

## Some Notes on St. Thomas's Use of "*dignitas*"

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THE ORIGINAL impetus for these remarks came from a public debate concerning the use of the terms "dignity" and "autonomy" in bioethics. "Dignity," as said of the human being, was said by one participant to be open to too many vague suggestions; he favored instead "autonomy" as expressing the most helpful view of the human being for bioethics. The other participant saw no less variability in what "autonomy" was seen to involve, but he noted a remarkable division on key issues by the users of the two words.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I read of the controversy in the August/September 2008 issue of *First Things*, in Paul Griffiths's article "The Very Autonomous Steven Pinker." Griffiths is replying to an article by Pinker in the May 2008 issue of *The New Republic*, entitled "The Stupidity of Dignity." Pinker himself was reacting to the volume *Human Dignity and Bioethics: Essays Commissioned by the President's Council on Bioethics*, The President's Council on Bioethics, Washington, DC, March 2008. Griffiths's list of issues on which the present users of the two words differ reads: "Autonomy-talkers typically support, among many other things, the effective absence of legal constraint on the availability of the following: the taking of human life in the womb; the bringing into being of humans as sources of stem cells; the bringing into being of humans as sources of cells and tissue for other humans (the English have a nice phrase for this—'savior siblings'); the freedom to kill the sick by removing nutrition and hydration from them; and the medical killing of those who seek and consent to it. Dignity-talkers are likely to oppose these public-policy positions. Autonomy-talk, therefore, provides what dignity-talk prevents: To replace the latter with the former yields, on the dominant present understanding, real difference."

My aim here is to note a variety of contexts in which St. Thomas employs the Latin term “*dignitas*,”<sup>2</sup> providing us with an idea of the background of some of our own considerations.

### Dignity and Governance

I begin with what seems to me the most “down to earth” use of the conception in St. Thomas, that found in the treatment of the virtue called “*observantia*,” in the *ST* II–II, q. 102. Thomas presents a hierarchical sequence of virtues akin to justice.<sup>3</sup> The highest in nobility is religion,<sup>4</sup> followed by filial piety (including patriotism), and then “*observantia*.”<sup>5</sup> Let us try as a translation “submissiveness.”

Thomas has in mind that after God, who is the supreme governor, and one’s father, who has been a source of life and sustenance and education, there is a mode of respect due to those in public office of various sorts, civil, military, educational. He describes our action towards such persons as a “*cultus*.” This is sometimes translated as “worship,”<sup>6</sup> as in, I suppose, “his worship, the mayor.” However, that word is now rather strong for such usage. Let us try “respect.”

Question 102, then, is on “*observantia*.” The first article asks whether it is a special virtue distinct from the others, and the second asks whether it belongs to *observantia* to exhibit “*cultum et honorem*,” respect and honor, to those “established in dignity [*in dignitate constituta*].” Naturally, this expression interested me. I did a search on the words: “*in dignitate constitut*” and found 30 instances, of which 17 were from this one question 102 in the *Secunda secundae*.<sup>7</sup> Let us note the body of the article:

<sup>2</sup> I will use the English word “dignity” in this essay, but I would say that it remains a question to what extent what we shall see about Thomas’s Latin “*dignitas*” can be carried by the English word.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *ST* II–II, q. 80, *art. unic.* where the term “potential part” of justice is used in the introduction, but explained as “virtues annexed to [justice].” The general theory of such annexation is explained at the beginning of the body of the article.

<sup>4</sup> Notice that religion is supreme among moral virtues, a virtue superior even to justice: *ST* II–II, q. 81, a. 6 *in corp.* and *ad 1*.

<sup>5</sup> The old (and in most things admirable) Dominican translation to be found on the New Advent website has “observance,” i.e., it is not much help.

<sup>6</sup> It is so translated in the old Dominican translation.

<sup>7</sup> I notice that in *ST* II–II, q. 183, a. 1 it is the “*plebeius*,” i.e. the common man, that is contrasted with the person “*in dignitate constituta*.” One should take account of such texts as II–II, q. 183 on “*status*,” which seems much more serious than “dignity.” *Status* relates to freedom and servitude. In 183, a. 1 “dignity and ordinary citizenship” are presented somewhat on an “easy come/easy go” level (like rich and poor), whereas “*status*” or “standing” is deeper and less changeable.

I answer that, as is clear from things already said, it is necessary that the virtues be distinguished in a descending order in keeping with the excellence of the persons [*excellencia personarum*] to whom something is to be rendered. Now, just as the father according to the flesh participates in a *particular* measure in the role of principle which is found in God *universally*, so also a person who in some respect *exercises a providential role towards us* participates in what is proper to a father, because the father is the principle of generation and education and discipline and of all those things that pertain to the perfection of human life.

Now, a person established in dignity [*persona . . . in dignitate constituta*] is in the role of a *governing principle* with respect to some things: for example, the governor of the city in political matters, the army commander in matters of warfare, the teacher in matters of learning, and it is similar in other areas. And thus it is that all such persons are called “fathers” because of the similarity of their solicitude; thus, in *Kings* 4.5 the servants of Naaman said to him: “Father, if the prophet had spoken to you of some great thing, etc.” And so, just as under religion, through which respect [*cultus*] is paid to God there is found in an order piety, through which parents are respected, so under piety is found “submissiveness [*observantia*]” through which respect [*cultus*] and honour are shown to persons established in *dignity*.<sup>8</sup>

We see that “dignity” has to do with *being in a providential position*, being actually a source, a principle of well-being in some respect: civil, military, scholastic.<sup>9</sup>

In 183, q. 2 on diversity of standings and jobs in the Church, after perfection and efficiency the third reason given for them is “dignity and beauty” which is had in a hierarchy of standings and official roles.

<sup>8</sup> *ST* II–II, q. 102, a. 1: “Respondeo dicendum quod, sicut ex dictis patet, necesse est ut eo modo per quendam ordinatum descensum distinguantur virtutes, sicut et excellentia personarum quibus est aliquid reddendum. Sicut autem carnalis pater particulariter participat rationem principii, quae universaliter invenitur in deo; ita etiam persona quae quantum ad aliquid providentiam circa nos gerit, particulariter participat proprietatem patris, quia pater est principium et generationis et educationis et disciplinae, et omnium quae ad perfectionem humanae vitae pertinent. Persona autem in dignitate constituta est sicut principium gubernationis respectu aliquarum rerum, sicut princeps civitatis in rebus civilibus, dux autem exercitus in rebus bellicis, magister autem in disciplinis, et simile est in aliis. Et inde est quod omnes tales personae patres appellantur, propter similitudinem curae, sicut IV Reg. V, servi Naaman dixerunt ad eum, pater, etsi rem grandem dixisset tibi propheta, etc.. Et ideo sicut sub religione, per quam cultus tribuitur deo, quodam ordine invenitur pietas, per quam coluntur parentes; ita sub pietate invenitur observantia, per quam cultus et honor exhibetur personis in dignitate constitutis.”

<sup>9</sup> It is in this sense that Thomas describes Our Lord's status in his earthly life thus [*De rationibus fidei*, cap. 7]: “Privatus absque dignitate vixit, ut homines ab inordinato appetitu honorum revocaret.” [He lived as a private person, without (a position of) dignity, so as to warn men against the inordinate appetite for honors.]

The idea is further exhibited in the reply to the second objection. The objection argues that the same sort of treatment is given to those who excel in science and virtue as is given to those “established in dignity,” and yet there is no special virtue by which we honor such people. Why then should there be one for those “in dignity?” And we get the important reply:

To the second it is to be said that someone by the fact that he is established in dignity has not merely some excellence of status, but also the power to govern subordinates. Hence the role of principle, inasmuch as he is governor of others, belongs to him. Now, by the [mere] fact that someone is accomplished in science or virtue he does not have the role of principle relative to others, but rather merely an excellence in himself. And therefore a particular virtue is specially determined for the showing of honour and respect for those who are established in dignity. However, because by science and virtue and all such things someone is rendered capable of the status of dignity, the reverence [*reverentia*] that because of any excellence is shown to some people pertains to the same virtue.<sup>10</sup>

So the *governing role* is essential to dignity, but the *capacity* for it pertains to any excellence.

### Hierarchy of Dignity among Humans

A more universal use of “*dignitas*,” yet still entirely *within* human affairs, is seen in Thomas’s *Commentary on St. Paul to the Romans*: Paul is speaking of those Gentiles who, not having the law, yet obeyed the law written in their hearts.<sup>11</sup> Thomas explains:

Thirdly, he [Paul] shows their dignity, in this, that, not having such law, they themselves are law for themselves, inasmuch as they fulfill the office of law towards themselves, instructing themselves and inclining

<sup>10</sup> ST II–II, q. 102, a. 1, ad 2: “Ad secundum dicendum quod aliquis ex hoc quod est in dignitate constitutus, non solum quandam status excellentiam habet, sed etiam quandam potestatem gubernandi subditos. Unde competit sibi ratio principii, prout est aliorum gubernator. Ex hoc autem quod aliquis habet perfectionem scientiae vel virtutis, non sortitur rationem principii quantum ad alios, sed solum quandam excellentiam in seipso. Et ideo specialiter quaedam virtus determinatur ad exhibendum honorem et cultum his qui sunt in dignitate constituti. Verum quia per scientiam et virtutem, et omnia alia huiusmodi, aliquis idoneus redditur ad dignitatis statum, reverentia quae propter quamcumque excellentiam aliquibus exhibetur, ad eandem virtutem pertinet.”

ST II–II, q. 84, a. 1, ad 1 is helpful on modes of reverence. Cf. also II–II, q. 104, a. 2, ad 4. On the nature of reverence, cf. II–II, q. 103, a. 1, obj. 1 and ad 1; also q. 81, a. 2, ad 1, and ultimately II–II, q. 19, a. 9 on reverence and filial fear, the gift of the Spirit.

<sup>11</sup> Rom 2:14–15.

themselves towards the good; because, as the Philosopher says,<sup>12</sup> law is a statement having compulsive power, issuing from some prudence and understanding. (And so it is said in 1 *Timothy* 1:9, that law is not laid down for the just, i.e., [such a person] is not coerced by an external law, but is laid down for the unjust, who need to be externally coerced.)

And this is the supreme degree of dignity among human beings, i.e. such that they are led to the good [inducantur ad bonum], not by others, but by themselves. But the second degree is of those who are led by others, but without coercion. But the third degree is of those who require coercion in order that they become good. The fourth is of those who cannot be directed to the good even by coercion. “*Your sons I have chastised in vain, for they have not taken the lesson*” [Jeremiah 2: 30].<sup>13</sup>

We are still in the domain of providential care, but it is possible that one be for oneself and others a conduit and source for such care.<sup>14</sup> As Thomas says in speaking of natural law, one possesses that law, not as oneself the *source* of the law, but as receiving the law as a participation in God's eternal law. In that way, one is a source of providential care for oneself and others.<sup>15</sup> At this point “dignity” and, suitably defined, “autonomy” might be the same thing.

<sup>12</sup> Aristotle, *EN* 10.9 (1180a21–24).

<sup>13</sup> Thomas, *In Ep. Ad Romanos*, c. 2, lect. 3: “Tertio ostendit eorum dignitatem, in hoc scilicet quod huiusmodi legem non habentes, ipsi sibi sunt lex, inquantum scilicet funguntur officio legis ad seipsos, instruendo se et inducendo ad bonum, quia, ut philosophus dicit ethic., lex est sermo coactionem habens ab aliqua prudentia et intellectu procedens. Et ideo dicitur I Tim. I, 9, quod iusto lex non est posita, id est, exteriori lege non cogitur, sed posita est iniustus, qui indigent exterius cogi. Et iste est supremus gradus dignitatis in hominibus, ut scilicet non ab aliis, sed a seipsis inducantur ad bonum. Secundus vero gradus est eorum qui inducuntur ab alio, sed sine coactione. Tertius autem est eorum qui coactione indigent ad hoc quod fiant boni. Quartus est eorum qui nec coactione ad bonum dirigi possunt. Ier. II, 30: frustra percussi filios vestros, disciplinam non receperunt.”

I notice a resemblance of this doctrine of grades to the citation of Hesiod by Aristotle in *EN* 1.4 (1095b10) [cf. Thomas, *In EN* 1.4 (54)]: “Far best is he who knows all things himself; / Good, he who harkens when men counsel right; / But he who neither knows, nor lays to heart / Another's wisdom, is a useless wight” [Oxford trans.; W. D. Ross].

<sup>14</sup> Cf. *ST* I–II, q. 91, a. 2 (Ottawa ed., 1210b6–11): “Inter cetera autem rationalis creatura excellentiori quodam modo divinae providentiae subiacet, inquantum et ipsa fit providentiae particeps, sibi ipsi et aliis providens.” [In contrast with the rest of creatures, the rational creature is subject to divine providence in a more excellent degree, and itself is rendered a participant in providence, providing for itself and others.]

<sup>15</sup> Cf. *ST* I–II, q. 90, a. 3, ad 1, and again *ST* I–II, q. 91, a. 2. —Thus, one can be a “law unto oneself” but as *receiving* the law from a higher power. This is not what is usually meant by “autonomy,” but might give to that word a more reasonable

### Dignity of the Human Being as a Person

What we have seen thus far has to do with the human being as a divine imitation.<sup>16</sup> We see more in the same line by considering the relation of the human being to other created natures. Thus, explaining the appropriateness of the word “person” for speaking of God, Thomas teaches:

[The word] “person” . . . signifies a certain nature with a certain measure of existence. Now, the *nature* that the word “person” includes in its meaning is the most possessed of dignity of all natures, namely the intellectual nature in general. Similarly, the *measure of existence* that “person” conveys is of highest dignity, viz. that something be existent through itself.<sup>17</sup>

Thomas indeed presents the word “person” as designed to indicate the sort of superiority that the human being has over other animals. Because actions are *in singulars* and the *human* singular, *as possessed of reason and choice*, is *source* of actions, and in this is distinct from other animals who are more acted upon than acting, the word “person” had been invented to distinguish the individual substance of a rational nature from the other animals.<sup>18</sup>

We see in such a text as *ST* II–II, q. 64, a. 1 how this relation to action expresses the difference between the human animal and the lower animals: a

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meaning. —In contrast to this, I think of the words of the U.S. Supreme Court in *Planned Parenthood vs. Casey*: “At the heart of liberty is the right to define one’s own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life. Beliefs about these matters could not define the attributes of personhood were they formed under compulsion of the State.” I would say that it is not “compulsion” if one *finds* a knowledge in *one’s own nature*.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. e.g. *ST* III, q. 57, a. 6, ad 3: “. . . Christ, by ascending once into heaven, obtained for himself and for us the perpetual right and dignity [*ius et dignitatem*] of the heavenly dwelling.” Cf. also III, q. 58, a. 4, ad 1&2; I, q. 12, and I–II, qq. 1–5, on beatitude; and I, q. 93, a. 4, on the three levels of man’s being “in the image of God.” —We see nature and supernature as pertaining to the discussion of human dignity. I have left the supernatural dimension aside for the present essay.

<sup>17</sup> *DP* 9.3:

Respondeo. Dicendum quod “persona,” sicut dictum est, significat quamdam *NATURAM* cum quodam *MODO EXISTENDI*.

*NATURA* autem, quam “persona” in sua significatione includit, est *omnium naturarum DIGNISSIMA*, scilicet *natura intellectualis secundum genus suum*.

*Similiter etiam MODUS EXISTENDI quem importat “persona” est DIGNISSIMUS*, ut scilicet *aliquid sit per se existens*. Cum ergo omne quod est *DIGNISSIMUM* in creaturis, Deo sit attribuendum, convenienter nomen “personae” Deo attribui potest, sicut et alia nomina quae proprie dicuntur de Deo.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. *ST* I, q. 29, a. 1 and cf. II–II, q. 64, a. 1, ad 2. The saying that brute animals do not act, but rather are acted upon, “. . . *non enim agunt, sed magis aguntur*. . .” is attributed by Thomas to St. John Damascene; cf. *ST* I–II, q. 6, a. 2, obj. 2 (the Ottawa editors send us to *De fide orthodoxa*, II.27 [PG 94.960]).

difference that can well be expressed as pertaining to human dignity. The very invention of the word "person" pertains to this awareness of human dignity.<sup>19</sup>

The famous prologue to the second part of the *Summa theologiae* presents being in the image of God precisely as being source of one's own operations, that is, personhood.

However, the passage I will feature here occurs in the justification of capital punishment. We read:

... man by sinning recedes from the order of reason; and so he recedes from human dignity [*recedit a dignitate humana*], inasmuch as man is naturally free and a being whose existence is its own justification [*propter seipsum existens*], and he falls in a way [*quodammodo*] into the servitude proper to beasts [*incidit quodammodo in servitutem bestiarum*],<sup>20</sup> in this respect, that it is ordained concerning him as it is useful for others, in accordance with the *Psalm* 48: "Man, though he was honoured, did not understand; he has been compared to the stupid beasts, and has been rendered similar to them."<sup>21</sup> And *Proverbs* 11:29 has: "Who is stupid will serve the wise."<sup>22</sup> And therefore, while it is intrinsically evil to kill a man who abides in his dignity [*hominem in sua dignitate manentem*], nevertheless it can be good to kill a human being who is a sinner, like killing a beast; for a bad man is worse than a beast, and does more harm, as the Philosopher says in *Politics* 1.1 (1253a32) and in *Ethics* 7.6 (1150a7).<sup>23</sup>

<sup>19</sup> A fuller treatment would consider the presentation of the difference between rational creatures and irrational creatures as presented in *ScG* III, 111–12 in the divine providential plan.

<sup>20</sup> In "Thomas Aquinas, Gerard Bradley, and the Death Penalty," which is chap. 18 in my book *Wisdom, Law, and Virtue* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), I have argued that Thomas here is not in disaccord with Pope John Paul II's assertion, in *Evangelium Vitae* 96: "Not even a murderer loses his personal dignity." The word "*quodammodo*" is very important.

<sup>21</sup> This verse is otherwise translated in modern translations: "... Man cannot abide in his pomp; he is like the beasts that perish" [RSV, 49:20].

<sup>22</sup> "... the fool will be servant to the wise" [RSV].

<sup>23</sup> *ST* II–II, q. 64, a. 2, ad 3: "Ad tertium dicendum quod homo peccando ab ordine rationis recedit, et ideo decedit a *dignitate humana*, prout scilicet homo est *naturaliter liber et propter seipsum existens*, et incidit quodammodo in servitutem bestiarum, ut scilicet de ipso ordinetur secundum quod est utile aliis; secundum illud *Psalm.*, 'Homo, cum in honore esset, non intellexit, comparatus est iumentis insipientibus, et similis factus est illis;' et *Prov.* XI dicitur: 'Qui stultus est serviet sapienti.' Et ideo quamvis hominem *in sua dignitate manentem* occidere sit secundum se malum, tamen hominem peccatorem occidere potest esse bonum, sicut occidere bestiam, peior enim est malus homo bestia, et plus nocet, ut Philosophus dicit, in I *Polit.* et in VII *Ethic.*"

Here the “dignity” proper to the human being is described in terms of freedom as contrasted with servitude, an assessment which in the preceding article was linked to our being master of our own actions. However, human dignity is also described here in terms of intrinsically valuable existence.

This latter description is well explained in *ScG* III, where Thomas presents the special character of divine providence regarding the rational creature. The rational or intellectual creatures are provided for just on account of themselves, in contrast to the rest of creatures, which are *ordered* to the rational creatures. The following argument gives an idea of the sort of distinction which is involved:

Whenever some things are ordered to some end, if any among them cannot attain to the end by themselves, it is necessary that they be ordered to those which attain to the end, which are ordered to the end because of themselves: for example, the end of the army is victory, which the soldiers attain by their own act, i.e. by fighting, which soldiers alone are sought after because of themselves [*propter se*] in the army; but all others, assigned to other tasks, for example looking after the horses, caring for the arms, are sought after because of the soldiers in the army. But it is clear from the foregoing that God is the ultimate end of the universe, whom the intellectual nature alone attains to in himself, knowing and loving him, as is clear from what has been said. Therefore, the intellectual nature alone is sought because of itself in the universe, but all others because of it.<sup>24</sup>

This gives a hint of the scope of the metaphysical vision of reality involved in such a conception of human dignity.

### God and the Height of Dignity

Having considered “dignity” as used of humans among themselves, and then as used to contrast humans with other animals, let us now consider its use regarding God.<sup>25</sup> We see such a use in a remarkable passage from

<sup>24</sup> *ScG* III, 112.3 [ed. Pera no. 2858]: “Amplius. Quandocumque sunt aliqua ordinata ad finem aliquem, si qua inter illa ad finem pertingere non possunt per seipsa, oportet ea ordinari ad illa quae finem consequuntur, quae propter se ordinantur in finem: sicut finis exercitus est victoria, quam milites consequuntur per proprium actum pugnando, qui soli propter se in exercitu quaeruntur; omnes autem alii, ad alia officia deputati, puta ad custodiendum equos, ad parandum arma, propter milites in exercitu quaeruntur. Constat autem ex praemissis finem ultimum universi deum esse, quem sola intellectualis natura consequitur in seipso, eum scilicet cognoscendo et amando, ut ex dictis patet. Sola igitur intellectualis natura est propter se quaesita in universo, alia autem omnia propter ipsam.”

<sup>25</sup> I might note that the word is used also in the realm of the mathematical and in science generally; cf. *ST* I-II, q. 94, a. 2:

Thomas's *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*. Thomas is reviewing the modes of knowing God which the ancient philosophers had developed:

Some came to a knowledge of God as regards the dignity of God himself: and these were the Platonists. For they considered that everything that is such through participation is to be traced back to something that is such by its own essence, as to the first and the highest: as all fiery things are traced back to a fire, which is such by its own essence. Therefore, since all the things that are participate in *being*, and are *beings* by participation, it is necessary that there be something at the summit of all things that is being itself by its own essence, i.e. that its essence be its being: and this is God, who is most sufficient and most full of dignity, and the most perfect cause of all being, from which all that are participate in being.<sup>26</sup>

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... sicut dicit Boetius, in libro *De hebdomad.*, quaedam sunt *dignitates* vel propositiones per se notae communiter omnibus, et huiusmodi sunt illae propositiones quarum termini sunt omnibus noti, ut, omne totum est maius sua parte, et, quae uni et eidem sunt aequalia, sibi invicem sunt aequalia.

[... as Boethius says in the book *De hebdomad.*, there are some *dignitates*, or propositions known by virtue of themselves generally to all, and such are those propositions whose terms are known to all, such as "every whole is greater than its own part," and "those things that are equal to one and the same thing are equal to each other."]

Cf. also CM 4.5.1 [ed. Cathala no.588]:

Primo movet quaestionem, quae est, utrum unius scientiae sit considerare de substantia et de *principiis quae in scientiis mathematicis vocantur "dignitates,"* aut est alterius et alterius scientiae considerare. Appropriat autem ista principia magis mathematicis scientiis, quia certiores demonstrationes habent, et manifestius istis principis per se notis utuntur, omnes suas demonstrationes ad haec principia resolventes.

[Firstly he poses the question, which is: whether it belongs to one science to consider substance and [also] those principles which in the mathematical sciences are called "*dignitates*," or does it belong to diverse sciences to consider these. He [Aristotle] relates these principles more to the mathematical sciences because they have more certain demonstrations and make a more evident use of these principles known by virtue of themselves, tracing back all their demonstrations to those principles.]

This usage surely reflects the notion of dominance, governance, by that which has dignity. It is Aristotle himself who has used the word here; the Latin Aristotle in the Thomas edition reads:

Dicendum autem, utrum unius, aut diversae scientiae, de vocatis in mathematicis dignitatibus et substantia. [But one must say whether there is one or diverse sciences concerning what are called in mathematics "axioms" and substance.]

This is at *Metaph.* 4.3 (1005a20), and the Greek word is ἀξιωμάτων.

<sup>26</sup> St. Thomas, *Super evangelium s. Ioannis lectura*, prologus s. Thomae (ed. R. Kai, O.P., [Rome and Turin, 1952]: Marietti, no. 5):

Quidam autem venerunt in cognitionem Dei ex dignitate ipsius Dei: et isti fuerunt Platonici. Consideraverunt enim quod omne illud quod est secundum participationem, reducitur ad aliquod quod sit illud per suam essentiam, sicut ad primum et

This is a summary of a metaphysical vision that is central to Thomas's own teaching, which is thus a vision of supreme divine dignity. In the *ST* I, q. 44, a. 1 this is seen as presenting *the efficient cause* of all things.<sup>27</sup> One thinks of the deep presence of that first efficient cause in the effects: God is present as to the very *esse* of things, and thus most intimately. N V

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ad summum; sicut omnia ignita per participationem reducuntur ad ignem, qui est per essentiam suam talis. Cum ergo omnia quae sunt, participant esse, et sint per participationem entia, necesse est esse aliquid in cacumine omnium rerum, quod sit ipsum esse per suam essentiam, idest quod sua essentia sit suum esse: et hoc est deus, qui est sufficientissima, et dignissima, et perfectissima causa totius esse, a quo omnia quae sunt, participant esse. Et huius dignitas ostenditur, cum dicitur "super solum excelsum," quod, secundum Dionysium, ad divinam naturam refertur; Ps. cxii, 4: *Excelsus super omnes gentes Dominus*. Hanc dignitatem ostendit nobis Ioannes, cum dicit: *Et Deus erat Verbum*, quasi: Verbum erat Deus, ut ly *Verbum* ponatur ex parte suppositi, et *Deus* ex parte apposit.

Speaking of the Word as *God* shows the dignity of the Word, since "God" indicates a nature having causal primacy.

- <sup>27</sup> Cf. *ST* I, q. 8, a. 1 and the doctrine of the *Liber de causis*, prop. 1: Thomas Aquinas, *Super Librum de causis expositio*, ed. H. D. Saffrey, O.P. (Fribourg/Louvain: Société philosophique / Nauwelaerts, 1954), 4–10. —English translation: St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Book of Causes*, trans. Vincent A. Guagliardo, O.P., Charles R. Hess, O.P., and Richard C. Taylor (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 5–11. —We note also the vocabulary of "most full of dignity" [*dignissimum*] in the presentation of God as seen by Thomas in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* 12.9 (1274b16): cf. *CM* 12.11 (ed. Cathala no. 2600):

Et ideo dicit hic, quod videtur omnibus apparens, quod principium sit dignissimum. Sed difficultates quaedam emergunt, si quis velit assignare quomodo se habeat ita "quod sit dignissimum," idest optimum et perfectissimum. [And therefore he says here that it seems evident to all that the principle is most full of dignity. But some difficulties emerge if one wishes to specify just how it is so situated as to be most full of dignity, i.e. best and most perfect.]

Notice that the Latin Aristotle, as presented in the Thomas edition, has "*divinissimum*" (truer to Aristotle) where Thomas himself uses "*dignissimum*." We should also note the interpretation of "*dignissimum*" in terms of the height of goodness and perfection. —I suppose that "*divinissimum*" is the William of Moerbeke translation; the *media* translation, as found in Albert the Great's *Metaphysica* (ed. Cologne, t. 16/2), has "*maxime divinum*."