REALITY—A Synthesis Of Thomistic Thought

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Preface

In this work we are incorporating the article on Thomism which we wrote for the Dictionnaire de theologie catholique. To that article we add: first, occasional clarifications; secondly, at the end, a hundred pages on the objective bases of the Thomistic synthesis, chiefly philosophic pages, which were not called for in a dictionary of theology.

Contradictory views, intellectual and spiritual, of St. Thomas have been handed down to us. The Averroists reproached him as but half-Aristotelian; the Augustinians saw in him an innovator too much attached to the spirit, principles, and method of Aristotle. This second judgment reappeared, sharply accented, in Luther, [1] and again, some years ago, in the Modernists, who maintained that St. Thomas, a Christian Aristotelian, was rather Aristotelian than Christian.

In other words, some scholars saw in the work of St. Thomas "a naturalization of revealed truth," [2] a depreciation of Christian faith, faith losing its sublimity, by a kind of rationalism, by exaggeration of the power and rights of reason. Now this rationalization of faith is indeed found in Leibnitz. [3] It is certainly not to be found in St. Thomas.

But these contrary judgments, however inadmissible, serve by contrast to set in relief the true physiognomy of the master, whom the Church has canonized and entitled Doctor Communis.

His whole life, all his intelligence, all his forces, were bent to the service of the Christian faith, both in his doctrinal battles and in the serenity of contemplation. Justification of this statement appears in the way he conceived his vocation as teacher. You find therein an ascending gradation which arouses admiration.

1. Whereas on the one hand he fully recognizes all that is excellent, from the

philosophical standpoint, in the teaching and method of Aristotle, he shows, on the other hand, against the Averroists, that reason can prove nothing against the faith. This latter task he accomplished by demonstrating against them from philosophy itself, that God's creative act is free, that creation need not be ab aeterno, that man's will is free, that the human soul is characterized by personal immortality.

2. In opposition to the Augustinians, who, repeating their master by rote, were in large measure unfaithful to that master, he carefully distinguishes reason from faith, but, far from separating these two, he rather unites them. [4].

3. He shows that philosophy deserves to be studied, both for its own sake, and also to establish, by arguments drawn simply from reason, that the praeambula fidei are attainable by the natural force of human intelligence.

4. As regards the purposes of theology, which he calls "sacred doctrine," he shows, first, that it is not to be studied merely for personal piety or for works of edification or to comment on Holy Scripture or to assemble patristic compilations or, finally, to explain the Sentences of Peter Lombard. Theology must rather, he goes on to show, be studied as a branch of knowledge, which establishes scientifically a system of doctrine with objectivity and universal validity, a synthesis that harmonizes supernatural truths with the truths of the natural order. Theology is thus conceived as a science, in the Aristotelian sense of the word, a science of the truths of faith. [5].

5. This position granted, it follows that reason must subserve faith in its work of analyzing the concepts and deepening the understanding of revealed truths, of showing that many of these truths are subordinated to the articles of faith which are primary, and of deducing the consequences contained virtually in the truths made known by revelation.

6. Nor does faith by thus employing reason lose aught of its supernatural character. Just the contrary. For St. Thomas, faith is an infused virtue, essentially supernatural by its proper object and formal motive, a virtue which, by an act that is simple and infallible, far above all apologetic reasoning, makes us adhere to God revealing and revealed. [6]. Infused faith, therefore, is superior not only to the highest philosophy, but also to the most enlightened theology, since theology can never be more than an explanatory and deductive commentary on faith.

7. Further, this conception of theology does not in any way lower Christian faith from its elevation. For, as the saint teaches, the source of theology is contemplation, [7] that is, infused faith, vivified, not only by charity, but also by the gifts of knowledge, understanding, and wisdom, gifts which make faith penetrating and pleasant of taste. Thus theology reaches a most fruitful understanding of revealed mysteries, by finding analogies in truths which we know naturally, and also by tracing the intertwining of these mysteries with one another and with the last end of our life. [8].

Such is the conception formed by St. Thomas on his vocation as Catholic doctor and particularly as theologian. And his sanctity, added to the power of his genius, enabled him to reply fully to his providential calling.

In his doctrinal controversies carried on exclusively in defense of the faith, he was always humble, patient, and magnanimous, courageous indeed, but always prudent. Trust in God led him to unite prayer to study. William de Tocco, his biographer, writes of him: "Whenever he was to study, to undertake a solemn disputation, to teach, write, or dictate, he began by retiring to pray in secret, weeping as he prayed, to obtain understanding of the divine mysteries. And he returned with the light he had prayed for." [9].

The same biographer [10] gives two striking examples. While writing his commentary on Isaias, the saint came to a passage which he did not understand. For several days he prayed and fasted for light. Then he was supernaturally enlightened. To his confrere, Reginald, he revealed the extraordinary manner in which this light came to him, namely, by the apostles Peter and Paul. This account was confirmed by one of the witnesses in the saint's canonization process.

A second example is reported. [11] In the friary at Naples, when the saint was writing of the passion and the resurrection of Christ, [12] he was seen, while praying before a crucifix in the church, to be lifted up from the floor. Then it was that he heard the words: "Thomas, thou hast written well of Me."

Daily, after celebrating Mass, he assisted at a second, where often he was the humble server. To solve difficulties, he would pray before the tabernacle. He never, we might say, went out of the cloister, he slept little, passed much of the night in prayer. When, at compline during Lent, he listened to the antiphon: "Midst in life we are in death," [13] he could not restrain his tears. Prayer gave him light and inspiration when he wrote the Office of the Blessed Sacrament. William de Tocco tells us also that the saint was often seen in ecstasy, and that, one day, while he was dictating a long article of the Trinity, he did not notice that the candle in his hand had gone so low that it was burning his fingers. [14].

Toward the end of his life he was favored with an intellectual vision, so sublime and so simple that he was unable to continue dictating the treatise on Penance which he had commenced. He told his faithful companion that he was dying as a simple religious, a grace he had prayed the Lord to grant him. His last words were given to a commentary on the Canticle of Canticles.

Let these traits suffice to show that St. Thomas reached the heights of contemplation, and that in his own life he exemplified his own teaching on the source of theology: theology pouring forth "from the fullness of contemplation." [15] This truth the Church recognizes by calling him Doctor Communis and by commending his teaching in numerous encyclicals, especially by the Aeterni Patris of Leo XIII.

The present work is an exposition of the Thomistic synthesis, an exposition devoted to the principles often formulated by the saint himself. We do not undertake to prove historically that all the doctrinal points in question are found explicitly in the works of St. Thomas himself, but we will indicate the chief references to his works. And our main task will be to set in relief the certitude and universality of the principles which underlie the structure and coherence of Thomistic doctrine.

First, then, we will note the chief works that expound this Thomistic synthesis, and likewise point out the most faithful and most penetrating among the saint's commentators. There will follow a philosophic introduction, to underline that metaphysical synthesis which is presupposed by Thomistic theology. Then we will emphasize the essential points in this doctrine by noting their force in the three treatises, De Deo uno, De Verbo incarnato, De gratia. Finally we will note briefly their importance in the other parts of theology.

Chapter 1: Philosophical Writings

The Thomistic synthesis, prepared gradually by the saint's commentaries on Scripture, on Aristotle, on the Master of the Sentences, by the Summa contra Gentes, by the Disputed Questions, reached definite form in the Summa theologiae. We will speak first of his philosophical writings, then of his theological works.

Here come first the commentaries on Aristotle.

1. On interpretation (Peri hermenias, on the act of judgment).

2. The Later Analytics (a long study of method in finding definitions, of the nature and validity of demonstration).

3. The Physica (natural philosophy).

4. De coelo et mundo.

5. De anima.

6. The Metaphysica.

7. Ethical works.

In searching Aristotle the saint fastens attention, not so much on the last and highest conclusions concerning God and the soul, but rather on the first elements of philosophy, just as we go to Euclid for the axioms of geometry. Nevertheless Aquinas often finds that these elements are deepened and their formulation most exact when Aristotle transcends the contrary deviations, first of Parmenides and Heraclitus, secondly of Pythagorean idealism and atomistic materialism, thirdly of Platonism and Sophistry. In Aristotle the saint discovers what has justly been called the natural metaphysics of human intelligence, a metaphysics which, commencing from sense experience, rises progressively till it reaches God, the pure act, the understanding of understanding (Noesis noeseos).

In commenting on the Stagirite, St. Thomas discards Averroistic interpretations contrary to revealed dogma, on Providence, on creation, on the personal immortality of the human soul. Hence it can be said that he "baptizes" Aristotle's teaching, that is, he shows how the principles of Aristotle, understood as they can be and must be understood, are in harmony with revelation. Thus he builds, step by step, the

foundations of a solid Christian philosophy.

In these commentaries St. Thomas also combats certain theses sustained by his Augustinian predecessors, but held by the saint to be irreconcilable with the most certain of Aristotle's principles. Aristotle conceives the human soul as the only substantial form of the human body. He maintains the natural unity of the human composite. Human intelligence, he maintains, is on the lowest rank of intelligences, and has as object the lowest of intelligible objects, namely, the intelligibility hidden in things subject to sense. Hence the human intelligence must use the sense world as a mirror if it would know God. And only by knowing the sense world, its proper object, can the human soul come, by analogy with that sense world, to know and define and characterize its own essence and faculties.

Brief Analysis

At the court of Urban IV, St. Thomas had as companion William de Moerbecke, O. P.: who knew Greek perfectly. The saint persuaded William to translate from Greek into Latin the works of Aristotle. This faithful translator assisted the saint in commenting on Aristotle. Thus we understand why Aquinas has such a profound understanding of the Stagirite, an understanding far superior to that of Albert the Great. On many points of Aristotelian interpretation St. Thomas is the authentic exponent.

Here we proceed to underline the capital points of Aristotle's teaching, as presented by St. Thomas.

In the saint's commentaries we often meet the names of Aristotle's Greek commentators: Porphyry, Themistius, Simplicius, Alexander of Aphrodisia. He is likewise familiar with Judaeo-Arabian philosophy, discerning perfectly where it is true and where it is false. He seems to put Avicenna above Averroes.

In regard to form, as is observed by de Wulf, the saint substituted, in place of extended paraphrase, a critical procedure which analyzes the text. He divides and subdivides, in order to lay bare the essential structure, to draw out the principal assertions, to explain the minutest detail. Thus he appears to advantage when compared with most commentators, ancient or modern, since he never loses sight of the entire corpus of Aristotelian doctrine, and always emphasizes its generative principles. These commentaries, therefore, as many historians admit, are the most penetrating exposition ever made of Greek philosophy. Grabmann [16] notes that scholastic teachers [17] cited St. Thomas simply as "The Expositor." And modern historians [18] generally give high praise to the saint's methods of commentating.

Aquinas does not follow Aristotle blindly. He does point out errors, but his corrections, far from depreciating Aristotle's value, only serve to show more clearly what Aristotle has of truth, and to emphasize what the philosopher should have concluded from his own principles. Generally speaking, it is an easy task to see whether or not St. Thomas accepts what Aristotle's text says. And this task is very easy for the reader who is familiar with the personal works of the saint.

St. Thomas studied all Aristotle's works, though he did not write commentaries on

all, and left unfinished some commentaries he had begun.

On Interpretation

From Aristotle's corpus of logic, called Organon, Thomas omitted the Categories, the Former Analytics, the Topics, and the Refutations. He explained the two chief parts.

1. De interpretatione (Peri hermenias) [19].

2. The Later Analytics [20].

In De interpretatione he gives us a most profound study of the three mental operations: concept, judgment, reasoning. The concept, he shows, surpasses immeasurably the sense image, because it contains the raison d'etre, the intelligible reality, which renders intelligible that which it represents. Then he proceeds to arrange concepts according to their universality, and shows their relation to objective reality. He finds that the verb "to be" is the root of all other judgments. We see that Aristotle's logic is intimately related to his metaphysics, to his teaching on objective reality, to his principle of act and potency. We have further a penetrating study of the elements in the proposition: noun, verb, and attribute. We see how truth is found formally, not in the concept, but in the objectively valid judgment. We are thus led to see ever more clearly how the object of intelligence differs from the object of sensation and imagination, how our intellect seizes, not mere sense phenomena, but the intelligible reality, which is expressed by the first and most universal of our concepts, and which is the soul of all our judgments, wherein the verb "to be" affirms the objective identity of predicate with subject.

The saint proceeds to justify Aristotle's classification of judgments. In quality, judgments are affirmative or negative or privative, and true or false. In modality they are possible or contingent or necessary. And at this point [21] enter problems on necessity, on contingency, on liberty. Finally we are shown the great value of judgments in mutual opposition, as contradictories, or contraries, and so on. We know how often this propositional opposition, studied by all logicians since Aristotle, is employed in the theology of Aquinas.

Later Analytics [22]

St. Thomas expounds and justifies the nature of demonstration. Starting with definition, demonstration leads us to know (scientifically) the characteristics of the thing defined, e. g.: the nature of the circle makes us see the properties of the circle. Then, further, we see that the principles on which demonstration rests must be necessarily true, that not everything can be demonstrated, that there are different kinds of demonstration, that there are sophisms to be avoided.

In the second chapter of this same work, he expounds at length the rules we must follow in establishing valid definitions. A definition cannot be proved since it is the source of demonstration. Hence methodical search for a real definition must start with a definition that is nominal or popular. Then the thing to be defined must be put into its most universal category, whence by division and subdivision we can

compare the thing to be defined with other things like it or unlike it. St. Thomas in all his works follows his own rules faithfully. By these rules he defends, e. g.: the Aristotelian definitions of "soul," "knowledge," "virtue." Deep study of these commentaries on the Later Analytics is an indispensable prerequisite for an exact knowledge of the real bases of Thomism. The historians of logic, although they have nearly all recognized the great value of these Thomistic pages, have not always seen their relation to the rest of the saint's work, in which the principles here clarified are in constant operation.

The Physica

Here the saint shows, in the first book, the necessity of distinguishing act from potency if we would explain "becoming," i. e.: change, motion. Motion we see at once is here conceived as a function, not of rest or repose (as by Descartes): but of being, reality, since that which is in motion, in the process of becoming, is tending toward being, toward actual reality.

Attentive study of the commentary on the first book of the Physica shows that the distinction of act from potency is not a mere hypothesis, however admirable and fruitful, nor a mere postulate arbitrarily laid down by the philosopher. Rather it is a distinction necessarily accepted by the mind that would reconcile Heraclitus with Parmenides. Heraclitus says: "All is becoming, nothing is, nothing is identified with itself." Hence he denied the principle of identity and the principle of contradiction. Parmenides, on the contrary, admitting the principle of identity and of contradiction, denied all objective becoming. St. Thomas shows that Aristotle found the only solution of the problem, that he made motion intelligible in terms of real being by his distinction of act from potency. What is in the process of becoming proceeds neither from nothingness nor from actual being, but from the still undetermined potency of being. The statue proceeds, not from the statue actually existing, but from the wood's capability to be hewn. Plant or animal proceeds from a germ. Knowledge proceeds from an intelligence that aspires to truth. This distinction of potency from act is necessary to render becoming intelligible as a function of being. The principle of identity is therefore, for Aristotle and Thomas, not a hypothesis or a postulate, but the objective foundation for demonstrative proofs of the existence of God, who is pure act.

From this division of being into potency and act arises the necessity of distinguishing four causes to explain becoming: matter, form, agent, and purpose. The saint formulates the correlative principles of efficient causality, of finality, of mutation, and shows the mutual relation of matter to form, of agent to purpose These principles thereafter come into play wherever the four causes are involved, that is, in the production of everything that has a beginning, whether in the corporeal order or in the spiritual.

Treating of finality, St. Thomas defines "chance." Chance is the accidental cause of something that happens as if it had been willed. The grave-digger accidentally finds a treasure. But the accidental cause necessarily presupposes a non-accidental cause, which produces its effect directly (a grave). Thus chance can never be the first cause of the world, since it presupposes two non-accidental causes, each of which tends to its own proper effect.

This study of the four causes leads to the definition of nature. Nature, in every being (stone, plant, animal, man): is the principle which directs to a determined end all the activities of the being. The concept of nature, applied analogically to God, reappears everywhere in theology, even in studying the essence of grace, and of the infused virtues. In his Summa the saint returns repeatedly to these chapters, [23] as to philosophical elements comparable to geometric elements in Euclid.

In the following books [24] Aquinas shows how the definition of motion is found in each species of motion: in local motion, in qualitative motion (intensity): in quantitative motion (augmentation, growth). He shows likewise that every continuum (extension, motion, time): though divisible to infinity, is not, as Zeno supposed, actually divided to infinity.

In the last books [25] Of the Physica we meet the two principles which prove the existence of God, the unchangeable first mover. The first of these principles run thus: Every motion presupposes a mover. The second thus: In a series of acting movers, necessarily subordinated, we cannot regress to infinity, but must come to a first. In a series of past movers accidentally subordinated an infinite regression would not be self-contradictory (in a supposed infinite series of past acts of generation in plants, say, or animals, or men). But for the motion here and now before us there must be an actually existing center of energy, a first mover, without which the motion in question would not exist. The ship is supported by the ocean, the ocean by the earth, the earth by the sun, but, in thus regressing, you are supposing a first, not an interminable infinity. And that first, being first, must be an unchangeable, immovable first mover, which owes its activity to itself alone, which must be its own activity, which must be pure act, because activity presupposes being, and self-activity presupposes self-being.

De Coelo Et Mundo

St. Thomas commented further, on the two books of De generatione et corruptione. [26] Of the De meteoris [27] he explained the first two books. Of the De coelo et mundo, [28] the first three books.

Reading the work last mentioned, De coelo, [29] we see that Aristotle had already observed the acceleration of speed in a falling body and noted that its rate of speed grows in proportion to its nearness to the center of the earth. Of this law, later to be made more precise by Newton, St. Thomas gives the following foundation: The speed of a heavy body increases in proportion to its distance from the height whence it fell. [30].

In regard to astronomy, let the historians have the word. Monsignor Grabmann [31] and P. Duhem [32] give Aquinas the glory of having maintained, [33] speaking of the Ptolemaic system, that the hypotheses on which an astronomic system rests do not change into demonstrated truths by the mere fact that the consequences of those hypotheses are in accord with observed facts. [34].

De Anima

In psychology Aquinas expounds the three books of De anima, [35] the opusculum

De sensu et sensato, [36] and the De memoria. [37].

In De anima, he examines the opinions of Aristotle's predecessors, particularly those of Empedocles, Democritus, and Plato. He insists on the unity of the soul in relation to its various functions. [38] Following Aristotle, he shows that the soul is the first principle of vegetative life, of sense life, of rational life, since all vital faculties arise from the one soul. [39].

How are these faculties to be defined? By the objects to which they are proportioned. [40] Having studied vegetative functions, he turns to sensation. Here we have penetrating analysis of the Aristotelian doctrine on characteristic sense objects (color, sound, and so on): and on sense objects per accidens (in a man, say, who is moving toward us). These sense objects per accidens (called in modern language "acquired perceptions") explain the so-called errors of sense. [41].

St. Thomas gives also [42] a profound explanation of this text from Aristotle: "As the action of the mover is received into the thing moved, so is the action of the sense object, of sound, for example, received into the sentient subject: this act belongs both to the thing sensed and to the thing sentient." St. Thomas explains as follows: Sonation and audition are both in the sentient subject, sonation as from the agent, audition as in the patient." [43].

Hence the saint, approving realism as does Aristotle, concludes that sensation, by its very nature, is a relation to objective reality, to its own proper sense object, and that, where there is no such sense object, sensation cannot exist. Hallucination indeed can exist where there is no sense object, but hallucination presupposes sensation. Echo, says Aristotle, presupposes an original sound, and even before Aristotle it had been observed that a man born blind never has visual hallucinations.

The commentary [44] insists at length that the thing which knows becomes, in some real sense, the object known, by the likeness thereof which it has received. Thus, when the soul knows necessary and universal principles, it becomes, in some real fashion, all intelligible reality. [45] This truth presupposes the immateriality of the intellective faculty. [46].

This same truth further presupposes the influence of the "agent intellect," [47] which, like an immaterial light, actualizes the intelligible object, contained potentially in sense objects, [48] and which imprints that object on our intelligence. That imprinting results in apprehension from which arises judgment and then reasoning. [49] The saint had already formulated the precise object [50] of human intelligence, namely, the intelligible being in sense objects. In the mirror of sense we know what is spiritual, namely, the soul itself, and God.

Just as intelligence, because it reaches the necessary and universal, is essentially distinct from sense, from sense memory, and from imagination, so too, the will (the rational appetite): since it is ruled only by unlimited universal good and is free in face of all limited, particular good, must likewise be distinct from sense appetite, from all passions, concupiscible or irascible. [51].

Immortality, a consequence of spirituality, immortality of the human intellect and

the human soul, may seem doubtful in certain texts of Aristotle. [52] Other texts, more frequent, [53] affirm this immortality. These latter texts are decisive, if the agent intellect is, as St. Thomas understands, a faculty of the soul to which corresponds a proportionate intelligence which knows the necessary and universal, and hence is independent of space and time. These latter texts are further clarified by a text in the Nicomachean Ethics, [54] which seems to exclude all hesitation.

Metaphysica

The saint's commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysica has three chief divisions:

1. Introduction to the Metaphysica.
2. Ontology.
3. Natural Theology.

The Introduction

Metaphysics is conceived as wisdom, science pre-eminent. Now science is the knowledge of things by their causes. Metaphysics, therefore, is the knowledge of all things by their supreme causes. After examining the views of Aristotle's predecessors, Thomas shows that it is possible to know things by their supreme causes, since in no kind of cause can the mind regress to infinity. The proper object of metaphysics is being as being. From this superior viewpoint metaphysics must again examine many problems already studied by the Physica from the viewpoint of becoming.

This introduction concludes with a defense, against the Sophists, of the objective validity of reason itself, and of reason's first principle, the principle of contradiction. [55] He who denies this principle affirms a self-destructive sentence. To deny this principle is to annihilate language, is to destroy all substance, all distinction between things, all truths, thoughts, and even opinions, all desires and acts. We could no longer distinguish even the degrees of error. We would destroy even the facts of motion and becoming, since there would be no distinction between the point of departure and the point of arrival. Further, motion could have none of the four causes as explanation. Motion would be a subject which becomes, without efficient cause, without purpose or nature. It would be attraction and repulsion, freezing and melting, both simultaneously.

A more profound defense of the objective validity of reason and reason's first law has never been written. Together with the saint's defense of the validity of sensation, it can be called Aristotle's metaphysical criticism, Aristotelian criteriology. "Criticism" is here employed, not in the Kantian sense of the word, but in its Greek root (krinein): which means "to judge" and the correlate noun derived from that verb (krisis) [56] Genuine criticism, then, is self-judgment, judgment reflecting on its own nature, in order to be sure it has attained its essential, natural object, namely, objective truth, to which it is naturally proportioned, as is the eye to color, the ear to sound, the foot to walking, and wings to flying. He who wishes to understand the saint's work De veritate must begin by absorbing his commentary on the fourth book of Aristotle's Metaphysica.

Ontology

This name may be given to the saint's commentary on the fifth book. It begins with Aristotle's philosophic vocabulary. Guided by the concept of being as being, St. Thomas explains the principal terms, nearly all of them analogical, which philosophy employs. Here is a list of these terms: principle, cause, nature, necessity, contingence, unity (necessary or accidental): substance, identity, priority, potency, quality, relation, and so forth.

Further, he treats of being as being in the sense order, where he considers matter and form, not now in relation to becoming, but in the very being of bodies inanimate or animated. [57] Then he shows the full value of the distinction between potency and act in the order of being, affirming that, on all levels of being, potency is essentially proportioned to act; whence follows the very important conclusion: act is necessarily higher than the potency proportioned to that act. In other words, the imperfect is for the sake of the perfect as the seed for the plant. Further, the perfect cannot have the imperfect as sufficient cause. The imperfect may indeed be the material cause of the perfect, but this material cannot pass from potentiality to actuality unless there intervenes an anterior and superior actuality which acts for that superior end to which it is itself proportioned. Only the superior can explain the inferior, otherwise the more would come from the less, the more perfect from the less perfect, contrary to the principles of being, of efficient causality, of finality. Here lies the refutation of materialistic evolutionism, where each successive higher level of being remains without explanation, without cause, without reason. [58].

Book X treats of unity and identity. The principle of identity, which is the affirmative form of the principle of contradiction, is thus formulated: "That which is, is," or again: "Everything that is, is one and the same." From this principle there follows the contingence of everything that is composed, of everything that is capable of motion. Things that are composite presuppose a unifying cause, because elements in themselves diverse cannot unite without a cause which brings them together. Union has its cause in something more simple than itself: unity.

Natural Theology

The third part of Aristotle's Metaphysica can be called natural theology. St. Thomas comments on two books only, the eleventh and the twelfth, omitting the others which deal with Aristotle's predecessors.

The eleventh book is a recapitulation, dealing with the preliminaries for proving the existence of God. The twelfth book gives the actual proofs for the existence of God, of pure act. Since act is higher than potency, anything at all which passes from potency to act supposes, in last analysis, an uncaused cause, something that is simply act, with no admixture of potentiality, of imperfection. Hence God is "thought of thought," "understanding of understanding," not only independent, subsistent being, but likewise subsistent understanding, ipsum intelligere subsistens. Pure act, being the plenitude of being, is likewise the Supreme Good, which draws to itself all else. In this act of drawing, in this divine attraction, St. Thomas, in opposition to many historians, sees not merely a final cause, but also an efficient cause, because, since every cause acts for an end proportioned to itself, the supreme

agent alone is proportioned to the supreme end. Subordination of agents corresponds to subordination of ends. Since the higher we rise, the more closely do agent and purpose approach, the two must finally be one. God, both as agent and as goal, draws all things to Himself. [59].

Let us note on this point the final words of St. Thomas. "This is the philosopher's conclusion: [60} There is one Prince of the universe, namely, He who is the first mover, the first intelligible, and the first good, He who above is called God, who is unto all ages the Blessed One. Amen."

But what he does not find in Aristotle is the explicit concept of creation from nothing, nor of eternal creation, and far less of free and non-eternal creation.

Commentaries On The Ethics

St. Thomas comments on two works of Aristotle's ethical and moral treatises.

1. The Nichomachean Ethics. [61].
2. The Politica. [62].

The Nicomachean Ethics

Following Aristotle, the saint here shows that ethics is the science of the activity of the human person, a person who is free, master of his own act, but who, since he is a rational being, must act for a rational purpose, a purpose that is in itself good, whether delectable or useful, but higher than sense good. In this higher order of good man will find happiness, that is, the joy which follows normal and well-ordered activity, as youth is followed by its flowering. Man's conduct, therefore, must be in harmony with right reason. He must pursue good that is by nature good, rational good, and thus attain human perfection, wherein, as in the goal to which nature is proportioned, he will find happiness. [63].

By what road, by what means do we reach this goal, this human perfection? By the road of virtue. Virtue is the habit of acting freely in accord with right reason. This habit is acquired by repeated voluntary and well-ordered acts. It grows thus into a second nature which these acts make easy and connatural. [64].

Certain virtues have as goal the control of passions. Virtue does not eradicate these passions, but reduces them to a happy medium, between excess and defect. But this medium is at the same time the summit. Thus fortitude, for example, rises above both cowardice and rashness. Temperance, above intemperance and insensibility. [65].

Similarly, generosity holds the highway, between prodigality and avarice. Magnificence, between niggardliness and ostentation. Magnanimity, between pusillanimity and ambition. Meekness defends itself, without excessive violence, but also without feebleness. [66].

But disciplining the passions does not suffice. We must likewise regulate our relations with other persons by giving each his due. Here lies the object of justice.

And justice has three fields of operation. Commutative justice acts in the world of material exchanges, where the norm is equality or equivalence. Above it lies distributive justice, which assigns offices, honors, rewards, not by equality, but by proportion, according to each man's fitness and merit. Highest of all is legal justice, which upholds the laws established for the well-being of society. Finally we have equity, which softens the rigor of the law, when, under the circumstances, that rigor would be excessive. [67].

These moral virtues must be guided by wisdom and prudence. Wisdom is concerned with the final purpose of life, that is, the attainment of human perfection. Prudence deals with the means to that end. It is prudence which finds the golden middle way for the moral virtues. [68].

Under given circumstances, when, for instance, our fatherland is in danger, virtue must be heroic. [69].

Justice, indispensable for social life, needs the complement which we call friendship. Now there are three kinds of friendship. There is, first, pleasant friendship, to be found in youthful associations devoted to sport and pleasure. There is, secondly, advantageous friendship, as among businessmen with common interests. Finally there is virtuous friendship, uniting those, for example, who are concerned with public order and the needs of their neighbor. This last kind of friendship, rising above pleasure and interest, presupposes virtue, perseveres like virtue, makes its devotees more virtuous. It means an ever active good will and good deed, which maintains peace and harmony amid division and partisanship. [70].

By the practice of these virtues man can reach a perfection still higher, namely, that of the contemplative life, which gives genuine happiness. Joy, in truth, is the normal flowering of well-ordered activity. Hence the deepest joy arises from the activity of man's highest power, namely, his mind, when that power is occupied in contemplating its highest object, which is God, the Supreme Truth, the Supreme Intelligible. [71].

Here we find those words of Aristotle which seem to affirm most strongly the personal immortality of the soul. St. Thomas is pleased to underline their importance. Aristotle's words on contemplation run as follows: "It will in truth, if it is lifelong, constitute perfect happiness. But such an existence might seem too high for human condition. For then man lives no longer as mere man, but only is as far as he possesses some divine character. As high as this principle is above the composite to which it is united, so high is the act of this principle above every other act. Now if the spirit, in relation to man, is something divine, divine likewise is such a life. Hence we must not believe those who counsel man to care only for human affairs and, under pretext that man is mortal, advise him to renounce what is immortal. On the contrary, man must immortalize himself, by striving with all his might to live according to what is most excellent in himself. This principle is higher than all the rest. It is the spirit which makes man essentially man."

Many historians have noted, as did St. Thomas, that in this text the Greek [72] word for mind signifies a human faculty, a part of the soul, a likeness which is participated indeed from the divine intelligence, but which is a part of man's nature.

Man it is whom Aristotle counsels to give himself to contemplation, thus to immortalize himself as far as possible. He goes so far as to say that this mind [73] constitutes each of us.

This summary may let us see why St. Thomas made such wide use of these ethical doctrines in theology. They serve him in explaining why acquired virtue is inferior to infused virtue. They serve likewise to explore the nature of charity, which is supernatural friendship, uniting the just man to God, and all God's children to one another. [74].

The Politica

St. Thomas commented the first two books, and the first six chapters of the third book. What follows in the printed commentary comes from Peter of Auvergne. [75].

We note at once how Aristotle differs from Plato. Plato, constructing a priori his ideal Republic, conceives the state as a being whose elements are the citizens and whose organs are the classes. To eliminate egoism, Plato suppresses family and property. Aristotle on the contrary, based on observation and experience, starts from the study of the family, the first human community. The father, who rules the family, must deal, in one fashion with his wife, in another with his children, in still another with his slaves. He remarks that affection is possible only between determinate individuals. Hence, if the family were destroyed there would be no one to take care of children, who, since they would belong to everybody, would belong to nobody, just as, where property is held in common, everyone finds that he himself works too much and others too little.

Aristotle, presupposing that private ownership is a right, finds legitimate titles to property in traditional occupation, in conquest, in labor. He also holds that man is by his nature destined to live in society, since he has need of his fellow men for defense, for full use of exterior goods, for acquiring even elementary knowledge. Language itself shows that man is destined for society. Hence families unite to form the political unity of the city, which has for its purpose a good common to all, a good that is not merely useful and pleasurable, but is in itself good, since it is a good characteristic of rational beings, a good based on justice and equity, virtues that are indispensable in social life.

These are the principal ideas proposed by Aristotle in the first books of the Politica, and deeply expounded by St. Thomas. In the Summa [76] he modifies Aristotle's view of slavery. Still, he says, the man who cannot provide for himself should work for, and be directed by, one wiser than himself.

In the second book of the Politica we study the constitutions of the various Greek states. Thomas accepts Aristotle's inductive bases, and will employ them in his work De regimine principum. [77] In the nature of man he finds the origin and the necessity of a social authority, represented in varying degree by the father in the family, by the leader in the community, by the sovereign in the kingdom.

He distinguishes, further, good government from bad. Good government has three forms: monarchical, where one alone rules, aristocratic, where several rule,

democratic, where the rule is by representatives elected by the multitude. But each of these forms may degenerate: monarchy into tyranny, aristocracy into oligarchy, democracy into mob-rule The best form of government he finds in monarchy, but, to exclude tyranny, he commends a mixed constitution, which provides, at the monarch's side, aristocratic and democratic elements in the administration of public affairs. [78] Yet, he adds, if monarchy in fact degenerates into tyranny, the tyranny, to avoid greater evils, should be patiently tolerated. If, however, tyranny becomes unbearable, the people may intervene, particularly in an elective monarchy. It is wrong to kill the tyrant. [79] He must be left to the judgment of God, who, with infinite wisdom, rewards or punishes all rulers of men.

On the evils of election by a degenerate people, where demagogues obtain the suffrages, he remarks, citing St. Augustine, that the elective power should, if it be possible, be taken from the multitude and restored to those who are good. St. Augustine's words run thus: "If a people gradually becomes depraved, if it sells its votes, if it hands over the government to wicked and criminal men, then that power of conferring honors is rightly taken from such a people and restored to those few who are good." [80].

St. Thomas commented [81] also the book De causis. This book had been attributed to Aristotle, but the saint shows that its origin is neo-Platonic. He likewise expounded [82] a work by Boethius: De hebdomadibus. His commentary on Plato's Timaeus has not been preserved.

All these commentaries served as broad and deep preparation for the saint's own personal synthesis. In that synthesis he reviews, under the double light of revelation and reason, all these materials he had so patiently analyzed. The synthesis is characterized by a grasp higher and more universal of the principles which govern his commentaries, by a more penetrating insight into the distinction between potency and act, into the superiority of act, into the primacy of God, the pure act.

The saint knew and employed some of Plato's dialogues: Timaeus, Menon, Phaedrus. He also knew Plato as transmitted by Aristotle. And St. Augustine passed on to him the better portion of Plato's teaching on God and the human soul. Neo-Platonism reached him first by way of the book De causis, attributed to Proclus, and secondly by the writings of pseudo-Dionysius, which he also commented.

Among the special philosophic books which the saint wrote, we must mention four: De unitate intellectus (against the Averroists): De substantiis separatis, De ente et essentia, De regimine principum.

Chapter 2: Theological Works

The saint's chief theological works are:

1. Commentaries.

    a) on Scripture.

b) on the Sentences.
c) on the Divine Names.
d) on the Trinity.
e) on the Weeks.

2. Personal works.

a) Summa contra Gentes.
b) Disputed Questions.
c) the Quodlibets.
d) The Summa theologiae.

St. Thomas commented on these books of the Old Testament:

a) the Book of Job.
b) the Psalms (I-5 I).
c) the Canticle of Canticles.
d) the Prophet Isaias.
e) the Prophet Jeremias.
f) the Lamentations.

In the New Testament, he commented on the following books:

a) the Four Gospels.
b) the Epistles of St. Paul.

He wrote further a work called Catena aurea ("chain of gold"): a running series of extracts from the Fathers on the four Gospels.

Here follows a list of those Fathers of the Church whom, throughout these works, the saint cites most frequently: Chrysostom, Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine, Leo the Great, Gregory the Great, Basil, John Damascene, Anselm, Bernard.

In his commentary on the Sentences, we see that the saint is keenly aware of the omissions and imperfections of previous theological work, and we observe how his own personal thought becomes more precisely established. Peter the Lombard had divided theology, not according to its proper object, but in relation to two acts of the will: to enjoy; to use.

a) Things to be enjoyed: the Trinity, God's knowledge, power, and will.
b) Things to be used: the angels, man, grace, sin.
c) Things to be both enjoyed and used: Christ, the sacraments, de novissimis.

St. Thomas sees the necessity of a more objective division, based on the proper object of theology, namely, God Himself. Hence his division of theology:

1. God, the source of all creatures.
2. God, the goal of all creatures.
3. God, the Savior, who, as man, is man's road to God.

In the Sentences, moreover, moral questions are treated, accidentally, as occasioned by certain dogmatic questions. Thomas notes the necessity of explicit treatment, on beatitude, on human acts, on the passions, on the virtues, on the states of life, and he becomes ever more conscious of the value of the principles which underlie his synthesis, on God, on Christ, on man.

The work Contra Gentes defends the Christian faith against the contemporary errors, especially against those which came from the Arabians. In the first books the saint examines truths which are demonstrable by reason, the preambles of faith. Then in the fourth book he deals with supernatural truths. Here St. Thomas treats especially of the mysteries, of the Trinity, the Incarnation, the sacraments, the way to heaven.

In each chapter of this work he sets forth a great number of arguments bound together by simple adverbs: "again," "further," "likewise," "besides." You may at first think the arguments proceed by mere juxtaposition. Nevertheless they are well ordered. Some are direct proofs, others are indirect, showing how his opponent tends to absurdity or inadmissible consequences. We do not have as yet the simple step-by-step procedure of the Summa theologiae, where we often find, in the body of the article, only one characteristic proof, ex propria ratione. And, when many proofs do occur, we clearly see their order, and the reason why each is introduced (e. g.: a special kind of causality).

In the Disputed Questions the saint examines the more difficult problems, beginning each article with as many as ten or twelve arguments for the affirmative, proceeding then to give as many to the negative, before he settles determinately on the truth. Through this complexity, for and against, he marches steadily onward to that superior simplicity which characterizes the Summa, a simplicity pregnant with virtual multiplicity, a precious and sublime simplicity, unperceived by many readers who see there only the platitudes of Christian common sense, because such readers have not entered by patient study of the Disputed Questions. Here, in these extended questions, the saint's progress is a slow, hard climb to the summit of the mountain, whence alone you can survey all these problems in unified solution.

The most important of the Disputed Questions are these four: De veritate, De potentia, De malo, De spiritualibus creaturis. The Quodlibets represent the same mode of extended research on various contemporary questions.

The Summa itself, then, gives us that higher synthesis, formed definitively in the soul of St. Thomas. This work, he says, in the prologue, was written for beginners. [83] Its order is logical. [84] It excludes everything that would hinder the student's advance: overlapping, long-windedness, useless questions, accessory and accidental arguments.

For this end he first determines theology's proper object: God, as revealed, inaccessible to mere reason. [85] This proper object determines the divisions, [86] as follows:

1. God, one in nature, three in person, Creator of the world.
2. God, the goal of creatures.
3. God, incarnate in Christ, who is the road to God.

This work reveals the saint at his best. He is master of all details studied in previous works. More and more he sees conclusions in their first principles. He exemplifies [87] his own teaching on "circular" contemplation, which returns always to one central, pre-eminent thought, better to seize all the force of its irradiation. His principles, few in number but immense in reach, illumine from on high a great number of questions.

Now intellectual perfection is based precisely on this unity, on this pre-eminent simplicity and universality, which imitates that one simple knowledge whereby God knows all things at a glance. Thus, in the Summa, we may single out, say, fifty articles which illumine the other three thousand articles, and thus delineate the character of the Thomistic synthesis. We think therefore that the proper kind of commentary on the Summa is one which does not lose itself in long disquisitions, but rather emphasizes those higher principles which illumine everything else. Genuine theological science is wisdom. Its preoccupation is, not so much to elicit new conclusions, as to reduce all conclusions, more numerous or less, to the same set of principles, just as all sides of a pyramid meet at the summit. This process is not lifeless repetition. Rather this timely insistence on the supreme point of the synthesis is a higher fashion of approaching God's manner of knowing, whereof theology is a participation.

This permanent value of the saint's doctrine finds its most authoritative expression in the encyclical Aeterni Patris. Leo XIII speaks there as follows: "St. Thomas synthesized his predecessors, and then augmented greatly this synthesis, first in philosophy, by mounting up to those highest principles based on the nature of things, secondly by distinguishing precisely and thus uniting more closely the two orders of reason and faith, thirdly by giving to each order its full right and dignity. Hence reason can hardly rise higher, nor faith find more solid support." Thus Leo XIII.

Definitive recognition of the authority of St. Thomas lies in the words of the Code of Canon Law: "Both in their own study of philosophy and theology, and in their teaching of students in these disciplines, let the professors proceed according to the Angelic Doctor's method, doctrine and principles, which they are to hold sacred." [88].

Chapter 3: The Thomistic Commentators

We deal here with those commentators only who belong to the Thomistic school properly so called. We do not include eclectic commentators, who indeed borrow largely from Thomas, but seek to unite him with Duns Scotus, refuting at times one by the other, at the risk of nearly always oscillating between the two, without ever taking a definite stand.

In the history of commentators we may distinguish three periods. During the first period we find defensiones against the various adversaries of Thomistic doctrine. In the second period commentaries appear properly so called. They comment the Summa theologiae. They comment, article by article, in the methods we may call

classical, followed generally before the Council of Trent. In the third period, after the Council, in order to meet a new fashion of opposition, the commentators generally no longer follow the letter of the Summa article by article, but write disputationes on the problems debated in their own times. Each of the three methods has its own raison d'etre. The Thomistic synthesis has thus been studied from varied viewpoints, by contrast with other theological systems. Let us see this process at work in each of these periods.

The first Thomists appear at the end of the thirteenth century and the beginning of the fourteenth. They defend St. Thomas against certain Augustinians of the ancient school, against the Nominalists and the Scotists. We must note in particular the works of Herve de Nedellec against Henry of Ghent; of Thomas Sutton against Scotus, of Durandus of Aurillac against Durandus of Saint-Pourcain and against the first Nominalists.

Next, in the same period, come works on a larger scale. Here we find John Capreolus, [89] whose Defensiones [90] earned him the title princeps thomistarum. Capreolus follows the order of the Lombard Sentences, but continually compares the commentaries of Thomas on that work with texts of the Summa theologiae and of the Disputed Questions. He writes against the Nominalists and the Scotists. Similar works were written in Hungary by Peter Niger, [91] in Spain by Diego of Deza, [92] the protector of Christopher Columbus. With the introduction of the Summa as textbook, explicit commentaries on the Summa theologiae began to appear. First in the field was Cajetan (Thomas de Vio). His commentary [93] is looked upon as the classic interpretation of St. Thomas. Then followed Conrad Kollin, [94] Sylvester de Ferraris, [95] and Francis of Vittoria. [96] Vittoria's work remained long in manuscript and was lately published. [97] A second work of Vittoria, Relectiones theologicae, was likewise recently published. [98].

Numerous Thomists took part in the preparatory work for the Council of Trent. Noted among these are Bartholomew of Carranza, Dominic Soto, Melchior Cano, Peter de Soto. The Council [99] itself, in its decrees on the mode of preparation for justification, reproduces the substance of an article by St. Thomas. [100] Further, in the following chapter on the causes of justification, the Council again reproduces the teaching of the saint. [101] When on April 11 1567, four years after the end of the Council, Thomas of Aquin was declared doctor of the Church, Pius V, [102] in commending the saint's doctrine as destruction of all heresies since the thirteenth century, concluded with these words: "As clearly appeared recently in the sacred decrees of the Council of Trent." [103].

After the Council of Trent, the commentators, as a rule, write Disputationes. Dominic Banez, an exception, explains still article by article. The chief names in this period are Bartholomew of Medina, [104] and Dominic Banez. [105] We must also mention Thomas of Lemos 1629): Diego Alvarez (1635): John of St. Thomas (1644): Peter of Godoy (1677). All these were Spaniards. In Italy we find Vincent Gotti (1742): Daniel Concina (1756): Vincent Patuzzi (1762): Salvatore Roselli (1785). In France, Jean Nicolai (1663): Vincent Contenson (1674): Vincent Baron (1674): John Baptist Gonet (1681): A. Goudin (1695): Antonin Massoulie (1706): Hyacinth Serry (1738). In Belgium, Charles Rene Billuart (1751). Among the Carmelites we mention: the Complutenses, Cursus philosophicus, [106] and the

Salmanticenses, Cursus theologicus. [107].

Let us here note the method and importance of the greatest among these commentators. Capreolus [108] correlates, as we saw above, the Summa and the Disputed Questions with the Sententiae of the Lombard. Answering the Nominalists and the Scotists, he sets in relief the continuity of the saint's thought.

Sylvester de Ferraris shows that the content of the Contra Gentes is in harmony with the higher simplicity of the Summa theologiae. He is especially valuable on certain great questions: the natural desire to see God [109]: the infallibility of the decrees of providence; [110] the immutability in good and in evil of the soul after death, from the first moment of its separation from the body. [111] Sylvester's commentary is reprinted in the Leonine edition of the Summa contra Gentes.

Cajetan comments on the Summa theologiae article by article, shows their interconnection, sets in relief the force of each proof, disengages the probative medium. Then he examines at length the objections of his adversaries, particularly those of Durandus and Scotus. His virtuosity as a logician is in the service of intuition. Cajetan's sense of mystery is great. Instances will occur later on when he speaks of the pre-eminence of the Deity. Cajetan is likewise the great defender of the distinction between essence and existence. [112] His commentary on the Summa theologiae was reprinted in the Leonine edition. [113].

Dominic Banez is a careful commentator, profound, sober, with great powers, logical and metaphysical. Attempts have been made to turn him into the founder of a new theological school. But, in reality, his doctrine does not differ from that of St. Thomas. What he adds are but more precise terms, to exclude false interpretations. His formulas do not exaggerate the saint's doctrine. Even such terms as "predefinition" and "predetermination" had been employed by Aquinas in explaining the divine decrees. [114] A Thomist may prefer the more simple and sober terms which St. Thomas ordinarily employs, but on condition that he understands them well and excludes those false interpretations which Banez had to exclude. [115].

John of St. Thomas wrote a very valuable Cursus philosophicus thomisticus. [116] Subsequent authors of philosophic manuals, E. Hugon, O. P.: J. Gredt, O. S. B.: X. Maquart, rest largely on him. J. Maritain likewise finds in them much inspiration. In John's theological work, Cursus theologicus, [117] we find disputationes on the great questions debated at his time. He compares the teaching of St. Thomas with that of others, especially with that of Suarez, of Vasquez, of Molina. John is an intuitionist, even a contemplative, rather than a dialectician. At the risk of diffusiveness, he returns often to the same idea, to sound its depths and irradiations. He may sound repetitious, but this continual recourse to the same principles, to these high leitmotifs, serves well to lift the penetrating spirit to the heights of doctrine. John insists repeatedly on the following doctrines: analogy of being, real distinction between essence and existence, obediential potency, divine liberty, intrinsic efficaciousness of divine decrees and of grace, specification of habits and acts by their formal object, the essential supernaturalness of infused virtue, the gifts of the Holy Spirit and infused contemplation. John should be studied also on the following questions: the personality of Christ, Christ's grace of union, Christ's habitual grace, the causality of the sacraments, the transubstantiation, and the sacrifice of the Mass.

In their methods the Carmelites of Salamanca, the Salmanticenses, resemble John of St. Thomas. They first give, in summary, the letter of the article, then add disputationes and dubia on controverted questions, discussing opposed views in detail. Some of these dubia on secondary questions may seem superfluous. But he who consults the Salmanticenses on fundamental questions must recognize in them great theologians, in general very loyal to the teaching of St. Thomas. You may test this statement in the following list of subjects: the divine attributes, the natural desire to see God, the obediential potency, the absolute supernaturalness of the beatific vision, the intrinsic efficaciousness of divine decrees and of grace, the essential supernaturalness of infused virtues, particularly of the theological virtues, the personality of Christ, His liberty, the value, intrinsically infinite, of His merits and satisfaction, the causality of the sacraments, the essence of the sacrifice of the Mass.

Gonet, who recapitulates the best of his predecessors, but also, on many questions, does original work, is marked by great clarity. So likewise is Cardinal Gotti, who gives a wider attention to positive theology. Billuart, more briefly than Gonet, gives a substantial summary of the great commentators. He is generally quite faithful to Thomas, often quoting in full the saint's own words.

While we do not cite in detail the works of contemporary Thomists, we must mention N. del Prado's two works: De veritate fundamentali philosophiae christianae, [118] and De Gratia et libero arbitrio. [119] He closely follows Banez. Further, A. Gardeil's three works: La credibilite et l'apologetique, [120] Le donne revele et la theologie, [121] and La structure de l'ame et l'experience mystique. [122] Inspired chiefly by John of St. Thomas, his work is still personal and original.

Among those who contributed to the resurgence of Thomistic study, before and after Leo XIII, we must mention eight names: Sanseverino, Kleutgen, S. J.: Cornoldi, S. J.: Cardinal Zigliara, O. P.: Buonpensiere, O. P.: L. Billot, S. J.: G. Mattiussi, S. J.: and Cardinal Mercier.

First Part: Metaphysical Synthesis Of Thomism

The metaphysical synthesis is above all a philosophy of being, an ontology, differing entirely from a philosophy of appearance (phenomenalism): from a philosophy of becoming (evolutionism): and from a philosophy of the ego (psychologism). Hence our first chapter will deal with intelligible being, the primary object of intelligence, and with the first principles arising from that object. A second chapter will show the precision given to the metaphysical synthesis by the first principle of act and potency, with the chief applications of this rich and fruitful principle.

Chapter 4: Intelligible Being And First Principles

St. Thomas, following Aristotle, teaches that the intelligible being, the intelligible reality, existing in sense objects is the first object of the first act of our intellect, i. e.: that apprehension which precedes the act of judging. Listen to his words: "The

intellect's first act is to know being, reality, because an object is knowable only in the degree in which it is actual. Hence being, entity, reality, is the first and proper object of understanding, just as sound is the first object of hearing." [123] Now being, reality, is that which either exists (actual being) or can exist (possible being): "being is that whose act is to be." [124] Further, the being, the reality, which our intellect first understands, is not the being of God, nor the being of the understanding subject, but the being, the reality, which exists in the sense world, "that which is grasped immediately by the intellect in the presence of a sense object." [125] Our intellect, indeed, is the lowest of all intelligences, to which corresponds, as proper and proportioned object, that intelligible reality existing in the world of sense. [126] Thus the child, knowing by sense, for example, the whiteness and the sweetness of milk, comes to know by intellect the intelligible reality of this same sense object. "By intellect he apprehends as reality that which by taste he apprehends as sweet." [127].

In the intelligible reality thus known, our intellect seizes at once its opposition to non-being, an opposition expressed by the principle of contradiction: Being is not non-being. "By nature our intellect knows being and the immediate characteristics of being as being, out of which knowledge arises the understanding of first principles, of the principle, say, that affirmation and denial cannot coexist (opposition between being and non-being): and other similar principles." [128] Here lies the point of departure in Thomistic realism.

Thus our intellect knows intelligible reality and its opposition to nothing, before it knows explicitly the distinction between me and non-me. By reflection on its own act of knowledge the intellect comes to know the existence of that knowing act and its thinking subject. Next it comes to know the existence of this and that individual object, seized by the senses. [129] In intellective knowledge, the universal comes first; sense is restricted to the individual and particular.

From this point of departure, Thomistic realism is seen to be a limited realism, since the universal, though it is not formally, as universal, in the individual sense object, has nevertheless its foundation in that object. This doctrine rises thus above two extremes, which it holds to be aberrations. One extreme is that of absolute realism held by Plato, who held that universals (he calls them "separated ideas") exist formally outside the knowing mind. The other extreme is that of Nominalism, which denies that the universal has any foundation in individual sense objects, and reduces it to a subjective representation accompanied by a common name. Each extreme leads to error. Platonist realism claims to have at least a confused intuition of the divine being (which it calls the Idea of Good). Nominalism opens the door to empiricism and positivism, which reduce first principles to experimental laws concerning sense phenomena. The principle of causality, for example, is reduced to this formula: every phenomenon presupposes an antecedent phenomenon. First principles then, conceived nominalistically, since they are no longer laws of being, of reality, but only of phenomena, do not allow the mind to rise to the knowledge of God, the first cause, beyond the phenomenal order.

This limited moderate realism of Aristotle and Aquinas is in harmony with that natural, spontaneous knowledge which we call common sense. This harmony appears most clearly in the doctrine's insistence on the objective validity and scope

of first principles, the object of our first intellectual apprehension. These principles are laws, not of the spirit only, not mere logical laws, not laws merely experimental, restricted to phenomena, but necessary and unlimited laws of being, objective laws of all reality, of all that is or can be.

Yet even in these primary laws we find a hierarchy. One of them, rising immediately from the idea of being, is the simply first principle, the principle of contradiction; it is the declaration of opposition between being and nothing. It may be formulated in two ways, one negative, the other positive. The first may be given either thus: "Being is not nothing," or thus: "One and the same thing, remaining such, cannot simultaneously both be and not be." Positively considered, it becomes the principle of identity, which may be formulated thus: "If a thing is, it is: if it is not, it is not." This is equivalent to saying: "Being is not non-being." Thus we say, to illustrate: "The good is good, the bad is bad," meaning that one is not the other. [130] According to this principle, that which is absurd, say a squared circle, is not merely unimaginable, not merely inconceivable, but absolutely irrealizable. Between the pure logic of what is conceivable and the concrete material world lie the universal laws of reality. And here already we find affirmed the validity of our intelligence in knowing the laws of extramental reality. [131].

To this principle of contradiction or of identity is subordinated the principle of sufficient reason, which in its generality may be formulated thus: "Everything that is has its raison d'etre, in itself, if of itself it exists, in something else, if of itself it does not exist." But this generality must be understood in senses analogically different.

First. The characteristics of a thing, e. g.: a circle, have their raison d'etre in the essence (nature) of that thing.

Secondly. The existence of an effect has its raison d'etre in the cause which produces and preserves that existence, that is to say, in the cause which is the reason not only of the "becoming," but also of the continued being of that effect. Thus that which is being by participation has its reason of existence in that which is being by essence.

Thirdly. Means have their raison d'etre in the end, the purpose, to which they are proportioned.

Fourthly. Matter is the raison d'etre of the corruptibility of bodies.

This principle, we see, is to be understood analogically, according to the order in which it is found, whether that order is intrinsic (the nature of a circle related to its characteristics): or extrinsic (cause, efficient or final, to its effects). When I ask the reason why, says St. Thomas, [132] I must answer by one of the four causes. Why has the circle these properties? By its intrinsic nature. Why is this iron dilated? Because it has been heated (efficient cause). Why did you come? For such or such a purpose. Why is man mortal? Because he is a material composite, hence corruptible.

Thus the raison d'etre, answering the question "why" (propter quid): is manifold in meaning, but these different meanings are proportionally the same, that is, analogically. We stand here at a central point. We see that the efficient cause presupposes the very universal idea of cause, found also in final cause, and in formal

cause, as well as in the agent. [133] Thus the principle of sufficient reason had been formulated long before Leibnitz.

We come now to the principle of substance. It is thus formulated: "That which exists as the subject of existence [134] is substance, and is distinct from its accidents or modes." [135] Thus in everyday speech we call gold or silver a substance. This principle is derived from the principle of identity, because that which exists as subject of existence is one and the same beneath all its multiple phenomena, permanent or successive. The idea of substance is thus seen to be a mere determination of the idea of being. Inversely, being is now conceived explicitly as substantial. Hence the conclusion: The principle of substance is simply a determination of the principle of identity: accidents then find their raison d'etre in the substance. [136].

The principle of efficient causality also finds its formula as a function of being. Wrong is the formula: "Every phenomenon presupposes an antecedent phenomenon." The right formula runs thus: "Every contingent being, even if it exists without beginning, [137] needs an efficient cause and, in last analysis, an uncreated cause." Briefly, every being by participation (in which we distinguish the participating subject from the participated existence) depends on the Being by essence. [138].

The principle of finality is expressed by Aristotle and Aquinas in these terms: "Every agent acts for a purpose." The agent tends to its own good. But that tendency differs on different levels of being. It may be, first, a tendency merely natural and unconscious, for example, the tendency of the stone toward the center of the earth, or the tendency of all bodies toward the center of the universe. Secondly, this tendency may be accompanied by sense knowledge, for example, in the animal seeking its nourishment. Thirdly, this tendency is guided by intelligence, which alone knows purpose as purpose, [139] that is, knows purpose as the raison d'etre of the means to reach that purpose. [140].

On this principle of finality depends the first principle of practical reason and of morality. It runs thus: "Do good, avoid evil." It is founded on the idea of good, as the principle of contradiction on the idea of being. In other words: The rational being must will rational good, that good, namely, to which its powers are proportioned by the author of its nature. [141].

All these principles are the principles of our natural intelligence. They are first manifested in that spontaneous form of intelligence which we call common sense, that is, the natural aptitude of intelligence, before all philosophic culture, to judge things sanely. Common sense, natural reason, seizes these self-evident principles from its notion of intelligible reality. But this natural common sense could not yet give these principles an exact and universal formulation. [142].

As Gilson [143] well remarks, Thomistic realism is founded, not on a mere postulate, but on intellectual grasp of intelligible reality in sense objects. Its fundamental proposition runs thus: [144] The first idea which the intellect conceives, its most evident idea into which it resolves all other ideas, is the idea of being. Grasping this first idea, the intellect cannot but grasp also the immediate

consequences of that idea, namely, first principles as laws of reality. If human intelligence doubts the evidence of, say, the principle of contradiction, then—as Thomists have repeated since the seventeenth century—the principle of Descartes [145] simply vanishes. If the principle of contradiction is not certain, then I might be simultaneously existent and non-existent, then my personal thought is not to be distinguished from impersonal thought, nor personal thought from the subconscious, or even from the unconscious. The universal proposition, Nothing can simultaneously both be and not be, is a necessary presupposition of the particular proposition, I am, and I cannot simultaneously be and not be. Universal knowledge precedes particular knowledge. [146].

This metaphysical synthesis, as seen thus far, does not seem to pass notably beyond ordinary natural intelligence. But, in truth, the synthesis, by justifying natural intelligence, does pass beyond it. And the synthesis will rise higher still by giving precision to the doctrine on act and potency. How that precision has been reached is our next topic.

Chapter 5: Act And Potency

The doctrine on act and potency is the soul of Aristotelian philosophy, deepened and developed by St. Thomas. [147].

According to this philosophy, all corporeal beings, even all finite beings, are composed of potency and act, at least of essence and existence, of an essence which can exist, which limits existence, and of an existence which actualizes this essence. God alone is pure act, because His essence is identified with His existence. He alone is Being itself, eternally subsistent.

The great commentators often note that the definition of potency determines the Thomistic synthesis. When potency is conceived as really distinct from all act, even the least imperfect, then we have the Thomistic position. If, on the other hand, potency is conceived as an imperfect act, then we have the position of some Scholastics, in particular of Suarez, and especially of Leibnitz, for whom potency is a force, a virtual act, merely impeded in its activity, as, for example, in the restrained force of a spring.

This conceptual difference in the primordial division of created being into potency and act has far-reaching consequences, which it is our task to pursue.

Many authors of manuals of philosophy ignore this divergence and give hardly more than nominal definitions of potency and act. They offer us the accepted axioms, but they do not make clear why it is necessary to admit potency as a reality between absolute nothing and actually existing being. Nor do they show how and wherein real potency is distinguished, on the one hand, from privation and simple possibility, and on the other from even the most imperfect act.

We are now to insist on this point, and then proceed to show what consequences follow, both in the order of being and in the order of operation. [148].

Article One: Potency Really Distinct From Act

According to Aristotle, [149] real distinction between potency and act is absolutely necessary if, granting the multiplied facts of motion and mutation in the sense world, facts affirmed by experience, we are to reconcile these facts with the principle of contradiction or identity. Here Aristotle [150] steers between Parmenides, who denies the reality of motion, and Heraclitus, who makes motion and change the one reality.

Parmenides has two arguments. The first runs thus: [151] If a thing arrives at existence it comes either from being or from nothing. Now it cannot come from being (statue from existing statue). Still less can it come from nothing. Therefore all becoming is impossible. This argument is based on the principle of contradiction or identity, which Parmenides thus formulates: Being is, non-being is not; you will never get beyond this thought.

Multiplicity of beings, he argues again from the same principle, is likewise impossible. Being, he says, cannot be limited, diversified, and multiplied by its own homogeneous self, but only by something else. Now that which is other than being is non-being, and non-being is not, is nothing. Being remains eternally what it is, absolutely one, identical with itself, immutable. Limited, finite beings are simply an illusion. Thus Parmenides ends in a monism absolutely static which absorbs the world in God.

Heraclitus is at the opposite pole. Everything is in motion, in process of becoming, and the opposition of being to non-being is an opposition purely abstract, even merely a matter of words. For, he argues, in the process of becoming, which is its own sufficient reason, being and non-being are dynamically identified. That which is in the process of becoming is already, and nevertheless is not yet. Hence, for Heraclitus, the principle of contradiction is not a law of being, not even of the intelligence. It is a mere law of speech, to avoid self-contradiction. Universal becoming is to itself sufficient reason, it has no need of a first cause or of a last end.

Thus Heraclitus, like Parmenides, ends in pantheism. But, whereas the pantheism of Parmenides is static, an absorption of the world into God, the pantheism of Heraclitus is evolutionist, and ultimately atheistic, for it tends to absorb God into the world. Cosmic evolution is self-creative. God, too, is forever in the process of becoming, hence will never be God.

Aristotle, against Heraclitus, holds that the principle of contradiction or of identity is a law, not merely of the inferior reason and of speech, but of the higher intelligence, and primarily of objective reality. [152] Then he turns to solve the arguments of Parmenides.

Plato, attempting an answer to Parmenides, had admitted, on the one side, an unchangeable world of intelligible ideas, and on the other, a sense world in perpetual movement. To explain this movement, he held that matter, always transformable, is a medium between being and nothing, is "non-being which somehow exists." Thus, as he said, he held his hand on the formula of Parmenides, by affirming that non-being still in some way is. [153] Confusedly, we may say, he prepared the

Aristotelian solution, deepened by St. Thomas.

Aristotle's solution, more clear and profound than Plato's, rests on his distinction of potency from act, a distinction his thought could not escape. [154].

In fact, that which is in process of becoming cannot arise from an actual being, which already exists. The statue, in process of becoming, does not come from the statue which already exists. But the thing in process of becoming was at first there in potency, and hence arises from unterminated being, from real and objective potency, which is thus a medium between the existing being and mere nothing. Thus the statue, while in process, comes from the wood, considered not as existing wood, but as sculptilis. Further, the statue, after completion, is composed of wood and the form received from the sculptor, which form can give place to another. The plant is composed of matter and specific (substantial) form (oak or beech): and the animal likewise (lion, deer).

The reality of potency is thus a necessary prerequisite if we are to harmonize the data of sense (e. g.: multiplicity and mutation) with the principle of contradiction or of identity, with the fundamental laws, that is, of reality and of thought. That which begins, since it cannot come either from actuality or from nothing, must come from a reality as yet undetermined, but determinable, from a subject that is transformable, as is the prime matter in all bodies, or as is second matter, in wood, say, or sand, or marble, or seed. In the works above cited St. Thomas gives explicit development to this conception of the Stagirite. Let us briefly note these clarifications.

a) Potency, that which is determinable, transformable, is not mere nothing. "From nothing, nothing comes," [155] said Parmenides. And this is true, even admitting creation ex nihilo, because creation is instantaneous, unpreceded by a process of becoming, [156] with which we are here concerned.

b) Potency, the transformable, is not the mere negation of determined form, not the privation, in wood, say, of the statue form. For negation, privation, is in itself nothing, hence again "from nothing comes nothing." Further, the privation of statue-form is found in gases and liquids, say, out of which the statue cannot be made.

c) Potency, the determinable, out of which arises the statue, is not the essence of the wood, which makes wood to be actually wood. Neither is it the actual figure of the wood to be carved, because what already is is not in process of becoming. [157].

d) Neither is potency identified with the imperfect figure of the statue that is in process of becoming, for that figure is imperfect actuality. The imperfect figure is not the determinable potency, but is already motion toward the statue to be.

But now this determinableness, transformableness: what is it positively? What is this real, objective potency, presupposed to motion, to mutation, to transformation? It is a real capacity to receive a definite, determined form, the form, say, of the statue, a capacity which is not in air or water, but is in wood, or marble, or sand. This capacity to become a statue is the statue in potency.

Here lies Aristotle's superiority to Plato. Plato speaks of "non-being which in some

way is." He seems to be thinking of privation or simple possibility, or of an imperfect actuality. His conception of matter, and of non-being in general, remains quite obscure when compared with the Aristotelian concept of potency, passive or active.

St. Thomas excels in explaining this distinction, just now noted, between passive potency and active potency. Real passive potency is not simple possibility. Simple possibility is prerequired and suffices for creation ex nihilo. But it does not suffice as prerequisite for motion, change, mutation. Mutation presupposes a real subject, determinable, transformable, mutable, whereas creation is the production of the entire created being, without any presupposed real potency. [158] Now, since active potency, active power, must be greater in proportion to its passive correlative, it follows that when passive potency is reduced to zero, the active potency must be infinite. In other words, the most universal of effects, the being of all things, cannot be produced except by the most universal of all causes, that is, by the Supreme Being. [159].

Real potency admitted, we have against Parmenides the explanation, not merely of mutation and becoming, but also of multiplicity. Form, of itself unlimited, is limited by the potency into which it is received. The form then, say of Apollo, can be multiplied by being received into different parts of wood or marble. And from this viewpoint, as long as that which was in potency is now in act, this real potency remains beneath the act. The wood, by receiving the statue-form, limits and holds this form and can even lose it and receive another form. The form of Apollo, as long as it remains in this particular piece of wood, is thereby limited, individualized, and as such, irreproducible. But a similar form can be reproduced in another portion of matter and that in indefinitum.

Article Two: Act Limited By Potency

Act, being completion, perfection, is not potency, which is the capacity to receive perfection: and act, perfection, is limited only by the potency which is its recipient. This truth is thus expressed in two texts of St. Thomas: "Form, even the lowest material form, if it be supposed, either really or mentally, separate from matter, is specifically one and one only. If whiteness, e. g.: be understood as apart from any subject of whiteness, it becomes impossible to suppose many whitenesses." [160] Again: "Things which agree in species and differ by number, agree in form and differ only in matter. Hence since the angels are not composed of matter and form, it is impossible to have two angels agreeing in species." [161].

This doctrine is embodied in the second of the twenty-four theses, approved by the Sacred Congregation of Studies in 1914. That thesis runs thus: "Act, perfection, is limited only by potency, which is the capability of receiving perfection. Hence, in an order of pure act, only one unlimited act can exist. But where act is limited and multiplied, there act enters into real composition with potency." [162].

From this principle, upheld by St. Thomas and his entire school, follow many consequences, both in the order of being and in the order of activity, since activity is proportioned to the agent's mode of being.

Article Three

First we will indicate, rising from lower to higher, the consequences in the order of being.

a) Matter is not form; it is really distinct from form. Let us look attentively at substantial mutation. We take two instances. First, a lion is burned, and there remain only ashes and bones. Secondly, food, by assimilative, digestive power, is changed into human flesh. These substantial mutations necessarily presuppose in the thing to be changed a subject capable of a new form but in no way as yet determined to that form, because, if it had already some such determination, that determination would have to be a substance (like air or water): and the mutations in question would no longer be substantial, but only accidental.

The subject of these mutations, therefore, must be purely potential, pure potency. Prime matter is not combustible, not "chiselable," and yet is really determinable, always transformable. This pure potency, this simple, real capacity, to receive a new substantial form, is not mere nothing (from nothing, nothing comes) ; nor is it mere privation of the form to come; nor is it something substantial already determined. It is not, says St. Thomas, [163] substance or quality or quantity or anything like these. Nor is it the beginning (inchoatio) of the form to come. It is not an imperfect act. The wood which can be carved is not yet, as such, the beginning of the statue-form. the imperfect act is already motion toward the form. It is not the potency prerequired before motion can begin.

This capacity to receive a substantial form is therefore a reality, a real potency, which is not an actuality. It is not the substantial form, being opposed to it, as the determinable, the transformable, is opposed to its content. Now, if, in reality, antecedently to any act of our mind, matter, pure potency, is not the substantial form, then it is really distinct from form. Rather, it is separable from form, for it can lose the form it has received, and receive another though it cannot exist deprived of all form. Corruption of one form involves necessarily the generation of another form. [164].

From the distinction, then, of potency from act arises between prime matter and form that distinction required to explain substantial mutation. Consequently prime matter has no existence of its own. Having no actuality of itself, it exists only by the existence of the composite. Thomas says: "Matter of itself has neither existence nor cognoscibility " [165].

In this same manner Aquinas, after Aristotle, explains the multiplication of substantial form, since matter remains under form, limits that form, and can lose that form. The specific form of lion, a form which is indefinitely multipliable, is, by the matter in which it exists, limited to constitute this individual lion, this begotten and corruptible composite.

Aristotle already taught this doctrine. In the first two books of his Physica he shows with admirable clearness the truth, at least in the sense world, of this principle. Act, he says, is limited and multiplied by potency. act determines potency, actualizes potency, but is limited by that same potency. The figure of Apollo actualizes this

portion of wax, but is also limited by it, enclosed in it, as content in vessel, and as such is thus no longer multipliable, though it can be multiplied in other portions of wax or marble. [166].

Aristotle studied this principle in the sense world. St. Thomas extends the principle, elevates it, sees its consequences, not only in the sense world, but universally, in all orders of being, spiritual as well as corporeal, even in the infinity of God.

b) Created essence is not its own existence, but really distinguished from that existence. The reason, says St. Thomas, why the substantial, specific form is limited in sense objects (e. g.: lion) lies precisely in this: Form, act, perfection, precisely by being received into a really containing capacity, is thereby necessarily limited (made captive) by that container. Under this formula, the principle holds good even in the supersense order: Act, he says, being perfection, can be limited only by the potency, the capacity which receives that perfection. [167] Now, he continues, existence is actuality, even the ultimate actuality. [168] And he develops this thought as follows: "Existence is the most perfect of realities. It is everywhere the ultimate actuality, since nothing has actuality except as it is. Hence existence is the actuality of all things, even of forms themselves. Hence existence is never related as receiver is related to content, but rather as content to receiver. When I speak of the existence of a man, say, or of a horse, or of anything else whatever, that existence is in the order of form, not of matter. It is the received perfection, not the subject which receives existence." [169].

Further, since existence (esse) is of itself unlimited, it is limited in fact only by the potency into which it is received, that is, by the finite essence capable of existence. By opposition, then "as the divine existence (God's existence) is not a received existence, but existence itself, subsistent, independent existence, it is clear that God is infinitely and supremely perfect." [170] Consequently God is really and essentially distinct from the world of finite things. [171].

This doctrine is affirmed by the first of the twenty-four Thomistic theses: Potency and act divide being in such fashion that everything which exists is either pure act, or then is necessarily composed of potency and act, as of two primary and intrinsic principles. [172].

For Suarez, on the contrary, everything that is, even prime matter, is of itself in act though it may be in potency to something else. Since he does not conceive potency [173] as the simple capacity of perfection, he denies the universality of the principle: act is limited only by potency. Here are his words: "Act is perhaps limited by itself, or by the agent which produces the act." [174].

The question arises: Does this principle, "act is limited only by potency," admit demonstration? In answer, we say that it cannot be proved by a direct and illative process of reasoning, because we are not dealing here with a conclusion properly so called, but truly with a first principle, which is self-evident (per se notum): on condition that we correctly interpret the meaning of its terms, subject and predicate. Nevertheless the explanation of these terms can be expressed in a form of reasoning, not illative, but explicative, containing at the same time an indirect demonstration, which shows that denial of the principle leads to absurdity. This explicative

argument may be formulated as here follows.

An act, a perfection, which in its own order is of itself unlimited (for example, existence or wisdom or love) cannot in fact be limited except by something else not of its own order, something which is related to that perfection and gives the reason for that limitation. Now, nothing else can be assigned as limiting that act, that perfection, except the real potency, the capacity for receiving that act, that perfection. Therefore that act, as perfection of itself unlimited, cannot be limited except by the potency which receives that act.

The major proposition of this explicative argument is evident. If, indeed, the act (of existence, of wisdom, of love) is not of itself limited, it cannot in fact be limited except by something extraneous to itself, something which gives the reason for the limitation. Thus the existence of the stone (or plant, animal, man) is limited by its nature, by its essence, which is susceptible of existence (quid capax existendi). Essence, nature, gives the reason of limitation, because it is intrinsically related to existence, it is a limited capability of existence. Similarly wisdom in man is limited by the limited capacity of his intelligence, and love by the limited capacity of his loving power.

Nor is the minor proposition of the argument less certain. If you would explain how an act, a perfection, of itself unlimited is in point of fact limited, it is not sufficient, pace Suarez, to appeal to the agent which produces that act, because the agent is an extrinsic cause, whereas we are concerned with finding the reason for this act's intrinsic limitation, the reason why the being, the existence, of the stone, say (or of the plant, the animal, the man): remains limited, even though the notion of being, of existence implies no limit, much less of different limits. Just as the sculptor cannot make a statue of Apollo limited to a portion of space, unless there is a subject (wood, marble, sand) capable of receiving the form of that statue: so likewise the author of nature cannot produce the stone (or the plant, the animal, the man) unless there is a subject capable of receiving existence, and of limiting that existence according to the different capacities found in stone, plant, and animal.

Hence St. Thomas says: "God produces simultaneously existence and the subject which receives existence." [175] And again: "In the idea of a made thing lies the impossibility of its essence being its existence because subsistent, independent existence is not created existence." [176].

Were this position not admitted, the argument of Parmenides, renewed by Spinoza, would be insoluble. Parmenides denied multiplicity in the sense world, because being cannot be limited, diversified, multiplied of itself, he says, but only by something other than itself, and the only thing other than being is non-being, is pure nothing.

To this argument our two teachers reply: Besides existence there is a real capacity which receives and limits existence. [177] This capacity, this recipient, which limits existence, is not nothing, is not privation, is not imperfect existence; it is real objective potency, really distinct from existence, just as the transformable wood remains under the statue figure it has received, just as prime matter remains under the substantial form, really distinct from that form which it can lose. As,

antecedently to consideration by our mind, matter is not form, is opposed to form, as that which is transformable is opposed to that which informs, thus likewise the essence of the stone (the plant, the animal) is not its existence. Essence, as essence (quid capax existendi): does not contain actual existence, which is a predicate, not essential, but contingent. Nor does the idea of existence as such imply either limitation or diversity in limitation (as, say, between stone and plant).

To repeat: Finite essence is opposed to its existence as the perfectible to actualizing perfection, as the limit to the limited thing, as the container to the content. Antecedently to any thought of ours, this proposition is true: Finite essence is not its own existence. Now, if in an affirmative judgment, the verb "is" expresses real identity between subject and predicate, [178] then the negation denies this real identity and thus affirms real distinction.

How is this distinction to be perceived? Not by the senses, not by the imagination, but by the intellect, which penetrating more deeply (intus legit): sees that finite essence, as subject, does not contain existence, which is not an essential predicate, since it is contingent.

A wide difference separates this position from that which says: Being is the most simple of ideas, hence all that in any way exists is being in act, though it may often be in potency to something else. Thus prime matter is already imperfectly in act, and finite essence is also in act, and is not really distinct from its existence Thus Suarez. [179].

A follower of Suarez, P. Descoqs, S. J.: writes thus concerning the first [180] of the twenty-four Thomistic theses: "Now if it is maintained that this thesis reproduces faithfully the teaching of Cajetan, and of subsequent authors inspired by Cajetan, I would certainly not demur. But however hard he tries, no one will show, and the chief commentators, however hard they have tried, have not been able to show, that the said teaching is found in the Master." [181].

Must we then say that the Congregation of Studies was in error, when, in 1914, it approved as genuine expression of the doctrine of St. Thomas, both that first thesis here in question and the other theses derived from that first? Is it true, as the article just cited maintains, [182] that St. Thomas never said that, in every created substance there is, not merely a logical composition, but a real composition of two principles really distinct, one of these principles, essence, subjective potency, being correlated to the other, existence, which is its act?

Now surely St. Thomas does say just this, and says it repeatedly. Beyond texts already cited, listen to the following passage: "Everything that is in the genus of substance is composed by a real composition, because, being substance, it is subsistent (independent) in its being. Hence its existence is something other than itself, otherwise it could not by its existence differ from other substances with which in essence it agrees, this condition being required in all things which are directly in the predicaments. Hence everything that is in the genus of substance is composed, at least of existence and essence (quod est)." [183] The beginning of this passage shows that the composition in question is not merely logical, but is real. Thus the passage says exactly what the first of the twenty-four theses says.

Let us hear another passage. "Just as every act (existence) is related to the subject in which it is, just so is every duration related to its now. That act however, that existence, which is measured by time, differs from its subject both in reality (secundum rem): because the movable thing is not motion, and in succession, because the substance of the movable thing is permanent, not successive. But that act, which is measured by aevum, namely, the existence of the thing which is aeviternal, differs from its subject in reality, but not in succession, because both subject and existence are each without succession. Thus we understand the difference between aevum and its now. But that existence which is measured by eternity is in reality identified with its subject, and differs from it only by way of thought." [184].

The first text just quoted says that in every predicamental substance there is a real composition between potency and act. The second text says that in substances measured by aevum (the angels) there is real distinction between existence and its subject. This is exactly the doctrine expressed by the first of the twenty-four theses.

We may add one more quotation from St. Thomas: "Hence each created substance is composed of potency and act, that is, of subject and existence, as Boethius says, [185] just as the white thing is composed of white thing and whiteness." [186] Now the saint certainly holds that there is real distinction between the white subject and its whiteness, between substance and accident. In both cases then, between substance and accident, and between essence and existence, we have a distinction which is not merely logical, subsequent to our way of thinking, but real, an expression of objective reality.

Antecedently to our way of thinking, so we may summarize Aristotle, matter is not the substantial form, and matter and form are two distinct intrinsic causes. St. Thomas supplements Aristotle with this remark: In every created being there is a real composition of potency and act, at least of essence and existence. [187] Were it otherwise, the argument of Parmenides against multiplicity of beings would remain insoluble. As the form is multiplied by the diverse portions of matter into which it is received, just so is existence (esse) multiplied by the diverse essences, or better, diverse subjects, [188] into which it is received.

To realize this truth you have but to read one chapter in Contra Gentes. [189] The composition there defended is not at all merely logical composition (of genus and differentia specifica, included in the definition of pure spirits): but rather a real composition: essence is not really identified with existence, which only contingently belongs to essence.

Throughout his works, St. Thomas continually affirms that God alone is pure act, that in Him alone is essence identified with existence. [190] In this unvaried proposition he sees the deepest foundation of distinction between uncreated being and created being. [191] Texts like these could be endlessly multiplied. See Del Prado, [192] where you will find them in abundance.

The first of the twenty-four theses, then, belongs to St. Thomas. In defending that thesis we are not pursuing a false scent, a false intellectual direction, on one of the most important points of philosophy, namely, the real and essential distinction

between God and the creature, between pure act, sovereignly simple and immutable, and the creature always composed and changing. [193].

On this point, it is clear, there is a very notable difference between St. Thomas and Suarez, who in some measure returns to the position of Duns Scotus. Now this difference rests on a difference still more fundamental, namely, a difference in the very idea of being (ens): which ontology deals with before it deals with the divisions of being. To this question we now turn.

The Idea Of Being

Being, for St. Thomas, [194] is a notion, not univocal but analogous, since otherwise it could not be divided and diversified. A univocal idea (e. g.: genus) is diversified by differences extrinsic to genus (animality, e. g.: by specific animal differences). Now, nothing is extrinsic to being (ens). Here Parmenides enters. Being, he says, cannot be something other than being, and the only other thing than being is nothing, is non-being, and non-being is not. St. Thomas replies: "Parmenides and his followers were deceived in this: They used the word being (ens) as if it were univocal, one in idea and nature, as if it were a genus. This is an impossible position. Being (ens) is not a genus, since it is found in things generically diversified." [195].

Duns Scotus [196] returns in a manner to the position of Parmenides, that being is a univocal notion. Suarez, [197] seeking a middle way between Aquinas and Scotus, maintains that the objective concept of being (ens) is simply one (simpliciter unus): and that consequently everything that is in any manner (e. g.: matter and essence) is being in act (ens in actu). This viewpoint granted, we can no longer conceive pure potency. It would be extra ens, hence, simply nothing. The Aristotelian notion of real potency (medium between actuality and nothing) disappears, and the argument of Parmenides is insoluble.

We understand now why, shortly after the Council of Trent, a Thomist, Reginaldus, O. P.: [198] formulated as follows the three principles of St. Thomas:

Ens (being) is a notion transcendent and analogous, not univocal.
God is pure act, God alone is His own existence.
Things absolute have species from themselves; things relative from something else.

Metaphysical Idea Of God

From this initial ontological divergence we have noted between St. Thomas and Suarez there arises another divergence, this time at the summit of metaphysics. Thomists maintain that the supreme truth of Christian philosophy is the following: In God alone are essence and existence identified. Now this is denied by those who refuse to admit the real distinction between created essence and existence.

According to Thomists this supreme truth is the terminus, the goal, of the ascending road which rises from the sense world to God, and the point of departure on the descending road, which deduces the attributes of God and determines the relation between God and the world. [199].

From this supreme truth, that God alone is His own existence, follow, according to Thomists, many other truths, formulated in the twenty-four Thomistic theses. We will deal with this problem later on, when we come to examine the structure of the theological treatise, De Deo uno. Here we but note the chief truths thus derived.

Consequences Of This Distinction

God, since He is subsisting and unreceived being, is infinite in perfection. [200] In Him there are no accidents, because existence is the ultimate actuality, hence cannot be further actualized and determined. [201] Consequently He is thought itself, wisdom itself, [202] love itself. [203].

Further, concerning God's relations to creatures we have many other consequences of the real distinction between act and potency. Many positions which we have already met on the ascending road now reappear, seen as we follow the road descending from on high. There cannot be, for example, two angels of the same species, for each angel is pure form, irreceivable in matter. [204] The rational soul is the one sole substantial form of the human composite, since otherwise man would not be simply a natural, substantial unity, [205] but merely one per accidens (as is, e. g.: the unity between material substance and the accident of quantity). For substantial unity cannot arise from actuality plus actuality, but only from its own characteristic potency and its own characteristic actuality. [206] Consequently the human composite has but one sole existence (see the sixteenth of the twenty-four Thomistic theses). Similarly, in every material substance there is but one existence, since neither matter nor form has an existence of its own; they are not id quod est, but id quo [207] (see the ninth of the twenty-four). The principle of individuation, which distinguishes, e. g.: two perfectly similar drops of water, is matter signed with quantity, the matter, that is, into which the substantial form of water has been received, but that matter as proportioned to this quantity (proper to this drop) rather than to another quantity (proper to another drop). [208].

Again, prime matter cannot exist except under some form, for that would be "being in actuality without act, a contradiction in terms." [209] Prime matter is not "that which is (id quod est): " but "that by which a thing is material, and hence limited." [210] Consequently "matter of itself has no existence, and no cognoscibility." [211] Matter, namely, is knowable only by its relation to form, by its capacity to receive form. The form of sense things, on the contrary, being distinct from matter, is of itself and directly knowable in potency. [212] Here is the reason for the objectivity of our intellectual knowledge of sense objects. Here also the reason why immateriality is the root of both intelligibility and intellectuality. [213].

Article Four

We come now to the applications of our principle in the order of action, operation, which follows the order of being. [214] Here we will briefly indicate the chief consequences, on which we must later dwell more at length.

Powers, faculties, habitudes differ specifically, not of themselves, but by the formal object, the act to which they are proportioned. [215] Consequently the soul faculties are really distinct from the soul, and each is really distinct from all others. [216] No

sense faculty can grasp the proper object of the intelligence, nor sense appetite the proper object of the will. [217].

"Whatever is moved (changed) is moved by something else." [218] This principle is derived from the real distinction between potency and act. Nothing can pass from potency to act except by a being already in act, otherwise the more would come from the less. In this principle is founded the proof from motion, from change, for God's existence. [219] Now, for Suarez, this principle is uncertain, for he says, "there are many things which, by virtual acts, are seen to move and reduce themselves to formal acts, as may be seen in appetite or will." [220] Against this position we must note that if our will is not its own operation, its own act of willing, if "God alone is His own will, as He is His own act of existence, and His own act of knowing," then it follows that our will is only a potency, only a capability of willing, and cannot consequently be reduced to act except by divine motion. Were it otherwise, the more would come from the less, the more perfect from the less perfect, contrary to the principle of causality. [221] St. Thomas speaks universally: "However perfect you conceive any created nature, corporeal or spiritual, it cannot proceed to its act unless it is moved thereto by God." [222].

The next consequence deals with causal subordination. In a series of causes which are subordinated necessarily (per se, not per accidens): there is no infinite regress; we must reach a supreme and highest cause, without which there would be no activity of intermediate causes, and no effect. [223].

We are dealing with necessary subordination. In accidental subordination, regress in infinitum is not an absurdity. In human lineage, for example, the generative act of the father depends, not necessarily, but accidentally, on the grandfather, who may be dead. But such infinite regress is absurd in a series necessarily subordinated, as, for example, in the following: "the moon is attracted by the earth, the earth by the sun, the sun by another center, and thus to infinity. Such regress, we must say, is absurd. If there is no first center of attraction, here and now in operation, then there would be no attraction anywhere. Without an actually operating spring the clock simply stops. All its wheels, even were they infinite in number, cause no effect." [224].

This position Suarez denies. He speaks thus: "In causes necessarily (per se) subordinated, it is no absurdity to say that these causes, though they be infinite in number, can nevertheless operate simultaneously." [225] Consequently Suarez [226] denies the demonstrative validity of the proofs offered by St. Thomas for God's existence. He explains his reason for departing from the Angelic Doctor. He substitutes for divine motion what he calls "simultaneous cooperation." [227] The First Cause, he says, does not bring the intermediate second cause to its act, is not the cause of its activity. In a series of subordinated causes, higher causes have influence, not on lower causes, but only on their common effect. All the causes are but partial causes, influencing not the other causes, but the effect only. [228] All the causes are coordinated rather than subordinated. Hence the term: simultaneous concursus, illustrated in two men drawing a boat. [229].

This view of Suarez is found also in Molina. Molina says: "When causes are subordinated, it is not necessary that the superior cause moves the inferior cause, even though the two causes be essentially subordinated and depend on each other in

producing a common effect. It suffices if each has immediate influence on the effect." [230] This position of Molina supposes that active potency can, without impulse from a higher cause, reduce itself to act. But he confuses active potency with virtual act, which of itself leads to complete act. Now, since a virtual act is more perfect than potency, we have again, contrary to the principle of causality, the more perfect issuing from the less perfect.

St. Thomas and his school maintain this principle: No created cause is its own existence, or its own activity, hence can never act without divine premotion. In this principle lies the heart of the proofs, by way of causality, for God's existence. [231].

All these consequences, to repeat, follow from the real distinction between potency and act. From it proceed: the real distinction between matter and form, the real distinction between finite essence and existence, the real distinction between active potency and its operation.

In the supernatural order we find still another consequence from the idea of potency, namely, obediential potency, that is, the aptitude of created nature, either to receive a supernatural gift or to be elevated to produce a supernatural effect. This potency St. Thomas conceives as the nature itself, of the soul, say, as far as that nature is suited for elevation to a superior order. This suitableness means no more than non-repugnance, since God can do in us anything that is not self-contradictory. [232].

For Suarez, [233] on the contrary, this obediential potency, which he regards as an imperfect act, is rather an active potency, as if the vitality of our supernatural acts were natural, instead of being a new, supernatural life. Thomists answer Suarez thus: An obediential potency, if active, would be natural, as being a property of our nature, and simultaneously supernatural, as being proportioned to an object formally supernatural. [234].

A last important consequence, again in the supernatural order, of the real distinction between potency and act, between essence and existence, runs as follows: In Christ there is, for both natures, the divine and the human, one sole existence, the existence, namely, of the Word who has assumed human nature. [235] Suarez, on the contrary, who denies real distinction between created essence and its existence, has to admit two existences in Christ. This position reduces notably the intimacy of the hypostatic union.

Such then are the principal irradiations of the Aristotelian distinction between potency and act. Real, objective potency is not act, however imperfect. But it is essentially proportioned to act. [236] Next come consequences in the four kinds of causes, with the absurdity, in necessary causal subordination, of regress in infinitum, either in efficient causality or in final causality. Culmination of these consequences is the existence of God, pure act, at the summit of all existence, since the more cannot come from the less, and in the giver there is more than in the receiver. The first cause, therefore, of all things cannot be something that is not as yet, but is still in process of becoming, even if you call that process self-creating evolution. The first cause is act, existing from all eternity, is self-subsisting Being, in whom alone essence and existence are identified. Already here we see that nothing, absolutely no reality, can exist without Him, without depending on Him, without a relation to Him

of causal dependence on Him. Our free act of will, being a reality, has to Him the same relation of causal dependence, and is thereby, as we shall see, not destroyed, but on the contrary, made an actual reality. [237].

This metaphysical synthesis, as elaborated by Aquinas, while far more perfect than the doctrine explicitly taught by Aristotle, is nevertheless, philosophically speaking, merely the full development of that doctrine. In Aristotle the doctrine is still a child. In Aquinas it has grown to full age. Now this progress, intrinsically philosophic, was not carried on without the extrinsic concurrence of divine revelation. Revelation, for St. Thomas, was not, in philosophy, a principle of demonstration. But it was a guiding star. The revealed doctrine of free creation ex nihilo was, in particular, a precious guide. But under this continued extrinsic guidance, philosophy, metaphysics, guarded its own formal object, to which it is by nature proportioned, namely, being as being, known in the minor sense world. By this formal object, metaphysics remains specifically distinct from theology, which has its own distinctive formal object, namely, God as He is in Himself, [238] God in His own inner life, known only by divine revelation. And here we can already foresee what harmony, in the mind of St. Thomas, unites these two syntheses, a harmony wherein metaphysics gladly becomes the subordinated instrument of theology. [239].

Second Part: Theology and De Deo Uno

Chapter 6: The Nature Of Theological Work

MUCH has been written in recent years on the nature of theological development and in widely divergent directions, also by disciples of St. Thomas. One much ventilated question is that of the definability of theological conclusions properly so called, namely, conclusions obtained by a genuinely illative process, from one premise of faith and one premise of reason. On this question Father Marin-Sola [240] is far from being in accord with Father Reginald M. Schultes, O. P. [241] We have personally written on this subject, refusing with Father Schultes to admit definability of the theological conclusion as above defined. [242].

Father Charlier, [243] still more recently, has entered the lists in diametrical opposition to Father Marin-Sola. His thesis runs thus: Demonstration, in the strict sense of the word, cannot be employed in theology. Theology, he argues, cannot of itself arrive with certitude at these conclusions, which belong to the metaphysics that the theologian employs rather than to theology itself. Theology must be content to explain and to systematize the truths of faith. But, of itself, it can never deduce with certitude conclusions which are only virtually revealed. [244].

One position then, that of Marin-Sola, holds that theological reasoning strictly illative can discover truths capable of being defined as dogmas of faith. The contrary position, that of Charlier, holds that theology is of itself incapable even of discovering such truths with certitude.

Neither of these opposed positions is, we think, in accord with the teaching of St. Thomas and his chief commentators. Genuine Thomistic teaching, we hold, is an

elevated highway, running above these two extremes. Extended quotation, from the saint and his best interpreters, would sustain our view. We have elsewhere [245] followed this method. Here we must be content to attain our goal by enumerating and outlining the various steps of theological procedure.

Article One: The Proper Object Of Theology

Theology is a science made possible by the light of revelation. Theology, therefore, presupposes faith in revealed truths. Hence the proper object of theology is the inner life of God as knowable by revelation and faith. By this object theology rises above metaphysics, which sees in God the first and supreme being, the author of nature, whereas theology attains God as God (sub ratione Deitatis). [246].

How does theology differ from faith? The object of theology, in the theologian who is still viator, is not the Deity clearly seen, [247] as in the beatific vision, but the Deity known obscurely by faith. [248] Theology, then, is distinguished from faith, which is its root, because theology is the science of the truths of faith, which truths it explains, defends, and compares. Comparing these truths with one another, theology sees their mutual relations, and the consequences which they virtually contain. But to use this method for attaining its proper object, the inner life of God as God, theology must presuppose metaphysics which sees God as the Supreme Being. That this is the object of metaphysics is clear, we may note, from revelation itself. When God says to Moses: "I am who am," [249] we recognize in those words the equivalent statement: God alone is subsistent existence. [250].

Theology, therefore, though here below it proceeds from principles which are believed, not seen as evident in themselves, is nevertheless a branch of knowledge, a science in the proper sense of the word. The characteristic of science is to show "the reason why this thing has just these properties." Theology does just that. It determines the nature and properties of sanctifying grace, of infused virtue, of faith, of hope, of charity. St. Thomas, in defining theology, uses the Aristotelian definition of science which he had explained in his commentary on the Later Analytics. [251] To know scientifically, he says, is to know this thing as what it is and why it cannot be otherwise. Theology then is a science, not merely in the broad sense of certain knowledge, but also in the strict sense of conclusions known by principles. [252].

Such is theology here below. But when the theologian is no longer viator, when he has received the beatific vision, then, without medium, in the Word, he will behold the inner life of God, the divine essence. Then he will know, with fullest light, what before he knew by faith. And beyond that, extra Verbum, he will see the conclusions derivable from faith. In heaven, theology will be perfect, its principles evident. But here below, theology is in an imperfect state. It has not, so to speak, become adult.

Hence theology, as attainable here below, while it is a science, and is a sub-alternate science, resting on the mind of God and the blessed in heaven, is nevertheless, when compared with all merely human knowledge, a wisdom specifically higher than metaphysics, though not as high as the infused faith which is its source. Theology then, generated by the theological labor, is by its root essentially supernatural. [253] If, consequently, the theologian loses faith (by grave sin against that virtue): there remains in him only the corpse of theology, a body without soul, since he no longer

adheres, formally and infallibly, to revealed truths, the sources of the theological habit. And this is true, even if, following his own will and judgment, he still holds materially one or the other of these truths.

So much on the nature of theology. We must now consider the different steps, the different procedures, to be followed by the theologian, if he would avoid opposed and exaggerated extremes.

Article Two: Steps In Theological Procedure

These steps are pointed out by St. Thomas, first in the first question of the Summa, [254] secondly, more explicitly, when he treats of specific subjects: eternal life, for example, predestination, the Trinity, the mysteries of the Incarnation, the Redemption, the Eucharist, and the other sacraments. We distinguish six such successive procedures.

1. The positive procedure.
2. The analytic procedure.
3. The apologetic procedure.
4. The manifestative procedure.
5. The explicative procedure.
6. The illative procedure.

    a) of truths explicitly revealed.
    b) of truths not explicitly revealed.
    c) of truths virtually revealed.

1. Theology accepts the depositum fidei, and studies its documents, Scripture and tradition, under the guidance of the teaching Church. This is positive theology, which includes study of biblical theology, of the documents and organs of tradition, of the various forms of the living magisterium.

2. The next step is analysis of revealed truths, in particular of the more fundamental truths, to establish the precise meaning of the subject and the predicate by which that truth is expressed. Take, for example, this sentence: The Word was made flesh. Theological analysis shows that the sentence means: The Word, who is God, became man. This labor of conceptual analysis appears in his first articles when St. Thomas begins a new treatise, on the Trinity, for example, or the Incarnation. In these articles you will search in vain for a theological conclusion. You will find but simple analysis, sometimes grammatical, but generally conceptual, of the subject and predicate of the revealed proposition.

3. On the next step theology defends revealed truths by showing either that they are contained in the deposit of faith, or that they contain no manifest impossibility. [255] No effort is made to demonstrate positively the intrinsic possibility of the mystery. If such possibility could be demonstrated by reason alone, then would the existence of the mystery be likewise demonstrated, for the Trinity is a being, not contingent, but necessary. The only thing attempted in this apologetic procedure is to show that there is no evident contradiction in the proposition which enunciates the dogma. God is triune, and one. He is "one" by nature, and "triune" in so far as this

unique nature is possessed by three distinct persons, as in a triangle, to illustrate, the three angles have the same surface.

4. On the fourth level theology uses arguments of appropriateness, to illumine, not to demonstrate, revealed truth. Thus, to clarify the dogma, say, of the Word's eternal generation or that of the redemptive Incarnation, theology appeals to the following principle: God is by nature self-diffusive; and the more elevated good is, the more intimately and abundantly does it communicate itself. [256] Hence it is appropriate that God, the supreme Good, communicate His entire nature in the eternal generation of the Word, and that the Word be incarnate for our salvation. [257] These mysteries, so runs the common theological doctrine, cannot be proved, and cannot be disproved, and although they do have a persuasive probability, they are held with certitude by faith alone. [258].

5. Further, theology has recourse to explicative reasoning, to demonstrate, often in strictest form, a truth, not new, but implicitly contained in a revealed truth. This procedure passes from a confused formulation of a truth to a more distinct formulation of the same truth. To illustrate: take the sentence, The Word, which was God, was made flesh. Against the Arians, that sentence was thus expressed: The Word, consubstantial with the Father, was made man. This consubstantiality with the Father, whatever some writers say, is much more than a theological conclusion, deduced illatively from a revealed truth. It is a truth identical, only more explicitly stated, with that found in the Prologue of St. John's Gospel.

A second illustration: Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church, and gates of hell shall not prevail against it. [259] This same truth is expressed, only more explicitly, as follows: The sovereign pontiff, successor of St. Peter, is infallible when ex cathedra he teaches the universal Church in matters of faith and morals. This latter formula does not enunciate a new truth deduced from the first. In each sentence we have the same subject and the same predicate, joined by the verb "to be." But the language, metaphorical in the first formula, becomes proper, scientific, in the second.

6a. Again, theology uses reasoning, not merely explicative, but strictly and objectively illative, to draw from two revealed truths a third truth, revealed elsewhere, often less explicitly, in Scripture and tradition. This kind of illative reasoning, frequent in theology, unites to the articles of the Creed other truths of faith, and thus forms a body of doctrine, with all constituent truths in mutual relation and subordination. This body of doctrine [260] stands higher than all theological systems, higher even than theological science itself. Thus we understand the title: De sacra doctrina, given by St. Thomas to the first question in the Summa theologiae. The first article of that question is entitled, doctrina fidei. In the following articles, the subject is doctrina theologica, sacra theologia, which is declared to be a science, itself superior to systems that have not, properly speaking, attained the status of science. How the various elements of this body of doctrine are grouped around the articles of faith becomes apparent only by that objective illative procedure, of which we are now speaking, which from two revealed truths deduces a third which has also been revealed, even at times explicitly, in Scripture or tradition. To illustrate, let us take these two statements: first, "Jesus is truly God," second, "Jesus is truly man." From these two statements there follows, by a strictly illative process, this third

statement: Jesus has two minds and two wills. And this third truth is elsewhere explicitly revealed, in the words of Jesus Himself: "Not as I will, but as Thou wilt." [261].

Now a conclusion of this kind, a conclusion revealed elsewhere, can evidently be defined by the Church as a dogma of faith. Does it follow, then, as is sometimes said, that in such cases theological reasoning is useless? Not at all. Reasoning in such cases gives us understanding of a truth which before we accepted only by faith. The characteristic of demonstration is not necessarily to discover a new truth, but to make the truth known in its source, its cause. In this kind of reasoning we realize the full force of the classic definition of theology: faith seeking self-understanding. [262] This realization is very important. [263].

6b. Theology uses reasoning, illative in the proper sense, to deduce from two revealed truths a third truth not revealed elsewhere, that is, not revealed in itself, but only in the other two truths of which it is the fruit. Thomists generally admit that such a conclusion, derived from two truths of faith, is substantially revealed, and hence can be defined as dogma. Reasoning enters here only to bring together two truths which of themselves suffice to make the third truth known. The knowledge of the third truth depends on the reasoning, not as cause, but only as condition. [264].

6c. Lastly, from one truth of faith and one of reason, theology, by a process strictly illative, deduces a third truth. Such a truth, since it is not revealed simply and properly speaking (simpliciter): is revealed only virtually, that is, in its cause. A truth of this kind, strictly deduced, lies in the domain, not of faith, but of theological science.

A subdivision enters here. In every reasoning process the major proposition, being more universal, is more important than the minor. Now, in the present kind of argument the truth of faith may be either the major or the minor. If the major is of faith, the conclusion is nearer to revelation than is a conclusion where the truth of faith forms the minor.

Many theologians, in particular many Thomists, [265] maintain that a conclusion of this kind, where either premise is a truth of reason, cannot be defined as a dogma of faith. They argue thus: Such a conclusion has, simply speaking, not been revealed. It has been revealed only in an improper sense (secundum quid): only virtually, in its cause. It is, properly speaking, a deduction from revelation. It is true, the Church can condemn the contradictory of such a conclusion, but if she does, she condemns it, not as heretical, that is, as contrary to the faith, but as erroneous, that is, contrary to an accepted theological conclusion.

Exemplifications of the six theological procedures we have now outlined appear throughout the Summa, particularly in the first question, and in the structure of all the theological treatises of St. Thomas.

The reason is now clear, we think, why we cannot admit the two contrary opinions we spoke of at the beginning of this section. Not all theological conclusions can be defined as dogmas of faith. In particular, we cannot admit that the Church can define as dogma, as simply revealed by God, a truth which is not revealed simpliciter, but

only virtually, secundum quid, in causa.

On the other hand, theology can very well reach certitude in such a conclusion which lies in its own proper domain, which is more than a conclusion of metaphysics placed at the service of theology. Further, the most important task of theology is evidently not the drawing of these conclusions, but rather the explanation of the truths of faith themselves, penetration into their deeper meaning, into their mutual relation and subordination. In this task theology has, as aids, the gifts of knowledge and wisdom, by which theological labor becomes more penetrating and savorous. Conclusions are thus sought, not for their own sake, but as a road to more perfect understanding of the truths of faith. Such labor, manifesting the deep inner power of faith, is proportioned to the scope so beautifully expressed by the Council of the Vatican: to attain, God granting, some understanding of the mysteries, an understanding in every way most fruitful. [266].

Article Three: The Evolution Of Dogma

The conception of theology outlined in the foregoing pages, though it denies the definability of theological conclusions properly so called, still occupies an important place in the evolution of dogma.

St. Thomas is certainly not unacquainted with dogmatic progress. Let us but recall his remarks concerning venatio ("hunting"): in his commentary on the Later Analytics, [267] on how to find, first a definition that is merely nominal (quid nominis): which expresses a confused notion of the thing to be defined, and, second, how to pass from this nominal definition to one that is clear, distinct and real. The most important task both of philosophy and of theology lies in this methodic step from the confused concept of common sense (or of Christian sense) to a concept that is clear and distinct. This process is not that from premise to conclusion. Rather, we deal with one concept all the way through, a concept, at first generic, becoming by precision specific, and then, by induction, distinguished from concepts which more or less closely resemble it. In this fashion have been reached the precise definitions now prevailing, of substance, of life, of man, of soul, of intellect, of will, of free will, of all the various virtues.

This same conceptual analysis has furnished great contributions to the refining of concepts indispensable in dogmatic formulas, of being, say, created and uncreated, of unity, of truth, of goodness, ontological and moral; concepts, further, of analogy relative to God, of divine wisdom, of the divine will, of uncreated love, of providence, of predestination; or again, of nature, of person, of relation, in giving precise formulas to the teaching on the Trinity and the Incarnation; of grace, free will, merit, sin, virtue, faith, hope, charity, justification; of sacrament, character, sacramental grace, transubstantiation, contrition; of beatitude, pain in purgatory and in hell, and so on.

Thus we see that immense conceptual labor is pre-required before we can proceed to deduce theological conclusions. Confused concepts, expressed in nominal definitions or in current terms of Scripture and tradition, must become distinct and precise, if we would refute the heresies that deform revelation itself. Long schooling is needed before we can grasp the profound import, sublimity, and fertility of the

principles which faith gives us.

Here lies the most important contribution of theological science to dogmatic development. And the degree of merit which a theological system will have in efficacious promotion of this development will depend on the universality of its synthesis. A synthesis generated from the idea of God, author of all things in the order both of nature and of grace, must necessarily be universal, whereas a synthesis dominated by particular, partial, and subordinated concepts, the free will of man, say, cannot reach a true universality, attainable only under a spiritual sun which illumines all parts of the system.

As image of the relation between theological systems and faith, we suggest a polygon inscribed in a circle. The circle stands for the simplicity and superiority of the doctrines of faith. The inscribed polygon, with its many angles, contains the rich details of the theological system. The polygon traced by Nominalism differs by far from that initiated by St. Augustine and elaborated by St. Thomas. But even if it is conceived as perfect as possible, the polygon can never have the transcendent simplicity of the circle. Theology, likewise, the more it advances, the more does it humiliate itself before the superiority of that faith which it never ceases to set in relief. Theology is a commentary ever drawing attention to the word of God which it comments on. Theology, like the Baptist, forgets itself in the cry: Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.

Chapter 7: The Proofs Of God's Existence

To show the structure and style of the treatise De Deo uno, as that treatise is found in the Summa, as understood by the Thomistic school, our first consideration must be given to the proofs there given for God's existence, since these proofs are starting points in deducing all divine attributes. Next, we will dwell on the pre-eminence of the Deity, and the nature and limits of our knowledge, natural and supernatural, of that divine nature. The last chapters, then, will speak of God's wisdom, of His will and His love, of providence and predestination.

In the Summa, St. Thomas reassumes, from a higher viewpoint, proofs for God's existence already given by Aristotle, Plato, Neo-Platonists, and Christian philosophers. After a synthetic exposition of these five arguments, we will examine their validity and point of culmination.

1. Synthetic Exposition

Examining these five ways, the saint finds in them generic types under which all other proofs may be ranged. We have given elsewhere [268] a long exposition of this problem.

St. Thomas does not admit that an a priori proof of God's existence can be given. [269] He grants indeed that the proposition, God exists, is in itself evident, and would therefore be self-evident to us if we had a priori face-to-face knowledge of God; then we would see that His essence includes existence, not merely as an object

of abstract thought, but as a reality objectively present. [270] But in point of fact we have no such a priori knowledge of God. [271] We must begin with a nominal definition of God, conceiving Him only confusedly, as the first source of all that is real and good in the world. From this abstract knowledge, so far removed from direct intuition of God's essence, we cannot deduce a priori His existence as a concrete fact.

It is true we can know a priori the truth of this proposition: If God exists in fact, then He exists of Himself. But in order to know that He exists in fact, we must begin with existences which we know by sense experience, and then proceed to see if these concrete existences necessitate the actual objective existence of a First Cause, corresponding to our abstract concept, our nominal definition of God. [272].

This position, the position of moderate realism, is intermediary, between the agnosticism of Hume on the one hand, and, on the other, that excessive realism, which in varying degree we find in Parmenides, Plato, and the Neoplatonists, and which in a certain sense reappears in St. Anselm, and later, much accentuated, in Spinoza, in Malebranche and the Ontologists, who believe that they have an intuition and not merely an abstract concept of God's nature.

The five classical proofs for God's existence rest, one and all, on the one principle of causality, expressed in ever deepening formulas, as follows. First: whatever begins has a cause. Second: every contingent thing, even if it should be ab aeterno, depends on a cause which exists of itself. Third: that which has a share in existence depends ultimately on a cause which is existence itself, a cause whose very nature is to exist, which alone can say: I am who am. Wherever, then, we do not find this identity, wherever we find composition, union between essence and existence, there we must mount higher, for union presupposes unity.

Most simply expressed, causality means: the more does not come from the less, the more perfect cannot be produced by the less perfect. In the world we find things which reach existence and then disappear, things whose life is temporary and perishable, men whose wisdom or goodness or holiness is limited and imperfect; then above all this limited perfection we must find at the summit Him who from all eternity is self-existing perfection, who is life itself, wisdom itself, goodness itself, holiness itself.

To deny this is to affirm that the more comes from the less, that the intelligence of a genius, that the goodness of a saint, come from blind material fatality. In this general formula are contained all a posteriori proofs, all founded on the principle of causality.

To see the validity of these arguments we may recall here what was said above on the law of necessary subordination in causes. In looking for the cause here and now required for this and that existent reality, we cannot have recourse to causes that no longer exist. Without grandfather and father this son would not exist. But he can now exist, though they and all his ancestors may be dead. They too, like himself, were contingent, not necessary, and, like him, compel us to look for a cause that gave them existence. They had each received existence, life, intelligence. None among them, progenitor or descendant, could ever say: I am the life. In all forms of

life the same principle holds good. The first source, the first ancestor, would have to be its own cause. [273].

Further, must we admit at all that contingent existences necessarily had a beginning? St. Thomas says: No, this is a question of past fact which we cannot know a priori. [274] But contingent existence, though it should be without beginning, can simply not be conceived without origin, without a cause, which had and has an unreceived existence and life, the eternal source of received existence and life.

The saint gives us an illustration. The footprint on the sand presupposes the foot from which it came, but if the foot were eternally placed on the sand, the footprint too would be eternal, without beginning, but not without origin. The priority of the foot is a priority, not of time and duration, but of origin and causality. Thus the whole world, with or without beginning, has its origin in the Supreme Cause. [275].

The cause demanded by existing facts, therefore, is not to be found in a series accidentally subordinated, in which previous causes are just as poor as subsequent causes, whose order itself might have been inverted. [276] The cause necessarily required for this existing fact can be found only in a series of causes essentially subordinated, and here and now actually existing. This is what metaphysicians term the "search for the proper cause," that is, the cause necessarily required here and now for the effect in question. This is the meaning of the words: Any effect suffices to show that its proper causes exists. [277] We do not say "that its proper cause once existed." From a son's actual existence we cannot conclude that his father still exists. The son's existence which, in becoming, in fieri, at the moment of generation depended on the father's existence, does not thus depend quoad esse, for continued existence. [278].

This dependence of effect on its proper cause is as necessary and immediate as is the dependence of characteristic properties on the nature of the circle, from which they are derived. Illustrative examples: the murderer murders, light illuminates, fire heats.

Let us see this principle at work in the first of the five ways of proving God's existence. Motion is not self-existent; we instinctively ask for the source, the moving agent. If motion is not self-explanatory, then nothing else that is in motion is self-explanatory. Hence the proper cause of motion is something that is not in motion, an unmoved mover, the source of all movement, of all change, local, quantitative, qualitative, vital, intellectual, voluntary, a mover which is its own uncaused and unreceived activity.

In illustration, take an example already given: the sailor supported, in ascending order, by the ship, by the waves, by the earth, by the sun, by some still higher cosmic center. Here we have a series of causes, necessarily subordinated and here and now existent. Were there here no ultimate and supreme center, no unmoved mover, then there could not be any intermediate center, and the fact we started from would be nonexistent. For the whole universe, with its all but numberless movements and intermediate sources of movement, you still need a supreme mover, just as necessarily, to illustrate, as you need a spring in your watch if the hands are to move. The wheels in the watch, whether few or many, can move the hands only so far as they are themselves moved by the spring. This proof is valid. But a wrong

conception of causality can render it invalid. [279].

Let us now look at the five different ways on which St. Thomas follows the applications of the principle of causality.

1. If movement is not self-explanatory, whether the movement is corporeal or spiritual, it necessitates a first mover.

2. If interconnected efficient causes are here and now actually operating, air and warmth, say, to preserve my life, then there must be a supreme cause from which here and now these causes derive their preservative causality.

3. If there exist contingent beings, which can cease to exist, then there must be a necessary being which cannot cease to exist, which of itself has existence, and which, here and now, gives existence to these contingent beings. If once nothing at all existed, there would not be now, or ever, anything at all in existence. To suppose all things contingent, that is, of themselves non-existent, is to suppose an absurdity.

4. If there are beings in the world which differ in their degree of nobility, goodness, and truth, it is because they have but a share, a part, because they participate diversely, in existence, in nobility, goodness, and truth. Hence there is, in each of them, a composition, a union, between the subject which participates and the perfection, existence, goodness, truth, which are participated to them. Now composition, union, presupposes the unity which it participates. [280] Hence, at the summit, there must be one cause, one source of all perfection, who alone can say, not merely "I have existence, truth, and life," but rather "I am existence, truth, and life."

5. Lastly, if we find in the world, inanimate and animated, natural activities manifestly proportioned to a purpose, this proportioned fitness presupposes an intelligence which produces and preserves this purposeful tendency. If the corporeal world tends to a cosmic center of cohesion, if plant and animal tend naturally to assimilation and reproduction, if the eye is here for vision and the ear for hearing, feet for walking and wings for flying; if human intelligence tends to truth and human will to good, and if each man by nature longs for happiness, then necessarily these natural tendencies, so manifestly ordained to a proportioned good, a proportioned purpose, presuppose a supreme ordinator, a supreme intelligence, which knows and controls the raison d'etre of all things and this supreme ordinator must be wisdom itself and truth itself. For again, union presupposes unity, presupposes absolute identity. A thing uncaused, says St. Thomas, [281] is of itself, and immediately (i. e.: without intermediary) being itself, one by nature, not by participation. [282].

2. Fundamental Validity Of The Five Ways

All these proofs rest on the principle of causality: Anything that exists, if it does not exist of itself, depends in last analysis on something that does exist of itself. To deny this principle leads to absurdity. To say "a thing contingent, that is, a thing which of itself does not have existence, is nevertheless uncaused" is equivalent to saying: A thing may exist of itself and simultaneously not exist of itself. Existence of itself would belong to it, both necessarily and impossibly. Existence would be an

inseparable predicate of a being which can be separated from existence. All this is absurd, unintelligible. Kant here objects. It is absurd, he says, for human intelligence, but not perhaps in itself absurd and unintelligible.

In answer, let us define absurdity. Absurd is that which cannot exist because it is beyond the bounds of objective reality, without any possible relation to reality. It is agreement between two terms which objectively can never agree. Thus, an uncaused union of things in themselves diverse is absurd. [283] The only cause of union is unity. [284] Union means a share in unity, because it presupposes things which are diverse, brought together by a higher unity. When you say: "Anything (from angel to grain of sand) can arise without any cause from absolute nothing," then you are making a statement which is not merely unsupported and gratuitous, but which is objectively absurd. Hence, we repeat: A being which is not self-existent, which only participates in existence, presupposes necessarily a Being which by nature is self-existent. Unity by participation presupposes unity by essence. [285].

We have here presented the principle of causality, as St. Thomas does in question three, by the way that ascends from effect to cause. [286] The same truth can be treated in the descending order, from cause to effect, [287] as it is in fact treated later in the Summa. [288] Many modern authors proceed from this second viewpoint. But the first order ought to precede the second. [289].

To proceed. The denial of the principle of causality is not, it is true, a contradiction as immediately evident as if I were to say: "The contingent is not contingent." St. Thomas [290] gives the reason why this is so. In denying causality, he says, we do not deny the definition itself of the contingent. What we do deny is, not the essence [291] Of the contingent, but an immediate characteristic (proprium) [292] Of that essence. But to deny the principle as thus explained is as absurd as to affirm that we cannot, knowing the essence of a thing (e. g.: of a circle): deduce from that essence its characteristics. Hence to deny essential dependence of contingent being on its cause leads to absurdity, because such denial involves the affirmation that existence belongs positively to a thing which is not by nature self-existent and still is uncaused. Thus we would have, in one subject, the presence both of unessential existence and of non-dependence on any cause of its existence: a proposition objectively absurd.

But we find the denial of this principle of causality in ways that are still less evidently contradictory (in Spinoza, for example) where the contradiction is, at first sight, hidden and unapparent. To illustrate. Some who read the sentence, "Things incorporeal can of themselves occupy a place," cannot at once see that the sentence contains a contradiction. And still it is absurd to think that a spirit, which lives in an order higher than the order of quantity and space, should nevertheless be conceived as of itself filling place, place being a consequence of quantity and space. [293].

Likewise there are contradictions which emerge only under the light of revelation. Suppose, as illustration, a man says there are four persons in God. Faith, not reason, tells us the proposition is absurd. Only those who enjoy the beatific vision, who know what God is, can see the proposition's intrinsic absurdity.

If denial or doubt of the principle of causality leads to doubt or denial of the

principle of contradiction, then the five classic proofs, truly understood, of God's existence cannot be rejected without finding absurdity at the root of all reality. We must choose: either the Being who exists necessarily and eternally, who alone can say "I am truth and life," or then a radical absurdity at the heart of the universe. If truly God is necessary Being, on which all else depends, then without Him the existence of anything else becomes impossible, inconceivable, absurd. In point of fact, those who will not admit the existence of a supreme and universal cause, which is itself existence and life, must content themselves with a creative evolution, which, lacking any raison d'etre, becomes a contradiction: universal movement, without subject distinct from itself, without efficient cause distinct from itself, without a goal distinct from itself, an evolution wherein, without cause, the more arises from the less. Contradiction, identity, causality, all first principles go overboard. Let us repeat. Without a necessary and eternal being, on which all else depends, nothing exists and nothing can exist. To deny God's existence and simultaneously to affirm any existence is to fall necessarily into contradiction, which does not always appear on the surface, in the immediate terms employed, but which is always there if you will but examine those terms. Many of Spinoza's conclusions contain these absurdities. A fortiori, they lie hidden in atheistic doctrine which denies God's existence. Hence agnosticism, which doubts God's existence, can thereby be led to doubt even the first principle of thought and reality, the principle of contradiction.

Having thus shown the validity of the five ways to prove God's existence we now turn to dwell on their unity, the point where they all converge and culminate.

3. Point Of Culmination

This point is found in the idea of self-subsistent being. [294] This idea unifies the five ways as a common keystone unifies five arches. Five attributes appear, one at the end of each way, in ascending order thus: first mover of the universe, corporeal and spiritual, first efficient cause, first necessary being, supreme being, supreme directing intelligence. Now these five attributes are to be found only in self-subsistent being, who alone can say: "I am who am." Let us look at each of the five.

The prime mover must be his own activity. But mode of activity follows mode of being. Hence the prime mover must be his own subsistent being.

The first cause, being uncaused, must have in itself the reason for its existence. But the reason why it cannot cause itself is that it must be before it can cause. Hence, not having received existence, it must be existence.

The first necessary being also implies existence as an essential attribute, that is, it cannot be conceived as merely having existence, but must be existence.

The supreme being, being absolutely simple and perfect, cannot have a mere participated share of existence, but must be of itself existence.

Lastly, the supreme directing intelligence cannot be itself proportioned to an object other than itself; it must itself be the object actually and always known. Hence it must be able to say, not merely "I have truth and life," but rather "I am truth and life."