

**THOMISTIC RESPONSES TO SOME OBJECTIONS TO AQUINAS' SECOND WAY**  
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Near the beginning of his *Summa Theologiae*,<sup>1</sup> the thirteenth century Dominican monk, Thomas Aquinas, claims that "the existence of God can be proved in five ways."<sup>2</sup> These arguments are regularly referred to as his *Five Ways* and are for many perhaps the most familiar reading from Thomas. Of particular interest for me is his *Second Way*, otherwise known as his efficient causality argument or cosmological argument. In this paper I will seek to give Thomistic responses to several common objections that I have encountered against this argument.

To say that I will seek to give "Thomistic responses" means one important thing, viz., that in my estimation, this argument can only be properly understood when it is placed within its philosophical context of the thought of Thomas Aquinas himself. There are a number of philosophical doctrines that serve as a context within which the argument must be read in order to understand it.

It is evident that Thomas not only presupposed at least some of these philosophical doctrines, but also expected his students already to be informed of these doctrines, or, more likely, expected the teacher using his *Summa Theologiae* to provide this philosophical context for the students. One clear example is his use of the doctrine of causality. It is certain that when Thomas uses the term 'cause' he is thinking in Aristotelian categories. But nowhere in the *Summa*

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<sup>1</sup> This work is available in English as *St. Thomas Aquinas Summa Theologica: Complete English Edition in Five Volumes*, translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1981).

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I, 2, 3. All English translations are from the English Dominican Province edition cited in note 1. Thomas acknowledges that certain ones of these arguments are not completely original with him. They are found for example in Aristotle's *Physics* VII, 1 241<sup>b</sup>24 and *Metaphysics* XII, 7 1072<sup>b</sup>23. Though the *Five Ways* are Thomas' most famous arguments for God's existence certain ones of them are expounded with greater detail in other of his works, including his *Summa Contra Gentiles* I, 13.

*Theologiae* prior to giving his argument does he bother to define what causality is or even acknowledge that he is indeed thinking in Aristotelian categories. He evidently expected his readers or hearers either to already know these categories or expected the teacher to provide the background.

If this is true of causality, what other philosophical doctrines might this be true of? I suggest at least the following: the possibility of natural theology, act/potency metaphysics, form/matter metaphysics, the essence/existence distinction, and a particular notion of *esse* or being. Neither time nor purpose will allow a discussion of these, but I would like at this point to say one thing about *esse* and its bearing on the essence/existence distinction since they alone among the doctrines I have listed mark profound differences between Thomas and Aristotle.<sup>3</sup> It cannot be emphasized too strongly how important these notions are in understanding not only his theistic arguments but also the bulk of his entire philosophy. I should like to unpack ever so slightly these doctrines because they will figure prominently in what Thomist responses to objections to his *Second Way* will look like.

#### *Esse* and the Essence/Existence Distinction

In his *On Being and Essence*, Thomas lays out for us the essence/existence distinction. The essence/existence distinction maintains that there is a real difference between the essence of a thing and the existence of a thing. The essence of something is *what* it is. The existence of something is *that* it is. Thomas was certainly not the first philosopher to make a specific mention

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<sup>3</sup> Controversy over the place of *esse* in Thomas' philosophy had erupted as early as the sixteenth century. For an early defense of the primacy of *esse* in the metaphysics of Thomas see Dominic Báñez, *The Primacy of Existence in Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Benjamin S. Llamzon (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1966).

of the essence/existence distinction though I believe that he is the first for whom the distinction will figure so prominently in his own philosophy.<sup>4</sup>

The infinitive of the Latin verb *sum* (I am) is 'esse' and is often translated into English as 'being' or 'existence.' There can be problems however with the ambiguity of these English expressions. In English the term 'being' can serve either as a noun or as a verb while 'existence' is a noun. In the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas, the term 'esse' more often serves as a technical expression to be distinguished from other metaphysical categories.<sup>5</sup> While it was not uncommon in the Middle Ages for philosophers to use the term 'esse' as a synonym for 'essence,' Thomas explicitly distinguished the two, describing the latter as that which receives *esse*. In his metaphysical schema, form and matter in sensible things together constitute an essence. Essence

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<sup>4</sup> Aristotle seemingly never makes much metaphysically of this distinction. He says, "For 'one man' and 'man' are the same thing, and so are 'existing man' and 'man' and the doubling of the words in 'one man' and 'one existing man' does not express anything different." (*Metaphysics* IV, 2, 1003<sup>b</sup>26-27, trans. Ross, in McKeon, 733. τὰντὸ γὰρ εἷς ἄνθρωπος καὶ ἄνθρωπος καὶ ὢν ἄνθρωπος, καὶ οὐχ ἕτερόν τι δηλοῖ κατὰ τὴν λέξιν ἐπαναδιπλούμενον τὸ εἷς ἄνθρωπος καὶ εἷς ὢν ἄνθρωπος.)

cf. Alfarabi: "We admit that essence and existence are distinct in existing things. The essence is not the existence, and it does not come under its comprehension. If the essence of man implied his existence, to conceive his essence would also be to conceive his existence, and it would be enough to know what a man is, in order to know that man exists, so that every representation would entail an affirmation. But the same token, existence is not included in the essence of things; otherwise it could become one of their constitutive characters, and the representation of what essence is would remain incomplete without the representation of its existence. And what is more, it would be impossible for us to separate them by the imagination. If man's existence coincided with his corporeal and animal nature, there would be nobody who, having an exact idea of what man is, and knowing is corporeal and animal nature, could question man's existence. But that is not the way it is, and we doubt the existence of things until we have direct perception of them through the senses, or mediate perception through a proof. Thus existence is not a constitutive character, it is only an accessory accident. (This is a tertiary quote. Djemil Saliba quotes Alfarabi in his *Etude sur la métaphysique*, pp. 84-85. Saliba is quoted by Etienne Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1955, reprinted 1972), 186.)

For Avicenna's philosophy as such and his views on the essence/existence distinction see: Parviz Morewedge, *The Metaphysics of Avicenna (ibn Sīnā): A Critical Translation-commentary and Analysis of the Fundamental Arguments in Avicenna's Metaphysica in the Dānīsh Nāma-I 'alā'ī* (The Book of Scientific Knowledge) (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973); Soheil M. Afnan, *Avicenna: His Life and Works* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1958); Fazlur Rahman, "Essence and Existence in Avicenna," in *Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, Vol. IV, eds. Richard Hunt, Raymond Klibansky, and Lotte Labowsky (London: The Warburg Institute, University of London, 1958), 1-16; Francis A. Cunningham, "Averroes vs. Avicenna on Being," *New Scholasticism* 48 (1974): 185-218; and Beatrice H. Zedler, "Another Look at Avicenna," *New Scholasticism* 50 (1976): 504-2521.

<sup>5</sup> For a thorough analysis of Thomas' view of being and its comparisons and contrasts with other views see Etienne Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, 2d ed. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1952).

and *esse* together constitute a being (*ens*, the participle of the Latin verb "to be").<sup>6</sup> Thus, for Thomas, '*esse*' is just as much a verb as noun as one might expect from an infinitive.

It is sometimes—perhaps awkwardly—translated as the "act of existing." But what this phrase lacks in facility it makes up in clarity. Thomas regards existence as an act. It, in effect, is what essences *do* or *can do*. If existence is an act that essences do, they cannot do it to themselves. This is so because they would have to exist before they exist. Thus several things seem to follow. First, if something has existence, then either that existence is of its essence or not. If it is of its essence to exist, this is God. If it is not of the essence of it to exist then its existing must be caused by something else. That something else which is doing the causing must itself exist (and must exist by virtue of its essence or not). There cannot be an infinite series of things being caused to exist as an explanation of their being caused to exist. Whatever is causing them to exist must itself be such that it is of its essence to exist. Such a being is sometimes referred to as uncaused existence.

With all this, Thomas does not deny the notion of secondary causality, or what in more modern terms might be termed instrumental causality. Nothing in Thomas' metaphysics requires him to maintain that there is no sense in which the parents cause the child to exist. What Thomas is saying is that, while a creature can cause a thing to "be this thing" only God can cause a thing "to be."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> It must be said that the matter is somewhat more detailed than I have described. Just to unpack his understanding of the term 'essence' would almost require rewriting the first chapter of *On Being and Essence* since I could hardly state it more succinctly than Thomas has done. But to do so is not only beyond the scope of this work but is also unnecessary for my purposes. I only bring up enough about essence in order to make my point about *esse* which is more germane to my defense of the *Second Way*.

<sup>7</sup> In the *Summa Contra Gentiles* Thomas argues: "Furthermore, effects correspond proportionally to their causes, so that we attribute actual effects to actual causes, potential effects to potential causes, and, similarly, particular effects to particular causes and universal effects to universal causes, as Aristotle teaches in *Physics II*. Now, the act of being is the first effect, and this is evident by reason of the universal presence of this act. It follows that the proper cause of the act of being is the first and universal agent, namely, God. Other agents, indeed, are not the cause of the act of being as such, but of being *this*—of being a man or being white, for example." (*Summa*

Further, for Thomas, existence as such is unlimited and contains all perfections. Here we see an inverse of Aristotle. For Aristotle, the infinite was largely a negative concept, being that which is most indefinite. The negation that characterizes the infinite is given positive content by the introduction of form, since for Aristotle form is the highest metaphysical category. To be is to be a form.

For Thomas the reverse is true. Infinite being is that which possesses all perfections in superabundance. *Esse* as such is infinite in all perfections. It is limited, if you will, only when conjoined with form or with form and matter. It is as if any given creature contains the fullness and perfections of existence only up to the extent that its essence or nature or form allows. Like a balloon that limits and shapes the air that infuses it, the essence of the creature bounds the otherwise limitless fullness of the perfections of existence.<sup>8</sup>

This is why, after Thomas sets forth his arguments for the existence of God, the classical attributes of God cascade one after another. For Thomas, God does not *have* form but *is His own* form.<sup>9</sup> If He is that being whose essence *is* His existence, then He contains all the perfections that there can be. As Thomas goes on to say very soon after the *Five Ways*, "All perfections existing in creatures divided and multiplied, pre-exist in God unitedly."<sup>10</sup> Given that *esse* is the

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*Contra Gentiles*, II, 21, trans. Maurer, Vol. 2, p. 61, emphasis in Maurer. Adhuc. Effectus suis causis proportionaliter respondent: ut scilicet effectus in actu causis actualibus attribuamus, et effectus in potentia causis quae sunt in potentia; et similiter effectus particulares causis particularibus, universalibus vero universales; ut docet philosophus, in II physicorum. Esse autem est causatum primum: quod ex ratione suae communitatis apparet. Causa igitur propria essendi est agens primum et universale, quod Deus est. Alia vero agentia non sunt causa essendi simpliciter, sed causa essendi hoc, ut hominem vel album.)

<sup>8</sup> I am grateful to philosopher Max Herrera for this metaphor.

<sup>9</sup> See *Summa Theologiae*, I, 3, 2 and I, 3, 7. Thomas says that "God is absolute form, or rather absolute being (Deus sit ipsa forma, vel potius ipsum esse). This means the same thing as saying that God is His own essence, or His own substance, or His own being. This being so, strictly speaking God does not have form that is *conjoined* with His being as if to say that God's form and God's being were really distinct as they are in creatures.

<sup>10</sup> *Summa Theologiae*, I, 13, 5. Omnes rerum perfectiones, quae sunt in rebus creatis divisim et multipliciter, in Deo praeexistunt unite.

essence of God Himself, Thomas will argue that every creature who possesses existence yet whose essence does not entail its existence, will be seen to have its own existence caused by that whose essence is its own existence and thus is uncaused.

With this brief picture of *esse* and the essence/existence distinction in mind, let me now turn my attention to the *Second Way* in particular. It reads thus:

The second way is from the nature of the efficient cause. In the world of sense we find there is an order of efficient causes. There is no case known (neither is it, indeed, possible) in which a thing is found to be the efficient cause of itself; for so it would be prior to itself, which is impossible. Now in efficient causes it is not possible to go on to infinity, because in all efficient causes following in order, the first is the cause of the intermediate cause, and the intermediate is the cause of the ultimate cause, whether the intermediate cause be several, or one only. Now to take away the cause is to take away the effect. Therefore, if there be no first cause among efficient causes, there will be no ultimate, nor any intermediate cause. But if in efficient causes it is possible to go on to infinity, there will be no first efficient cause, neither will there be an ultimate effect, nor any intermediate efficient causes; all of which is plainly false. Therefore it is necessary to admit a first efficient cause, to which everyone gives the name of God.<sup>11</sup>

A formal schematization of the argument will enable us to see that it is formally valid.

- SW1. In the world of sensible objects there is an **O**rders of efficient causes.
- SW2. It is not possible that anything is the **E**fficient cause of itself.
  - a. If something is the **E**fficient the cause of itself, then it would have to be **P**rior to itself.
  - b. It is impossible for something to be **P**rior to itself.
  - c. Therefore, it is not possible that anything is the **E**fficient cause of itself.
- SW3. If in the world of sensible objects there is an **O**rders of efficient causes then it is possible to go on to **I**nfinity in efficient causes if and only if both it is not possible that anything is the **E**fficient cause of itself and there is no **F**irst Cause.
- SW4. If it is possible to go on to **I**nfinity in efficient causes, then there is no inter**M**ediate cause.
- SW5. If there is no inter**M**ediate cause, then there is no **U**ltimate effect.

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<sup>11</sup> *Summa Theologiae* I, 2, 3. Secunda via est ex ratione causae efficientis. Invenimus enim in istis sensibilibus esse ordinem causarum efficientium: nec tamen invenitur, nec est possibile, quod aliquid sit causa efficiens sui ipsius; quia sic esset prius seipso, quod est impossibile. Non autem est possibile quod in causis efficientibus procedatur in infinitum. Quia in omnibus causis efficientibus ordinatis, primum est causa medii, et medium est causa ultimi, sive media sint plura sive unum tantum: remota autem causa, removetur effectus: ergo, si non fuerit primum in causis efficientibus, non erit ultimum nec medium. Sed si procedatur in infinitum in causis efficientibus, non erit prima causa efficiens: et sic non erit nec effectus ultimus, nec causae efficientes mediae: quod patet esse falsum. Ergo est necesse ponere aliquam causam efficientem primam: quam omnes Deum nominant.

SW6. There is an Ultimate effect. Therefore, there is a First Cause.  
 SW7. If there is a First cause, this first cause is God. Therefore God exists.

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SW1. O	Premise
SW2. $\sim E$	Premise
a. $E \supset P$	
b. $\sim P \therefore \sim E$	
SW3. $O \supset (I \equiv (\sim E \cdot \sim F))$	Premise
SW4. $I \supset \sim M$	Premise
SW5. $\sim M \supset \sim U$	Premise
SW6. $U \therefore F$	Premise/ Preliminary Conclusion
SW7. $F \supset G \therefore G$	<u>Premise/Conclusion</u>
SW8. $I \equiv (\sim E \cdot \sim F)$	M.P. SW1, SW3
SW9. $(I \supset (\sim E \cdot \sim F)) \cdot ((\sim E \cdot \sim F) \supset I)$	Equiv. SW8
SW10. $(\sim E \cdot \sim F) \supset I$	Simp. SW9
SW11. $\sim \sim U$	D.N. SW6
SW12. $\sim \sim M$	M.T. SW5, SW11
SW13. $\sim I$	M.T. SW4, SW12
SW14. $\sim(\sim E \cdot \sim F)$	M.T. SW10, SW13
SW15. $\sim \sim E \vee \sim \sim F$	DeM. SW14
SW16. $E \vee F$	D.N. SW15
SW17. F	D. Syll. SW16, SW2
SW18. G	M.P. SW7, SW17

In a previous EPS paper I dealt with one objection, viz., "Why Can There Not Be an Infinite Regress?" Other objections that I have encountered include: "Does the *Second Way* Commit the Fallacy of Composition?"; "Does the *Second Way* Commit the Quantifier Shift Fallacy?"; "Do All Men Call this God?"; "Why Is There Only One God?"; "Is God Good?"; and "Is the *Second Way* Based on an Obsolete Philosophical System?"

Obviously, time will not allow a thorough treatment of each of these objections. I would, however, like to say something about as many of them as I have time if only to suggest a direction that I believe a Thomist could go in a more thorough response.

### **Does the *Second Way* Commit the Fallacy of Composition?**

Some critics claim that the *Second Way* commits the Fallacy of Composition. They allege that just because each item in the universe is caused, it does not follow that the universe itself is

caused. To insist that the characteristics of the parts necessarily obtain to the whole is to commit the Fallacy of Composition.

The Fallacy of Composition is an informal fallacy. A fallacy is informal if it does not break any formal rule of logic (which would make it a formal fallacy). Further, a fallacy is informal when the same pattern of reasoning with different content might not be a fallacy at all. Thus, what is important in evaluating whether a given argument commits an informal fallacy is a consideration of the content of the pattern of reasoning.

One commits the Fallacy of Composition when one illicitly argues that the characteristics of the parts necessarily pertain to the whole, or that the characteristics of a given thing necessarily pertain to a collection of those things. Arguing that since each tile of the floor is square, therefore the floor must necessarily be square is to commit the Fallacy of Composition. A floor made up of square tiles could be rectangular. The critics allege that when Thomas argues that since everything in the universe is caused, therefore the universe is caused, he is committing such a fallacy.

What is interesting about many informal fallacies is the fact that the same pattern of reasoning with different content commits no fallacy at all. While the square tiles do not necessitate a square floor, green tiles seemingly do necessitate a green floor. Further, vinyl tiles surely necessitate a vinyl floor. Thus we have a pattern of reasoning that is fallacious with one content and not fallacious with other content.

What is necessary, then, is to try to discover what the relevant difference is between the two contents. If one can do that, then one would be in a position to try to judge whether Thomas' argument commits the Fallacy of Composition. This is so because if one is able to say that the reason the shape of the tiles does not entail the shape of the floor while the color or material of

the tiles does entail the color or material of the floor<sup>12</sup> is because of factor X, then one might be able to see if causality exemplifies factor X, which is to say, one might be able to decide whether causality is more like the square of the tiles (which would mean that Thomas' argument commits the Fallacy of Composition) or whether causality is more like the green of the tiles (which would mean that Thomas' argument does not commit the Fallacy of Composition).

I know of no one who has successfully isolated the factor or factors relevant to why such a pattern of reasoning is fallacious with one content and not fallacious with other contents. Attempts with which I am familiar turn out to be just one more example of either the fallacy or not and do not illustrate exactly what is the *sine qua non* of the fallacy.

Perhaps the accusation by the critic turns on a misunderstanding of the term 'world' in the argument (or the term 'universe' in more modern renderings of the cosmological argument). In an important sense, there is no universe over and above the individual things which comprise the universe. The term is just convenient shorthand for all the things that exist (except God). Thus, if the universe just is all the things that exist, then whatever is true of all the things is true of the universe. If everything in the universe is caused, the universe is caused.

In response, the critic might point out that this will not help Thomas at all. For either he is trying to argue for a cause of the universe or not. If there is no universe, then of course there is no cause of the universe. But if he is arguing for the cause of everything in the universe, then the argument seemingly ceases to be an argument and becomes nothing more than a redundancy. This is so because the argument would be saying that since everything in the universe is caused, then everything in the universe is caused.

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<sup>12</sup> Of course even this example is not strictly the case. One could make a floor of yellow and blue tiles in such a way that it appears green. Excepting such counter-examples, the color argument is still sufficient to illustrate the point. A floor of all green tiles surely makes an all green floor.

Further, the critic might say, there does seem to be a legitimate way to talk about a collection of things as itself being a thing. For example, we can talk about a crowd of people in a way that is more than what we might be saying about the individual people that comprise the crowd. But the critic will quickly point out that explaining the presence (i.e., existence) of each individual in the crowd *ipso facto* explains the existence of the crowd. Thus, if Thomas denies that he is arguing for a cause of the universe, then whence his argument? But if he is claiming that the explanation of the existence of each object in the universe still leaves the existence of the universe unexplained, then he is committing the Fallacy of Composition.

In response to the critic, the Thomist might say that the fact that the universe is comprised of numerous objects is accidental to the argument itself. For Thomas the existence of one creature is a sufficient condition for there being God. This is so in his model because for every creature, there is the essence/existence distinction. Since it is irrelevant to the argument whether or not there is a plurality of things in the world whose cause Thomas is seeking to account for, then he cannot be committing the Fallacy of Composition.

If one objects to this line of reasoning, then we are no longer discussing the Fallacy of Composition as such. Instead, we would be arguing about the legitimacy of the essence/existence distinction. The critic has now simply changed the objection from the Fallacy of Composition to the truth of the system itself.

In summary, the accusation that Thomas' argument commits the Fallacy of Composition misses on several counts. First, Thomas is not arguing for the existence of a thing called the universe that is over and above the individual things that comprise it. The universe just is all the things that exist (except God). Thus, he is not saying that because all objects have a certain characteristic (i.e., of being caused) that therefore the whole collection of those objects has the same characteristic.

Second, the notion that the universe is a plurality of objects is accidental to Thomas' argument. The metaphysical point that Thomas is making would remain even if there was only one existent object besides God. Since it is accidental, then Thomas could not be committing the Fallacy of Composition because the composition is not essential to the argument.

### **Does the *Second Way* Commit the Quantifier Shift Fallacy?**

Modern attacks on Thomas' argument level the charge that it commits the Quantifier Shift Fallacy. Antony Flew claims that the Quantifier Shift Fallacy "is committed more than once in the Five Ways."<sup>13</sup> One commits this fallacy when, regarding the quantificational schematization of an argument, the universal and existential quantifiers illicitly switch places. The fallacy occurs when one claims that there is an equivalency between two propositions that employ this illicit shift.

The fallacy illicitly claims that because

(QP1)  $(\forall x)(\exists y)(Pyx)$

one should be able to conclude

(QP2)  $(\exists y)(\forall x)(Pyx)$ .

Premise (QP1) says that for every x, there exists a y such that y bears P to x. For example, one might say that for every person, there is a woman who is the mother of that person. But it does not follow from this that there is one mother that every person has, which is what premise (QP2) is saying.

In my schema of Thomas' argument, Premise SW1 asserts that there are causes in the world. Premise SW6 concludes that there is a First Cause of the world. But critics argue that going from things being caused to a cause of things is fallacious. They point out that just because

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<sup>13</sup> Antony Flew, ed. *A Dictionary of Philosophy*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (New York: St. Martins Press, 1984), s.v., "quantifier shift fallacy," p. 296.

each thing in the universe has a cause, it does not follow that there is a single cause of all the things taken together. One might observe that his objection is virtually a formal quantificational accounting of the informal Fallacy of Composition.

Several things might be said in response to this criticism. First, while the conclusion that there can be only one ultimate cause is something more than what is explicit in the *Second Way* as such, it is nested in the *Second Way* when it is cast within its proper metaphysical context, the fuller exemplification of which would entail the unity of the cause. Thus, there is more to be said about the number of causes than is perhaps evident in the argument *simpliciter*. I address this point more fully below when I deal with the objection "Why Is There Only One God?"

Second, it is a misconstruing of Thomas' argument to say that he is claiming that each thing has an efficient cause in the same way. The premise in Thomas' argument is not claiming that each thing must have an efficient cause in the way, for example, each person was caused to come into existence by one's parents, and they by their parents, and so on. This type of causality is precisely the kind of causality that Thomas allows to be infinite later in the *Summa Theologiae* in Question Forty-Six. If he allows this chain of causality to be infinite in Question Forty-Six, it follows that Thomas would allow for there to be an infinite number of causes.

Thus, taking the cause in one sense, Thomas is not actually arguing for premise (QP2) on the basis of premise (QP1). He is not saying that because each thing has a cause, there must be one cause that each thing has. This would indeed be a *non sequitur*. Indeed, it would be unbelievable that anyone would commit such a fallacy, for surely it is obvious that if 1,000 people each have a mother, it does not follow that there is one mother for the entire group of 1,000. This fallacy is too facile to attribute to Thomas. If there is a plurality of causes I cannot imagine that Thomas would try to conclude that this plurality of causes logically entails just one

cause. If, therefore, Thomas is not saying that because there is a plurality of causes there must be one cause of the plurality, then the Quantifier Shift Fallacy does not exist here.

Perhaps part of the confusion arises precisely because what is a metaphysical argument for Thomas is illicitly reduced to a formal argument by way of a logical schema. When dealing with metaphysical issues that comprise so much of Thomas' thinking, logical schemata may be incapable of capturing the material content of the arguments.

For example, suppose one were to argue "If x is bigger than y, and y is bigger than z, then x is bigger than z." This would be schematized as:

$$\forall x \forall y \forall z [(Bxy \cdot Byz) \supset Bxz]$$

Now, while this proposition can be known to be true when "is bigger than" is substituted for B, there are obvious counter-examples to this formal schema when one makes different substitutions. Substituting "is the mother of" for "is bigger than" would yield a false proposition. What this shows is that, while there is nothing internally problematic with the proposition *formally* speaking, the proposition might turn out to be false *materially* speaking. With respect to Thomas' argument, then, one should consider the material content (i.e., the metaphysics) rather than merely the formal content. While premise (QP1) does not logically entail premise (QP2), it might turn out that the material truth of premise (QP1) is a sufficient condition for the material truth of premise (QP2). Thus, if Thomas is making a metaphysical argument (i.e., if his argument is depending on the material content of the propositions) rather than just a logical argument, then it is a red herring to point out that the attempt to logically derive premise (QP2) from premise (QP1) commits the Quantifier Shift Fallacy.

Third, one might consider whether the Quantifier Shift Fallacy is always a fallacy. In other words, is the Quantifier Shift Fallacy formal or informal? Is it a matter of the logic of the argument or the content of the argument? If it is the latter, then this would mean that not every

instance of shifting the quantifier is illicit. Are there any counter-examples to the claim that it is inherently (i.e., formally) a fallacy?

Consider the following using our tile example from earlier: Every tile in the floor has a material out of which it is comprised, therefore the floor has a material out of which it is comprised. Stated formally one might say "For every tile in the floor, there exists a material, such that the tile is comprised out of that material." (or to state it grammatically so as to keep the schema consistent: "For every tile in the floor, there exists a material, such that the material comprises that tile") schematized as  $(\forall t)(\exists m)(Cmt)$ . Would it be a fallacy to shift the quantifiers and conclude that therefore there is a material that all the tiles are comprised, schematized as  $(\exists m)(\forall t)(Cmt)$ ?

Just as with the fallacy of composition, what I think the argument of the tiles shows is that the *form* of the argument is not intrinsically flawed, but there is only a fallacy just in case the *material* of the argument does not yield the entailment. While the fact that individuals who have mothers does not entail that the group of individuals has a mother, is it true that the fact that individuals have a material out of which they are comprised does entail that the group is comprised of that material even though formally the two arguments are identical. Thus, while

$$(\forall x)(\exists y)(Myx) / \therefore (\exists y)(\forall x)(Myx)$$

is materially invalid,

$$(\forall t)(\exists m)(Cmt) / \therefore (\exists m)(\forall t)(Cmt)$$

is not.

I believe all of this shows that just because one can schematize Thomas' argument to be a case of a shifting of the quantifiers this does not necessarily mean that the argument is invalid. Quantifiers can shift without a fallacy being committed. The question becomes, then, whether 'cause' is more like the 'mother' of the illicit example or more like the 'material' of the valid

example. This shows, therefore, that the argument is a *metaphysical* one and not merely a *logical* one. Whether the claims of premise (1) metaphysically entail premise (2) demands a consideration of the metaphysical context of Thomas' argument. Only until one recognizes that Thomas' argument as a metaphysical one rather than a logical one and considers what that metaphysical context is, can one be in a position to judge the truth of the conclusion of the argument.

### **Do All Men Call this God?**

It is conspicuous to many critics that each of the *Five Ways* concludes that there is a God in a way that *prima facie* goes beyond the premises themselves. Taken in isolation, there can be no doubt that no conclusion of any of the *Five Ways* is a full-blown theism. There is obviously nothing within the arguments as such that suggests that the being that is argued for is a person or has any of the expected attributes of God. Indeed, it is plain that, since Aristotle utilized these same arguments, the arguments as such do not entail the God of the Judeo-Christian tradition.

In a very real sense, this objection has already been answered. Thomas can utilize the same arguments as Aristotle and yet come to a radically different conclusion precisely because of the metaphysical commitments that Thomas has regarding the essence/existence distinction and his particular notion of *esse*. Thus, while on the one hand one would have to admit that, technically speaking, the arguments *simpliciter* do not entail God, within their philosophical context they can lead to nothing else.

This is made more explicit by Thomas with the subsequent questions he takes up in the *Summa Theologiae*. With Questions Three through Forty-three, Thomas unpacks a number of attributes that pertain to this First Cause. The first attribute is Simplicity. Since in God essence and existence are not really distinct, then there is no principle of differentiation in the being of God. Simplicity is today a very controversial topic among philosophical theologians. Many

would suggest that even if the concept of simplicity is coherent, it is not necessary for a being to be simple in order to be God and that simplicity is in fact not true of God. For Thomas, however, simplicity follows from his understanding of the essence/existence distinction.

Further, the remaining classical attributes of God cascade from this notion of the essence/existence distinction and the notion that God's essence is His existence. Since being (*esse*) as such is unlimited unless conjoined with form<sup>14</sup> or form and matter, then a being whose essence is existence (*esse*) will exemplify all perfections infinitely. For Thomas, then, God will be infinite in His goodness, knowledge and power, as well as other attributes. While these notions are not themselves argued for in the *Second Way* as such, they follow by virtue of the metaphysical nature of God. Further, as I have been saying, they can be unpacked from the *Second Way* when the argument is interpreted within its philosophical context. With these, Thomas would insist that the being with such attributes is God.

### **Why Is There Only One God?**

#### Aristotle's 55 or 47 Unmoved Movers

Critics of the *Second Way* point out that there is nothing in the argument as such that entails monotheism. Why could there not be a number of causes that are responsible for the universe? As Hume argued through Philo:

And what shadow of an argument, continued Philo, can you produce, from your hypothesis, to prove the unity of the Deity? A great number of men join in building a house or ship, in rearing a city, in framing a commonwealth; why may not several deities combine in contriving and framing a world?<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> As I said in note 9, Thomas does use the language of God as form. See *Summa Theologiae*, I, 3, 2 and I, 3, 7. Thomas says that "God is absolute form, or rather absolute being (*Deus sit ipsa forma, vel potius ipsum esse*). This means the same thing as saying that God is His own essence, or His own substance, or His own being. This being so, strictly speaking God does not *have* form that is *conjoined* with His being as if to say that God's form and God's being were really distinct as they are in creatures.

<sup>15</sup> David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1989), 51.

If our experience in earthly matters suggests multiple causes for complex objects, why should it be the case that there is only one cause of the universe? <sup>16</sup>

Not surprisingly, Thomas proffers the *Second Way* as an argument for Christian monotheism. One must wonder why, if Aristotle's use of the same argument allows for fifty-five or forty-seven substances that are responsible for the movements in the universe, how can the same argument be used by Thomas to insist on only one.

It might seem that if there is more than one God, then atheism is *a fortiori* false. Thus, one might think that the theist could argue that if many Gods exist, then one God exists. But of course this will not do for Thomas. To show that the *Second Way* allows for polytheism is to evacuate it of its force. While it is true that there is nothing explicit in Thomas' *Second Way* as such that entails monotheism, the doctrine does follow from a fuller implementation of Thomas' metaphysics. I have argued that this metaphysical backdrop or context is not accidental to his argument. If I am right then this metaphysical scheme is exactly what makes the *Second Way* the

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<sup>16</sup> In his *Metaphysics* Aristotle concludes that the number of movers needed to explain the movement of the various spheres is either forty-seven or fifty-five. He says fifty five if one includes "both those which move the planets and those which counteract these" and forty-seven "if one were not to add to the moon and to the sun the movements we mentioned." (Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, XII, 8, 1074<sup>a</sup>11-13, trans. W. D. Ross, in McKeon, p. 883. τε φερουσῶν καὶ τῶν ἀνελιττουσῶν ταύτας ... εἰ δὲ τῇ σελήνῃ τε καὶ τῷ ἡλίῳ μὴ προστιθεῖται τις ὡς εἴπομεν κινήσεις....) His observations led him to this conclusion based on the motion of nature and the heavens that must be accounted for by "a substance which is eternal and unmovable and separate from sensible things." (Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, XII, 8, 1073<sup>a</sup>4, trans. W. D. Ross, in McKeon, p. 881. οὐσία τις αἰδίτος καὶ ἀκίνητος καὶ κχωρισμένη τῶν αἰσθητῶν....)

Whether the substance is one or many and, if many, how many is a subject that Aristotle seems to take up only reluctantly. That he thought there was a plurality of movers is evident. The conclusion he comes to is one that he seemingly comes to tentatively. "Evidently, then, there must be substances which are of the same number as the movements of the stars, and in their nature eternal, and in themselves unmovable ...." (*Metaphysics*, XII, 8, 1073<sup>a</sup>36-40, trans. W. D. Ross, in McKeon, p. 882. φανερόν τοίνυν ὅτι τοσαύτας οὐσίας ἀναγκαῖον εἶναι τῆν τε φύσιν αἰδίτου) .... "Let this, then, be taken as the number of the spheres, so that the unmovable substances and principles also may probably be taken as just so many; the assertion of *necessity* must be left to more powerful thinkers." (Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, XII, 8, 1074<sup>a</sup>16, trans. W. D. Ross, in McKeon, p. 883. Τὸ μὲν οὖν πλῆθος τῶν σφαιρῶν ἔστω τοσοῦτον, ὥστε καὶ τὰς οὐσίας καὶ τὰς ἀρχὰς τὰς ἀκινήτους τοσαύτας εὐλογον ὑπολαβεῖν· τὸ γὰρ ἀναγκαῖον ἀφείσθω τοῖς ἰσχυροτέροις λέγειν.)

argument that it is as an argument for the existence of God. Regarding the number of gods, therefore, this same scheme will be a sufficient condition for monotheism.

Thomas gives a number of arguments for a single first principle in his *On Being and Essence*, his *Writings on the "Sentences" of Peter Lombard* and more specifically for monotheism in the *Summa Contra Gentiles* all of which antedate the *Summa Theologiae*. Some of those arguments are repeated in the *Summa Theologiae*. The argument from *On Being and Essence* and in the *Writings on the "Sentences" of Peter Lombard* utilizes the essence/existence distinction.<sup>17</sup> The argument from *Summa Contra Gentiles* utilizes the notions of equivocal and univocal predication.<sup>18</sup>

These and other arguments that Thomas gives show that his metaphysical principles that serve as the framework within which he gives the *Second Way* entails that there could be only one God. Just as certain, perhaps, is that most of the critics of the *Second Way* who say that the argument as such does not entail monotheism level this charge without considering this framework.

### **Is God Good?**

While nothing in the *Second Way* makes any claim that God is good, it is rightfully assumed that if Thomas is to prove the God of his own Christianity, this God will have to be good. In the debate between atheists and theists, the moral status of the first cause is perhaps the second most argued issue after the existence of the first cause. If the cause of the universe is not morally good, this being could not be the God of Thomas' Christianity. Since the moral status of

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<sup>17</sup> Book 2, Distinction 1, Question 1.

<sup>18</sup> I, 42.

this cause is not addressed in the *Second Way* as such, then it would seem that the *Second Way* is not an argument for God rightly so called.

For this reason I should like to make some very brief comments in this regard. First, nothing can have an actual moral status unless that thing exists in some sense. Non-being as such is neither good nor evil since it is not. Thus, even if the theist could not successfully defend the goodness of God, an accusation that God is evil is a tacit admission that God exists. I do not mean to be sophistical here but merely to point out that arguments to the end that X exists and arguments to the end that X is good or evil are, *prima facie*, different arguments.

Second, the critic might respond that the theist is getting off too easy here. It is no trivial thing to say that God is good. And if the atheist can successfully show that goodness is a necessary condition for being God, then to show that the first cause is evil is *de facto* to show that it is not God and further to show that the existence of God is still to be demonstrated.

In response the Thomist would appeal to the metaphysics of the issue and argue that existence as such is good. In fact, the language is even stronger. For Thomas being and good are convertible. This is not to say that when we judge something to be good we are saying nothing more about it than that it is. Rather, though being is common to all things that exist, Thomas argues "some predicates may be said to add to being inasmuch as they express a mode of being not expressed by the term *being*."<sup>19</sup>

There are two ways this is done. The first way this is done is when the mode expresses a certain manner of being inasmuch as there are different grades of being. Thus, in one sense 'substance' does not add a difference to being but expresses a special manner of existing. By expressing this special manner of existence one might say that the term 'substance' does add to

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<sup>19</sup> *Truth*, I, 1, Reply, trans. Mulligan, vol. 1, p. 5. sed secundum hoc aliqua dicuntur addere super ens, in quantum exprimunt modum ipsius entis qui nomine entis non exprimitur.

the notion of 'being' in such a way that, though 'being' and 'substance' are convertible, something is still expressed by the use of the term 'substance' that is not expressed by the use of the 'being.'

The second way in which some predicates may be said to add to being is that some predicates add to being because they express a mode that is common and consequent upon every being. This second way gets us closer to the issue at hand. Here two further divisions are noted, viz., whether the mode follows upon every being in consideration of that being absolutely or whether the mode follows upon every being in consideration of that being in relation to another being. Here then Thomas argues that, since the soul has both knowing and appetitive powers "good expresses the correspondence of being to the appetitive power, for, and so we note in the *Ethics*, the good is 'that which all desire' just as "true expresses the correspondence of being to the knowing power, for all knowing is produced by an assimilation of the knower to the thing known."<sup>20</sup>

Thus, since for Thomas being as such is good and being is limited only inasmuch as it is conjoined with form or with form and matter, then any being that is infinite being is *de facto* infinitely good. Now this argument is bound to fail unless and until one accepts the metaphysical schema that informs the argument. But for the atheist to insist that the issue of the moral status of the first cause be settled irrespective of any particular metaphysical commitments is to ask the Thomist to cease being a Thomist. The issue ultimately turns, therefore, both for the existence as well as other things concerning God, to the truthfulness of this philosophical system itself. It is to this final consideration that one would need to turn ones attention.

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<sup>20</sup> *Truth*, I, 1, Reply, trans. Mulligan, vol. 1, p. 6. Convenientiam ergo entis ad appetitum exprimit hoc nomen bonum, ut in principio Ethic. dicitur quod *bonum est quod omnia appetunt*. ... Convenientiam vero entis ad intellectum exprimit hoc nomen verum. Omnis autem cognitio perficitur per assimilationem cognoscentis ad rem cognitam ....