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# What Kind of 'Proofs' are Aquinas's Demonstrations of God's Existence?

*Jonathan Bieler*

In order to understand the importance of the demonstrations of God's existence in the second *quaestio* of the *Summa Theologiae*, we need to follow the guidelines of interpretation that Aquinas himself provides in the chapters previous to the account of the five ways.[1] Otherwise we cannot understand the text properly. Indeed, we naturally expect universal validity and necessity from an argument labeled as a proof. But things are not as simple as that in the *Summa Theologiae*. In this paper, I would like to argue that, in order to evaluate the demonstrations of God's existence in the *Summa Theologiae*, it is necessary to understand the idea of *scientia*, which Aquinas develops in his commentary on Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*. Helpful for my reasoning was John I. Jenkins, *Knowledge and Faith in Thomas Aquinas*.[2] In a further step, I would like to turn to the principle of any *scientia*, the intellect, and elaborate how Aquinas's whole metaphysics of being can serve as a proof of God's existence.

## The Concept of *Scientia*

The concept of *scientia* in Aquinas is a complex one, and we need to turn to the basics of medieval Aristotelian epistemology in order to understand it. Every *scientia* is concerned with the subject matter (*subiectum genus*) it considers.[3] Metaphysics considers being in general (*ens commune*), its attributes as well as its principles, and even its extrinsic causes. In any given *scientia* the subject matter always stays the same.[4] In the course of scientific reasoning the essence of the subject and its attributes are further analyzed and illuminated.[5] Naturally, this

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[1] *Sum. theol.*, 1a, q. 1, a. 3.
[2] John I. Jenkins, *Knowledge and Faith in Thomas Aquinas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
[3] Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, 76b 13. Cited in Jenkins, *Knowledge and Faith*, 13.
[4] Thomas Aquinas, *Expositio in libros Metaphysicorum*, Prooemium.
[5] *Post. Anal.*, lib. 1, l. 18, n. 9: "Omnis enim scientia demonstrativa est circa tria: quorum unum est genus subiectum, cuius per se passiones [principles of the essence] scrutantur, et aliud est

is not accomplished in a random fashion, but according to first and common principles. The scientist reasons from the principles of the subject matter to its attributes by means of syllogisms.[6] Principles are twofold: the common and fundamental ones, which are observed in every scientific demonstration, e. g. the principle of non-contradiction; and the specific ones, which consist of the definitions of the subject matter,[7] e. g. the definition of *ens* as "that which has being (*esse*)."[8] The first principles refer to the formal aspect, the specific ones to the material aspect of a scientific syllogism. Perfect scientific knowledge is certain knowledge[9] and it is attained through syllogisms and conclusions which strictly adhere to these specific principles and can be resolved according to the first principles.[10] The premises in an ideal scientific demonstration have to meet certain standards. If the premises are true, first, immediate, better known and prior to as well ascauses of the conclusion,[11] then they are valid and the syllogism is demonstrative.[12] All of these conditions have to be fulfilled for a demonstration to be a scientific proof in the full sense.[13] These conditions, especially the last three (i. e., better known, prior and causal), are closely related and to understand one of them helps to understand the others.

In a common syllogism premises do not have to meet any conditions. But since *scientia* is of real objects, premises have to be true, which means the described features of the object really have to exist.[14] No true knowledge can be reached if a *scientia* starts from false premises.[15] The same essential commensurability of the premises and the conclusions holds for the next two conditions of premises: priority and causality. A conclusion cannot be proven with premises that have no demonstrative force. Aquinas calls the *first* and *immediate* premises *indemonstrabilia*, which means that they cannot be proven

communes dignitates [first principles], ex quibus sicut ex primis demonstrat, tertium autem passiones [attributes], de quibus unaquaeque scientia accipit quid significant." See Albert Zimmermann, "Ontologie oder Metaphysik? Untersuchungen über den Gegenstand der Metaphysik im 13. und 14. Jahrhundert," in *Recherches de Théologie et Philosophie médiévales. Bibliotheca 1* (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 200-223.

[6] *Post. Anal.*, lib. 1, l. 7, n. 6: "Scientia est conclusionum et intellectus principiorum."

[7] *Post. Anal.*, lib. 1, l. 43, n. 13: "Duplicia sunt principia. Quaedam ex quibus primo demonstratur, sicut primae dignitates, ut quod non contingit idem esse et non esse. Et iterum sunt quaedam principia circa quae sunt scientiae, scilicet subiecta scientiarum; quia definitionibus subiecti utimur ut principiis in demonstrationibus. Illa ergo prima ex quibus demonstratur, sunt communia omnibus scientiis: sed principia circa quae sunt scientiae, sunt propria cuilibet scientiae, sicut numerus arithmeticae, et magnitudo geometriae. Principia autem communia oportet ad haec propria applicari ad hoc quod demonstretur."

[8] *In. Met.*, lib. 12, l. 1, n. 4: "Ens dicitur quasi esse habens."

[9] *Post. Anal.*, lib. 1, l. 4, n. 5.

[10] *Post. Anal.*, lib. 1, l. 4, n. 9: "Cum scire nihil aliud esse videatur, quam intelligere veritatem alicuius conclusionis per demonstrationem."

[11] *Post. Anal.*, lib. 1, l. 4, n. 10.

[12] Jenkins, *Faith and Knowledge*, 20.

[13] For further explanation of the whole topic, see ibid., 11-50.

[14] *Post. Anal.*, lib. 1, l. 4, n. 13: "Nam esse et esse verum convertuntur."

[15] Ibid.: "Conclusionem demonstrationis, quae facit scire, oportet esse veram, et per consequens eius propositiones [premises]: non enim contingit verum sciri ex falsis, etsi concludi possit ex eis."

because they are self-evident. They are the first principles, such as the principle of non-contradiction,[16] which indicates that something cannot both be and not be at the same time and in the same respect. If there were no such self-explanatory first principles, an infinite regress would take place in demonstrations,[17] so that no probative force could be reached at all in any demonstrative syllogisms. To achieve assent to a demonstrative conclusion from any listener, one has to proceed from truths already commonly assented to and naturally affirmed. These are the first and immediate truths or principles.

A conclusion weighs as a proof if its premise is its *cause*.[18] How are we to understand the causal relationship between the premise and the conclusion? The premise originates from an intellectual judgment about the nature of the subject matter which is expressed in a verbal proposition, e. g., "man is a rational animal." This proposition is called a specific principle. It does not express all the features of the essence at once, but a constitutive part of it, at best the definition(s). It is obvious that a science can hardly ever be called perfect, since true definitions are hard to find. Further attributes derived from such a definitional premise count as essential (*per se*) if they can be shown to be caused by this definition that describes an essential principle of the object itself. This causal relationship between the premise and the conclusion is not to be understood in a mere cognitive way. It rather mirrors the true causal structure of the object itself. Yet it is not the case that the verbal definition itself is a cause, but that for which it stands: the essential principle, in the case of a human being the rational part of the soul, is the real essential principle and cause of essential attributes that logically follow from it. Thus the causal relationship between premise and conclusion should have a foundation in reality itself. If the syllogism, then, is a mirror of the causal structure of reality, it can be labeled as a proof. The term ontology expresses what is meant here: logic according to being.

Aquinas gives the example of a solar eclipse.[19] We see that the sun is eclipsed, but in order to have *scientia* of this fact we need to know its causes. When we know that the different orbits of the earth and the moon cause periodical eclipses, then we have *scientia*. We can then logically prove why things are as they are and why they cannot be otherwise, because *scientia* is certain knowledge.[20] Through *scientia* of a solar eclipse one can therefore even anticipate the times when the moon will be interposed between the earth and the sun, because their orbits are known. If causes are constant then effects

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[16] Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1005b 19-20.

[17] *Post. Anal.*, lib. 1, l. 4, n. 14: "Cum in demonstrationibus non sit abire in infinitum, tandem erit devenire ad aliqua immediata et indemonstrabilia."

[18] *Post. Anal.*, lib. 1, l. 4, n. 15: "[Aristoteles] probat quod demonstrationis propositiones sint causae conclusionis, quia tunc scimus, cum causas cognoscimus. Et ex hoc concludit ulterius quod sint *priores* et *notiores*, quia omnis causa est naturaliter prior et notior suo effectu."

[19] Ibid.

[20] *Post. Anal.*, lib. 1, l. 4, n. 5: "Scientia est etiam certa cognitio rei; quod autem contingit aliter se habere, non potest aliquis per certitudinem cognoscere; ideo ulterius oportet quod id quod scitur non possit aliter se habere."

necessarily follow, therefore *scientia* is of necessary things.[21] In a perfect *scientia* the premises of a demonstrative syllogism signify real causes prior in the order of things and therefore better known *per se*, in itself.[22] Jenkins writes: "This inference from *A causes B* to *A is better known than B*, which initially seems quite odd to us, is explained by the *Posterior Analytics's* distinction between what is better known *simpliciter* and *quoad nos*, or to us."[23] Aquinas says: "And because prior and better known are said in two senses, namely 'to us' and 'by nature,' Aristotle thereupon says that those propositions [premises] from which a demonstration proceeds are prior and better known simpliciter and by nature, but not to us. And to elucidate this Aristotle says that what are prior and better known simpliciter are those things which are removed from sense perception, while the things better known to us are closer to sense perception—viz. particulars."[24]

Causes are therefore first in being but last in understanding, since the first step in cognition is the sensible perception.[25] We firstly perceive the mere fact that the sun is suddenly dark at daytime and we have no explanation of this fact yet. Natural causes are thus intelligible in a higher sense than effects, because in them the effects are implicitly contained.[26] But effects are better known to us, because they are immediately evident to our senses. Therefore intellectual progress towards the ontological causes starts with sensible perception[27] and in order to apprehend the causes we have to go beyond sensible facts.

Aquinas, therefore, knows two ways in which something is known *per se*. A cause is known *per se* in itself, because it contains the meaning of the effect it produces. Yet we more evidently perceive sensible things, i. e. effects, which makes them known *per se to us*. Our intellect then turns in a second step towards the possible or real causes and thinks about them. There seems to be a tension between two different orders: the order of human knowledge and the order of being. What is first in each order is regarded as better known either according to an apprehension which grasps being more evidently in its real causal order or according to the human knowledge from sense perception. A proof in the strict sense needs to be constructed of premises that mirror the real causal order of things in order to have demonstrative power

A scientific proof thus requires that its propositions are true, first, immediate, better known *per se* in itself and *not* to us, thus prior as well as causes of the conclusion. Do the five "proofs" of God's existence in the *Summa Theologiae* fulfill these six requirements?

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[21] *Post. Anal.*, lib. 1, l. 4, n. 7: "De quo simpliciter habetur scientia, oportet esse necessarium, scilicet quod non contingat aliter se habere."
[22] Ibid., lib. 1, l. 4, n. 15.
[23] Jenkins, *Faith and Knowledge*, 42.
[24] Cited in ibid., 42.
[25] *De ver*., q. 1, a. 11 co.
[26] *Post. Anal.*, lib. 1, l. 4, n. 4: "Conclusionem praescimus in principiis."
[27] *Post. Anal.*, lib. 1, l. 4, n. 16: "Cognitio autem sensitiva est in nobis prior intellectiva, quia intellectualis cognitio ex sensu procedit in nobis."

## The *Demonstratio Quia* of God's Existence in the *Summa Theologiae*

Interestingly, the distinction between better known *secundum naturam* (*per s*e in itself) and *quoad nos* is put forward again in an article in the same *quaestio* as the "five ways"[28] and even in the very first *quaestio* of the *Summa Theologiae*.[29] According to Aquinas, we cannot know who God is, although God is known *per se* in himself. And since he has no causes which we could know and use to prove his existence, the only way that remains for us is to approach God through his effects.[30] A demonstration from effects is called *demonstratio quia*, which serves for showing *that* some cause has to exist.[31]

If mere effects are taken as premises of a demonstration, only the simplest of the six conditions mentioned above is fulfilled. The premises are indeed true—but certainly neither first and immediate principles, nor causes, nor prior, nor better known *per se* in themselves. What's the point in calling this a proof? It seems like this kind of demonstration inverts the order of the real world towards the order of human cognition.

The essence of the Christian God lies outside the scope of a *demonstratio quia* because it is impossible for the human intellect to totally grasp God's essence.[32] Aquinas only takes into account what is commonly denominated by the *word* "God" and places it as the essence that has to be demonstrated to exist.[33] What the word "God" means, is taken from his created effects that have a certain perfection.[34]

The formal kind of demonstration we have here is clearly situated in Aquinas's concept of *scientia*. It is just the first step in a whole process of scientific preoccupation with any subject matter. A scientist has to show first that his subject matter exists, before he can start to investigate what its essence is.[35] He needs to lay a firm ground through a *demonstratio quia*, so that the object under investigation is not a merely assumed one.[36] The title of the article in the

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[28] *Sum. theol.*, 1a, q. 2, a. 1.

[29] *Sum. theol.*, 1a, q. 1, a. 5, ad 1: "Nihil prohibet illud quod est certius secundum naturam, esse quoad nos minus certum, propter debilitatem intellectus nostri."

[30] *Sum. theol.*, 1a, q. 2, a. 2: "Cum enim effectus aliquis est nobis manifestior quam sua causa, per effectum procedimus ad cognitionem causae."

[31] Ibid.

[32] *Sum. theol.*, 1a, q. 2, a. 1: "Nos non scimus de Deo quid est."

[33] Ibid.: "Demonstrando Deum esse per effectum, accipere possumus pro medio quid significet hoc nomen Deus."

[34] *Sum. theol.*, 1a, q. 13, a. 2, ad 3: "Cognoscimus [essentiam dei] secundum quod repraesentatur in perfectionibus creaturarum."

[35] Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, 89b 31-35. See *Post. Anal.*, lib. 1, l. 2, n. 5: "Antequam sciatur de aliquo an sit, non potest sciri proprie de eo quid est: non entium enim non sunt definitiones. Unde quaestio, an est, praecedit quaestionem, quid est. Sed non potest ostendi de aliquo an sit, nisi prius intelligatur quid significatur per nomen."

[36] *C. Gentiles*, 1, cap. 9, n. 8: "Praemittendum est quasi totius operis [i.e. scientia of sacra doctrina] necessarium fundamentum, consideratio qua demonstratur Deum esse. Quo non habito omnis consideratio de rebus divinis necessario tollitur."

*Summa Theologiae* where Aquinas puts forward his "five ways" corresponds exactly to the first formal question in scientific reasoning: *An est* or *utrum est*: whether the object exists at all. The answer cannot provide a "proof" in the strict sense, because there is no knowledge yet what the "proven" object really is and what its causes are. A proof would be pointless. One indication of the existence of a thing is the fact that a word exists at all for the diffusely anticipated subject. Aquinas answers the following question in his demonstrations of the existence of God: "Does the word 'God' signify something that exists in the real world at all?"

Such a demonstration is understandably not fully convincing to the modern reader. What is meant by the word "God"? According to Aquinas, names are imposed on God from his effects.[37] Since there are plenty of effects, everyone would then have a different notion of God. Some philosophers would even say that there is no God at all because they take effects as first causes. What Aquinas means by the word "God" is "the first cause of all things". This shapes his perspective on everything else.

In order to show conclusively that a subject exists, one has to know the causes of its existence.[38] But if God is the one who has no cause, since he is understood as the first cause, and we don't know his essence, his existence cannot be demonstrated with full persuasiveness. It is not God in his essence that is demonstrated, but the truth of the proposition "God (the first cause) exists." That is why an atheist may not be touched by such a "proof", because God in his living glory is not made visible.

This kind of demonstration can only be compelling if causality is accepted in an Aristotelian (and Thomistic) sense, for the five ways are founded on this concept of causality. Philosophers such as Kant, who refuse this kind of causality, end up completely denying the demonstrative force of Aquinas's demonstrations.[39] According to Leon Elders four of the five ways respond to the four kinds of causes.[40] The third way is not classified. In it Aquinas argues that if there are only possible things, they would at one point in time not exist, since possible things can sometimes be and sometimes not be. From a possible nothingness nothing can emerge. Therefore at least one necessary principle is required to explain these possible things or effects. Thus possibility presupposes necessity. In order for anything to be possible something must be necessary.[41]
This is the lifeblood of Aquinas's *demonstrationes quia*: a necessary cause must exist to explain the existence of sensible effects. We call that cause "God", the

[37] *Sum. theol.*, 1a, q. 2, a. 2: "Nomina Dei imponunter ab effectibus."
[38] *Post. Anal.*, lib. 1, l. 4, n. 15: "Oportet autem quod causa conclusionis demonstrativae sit notior, non solum quantum ad cognitionem *quid est*, sed etiam quantum ad cognitionem *quia est*."
[39] To the problems resulting from the rejection of causality, see: Martin Bieler, "Causality and Freedom" in *Communio International Catholic Review 32* (Fall 2005): 407-434.
[40] (1) *causa materialis*; (2) *causa efficiens*; (4) *causa formalis*; (5) *causa finalis*. Leon Elders, *Die Metaphysik des Thomas von Aquin in historischer Perspektive*, (Salzburg: Anton Pustet, 1987), 91.
[41] *Sum. theol.*, 1a, q. 2, a. 3.

"first cause."[42] Nothing is said yet about who God is in himself. Thus this notion of God is still entirely philosophical. Given the Aristotelian concept of causality, a first cause is logically necessary. This implies that in such a demonstration, faith is not involved. It is through the *natural light* of the intellect that we can move from effects better known to us to the cause which produces these effects. Since faith does not yet come into play, the five ways are preambles to the articles of faith and debatable with philosophical means.[43]

Aquinas acknowledges the weakness of our natural intellect to apprehend God's essence and consequently smashes the hope of every fundamentalist Christian of finally being able to forcibly convince all atheists of the irrefutable existence of the God of the Bible.[44] In his view, it is not possible to prove *who* this "God" is with simply rational arguments. Yet just as we come to an understanding of a person when we consider his or her actions or effects, so we can understand something of God on the basis of his actions or effects.

God is the cause of all beings.[45] Therefore all the things in the world, his effects, can lead us to knowledge about him.[46] It is the challenge of every non-atheistic metaphysics to give an account of the way in which God causes beings. How God is seen to relate to his creation is at the same time a statement about God. If God is defined as the first mechanical-like mover, beings cannot bear a strong resemblance to him. Aquinas has a refined concept of how God brings beings into being. Nowadays it is insufficient to solely reflect upon the concept of causality to describe the relation of God and the world of beings, because some thinkers deem the scheme of cause and effect to be inflexible and banal. Is this seemingly impersonal scheme irreconcilable with the loving Christian God, who deeply cares for his creation? I think neither Aristotle, the discoverer of the four causes, nor Aquinas would have answered this question affirmatively.

Aristotle was close to everyday-language and reality. He developed the four causes on the basis of the procedure of a craftsman making a statue. The four causes are thus derived from a process of production. One can therefore say that the production of the world and the four causes are intimately connected.[47] Creation is primary, because there is more to it than mere causality. As is well-known, Aristotle did not conceive the world as a creation from nothing; it was eternal for him. Both Aristotle and Aquinas conceived sensible objects as beings, yet only the latter saw an analogy between the craftsman making a statue and God bringing into being. Thus Aquinas could apply the whole concept of

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[42] *C. Gentiles*, lib. 1, l. 4, n. 3: "Sed esse divini non potest aliqua causa: quia ipse est necesse per seipsum."
[43] *Sum. theol.*, 1a, q. 2, a. 2, ad 1.
[44] Cf. 2 Cor 12:9-10.
[45] *C. Gentiles*, lib. 2, cap. 15, n. 3: "Ipse [Deus] est causa omnium de quibus ens praedicatur."
[46] *Sum. theol.*, 1a, q. 44, a. 3: "Deus est prima causa exemplaris omnium rerum. . . . Manifestum est autem quod ea quae naturaliter fiunt, determinatas formas consequuntur. Haec autem formarum determinatio oportet quod reducatur, sicut in primum principium, in divinam sapientiam, quae ordinem universi excogitavit, qui in rerum distinctione consistit. Et ideo oportet dicere quod in divina sapientia sunt rationes omnium rerum."
[47] See Bieler, "Causality and Freedom," 424-27.

causality to creation and apprehend creation as primary,[48] whereas Aristotle deemed "God" primarily as the final cause, to which things move as though toward an end.

For Aquinas the causes are grounded in being and creation. He expresses the primacy of being by claiming that what is first and most known by the intellect is being, *ens*,[49] not causality. At the very center of his metaphysics lies the creation as a communication of being (*esse*). Therefore the world's existence is not founded on the mere interplay of effect and cause, but rather on the relation of creator and creation, which can be looked at by means of the scheme of cause and effect.

Aquinas's argument constitutes a step which philosophy takes in accordance with theology. It is not a step that abrogates all previous thinking. Aquinas could not make such a frequent use of analogous reasoning, if he would not have continued to build on genuinely philosophical findings in his theological thinking. Aquinas says at the beginning of the *Summa Theologiae* that grace does not destroy nature, but perfects it.[50] This is why there is no opposition between philosophy and theology in Aquinas: faith perfects reason. The five ways constitute the sound connection between philosophy and theology. If it is true that no science proves the existence of its own subject, then a *demonstratio quia* of God can only belong to a philosophy[51] that opens up towards the subject of theology.

Aquinas's metaphysics of being is closely related to his theology, yet is still part of philosophy, because it does not consider God in himself but only as the cause of its subject matter, being in general (*ens commune*).[52] Accordingly, for Aquinas philosophy is not uncommunicative towards its superordinate science;[53] philosophy is like a steppingstone towards theology, analogous to the process of our knowledge, which starts with sensible things and continues with the abstraction of their immaterial forms.[54] Is it then not possible, since both sciences are compatible, to conceive of a new proof of God? We could take the most perfect effect of God in creation as its premise: *esse commune*. Wouldn't this premise possess more demonstrative power than the subordinate effects, because it is better known *per se* in itself?

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[48] *Sum. theol.*, 1a, q. 13, a. 11, ad 2: "Esse absolute praeintelligitur causae." In order to be a cause, something has to be: being comes first."

[49] *De ver.*, q. 1, a. 1: "Illud autem quod primo intellectus concipit quasi notissimum, et in quod conceptiones omnes resolvit, est ens."

[50] *Sum. theol.*, 1a, q. 1, a. 8: "Cum igitur gratia non tollat naturam, sed perficiat, oportet quod naturalis ratio subserviat fidei; sicut et naturalis inclinatio voluntatis obsequitur caritati."

[51] Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, 76b 11-16.

[52] *In Metaph.*, proem: "Eiusdem enim scientiae est considerare causas proprias ali-cuius generis et genus ipsum."

[53] *Sum. theol.*, 1a, q. 2, a. 2, ad 1: "Sic enim fides [theology] praesupponit cognitionem naturalem [philosophy], sicut gratia naturam, et ut perfectio perfectibile."

[54] *De ver.*, q. 1, a. 11: "Cognitio nostra . . . hoc ordine progreditur ut primo incipiatur in sensu et secundo perficiatur in intellectu." Ibid., ad 1: "In homine intellectus, qui est superior, aliquid accipit a sensu."

Are not *esse commune* and *ens commune* the goal the student of philosophy reaches after a long process of reasoning from effects to causes, since he proceeds from propositions better known to him or her to propositions better known *per se*?[55] It seems like here is the deeper connection between philosophy and theology that reveals itself only to the student who is advanced in philosophy. A circle closes itself here that began at the simplest effects of the first cause and concludes with the most perfect effect. As has been said above we name God from perfections. The transcendentals unfold the simple and complete perfection of being into several aspects, one of them, the *aliquid*, denoting the distinctness of beings as a perfection. Thus we can say that beings and being as a whole show forth God's perfection and we can thus take creation as a whole as the best premise for a proof of God.[56] One of God's most perfect attributes we can derive from creation is his goodness and generosity, because there is no need for God to create, because he is free.[57] He is also all-knowing because he comprehends himself, who is the cause of all. Theology is for Aquinas simply an expression of God's self-knowledge.[58] The final end of *sacra doctrina* is the *scientia* God has of all beings through knowledge of himself.[59]

The Bible teaches us that God has created man after his image (Gen 1:27). The perfections of creation, such as truth, goodness and freedom, from which we name God, are therefore revealed to us most openly in ourselves and in other human beings.[60] In the remainder of this paper, I would like to explore Aquinas's concept of being and creation a bit more and then focus particularly on the intellect as the root of freedom.[61] I hope that by exploring God's creation in the interplay between *esse* and *ens* we also learn more about God himself.[62]

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[55] Jenkins, *Faith and Knowledge*, 49: "The goal of inquiry is that we may come to grasp what is *per se notum* in itself, and reason to conclusions from these truths. We can only do this however, by undertaking a period of training under the guidance of the masters in the field, so that we may acquire the intellectual habits to apprehend what is *per se notum* as such."

[56] *Sum. theol.*, 1a, q. 13, a. 11, ad 3: "Sufficit quod imponantur [nomina divina] ab aliquibus perfectionibus procedentibus a Deo in creaturas. Inter quas prima est ipsum esse, a qua sumitur hoc nomen qui est."

[57] *In 1 Sent.*, d. 45, q. 1, a. 2, co: "Alia vero vult [Deus] in ordine ad bonitatem suam: non autem hoc modo ut per ea aliquid bonitatis acquirat . . . sed ita quod eis de bonitate sua aliquid largiatur: et ideo liberalitas est quasi proprium ipsius."

[58] *Sum. theol.*, 1a, q. 1, a. 3: "Sacra doctrina sit velut quaedam impressio divinae scientiae, quae est una et simplex omnium."

[59] *Sum. theol.*, 1a, q. 1, a. 2.

[60] See Martin Bieler, *Freiheit als Gabe. Ein schöpfungstheologischer Entwurf* (Freiburg / Basel / Wien: Herder Verlag, 1991).

[61] *De ver.*, q. 24, a. 2: "Totius libertatis radix est in ratione constituta. Unde secundum quod aliquid se habet ad rationem, sic se habet ad liberum arbitrium."

[62] For the intellect's relationship to God see: *Sum. theol.*, 1a, q. 2, a. 1, ad 1 and *De ver.*, q. 22, a. 2, ad 2: "Omnia cognoscentia cognoscunt implicite Deum in quolibet cognitione." For the connection of natural desire for God and reason see *C. Gentiles*, 1, cap. 11, n. 5.

## Being, the Word, and the Natural Light of the Intellect

Being (*esse commune*) is "pure mediation"[63] which designates the direct connection God has with created substances. Yet God's essence is his unitary subsistent being[64] which cannot be immediately participated, because that would destroy his unity in substance. Rather, he is abundant fullness and lets created beings be on their own by virtue of *esse*.[65] He has such a generative power, that his unity is not touched when he gives *esse* away. Therefore being (*esse commune*), in which all beings participate, is not God himself, because it is non-subsistent.[66] Thus beings do not exist by grace of another subject besides God.[67] *Esse* marks God's first effect in creation.[68] But since it is no subject of creation and therefore not subsistent, what is properly said to be created are substances.[69] This means that God's intent in creation is the constitution of substances and that they return to him as the giver. A substance is that which has and receives *esse.*[70] Yet it does not outwardly participate in *esse* as if it were joining a club.[71] For *esse* constitutes the substance itself[72] and its essence.[73] The other ends of creation *vis-à-vis* God are, then, the substances. *Esse* "is" only a mediative passage-way, an insubstantial bridge between beings and God, who intends to create by affirming the substance itself as such. He thus does not hold the gift of *esse* back by making it a seemingly more perfect hypostasis besides beings. Otherwise God himself would appear as a gentleman-like promoter with no real interest in beings.[74] The will of God therefore points to beings themselves, which are good,

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[63] See Ferdinand Ulrich, *Homo Abyssus. Das Wagnis der Seinsfrage* (Freiburg: Johannes Verlag, 1998), 127.

[64] *Sum. theol.*, 1a, q. 44, a. 1: "Deus est ipsum esse per se subsistens. Et iterum ostensum est quod esse subsistens non potest esse nisi unum."

[65] *Sum. theol.*, 1a, q. 12, a. 8, ad 4: "Si tamen solus Deus videretur, qui est fons et principium totius esse et veritatis."

[66] *De pot.*, q. 1, a. 1: "[E]sse [commune] significat aliquid completum et simplex sed non subsistens." See also *C. Gentiles* lib. 1, cap. 26.

[67] *Sum. theol.*, 1a, q. 45, a. 1, ad 1: "[E]sse non importat subiectum creatum."

[68] *De pot.*, q. 3, a. 4: "Primus autem effectus est ipsum esse, quod omnibus aliis effectibus praesupponitur et ipsum non praesupponit aliquem alium effectum."

[69] *Sum. theol.*, 1a, q. 45, a. 4: "Proprie vero creata sunt subsistentia." See also Ulrich, *Homo Abyssus*, 117-27.

[70] *In 12 Metaph.*, lecture 1, n. 4: "Nam ens dicitur quasi esse habens, hoc autem solum est substantia, quae subsistit." *De ver.*, q. 21, a. 5: "In creatura autem est esse receptum vel participatum."

[71] *De caus.*, l, 6: "Ens dicitur id quod finite participat esse."

[72] *Sum. theol.*, 1a, q. 50, a. 2, ad 3: "Ipsum autem esse est quo substantia est, sicut cursus est quo aliquid currit."

[73] *Sum. theol.*, 1a, q. 29, a. 2, ad 4: "Et ideo convenientius fuit quod in definitione personae, quae est singulare alicuius generis determinati, uteretur nomine naturae, quam *essentiae, quae sumitur ab esse,* quod est communissimum." (Italics are mine.)

[74] See Ulrich, *Homo Abyssus*, 26-46. Ulrich points to the *ratio boni* of the non-subsistence of being (*esse*).

because God only wants what is good.[75] The good of beings, i. e. their beatitude, in turn consists in God whom they imitate[76] and to whom they return.

*Esse*, which is never to be separated from its end-point, beings that return to God, is the first[77] and most perfect[78] effect of God and thus expresses his goodness most adequately.[79] Yet it does not express God in the same manner as a subject expresses its own nature, which would be called self-realization. There is no essence being could express which would belong to its substance.[80] Since it is not subsistent, there is no intermediate entity or arbitrative instance between God and created substances. It is God himself who expresses himself in the thing's substance by means of being (*esse*) and essence, the two constitutive principles of substance.[81] The different essences mediate the one *esse*.[82]

Being is an act—a radiation of the divine light.[83] Aquinas compares *esse* to the sunlight because the light proceeds from the sun and is only seen when it shines on things.[84] In terms of concrete existence, *esse* is missing something, but that is just because it is itself the one (*simplex*) and complete (*completus*) act of all, which illuminates all.[85] But since *esse* itself is no subject, it cannot be the first origin of all. Like the light originating from the sun, there must be a freedom (*esse subsistens*) apart from being (*esse commune*), which is called God. *Esse commune* alone is not sufficient to explain the created world; there must be a higher "cause," from which it flows[86] and from which it receives its end. *Esse commune* as such flows from God like the insubstantial light from the sun. It is a similitude of God's goodness insofar as God's good will to create beings and to

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[75] *Sum. theol.*, 1a, q. 50, a. 1: "Id enim quod praecipue in rebus creatis Deus intendit est bonum quod consistit in assimilatione ad Deum."

[76] Ibid.: "Perfecta autem assimilatio effectus ad causam attenditur, quando effectus imitatur causam secundum illud per quod causa producit effectum; sicut calidum facit calidum."

[77] *Sum. theol.*, 1a, q. 45, a. 4, ad 1: "Prima rerum creatarum est esse."

[78] *De pot.*, q. 7, a. 2, ad 9: "Esse est inter omnia perfectissimum."

[79] *De ver.*, q. 22, a. 2, ad 2: "Ipsum esse creatum est similitudo divinae bonitatis; unde in quantum aliqua desiderant esse, desiderant Dei similitudinem et Deum implicite."

[80] See in general Ulrich, *Homo Abyssus.* See also Martin Bieler, "The Theological Importance of a Philosophy of Being," in *Reason and the Reasons of Faith*, ed. P. J. Griffiths and R. Hütter (New York: T&T Clark International, 2005), 311-17.

[81] For the two constitutive prinicples of *ens* see: Ludger Oeing-Hanhoff, *Ens et unum covertuntur. Stellung und Gehalt des Grundsatzes in der Philosophie des hl. Thomas von Aquin* (Münster in Westfalen: Aschendorff Verlag, 1953), 21-110.

[82] *In 3 Sent.*, d. 6, q. 2, a. 2, co: "Hoc quidem esse est in re, et est actus entis resultans ex principiis rei, sicut lucere est actus lucentis." Cf. Thomas Prufer, *Sein und Wort* (München: Diss. masch., 1959), 29: "Die forma vermittelt das esse, indem sie es auffängt, befestigt und behält."

[83] *De caus.*, l, 6: "Unumquodque cognoscitur per id quod est in actu; et ideo ipsa actualitas rei [esse commune] est quoddam lumen ipsius et, quia effectus habet quod sit in actu per suam causam, inde est quod illuminatur et cognoscitur per suam causam."

[84] *In Boeth. De Trin.*, 1, q. 1, a. 3, ad 1: "Unde non oportet quod cognoscatur [lumen intellectus] nisi in ipsis cognoscibilibus, sicut lux non oportet quod primo videatur ab oculo nisi in ipso colore illustrato."

[85] *De pot.*, q. 7, a. 2, ad 9: "Esse est actualitas omnium actuum."

[86] *De ver.*, q. 21, a. 1, ad 4: "Bonum sit diffusivum secundum sui rationem."

let them return to him is fulfilled by it.[87] God is thus *causa efficiens* as well as *causa finalis* of beings at the same time.[88] As *causa efficiens*, he initiates creation. As *causa finalis* he wants himself as the good end of creation. Thus he is in total accordance with himself and remains a unity in letting creatures participate in existence.[89] There is a unity of God and of his creation that integrates the difference between them.[90] This is achieved by means of a formal cause: *esse commune*.[91]

How does this unity that integrates the difference present itself to us when we consider the constitutive structure of the intellect? Every intellect abstracts its first conception[92] from sensible perception in virtue of the light of the agent intellect.[93] The natural light is the root of human freedom insofar as it is the root of the intellect and allows for all its subsequent operations. There is a direct connection between the light of the intellect and uncreated truth itself.[94] It is thus by participation in the divine light that human beings are enabled to know. Yet it would compromise human freedom and would be against every natural experience if the intellect already knew all things actually and by nature.[95] At the root there would be a divine influence that would determine all knowledge and humans would not acquire anything on their own. If all would be already known, would we still have a choice? Is the encounter between divine and human freedom still possible, if one of both has already imposed itself on the other? Would this not destroy the dignity of human beings?

Human beings however are not only finite,[96] but also infinite.[97] The finiteness of human beings consists in the fact that they have to learn. Their infinity consists in the fact that they are potentially able to learn everything.[98]

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[87] Ibid.: "Effectus participat causam efficientem secundum assimilationem formae tantum, sed finem consequitur res secundum totum esse suum, et in hoc consistebat ratio boni." See Ulrich, *Homo Abyssus*, 62-68.

[88] *Sum. theol.*, 1a, q. 44, a. 4: "Primo agenti, qui est agens tantum, non convenit agere propter acquisitionem alicuius finis; sed intendit solum communicare suam perfectionem, quae est eius bonitas. Et unaquaeque creatura intendit consequi suam perfectionem, quae est similitudo perfectionis et bonitatis divinae. Sic ergo divina bonitas est finis rerum omnium."

[89] *Sum. theol.*, 1a, q. 43, a. 3: "Quae [formae exemplares in mente divina existentes] quidem licet multiplicentur secundum respectum ad res, tamen non sunt realiter aliud a divina essentia, prout eius similitudo a diversis participari potest diversimode."

[90] See Ferdinand Ulrich, *Leben in der Einheit von Leben und Tod* (Freiburg: Johannes Verlag, 1999).

[91] *De anima*, a. 1, ad 17: "Esse sit formalissimum inter omnia."

[92] *De ver.*, q. 1, a. 1: "Illud autem quod primo intellectus concipit quasi notissimum, et in quod conceptiones omnes resolvit, est ens."

[93] *C. Gentiles*, lib. 2, cap. 79, n. 9: "Anima humana, cuius lumen est intellectus agens."

[94] *In Boeth. De Trin.*, 1, q. 1, a. 3, ad 1: "Per lumen, quod est eius [ipsae veritatis increatae] similitudo, nobis inditum cognoscimus et iudicamus. Nec hoc lumen habet aliquam efficaciam nisi ex prima luce."

[95] *Quaestiones de quolibet* 7, q. 1, a. 1 co: "Hoc est in nobis lumen intellectus agentis, quod se habet ad intellectum possibilem nostrum, sicut lumen solis ad oculum."

[96] *De caus.*, l. 6: "Ens dicitur id quod finite participat esse."

[97] *De ver.*, q. 1, a. 1: "Hoc autem est anima quae quodammodo est omnia."

[98] *In 3 Sent.*, proem.: "Homo enim est quasi orizon et confinium spiritualis et corporalis naturae."

This interplay between the aspects of the finiteness and the infinity of the intellect's light ensures the integrity and the goodness of creation: Man is given to himself totally, yet appropriately. *Esse* is given to the *animal rationale*, who knows himself naturally as somehow being.[99] In order to uncover his own essence, he has to give himself away by applying his own self-knowledge to an object he is already confronted with through his open corporeal senses. Subsequently man affirms this object as existing as well and from that everything else follows. The intellect's irradiating light can make the essence of the outward object perceivable through an illumination of the sensible perception.[100] Man "realizes" his own nature by apprehending the structure (and otherness) of others and consequently reflecting on his own actions to know himself. With time and learning, he may apprehend the transcendental structure of being itself (*esse commune*).[101] By receiving *esse* as a gift the human being follows his or her own ways of acting and the ultimate act of *esse*.[102] Eventually he may ask for his creator, for *esse* is not the first cause.

The first principles form the instruments of the intellect. The human being forms the very first principle by reflecting on his judgment pronounced in his very first encounter with other objects. He realizes that *this* being (*ens*) is not another one (*non-ens*).[103] From this realization of unity that integrates any difference and plurality, a first principle is derived, which is apt to the human intellect, because it is finite and comprehensible, yet at the same time applicable to all and thus in a way infinite:[104] the principle of non-contradiction,[105] to which

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[99] *De ver.*, q. 10, a. 8: "Ad hoc autem quod percipiat anima se esse, et quid in seipsa agatur attendat, non requiritur aliquis habitus; sed ad hoc sufficit sola essentia animae, quae menti est praesens: ex ea enim actus progrediuntur, in quibus actualiter ipsa percipitur." See Richard Lambert, "The Habitual Knowledge of the Soul in Thomas Aquinas" in *The Modern Schoolman* 60 (1982): 1-19.

[100] Michael Tavuzzi, "Aquinas on the Preliminary Grasp of Being" in *The Thomist* 51 (1987): 568: "Could it not be this very actuality (*De caus* l. 6: 'unumquodque cognoscitur per id quod est in actu et ideo ipsa actualitas rei est quoddam lumen ipsius.'), this being-in-act of the perceived sensible object, which is first excised by the agent intellect and by it impressed on the possible intellect as its primary actualization or *informatio*—as the very 'dawn' of its cognitional vitality, a primary 'information' whose content corresponds to that initial and most primitive meaning that the term 'being' [*ens*] does and can have for the intellect, a meaning which, no matter how rudimentary, still enables the agent intellect to derive from it those first principles of the understanding by whose instrumentality it can *then* abstract the potentially intelligible aspect of the sensible object—its quiddity or specific nature."

[101] Cf. *De ver.*, q. 1, a. 1. The soul reflects on being (*esse*) in a process of abstraction and separation. See Gustav Siewerth, "Die Abstraktion und das Sein nach der Lehre des Thomas von Aquin" in *Gesammelte Werke* 1 (Düsseldorf: Patmos Verlag, 1971), 325-32.

[102] *C. Gentiles*, lib. 3, cap. 69, n. 20: "[A]gere sequitur ad esse in actu."

[103] Leon Elders, *Autour de Saint Thomas d'Aquin. Recueils d'études sur sa pensée philosophique et théologique, vol. 1* (Brugge-Paris: Editions Tabor, 1987), 202: "Le premier jugement de notre esprit porte sur l'opposition de l'Etre et de l'Autre, et c'est ce jugement qui vient au premier lieu."

[104] Ibid, 198: "Le jugement negatif [from which the first principle is formed] qui est à l'origine de la théologie et de la métaphysique contient donc en germe tout le dévelopement ultérieur de notre vie intellective."

[105] *Sum. theol.*, 1a-2ae, q. 94, a. 2: "Et ideo primum principium indemonstrabile est quod non est simul affirmare et negare, quod fundatur supra rationem entis et non entis, et super hoc principio omnia alia fundantur."

all causality can be reduced.[106] Scientific progress is therefore made possible through the application of such principles according to the formal structure outlined in the first section of this paper.

The way in which we conceive of the first principles of the intellect makes freedom possible. What do these principles tell us? They are the keys for our grasp of being (*esse*). The principle of non-contradiction ensures us that being is given to beings with total non-ambiguity: God says "yes" to beings and does not say "yes and no" at the same time.[107] He is in unity with himself in creation and does not give existence in discrepancy with himself. This is what we can demonstrate of him out of his first effect, which displays his total goodness. It is God's "yes" to creation that human beings confusedly hear first and respond to when they grasp the first principles. It is not an apprehension of God himself; rather his word is conceived.[108] This is the highest proof of God that philosophy can accomplish. It draws on God's footprints in his most perfect effect[109] and his presence in his creation, which is open for him in freedom. This footprint is the goodness of being given by an unknown giver who lets the gifted be free. Theology, on the other hand, considers God's "effect," which is God himself as well. And this is Christology.

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[106] Elders, *Autour de Saint Thomas d'Aquin 1*, 199: "Le principe de causalité se laisse réduire par exemples au principe de [non-]contradiction, car une chose ne peut pas à la fois devenir et ne pas devenir (ce qui serait le cas dans un devenir sans cause)."

[107] Cf. 2 Cor 1:17-20. As basis for all this see, Ferdinand Ulrich, *Leben in der Einheit von Leben und Tod*, 100-103.

[108] *Sum. theol.*, 1a, q. 2, a. 1, ad 1: "Sed hoc non est simpliciter cognoscere Deum esse; sicut cognoscere venientem, non est cognoscere Petrum, quamvis sit Petrus veniens."

[109] *C. Gentiles*, lib. 1, cap. 8.