath, blessing of the breasts and of the womb. The blessings of your father are mighty beyond the blessings of the eternal mountains, the bounties of the everlasting hills; may they be on the head of Joseph, and on the brow of him who was separate from his brothers. (Gen 49:22-26)

The first line, calling Joseph a “fruitful bough,” could be rendered more literally as a “son of fruit,” or “fruitful son” (בן פרת, *ben phrat*);¹⁹ likewise, this literal allusion to offspring is supported in the next part of the verse, which could also be translated more literally as “his daughters [בנות, *benut*] run over the wall.” Thus, one could imagine that the “spring” beside which, and even *because* of which, Joseph bears so much fruit is intended to be the Nile, and the walls over and beyond which his tendrils grow are the boundaries of Egypt, indicating Joseph’s reaching back to Jacob and his family, and perhaps even to the entire world in its famine.²⁰ Indeed, the verse seems reminiscent of Rachel’s dreams of a great family line, in the imagery of a vine with roots with a constant source of fresh water, growing unhindered by confining walls. This fecundity reading is strengthened by the language of “blessings of the breasts and of the womb,” which are placed parallel with imagery of the “blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that couches beneath”; indeed, the celestial

19 This line might also point back to the meaning of Ephraim’s name, “fruitful one,” which we will discuss shortly. A few translations render this line as “son of a donkey” because of an ambiguity of the Hebrew, but this is not the dominant reading. Remarkably, given the meaning of the name “Joseph,” the Septuagint has “increase” instead of “fruitful,” reading “Joseph is a son increased” (ἵσος ἡσχημενος).

20 Of course, David later sings psalms that employ this exact image, and where the true spring that gives a tree its life is the word or law of the LORD; see Ps 1:3, and 80:8-13.

image may echo Abraham's own counting of the stars of heaven, and even Joseph's own dream of the bowing stars.²¹

Jacob's elaborate anointing of Joseph almost looks to be addressed chiefly to the ten elder brothers, who at this point have all heard their own (mixed or at least cryptic) blessings. These five verses seem to be the Patriarch's declaration that, in spite of Joseph's having suffered profoundly at the hands of his brothers, the fierce archers,²² the Almighty was with him through it all, and had been his strength not so much to take vengeance on the wrongdoers, but to help their victim escape their wrath. Indeed, the God of Jacob had bestowed on Joseph unimaginable blessings. Thus, in recognition of these sufferings and blessings, Jacob for his part is directing toward Joseph and his line a special portion of the mighty blessings promised to Abraham and already partly received by Jacob. This is no doubt why Jacob offers Joseph a private prologue to the aforementioned blessings: "God will be with you, and will bring you again to the land of your fathers. Moreover, I have given to you rather than your brothers one mountain slope" (Gen 48:21-22). Whence Jacob promises Joseph not only an ongoing share in the Covenant with his grandfather Abraham through the particular possession of part of the Land of Promise, but both God's abiding presence with him in Egypt and even God's guidance out of Egypt when the time is right.

21 Moses sings a similar prophesy about the tribe of Joseph, at the end of Deuteronomy (33:13-17).

22 What is translated as "archers" is literally "masters of arrows" (בעלי הציים, *baali itzim*); the ones who contemptuously called Joseph the "ba'al of dreams" Jacob now, probably with no less anger, calls the "ba'als of arrows." We never see how Jacob takes the revelation of what really happened to Joseph when the ten brothers had handed their father the blood-soaked ornamented robe; it seems likely that Joseph never told him, but surely at some point one of the brothers confessed, given how we see it weighing on their consciences when they first came to Egypt. St. Ephrem imagines this event as well; see *Commentary on Genesis*, 40.4.

Indeed, one could venture a guess that if we Christians did not know already that the messiah would come from the line of *Judah*, based on chapter 49 we might begin to expect that the promise about the seed of Abraham would be fulfilled in the line of Joseph. This expectation could in fact be strengthened by reflecting on the twists and turns of Joseph's life, which culminated in the deliverance not only of the incipient nation of Israel, but also of the great kingdom of Egypt.²³ In short, Joseph

23 Note that Scripture actually says he saved "all the earth" (41:57). Joseph is the savior of the house of Israel not only in providing it with food, but also in providing it with forgiveness, for without his manipulation his brothers might never have fully realized and repented of their guilt. Certainly without his intervention they would never have been forgiven, which was the greatest gift of all, combined as it was with the apparent undoing of the consequences of their crime, for from their perspective Joseph had as it were risen from the dead. As for Egypt, we might say something similar: The careful reader can see something like an attempt, on Joseph's part, in both word and deed to lead the Egyptians to Yahweh. Consider each interaction with them: when serving Potiphar we see that "The LORD was with Joseph ... and his master *saw* that the LORD was with him ... [and] the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake" (39:2, 3, 5, emphasis added). When Potiphar's wife tries to seduce him, he pleads with her, "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (v. 9). To his cellmates Joseph insists that dream "interpretations belong to God" (40:8), and then when Pharaoh asks him to explain his dreams he redirects Pharaoh's understanding of God's gifts by saying, "It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh a favorable [*lit.* peaceful] answer" (41:16), and when he explains the dream he says, "God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do, ... God has shown to Pharaoh what he is about to do... And the doubling of Pharaoh's dream means that the thing is fixed by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass" (vv. 25, 28, 32), at which Pharaoh declares that the "Spirit of God" is in Joseph (v. 38). Joseph's interactions with Pharaoh make it particularly clear that he is "evangelizing" the king of Egypt: he is telling Pharaoh that only God can give a king peace, and that God is sending the dreams to give him instructions on how to save the land: "God is trying to save you, but you do not understand him. I do. Let me help you." It is true that (with the exception of Potiphar) the distinctively Israelite name of God, "Yahweh" (i.e., the LORD), is not used in these accounts, but this could be Joseph's careful diplomacy or even apologetics. Certainly Pharaoh knows Joseph is a Hebrew, and therefore that when he says "God" he means the God of the Hebrews. This openness (not to

seems to have been a messiah of sorts to the house of Jacob, and beyond, and his fruitful seed at the end of Genesis to be becoming the chief tribe of Israel, as his brothers had once so feared it would.

Ephraim and Manasseh

In order to go more deeply into this claim about Joseph's messiahship, more must be said about the headship of the tribe of Joseph as embodied in his first fruits, the two sons born to him and Asenath upon his ascent to the right hand of Pharaoh. Again we find that the names are chosen for their significance. The firstborn he names "Manasseh," which means "makes one forget," for God (Joseph at this time believes) wants his joy in Egypt to be so great that he forgets his thirteen years of suffering—from his brothers' betrayal, to his slavery and false accusation in the house of Potiphar, to the decade or more rotting in Pharaoh's jail. Indeed, Joseph at this point even wants to forget his entire life before those sorrows, declaring the desire to forget "all my father's house" (41:51).²⁴ Joseph's second child he names "Ephraim," meaning "fruitful," saying, "For God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction" (41:52). Although it is tempting to interpret Joseph's purpose in selecting this name

say complete conversion) to the God of Joseph and his family may add a deeper explanation for Pharaoh's profound eagerness to welcome and honor the house of Jacob to Egypt, even to the point of submitting to a blessing at the hands of Jacob (45:16-23, 47:5-11).

24 Apparently he has no trouble forgetting Potiphar and his wife. Given his power at this point—in Pharaoh's words, "all my people shall order themselves as you command; ... without your consent no man shall lift up hand or foot in all the land of Egypt" (41:40, 44)—Joseph could easily have taken his revenge on the house of Potiphar, no questions asked. One imagines Potiphar's wife quaking in fear upon the former slave's elevation. But, remarkably, Joseph keeps looking forward, never backward. St. Ephrem imaginatively and plausibly speculates on the reaction of Potiphar and his wife to the elevation of Joseph; see *Commentary on Genesis*, 35:7-9.

(*fruitfulness*) as a continuation of Rachel's choice of *his own* name (*adding to*), Manasseh's name excludes this possibility. For "Manasseh" shows that, although Joseph has pined for his family all these years in Egypt's dungeons, he is now ready to detach his hopes and dreams from the destiny of his family in Canaan, and to focus on his young family in Egypt. While we never see Joseph praying to the God of his father (much less God speaking to him), we also do not see any sign that Joseph ever loses his trust in Yahweh—indeed, his words consistently witness to the contrary;²⁵ still, Joseph at this point no longer seems intent on escaping Egypt and returning to the Land of the Promise.²⁶ No doubt at this point Joseph is mystified about what was meant by that double-dream of his youth, where (at least in his family's telling) he was destined to rule the house of Israel; but with the consoling birth and naming of Ephraim and Manasseh, he renews his confidence in God's providence over his life, even among his captors, ready to follow where the "spirit of God" (41:38) directs him.

Thus, even when Joseph reveals himself to his brothers later when they come to Egypt, he describes himself as belonging to a new family and even effectively being its head, saying,

25 See note 23 above. This is where the iconoclastic interpretation of the Joseph story, where Joseph is the anti-hero of the story because he is (secretly) neither a believer in Yahweh nor even sincerely pious about the reality of the divine, strains credulity most; as an example of this approach that is nevertheless insightful in many ways, see Kass, *The Beginning of Wisdom*, 509-659. On Kass's account, Judah is the real hero of the Joseph chapters and Jacob despairs of his opportunistic paganizing son (see esp. 583-587, 593-608). The careful reader of Kass's commentary detects that Kass is unable to explain why the narrator in Genesis makes it clear (e.g., Gen 39:21-23) that Yahweh is with Joseph throughout the tale, much less how it is that a man of no genuine faith can foresee the seven years of fertility and the seven years of famine; Kass makes no comment on these elements of the story.

26 At the end of his life, however, he exhorts the brothers to return after he dies, and to bring his body with them (50:25).

“God has made me a father to Pharaoh and Lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt” (48:8). Jacob’s perception of this separation may be part of what motivates him, when they are all finally settled in Egypt, formally to adopt Ephraim and Manasseh as *his own* sons, as it were alongside Joseph, saying that they will be “mine, just as Reuben and Simeon are mine” (48:5). Jacob thereby reassures Joseph that he is still a part of the covenant; he too will inherit the Land of Promise. Notice that in this adoption, the first and second born of Joseph are given a status equal to or perhaps exceeding the first and second born of Jacob.²⁷ To this Jacob adds, “in them let *my* name be perpetuated, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth” (48:16; emphasis added). Jacob further specifies this reunification of the houses of Joseph and Israel in a way that leaves its mark on the rest of the Old Testament. For as he adopts Joseph’s boys, he seems to be overcome with the spirit of prophesy, crossing his arms and giving the blessing of the firstborn to Ephraim, the second born. When Joseph protests that his father must be confused, Jacob responds,

“I know, my son, I know; he [Manasseh] also shall become a people, and he also shall be great, nevertheless his younger brother [Ephraim] shall be greater than he, and his seed shall become a multitude of nations.” So he blessed them that day, saying, “By you Israel will pronounce blessings, saying, ‘God make you as Ephraim and as Manasseh’”; and thus he put Ephraim before Manasseh. (48:19-20)²⁸

27 As First Chronicles puts it, Reuben “was the first-born; but because he polluted his father’s couch, his birthright was given to the sons of Joseph the son of Israel, so that he is not enrolled in the genealogy according to the birthright; though Judah became strong his brothers and a prince was from him, yet the birthright belonged to Joseph” (1 Chr 5:1-2).

28 There is a possible double meaning in this last line “a multitude of nations,”

There is no indication that Ephraim has done something to merit this upset to the “natural” order; it is not a reward to him or to Joseph. Rather, by the help of the Spirit of God, Jacob simply foresees it. Thereby, although both sons of Joseph are in some way placed ahead of the other tribes, Ephraim is given the primary place among them.

From then on Scripture seems to give the tribe of Ephraim a kind of primacy over that of Manasseh. For we find Ephraim usually mentioned before Manasseh in the listings of the tribes, such as during the initial census in the book of Numbers (Nu 1:10, 1:32), and is even named as one of the four principal tribes (beside Judah, Reuben, and Dan) in the principal positions around the tabernacle, and the Israelite camp itself over the forty years in the desert (Nu 2:18). Indeed, the tribe of Ephraim brings its offering to the Tabernacle consecration ahead of the tribe of Manasseh (Nu 7:48ff). Likewise, at the end of Deuteronomy Moses sings of the “ten thousands of Ephraim,” but only of “the thousands of Manasseh” (33:17), in an idiom of praise that we later see irks King Saul when the citizens of Jerusalem sing of him and David.²⁹ We may even be seeing Manasseh chafe in its subordination to Ephraim later, when the Israelites are finally at the point of conquering the land of Canaan. At this point half the tribe of Manasseh (along with Reuben and Gad) refuses to enter the land, but settles in the Gilead northeast of the Jordan. Thus, part of Manasseh separates itself from the headship of Ephraim and most of the chosen people, and from the Promised Land itself.³⁰ Ephraim increases while Manasseh, partly by choice, decreases.³¹

as we will see shortly.

29 See 1 Sam 18:6-9.

30 See Nu 32:39-41, 34:24; 36:1, et al.

31 This decision to settle outside of the Promised Land is ominous with the benefit of hindsight. For the trans-Jordan region of the Gilead is among the first lands to be conquered by the Syrians, and later the Assyrians; see 2 Ki

Further, given the way Ephraim son of Joseph seems to inherit the mantle of Jacob, it is maybe not surprising when, during the sojourn in the desert east of Canaan, two heroes arise from within the ranks of Israel: Caleb, of the tribe of Judah, and Joshua, of the tribe of Ephraim.³² Joshua himself would become Moses's right hand in all things after the flight from Egypt, and now a few months later he and Caleb, in the fateful scouting expedition into Canaan, are the only Israelites confident in God's help. Because of their lack of faith the entire generation of newly liberated Hebrews would be cursed with dying off in the desert over forty years—all except Joshua and Caleb; only the children born during the desert wanderings, under the leadership of the son of the Josephite Ephraim, with the son of Judah at his side, would eventually enter and subdue the Promised Land. Appropriately, then, the Psalmist later sings, "Ephraim is my helmet; Judah is my scepter" (Ps 60:7). This leadership based on a profound trust in God's power and protection may itself cast light on the fact that, although it is well remembered that generations later, under David and Solomon, the Ark of the Covenant will rest in the temple of Jerusalem in the tribal lands of Judah, it is often forgotten that for the first hundred years or more of the settling of the Holy land, the tabernacle and the Ark rest in Shiloh and Bethel, both in the territories allotted to the sons of Joseph.³³

10:32-33, and 15:29. One wonders whether there is significance behind the fact that the most abhorrent of the kings of the Judah is named Manasseh; see 2 Chr 33, and 2 Ki 21.

32 Note that, according to each of the two censuses in Numbers, the two largest tribes are, by a wide margin, Judah (with 74,600 and 76,500, respectively) and the double-tribe of Joseph (at 72,700 and 85,200); see Nu 1:27, 33, 35; 26:22, 34, and 37.

33 See 1 Sam 1:3, 9; Judges 21:4, 19; Jos 18:1, 37, 20:27.

The Kingdom of Ephraim and Joseph

In fact, the Ark's eventual removal from Joseph in the north to Judah in the south itself suggests a connection and even a tension between these two chief tribes manifested in the later history of the Chosen People. This tension reaches a breaking point when, under the Judahite king Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, the kingdom splits in two. And again we find significance in the names the two halves take for themselves, for although modern historians typically refer to them as the northern and southern kingdoms, Scripture does not. Rather, Scripture usually describes the south as Judah and the north as Israel—"Israel" because the majority of the tribal territories constitute the northern region, so the greater part held on to the name of the whole.³⁴

That being said, another, slightly less common way Scripture names the two kingdoms is to call the south Judah and the north *Ephraim*, or even *Joseph*.³⁵ This idiom is most common among the prophets. For instance, centuries after the split of the kingdom, the prophet Ezekiel in the valley of the dry bones prophecies the ultimate reunification of the sons of Jacob, recording the word of the LORD saying,

Son of man, these are the whole house of Israel. . . . Son of man, take a stick and write on it, "For Judah, and the

34 This is a little ironic, given that, technically, the northern tribes broke away from the legitimate heir of Solomon in the south, rather than vice versa; no doubt the north's holding onto the original name of the twelve tribes signifies their conviction that they are the true sons of Jacob, and that the south has in fact lost its authority because of its tyrannical rule; see 1 Ki 12:1-20. On the other hand, it is surprising that the south does not seem to resist the north's appropriation of the name "Israel." A sign of a guilty conscience? Or a rejection of the other sons of Jacob?

35 One source of this idiom is no doubt the fact that the leader of the northern schism, who becomes its first king, is Jeroboam, who is of the tribe of Ephraim; see 1 Ki 11:26-39.

Christopher A. Decaen

children of Israel associated with him”; then take another stick and write upon it, “For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim, and all the house of Israel associated with him”; and join them together into one stick, that they may become one in your hand. . . . Behold, I am about to take the stick of Joseph (which is in the hand of Ephraim) and the tribes of Israel associated with him; and I will join with it the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, that they may be one in my hand. (Ez 37:11, 16-17, 19)

One finds the northern kingdom referred to as Ephraim also in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, and others,³⁶ but the prophet most insistent on this name is Hosea. Indeed, Hosea calls himself “the watchman of Ephraim” (Hos 9:8), for he addresses most especially the northern kingdom because of its (at that time) greater apostasy:

I know Ephraim, and Israel is not hid from me; for now, O Ephraim, you have played the harlot, Israel is defiled. Their deeds do not permit them to return to their God. For the spirit of harlotry is within them, and they know not the LORD. The pride of Israel testifies to his face; Ephraim shall stumble in his guilt; Judah also shall stumble with them. . . . Ephraim shall become a desolation in the day of punishment . . . Ephraim is oppressed, crushed in judgment, because he was determined to go after vanity. Therefore I am like a moth to Ephraim, and like dry rot to the house of Judah. When Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah his wound, then Ephraim went to Assyria, and sent to the great king. But he is not able to cure you or heal your wound. (Hos 5:3-5, 9, 11-13)

³⁶ One even sees it called “Ephraim” in some of the histories, e.g., 2 Chr 25:10. Isaiah speaks about the northern kingdom’s animosity toward Judah, saying that “Ephraim . . . has devised evil against you [Judah]; . . . [but] within sixty-five years Ephraim will be broken to pieces so that it will no longer be a people” (Is 7:5, 8). See too Isaiah 9:21, 11:13, 28:1; Ez 37:15; Jer 31:9-20.

Other examples include: “Ephraim mixes himself with the peoples” (7:8), “Ephraim is like a dove, silly and without sense, calling to Egypt, going to Assyria” (7:11), and “They shall not remain in the land of the LORD; but Ephraim shall return to Egypt, and they shall eat unclean food in Assyria” (9:3). The allusions to Assyria make it clear that the name “Ephraim” here does not designate just the one tribe, but *all* the northern tribes that will eventually ally with and then be conquered by Assyria.³⁷ The language of a return to Egypt itself alludes perhaps not only to an undoing of the liberation of the sons of Israel from Egyptian slavery, but also an anti-typology of Joseph leading his people into Egypt to save them. This looks even more likely when we recall that Ephraim was born in Egypt and is in fact half Egyptian. Note too that, when Hosea compares Ephraim and Judah, the former is given priority, as if to indicate that both would be punished, but Ephraim first; this too fits the history of the defeat and exile of the people of Israel: first the north is conquered by Assyria, and then several decades later the south by Babylon.³⁸

This extension of the imagery of the life of Joseph and his son Ephraim, however, is not straightforward. These passages show that, in spite of Joseph’s personal merit, his seed is not always a hero in the story of the Chosen People, for we see that the kingdom of Joseph has turned from the God of their fathers. The historical books of the Old Testament record the revolt of the tribes led by the sons of Ephraim and Joseph against the tribe of David and Judah, its consequent rejection of the temple in

37 See 2 Ki 15:19, 17:1-23, 18:9-12. In one instance at least it appears that all twelve tribes of Israel (at the time of the Exodus) are being called “Ephraim,” perhaps to indicate Joseph’s original headship over the house of Israel; see Hos 11:1-4.

38 It is most fitting that Hosea be the prophet to associate Ephraim with the north, as the name “Hosea” is the shortened form of the name “Joshua,” the great leader and general from the tribe of Ephraim.

Jerusalem for intercourse with the gentiles, and finally a swapping of monotheism for idolatrous syncretism and all the abominations that arise from it.³⁹ Indeed, we see this very ambiguity about Joseph being a symbol of fidelity or of infidelity in the Psalms: whereas in one psalm David can praise Joseph's line, saying that the LORD "leadest Joseph like a flock!" and calls on Him to "shine forth before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh" (Ps 80:1, 2),⁴⁰ not far away he sings a condemnation of Joseph: Yahweh "rejected the tent of Joseph, and did not choose the tribe of Ephraim, but he chose the tribe of Judah, Mount Zion" (Ps 78:67-68).⁴¹ Unlike their father, the sons of Joseph are themselves not pillars of spiritual purity. Thus, whatever association we find between Joseph and the northern kingdom, it should no more be taken to imply spiritual fidelity or moral rectitude on the north's part than should the association between David and the southern kingdom be taken to imply that the south is "after God's own heart," as was David (1 Sam 13:14, Acts 13:22). Indeed, Joseph the kingdom has almost become the opposite, or anti-type, of Joseph the man, and the reader is reminded that Jacob's blessing at the end of Genesis promised only great fertility, not great piety.

39 This begins in 1 Ki 12:25-33, but the refrain of the kings of Israel "walking in the sins of Jeroboam" or "doing more evil than all who were before him" runs throughout the rest of First Kings and beyond. See also 2 Chr 10ff, esp. 11:13-15, 13:8-9.

40 Notice that this and the next psalm giving such special attention to Joseph and Ephraim are among those middle psalms entitled "psalms of *Asaph*," one of Rachel's source words for Joseph's name; these psalms might also be translated "psalms of gathering" or, on the contrary, "psalms of taking away."

41 Much of this psalm indicates that the leadership of the sons of Joseph in the years following the conquest of Canaan led to idolatry and that Shiloh, in the territories of Joseph, was thereby rejected as the resting place of the Ark (v. 60). This underlines the notion that the northern dabbling in apostasy predates by centuries the cleavage of the kingdom under Rehoboam and Jeroboam.

Nevertheless, although *both* the north and the south are eventually conquered and carried off by the gentile nations, an important distinction must be made between them here. Namely, although Judah's conqueror (Babylon), after 70 years in captivity, allows them to return to the land of Promise to resettle it and begin again, nothing similar happens to the exiled northern Israelites; the kingdom of Ephraim *never* returns. The tribes led by the sons of Joseph are so assimilated into pagan Assyria and its subject nations that when Assyria later decides to repopulate the desolated northern territory, the colonists she chooses are mostly foreigners, though perhaps also a few Israelite priests are also brought back to teach the Assyrian subjects the local cult (2 Ki 17:24-41). Thus, few of the Assyrian settlers are sons of Israel, and those few end up practicing a corrupt form of the ancient faith; they become the progenitors of the Samaritans of the gospels, who are, for this reason, spoken of so disparagingly by the Jews at the time of Christ. Just as the sons of Joseph had become gentiles in their heart long before being physically "taken away" and "gathered to" the gentiles, so too by the time of Christ the sons of Joseph are genetically indistinguishable from the nations. Through his line Joseph has not so much added the gentiles to himself as he *has been added to them*. Perhaps this is why Jacob long ago had prophesied that the seed of his adopted son Ephraim (the "fruitful") would become a "multitude of nations," or more literally, "the fullness of the nations" [מלא-הגוים, *ml'agoyim*] (Gen 48:19)—or even "the fulfillment of the gentiles"?

But the prophets of Israel do not give up hope for the kingdom of Ephraim and Joseph, as though the promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had contracted now to Judah. Rather—and here we enter prophecy that even now remains partially unfulfilled—the north too will return. This is insisted upon by the prophet Jeremiah, himself a Benjaminite and a citizen of the southern

kingdom, and emphatically no optimist. Jeremiah records this promise to the people of the lands of Joseph:

“Behold, I will bring them from the north country, and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth ... for I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my first-born.” ... Thus says the LORD: “A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are not.” Thus says the LORD: “Keep your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears; for your work shall be rewarded, says the LORD, and they shall come back from the land of the enemy. There is hope for your future, says the LORD, and your children shall come back to their own country. I have heard Ephraim bemoaning, ‘Thou hast chastened me, and I was chastened, like an untrained calf; bring me back that I may be restored, for thou art the LORD my God. ...’ Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he my darling son? For as often as I speak against him, I do remember him still. Therefore my heart yearns for him; I will surely have mercy on him, says the LORD.” (Jer 31:7-9, 15-18, 20)

Thus, the sons of Rachel (Joseph and Benjamin, and by extension Ephraim and Manasseh) are indeed dead, but they will live again. Despite their infidelity and cataclysmic dissolution among the nations, a miracle will occur: do not weep, Rachel, for your children will be called back to life, returning to the Land of Promise and to the One who made that promise, who never ceases to acknowledge the sons of Joseph as his own sons as well, even his firstborn. At that time, the northern kingdom will be reunited with the southern, when Yahweh will “make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah” (v. 31).⁴²

⁴² Even the second book of Kings interrupts its narrative as it begins to recount the Assyrian exile, proclaiming, “But the LORD was gracious to them

Thus, although the original sons of Judah and Joseph were not enemies—Joshua and Caleb were allies when all else had lost faith, and Samuel the Ephraimite himself anointed David king of Israel—in the later history of the kingdom of Israel, their bond had deteriorated. As though recapitulating the ancient tension between their mothers Leah and Rachel, in the age following the death of Solomon the lines of Judah and Joseph become estranged and opposed. But just as in Joseph’s own life story the hand of God is at work, using great evils to accomplish still more magnificent goods, so too with the division of the kingdom and the subsequent apostasy. Thus, if we can say that Judah (and later Judea in the time of Christ) embodies a greater fidelity to God and pure Israelite blood, we might also say that the kingdom of Joseph (and the region of Samaria in the time of Christ) embodies a tragic but perhaps providential fusion of Israel and the gentile nations. Like Joseph himself when he first bound himself to Egypt but later let his father bind his Egyptian boys to the chosen people, the kingdom of Joseph has added Israel to the gentiles for the sake of, and perhaps as a foreshadowing of, the addition of the gentiles to Israel at the coming of the messiah, when there will be “no distinction between Jew or Greek” (Rom 10:12).⁴³

and had compassion on them, and he turned toward them, because of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and would not destroy them; nor has he cast them from his presence until now” (2 Ki 13:23). Note that the conclusion I am drawing means that we Christians, all of whom are Gentiles, can consider ourselves sons of Joseph, or even of Ephraim, as St. Ambrose points out; see *The Patriarchs*, 1.3.5.

43 Perhaps this is a further reason for the image, in Jacob’s blessing to Joseph, of a bough or vine with tendrils that are well fed by a nearby spring and that climb over walls without limit (Gen 49:22). As one of the psalms puts it: “Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, thou who leadest Joseph like a flock! ... Thou didst bring a vine out of Egypt; thou didst drive out the nations and plant it. Thou didst clear the ground for it; it took deep root and filled the land. The mountains were covered with its shade, the mighty cedars with its branches; it sent

St. Matthew and the Two Josephs

Thus, all of this about the later fate of the tribe of Joseph relates to the messianic or Christlike aspect of the life of Joseph. As a segue, consider the beginning of the gospel of Matthew, the first of the gospels and the one said to have been written specifically to the Jews. It begins with what is usually translated as the “The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ” (Mt 1:1), but the word for “genealogy” is the Greek word *genesis* (βιβλος γενέσεως). Recalling that the version of their Scriptures that would be most familiar to Jews in the time of Christ would have been in Greek, in some version of the Septuagint, a Jew would right away see that the first book of the New Testament is claiming to be a new “book of genesis”; the life of Christ is a new creation, and begins a new birth of the people of God. Indeed, this gospel’s genealogy ends with “Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born” (Mt 1:15-16). Notice that the lineage of Jesus, like that of *Joshua* his namesake, is traced through that of a Joseph, a son of someone named Jacob. Whether we think of Matthew’s genealogy as a historical record or as a symbolic lineage, this coincidence suggests that the author (or Author) is calling the reader back to Genesis and the founding of the original twelve tribes. Just as Genesis began the Old Testament and ended with the Joseph story, so Matthew’s genealogy begins the New Testament and ends its genealogy with a special attention to another Joseph.

We might go a little deeper here, since Joseph, the adoptive father of Jesus, occupies a central role in the opening chapters of

out its branches to the sea [i.e., the Mediterranean], and its roots to the River [i.e., the Nile]. Why then has thou broken down its walls, so that all who pass along the way pluck its fruit? The boar from the forest ravages it, and all that move in the field feed on it. Turn again, O God of hosts! Look down from heaven, and see; have regard for this vine, the stock which thy right hand planted” (Ps 80:1, 8-15). This too is a psalm of “Asaph.”

Matthew.⁴⁴ Compare it to the gospel of Luke. If there is reason behind the longstanding tradition that the opening chapters of Luke record the memories of the Blessed Mother, recounting as they do the annunciation, the visitation, the details about the night of the nativity, the presentation, and the finding in the temple, then likewise we might speculate that the opening chapters of Matthew are told from the perspective of St. Joseph. For after this gospel touches only lightly on the annunciation (1:18), it focuses on Joseph and his reaction to Mary being with child, the angel's explanation to him in a dream (1:19-25), of course the nativity, the wise men (2:1-12), Joseph's *second* dream, where the angel counsels flight into Egypt to escape Herod, and his following that advice (2:13-15), a *third* dream wherein Joseph is told it is now safe to return to Israel, because of Herod's death (2:16-21), and a *fourth* dream in which Joseph is warned to avoid Judea, where Herod's son Archelaus is now ruling, and instead to settle in Galilee (2:22-23).⁴⁵ It is thus almost tempting to describe the beginning of the gospel according to Matthew as the "proto-gospel according to Joseph."

No doubt the attentive reader caught two additional parallels between St. Joseph and Joseph the Patriarch. The first was that St. Joseph too is a dreamer—God communicates with him solely through dreams. This is all the more striking when we realize that this is all but unique in the New Testament, for excepting only the Magi (who amid these very events are warned away from Jerusalem "in a dream" [Mt 2:12]), only Joseph among the figures in the New Testament receives divine instructions through a dream.⁴⁶ Zechariah, John the Baptist, the

44 His name is mentioned seven times in these first two chapters, as opposed to three times in all of Luke, only once in John, and not at all in Mark.

45 Note that Galilee is mostly in what was the territory of Manasseh, Joseph's *other* son.

46 Pontius Pilate's wife is mentioned—again, in this gospel—as "suffering much over him [Jesus] today in a dream" (Mt 27:19). Although it is possible

Blessed Mother, Peter, Mary Magdalene, and Stephen all have visions or are actually visited by Divine emissaries, and Paul, James, and John hear Voices from heaven, but only Joseph the carpenter hears God's will in his sleep, like his ancient namesake. There are of course differences between the dreams of the two Josephs: while the one dreams only of the future (whether in three days, or seven years, or at some unspecified date to come), the other dreams only about current events, things happening or needing to happen right now; likewise, whereas the dreams of the original Joseph (and of those around him) are murky riddles, St. Joseph receives straightforward instructions combined with clear explanations from an angel. That said, the likeness seems more remarkable than the difference: critically, in *both* Joseph stories God is the source of the dreams of Israelite and pagan alike, and in both the ultimate goal is the salvation of Israelite and pagan alike.

But the second parallel between the two Joseph stories has even more punch: both Josephs travel into Egypt, leading their family into the pagan land of the Pharaoh, and do so not by choice, but in order to escape certain death in, of all places, the land flowing with milk and honey. And by making this sorrowful journey, each Joseph sets in motion a chain of events that will save the world. This very connection between these two peregrinations into and out of Egypt is highlighted by Matthew's gospel itself when, right at this point in the narrative, it cites the prophet Hosea, saying, "Out of Egypt I have called my son" (Hos 11:1; Mt 2:15). Now, Hosea's context makes it clear that he is referring literally to the Hebrew exodus from Egypt in the days of Moses;⁴⁷ Matthew, however, sees Hosea's words as prophetic,

that this dream is supernatural in origin, like the others, it is unclear whether Pilate's wife is receiving instructions or just images. Regardless, notice that like the Magi, Pilate's wife is a pagan, like Pharaoh and his baker and cupbearer.

47 "When Israel was a child, I love him, and out of Egypt I called my son. The

or perhaps the exodus itself as a figure, of the Christ child's exodus from Egypt. Matthew seems to want us to see the one as having the same form as the other: in the one case, the exodus is led by Moses, with young Joshua, son of Joseph, at his side;⁴⁸ in the other case, the exodus is led by another Joseph, with another young Joshua, his adopted son, at *his* side.

The Son of Joseph or the Son of David?

Now, to be clear, none of this should be taken to imply some revisionist conspiracy theory about the family of the Messiah, such that the line of Joseph, not Judah, is Jesus' bloodline, or that Jesus is in fact a descendent of Joshua, not of David. Genetically Jesus's human nature came through Mary, who, like St. Joseph himself, *is* of the tribe of Judah, and at any rate both the Old Testament prophets and the gospels clearly and repeatedly describe the messiah as the seed of David, as a shoot from the stump of *Jesse*, and sometimes even as David *himself*. In fact, the gospel of Matthew more than the other three is emphatic in this regard, recording Jesus being called the "son of David" seven times.⁴⁹

One *should* conclude from the foregoing, however, that Scripture, or at least Matthew's gospel, wants us to associate Jesus with Judah *and* Joseph, both tribes, the one physically or in some sense according to the flesh, and the other (we might say) spiritually. Besides the previously noted connections between Jesus and Joseph in conjunction with David, there are several

more I called them, the more they went from me; they kept sacrificing to the Ba'als, and burning incense to idols" (Hos 11:1-2).

48 It appears that Joshua and Moses bear the bones of Joseph out of Egypt, fulfilling Joseph's dying wish at the end of Genesis to be brought back to the Promised Land (Gen 50:24-25). Of the twelve sons of Jacob, only the bones of Joseph are explicitly recorded as brought back to the Promised Land for burial; see Ex 13:19, Josh 24:32.

49 See Mt 8:11-12, 9:27, 12:23, 15:22, 20:30-31, 21:9 and 15, and 22:42.

other more subtle ones in Matthew's gospel. I will point out three, the first of which was hinted at earlier. First, David and Joseph are the bookends of the genealogy of this gospel. While, as we said before, it ends with "Jacob, the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ" (1:16), it *begins* with "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David" (1:1). Both David and Joseph, then, are being declared Jesus' father (even though strictly speaking *neither* is). Further, the town of Christ's birth, Bethlehem, is often called the city of David, because it was his hometown and the place where he was anointed king (1 Sam 16:1, 12), but it is also where Rachel, Joseph's mother, died and was buried (Gen 48:7). As if to emphasize the connection with Rachel (and, indirectly, Joseph), only the gospel of Matthew records the slaughter of the holy innocents in Bethlehem, quoting the aforementioned words of Jeremiah about Rachel weeping for her sons, "because they were no more" (Jer 31:15; Mt 2:18).⁵⁰ A third example of the pairing of David and Joseph in connection with Jesus is structural or symbolic: the same gospel that repeatedly reminds us that the Christ is the son of David nevertheless takes place almost exclusively in the regions of Galilee, Samaria, and trans-Jordan—traditionally the territories associated with Ephraim and Manasseh, the semi-paganized former kingdom of Joseph.⁵¹ Indeed, in Matthew's reckoning Jesus does not finally set foot in the land of David, Judea, until chapter 21. The Evangelist appears to want

50 Jeremiah's own passage is strange by itself, since Rachel never wept over dying children—both her sons outlive her—though she weeps over Benjamin at his birth. It is possible, following the suggestion made earlier, that Jeremiah is imagining Rachel weeping for children that would never be, since she herself was dying. Context, however, indicates that Rachel is here symbolic as the mother of the people of the northern kingdom, those led by the sons of Joseph.

51 The places named are Galilee, Nazareth, Bethsaida, Capernaum, Jericho, Syria, the Decapolis, Tyre, and Sidon. Indeed, it is Matthew's gospel that quotes Isaiah calling the region containing some of these towns "Galilee of the Gentiles" (Mt 4:15; Isa 9:1-2).

the reader to see in Jesus' ascent from Egypt into the northern regions of the Promised Land, delaying his entry into Jerusalem in the south, a sort of recapitulation of Israel's own conquest of Canaan; for they too entered the land (under the leadership of the first Joshua) first by way of the northern territories, allotted to Ephraim and Manasseh, and only slowly worked their way south, into the territory allotted to Judah.⁵²

Of course, perhaps Matthew would emphasize Christ's connection to both David and Joseph simply because the two are so similar to each other. Both are raised in a family of shepherds, both are the youngest or nearly the youngest in their families, both rise from humble origins to positions of vast political rule, both become saintly leaders of their people, and so on. Still, noting the likenesses also brings the differences into relief: for all his profound virtues, David committed adultery with Bathsheba and then orchestrated the murder of his innocent subject Uriah, whereas Joseph steadfastly repelled the temptation to adultery with his master's wife, even when it meant condemnation, and when he was at his political zenith, he never took revenge even upon the guilty, his brothers, when they fell into his hands during the famine.⁵³

Now, this is not to assert that Joseph was unqualifiedly a better man than David—there were indeed moral ambiguities

52 Jerusalem itself is acquired only under David, centuries after Joshua's entrance into Canaan. Matthew goes a step further in emphasizing the northern kingdom's connection with Jesus: At the Last Supper Jesus foretells that "after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee" (26:32), and then upon his resurrection both the angel and then Jesus himself tell the women at the tomb the same thing (28:7, 10), and this gospel even decides to end its narrative on a mountain in Galilee, even though Luke clearly indicates that Christ's ascension occurs near Jerusalem (28:16-20).

53 Perhaps David's sin is foreshadowed in the Judah story that interrupts the Joseph story (Gen 38), where Judah commits adultery with his daughter-in-law, believing her to be a harlot, and then (hypocritically) wants her to be burned to death for her harlotry.

in some of Joseph's deeds⁵⁴—but only that in many respects the life, and even the mission, of Joseph prefigures that of Christ better than does the life of David. The peculiar parallels are numerous: it is Joseph, for instance, who is first mocked, and then out of envy betrayed by his brothers, the house of Israel, who disrobe him and plan to kill him. Just as Joseph's brother Judah suggests selling him to pagans for silver, Jesus' own betrayer, also named Judah (Ιουδας being only the Greek spelling of the Hebrew name),⁵⁵ also trades him for silver. Just as Jesus is crucified between two thieves, one who repents and to whom Jesus promises salvation, and one who mocks him and presumably is damned, Joseph is cast into a dungeon between two other prisoners, one of whom is saved after Joseph foretells his rescue, and the other is executed. In the one case, Joseph tells one cellmate, "Remember me when it is well with you ..." (Gen 40:14), though the narration notes, "Yet the chief butler did not remember Joseph, but forgot him" (v. 23), in the other case, the good thief tells Jesus, "Remember me when you come into your kingly power" (Lk 23:42), and Jesus responds, "Amen I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise" (v. 43). Indeed, both the dry cistern and later his dungeon cell Joseph calls "the pit" (40:15), a fairly transparent image of death and entombment;

54 The tests through which he puts his brothers, and his father and younger brother, come to mind; more concerning, however, is Joseph's role in reducing all of Egypt to "slavery" (or more strictly, serfdom) in exchange for grain near the end of the seven lean years (Gen 47:13-26). Still, it is hard to simply condemn this action, given the fact that Pharaoh would probably not have let Joseph give his grain away for free. Indeed, those who see this as a great moral evil tend to focus on its unforeseeable long term consequence: envious Egyptians turning on the privileged Hebrew sojourners centuries later when a new Pharaoh arises to power who "did not know Joseph" (Ex 1:8).

55 Note that whereas Joseph is sold for 20 pieces of silver (Gen 37:28), Jesus is sold for 30 (Mt 26:15, 27:3); only Matthew's gospel records this detail. It is unclear in the Joseph narrative, however, whether Judah and the brothers actually get the money, since it almost appears that the Midianites sell Joseph before the sons of Israel get around to it. See note 5.

yet from each of these pits Joseph is brought forth alive. In fact, in psalm 40, David himself may be meditating on these darkest points in the life of Joseph when he sings, “I waited patiently for the LORD; he inclined to me and heard my cry. He drew me up from the desolate pit, out of the miry bog” (Ps 40:1-2).⁵⁶ Significantly, for both Joseph and for Christ, this rising from the pit happens for the sake of bringing grain, the live-giving bread, to a starving world, thereby saving both the pagans and the very brothers intent on their savior’s death.⁵⁷

In short, of the two, Joseph more clearly prefigures the suffering servant of the book of Isaiah, the one “despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief” (Is 53:3), the prophesied figure whom many of the Jewish scribes and rabbis eventually came to see must somehow be the messiah, though such suffering seemed incompatible with the anointed king and savior of Israel. The long suffering of Joseph seems rather unlike the life of David—at least given the way the Old Testament prophets most often celebrate David: as the great warrior King who slaughters Philistines and completes the conquest of the land of Canaan, who makes Mount Zion the final resting place of the Ark, and after whose reign Israel has its golden era of peace and prosperity. This life too is clearly an image of Christ, but not so much of the Christ who came in weakness, but of the Christ who will come in strength.

56 The pit (בֹּרַי, *bor*) is a recurring image of death and Sheol in David’s songs (see Ps 28:1; 30:3; 35:7-8; 69:13-14; 88:3-7; 143:7), and although he never mentions Joseph in these contexts, it is difficult to imagine that the Joseph story is far from his mind.

57 Just as Joseph finally reveals himself to his brothers only after Egypt itself has been saved from the famine, so too Christ will be finally recognized by the Jews after the “full number of the gentiles come in” (Rom 11:26). Why do the sons of Israel not recognize either Joseph as Joseph then, or Jesus as the messiah now? First of all, because when he appeared to them he did not look the way they pictured him to look, but more importantly, because they believe he is dead and is no more.

The Two Messiahs of the Talmud

I will note one last confirmation of this understanding of the relation of Joseph and David to Jesus, this time from the Talmud, the written collection of rabbinic traditions, commentaries, and disputes about the Old Testament. The Talmud was compiled and expanded by the Jewish scribes over several centuries, beginning before the time of Christ and continuing for hundreds of years after. And although the Jews have never quite treated it as inspired the way Scripture is, they have always treated the Talmud with profound respect and even authority; the status of the Talmudic writings for the Jews might be comparable with that of the writings of the Church Fathers for Catholics. Now, in the Talmud, and in several of the Dead Sea Scrolls from the first or second century BC, there was a longstanding tradition whispered now and again that there would be not one but *two* messiahs: one who would come first, suffer on our behalf, and be slain, and one who would follow, rule as king, and complete the work of the first. The latter messiah the Talmudic rabbis commonly referred to as “mashi’ach ben David,” that is, Messiah son of David, and the former as “mashi’ach ben Yosef,” Messiah son of Joseph.⁵⁸

Probably the earliest explicit reference to the double-messiah tradition in the Talmud is in a section about the proper way to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles in the Temple, in a midrash (or commentary) on Zechariah chapter 12, about the day of the LORD. Zechariah records Yahweh saying that on that day

58 For a good introduction to the two messiahs in the Talmud, see Roy H. Schoeman, *Salvation is from the Jews: The Role of Judaism in Salvation History from Abraham to the Second Coming* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2003), 118-123. David C. Mitchell’s *Messiah ben Joseph* (Scotland: Campbell Publications, 2016), however, is easily the most thorough and up to date study of the subject in the English language.

JOSEPH, THE GENTILES, AND THE MESSIAH

I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of compassion and supplication so that, when they look on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him as one weeps over a first-born. On that day the mourning in Jerusalem will be as great as the mourning for the Hadad-rimmon⁵⁹ in the plain of Megiddo. The land shall mourn, each family by itself. (Zech 12:10-12)

As good readers of the gospel of St. John, we Christians are tempted to zero in on the line about looking upon the one they have pierced, and have a fairly distinct messianic interpretation of this passage in mind.⁶⁰ But the Talmudic writing on this passage focuses on other concerns, asking:

What will they be in mourning for? Rabbi Dosa⁶¹ and the rabbis disputed this. One said, "They will mourn the Messiah son of Joseph, who has been slain"; the other says, "They will mourn the Evil Inclination, which has been slain." Now, if you say, "They will mourn the Messiah son of Joseph, who has been slain," then that is as if it is written, "They shall look to Me as the one they have pierced,

59 "Hadad-Rimon is Canaanite Baal. It is widely agreed that here Zechariah 'is making direct reference to the standard ritual wailing for Baal-Hadad, the god of rainfall and fertility, who is ousted from the earth during the dry summer'; this ritual lamentation took place annually near Megiddo in the town of Hadad-Rimmon, named for its Baal cult centre. Baal's devotees mourned his death, yet looked for him to reappear with the autumn rains to lead his heavenly host to victory and bring life, rain, and fertility to the land. Therefore the direct mention of Hadad-Rimmon suggests that Zechariah's stricken Messiah, like Baal, will die and reappear, bringing life to the land" (Mitchell, *Messiah ben Joseph*, 46).

60 See John 19:37.

61 The reference to Rabbi Dosa ben Harkinas, together with the context of this passage celebrating Tabernacles in the Temple, help scholars to date the dispute in question here to roughly 40-50 AD.

and mourn for him as one mourns for an only son”; but if you say, “They will mourn the Evil Inclination, which has been slain,” then why would they mourn? Surely they should rather rejoice! Why will they weep?⁶²

There are several details worth noting here. First, the scribe recording the dispute implies that the Messiah son of Joseph reading of Zechariah makes a lot more sense than the slaying of the evil inclination reading. (The “evil inclination” is the Jewish expression for what amounts, in Catholic theology, to “concupiscence,” the effect of original sin.) Second, insofar as this messiah is associated with Zechariah 12, the rabbis seem to admit that the same ones who will pierce and slay him will afterwards be the ones who grieve over their actions as though they had killed their own child, and that these murderers will in fact be the people of Israel themselves. A disturbing passage, if so interpreted—putting the Jews in a situation not unlike that of Peter when he was foretold to betray his master. One might almost be sympathetic with a desperate or far-fetched attempt to read it in terms of the death of concupiscence. Third, and most importantly, the passage does not propose the Joseph reading, but speaks of it incidentally, as though it was already well known to the reader and to the rabbis involved in the dispute. The belief that there will one day be a dying Josephite messiah seems to have well-established currency by this time, probably in the mid first century AD, so the tradition itself is probably much older.⁶³

62 Second Order *Mo'ed* (Appointed Times), Sixth tractate *Sukka* (Tabernacles) 52a (*The Talmud: A Selection*, ed. N. Solomon [London: Penguin, 2009], 223). It is noteworthy that this and the following sections of the Talmud referring to the Josephite Messiah are in the tractate devoted to the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles, which was originally called the Feast of Ingathering, at least in part because of its coinciding with the final harvest of the year. This feast's original name, in the Hebrew, is *aseph* (אָסֵף, Ex 23:16, 34:22, Dt 15:13), one of Rachel's two etymologies for “Joseph.”

63 Mitchell, *Messiah ben Joseph*, 135. The Dead Sea Scrolls references date to

A page or so later in the Talmud, the commentary refers now to both messiahs by name:

The rabbis taught: The Holy One (Blessed be he!) says to Messiah son of David (May he be revealed speedily in our days!), Ask me for anything and I shall grant it to you—as it is written, “Let me tell of the decree: [The LORD said to me, ‘You are my son,] I have fathered you this day. Ask it of me, and I will make the nations your domain” (Ps 2:7-8). When [Messiah son of David] sees Messiah son of Joseph slain, he says to Him, “Lord of the universe! All I ask from you is life!” He replies, “Even before you asked, your father David prophesied, ‘He asked you for life; you granted it’ (Ps 21:5).”⁶⁴

Here the notion that the son of Joseph would come first is understood, though the son of David seems to witness his death, so they may be being imagined as contemporaries. But again the dual-messiah theory is not explained or defended; it seems to be already a commonplace in the discussions among the rabbis.⁶⁵

somewhere between 100-200 BC; see idem, 83-104, 143.

64 Ibid., p. 224. The passage goes on to make a third reference to the two messiahs, at 52b, where it says, “And the LORD showed me four smiths’ (Zech 1:20). Who are these? Rabbi Hana bar Bizna said in the name of Rabbi Shimon Hasida, ‘Messiah son of David, Messiah son of Joseph, Elijah, and the Righteous Priest.’” Here the eschatological drama is rendered still more elaborate with the four figures. Truly it is difficult to understand whether Zechariah is speaking about one or several figures, especially as regards the priest. As Mitchell puts it, “One suspects that all these figures—enclosed within one another like babushka dolls—are actually one and the same, displaying mingled characteristics of the promised world-rulers both of Judah and of Joseph” (*Messiah ben Joseph*, 44).

65 Mitchell makes the intriguing suggestion that an expectation of a Josephite messiah may be behind why the names Joseph and Joshua/Jesus were so commonplace at the time of Christ, for “In a period of less than 100 years, from 30 BC to AD 63, we find four high priests bearing the name Joshua and four bearing the name Joseph... How can this compulsive interest in these non-Judean, non-Zadokite names be explained? Does it not look like the Judeans and the

So where did the theory come from? Surely the idea of bifurcating the LORD's anointed would be a distasteful notion, so the rabbis would not have proposed it without good reason. But because the passages above are the oldest explicit references to the two messiahs in the Talmud, we can only speculate on the inspiration for the idea. Yet the fact that they detect the Josephite messiah in the book of the prophet Zechariah suggests that this is a good place to start.⁶⁶ And sure enough, when we do so, we find some hints in the book as a whole.

The book of Zechariah is one of the last books of prophecy in the Old Testament, written in the days of Darius, king of Persia, who helped the Jews rebuild the Temple in the newly resettled land of Canaan. Zechariah is arguably one of the most cryptic of the prophetic books, containing as it does various strange images: staffs named "Grace" and "Union," golden lampstands, bowls, and olive trees, flying scrolls, winged women, four horses and later four chariots, among other cryptic ciphers; it also imagines a wide variety of mysterious figures, from Elijah to Satan himself. In particular, Joshua the high priest is addressed in chapter 3, and is given the promise that "Behold, I will bring my servant the Branch" (Zech 3:8), but a few verses later this image is complicated when Zechariah asks the angel,

"What are these two branches of the olive trees, which are beside the two golden pipes from which the oil is poured out?" He said to me, "Do you not know what these are?" I said, "No, my lord." Then he said, "These are the two anointed ones who stand by the Lord of the whole earth."
(Zech 4:13-14)

Zadokites [i.e., Levitical priests] were hoping for a coming ruler called Joseph or Joshua, and named their sons in the expectation that one of them might be he?" (Ibid., 103).

66 Mitchell speculates that the two messiah view should be traced back to Jacob's Genesis blessing/prophesy, but also to some of the aforementioned psalms and several of the prophets, including Zechariah, as I do.

We have here a fairly direct reference to two messiahs in the two anointed ones, since “messiah” is simply a transliteration of the Hebrew word for one anointed with oil. There remains an ambiguity, however, since the branch is initially described as one, but in the end becomes two. This Branch is described further in chapter six, again in an oracle addressed to another Joshua, who this time appears himself to *be* the Branch:

[M]ake a crown and set it upon the head of Joshua, the son of Jehozadak, the high priest; and say to him, “Behold, the man whose name is the Branch; for he shall grow up in this place, and he shall build the temple of the LORD. It is he who shall build the temple of the LORD, and shall bear royal honor, and shall sit and rule upon his throne. And there shall be a priest by his throne, and a peaceful understanding shall be between them both.”
(Zech 6:11-13)

Here we have two figures, a king and a priest, and the former is charged with building the temple. Although there is no explicit association with David and Joseph, there is perhaps a hint: the Branch is the king, and therefore presumably in the line of David,⁶⁷ while the high priest, one would assume, is of the line of Levi. And yet, confusingly, both are named Joshua,⁶⁸ so both might be associated with the Ephraimite general who had conquered Canaan, and therefore with the house of Joseph.

A little further on Zechariah says something more that might point a little more clearly to Joseph and David in connection with the two anointed ones:

67 Jeremiah confirms this, for he too speaks of the coming “Branch”: “Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous branch” (Jer 23:5; see also 33:15).

68 Assuming that this high priest is the same as the one three chapters back in Zech 3:1-10, the Joshua who first receives the promise of the Branch to come.

Christopher A. Decaen

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Lo, your king [the Branch?] comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on an ass, on a colt the foal of an ass. I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the war horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall command peace to the nations; his dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to ends of the earth. As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will set your captives free from the waterless pit. Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope; today I will restore to you double. For I have bent Judah as my bow; I have made Ephraim its arrow. I will brandish your sons, O Zion, over your sons, O Greece, and wield you like a warrior's sword. (Zech 9:9-13)

We Christians are of course drawn to the messianic first verse, in light of Palm Sunday in the gospels, but the references to Ephraim, on the one hand, and Jerusalem and Judah, on the other are more relevant to our interest. The two are spoken of not quite as synonyms, but as complementary. Just as a chariot needs a warhorse to be complete, a bow needs an arrow so that together they can make a single weapon. And Yahweh unites the bow and arrow that is Judah and Ephraim together in order to conquer, and then bring peace to, the gentiles. Indeed, the idioms of “setting captives free from the waterless pit,” the “double” portion restored, and “prisoners of hope,” conjure memories of both the plight of Joseph and his confidence in the plan of God.⁶⁹

In the next chapter, Zechariah lines up the tribes of Joseph and David one last time when he says:

⁶⁹ Zechariah may even be alluding to the life of Joseph in other verses using the images of Yahweh's blessings of grain, traitorous shepherds, dreams, and even divination of dreams (respectively, 9:17, 10:1, 2, 3).

JOSEPH, THE GENTILES, AND THE MESSIAH

I will strengthen the house of Judah and I will save the house of Joseph. I will bring them back because I have compassion on them, and they shall be as though I had not rejected them; for I am the LORD their God and I will answer them. Then Ephraim shall become a mighty warrior, and their hearts shall be glad as with wine. Their children shall see it and rejoice, and their hearts shall exult in the LORD. I will signal for them and gather them in, for I have redeemed them, and they shall be as many as of old. Though I scattered them among the nations, yet in far countries they shall remember me, and with their children they shall live and return. I will bring them home from the land of Egypt, and gather them from Assyria; and I will bring them to the land of Gilead and to Lebanon, till there is no room for them. They shall pass through the sea of Egypt, and the waves of the sea shall be smitten, and all the depths of the Nile dried up. The pride of Assyria shall be laid low, and the scepter of Egypt shall depart. (Zech 10:6-11)

We notice again the Joseph-related language of “gathering the people.” Even Egypt and Assyria fit the Judah/Joseph division, for the northern kingdom of Joseph was conquered and dispersed into Assyria, whereas part of the southern kingdom was carried off to Babylon while a remnant fled to Egypt.⁷⁰ At the time of Zechariah, the Babylonian exiles are returning, but not yet the Egyptian or Assyrian exiles, and this is a promise that they will.

Thus, we see what are perhaps signs in Zechariah of both a marked attention to Joseph alongside David, but even to hints of a pair of messiahs who themselves might embody the people of Joseph and David and be unified as one Branch. This of course may not be the primary source in Scripture from which

⁷⁰ See 2 Ki 25:26.

the rabbis later developed the Josephite and Davidite messiah notion, and all of this is not much on which to base what appears to have been a fairly elaborate theory in the minds of the rabbis recorded in the Talmud. But at least this much is clear: the very fact of this tradition among the Jewish rabbis is a sign that we are at least in good company when we are drawn to associate the two patriarch brothers with the Christ.

One Messiah, the Son of Joseph, Son of David

Whatever the precise origin of this Talmudic tradition, we Christians know that it is only an approximation of the truth: there was and is only one Messiah. It is also true, however, that Jesus' incarnate presence among us does come under two guises, at two times, and with two at least superficially different purposes. For he does come first in humility, born to a poor couple, sleeping in an animal's slop-dish, working menial labor as a carpenter, to one day preach, be rejected by his brothers, and finally be handed over to gentiles, to be tortured and die, and thereby fulfil his mission. When he comes again, however, he will stand manifest in his full glory to destroy those who resolutely reject him and to rule peacefully those who have repented of their contempt for his rule.

Still, these two comings are not so utterly separate from each other that we should embrace a neat and tidy division of the two Talmudic messiahs according to the two comings of Christ, as though he were the son of Joseph at the first coming, and the son of David at the second. As was pointed out already, during his earthly life Christ is explicitly and consistently spoken of as belonging to the house of Judah, and as the son of David. This is why his disciples keep expecting him to assume the throne of Judea and drive out the Romans, and whence when he foretells his passion they try to convince him not to enter Jerusalem.

Further, Joseph's close connection with the Northern Kingdom, and David's with the Southern, is itself ambiguous in terms of Christ's mission, for while it is true that Jesus spends the majority of his ministry in the northern regions, he is also clearly intent on evangelizing first and foremost the Jews, the remnant of *Judah*, even when they inhabit the north. The Israelites genetically belonging to the defunct Northern Kingdom themselves remain largely in exile even at the time of Christ, and when Jesus interacts with the half-breed Israelites known as Samaritans, it is usually with a certain reservation or restraint, as though the time for their evangelization is not quite right. Thus, Jesus' first coming looks to be just as Davidic as it is Josephite.

Indeed, the characters of the two comings of the messiah are so intertwined that in an important way they are one. For Jesus's first coming ends *not* in his death—as the simple “Josephite messiah” narrative would suggest—but in his resurrection and ascension, thus revealing the already present but veiled glory of his kingship as conqueror of sin and death. Whereas Joseph himself needed to be rescued from the pit, and the Talmudic Josephite messiah merely is slain and is no more, Jesus Christ rises from the pit of death by his own power. The notion that the messiah might also be *God*, and therefore *cannot* be killed in any irrevocable way, apparently had not even entered into the dreams of the rabbis; if it had, perhaps they would not have felt compelled to divide the messiah into one who saves by being slain, and one who saves by conquering and then ruling for all ages. In short, at his second coming Christ will not start again, beginning where he failed in his first coming, but will merely make manifest his already accomplished victory over sin and death. Truly, his first coming begins as Josephite, but it ends as Davidic, and it is this guise as the son of David, the Promised Land-conquering warrior-king, which more completely reveals

the majesty of his divinity; and this guise endures even now, until his second and final coming.⁷¹

Thus, I am proposing that at both comings Jesus is the son of David and the son of Joseph; at both comings he will be humble, for in both he is a God who has stooped to become a man, and at both comings (and at all times in between) he offers one sacrifice, his very life, for our sins; and at both comings he displays in different ways his power to conquer and rule not just Judah, and not just all twelve tribes of Israel, but even the gentiles that the sons of Joseph will one day lead back to the Promised Land. As it was said back in Genesis, “*all* the earth came to Egypt, to Joseph, to buy grain, because the famine was severe over *all* the earth” (Gen 41:57, emphasis added).⁷²

By way of summary, then, we have seen that Joseph plays a significant role in the history of Israel. He was Israel’s first savior, saving the house of Jacob from certain death, and in a way even from their sins. His tribe then “adds to itself” by doubling in size, becoming Ephraim and Manasseh, incorporating part of Egypt into the line of Jacob. Then, at the time of the exodus, the sons of Joseph take a position second only to Moses, in the person of Joshua the Ephraimite, who holds onto the faith and forty years later leads his brothers into Canaan. Then the tribe recedes

71 Recall that another meaning of Joseph’s name is to *repeat*, or *do again*, a fitting meaning, given the two comings.

72 We would be remiss if we did not note that Joseph is given another name. In Gen 41:45, as reward for saving Egypt, Pharaoh gives Joseph governing power, the daughter of the priest of On (Heliopolis) in marriage, and a new name: Zaphenath paneah. The exact meaning is disputed among scholars, though it clearly has something to do with God and life. One interpretation that seems to be a minority view, but which can explain every particle of the name (unlike any other theory I’ve seen) is that the name is *zph nt ph hnh*, and since *z* = son, *ph* = the, *nt* = god, *hnh* = life, the whole translates roughly as “the son of god, the life.” Remarkably, the Vulgate translates the name as *salvator mundi*; one wonders whether St. Jerome knows something about the Egyptian language that we do not.

into the shadows in the time of the Judges and the kings Saul and David, at which time the tribe of Judah takes the position of prominence. Under David's grandson the kingdom splits and the tribes of Joseph come to the fore again, but only to "gather" with the gentiles in their spiritual harlotry, and finally to be physically assimilated by and "added" to the gentiles.

Thus, by the time that several hundred years later Caesar Augustus calls for a census of the known world, only a slight trickle from the tribes of Joseph had made their way back to the Land of the Promise. In those days, the messiah was born to a man named Joseph of the tribe of David. Jesus, like Joseph, is content to live in obscurity and poverty until the time of his mission is at hand. Then his wisdom and power are gradually revealed to a rabble of Jews, but his full majesty and kingship are held in reserve. But finally the clearest sign of the presence of God among us in the person of this son of Joseph is shown only at the end when, in the depth of his love, he dies for his brothers—now both Jew and Gentile, whom Providence has "gathered" into his family—the very men who "gather" together to murder him. This final act as the Messiah Son of Joseph then gives way, after three days, when the crown of a King is assumed and the God-man rises up out of the pit, taking with him his former enemies, whom he had "added" to his very self.

***THE AQUINAS REVIEW* SUBSCRIPTION FORM**

The Aquinas Review is issued yearly at no charge to subscribers. If you would like to receive a copy, please fill out the following information, detach the page, and mail it to:

Subscriptions, *The Aquinas Review*
10,000 Ojai Road
Santa Paula, CA 93060

Subscriptions may also be requested by electronic mail to dean@thomasaquinas.edu
(please provide your postal address).

Name _____

Address _____

Tel. (optional) _____

For information about Thomas Aquinas College, please visit thomasaquinas.edu.

