

The Relation of Metaphysics to the Secondary Object of Revelation, and the Analogy of Being as the Metaphysical Framework for *Sacra Doctrina*

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IN THIS ESSAY I will try to pursue several objects that are essentially related, but rarely treated together systematically. *First*, I will consider the secondary object of revelation—that which is required for the intelligibility of revelation—as necessarily including not only historical and logical, but metaphysical truth. Some of these truths are medicinally revealed in Scripture although they are natural truths, for as Thomas writes in *Summa theologiae* I, q. 2, a. 2, ad 1: “The existence of God and other like truths about God, which can be known by natural reason, are not articles of faith, but are preambles to the articles; for faith presupposes natural knowledge, even as grace presupposes nature and perfection the perfectible.” I will start by referring to former Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith prefect then-Cardinal Ratzinger’s *Doctrinal Commentary on the Concluding Formula of the Professio fidei*,¹ a commentary on the profession of faith issued by the CDF on June 29, 1998. I will also point out the Church’s consecration of certain natural metaphysical principles in her teaching, principles that are not merely contingent concepts or placeholders but whose own density of natural intelligibility is vital for the intelligibility of the doctrine of the faith. I also here address St. Thomas’s teaching

¹ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Concluding Formula of the Professio fidei* [DCPF], issued June 29, 1998, coincident with the promulgation of *Ad Tuendam Fidem* by Pope John Paul II, modifying the Oriental and Latin codes of canon law.

regarding the necessarily essential role of metaphysics within *sacra doctrina* or theology.

Secondly, I will offer remarks regarding St. Thomas's development in his work of the metaphysical framework for *sacra doctrina* in his teaching of the *analogy of being* as the foundation for the *analogy of creature to God*—an account never renounced by him but expressed later in different language the reasons for which he indicates. Failure to observe the reasons he provides for the shift in his language has actually led several authors in the twentieth century² to hold that Thomas radically altered his account of analogy, or else to hold that he does not have such an account. But to the contrary, I will argue that he holds one formal account that universally structures his theology.

Thirdly, I will address Thomas's account of the *imago dei* in the human creature, illustrating the essential importance of the analogy of being within Catholic theology for understanding this teaching.

Fourthly and finally, I will conclude with observations regarding the challenging analysis of a contemporary theologian of great intelligence and probity—my distinguished, insightful, and learned colleague Father Guy Mansini, O.S.B.—who has argued that valid reasoning for the existence of God is *something of nature* that seemingly owing to the effects of original sin is only possible for man following upon revelation and *pari passu* with infused theological faith and sanctifying grace.³ Without providing the

² E.g., to name the most prominent, Bernard Montagnes, *The Doctrine of the Analogy of Being according to Thomas Aquinas*, trans. E. M. Macierowski, ed. Andrew Tallon (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2004).

³ See the last sentence of Fr. Mansini's "Why Revelation Gives Shelter to Metaphysics," *Nova et Vetera* (English) 18, no. 4 (2020): 1089–1101, at 1101: "It *must* exist in order for revelation to be affirmed; it is *enabled* to exist only with the continued assent of faith to that same revelation." But his thesis is more extensively developed and stated in his conference paper "Acts 17 and the Structure of Apostolic Hope," given February 13, 2021, at the conference sponsored by the Aquinas Center of Ave Maria University on "Hope and Death: Christian Responses (February 11–13). Therein he argues that the natural knowledge of God is possible only *pari passu* with the integrality of the reception of sanctifying grace and infused faith. This is a work of great interest and penetration, which will in due course be published, and my remarks pertain particularly to this. It is, on reflection, implied by the line from his earlier work quoted above: i.e., if metaphysics can only be "enabled to exist" through the continued assent of theological faith, this implies that it cannot exist without theological faith. This is the premise at issue. In the first essay, the truth that God exists is affirmed as necessarily required to be available *outside of revelation*, but that does not rule out (as he later argues in his conference paper) that the natural capacity for this truth is after the Fall only actuated *at one moment* with the reception of theological faith: that as it were it

full consideration and response this challenging consideration merits, I will argue that this judgment seems deeply problematic for the intelligibility of revelation and the Church's discourse with the world; that it seems unduly to constrict the dignity of the *imago dei* in man—the principle which is the created foundation for all later perfections in grace and glory; and that the metaphysical intelligibility of being itself may be seen as a sign of the transcendence of the image of God in man. All these points highlight the crucial role of metaphysical truth in relation to revelation, doctrine, and theology.

The Secondary Object of Revelation

In the CDF's *Doctrinal Commentary on the Concluding Formula of the Professio fidei*, then-Cardinal Ratzinger observed the distinction in Church teaching between that which is formally revealed, and that which is required for the intelligibility of the reception and promulgation of revelation.⁴ Regarding that which is formally revealed the document begins by quoting the profession of faith that it is commenting upon:

The first paragraph states: "With firm faith, I also believe everything contained in the Word of God, whether written or handed down in Tradition, which the Church, either by a solemn judgment or by the ordinary and universal Magisterium, sets forth to be believed as divinely revealed." The object taught in this paragraph is constituted by all those doctrines of divine and Catholic faith which the Church proposes as divinely and formally revealed and, as such, as irreformable.⁵

all comes together in one package and at one time, the natural knowledge being *pari passu* with reception of theological faith, even though this is a function of nature restored by theological faith (to illustrate his suggestion using my own example: just as my holding a cup up is simultaneous with my arm's activity, and yet the arm's activity is causally prior). And the proposition of the first essay—that natural knowledge of God can only be enabled to exist with the "continued assent of faith"—does seem clearly to imply, and to need, the further development that Fr. Manini lends to his treatment in the second paper. For why should something whose *initial* existence did not require theological faith, *necessarily* be insusceptible of being enabled to exist if theological faith is lost? The thesis of the first essay does seem to imply this. It is simply not as conspicuously articulated in the first essay, while—or so it seems—implying it.

⁴ DCPF, §5 with respect to revelation, §§5 and 6 with respect to that which is required for the intelligibility of revelation, the "secondary object" of revelation.

⁵ DCPF here adds: "These doctrines are contained in the Word of God, written or

The *Commentary* states a paragraph further down that:

These doctrines require the assent of theological faith by all members of the faithful. Thus, whoever obstinately places them in doubt or denies them falls under the censure of heresy, as indicated by the respective canons of the Codes of Canon Law.

The *Commentary* notes further that:

6. The second proposition of the *Professio fidei* states: "I also firmly accept and hold each and everything definitively proposed by the Church regarding teaching on faith and morals." The object taught by this formula includes all those teachings belonging to the dogmatic or moral area, which are necessary for faithfully keeping and expounding the deposit of faith, even if they have not been proposed by the Magisterium of the Church as formally revealed.⁶

It notes that:

Every believer, therefore, is required to give firm and definitive assent to these truths, based on faith in the Holy Spirit's assistance to the Church's Magisterium, and on the Catholic doctrine of the infallibility of the Magisterium in these matters.

Whoever denies these truths would be in a position of rejecting a truth of Catholic doctrine and would therefore no longer be in full communion with the Catholic Church.

It continues:

7. The truths belonging to this second paragraph can be of various natures, thus giving different qualities to their relationship with revelation. There are truths which are necessarily connected with revelation by virtue of an historical relationship; while other truths

handed down, and defined with a solemn judgment as divinely revealed truths either by the Roman Pontiff when he speaks 'ex cathedra,' or by the College of Bishops gathered in council, or infallibly proposed for belief by the ordinary and universal Magisterium."

⁶ *DCPF* here adds: "Such doctrines can be defined solemnly by the Roman Pontiff when he speaks 'ex cathedra' or by the College of Bishops gathered in council, or they can be taught infallibly by the ordinary and universal Magisterium of the Church as a 'sententia definitiva tenenda.'"

evinced a logical connection that expresses a stage in the maturation of understanding of revelation which the Church is called to undertake. The fact that these doctrines may not be proposed as formally revealed, insofar as they add to the data of faith elements that are not revealed or which are not yet expressly recognized as such, in no way diminishes their definitive character, which is required at least by their intrinsic connection with revealed truth.⁷

The document thus speaks of the truths pertaining to the secondary object of revelation as being of “various natures” giving “different qualities to their relationship with revelation.” It lists logical connection with revelation, or historical relationship to it, but does not suggest that this is an exclusive list. It is in fact, I will argue, *impossible* that it should be an exclusive list. That argument begins now.

Metaphysical Truth and the Secondary Object of Revelation

As part of the divine providence preparing the world for Christian revelation, classical civilization laid the foundation for certain metaphysical insights into the truth of being and nature and the relative but real transcendence of human spirit. These insights have been developed and elevated further by a long process of intellectual refinement and assimilation to the understanding of revelation. Articulated in what are called the preambles of faith concerning God and the human soul, arguably they enter into the secondary object of revelation, that is, the conditions requisite to the intelligibility of the promulgation of the Gospel, although some are medicinally revealed (as for instance the incorruptibility of the soul, which Thomas thought to be philosophically demonstrable).⁸ Christ did not come to preach the message of the metaphysical principle of contradiction, but if the principle does not pertain to the real—a metaphysical premise—the entirety of the realism of the assent of faith is denied in one breath. Similarly, whatever the structure of created being is, it is by divine decree rather than by human assertion a prerequisite for, and a conditioning element of,

⁷ *DCPF* here adds: “Moreover, it cannot be excluded that at a certain point in dogmatic development, the understanding of the realities and the words of the deposit of faith can progress in the life of the Church, and the Magisterium may proclaim some of these doctrines as also dogmas of divine and catholic faith.”

⁸ *DCPF* §7 mentions logical and historical necessities for the intelligibility of the promulgation of the faith: but clearly and more fundamentally there are metaphysical necessities for the intelligibility of the promulgation of the faith. The principle of contradiction as applying to being is not merely a logical, but a metaphysical, principle.

supernatural revelation. Thus theology that lacks metaphysics and philosophy of nature—or even lacks realist ontology of knowledge—seems in danger of converting divine truths into a species of glossolalia.

The Church has consecrated certain principles and insights in formulating her teaching. For example, to mention only a few: relation and procession, person, nature, and substance with respect to the Trinity; substance and nature with respect to the Person of Christ; form with respect to sanctifying grace, justification, and the sacraments. With respect to the moral life, one would need to observe the primacy of the Church's embrace of the natural law doctrine of St. Thomas Aquinas⁹—principles such as “end,” “object,” “matter,” “intention,” “choice,” “eternal law,” and “divine law”—whose intelligibility itself involves and requires metaphysical judgments.¹⁰ Imagine that the metaphysical intelligibility of *person*, *nature*, *God*, and *man* is subtracted from the proposition that Christ is one *person* with two *natures*, *divine* and *human*. What remains? Not to mention that the term “one” itself requires metaphysical explication in terms of transcendental unity. When one treats all such natural principles consecrated within the Church's teaching as lacking immutable and naturally intelligible content founded on the reality of things, even revealed truth is in danger of becoming a species of metaphor rather than a doctrine of faith “irreformable by virtue of itself.”

The relativization of the content of the secondary object of revelation—of that which is naturally required for the intelligibility of the doctrine of the faith—ineluctably endangers and relativizes the doctrine of the faith itself. This is precisely why overt negation or rejection of the secondary object of revelation (as opposed to simple confusion or ignorance) causes separation from communion with the Church.

This is of course *not* to say that every metaphysical unclarity or error is itself immediately a cause of separation from the Church, but only (1) that certain metaphysical truths are required for the intelligibility of revelation, and further, (2) that the structure of created being enters into doctrinal consideration and questions of doctrinal development and application

⁹ See Pope John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor* (1993), §44: “The Church has often made reference to the Thomistic doctrine of natural law, including it in her own teaching on morality.”

¹⁰ Final cause or *end*, taken as a principle of moral thought, is of course part of a teleological account of the moral life. Natural law as a *rational participation* of the eternal law of course presupposes the account of the eternal law, which is vouchsafed by the natural intelligibility of the arguments for God as first efficient and last or ultimate final cause. There are, of course, many other illustrations.

pertaining to faith and morals. This was the problem that catalyzed the furor regarding *la nouvelle théologie*: not merely the special role of the teaching of Aquinas, but rather the nature of Church doctrine itself, and the possibility of theology as *scientia*, as a noble contemplation of the truth about God unifying the truths of revelation and nature. The preambles of faith are medicinally revealed, while nonetheless they are discernible to natural intelligence. God may elevate any person in grace, but the capacity to realize that finite beings are effects of God arguably is a natural capacity essential to any being created *ad imaginem dei*. I will return to this point. But first we must move from the inclusion of metaphysical truth in the secondary object of revelation to the essential and privileged instrumentality of metaphysics in *sacra doctrina*.

To put the matter as St. Thomas does, we do not possess quidditative or direct essential knowledge of God, who is the subject of theology. A science of that which we essentially do not know sounds like a contradiction in terms: yet even after revelation we do not enjoy direct knowledge of the essence or quiddity of God, a knowledge which awaits the beatific vision. One recalls the judgment of St. Thomas in *De veritate*¹¹ that philosophic knowledge of God should be compared with beatific knowing more as not-seeing to seeing than as not seeing so well to seeing better.

How then can theology proceed? Thomas's answer in *ST* I, q. 1, a. 7, ad 1, is clear: theology proceeds on the basis of all the effects of God in nature and grace.¹² But the proper and first effect of God, is being in the sense of *esse* or actual existence.¹³ As Thomas puts it in the *ST* I, q. 45, a. 5,

Now among all effects the most universal is existence itself: thus it must be the proper effect of the first and most universal cause, and that is God.¹⁴

A little further on within the body of the same article, Thomas writes, "but that which is the proper effect of God creating is that which is presupposed to all other effects, *namely, absolute existence*."¹⁵ The "to be" or "actual existing" of beings is presupposed to all other effects. On this

¹¹ St. Thomas Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 18, a. 1.

¹² St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* [*ST*] I, q. 1, a. 7, ad 1.

¹³ *ST* I, q. 45, a. 5, resp.

¹⁴ *ST* I, q. 45, a. 5: "Inter omnes autem effectus, universalissimum est ipsum esse. Unde oportet quod sit proprius effectus primae et universalissimae causae, quae est Deus."

¹⁵ *ST* I, q. 45, a. 5: "Illud autem quod est proprius effectus Dei creantis, est illud quod praesupponitur omnibus aliis, *scilicet esse absolute*."

understanding it is only owing to *esse*—"to be, existence"—that *ens*, *that which exists*, is real and so can be first in the intellect's conception. *Esse* is the most universal effect. The *is* in the *that which is*—the actuality of any and every being, and accordingly what is most formal in *that which is*—is *esse*. Being *in the sense of* the "that which is" or *ens* (as present participle) necessarily is known in relation to "being" as *esse* or actual existing (as verb). Thomas writes in the *Summa contra gentiles* that we naturally know being (*ens*) and whatever belongs to a being as such,¹⁶ (i.e., the *per se* properties of being) and in *De trinitate* that knowledge of *ens commune* which is the subject matter of metaphysics precedes and is the basis for natural knowledge of God.¹⁷

The proposition that the proper effect of God is *esse absolute*, when conjoined with *ST* I, q. 1, a. 7, establishes the privileged instrumentality and centrality of metaphysics within *sacra doctrina*. For what stands in for the lack of quidditative knowledge of God is all the effects of God in nature and grace, and the most universal effect (*esse*) is the most formal

¹⁶ *Summa contra gentiles* [SCG] II, ch. 83, no. 31: "Naturaliter igitur intellectus noster cognoscit ens, et ea quae sunt per se entis inquantum huiusmodi; in qua cognitione fundatur primorum principiorum notitia, ut non esse simul affirmare et negare, et alia huiusmodi" (trans. James F. Anderson in Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles Book Two: Creation* [Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975], 281–82). Of course this is while persistently affirming that what the human intellect is most natively proportioned to knowing is "quiddity in corporeal matter"—cf. *ST* I, q. 84, a. 7, corp.: "Intellectus autem humani, qui est coniunctus corpori, proprium obiectum est quidditas sive natura in materia corporali existens."

¹⁷ See St. Thomas's commentary on Boethius's *De trinitate*, q. 5, a. 1, ad 6: "quamvis subiecta aliarum scientiarum sint partes entis, quod est subiectum metaphysicae, non tamen oportet quod aliae scientiae sint partes ipsius. . . . Sic autem posset dici pars ipsius scientia, quae est de potentia vel quae est de actu aut de uno vel de aliquo huiusmodi, quia ista habent eundem modum considerandi cum ente, de quo tractatur in metaphysica"—"Although the subjects of the other sciences are parts of being, which is the subject of metaphysics, the other sciences are not necessarily parts of metaphysics. . . . However, the science treating of potency, or that treating of act or unity or anything of this sort, could be called a part of metaphysics because these are considered in the same manner as being, which is the subject of metaphysics." And q. 5, a. 4, corp.: "Sic ergo theologia sive scientia divina est duplex. Una, in qua considerantur res divinae non tamquam subiectum scientiae, sed tamquam principia subiecti, et talis est theologia, quam philosophi prosequuntur, quae alio nomine metaphysica dicitur"—"Accordingly, there are two kinds of theology or divine science. (1) There is one that treats of divine things, not as the subject of the science but as the principles of the subject. This is the kind of theology pursued by the philosophers and that is also called *metaphysics*" (translation mine).

principle of the subject of metaphysics (*ens commune* or that which exists in general).

It follows that metaphysics has a privileged instrumentality within *sacra doctrina*, and the theologian who proceeds without metaphysical wisdom risks either absorbing revealed truths into contingent conceptual constructs or social ideology, or else converting the contemplation of the truth of revelation into a species of fideist poetry or only aspirationally connected historical moments.

The actual being, nature, and substance of created things are real, and supernatural revelation is real. The continuity and relation between these can only be understood, short of the beatific vision, on the basis of metaphysical truth. We cannot start out *within* the beatific vision and see clearly therein or deduce the entirety of divine providence, creation, grace, and revelation. The principle of contradiction in its application to being is one such metaphysical principle; and arguably it cannot be sustained as applying to many, limited, changing creatures without the real division of being by potency and act for the reasons made conspicuous by Aristotle and that I will set out below. A theologian who wishes to deepen insight into the reality of nature, grace, and revelation, and who absents himself from these principles does so at hazard to the unity and fruitfulness of theology as sacred science.

Saint Thomas Aquinas and the Metaphysical Framing of Theological Science

This brings us to my second consideration, that of the metaphysical framing of theological science. Here I will speak briefly about the division of being by potency and act—with its harvest of the real distinction of essence and existence in finite being—but in particular and at length regarding his account of the analogy of being as the foundation for the analogy of creature to God.

Unsurprisingly, the division of being by potency and act is spoken of by Aristotle as analogical. As pertains to the division of being by potency and act, Thomas embraced and further perfected Aristotle's account. While Aristotle develops this teaching in relation to the analysis of physical being, his purpose is from the beginning the provision of an adequate metaphysical response to Parmenides. Parmenides famously held¹⁸ that being is

¹⁸ See fragments of Parmenides's *On Nature* in G. S. Kirk, J. E. Raven, and M. Schofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983),

self-identical and one with itself, and that plurality is unreal; that being is all there is, and outside of being there is nothing, and so nothing exists outside of being to limit it, so that being is unlimited; and that being could only change by becoming nonbeing, but being *is* not nonbeing and nothing is outside of it that could alter it, so that change is impossible. Of course, we look up and see a flock of many, limited, changing creatures flying by, and conclude that Parmenides is out to lunch. But the difficult question is how to reconcile the principle of contradiction *as a principle of being* with real manyness, limit, and change. Aristotle saw that there was a principle in being which is neither act, nor mere negation of act, but rather *potency* or capacity for act,¹⁹ and that potency explained the reality of manyness, limit, and change. Aristotle himself provides a metaphysical, and not a purely physical, account of this distinction. As Aristotle teaches in *Metaphysics* 11.9.1065b15–16: “Now since every kind of thing is divided into the potential and the real, I call the actualization of the potential as such, motion.” Any actualization of potency as such is according to Aristotle “motion,” and every kind of thing is divided into the potential and the real, that is, this division extends to everything. God is *Actus Purus*, Pure Act, but everything else is act limited by potency.

I do not concur with the late Fr. Norris Clarke’s argument that the metaphysical doctrine of the limitation of act by potency cannot be found in Aristotle’s teaching.²⁰ In my view Aristotle clearly understands that *manyness* pertains to being only owing to *potentia*, and that there can be but one *Actus Purus*; whereas manyness involves act as *limited* by potency, for example, to take one illustration, substantial form as limited to particular dimensions in relation to matter as a potential principle. The confusion about “limitation” is that Aristotle often refers to the potential *infinitude* of matter and to form as limiting in this respect. But he clearly asserts that manyness, limit (with respect to *perfection*), and change accrue to being by potency and do not pertain to the divine nature as Pure Act.

Proceeding from the Aristotelian insight into the transcendence of act

e.g., 248–51.

¹⁹ Of course, Aristotle makes clear that subjective potency exists solely in relation to, and as limiting, some principle of act: potency in itself is not a subject of being but exists in relation to an actual subject. The extension of this principle to what we would call “possibility” refers to what is within the objective frame of causality of an active power, or else to what is noncontradictory (as that which is noncontradictory *might* be, although of course the real constraints of the nature of the principles in play makes this something quite different from the logicism of “possible worlds” scenarios).

²⁰ See W. Norris Clarke, S.J., “The Limitation of Act by Potency,” in *Explorations in Metaphysics: Being-God-Person* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994).

Aquinas explicates Aristotelian *actual nature* in terms of *existence* as act and essence as potency in finite being (arguably something at least implied by Aristotle's thought). In any case there seems no reason to doubt that the *analogical formality of act* according to proper proportionality—a likeness of truly differing proportions—is Aristotelian in provenance, and is taken up and developed by St. Thomas. As Aristotle put it:

Our meaning can be seen in the particular cases by induction, and we must not seek a definition of everything but be content to grasp the analogy, that it is as that which is building is to that which is capable of building, and the waking to the sleeping, and that which is seeing to that which has its eyes shut but has sight, and that which has been shaped out of the matter to the matter, and that which has been wrought up to the unwrought. Let actuality be defined by one member of this antithesis, and the potential by the other. But all things are not said in the same sense to exist actually, but only by analogy—as A is in B or to B, C is in D or to D; for some are as movement to potency, and the others as substance to some sort of matter.²¹

In *De veritate* Thomas's initial illustration of proper proportionality is a mathematical example (e.g., as 6 is to 3, so is 4 to 2) that of course mathematically reduces to one-half. But he quickly moves to the proposition that as sight is to the eye, so is understanding to the mind.²² This does not reduce to one univocal object either in genus or in species: sight is not understanding, and the eye is not the mind. The "illumination" in question is not one thing but radically diverse, yet proportionately identical as each may be taken to articulate a relation of object and power, although these—and the comparable act/potency relations²³—are radically diverse. He argues that the analogy of proper proportionality—that as one thing is to what is its own, so is another to what is its own, or "as A is to B, so is C to D"—is the form of analogy pertinent to being, true, and other transcendental or pure perfections that of themselves do not include in their definitions any material limit²⁴ (as "being" does not of itself desig-

²¹ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 9.6.1048a35–1048b9.

²² Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 2 a. 11, resp.

²³ E.g., as actual sight is to the eye, so is actual understanding to the mind.

²⁴ Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 2, a. 11, resp.: "Quandoque vero nomen quod de Deo et creatura dicitur, nihil importat ex principali significato secundum quod non possit attendi praedictus convenientiae modus inter creaturam et Deum; sicut sunt omnia in

nate some particular limit of being,²⁵ which would be a particular limit of potency).²⁶

A perfect univocal abstraction takes in one thing, and leaves everything else out: as one takes in "circularity" and leaves out "blue" and "plastic." A genus does not include the specific difference in its definition: if it did, then every member of the genus would be of that species. But unlike a univocal object, *being* must include all its natural genera, specific differences and ergo species, and individuals, on pain of their nonexistence. The being analogically common to finite things contains everything in

quorum definitione non clauditur defectus, nec dependent a materia secundum esse, ut ens, bonum, et alia huiusmodi"—"At other times, however, a term predicated of God and creature implies nothing in its principal meaning which would prevent our finding between a creature and God an agreement of the type described above. To this kind belong all attributes which include no defect nor depend on matter for their act of existence, for example, being, the good, and similar things" (trans. mine). Thomas is very clear that this is proportionality. Having spoken of (strict) proportion and ruled it out as the analogy pertaining to God, he treats proportionality, stating: "Sed in alio modo analogiae nulla determinata habitudo attenditur inter ea quibus est aliquid per analogiam commune; et ideo secundum illum modum nihil prohibet aliquod nomen analogice dici de Deo et creatura"—"But in the other type of analogy, no definite relation is involved between the things which have something in common analogously, so there is no reason why some name cannot be predicated analogously of God and creature in this manner" (trans. mine).

²⁵ The analogy of proper proportionality is not metaphor, precisely because the perfections affirmed do not designate any particular limit (consequent on potency) whatsoever: good does not signify evil, being does not signify nonbeing, and true does not signify falsity. Yet the beings, goods, and truths we connaturally apprehend in this life are limited: we know "of" God naturally, but do not simply "know" God (something that happens in the beatific vision, wherein of course God always measures our mind, and is never measured by it).

²⁶ As Aristotle (*Meta.* II, 3, 998b22) and Thomas (in his commentary and elsewhere) both hold, being is not a genus, because no genus includes in its definition the specific differences that cause there to be different species within the genus: if it did, then all members of the genus would necessarily be of that species. For example, if the definition of the genus "animal" contained "reason" then all animals would be rational. But all the *differentiae* of being are included within being, on pain of not existing at all. The actual being affirmed of different beings and kinds of beings is thus already a transcendental and analogical perfection, proportionate to the subject and limited only by whatsoever degree and kind of potency. If being were not analogical from the start, then the "is" of the premises in the argumentation for the existence of God would mean only "is material" or "is of this limit of potency," and thus the "is" of the conclusion correspondingly would mean only "is material" or "is materially limited." Nothing can be in a valid conclusion that is not already in the premises. If, and only if, the "is" of the premises is intrinsically analogical can the conclusion to God as unlimited in perfection and wholly immaterial be reached. If the prime perfection of being is

proportion to its existence or actuality as really limited by potency, and is utterly exceeded by God its principle as Pure Act exceeding all limit of potency. Diverse existing individuals, real differences and consequent natural species, and the material substrate founding genera, all are contained within the subject matter of metaphysics. As Aristotle observes, such analogy is manifest in the division of every category of being by act and potency:²⁷ the respective acts and potencies simply are not the same, yet *are* proportionally similar.²⁸

In this kind of analogy, St. Thomas states, “no definite relation is involved between the things which have something in common analogously, so there is no reason why some name cannot be predicated analogously of God and creature in this manner.” What is in question here is the likeness of different proportions *insofar as they are truly diverse*: as the angel is to its being, so is the frog to its. But there is no natural genus of “angel-frog.” This is a likeness of differing proportions of act *insofar as they are different and with no limit on how different they may be*. Hence such analogy can extend to God, whose perfection is not limited by reciprocal proportion to finite creatures.

While the analogy of proportionality is trans-generic and trans-specific, it does not *of itself* necessarily rule out all real two-way proportion. Two finite beings that share *no* natural genus because they lack common matter, and that share only the logical genus of substance²⁹—for example,

affirmed proportionate to the subject as limited by whatsoever potency, and the subject is unlimited by potency, the subject possesses the perfection of being without any limit. Indeed, all the ways in which the plurifiability of being is affirmed require potency, and so a subject lacking all potency is radically one, as there is nothing to account for its plurification. Thus Thomas argues in *De ente et essentia* that *if* there were a being whose essence were not really distinct from its existence, there could only be one, and he makes this argument before formulating his argument for the universalization of the real distinction (a fortiori in all other cases, existence and essence are really distinct) and before offering a universal proof for the reality of God predicated on the universal distinction of essence and existence in all but one possible case and showing that since beings that are not their own *esse* cannot account for their being, all things must receive their existence from *ipsum esse subsistens per se*, God.

²⁷ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 11.9. 1065b15–16.

²⁸ See Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 9.6.1048a25–b9.

²⁹ *ST I*, q. 88, a. 2, ad 4: “Ad quantum dicendum quod substantiae immateriales creatae in genere quidem naturali non conveniunt cum substantiis materialibus, quia non est in eis eadem ratio potentiae et materiae, conveniunt tamen cum eis in genere logico, quia etiam substantiae immateriales sunt in praedicamento substantiae, cum earum quidditas non sit earum esse. Sed Deus non convenit cum rebus materialibus neque secundum genus naturale, neque secundum genus logicum, quia Deus nullo modo est in genere, ut

angel and frog—are still as finite separated ontologically by only a finite degree of perfection. Thus *one* may determinately and ordinally possess a supra-generic *analogically* greater perfection of act *than the other*, even though they share no common genus or species: there is hierarchy in created being. The analogy of proper proportionality (as A is to B, so is C to D) does not *require* such finite difference, but it does not *exclude it* where it obtains. *It simply does not require it.* The difference between two finite beings is itself finite, and so a real *two-way analogical proportion* may be affirmed even between things sharing no common genus. As superior as angelic intelligence is to human intelligence, it is not *infinitely* superior.

But the case is different when one moves from analogical relations within finite being to those between creatures and God. Thomas in *De veritate* affirms what he affirms everywhere else in his corpus: namely, that while the creature has a determined real relation to God, *God has no real determined relation to the creature, is in no way really dependent on the creature, and infinitely transcends the creature.*³⁰ Thus there is not a strict “two-way” commensurate proportion, because God does not transcend the creature by merely some finite increment of perfection. There is a relation of one thing to another, or, as he puts it, as the creature is to what is its own, so is God to what is His own. This he calls an “analogy of transferred proportion”³¹ —*proportionis translatum*—because it takes the term “proportion” from the case where there is a “two-way” real relation in a reciprocal proportion, and applies it to the case where *only the creature* has a real relation to God³² and God has no real proportion to or relation of dependence on the

supra dictum est. Unde per similitudines rerum materialium aliquid affirmative potest cognosci de Angelis secundum rationem communem, licet non secundum rationem speciei; de Deo autem nullo modo” — “To the fourth it should be said that created immaterial substances are not in the same natural genus as material substances, for they do not agree in power or in matter; but they belong to the same logical genus, because even immaterial substances are in the predicament of substance, as their essence is distinct from their existence. But God has no connection with material things, as regards either natural genus or logical genus; because God is in no genus, as stated above (q. 3. a. 5). Hence through the likeness derived from material things we can know something positive concerning the angels, according to some common notion, though not according to the specific nature; whereas we cannot acquire any such knowledge at all about God.”

³⁰ *De veritate*, q. 2, a. 11.

³¹ *De veritate*, q. 23, a. 7, ad 9.

³² *De veritate*, q. 2, a. 11, ad 1. Actually, there are two “transferences”: one is from quantitative comparison to analogy of proportionality; the other is from things that are different only by a finite ontological distance though this is trans-generic and trans-specific and so do exhibit *analogical* reciprocal proportion, to God, to whom no

creature. God is infinitely transcendent Pure Act and would be identically the same if there were no creation. Only a way of predicating being, true, good, and so on, which does not designate God in such a way as to limit God to the perfection of creatures will be sufficient: namely the analogy of proper proportionality, which intrinsically affirms all the transcendental perfections of God as identified with the unique simple substance of God who is infinitely perfect. There is no “two-way” proportion here because God is not merely first in a series but infinitely transcends the series: God possesses transcendental perfections proportionate to the lack of constriction of any potential principle whatsoever, while the creature possesses perfection proportionately constricted by potency.

In *De potentia*, the *Summa contra gentiles*, and other works, Thomas drops the phrase “transferred proportion” and speaks simply of the relation of any one thing to another as proportion *for so long as no real determined relation of God to the creature is affirmed*.³³ He simplifies his semantics and explains why: namely, the creature *is* really related to God and this may be called a proportion although it is not properly reciprocal.

Thomas throughout his work denies that there is real determined relation of God to the creature. He does speak of the real *attribution* of the created effect to God since the effect only *is* an effect *as attributed to the cause*. But this first requires that there be a way of affirming that God exists without treating the existing of the infinite God as proportioned to the finite: the way he early identified as *proportionis translatum*, “transferred” proportion. God is to what is his, as the creature is to what is its own, and the creature is really ordered to God, but not the converse. Thomas holds this throughout his work, and explains his later use of the term “proportion” *not* for what is *reciprocal* but rather *one-sided*, in *De potentia*, the *Summa contra gentiles*, and other works. For example, in the *Summa contra gentiles* he rules out “commensuration in an existing proportion” but allows “proportion” to stand for “any relation of one thing to another.”³⁴ In

being has any commensuration in a genuinely reciprocal two-way proportion.

³³ See St. Thomas Aquinas, *De potentia*, q. 7, a. 10, ad 9: “Ad nonum dicendum, quod si proportio intelligatur aliquis determinatus excessus, nulla est Dei ad creaturam proportio. Si autem per proportionem intelligatur habitudo sola, sic patet quod est inter creatorem et creaturam; in creatura quidem realiter, non autem in creatore”—“If by proportion is meant a definite excess, then there is no proportion in God to the creature. But if proportion stands for relation alone, then there is relation between the Creator and the creature: in the latter really, but not in the former” (trans. mine).

³⁴ See *SCG* III, ch. 54, no. 14: “Proportio autem intellectus creati est quidem ad Deum intelligendum, non secundum commensurationem aliquam proportionem existente, sed secundum quod proportio significat quancumque habitudinem unius ad alterum, ut

the *Summa theologiae* he uses the analogy of proportionality in speaking of the divine transcendence.³⁵ Nowhere does St. Thomas hold that God has any real proportion to the creature; and *nowhere does he unsay his unequivocal affirmation that the analogy pertinent to transcendental being, true, and good is that of proper proportionality.*³⁶

The analogy of transferred proportion, of one to another, and effect to cause between the creature and God all presuppose the analogy of being as one of proper proportionality: *first* because act or existence is intrinsically affirmed of each thing proportionate to *what* it is, and these proportions are *diverse*;³⁷ and *secondly* because only such analogy permits the intrinsic

materiae ad formam, vel causae ad effectum. Sic autem nihil prohibet esse proportionem creaturae ad Deum secundum habitudinem intelligentis ad intellectum, sicut et secundum habitudinem effectus ad causam”—“Now, the proportion of the created intellect to the understanding of God is not, in fact, based on a commensuration in an existing proportion, but on the fact that proportion means any relation of one thing to another, as of matter to form, or of cause to effect. In this sense, then, nothing prevents there being a proportion of creature to God on the basis of a relation of one who understands to the thing understood, just as on the basis of the relation of effect to cause. But to speak of a relation of one to another requires first affirming that each actually exists, and this can only be by the analogy of proportionality since the actuality of God has no reciprocal commensurate proportion to the creature” (trans. mine).

³⁵ See e.g., *ST* I-II, q. 114, a. 1, resp.: “Manifestum est autem quod inter Deum et hominem est maxima inaequalitas, in infinitum enim distant, et totum quod est hominis bonum, est a Deo. Unde non potest hominis ad Deum esse iustitia secundum absolutam aequalitatem, sed secundum proportionem quandam, inquantum scilicet uterque operatur secundum modum suum”—“Now it is clear that between God and man there is the greatest inequality: for they are infinitely apart, and all man’s good is from God. Thus there is not able to be justice of absolute equality between man and God, but only according to a certain proportion, inasmuch as each is operative according to its own mode.”

³⁶ It is on the basis of the being of creatures that the mind rises to God, and the real relation of createdness in creatures is a quasi-accident of “having being from another” whose foundation is *the being of the creature since nonexistent things have no real relations*. But the language of being is the language of the likeness of *differing* proportions of act. Since non-existent beings do not have real relations, and creation is not a real change in God, the real relation of the creature to God is *founded upon the being of the creature*. Being is intrinsically predicated both of creatures and of God, and it is only *owing to this* that a “one-way” analogy of attribution of the created effect to God is intelligible.

³⁷ God is proportionate to what pertains to God, as the creature is proportionate to what is its, but this does not mean that God is or can be proportioned to the creature. Nonetheless, as noted, proper proportionality as obtaining among creatures—even creatures as distant from one another in perfection as the angel and the frog—*permits* ontological reciprocal proportion without requiring it, because the analogical “distance” between two finite beings (even beings that share no common genus or species) is

attribution of perfections of God in an *infinitely* different way from the way they are predicated of creatures. When extended to God, “two-way” *reciprocal* proportion *cannot obtain* because God *is not* determined *in proportion to the creature*.³⁸ God is to what pertains to God, as the creature is to what is its own: *proportionality, not proportion*.³⁹

Thomas’s semantics alter, but not the framing role of the analogy of proper proportionality with respect to being. One sees this understanding in play in the doctrine of the creation of man *ad imaginem dei*, according to the image of God.

The *Imago Dei* in the Human Creature

St. Thomas’s understanding of the *imago dei*, the image of God in the human creature, has been subject to a misunderstanding that has been applied in diametrically opposite senses. Some—I would name Jacques Maritain in his seminal work *The Person and the Common Good*—seem to err in reducing the analogical pure perfection of *person* in man to the *imago dei* understood as simple intellectual nature.⁴⁰ Others (I would

finite. So there is a hierarchy of finite perfections and a real finite analogical “distance” between angelic and sublunary being. Much like the way that being may be found with potency but need not be, the analogy of proper proportionality may be found in cases of real two-way analogical proportion *but need not be*.

³⁸ *De veritate*, q. 2, a. 11.

³⁹ See *De veritate*, q. 23, a. 7, ad 9. Thomas’s use of the quantitative illustration when clearly it is insufficient is reminiscent of his use of “fire” in the fourth way in the *Summa theologiae*, where he is reasoning concerning differing gradations of the intensive perfection of being, true, good, and other transcendental or pure perfections: yet there is no reason to think that he considered “fire” to be a transcendental or pure perfection. It seems merely to be a “hook” to provide a species of phantasm to enable the natural philosopher to have a point of comparison. Something like this seems involved here, too. All this is rendered difficult because in *De veritate* Thomas continues to use the stock example of mathematical proportionality long after he has left it substantively behind. Yet no Thomist exegete thinks that for Thomas the only form of real determined proportion between God and creature that he means to deny is *quantitative*—as though God were not on a *quantitative* continuum with creatures but were in other respects limited by a real determined proportion to the creature. And in *De potentia* what is denied of God is *definite* excess in relation to the creature (that is, God *infinitely* exceeds the creature); see *De potentia*, q. 7, a. 10, ad 9.

⁴⁰ See Jacques Maritain, *The Person and the Common Good*, trans. John J. Fitzgerald (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1994). He speaks of *the person* as a *whole*, but treats matter as a potential *part* which is the root of the *individual* as distinct from *the person*. But the complete substance of a rational nature essentially includes bodily perfections. It is the *intellectual nature alone* in which St. Thomas says that the

suggest Karl Barth or Edith Stein⁴¹) seem to err in the opposite fashion, by supposing the *imago* is identical with the analogical perfection of person as *complete* substance of a rational nature and thus including *matter and bodily perfections*. Both are incorrect in supposing that *person* and *imago* are the same.

According to St. Thomas, the *imago* is found in man *sola natura intellectualis*,⁴² *only according to the intellectual nature as a purely immaterial principle*. He clearly holds that all else in the human creature pertains to the *imago* only as an accidental quality (accidental vis-à-vis the *imago* taken analogically and as such, not accidental vis-à-vis the complete substantial nature of the human person) and by way of “trace,” that is, a likeness that does not attain to the perfection of an analogical *image*. The analogy of *person* as a pure perfection regards the *integral or complete* substance of a rational nature, and in the human case this integrality essentially includes matter and bodily perfections. But the analogy of intellectual nature as a pure perfection *excludes* materiality—excludes the sense powers and all bodily perfections. Thus, the *imago dei* is an analogical pure perfection extrinsically limited by matter in the human person, predicated with differing limitations of potency of man and angel, and affirmed in the “First-Born of creatures” as perfect: according to proper proportionality.⁴³

imperfect analogical *imago* in the human creature consists.

⁴¹ Barth explicates the Pauline account of unilateral uxorial submission by a principal appeal to submission within the Trinity; Stein affirms that the sexual difference is originatively and most formally spiritual, rather than spiritual *owing* to the nature of the substantial union of spiritual soul and matter (which is originatively second matter affecting the manner in which it may be brought to diverse act: as male, or female). For Barth, see *Church Dogmatics* IV/1, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1961): “His divine unity consists in the fact that in Himself He is both One who is obeyed and Another who obeys” (201); and “As we look at Jesus Christ we cannot avoid the astounding conclusion of a divine obedience. Therefore we have to draw the no less astounding deduction that in equal Godhead the one God is, in fact, the One and also Another, that He is indeed a First and a Second, One who rules and commands in majesty and One who obeys in humility” (203). For Edith Stein / Teresa Benedicta, see Edith Stein, *Essays on Woman*, 2nd revised edition, volume 2, trans. Freda Mary Oben, ed. Lucy Gelber and Romaeus Leuven (Washington, DC: ICS, 2017).

⁴² *ST I*, q. 93, a. 2, ad 3.

⁴³ As Thomas says of the Word made flesh in *ST I*, q. 93, art. 1, ad 2, “The First-Born of creatures is the perfect Image of God, reflecting perfectly that of which He is the Image, and so He is said to be the ‘Image,’ and never ‘to the image.’” But creatures are created according to the image. Created nature and *imago* are not necessarily coextensive, and indeed are fully so only in God.

The intrinsically spiritual soul, while limited by potency and accordingly imperfect in its actuality, is nonetheless such as to provide an analogical image of God in the human creature precisely because it is positively immaterial. Without this foundational principle of spirit in the human creature, the elevation of the human person to the beatific vision would be as impossible as the bestowal of the beatific vision to a rock. The rock would need substantially to change into a knowing and loving creature to be susceptible of elevation to the order of grace and the attainment of a union of knowledge and love with God. Owing to the *imago*—the intellectual nature—the human creature does not need to lose humanity in order to be elevated through grace to attain to this vision: under the active agency of God the natural universality of its intellective power is capable of higher actuation. The overflow of the beatific vision into the flesh is required for the sake of integral human nature, but the beatific vision is essentially possessed even by the separated soul.

To repeat, in *ST I*, q. 93, a. 2, ad 3, Thomas says that the intellectual nature *alone* is to the image of God—“*sola natura intellectualis est ad imaginem Dei*”⁴⁴—and that it “has a capacity for the highest good”—“*quae est capax summi boni*.” What kind of capacity is this? Those who know Thomas’s teaching realize that he adverts to obediential potency—a passive potency for perfections that may be brought forth in a creature only by an extrinsic active power.⁴⁵ The universality of the adequate objects of intellect and will manifests what—consequent on revelation—we realize to be a purely passive capacity for elevation to the beatific vision, a vision toward which Thomas teaches that no creature can move apart from grace.⁴⁶ All the nobler perfections of the *imag-*

⁴⁴ It is noteworthy that Aristotle names God as “thought thinking itself”—as Pure Act and Perfect Intellect . . . But whence does Aristotle find the analogical foundation for such affirmations, save in the evidence of being as irreducible to any genus whatsoever, within which he discerns that analogicity of intellectual nature between man, separated substance, and God, that becomes for Thomas the foundational, essential, and principal reality signified by the *imago dei* in man, the *imago naturae*?

⁴⁵ St. Thomas deploys this principle with respect to infused virtue in Christ and in all those in a state of grace, to the capacity of human nature to be elevated to union with the Person of the Word, and generally to infused virtues in the soul. With respect to obediential potency and infused virtue in Christ, see *Summa theologiae* III, q. 11, a. 3, resp.; with respect to the union of human nature with the Person of the Word, observe his text in the *tertia pars* of the *Summa theologiae*, q. 1, art. 3, ad 3; and with respect to infused virtue generally, see *Quaestiones disputatae de virtutibus*, q. 1, a. 10, ad 13.

⁴⁶ See, e.g., *ST I*, q. 62, a. 2. And, of course, for Thomas desire *is* motion: cf. *Summa theologiae* I-II, q. 3, art. 4, resp.: “But it is evident that desire itself of the end is not attainment

ing of God in and by the human creature, the perfections of the *imago gratiae*—the *image of grace*—and of the *imago gloriae*—the *image of glory*—presuppose the intellectual nature. The stakes at hazard are thus great in understanding that the human creature is created *ad imaginem dei* by reason of that which is noblest in the human person, the intellectual nature in its openness to the universe of being, true, and good. And *the imago* is predicated by analogy of proper proportionality of man, angel, and God. Although we may say that there is a hierarchy of analogically finite distance between the perfections of man and those of the myriad angelic host, this is only because of the varied limitations of potency: God has no determined finite proportion to the creature, but the creature is ordered determinately to God.

The *Imago* and the Intelligibility of Creation

I wish to close by adverting to the reasoned disquisitions of my profound and insightful colleague Father Guy Mansini—who is inclined to hold the thesis that knowledge of the reality of God is a natural possibility for man foreclosed by sin but opened up again by the reality of revelation and sanctifying grace. His analysis is articulated first in his 2020 article “Why Revelation Gives Shelter to Metaphysics,” but is more expressly and definitively developed in his 2021 conference paper “Acts 17 and the Structure of Apostolic Hope.”⁴⁷ Although one might argue with his conclusion on the grounds of positive theology in interpreting the teaching of Vatican I that natural knowledge of God our Creator and Lord is truly possible, this does not reach the heart of his thesis, for he affirms that it *is* natural, but seems to suggest that it is natural in the way that the full density of natural virtues is “natural” after the Fall—that is, post-lapsarian man will require sanctifying grace for this recovery of nature.

of the end, but is a movement towards the end” (“Manifestum est autem quod ipsum desiderium finis non est consecutio finis, sed est motus ad finem”).

⁴⁷ See note 3 above for brief added consideration of these two works and their relation.

It is arguable whether the authors of Vatican I meant this: but this reading of “natural” in the light of the wider tradition poses a question that arguably has not been definitively addressed.⁴⁸ So there is dispute in positive theology.

⁴⁸ Acknowledging that there is space in the tradition to raise this question on the basis of the reasons already articulated above (i.e., that the account in question holds that there is natural knowledge of God but that after the Fall for this natural knowledge to occur requires sanctifying grace, rendering such natural knowledge putatively similar to the possession of all the acquired natural virtues after the Fall, which requires sanctifying grace), it should be observed that the magisterium has on the whole interpreted Vatican I differently. It must in justice be noted that Fr. Mansini’s proposal *does* unequivocally acknowledge that the knowledge of God in question *is essentially natural*—something that most of those who affirm the need for sanctifying grace to have such knowledge *actually deny*. Nonetheless, the possibility that the knowledge in question requires grace as a *conditio sine qua non* of its possession after the Fall—for whatsoever reason—is, *with severity* (but this *could* be argued to be because of the negation of the naturalness of such knowledge *tout court* by most of those who think grace is necessary for it) denied. See Pius XII, *Humani Generis* (1950), §25: “It is not surprising that novelties of this kind have already borne their deadly fruit in almost all branches of theology. It is now doubted that human reason, without divine revelation and the help of divine grace, can, by arguments drawn from the created universe, prove the existence of a personal God; it is denied that the world had a beginning; it is argued that the creation of the world is necessary, since it proceeds from the necessary liberality of divine love; it is denied that God has eternal and infallible foreknowledge of the free actions of men—all this in contradiction to the decrees of the Vatican Council.” It is a sign of how discerning and penetrating is the formulation of Fr. Mansini’s consideration, that one may ask the question whether the *reason* for the condemnation articulated in *Humani Generis* is that the position condemned would deny the essentially natural character of such knowledge (which Fr. Mansini’s position expressly seeks not to do—although a critic might argue that his analysis implies this, but that is another matter), or simply because it affirms sanctifying grace to be necessary for it. The simplest reading would seem to be that in *Humani Generis* both are considered erroneous but specifically that divine revelation and the help of divine grace are denied to be necessary for such knowledge. In the absence of an express qualification, the teaching of *Humani Generis* appears to be that such knowledge does not require sanctifying grace but lies within the ordinary exercise of the natural rational power even after the Fall and apart from sanctifying grace. Other cognate magisterial fonts might be cited to similar effect. For a criticism of the position that natural knowledge of the truth of the proposition that God exists presupposes revelation, see Joseph Trabbic, “By Revelation Alone? Some Objections to Robert Sokolowski’s ‘Christian Distinction,’” *The Heythrop Journal*, 59, no. 3 (2018): 456–67. With respect to this excellent essay—with whose principal conclusions I concur, and whose analysis is bracing—one might however note that something may be “natural” in an equivocal sense, that is, as belonging in its full character to the normative iteration of a species, but not necessarily in the same way to a damaged or unhealthy one in whom it may be found with diminution. This seems to

Systematically, this consideration is a theological exploration of the feasibility of a moderate and insightful “pruning back” of the Thomistic apologetic optimism regarding natural knowledge of God.⁴⁹ It is a challenging consideration. It might be thought that this is in some way profoundly consistent with the Thomistic emphasis upon the efficacy of the divine motion of grace in healing and restoring nature. Father Mansini’s treatment is brilliant in mapping out precisely where and how this consideration

be the argument of Sokolowski and Mansini with respect to the Fall. Yet this analysis of Sokolowski and Mansini also seems implicitly to involve viewing the intellect as subject to the Fall in the same manner as the will, whereas one might think there is a difference, since the openness of the intellect to being is arguably presupposed to revelation. On this view of the difference between intellect and will in relation to the Fall (which I am inclined to hold), while one may not after the Fall and apart from grace successfully and practically integrate this natural judgment of the existence of God with the whole of one’s life, or be able to draw the full existential or moral fruit from natural knowledge of the reality of God, nonetheless one may achieve such knowledge and discern certain of its strategic implications (even *some* moral implications). Such knowledge may also of course involve a certain admixture of error (although not to the point of annulling the possibility of the knowledge itself). This seems to be St. Thomas’s teaching.

⁴⁹ It must be observed that howsoever helpful the intellectual achievement of insight into the dependence of creatures on God is, that no demonstration whatsoever can force anyone to entertain it or even assure that its own intelligibility will be communicated adequately to every intelligent mind. The proofs, for example, presuppose antecedent intelligent engagement. Brilliant but profane minds are possible, as are profane but obtuse minds, and it is possible that many in each category are remote from such considerations and indeed spend effort in diverting themselves precisely from such considerations. This, of course, need not impede the helpfulness of such reflections for those who seek ardently for truth and appreciate it. But one must not assume that there is a “silver bullet” of apologetic reasoning, since any such consideration penetrates not alone by the “velocity” of its argument, but by virtue of minds that are proximate to receive it. One may think—I do—that there are many such minds, and that the natural motion of the mind in the face of the evidence often illatively precedes the formulation of the precise arguments and the full answers to objections (much as natural reasoning power is presupposed to the development of formal logic). But this still requires the somber realization that finally it is an all-disposing providence that governs the motion of souls. Interestingly, those who believe that such argumentation *can* at times be dispositive for souls who need the cautionary reminder of the limitation of such reasoning, since those for whom it is considered to be a capacity of nature whose exercise after the Fall will first require sanctifying grace as including the *gratia sanans* to recover its use, will *never* deploy it apologetically in speaking to those remote from the faith, and so no reminder would for them seem to be apologetically necessary. But it is necessary for those whose apologetic activity seeks to manifest awareness of the natural dynamism of the mind to such truth and the possibility of some genuine attainment of it even prior to the *gratia sanans*, but who must not for all that fall to the supposition that this is some species of “silver bullet.”

fits integrally within the state of the tradition.⁵⁰ I will be reflecting on his analysis for a long time. His argument is the more powerful because he clearly understands the need for immutable content in doctrine, and the role of natural truths in this judgment.⁵¹ Further, he retains the affirmation of the knowledge *as* natural, but as available to post-lapsarian nature only under the causality of the grace of faith. The issue is one of epistemology taken precisely in relation to original sin and grace. It is a brilliantly articulated and structured consideration, of great doctrinal fruitfulness not least in its invitation to think through the entire Catholic problematic. There are, however, problems.

There is an argument to be made simply from the natural knowability of the premises of arguments for God and their implications. That is, it does not seem impossible to know these premises naturally. It may be said that the cloud of sin and death morally undercut such knowledge; but conversely, it may be pointed out that the judgment that things flow forth from God who is infinitely good is, even in the face of sin and death, such as to suggest the thinkability of an indeterminate “more” which, of course, in fact comes to be realized beyond all determinate natural expectation in supernatural revelation. Thomas famously said that “I answer that not only does faith hold that there is creation but reason also demonstrates it.”⁵²

There is also a question whether the thesis is consistent with the fact of the case: have not persons in mortal sin come to hold prior to their conversions, and on the basis of ordinary experience and reason, that God exists?

There is a possible concern with circularity. One may be moved by grace without knowing demonstrations for the reality of God. Yet the natural motion of the mind articulated by these demonstrations precedes these, just as natural reason precedes development of formal logic. If such knowledge is possible only *by grace* and not *by natural reason alone*—if the reason absolutely *needs grace* to see this—there is at least danger of an intellectually vicious circle. However, in closing I wish to pose an issue that pertains to the *imago* and to the intelligibility of revelation.

⁵⁰ I would add, that while traditionalism with respect to knowledge of God has in certain particular applications, developments, or possible implications been condemned, it itself with respect to knowledge of God seemingly has not ever discretely been condemned.

⁵¹ See Fr. Mansini’s remarkably penetrating and instructive work, “The Historicity of Dogma and Common Sense: Ambrose Gardeil, Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, Yves Congar, and the Modern Magisterium,” *Nova et Vetera* (English) 18, no. 1 (2020): 111–38.

⁵² St. Thomas Aquinas, *In II sent.*, d. 1, q. 1, a. 2, sol.

The intellectual nature (the *imago*) extends to being, which is the first intelligible as sound is the first audible. The universality of its range and object renders it in relation to the active power of God to be a passive power for divine elevation to grace and glory. The natural power of intellect extends to the universal being common to finite effects, and thus to the question of the cause of this being.⁵³ The premises of argument for the reality of God include no proposition knowable by revelation alone. How then can it be impossible for the intellectual creature to discover this apart from supernatural revelation? And if it were impossible, would the minimal conditions for the intelligibility of revelation be able to be articulated or to be grasped by the human mind prior to the actual reception of infused theological faith? *Since being is the first, proper, and most universal effect of God, it is also in this life that in terms of which effects as effects are intelligible.* Accordingly, the validity of reasoning from finite effect to God—from universal being to its cause, from *per accidens* to *per se*, from imperfect to perfect—is something of nature available to the intelligence to understand.

Were finite effects as depending on and pointing to God naturally unintelligible absent revelation, the rational communicability of the idea of revelation might itself seem to become endangered, such that no middle term of conversation could exist between the Church and the world. Revelation in this life is a created grace—as is, indeed, the humanity of Christ as subsisting uniquely in the Person of the Eternal Word.⁵⁴ But understanding this, itself, requires prior capacity to see that finite created effects depend on their divine first cause. The intelligibility of the faith requires this, but one might think the capacity for it proceeds from the foundational

⁵³ It might be thought that the account of original sin as rendering natural knowledge of God impossible apart from *gratia sanans* consequent on sanctifying grace, implies a species of voluntarism with respect to human knowledge (or at least a greater parity of the effect of original sin on both intellect and will than has often been supposed to be the case). Of course, an intellectualist account does not suggest that the possessor of natural knowledge of God apart from grace consequent on original sin will be wholly able to integrate such a conviction with the entire scope of his life. In any case, an account treating the effects of original sin on intellect directly rather than indirectly owing to the “curvature” of the will might then also suggest or imply a more purely fiduciary account of the act of faith. Yet this does not seem to be the intention of the analysis. Fr. Mansini’s analysis is, precisely by way of drawing the mind back to central issues in fundamental theology, a profound and helpful exploration, howsoever distant I am from its principal conclusion with respect to natural knowledge of God after the Fall.

⁵⁴ *ST* III, q. 2, a. 7, resp. and ad 2.

character of the intellectual nature as that in which the *imago dei* in man essentially consists.

One essential sign of the universality of human spirit is arguably the inherent natural intelligibility of being: but that intelligibility is not itself a supernatural mystery.⁵⁵ This objective proportioning of the *imago* to *being* is ineradicable, such that the created human intelligence as such may be impaired in attainment of metaphysical truth but this cannot be rendered absolutely impossible for it *as such* by any condition in which it is still susceptible of act. This is because this proportion of intellect to *that which is* constitutes the foundation of the very *ordering* of any intellect *prior to any act*: in man it is part of the passive participation of the eternal law that

⁵⁵ Another way of making the same observation, is that nature is weakened but not destroyed by the Fall, and that the Fall affects intellect and will differently. So that arguably it is impossible that (apart from cases like brain injury and others) that one have intellect and be simply incapable of knowing that which one might even prefer *not* to know, or for fallen man to be incapable of natural knowledge of the reality of God apart from sanctifying grace, *because the intellect's root capacity for truth implies this and it cannot be denied without suppressing the very foundation of the rectification of the will through reception of truth*. This of course does not mean that the recipient need be capable of making full use of such knowledge inasmuch as sin and unrectified appetite may obstruct further application of such knowledge. St. Thomas argues in *ST* I-II, q. 85, a. 1, resp., that nature is, *in part*, destroyed by original sin. He identifies three senses of human nature: (1) the principles and properties of human nature; (2) the natural inclination to virtue; and (3) that gift of original justice conferred upon the first parents of the human race. He states that the third (the gift of original justice) is destroyed by sin; the second (the natural inclination to virtue) is diminished by sin; and the first (the principles and properties of human nature) is neither destroyed nor diminished by sin (after all, if the principles and properties of human nature were diminished or lost by sin humans could not be damned—for the damned would not be human!). Since the root of our natural inclination to virtue is the rational nature, this inclination cannot be wholly snuffed out—even the damned possess it, for it is the source of their unending remorse of conscience. The tendency of the rational creature to God cannot wholly be eradicated. And as the intellect as a power has being for its adequate object, that the mind be incapable of seeking causal origination of the being common to the proportionate objects of our knowledge and inferring the reality of the prime cause might be taken even to deny the intellectual principle itself. Whereas, diminished rational motion, and the incapacity apart from grace wholly to harvest the implications of the reality of God, do seem to be implications of the Fall. Hence a more certain demonstrative knowledge of God as prime cause might be naturally found only among the few, and with admixture of error; but a wider but less certain knowledge, predicated on the natural motion of the mind to seek causes, but not given demonstrative form or precision and further admixed with error, might be thought even after the Fall to be more common than the thesis of the impossibility of such natural knowledge apart from sanctifying grace envisions.

is the ontological condition for natural law, and for the obediential potency of man to grace and glory. One recalls St. Thomas's words of *ST* I-II, q. 91, a. 2, that all things participate the eternal law from which they derive their inclinations to their proper acts and ends. These inclinations are derived from the ontological and teleological *order* impressed on creation. The human intellect is ordered to being (*ens*) as adequate object, to the true as formal object, and to quiddity in corporeal matter as proper object. Thus the intellect is of its very nature *capax* with respect to the knowledge of being, howsoever it may suffer impediment, for so long as it can attain its act at all. It is for this reason that one might argue that the obscuration of sin cannot remove the possibility of natural discovery of the existence of God prior to sanctifying grace: because the causal question regarding being concerns the object proper to intelligence as such, and so may not wholly be suppressed or obviated so long as intellectual activity remains. Being as *ens* (actual nature, that which actually exists, essence under the formality, as it were, of existing) is first in the intellect, and is the adequate object of intellect in relation to which truth is principally and first known.⁵⁶ If this proportion of intellect to being were utterly lost, it is not clear how truth could be possible for man nor how one could be elevated in grace; but if the proportion howsoever weakened is retained, the truth of the judgment that God exists may become conspicuous.

It is not for historically antiquarian reasons that one observes that Aristotle affirmed that God as first cause has no real reciprocal dependence on anything, implying that God absolutely transcends limited beings. Aristotle speaks of God as "producing motion as being loved"⁵⁷ indicating both efficient causality (production) and "being loved" or the final causality of God as end. Indeed, Aristotle named God analogically from what Thomas later identifies as that wherein man is created *ad imaginem dei*, namely, spirit, the intellectual nature as pure perfection. God is Pure Act, Pure Intellect knowing itself. With all the imperfections of Aristotle's account—such as his failure to treat the intellectual perfection of will (i.e., love) in God, or his erroneous conviction of the demonstrability of the eternity of the world—his affirmation of divine simplicity and transcendence nonetheless implies the divine aseity. It is incompatible with the view

⁵⁶ *Ens* incorporates actual and possible being, but knowledge of the latter presupposes prior knowledge of the former, since both potency and possibility are only intelligible in relation to *act*. Aquinas is not wrong to see in Aristotle's *actual nature*, and in Aristotle's teaching that every category of being is divided by potency and act, the foundation for his teaching of the real distinction of essence and existence.

⁵⁷ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 12.7.1072b3–4.

that God is merely the first member of a series. While the trail of created effects leads to God, *according to Aristotle God also stands absolutely outside the series*.⁵⁸ Aristotle speaks of these things employing the analogy of the proportionality of act and potency. It seems difficult to attribute these insights to sanctifying grace in him, although surely it was a limited but actual grace.

Conclusion

The spiritual power in man testifies naturally to many things whose ultimate exegesis will be provided only by faith. But one might think one must truly be able to speak of them for that exegesis actually to obtain: the illumined page cannot be written in invisible ink.⁵⁹ This is the gravamen of the account of *sacra doctrina*, and the apologetic derivative from it promulgated in *Aeterni Patris*, which turns our minds to St. Thomas Aquinas not for parochial, but for evangelical, reasons.⁶⁰ N.V

⁵⁸ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Book XII 12.10.1075a10–15: “We must consider also in which of two ways the nature of the universe contains the good or the highest good, whether as something separate and by itself, or as the order of the parts. Probably in both ways, as an army does. For the good is found both in the order and in the leader, and more in the latter; for he does not depend on the order but it depends on him” (trans. mine). One notes the lack of any *dependence* of the supreme good (God, Pure Act) upon the order of the world. But the order depends on God, and to be contained thoroughly within this order is also to have reciprocal real relations with some aspect of it (even angels depend on God to be, and for their infused species, and are existentially determined by their place in the hierarchy of created being). Of course, Aristotle does not speak of creation, but his account of God is an account of the cause of being on whom all else depends for its actuality.

⁵⁹ I write this because, if visible, these truths may—with howsoever many imperfections and failures—actually in some case be known even in the poor light of a postlapsarian mind prior to justifying grace. But then the beginning of such discernment may in some cases become a material occasion for the grace of conversion. Or so it seems to me. Fr. Mansini’s invitation to think through with great care this entire problematic should be received with profound gratitude.

⁶⁰ Since presenting and editing this essay, I have enjoyed the great benefit of receiving further clarification from Fr. Mansini regarding his full position, to the effect that on his account even *in puris naturalibus* one would not be proximate to natural knowledge of God, but that this proximity is achieved only following upon revelation from God as to the contingent status of the world as such. The natural status of this knowledge raises further questions—if there is no active power for its realization absent revelation, one might think it is not a natural capacity (but some Scholastic doctors, e.g., Scotus, have differed with Aquinas on this point). However, after the Fall and prior to the definitive revelation in Christ, it is my understanding that on Fr. Mansini’s

account, such knowledge ought to be considered no longer naturally proximate to the human person owing to the effects of original and actual sin. And so my analysis stated above does pertain to Fr. Mansini's account: first, inasmuch as this knowledge that is held to be in a sense natural though uniquely and solely facilitated by revelation is rendered impossible owing to sin prior to definitive revelation in Christ; and second, also inasmuch as the natural foundation of the *imago* in the human person is not thought to imply the real possibility of such knowledge *in puris naturalibus*. While the analysis here falls short of a complete presentation, appreciation, or critique, I hope that the strategic concerns here articulated—especially that which is founded on the adequate object of human intelligence in relation to the *imago dei*—may provide a helpful ground of contrast and engagement with the further development of the theology of disclosure.