

St. Thomas, Norman Kretzmann, and Divine Freedom in Creating

LAWRENCE DEWAN, OP

Collège Dominicain

Ottawa, Canada

MY PROJECT here is to review and criticize the position of the late Norman Kretzmann concerning Thomas Aquinas on God's freedom to create or not to create. I will first recall the Kretzmann position; second, defend St. Thomas; and third, suggest one fundamental reason why Kretzmann made the mistake I see him as making.

As is well-known, St. Thomas taught that God exercised free choice in willing to create rather than not to do so.¹ Kretzmann, considering the

¹ *ST I*, q. 46, a. 1 (294a40–42): “Speaking unqualifiedly, it is not necessary for God to will something other than himself” (absolute loquendo, non est necesse Deum velle aliquid nisi seipsum). Cf. *I*, q. 19, a. 10, and *I*, q. 19, a. 3. That St. Thomas did not consider this an *easy* topic, though it is knowable by natural reason, is suggested by his use of it to help explain God having revealed a truth about himself that surpasses the capacity of natural reason, namely, that he is a Trinity of persons. He says:

knowledge of the divine Persons was necessary . . . in one way, so that one might *judge rightly concerning the creation of things*. For through this, that we say that God made all things through his Word, *there is excluded the error of those holding that God produced things by necessity of nature*. And by the fact that we hold that there is in Him a procession of love, it is shown that *he did not produce creatures because of any neediness [non propter aliquam exigentiam]*, nor on account of some other extrinsic cause, but because of *the love of his own goodness*. Hence also, Moses, after he said: “In the beginning, God created heaven and earth,” adds: “God said: Let there be light!” in order to show the Word of God; and after, he said: “God saw the light, that it was good,” in order to show the approval of the divine Love; and similarly with the other works. (*ST I*, q. 32, a. 1, ad 3 [210a44–b11], emphasis added)

overall presentation of Thomas on the divine will and creation, judged that Thomas should rather have said, based on some of Thomas's own principles, that God's willing to create was an absolutely necessary act of divine willing, just as God's willing his own being is absolutely necessary. He thus thought he saw a tension in Thomas on this subject.²

Kretzmann's Criticism

How does Kretzmann argue for this position? Let us begin with a statement from his last book, on creation.³ In his treatment of *Summa contra Gentiles* 2.23, where Thomas teaches that God, as regards his action relative to creatures, acts not by natural necessity but by judgment or choice of the will (*per arbitrium voluntatis*), Kretzmann says:

Aquinas's own presentation of God's willing of other things, particularly in Book I, [note 56] and his acceptance of the Dionysian principle ("Goodness is by its very nature diffusive of itself and [thereby] of being") commits him to a necessitarian explanation of God's willing things other than himself. [note 57] I favor such an explanation, which sees God's creating as his (freely)⁴ acting through the necessity of his nature (considered as perfect goodness), and which confines the creator's free choice among alternatives to the selection of which ones

² Kretzmann's 1991 paper on the "general problem" (cf. below, note 8) begins with references to Augustine and the question whether the "why?" of God's creating is "goodness" or "he willed"; Kretzmann thinks he sees this tension in Thomas; the possibility of such a "tension" of answers in Augustine was presented by H. Cousineau, SJ, "Creation and Freedom: An Augustinian Problem: 'Quia voluit?' and/or 'Quia bonus?'" *Recherches Augustiniennes* 2 (1962): 253–71.

³ Norman Kretzmann, *The Metaphysics of Creation: Aquinas's Natural Theology in Summa Contra Gentiles II*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999).

⁴ Lest the word "freely" confuse us, I would note, first, that *I* will mean by "free" willing in this essay the freedom of *choice*. Kretzmann here is speaking of what Thomas carefully describes as a willing by "natural necessity" (cf. *ST* I, q. 82, a. 1); the will is unable to exercise any control over such an act (*ibid.*, ad 3). In *ST* I, q. 19, a. 3, he calls God's willing his own goodness "absolutely necessary." Kretzmann's use of the term "freely" about such willing seemingly relates to the use of the term "*liberum voluntatem*," "free will," about such willing, in keeping with the expression of Augustine in *De civitate dei* 5.10 [PL 41.152], referred to by Thomas in *De veritate* 24.1, ad 20; as Thomas explains in *ST* I, q. 82, a. 1, ad 1, this refers only to lack of *coercion*. Cf. also Thomas, *Contra doctrinam retrahentium* c. 13 (written in 1271): "Libertati enim voluntatis non opponitur confirmatio voluntatis in bono: alioquin nec deus nec beati liberam voluntatem haberent. Opponitur autem ei necessitas *coactionis* ex violentia vel metu procedens" (To freedom of the will the confirmation of the will in the good is not opposed: otherwise neither God nor the blessed would have free will. However, coercive necessitation whether coming from violence or from fear is opposed to it).

to actualize for purpose of manifesting the goodness that is identical with his being. As I see it, God does (freely) create through the necessity of his nature, and freely chooses among alternatives in deciding what to create. (126)

The footnotes send us to Book 1 of the *Summa contra Gentiles*, and so also to *The Metaphysics of Theism*, Kretzmann's commentary on that work.⁵ Note 5⁶ sends us to *Summa contra Gentiles* 1.75.643, 676.647, and 81.682. Now, all of these passages merely make the point that God wills himself and other things in a single act of will. Without wishing to minimize the subtlety of Thomas's treatment of the divine simplicity, one can still say that due attention to the distinction between the principal object of the divine will and derivative objects, as taught in *Summa contra Gentiles* 1.74–75, should serve to eliminate difficulty for divine freedom merely based on the unity of the act.⁷ Note 57 sends us to Norman Kretzmann, *The Metaphysics of Theism* (ch. 7, sect. 7–9) for an “at length” argument on the matter, and to two 1991 papers.⁸ All we have here in this *The Metaphysics of Creation*

⁵ Norman Kretzmann, *The Metaphysics of Theism: Aquinas's Natural Theology in Summa Contra Gentiles I*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).

⁶ The third number in each of these references indicates the paragraph in the ScG edition by C. Pera, P. Marc, and P. Carmello (Rome/Turin: Marietti, 1961).

⁷ We can see that Kretzmann's unhappiness with Thomas's own teaching on God's free choice is related to the question of the object of the act. The creatures are included in the object, not as principal object, but as associated secondary objects, because of the divine intellect's assessment of them, not as principles of God's goodness, but as likenesses of God's goodness. Cf. ScG 1.82 (699). That is why it would be a monstrosity for God's will to bear upon them other than as mere *convenientia*: they cannot be willed as *necessaria*. (ed. Pera, column A, lines 45–51.) Kretzmann, on the other hand, writes:

This single act of will—God's sole, eternally occurrent, all-encompassing volition—has already expressly been shown to be necessary and choiceless as regards its principal object, even if it is free in an attenuated sense. How, then, could any act *identical* with that act count as an act of choice? As we go further into Aquinas's account of God's willing of creatures, it's becoming only harder to see how choice can enter into God's volition at all. Aquinas acknowledges the difficulty. (Kretzmann, *The Metaphysics of Theism*, 220)

He goes on to quote the introduction to ch. 81 (682). Of course, Aquinas is quite satisfied with his own answers to the difficulty which he goes on to propose. Evidently, Kretzmann will not be. (We might note that if Kretzmann is going to attribute any choice to God, he is certainly going to have to face the same difficulty, or give up the divine simplicity. However we will not pursue that issue here.)

⁸ These are in Scott MacDonald, ed., *Being and Goodness: The Concept of the Good in Metaphysics and Philosophical Theology* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press,

text is the single-act doctrine plus the “Dionysian principle,” namely, “bonum diffusivum sui” doctrine.⁹ Certainly, the one-act doctrine does not do much for Kretzmann’s case, and it seems to me that everything hinges on what to make of Thomas’s technique of using “bonum diffusivum sui.” Since Kretzmann himself, on this matter, sends us to *The Metaphysics of Theism*, let us review what he does there.

In the section of his discussion where he addresses Thomas’s explanation of the divine goodness as principle, giving worth to the existence of other things, Kretzmann begins by underlining that the other things cannot be “means.” He notes that Thomas himself stresses this. But this leads Kretzmann to the view that God all by himself would seem to be “the best of all possible worlds.” Accordingly, when Kretzmann directly confronts the question of why the divine goodness would constitute a reason¹⁰ for the existence of things other than God, it takes the form:

what motivates God to choose not the *world* consisting solely of himself, the absolutely perfect being, but, instead, a *world* consisting of the absolutely perfect being accompanied by a universe swarming with countless other beings, none of which—not even any that is perfect in its kind—is or could be absolutely perfect? I find Aquinas’s attempts to answer this question unconvincing. (222, emphasis added)

As an indication of an “unconvincing” answer, he here quotes (and it is certainly the right passage to refer to) *Summa contra Gentiles* 1.82 (699); to me it seems perfect. We read:

Now, though the divine will is not determined relative to its effects, nevertheless it is not necessary to say that it wills none of them, or that it is determined by something outside towards willing them: for since the *apprehended* good determines the will as its proper object, and the divine *intellect* is not extraneous to his will, since both are his essence, then if the will of God is determined by his intellect towards willing

1991): “A General Problem of Creation: Why Would God Create Anything at All?” 208–28; and “A Particular Problem of Creation: Why Would God Create This World?” 229–49. It is the first of these that concerns our question.

⁹ Cf. for example, *ST* I, q. 5, a. 4, obj. 2 and ad 2. On “bonum diffusivum sui” and Thomas, cf. my paper, “St. Thomas and the Causality of God’s Goodness,” *Laval théologique et philosophique* 34 (1978): 291–304.

¹⁰ *ScG* 1.86 (ed. Pera, no. 718) teaches that the reason for God willing other things diverse from himself is his own goodness, his goodness being willed by him as an end, and the others willed by him as items ordered toward that end. In my aforementioned paper, on “the causality of God’s goodness,” I have presented Thomas’s conception of the good as what has the nature of what merits reproduction: cf. especially p. 301.

something, that will not be a determination of the divine will brought about by something outside. For the divine intellect apprehends not only the divine act of being [*divinum esse*], which is his goodness, but also other goods, as was shown earlier. [1.49] It apprehends these as likenesses of the divine goodness and essence, and not as its principles. And thus the divine will tends towards them as items harmonizing [*convenientia*] with his own goodness, but not as items necessary for his own goodness.

Kretzmann quoted this in part, but I am quoting it as a whole. The reason I do so is that Kretzmann never seems to have appreciated the doctrine of the mode of goodness of the object, a doctrine Thomas is observing as to will as found in us, and obviously needed if the notion of will as applied to God is to have any proper content.

I say that the passage from Thomas is the right *Summa contra Gentiles* text to quote as to God's willing of other things, but I do not see it as an "answer" to Kretzmann's question, for the simple reason that I do not believe Thomas would ever have accepted that question as truly *à propos*. I will return to this at the end of the essay.

What we have in the above *Summa contra Gentiles* text is the very same line of thinking that we will have in the *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 19, a. 3 as regards the impossibility of God's willing of creatures being anything but a choice. It seems to me inevitable.

Thomas's Argument

Though Kretzmann in *The Metaphysics of Theism* is commenting on *Summa contra Gentiles* 1, he refers to *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 19, a. 2, which he presents as "more pointed evidence" [225] of the necessity that production follow from goodness ["bonum diffusivum sui"]. That is, the supposed tension in Thomas's doctrine would find question 19, article 2 at odds with question 19, article 3. Accordingly, I wish to focus on the sequence of discussions in question 19. The very least one can say is that Kretzmann has in front of him Thomas himself designing a questionnaire in which the doctrine of self-diffusion is used *immediately prior* to I, q. 19, a. 3, the doctrine of the *inevitability of freedom, that is, no absolute necessity*, in that self-diffusion, in the case of God producing other things (free self-diffusion as the *metaphysically necessary* judgment of the issue). Thomas can hardly be accused of "perhaps inadvertently" (Kretzmann's expression)¹¹

¹¹ This expression is actually used by Kretzmann in *The Metaphysics of Theism*, 223, where the discussion bears on ScG 1.87 (724), that God's goodness "is the cause of God's willing; and it is also the very willing itself." In that text, Thomas is making the point that, if one wishes to speak of a "cause" of God's willing, one can only

confusing the two doctrines. Thomas obviously sees the presentation as entirely coherent, and the only possible coherent account.

Let us review, then, the sequence of discussion in question 19. The topic is the divine will. God has come on the scene, so to speak, in the *Summa Theologiae* I as an existing maximal being, cause of being and goodness and of every perfection for every being: *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 2, a. 3: the Fourth Way. The nature of his being, perfection, and goodness has been presented as far as the human mind can do so.¹² Moving into divine operation, questions 14–18 present the divine intellect and associated considerations. Thus, all is prepared for consideration of the will.

The first article of question 19 asks whether there is will in God, and this is affirmatively answered on the basis of God's having intellect. Will accompanies intellect. However, this is not simply asserted. The accompanying of intellect by will is explained through a comparison with natural things, things that lack knowledge. The point is to spotlight the presence of *inclination* in things.¹³ A natural being, if it has not a form that is natural for it, tends toward it, and if it has that form, reposes in it. (Thus, Thomas regularly introduces the proposition, when speaking of appetite in the most general way, that every being has appetite for its own perfection.)¹⁴ This then is proposed as a law of being, and it is seen to be full-filled at the higher level that is the intellectual nature, the nature having intellectual knowledge. Just as the natural thing has being and perfection through form, so the intellectual nature, through intelligible form, sees

refer to the divine goodness itself, and since that is identical with the divine act of will, this is hardly a "causality" that threatens the divine perfection. There is no reason to say that this implies a necessitarian explanation of God's willing other things, unless one thinks that a doctrine of thoroughgoing divine simplicity implies it. That is not, in fact, Kretzmann's argument. He rather sees in the above sentence from ScG 1.87 an "echo" of "bonum diffusivum sui," and for him "bonum diffusivum sui" is a doctrine of necessary creation. Why, I ask, would identifying God's goodness with his willing constitute an "echo" of "bonum diffusivum sui" anyway? Perhaps he takes it as meaning that God's goodness is *essentially* the willing of *creatures*. This is to ignore the diversity of notions whereby we make our approach to God. God is, indeed, identical with the choosing of creatures, and that is why the willing of things other than God is suppositionally necessary (cf. *ST* I, q. 19, a. 3): given that he does so choose, he must eternally so choose, because he is unchangeable (something that pertains to essence as such).

¹² Qq. 3–11, with qq. 12 and 13 on the human knowing and naming of God.

¹³ Cf. *ST* I, q. 80, a. 1; also I, q. 60, a. 5 (ed. Ottawa, 366a50–53) and the entire discussion of natural inclination in the intellectual nature presented in I, q. 60, a. 1–5.

¹⁴ Cf. *ST* I, q. 5, a. 1; I, q. 48, a. 1 (ed. Ottawa, 304a4–5).

goodness.¹⁵ Accordingly, it is presented as seeking the goodness that it perceives itself to lack, and reposing in the goodness that it properly possesses. All this relates to the doctrine that through sense and intellect the soul is in a way all things.¹⁶ That is, the intellectual nature has a capacity to share in infinite goodness.¹⁷ All this natural inclination, attending on the apprehension of goodness, pertains to will.¹⁸

Remarkably, the body of I, q. 19, a. 1 merely concludes that since God has intellect, he has will (though it does add that just as the divine act of understanding is identical with the divine act of being, so also is the divine act of willing).¹⁹ The implications of its approach are seen only in the replies to the objections. Thus, in the ad 2 we see that his willing is a love of *his own* goodness and a delighting in *that* goodness. Similarly, though a will is a “moved mover,” the picture we get in the ad 3 is that it is only the divine goodness itself that “moves” the divine will (and since both the goodness and the will are identically the divine essence, there is really no “this moves that”).²⁰ This primary focus on will in God as divine love and delight for the divine goodness is *quite different* from the approach to the question of God’s having will in the earlier *De veritate*. There, will was presented as *relating one thing to another*, and especially as having *free inclination* in that regard, the example being the architect free to build or not to build, and to build this or that.²¹

Accordingly, in *Summa Theologiae* I, question 19, the next article asks whether God wills things other than himself. It is worth underlining that

¹⁵ Cf. *ST* I, q. 59, a. 1.

¹⁶ *ST* I, q. 14, a. 1; I, q. 80, a. 1, and so on.

¹⁷ Cf. *ST* I–II, q. 2, a. 6 (723b33–724a5); also I, q. 54, a. 2 (334a18–29).

¹⁸ *ST* I, q. 60, a. 5: “[T]he natural inclination in those things which lack reason demonstrates the natural inclination in the will of the intellectual nature.”

¹⁹ This is a backward reference to *ST* I, q. 14, a. 4, where it was argued that God’s *esse* and essence and *intelligere* are identical, and thus that to attribute understanding to God does not posit any multiplicity in the divine substance.

²⁰ The doctrine that God is by his very own essence good, taught in I, q. 6, a. 3, is referred to in all three replies to objections here in I, q. 19, a. 1. The doctrine of I, q. 6, a. 3 should be stressed. Where the good of creatures was seen in their substantial being, in the accidents related to their perfect operation, and in their order to another as to an end, God is seen as essentially his own act of being, and what others have through accidents, he has essentially; most important, he is not ordered toward anything else, as to an end, but rather he is the ultimate end of all things. He has every mode of perfection as identical with his own essence. No wonder it is a question whether he could possibly will anything other than himself!

²¹ *De veritate* 23.1; cf. also *Scriptum super Sententiis magistri Petri Lombardi* 3.27.1.4 (ed. Moos, 868, nos. 74–75), where inclination is presented in terms of order toward others.

this is not yet the question: Is God's willing of the things the *cause* of the existence of those things. That question will be posed only in article 4. In article 2, the focus is on the sort of willing to be attributed to God, as regards its objects. It has been seen that the object of divine willing is the divine goodness or essence.²² Is there any room for, any appropriateness of, a willing of things other than the divine goodness? Just as there was controversy attached to the very idea of the divine *intellect* considering anything but God himself, so also the parallel question must be raised as regards the divine willing.²³

How does Thomas handle this? We see a replay of the technique used in article 1.²⁴ Thomas begins with the simple conclusion: God wills not only himself but [the things] other than himself. He then immediately refers us to the just seen comparison of the will in intellectual natures to the inclination in natural things. We read:

For the natural thing does not have merely a natural inclination with respect to its own proper good, that it acquire it when it does not have it or that it repose in it when it has it, but also that it diffuse [*diffundat*] its own proper good into other things, according as this is possible. Hence, we see that every agent, inasmuch as it is in act and perfect, produces something similar to itself.²⁵

²² I had written that the *primary* object was seen to be the divine good; however, though I, q. 19, a. 1, ad 3, does speak of the "principal" object, in considering things other than God, in speaking of God himself it speaks simply of his own goodness as being "*the object of the divine will*"; so also, in the ad 2, the will of God always has "its object," since it is essentially identical with it. In I, q. 19, a. 3 (133a8–17), God's own goodness is called the "proper object" of his will, and, by implication, the "proper and principal object."

²³ Cf. *ST* I, q. 14, a. 5. Notice the similarity in the types of objection proposed there and here in I, q. 19, a. 2. There is no real parallel to I, q. 19, a. 2 in the *De veritate*. The Ottawa edition suggests *De veritate* 23.4, but this is on a somewhat different topic: whether the divine will necessarily wills everything that it wills. *De veritate* 23.1, as we said, collapses into a unity the question of God having will with God willing other things.

²⁴ In *Scriptum super Sententiis magistri Petri Lombardi* 1.45.1.2, it is clearer that Thomas is speaking of God willing the things other than himself *that actually exist*. This makes clearer the distinction between the queries: (1) Does God will other things? And, (2) Is his willing the *cause* of these things? I might repeat that from the outset (*ST* I, q. 2, a. 3), God is presented as the maximal being, *cause* of being and goodness and every perfection for all beings.

²⁵ Cf. *De Potentia* 2.1:

The nature of any act whatsoever is that it communicate itself inasmuch as this is possible. Hence, [text reads *unde*; but I suggest *enim*: that is, For] each agent acts inasmuch as it is in act; but to act is nothing else but

This is the starting point of the consideration. It is immediately and with maximum brevity attributed to will: "Hence, this also pertains to the intelligibility of will: that the good which someone has, he communicate to others, according as this is possible."²⁶ Next, the validity of going on to attribute this to will as found in God is stressed and explained: "And this pertains *most especially* to divine will, from which, by some likeness, all perfection is derived." We might ask here whether we are not anticipating the later conclusion that God's will is the cause of things; perhaps this is not so, since that conclusion is about efficient causality, and what we have here seems to be more a matter of exemplar causality; thus, perhaps the anticipation is relative to I, q. 44, a. 3: God as the exemplar cause of all. Of course, in I, q. 6, a. 4 we were told that he was the exemplar cause of all goodness, which is very much identified with perfection: cf. I, q. 6, a. 3.²⁷

And at last we come to the actual application of the principles to the question at hand:

Hence, if natural things, inasmuch as they are perfect, communicate their good to others, much more does it pertain to the divine will that it communicate its good to others through likeness, according as this is possible. Thus, it wills both itself to be and the others: but itself as end, whereas [it wills] the others as ordered towards the end, inasmuch as it becomes [*inquantum condecet*] the divine goodness for others to participate in it.

to communicate that through which the agent is in act, to the extent that this is possible. Now, the divine nature is maximally and most purely act. Hence it too communicates itself inasmuch as this is possible. Thus, it communicates itself by mere likeness to creatures, as is clear to all: for every creature is a being in virtue of likeness to it.

Kretzmann does not refer to this text in either of his books; it clearly would have confirmed him all the more in his conviction. It certainly shows that Thomas has no hesitation in using the doctrine of "*bonum diffusivum sui*." Everything really turns on the question: How possible is divine willing of others? I believe Thomas has *demonstrated* that *it can only be a choice*.

²⁶ In her April 26, 1995, obituary in the *New York Times*, Ginger Rogers, the dancer and entertainer, who died the previous day at age eighty-three, was reported as having once been asked by an interviewer what personal quality she was proudest of; she replied: "The most important thing in anyone's life is to be giving something. The quality I can give is fun and joy and happiness. This is my gift."

²⁷ Note ST I, q. 59, a. 1, where the whole hierarchy of inclination is presented as emanating from the divine will. In connection with ST I, q. 59, a. 1, note I-II, q. 79, a. 2, s.c., where there is a reference to Augustine, *De Trinitate* 3.4 (PL 43, 873): "[T]he will of God is the cause of all movements" (used by Thomas as referring to the movements of the *liberum arbitrium* of the human being).

This ends the body of the article. Clearly, there is *no* hesitation on Thomas's part in presenting this conception of what belongs to divine will *most of all* instances of inclination: It is to communicate the divine goodness by likeness as much as possible.

However, there is more to the conclusion than that. There is already the careful specification of the nature of the objects of the willing. In willing himself to be,²⁸ God is willing *as one wills an end* (and for the willing of the end precisely as end, there can be no question of choice: *ST* I-II, q. 13, a. 3). In willing things other than himself to be, however, he is willing them "as ordered towards the end" [*ut ad finem*]: This does not yet determine explicitly the mode of his willing of those things, that is, whether it is a necessary willing or an optional willing. That is only made explicit in the next article. However, it expresses the measure of the *possibility* mentioned in the expression "as much as possible": What is the measure of the "goodness" of such an object? The stage is thus set for that next article, especially when one takes into consideration the word *condecet*, that is, it is *becoming* for the divine will to so will.²⁹

If the conclusion of this article 2 is about the very nature of will and especially of the divine will, it is also true that the conclusion of article 3 is about that same nature. In article 3 Thomas *demonstrates* that the *only possible* mode of the divine willing of another thing is that of entirely free choice. The inclination to communicate goodness is characterized by "according as this is possible." In what way is the divine willing of other things *possible*? What does the nature of will, as we experience here in this world, tell us about that? Just as we used natural things and created will to approach the character of the divine will as regards the inclination to communicate the divine goodness, so also here we base our judgment on will as we know it in creatures.³⁰

There are six objections introducing this discussion, surely a sign of difficulty and of some debate in the schools. The article's query is: Whether

²⁸ While it is true that God "wills himself to be," I would suggest that the best conception of his willing of himself is as "loving himself" and "delighting in his own being and goodness." "Willing himself to be" might be taken causally, and that would be quite wrong. Cf. *ST* I, q. 41, a. 2.

²⁹ On this assessment of the divine willing of creatures as *decentia*, cf. my paper: "St. Thomas, God's Goodness, and God's Morality," in *The Modern Schoolman* 70 (1992): 45–51.

³⁰ On the justification of this procedure of natural theology, cf. Aquinas, *Scriptum super Sententiis magistri Petri Lombardi* 1.2.1.2 (where the obj. 2 and the ad 2 speak explicitly of distinguishing in God what pertains to the operations of intellect and will) and 1.2.1.3 (a later, c. 1265, addition to Thomas's *Scriptum super Sententiis magistri Petri Lombardi*).

God wills by necessity whatever he wills? Thomas is going to say that God wills himself by *absolute* necessity, and that *all* his willing is necessary, speaking of *suppositional* necessity (the supposition being that he *does* so will, and the necessity deriving from the fact that the divine will is immutable);³¹ however, his willing of things other than himself is not by absolute necessity, but rather is voluntary.³²

The body of this article is much longer than the two preceding it. The distinction between absolute necessity and suppositional necessity shapes the reply. We have first the explanation of this distinction. What characterizes absolute necessity? This pertains to the discussion of an essential nature. Thus, it can be judged by the relationship of the terms that express the situation. With absolute necessity, the predicate is included in the notion of the subject (in this way, it is necessary that a human being be an animal), or else the subject is included in the definition of the predicate (in this way, a [whole] number is odd or even).³³ This is contrasted with the proposition: "Socrates is seated." There is no absolute necessity

³¹ As one can see from I, q. 19, a. 3, obj. 1 and ad 1 (where the point depends on divine *eternity*), immutability pertains to the divine will in virtue of its identity with the divine *substance* (cf. I, q. 14, prologue [ed. Ottawa, 91a16–19]); thus, Thomas discussed eternity and immutability in qq. 9 and 10; cf. especially I, q. 9, a. 1.

³² We might note the scriptural passage that Thomas selects for the *sed contra* argument. Where does he find an authority for the divine freedom with respect to God willing things other than himself? He goes to St. Paul, Ephesians 1.11, speaking of the creator: "who brings about all things according to the counsel of his will" (qui operatur omnia secundum consilium voluntatis suae). (The Greek runs: "ta panta energountos kata tén *boulén* tou thelématos autou" [emphasis added]. The *Bible de Jérusalem* translates: "qui mène toutes choses aux gré de sa volonté" [emphasis added]. The *Revised Standard Version* has: "Who accomplishes all things according to the *counsel* of his will" [emphasis added]. Thomas is quoting the Latin Vulgate. [At ST II–II, q. 51, a. 1. Thomas notes the equivalence of the Greek word *boulé* and the Latin word *consilium*.]) The word *consilium*, counsel, is the key here. Thomas argues in the *sed contra* that what we do by *counsel* of the will, we do not do by *necessity* of the will. The crucial role of counsel in the conception of the will moving itself, that is, freedom of choice, is clearly brought out in *De Malo* 6. The argument is very definite. We read: "Cum igitur uoluntas se consilio moueat, consilium autem est inquisitio quedam non demonstratiua set ad opposita uiam habens, non ex necessitate uoluntas se ipsam mouet (Since, therefore, the will moves itself through counsel, and counsel is not a demonstrative investigation but rather an investigation that can arrive at opposite conclusions, the will does not set itself in motion in a necessary way; lines 377–381). Cf. my paper "St. Thomas and the Causes of Free Choice," in *Acta Philosophica* 8 (1999): 87–96. In the ST, cf. I–II, q. 14, a. 2, on counsel as bearing strictly on what is "ordered towards an end" and not on the end as such.

³³ These examples relate to the two modes of per se predication presented in *In Post. An.* 1.10 (Leonine lines 25–76), which paraphrases Aristotle at 73a34–40.

there, since he can be seated or standing or lying down. However, it can be a case of suppositional necessity: supposing that he is seated, it is necessary that he is seated while he is seated.³⁴

This now is applied to the divine will. Any power has a necessary relation to its proper object: It is of the very nature of the power that it tend toward its proper and principal object—sight to color.³⁵ And the divine will has such a relation to the divine goodness: This is its proper object, and is thus willed by God the way we humans necessarily will happiness.³⁶

We should underline the way it is still the very nature of will, as we can observe it in humans, that is the means of making the judgment about the divine will. What we mean by “will” in God must be based on what we mean by “will” in us. What we call will in us must exist by priority of God, and in a higher way.³⁷

We continue with the same application. God wills things other than himself as items “ordered towards the end” that is his own goodness. It belongs to *will as such* that what is ordered toward an end, but is not necessary for the existence of that end, is not willed of necessity: It is an object of willing that as an object is *intrinsically optional*. If the end is a leisurely promenade, you do not necessarily make use of a horse.

Thus, it is quite evident that for God to will such an object, that is, an intrinsically optional object of divine will, with absolute necessity would be *against the very nature of will*. If something other than God is willed by God, the willing *must* have the character of optional willing relative to such an object. This follows from the perfection in itself of the divine goodness, infinite in its own intrinsic perfection, and from the nature of will.

³⁴ The distinction between absolute and suppositional necessity is seen in Thomas's *Expositio libri Peryermenias* 1.15 (ed. Leonine, t. 1*1 [Rome/Paris: Commissio Leonina/Vrin, 1989], lines 17–46) commenting on Aristotle, 19a23, where we are told that suppositional necessity is based on the principle that the same thing cannot simultaneously be and not be.

³⁵ Cf. the intellect to being; sound to hearing: *ST* I, q. 5, a. 2.

³⁶ As I said, it is in I, q. 19, a. 1, ad 3, that we see that it is the divine goodness that is the object of the divine will. In *ScG* 1.74 the doctrine is that the essence of God is the “principal item willed,” the “principal object.” However, one should also notice *ScG* 1.72, on God having will, where, in no. 625, one sees the necessity that in God the object of appetite and the appetite itself must be identical: The reason is that only God himself as will can proportionately correspond to the divine goodness.

³⁷ Cf. *ST* I, q. 13, a. 2, on how good is said on God. “Will” is clearly expressive of perfection, as indicated by the arguments in I, q. 19, a. 1; also, even though it can express a relation to creatures, it is said of God as pertaining eternally to him: I, q. 13, a. 7, ad 3.

Of course, we have seen that God *does will* things other than himself. Thus, there is a *suppositional* necessity in his so willing, given the immutability of God.

The doctrine can be summarized by focusing on the contrast between divine being and goodness, on the one hand, and created being and goodness, on the other. As soon as this distance is grasped, it is clear that, relative to the divine will, created goodness can only be an optional object. The grasping of the distance is had in the successive considerations expressed in [A] the Fourth Way proof of God's existence [ST I, q. 2, a. 3], [B] the conclusion that God is the act of being itself subsisting [I, q. 3, a. 4], [C] that thus in God preexist the perfections of all things eminently [I, q. 4, a. 2], [D] that he is thus the source of all goodness [I, q. 6, a. 4]. Indeed, [E] his perfection, that is, his goodness, is unqualifiedly infinite [I, q. 7, a. 1].

Hence, as regards the doctrine that it belongs to the divine will, most of all, to communicate its good through likeness as much as possible [1.19.2], it seems clear that adequate attention must be paid to the expression "as much as possible." How possible is such a willing? It is only possible in the mode of choice. A necessary act of willing a creature contradicts the nature of willing and divine willing.

Thus, far from there being a "tension" as between the doctrines of 1.19.2 and 1.19.3, 1.19.3 completes the picture of divine willing, using the very same line of investigation that obtained in 1.19.1 and 1.19.2. God is "all for" communicating his goodness to another being, and does so in the only possible way, namely, by freely choosing to do so.

The *formality* of Thomas's approach is remarkable. He is not yet even addressing the question of whether the divine willing of other things is the *cause* of those other things. He is focusing strictly on the nature of willing. Since our immediate interest is Kretzmann's issue, which turns on the nature of the will as presented in 1.19.2, I will leave aside discussion of 1.19.4.³⁸

The Root of the Kretzmann Problem

As we said at the beginning of the essay, in Kretzmann's presentation of Thomas, God seems to be the "best possible world," and the question Thomas is supposed to be answering becomes why God chooses to *add* less perfect being to such a situation. Thus, Kretzmann has Thomas viewing God as "choosing . . . a world consisting" of himself and less perfect beings. The obvious point is that such a *unified* object, a world including

³⁸ I might note, however, that if Kretzmann were right, one could not say that the divine will is the *cause* of the things God creates; the divine nature would be the cause: cf. the very helpful ST I, q. 41, a. 2.

God and creatures, is not in Thomas's doctrine at all, and certainly not an object of divine choice.

Such a choice would have to be undertaken in the light of an end that would include under it the divine good and the created good as *ad finem* items.³⁹ In that picture, "the good world" would be a third item to which divine good and created good would relate (even as *parts*). Such a three-fold picture of the analogy of the good between creatures and God is explicitly rejected by Thomas.⁴⁰

Kretzmann speaks of Thomas's God as "*surrounded* [emphasis added] by uncountably many variously incomplete *likenesses* of itself" (*Metaphysics of Theism*, 223). These likenesses Kretzmann conceives of as supposedly "*suitable companions*" (223, original emphasis) for the absolutely perfect being.⁴¹

These views are quite foreign to Thomas's own conception of the creator and his product. Though Kretzmann speaks of God as being absolutely perfect and as perfect goodness, it seems to me that he is not following out the implications of such unqualifiedly infinite being, perfection, goodness. To conceive of a world consisting of God and creatures is to place God within an order with those creatures. This is rejected by Thomas. God is not really related to creatures. Kretzmann characterizes Thomas's God by the word "accompanied":

what motivates God to choose not the *world* consisting solely of himself, the absolutely perfect being, but, instead, a *world* consisting of the *absolutely perfect being accompanied* by a universe swarming with countless other beings. (*Metaphysics of Theism*, 222, emphasis added)

The word "accompanied" ties together the two parts of the object of choice Kretzmann has in mind, and requires criticism in the light of the doctrine that the divine transcendence leaves room for no real relation of God to a creature.⁴² As Thomas says:

since God is *outside the entire order of the creature*, and all creatures are ordered to him, and not the converse, it is evident that creatures are

³⁹ The object of choice is what is *ad finem*, that is, ordered toward an end; the ultimate end in no way falls under choice: *ST* I–II, q. 13, a. 3.

⁴⁰ Cf. *ST* I, q. 13, a. 5 (ed. Ottawa, 81a15–37). Notice that the order is from creatures to God, as to that in which the perfections of all things preexist in an excelling way.

⁴¹ They are, of course, suitable *products*: *ScG* 82 (699): "divina voluntas in illa tendit ut suae bonitati convenientia."

⁴² On the way that God transcends "the whole of being," cf. my papers "St. Thomas and Creation: Does God Create 'Reality'?" *Science et Esprit* 51 (1999): 5–25; and "Thomas Aquinas and Being as a Nature," *Acta Philosophica* 12 (2003): 123–35.

really related to God himself, but in God there is not any real relation to creatures; rather, [such relations are] merely according to notion, inasmuch as creatures are related to him.⁴³

Creatures accompany God, by virtue of a real relation to him, that is, they serve him. If one says that God “is accompanied,” it is that real relation in creatures that one must mean.

Kretzmann’s approach eliminates the difference in the two modes of object of will, the principle object and the secondary objects, judged to be secondary because of the nature of the proportion of their goodness to the divine goodness.⁴⁴ We see this clearly in Kretzmann’s attributing to Thomas the idea of a divine choice of a world including God and creatures.⁴⁵

Though Kretzmann speaks of God as containing all perfection, my general point is that Kretzmann fails to appreciate the divine transcendence. This makes him misconceive the problem of why creation. He expresses it in terms of a perfect world and addition or subtraction. (Thus, a sort of “why spoil it?” question seems implied.)

One might concede that God, if one will, is the best possible “world,”⁴⁶ and stress that there are no additions possible.⁴⁷ But likeness to it is possible and worthwhile.

I wish to suggest that the difficulty that Kretzmann has with God’s free choice in creating is linked to his failure to appreciate Thomas’s doctrine of being, and so of goodness. After all, the case for free creation turns entirely on the distinction between that which is good by its very own

⁴³ *ST* I, q. 13, a. 7 (ed. Ottawa, 84a21–29).

⁴⁴ The use of the term “proportion” here follows that of Thomas in *ST* I, q. 12, a. 1, ad 4, concerning the relation of the creature to the creator.

⁴⁵ The creatures are included in the object, not as principal object, but as associated secondary objects, because of the divine intellect’s assessment of them, not as principles of God’s goodness, but as likenesses of God’s goodness. Cf. *ScG* 1.82 (699). That is why it would be a monstrosity for God’s will to bear upon them other than as mere *convenientia*: They cannot be willed as *necessaria* (ed. Pera, column A, lines 45–51).

⁴⁶ I say this by way of concession. It should be asked whether such a “world” problematic is not a technique of approach to reality more appropriate for the calculative mind as contrasted with genuine ontological analysis: cf. Charles De Koninck, *The Hollow Universe* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), ch. 1, “The World of Symbolic Construction, or Two is One Twice Over.” I consider it truer to say that God is not part of a “world” at all; on this, see my review article of Kretzmann’s *The Metaphysics of Theism*, “Review of Norman Kretzmann, *The Metaphysics of Theism*,” *EIDOS* (University of Waterloo) 14 (1997): 111–13.

⁴⁷ For the impossibility of addition to the unqualified infinite, cf. *De Malo* 5.1, ad 4 (quoted below in the addendum, note 55), and *ST* III, q. 10, a. 3, ad 3.

essence and that which is good only by participation. That Kretzmann's approach might leave out this dimension of the doctrine one was already led to expect by his remarks in *The Metaphysics of Theism* concerning Thomas's presentation of God as *the subsistent act of being [ipsum esse subsistens]*. Kretzmann quotes with approval Christopher Hughes, criticizing the statement that God is "being itself (*ipsum esse*)."⁴⁸ Kretzmann says:

that way of putting it suggests that God is nothing but existence, and as one recent critic puts it, "nothing subsistent could be just existence: a merely existent substance is too thin to be possible."⁴⁹ The identification Aquinas seems to prefer is this: God, or God's nature, is "his own being (*suum esse*)"—that is, the uniquely necessary being of the kind that ultimately explains all existing.⁴⁹

The view that "existence" is "too thin" to be a subsisting thing suggests to me that Kretzmann is limiting the signification of *esse* to the mere assertion of the extra-mental situation of the things one speaks of (the "is" that expresses truth).⁵⁰ If, on the other hand, one were already considering the hierarchy of acts of being discovered in the infra-divine world,⁵¹ one would see that there must exist something that is *being itself, subsisting by itself*. Far from being "thin," it is rightly judged by Thomas to contain eminently the perfections of all things.⁵² Nor is the assertion true

⁴⁸ Christopher Hughes, *On a Complex Theory of a Simple God: An Investigation in Aquinas's Philosophical Theology* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), 21.

⁴⁹ Kretzmann, *The Metaphysics of Theism*, 127–28.

⁵⁰ *ST* I, q. 3, a. 4, ad 2; also cf. *CM* 5.9 (895–896). In this sense of "existence," we say even of blindness that it exists.

⁵¹ Cf. for example, *De ente et essentia* c. 1 (ed. Leonine, lines 53–63, emphasis added):

But because "*ens*" is said absolutely and primarily of substances, and posteriorly and in a somewhat qualified sense of accidents, thus it is that *essentia* also properly and truly is in substances, but in accidents it is in a certain measure and in a qualified sense. But of substances, some are simple and some are composite, and in both there is *essentia*; but in the simple *in a truer and more noble degree [ueriori et nobiliori modo]*, *inasmuch as they also have more noble esse*; for they are the cause of those which are composite, at least [this is true of] the first simple substance which is God.

Cf. also *Scriptum super Sententiis magistri Petri Lombardi* 2.1.1.1 (second argument in the body of the article) (ed. Mandonnet, 12–13). Where the act of being is conceived as itself found in hierarchy, it is not something by nature "thin."

⁵² This doctrine is central in *ST* I. Cf. *ST* I, q. 4, a. 2 (25a11). God is *ipsum esse subsistens*. It is not at odds with the talk about "God's *esse*," but rather is the appropriate way of describing the peculiar status of God's *esse*. Cf. *ST* I, q. 4, a. 2, ad 3. Nor is it at all absent from *ScG* 1, on which Kretzmann is commenting:

that Thomas prefer[s] speaking of God's nature as "his own being" rather than as *ipsum esse subsistens*. Indeed, when, in introducing creation, Thomas presents God as the cause of being for anything that in any way is, it is precisely *ipsum esse subsistens* that is featured.⁵³ It must be appreciated to see why creation can only be a choice.

Addenda

Bernhard-Thomas Blankenhorn, OP, "The Good as Self-diffusive in Thomas Aquinas," *Angelicum* 79 (2002): 803–37. While I find much that is good in this paper, many things trouble me.

cf. ScG 1.28 (no. 260): For a thing "to be its own *esse*" is for that thing to be comparable, as to *esse*, to the way pure subsisting whiteness is related to things that merely participate in whiteness. Thus, while in the passage it is never said that God is *ipsum esse subsistens*, it is said that God who is his own *esse* has *esse* according to the entire power of *being itself* (*ipsius esse*).

⁵³ ST I, q. 44, a. 1. Kretzmann, in *The Metaphysics of Creation*, 56, has some remarks about the other arguments in ScG 2.15, but he concentrates on no. 927, the fifth argument. I would have liked to see a discussion of the first, no. 923, which he mentions in no. 54. He says that "the version of the thesis" for which it argues "looks too strong." This is that "everything that is in any way at all" is from God. He objects that sin, according to St. Thomas, *is* in some way. He then argues, in keeping with what he finds in the notes of the Marietti ed. of I, q. 44, a. 1, of the ST, that the *quocumque modo* expression must be limited to all *natural* beings of any kind. Now, in I–II, q. 79, a. 2: Whether the act of sin is from God, Thomas uses the very language discussed by Kretzmann: "Respondeo dicendum quod *actus* peccati et est *ens*, et est *actus*; et ex utroque habet quod sit a deo. Omne enim *ens*, quocumque modo sit, oportet quod derivetur a primo ente; ut patet per Dionysium, V cap. *De Divinis Nominibus*," emphasis added. And Thomas goes on to explain why God is not the cause of the sin as a sin, that is, as *lacking* the due order.

The problem text to which Kretzmann refers, which speak of a sin as a thing "that is in some way," is *Scriptum super Sententiis magistri Petri Lombardi* 2.37.1: The meaning of "thing," "*res*," which is attributed to the act of sin, including the privation itself, is that of a *res rationis*, and can be attributed even to a pure negation. They are called "beings" because the mind can treat them as beings in order to consider them. They are not *in natura*. This must be what Kretzmann means in saying that a text like 1.44.1 only refers to "natural beings," that is, a sense of "natural being" that would include human rational actions (God is the cause of the act that is involved in the sin, but not of the lack in that act.). However, in 2.37.2, which Kretzmann here cites as well, in the ad 2, it is explained that *even the being of reason that the sin has is from God*.

Thus, the references do not oppose the doctrine that everything that in any way is is from God; it is the defect that is involved in sin that is not from God. There is no reason to limit the beings talked about in 1.44.1 to "every (natural) being of any kind at all" (*The Metaphysics of Creation*, 56, note 54). Rather, it follows for any item that in any way participates in being, precisely to the extent that it participates in being.

At page 819 he attempts to save a “self-communication” within the divine essence, quite apart from a doctrine of the Trinity. Obviously, such a view of God’s understanding and willing himself yields “self-communication” only as an *ens rationis*. There is no real communication, since that implies real distinction. He is trying to save us from “[Norris] Clarke’s dilemma,” that we must either posit necessary creation or a plurality of persons in God in order to maintain “bonum diffusivum sui.” I think one must be content with things seeking to communicate their good *inasmuch as it is possible*.

He lays great emphasis on the “bonum diffusivum sui” referring to final causality. While this is certainly true, Thomas’s doctrine in *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 19, a. 2 is about the nature of the will and thus about efficient causality. Everything turns on the nature of the will in I, q. 19, aa. 1–3.

Blankenhorn kindly refers to my paper, “St. Thomas and the Causality of God’s Goodness,” *Laval théologique et philosophique* 34 (1978): 291–304: “Dewan argues that Peghaire misinterpreted Plato and Thomas, that both see the good as a matter of final causality, and therefore do not posit a necessity on God’s part to create” (830).

In fact, I say nothing about the issue of necessary versus free creation in that paper. What I say is that Thomas’s doctrine of the good as diffusing itself is a doctrine of final causality, but that the doctrine of the final cause always involves the effect: an agent producing something. Peghaire had not understood the reason statements about final causality speak so explicitly about efficient causality. Kretzmann depended somewhat on Peghaire in this respect.

While I do not want to get into the paper’s discussion of the act of being, I must mention that at pages 811 to 812 he makes substantial form “first act” and sees *esse* as seemingly the principle of “acting substantially.” Is he saying that *esse* is second act? Yes, he calls *esse substantiale* an “action”! This is squarely against *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 54, a. 2: The *esse* of a creature cannot be an *actio*.

Sandra Menssen and Thomas Sullivan, “Must God Create?” in *Faith and Philosophy* 12 (1995): 321–41. This paper evaluates two sets of arguments against God creating with absolute freedom: one having the Leibnizian line that God must create the best possible world, and the other based on “bonum diffusivum sui.”

I see, on page 323, that they think of God and creatures as members of a single “world” (and of a “possible world” as consisting of God alone). Now, one might accept the view that God, all by himself, is the “best of all possible worlds.” (I say this by way of concession. It should be asked whether such a “world” problematic is not a technique of approach to

reality appropriate for the calculative mind as contrasted with genuine ontological analysis: cf. C. De Koninck, *The Hollow Universe* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), ch. 1: "The World of Symbolic Construction, or Two is One Twice Over.") However, in doing so, there is no reason to view the result of creation as a new "world" uniting that best world with other beings. Part of the doctrine of analogy of being is that God transcends created reality infinitely. Thus, there is no real relation of God to created reality.

On pages 324 to 325, the authors *defend* a premise [designated "2-a"] in an argument they will reject for other reasons. The premise they defend amounts to saying that a "possible world" that includes God plus a good created world is better than a "possible world" that consists merely of God himself. They defend this on the basis of the premise that "being has value in and of itself" (p. 325).

I would say that this is false. Though the good is in things, nevertheless all the goodness of things derives from the goodness of God. God is the exemplar, efficient, and final cause of all goodness (*ST* I, q. 6, a. 4). One cannot "add" together the goodness of God and the goodness of a creature, so as to get something "better" than the goodness of God alone.⁵⁴ On page 324 they reject what they call "the standard Thomistic line of attack," namely, that one cannot add to the infinite, and God is infinite. Their rebuttal is: "But as Aquinas noted, one can make additions to the infinite if one goes into a different order of infinity" (324). At this point (note 13), they refer us to *Summa Theologiae* III, q. 10, a. 3. It appears that they have in mind the ad 3. However, from that text it is clear that the idea that one can "add to the infinite" holds good only when one is speaking of a *particular* infinite, and not when one is speaking of the divine infinity unqualifiedly. Thus, the authors are misusing the reference to Thomas. He would not suffer an "addition" to the divine infinite goodness as they do.

⁵⁴ *De Malo* 5.1, ad 4: "To the fourth it is to be said that created good added to uncreated good does not make a greater good, nor greater blessedness. The reason for this is that if two participants are conjoined, that which in them is participated can be augmented, but if a participant is added to that which is by essence such, this does not make something greater. . . . Therefore, since God is the very essence of goodness, as Dionysius says in the book *On the Divine Names*, whereas all others are good by participation, God is not made more good by the addition of any good whatsoever: because the good of any other thing whatsoever is contained in him. Hence, since beatitude is nothing other than the obtaining of perfect good, whatever other good added to the divine vision or enjoyment will not make one happier; otherwise, God would be made happier by making creatures."

They also argue against “bonum diffusivum sui” necessitating creation, but they do so, it seems to me, by getting away from the historical meaning (and metaphysical truth) of “bonum diffusivum sui.” The authors see themselves as acting somewhat like Thomas in finding an acceptable meaning for “bonum diffusivum sui” (apparently because Thomas was accused by Kretzmann of having introduced a “novel interpretation” of “bonum diffusivum sui”). In so doing they refuse to be “mired in historical exegesis” (331). N-V