

## Being Good: Thomas Aquinas and Dionysian Causal Predication

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MODIFYING Marie-Dominique Chenu's claim of *exitus et redivus* as the "very plan of the *Summa*," Michel Corbin has proposed an extension of this twofold movement into a tripartite pattern.<sup>1</sup> On Corbin's modification, a further mediation lies in the *tertia pars* where the *exitus* of God's descent in the *prima pars* and the *redivus* of humanity's graceful ascent in the *secunda pars* are embodied in an incarnational-sacramental "synthesis" of the two movements.<sup>2</sup> In as much as Corbin wants to rethink Chenu's "plan," he is nevertheless faithful to Chenu's fundamental intuition: "the Christian Neoplatonists are plainly the thinkers who can supply Saint Thomas with expression and support for this vast theme, and, *de facto*, the Dionysian tradition."<sup>3</sup>

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This essay is not primarily concerned to clarify the debate concerning the "plan" of the *Summa theologiae*.<sup>4</sup> The question here, rather, concerns

<sup>1</sup> For Chenu's "plan," see M.-D. Chenu, O.P., *Toward Understanding Saint Thomas*, trans. A.-M. Landry and D. Hughes (Chicago: H. Regnery, 1964), 297–318, at 304; and cf. idem, "Le plan de La Somme théologique de saint Thomas," *Revue Thomiste* 47 (1939): 93–107. For Corbin's modification, see Michel Corbin, S.J., *Le chemin de la théologie chez Thomas d'Aquin* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1972), 794ff.

<sup>2</sup> Corbin, *Le chemin de la théologie chez Thomas d'Aquin*, 788ff. Cf. John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 58ff.

<sup>3</sup> Chenu, *Toward Understanding Saint Thomas*, 306.

<sup>4</sup> Jean-Pierre Torrell identifies three principal positions on the "plan" of the *Summa*. First, Chenu's, which understands the *exitus et redivus* as correlating to the *prima pars* and the *secunda pars*, and therefore leaves the *tertia pars* as something of an afterthought. Second, the view represented by A.-M. Patfoort, who very much rejects

the nature of Aquinas's use and reading of Denys the Areopagite, and specifically the Dionysian *triplex via*, by which we come to know God according to the triadic pattern: by negation (*per remotionem*/παρὰ ἀφαιρέως), by eminence (*per eminentiam*/παρὰ ὑπεροχής), and by causal attribution (*per causalitatem*/παρὰ αἰτίας).<sup>5</sup>

In what follows I want to suggest a reading of Aquinas's metaphysical noetic sensitive to the middle mediation of the Dionysian *triplex via*—"per eminentiam"—, a mode of mediation that both transcends and inter-plays in the midst of "attribution" and "negation." I want to suggest that "per eminentiam" functions as a "redoubling mediation," and that herein it both qualifies and expands "attribution" and "negation" through a non-collapsible "synthesis" of the two rhythms that yet moves "beyond" in the direction of a theoretical *reductio in mysterium*.<sup>6</sup> For this reason I invoke

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Chenu's "plan," arguing that the *exitus et reditus* motif recurs throughout the *Summa* but does not structure the movement of the whole. See A.-M. Patfoort, "L'unité de la *Ia Pars* et le mouvement interne de la *Somma* théologique de S. Thomas d'Aquin," *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 47 (1963): 513–44. The last principal position, according to Torrell, is represented by the response of M.-V. Leroy to Patfoort's rejection of Chenu. This position seeks critically to modify the *exitus et reditus* "plan" in order to integrate the *tertia pars* more significantly into the overall structure of Aquinas's work. See M.-V. Leroy's review of Patfoort's essay in *Revue Thomiste* 84 (1984): 298–303. Although Torrell does not mention Corbin in his discussion of the principal positions, nevertheless Corbin fits very much into this third position. For Torrell's discussion see Jean-Pierre Torrell, O.P., *Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 1, *The Person and his Work*, trans. Robert Royal (Washington: Catholic University, 1996), 150–53. More recently, Rudi te Velde has rejected Chenu's plan *tout court* in his *Aquinas On God: The 'Divine Science' of the Summa Theologiae* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2006), 9–18. Against the circular scheme of Chenu, te Velde articulates a "linear movement of increasing concretization."

<sup>5</sup> Denys, *De divinis nominibus*, 7.3 (PG 3.872A): κατὰ δύναμιν ἀνείμεν ἐν τῇ πάντων ἀφαιρέσει καὶ ὑπεροχῇ, καὶ ἐν τῇ πάντῳ αἰτίᾳ. Naming a *triplex via* in Denys is often wrongly attributed to Aquinas; in fact it seems it was Aquinas's teacher, Albert the Great, who first so named this Dionysian text (though I think the triadic pattern is, in fact, native to Denys). See Harry C. Marsh, Jr., "Cosmic Structure and the Knowledge of God: Thomas Aquinas' *In Librum Beati Dionysii De Divinis Nominibus Expositio*" (Ph.D. dissertation, Vanderbilt University, 1994), 91. Cf. Fran O'Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas* (Leiden, Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1992), 31. For an English translation of the *Corpus Dionysiacum*, see *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, trans. Colm Luibheid (New York: Paulist Press, 1987). Henceforth, unless otherwise noted, I have followed Luibheid's translation. Translation here modified.

<sup>6</sup> By "redoubling mediation" I mean a process of mediating *exitus et reditus*/"attribution" and "negation" that synthetically preserves the double rhythm of the movements in the mediation of a "third." Underpinning my thought is William Desmond's notion of the "metaxological" and the doubling he identifies as a

Corbin: because of his insistence on a further mediation in the *tertia pars*, which contains and expands the *exitus et reditus* in something like a mystical union of the “two,” this I read as somewhat correlative with the function of the Dionysian *triplex via*. My interest, therefore, is to explore the nature of the *triplex via* as an essential Dionysian contribution to Aquinas’s causal metaphysics, his pre-eminent name of God and what has come to be called the *analogia entis*.<sup>7</sup>

My argument on behalf of a Dionysian resource at the service of Aquinas’s pre-eminent name of God may seem counter-intuitive. Denys names God pre-eminently “the good” and clarifies that he does so because God is “beyond being” (ὑποουσίως).<sup>8</sup> Indeed, Denys’s God “beyond being” has been deployed, not least by Jean-Luc Marion, to attack the supposed “onto-théo-logie” of the Thomistic pre-eminent name of God.<sup>9</sup>

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correspondence to “the *eros* and *agape* of metaphysics.” In order to emphasise the metaxological (as opposed to the mere dialectical) Desmond specifies that in the metaxological there is a “redoubling in excess of the dialectical reduction,” which is therefore the preservation of the *dia* beyond the dialectic. See William Desmond, *Being and the Between* (Albany: SUNY, 1995), 177–222.

<sup>7</sup> The term *analogia entis* is of course not proper to Aquinas or Denys. It seems first to have been used by Aquinas’s famous sixteenth-century commentator, Cardinal Cajetan de Vio (whose commentary is included in the Leonine edition). Nevertheless, as John Betz states, “what it [*analogia entis*] describes is more or less original to Aquinas,” and especially in the sense that the *analogia entis* of Aquinas was explicated by Erich Przywara, S.J. in his *Analogia Entis*, in *Schriften*, vol. 3 (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1962). What the Przywara emphasis clarified, as Betz shows, is that “*analogia entis* is precisely . . . [the] *unstable* rhythm between similarity and an ultimate dissimilarity; and this is why Przywara summarizes the *analogia entis* (explicitly against Hegel) as a methodological *reductio in mysterium*.” In the briefest terms, again as Betz summarises, *analogia entis* for Przywara was “an analogy between an absolute identity of essence and existence in God and an utterly contingent and gratuitous relation of essence and existence in creatures.” See John R. Betz, “The Beauty of the Metaphysical Imagination,” in *Belief and Metaphysics*, ed. Conor Cunningham and Peter M. Candler, Jr. (London: SCM Press, 2007), 41–65; on Przywara and the *analogia entis*, see especially 51–60, quotations here at 53 and 54. Przywara’s *Analogia Entis* is currently being translated into English for publication with Eerdmans by Betz and David Bentley Hart.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Denys, *De divinis nominibus*, 4.3 (PG 3.697A), and 5.1 (PG 3.816B).

<sup>9</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, *Dieu sans l’être* (Paris: PUF, 1982), 111–22. Here Marion contrasts Denys to Aquinas, who, for the author of *Dieu sans l’être*, represents an “onto-théo-logie” which imprisons the God of revelation in the philosophy of “being.” By contrast, Denys is said to represent a “théo-onto-logie,” a recapitulation of the philosophy of “being” through revelation into a theology of “loving” that now determines the content of “being.” Marion subsequently retracted this early position against Aquinas. For his retraction see Jean-Luc Marion, “Saint Thomas d’Aquin et l’onto-théo-logie,” *Revue Thomiste* 95 (1995): 31–66; and his

However, as Jan Aertsen has shown, the dichotomy between “the good” (*summum bonum*) and “being” (*esse*) is false in Aquinas, for whom there is an essential convertibility of the two *transcendentia*.<sup>10</sup> From this convertibility, I argue that it is through fidelity to Dionysian theology and the *triplex via* that Aquinas resolutely affirms “being” as pre-eminent name. Thus exploring, I seek to propose and creatively investigate the Thomistic modifications of Dionysian causality in terms of a discontinuous-continuity with a focus on the nature of participating being as “gift.”

### Causality and the “Third” Way: Naming God “Being”

Rudi te Velde has written that the *triplex via* “determines the form under which the ontological reality of [Aquinas’s] God becomes knowable and meaningful to us.”<sup>11</sup> It is the noetic way: *per remotionem*, *per eminentiam*, *per causalitatem*. According to this tripartite pattern, the rhythms of negation (*per remotionem*) and attribution (*per causalitatem*) are further mediated by a redoubling of cataphasis and apophasis in terms of an unequalisable attributive-negation: *per eminentiam*. Thus the metaphysics of causality involve a complex interplay in which the rhythms of apophasis (negation/*exitus*) and cataphasis (attribution/*reditus*) are caught up in a further variation. Here negation and attribution are mediated by a plenitudinal “third,” which now becomes integral to the logic of how the cause is at once cataphatically *unveiled* and apophatically *veiled* in the participating effect.

The causal logic of the veiled-unveiling of the cause in the effect means, as Jean Durantel writes, “for St Thomas as much as for Denys . . . the sensible world is a transparency of the invisible.”<sup>12</sup> Aquinas and Denys read creation as a pattern of signs that signify what paradoxically exceeds signification: “Creation for Denys and Thomas is first of all a procession of a term that images more than can be named or understood . . . [because] the very first characteristic of creation is its being some kind of

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1991 preface to the English edition of *Dieu sans l'être*, idem., *God Without Being*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), xxii–xxiv.

<sup>10</sup> Jan A. Aertsen, “The Convertibility of being and Good in St Thomas Aquinas,” *The New Scholasticism* 59 (1985): 449–70. Further, as Adrian Pabst has clarified, the whole tradition reaching back to Plato, according to which the good is said to be “beyond being” (ἐπέκειν τῆς οὐσίας/ὑπνουσίως), has been too often misconstrued; as Pabst argues, the good’s status “beyond being” should in Plato be read as signifying “its superabundance and plenitude, not its separation from being.” See Adrian Pabst, “The Primacy of Relation over Substance and the Recovery of a Theological Metaphysics,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 81 (2007): 557–82, at 567–68.

<sup>11</sup> Rudi te Velde, *Aquinas On God*, 174.

<sup>12</sup> J. Durantel, *Saint Thomas et le Pseudo-Denis* (Paris: Librairie Félix Alcan, 1919), 238.

likeness [or trace] of the divine being.”<sup>13</sup> In other words, on Durantel’s reading, for Denys and Aquinas, knowledge of God and naming God are tightly tied to the reality of the causal ontology of creation as such. If creation and signification are linked, then being is already a kind of predication.<sup>14</sup> The act of existence mediates the cause of creation, and this mediation of God in creation makes predication of God possible.

This logic is rooted in the middle “way” of the *Summa*’s famous *quinque viae*: awakening to the truth that there are beings for whom it is possible not to be (*est sumpta ex possibili et necessario*).<sup>15</sup> This “way” to God proceeds through what Aidan Nichols names the “fragility of beings.”<sup>16</sup> If beings exist with fragility, with a potency not to be, then being must arrive as a *gift* from a source of being which of necessity *must be*. Thomistic divine causality is hereby grounded in the irreducible relation of the gift of being: “To be a sharer in being is to be a receiver, to accept a gift from a source, from unparticipated existence, He Who Is, *ipsum subsistens*.”<sup>17</sup> Thus “fragility” is convertible with the ontological necessity of receptivity to gift, since the fragile being only “is” to the extent that it receives its being from that which is “beyond fragility.” Or as William Desmond writes:

His third way, the way from possible being, latter called the proof from contingency, hangs on the fact that the world is a happening that carries no self-explanation. It is, but it might possibly not be; there is no inherent necessity that it must be. It is a happening that happens to be, but the happening as happening points to being beyond contingency that is the source or ground of happening.<sup>18</sup>

The fragility of being hereby presupposes an ontological openness beyond self-explanation, the “happening” of a mysterious arrival of gift beyond every claim of self-sufficiency. On Desmond’s reading this is constitutive of

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 247.

<sup>14</sup> On being and predication cf. Barry Miller, *The Fullness of Being: A New Paradigm for Existence* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002).

<sup>15</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I, q. 2, a. 3. All English quotations from the *Summa* generally follow (with light modification sometimes) the translation of the Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benzinger Bros, 1948).

<sup>16</sup> See the chapter “Thomas Aquinas and the fragility of beings,” in Aidan Nichols, O.P., *A Grammar of Consent: The Existence of God in Christian Tradition* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), 81–96.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>18</sup> William Desmond, *Is There a Sabbath for Thought?: Between Religion and Philosophy* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 12–13. Cf. William Desmond, *God and the Between* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 132–34.

the “elemental wonder of metaphysical astonishment,” the participational mystery of being’s givenness: “its givenness as given into being.”<sup>19</sup>

The logic of the third “way” thus involves a careful modification of the naturalism of Aristotelian causality in the direction of causal procession and participation.<sup>20</sup> Aristotle’s principle of *kinesis* is here read through the contingency of existence itself; the cause is no longer a temporal position preceding the effect, but the ontological relation between act and potency.<sup>21</sup> As John Milbank argues, Aquinas derives “the ‘is’ of temporal/spatial beings *entirely* from the first principle, but a principle no longer conceived as itself a representable object or being [as with Aristotle], which would depend for its foundation upon what it is supposed to

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>20</sup> On the view of Aidan Nichols, the first, second, fourth, and fifth “ways” correspond to the familiar fourfold scheme of Aristotelian causality: material, efficient, formal, and final. Nichols suggests that the third “way” occupies the central position not by chance: “The Third Way indicates the ground or basis of the fourfold causality whose role in the relation between the world and God the First, Second, Fourth and Fifth Ways explore.” As Nichols notes, causality for Aquinas is in fact much closer to Avicenna’s Neoplatonised-Aristotelianism than the “pure” Aristotelianism according to which Aquinas has often been read (cf. Avicenna, *De Philosophia Prima* 1.6–7). Thus Nichols argues: “the perspective in which the Third Way, the central way of the Five Ways, attains to God is the most important for Thomas’s metaphysics, and indeed for any creation thinking. The Third Way concludes to God as the foundation and source not of this or that aspect of things nor of this or that aspect of the world as a whole, but of the very being of things, the very being of the world.” See Aidan Nichols, O.P., *Discovering Aquinas: An Introduction to his Life and Work* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 45–47. Cf. Milbank and Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas*, 34. Further on the *quinque viae*, cf. Fergus Kerr, O.P., “Theology in Philosophy: Revisiting the Five Ways,” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 15 (2001): 115–30; and W. J. Hankey, *God in Himself: Aquinas’ Doctrine of God as Expounded in the Summa Theologiae* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 36–56.

<sup>21</sup> Here, as W. Norris Clarke has shown, for Aquinas, the Aristotelian act-potency relation is fully grounded in the doctrine of limitation such that it “requires the introduction of the Neoplatonic theory of participation.” For Clarke, modifying slightly the view of Cornelio Fabro, we find in Aquinas an “Aristotelianism specified by Neoplatonism.” See W. Norris Clarke, S.J., “The Limitation of Act by Potency in St. Thomas: Aristotelianism or Neoplatonism?,” in *Explorations in Metaphysics: Being—God—Person* (London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 65–88, at 66 and 82. Cf. Cornelio Fabro, *La nozione metafisica di partecipazione secondo s. Tommaso d’Aquino* (Turin: 1950). Further, on the “Neoplatonism” of Aquinas, cf. W. J. Hankey, “Aquinas’ First Principle, Being or Unity?” *Dionysius* 4 (1980): 133–72; idem, *God in Himself*, 2–13; and Adrian Pabst, “Matter and Form in Aquinas: The Cause and the Principle of Individuation,” chapter 5 of Pabst, *Creation and Individuation: Theology and Politics in Patristic, Medieval and Early Modern Thought* (Ph.D. thesis: University of Cambridge, 2007), 110–33.

found.”<sup>22</sup> This means that Aquinas’s notion of causality should be read in terms of the Neoplatonist tradition, which, ever since Plotinus, was already synthesizing Aristotelian notions of causality into the logic of causal emanation.<sup>23</sup> The first cause is both the transcendent and immanent cause of being without being reduced to a “fragile” being among beings: the “causal origin is really for Aquinas less Aristotelian ‘cause’ than the Dionysian ‘requisite’ (*aitia*), or attribution to the original source of the ‘gift’ in its whole entity as effect.”<sup>24</sup> This is to understand the relation of the creature to God through the middle “way” of the *quinque viae*, to agree with Nichols: “The nerve of the proof . . . [is] to wit, the necessity of a first cause which is Pure Act or being, itself subsistent in its own right.”<sup>25</sup>

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The Thomistic metaphysics of causal participation are thus deeply Neoplatonic; and Aquinas draws this depth largely (but not exclusively) from the *Corpus Dionysiacum*.<sup>26</sup> Fran O’Rourke points to a single Dionysian epistle, *Epistola* 9, as containing the key to Denys’s noetic of divine causality.<sup>27</sup> There Denys explains the reality of creation as a pattern of symbols according to which the veiled theology of the distant God is learned in the clarity of unveiling (προκαλυμμάτων ἐκτὸς θεολογίας σαφοῦς ἀκηκοότες).<sup>28</sup> Denys writes:

<sup>22</sup> John Milbank, “Only Theology Overcomes Metaphysics,” in *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, Culture* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1997), 36–52, here at 41. Cf. David Burrell, C.S.C., “Analogy, Creation, and Theology,” in *The Theology of Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Rik van Nieuwenhove and Joseph Wawrykow (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 77–98, at 81: “[I]t was specifically the works of Dionysius the Areopagite that facilitated the breakthrough to *esse*, which allowed Aquinas (in [Edward] Booth’s terms), to overcome the aporia bequeathed by Aristotle to philosophy, and especially to subsequent commentators on his work,” the “aporia” being Aristotle’s conflation of substance and the implications thereof (cf. *Metaphysics*, 9.8 [1050b]). See Edward Booth, *Aristotelian Aporetic Ontology in Islamic and Christian Thinkers* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1983).

<sup>23</sup> See Lloyd Gerson, *God and Greek Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

<sup>24</sup> Milbank and Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas*, 31, citing Jean-Luc Marion, “Saint Thomas d’Aquin et l’onto-theo-logic,” 31–66.

<sup>25</sup> Nichols, *A Grammar of Consent*, 90.

<sup>26</sup> It would be hard to overemphasise the importance of Denys in Aquinas’s thought. After Aristotle and Augustine, he is the most quoted authority in the entire *Summa*. Durantel counts 1702 express citations and an additional 12 general references without citation. In the first twelve questions of the *prima pars* alone Chenu counts 25 references to Denys. See Chenu, *Toward Understanding Saint Thomas*, 127; and Durantel, *Saint Thomas et le Pseudo-Denis*, 60.

<sup>27</sup> O’Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas*, 9.

<sup>28</sup> Denys, *Epistola* 9.1 (PG 3.1108B).

[L]et us not suppose that the outward face of these contrived symbols [the various beings of the multiple creation] exist for its own sake. Rather, it is the protective garb of the understanding of what is ineffable and invisible to the common multitude. . . . As Paul said and as true reason has said, the ordered arrangement of the whole visible realm makes known the invisible things of God.<sup>29</sup>

Hereby Denys establishes the cosmos “poetically”: as a text which, when read properly, is understood as a hymn of praise written of God himself. The variety of created effects form a pattern, a texture of communication that cataphatically unveil God’s glory to the “lover of holiness,” while apophatically veiling the intimacy of that glory from “the profane.”<sup>30</sup> Only the “lover of holiness,” who apprehends the complete consort dancing together,<sup>31</sup> only he can read the poem of creation’s variety and know it as a sign of the divine cause. For Denys this logic is grounded in Scripture (cf. Rom 1:20).<sup>32</sup>

Affirming the multiplicity of creation as a pattern that reveals the invisible things of the Creator’s Godhead and power, herein lies the first meaning of the plurality of the world for Aquinas. Following Denys’s causal logic, Aquinas writes, “every effect . . . receives the similitude of the agent not in its full degree, but in a measure that falls short, so that what is divided and multiplied in the effects resides in the agent simply, and in the same manner.”<sup>33</sup> Since the intensity of the cause necessarily declines to the effect, the effect can never image the cause in its full refulgence. Thus the God who creates the world to communicate his goodness (*bonum diffusivum sui*) produces a multiplicity of beings to form a communal pattern: *esse cum ordine in rebus*.<sup>34</sup> Thereby the heterogeneity of different beings within the cosmic order of their communion (their symphonic/poetic pattern of difference) communicates the One Source. As Aquinas writes:

[T]he distinction and multitude of things come from the intention of the first agent, who is God. For He brought things into being in order that His goodness might be communicated to creatures, and be represented by them; and because His goodness could not be adequately represented by one creature alone, He produced many and diverse creatures, that what was wanting to one in representation of the divine

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 1–2 (PG 3.1105C–1108B).

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Ibid. (PG 3.1105C–1108B).

<sup>31</sup> To paraphrase from T. S. Eliot’s “Little Gidding.”

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Denys, *De divinis nominibus*, 4.4 (PG 3.700C).

<sup>33</sup> ST I, q. 13, a. 5.

<sup>34</sup> Aquinas, *Super De divinis nominibus*, cap. 7, l. 4. Cf. O’Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas*, 33.

goodness might be supplied by another . . . hence the whole universe together participates in divine goodness more perfectly, and signifies it better than any single creature whatever.<sup>35</sup>

The multiplicity of creation is hereby posited as a semiotic unity (*universum*) in which what “is” has significant meaning: it is the divine *convenientia* according to which the being of the world is redolent of the glory of God.<sup>36</sup>

What has been rehearsed yields to that metaphysical tradition which, as Pope John Paul II described it, “views reality in its ontological, causal and communicative structures . . . because it is based upon the very act of being itself, which allows a full and comprehensive openness to reality as a whole, surpassing every limit in order to reach the One who brings all things to fulfilment.”<sup>37</sup> This “comprehensive openness” involves a move to what Desmond calls the “metaxological”: a mindfulness of being’s plurivocity in the “pluralization of the mediations of givenness” understood in terms “of unity, of difference and of mediated community.”<sup>38</sup> This is *analogia entis*. It is a mode of being and cognising being that allows for the reality of beings’ “being between” equivocality and univocity; it is a mediation of thought and speech that carries with the fragility of beings in the midst of the causal plurivocity of effects. As Aquinas writes: “in analogical terms a word taken in one signification must be placed in the definition of the same word taken in other senses.”<sup>39</sup> An analogical mode of thought is thus able to account for an excessively un-encompassable communication of alterity between different terms in which “a multiple sense” comes to signify “various proportions to some one thing.”<sup>40</sup> The plurivocity of analogous discourse makes possible a community of signification that does not collapse diverse modes of being into either the pure negativity (apophasis) of equivocality, or the pure positivity (cataphasis) of univocity. Here “to be” is fully determined by the First Principle, which itself remains indeterminate, a non-representable cause, not grounded in that which it creates, but nevertheless intelligible within the realm of participation. Thus the possibility of meaningful language of God is rooted in the soil of meaningful being: the *analogia entis* is the condition of the possibility of *analogia verbi*. Analogy is the real way to be, to talk, to read and to name.

<sup>35</sup> ST I, q. 47, a. 2.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Desmond, *Is There a Sabbath for Thought?*, 12.

<sup>37</sup> John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, §97. Cf. Fergus Kerr, O.P., *After Aquinas: Visions of Thomism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 73ff.

<sup>38</sup> Desmond, *Being and the Between*, 177, and cf. 288.

<sup>39</sup> ST I, q. 13, a. 10.

<sup>40</sup> ST I, q. 13, a. 5.

### Causality between Faith and Reason

If the first meaning of the plurality of the world for Aquinas lies in the mode by which the multiplicity of beings communicates the goodness of the One cause, the second meaning of the plurality of the world is rooted in the divine processions of the Triune God. Gilles Emery and Philipp Rosemann have both highlighted the inherently Trinitarian nature of the Thomistic conception of divine causality.<sup>41</sup> As Aquinas writes: “The eternal processions of the persons [of the Trinity] are the cause and reason [*causa et ratio*] of the production of creatures.”<sup>42</sup> Thus, for both Emery and Rosemann, the *exitus et redivus* scheme of creation in Aquinas is Trinitarian, which means that the multiplicity of creation is not a mere declension from a monadic unity, but a participation in the *multitudo transcendens* of the triadic Godhead.<sup>43</sup> The revelation of the Trinity is crucial for two reasons: in order that humankind might have proper knowledge of creation (that is, *exitus*), and in order that human beings might have the right view of salvation (that is, *redivus*).<sup>44</sup> This leads Emery to conclude that there is a “double transcendent ‘mediation’” of the Son and Spirit proceeding and returning.<sup>45</sup> In the circular movement of creation’s *exitus et redivus* “the Trinitarian processions are the dynamic pivot.”<sup>46</sup> This Trinitarian conception of causality complicates how we should conceive the interrelation of philosophy and theology in Aquinas.

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Pope Benedict XVI has recently invoked Aquinas as a “model of harmony between reason and faith”—first in his Angelus address on the

<sup>41</sup> See Gilles Emery, O.P., *La Trinité créatrice: Trinité et création dans les commentaires aux ‘Sentences’ de Thomas d’Aquin et de ses précurseurs Albert le Grand et Bonaventure* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1995); idem, *Trinity in Aquinas* (Ypsilanti, MI: Sapientia Press, 2003); idem, “Trinity and Creation,” trans. Patrick I. Martin, in *The Theology of Thomas Aquinas*, 58–76; and Philipp W. Rosemann, *Omne ens est aliquid: Introduction à la lecture du ‘système’ philosophique de saint Thomas d’Aquin* (Paris: Éditions Peeters, 1996), 191–210. Further to Emery and Rosemann cf. Rowan Williams, “What Does Love Know? St Thomas on the Trinity,” *New Blackfriars* 8 (2001): 260–72.

<sup>42</sup> Aquinas, *Super Sententiis*, lib. 1, d. 14, q. 1, at 1. As Emery notes, this thesis, which occurs no fewer than ten times in *Super Sententiis*, is not confined to the early commentary but repeats in all the major works of Aquinas. Emery points specifically to *De potentia*, q. 10, a. 2, arg. 19, sed contra 2, and ad 19; and *ST I*, q. 45, a. 6, and a. 7, ad 3. See Emery, “Essentialism or Personalism in the Treatise on God in St. Thomas Aquinas?,” trans. Matthew Levering, in *Trinity in Aquinas*, 165–208, at 172 n. 23.

<sup>43</sup> *ST I*, q. 30, a. 3; Emery, “Trinity and Creation,” 73.

<sup>44</sup> *ST I*, q. 32, a. 1, ad 3.

<sup>45</sup> Emery, “Trinity and Creation,” 67.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

Feast of St. Thomas Aquinas (2007), and then in his abandoned lecture at La Sapienza University (January 17, 2008).<sup>47</sup> By these two invocations, Benedict has brought the Angelic Doctor to bear on one of the great themes of his pontificate: recovering the “grandeur” of reason. And, as I shall presently propose, the Pope’s invocation is helpfully deployed when specifying the mode of the Thomistic noetic of divine causality.

In his Regensburg address, Benedict articulated the recovery of the “grandeur” of reason in terms of reversing modernity’s “programme of dehellenization,” a program according to which: (1) “faith” is detached from “reason” such that God is left to be understood purely in terms of divine will (*voluntas ordinata*); and (2) “reason” is secularised and conceived of as fully autonomous, replete and no longer in need of the supernatural purification and illumination of “faith.”<sup>48</sup> In this way the secularisation of the modern mind is directly linked to a voluntaristic conception of God such that, as Tracey Rowland writes, “Faith without reason ends in fideism, but reason without faith ends in nihilism.”<sup>49</sup> Against the threatening consequences of this bifurcation of faith and reason, Benedict has pointed to Aquinas, who, having the charism of both a “philosopher” and a “theologian,” is said to have embodied the mode by which “[f]aith presupposes reason and perfects it, and reason, enlightened by faith, finds the strength to rise to knowledge of God and spiritual realities.”<sup>50</sup> Thus, as James V. Schall summarises the argument of Benedict’s Angelus on Aquinas: “Reason by itself is not full reason. Faith by itself is not full faith.”<sup>51</sup> Likewise Rowland writes that according to Benedict’s reading of Aquinas, “faith and reason, theology and philosophy, are symbiotically, and

<sup>47</sup> Benedict XVI, “Faith and Reason in Dialogue: Angelus, Memorial of St Thomas Aquinas: 28 January,” in *L’Osservatore Romano*, Weekly Edition in English (January 31, 2007), 1, quotation here at para. 1; idem, “Lecture of the Holy Father Benedict XVI for his visit to La Sapienza University of Rome” (January 17, 2008). The lecture at La Sapienza in particular seems to have been conceived as an explicit extension of Regensburg, the two lectures forming something of a “diptych.”

<sup>48</sup> See Benedict XVI, “The Regensburg Lecture” (September 12, 2006), in James V. Schall, S.J., *The Regensburg Lecture* (South Bend, IN: St Augustine’s Press, 2007), 130–48.

<sup>49</sup> Tracey Rowland, *Ratzinger’s Faith: the Theology of Pope Benedict XVI* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 5; and cf. idem, *Culture and the Thomist Tradition: After Vatican II* (New York: Routledge, 2003). Further, on the intrinsic relation between rationalism and nihilism, cf. John Paul II, *Fides et ratio*, §§45ff.

<sup>50</sup> Benedict XVI, “Faith and Reason in Dialogue: Angelus, Memorial of St Thomas Aquinas,” §6. Cf. Milbank and Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas*, 19–59.

<sup>51</sup> James V. Schall, S.J., “Benedict on Aquinas: ‘Faith Implies Reason’” (February 1, 2007), sect. 2; online at [www.ignatiusinsight.com/features2007/schall.asp](http://www.ignatiusinsight.com/features2007/schall.asp).

not extrinsically, related.”<sup>52</sup> Schall and Rowland commonly show how Benedict’s understanding of Aquinas brings him to occupy the polyvalence of a “suspended middle” in which “philosophy is not philosophy if it is only philosophy and theology is not theology if it is only theology.”<sup>53</sup> There is an organic interpenetration of theology and philosophy according to which it would be technically false to attempt to conceive of something like a “pure” reason. For Benedict, if reason is to be truly reasonable—if it is to be most fully itself—reason must enter into communication with faith: *credo ut intelligam*. Faith is the “purifying force for reason, helping it to be more fully itself.”<sup>54</sup> Thus, the Pope describes every philosophical pretension to repleteness as destructive of the very essence of reason: “if reason, out of concern for its alleged purity, becomes deaf to the great message that comes to it from Christian faith and wisdom, then it withers like a tree whose roots can no longer reach the waters that give it life.”<sup>55</sup> Faith is integral to the “courage to engage the whole breadth of reason, and not [to succumb to] the denial of its grandeur.”<sup>56</sup>

In these terms the Pope proposes that the recovery of the “grandeur” of reason will involve a rediscovery of the Christian “synthesis” of Abrahamic faith with Hellenistic reason in order, thereby, to allow “reason and faith [to] come together in a new way.”<sup>57</sup> Herein he reclaims Aquinas in his characteristic manner of refusing *tout court* the parallelism of faith and reason evident in certain variants of Neoscholasticism.<sup>58</sup> For Benedict,

<sup>52</sup> Rowland, *Ratzinger’s Faith: the Theology of Pope Benedict XVI*, 5.

<sup>53</sup> Schall, “Benedict on Aquinas: ‘Faith Implies Reason,’” sect. 2. Hans Urs von Balthasar coined the term “suspended middle” (which Schall does not use) to describe how Henri de Lubac, resourcing Aquinas’s theology of *desiderium naturale visionis Dei*, came to a position “in which he could not practice any philosophy without its transcendence into theology, but also no theology without its essential inner substructure of philosophy.” Balthasar, *The Theology of Henri de Lubac: An Overview*, trans. Joseph Fessio, S.J., and Michael M. Waldstein (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983), 15. John Milbank describes the “suspended middle” as a metaphysical sensibility “between the discourses of philosophy and theology, fracturing their respective autonomies, but tying them loosely yet firmly together.” Milbank, *The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac and the Debate Concerning the Supernatural* (London: SCM Press, 2005), 5. Cf. Henri de Lubac, S.J., *Surnaturel: Études historiques* (Paris: Aubier, 1946).

<sup>54</sup> Benedict XVI, “La Sapienza,” §11; cf. idem, *Spe Salvi*, §23.

<sup>55</sup> Benedict XVI, “La Sapienza,” §12.

<sup>56</sup> Benedict XVI, “The Regensburg Lecture,” §16.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., §15.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, *The Nature and Mission of Theology: Approaches to Understanding Its Role in the Light of Present Controversy*, trans. Adrian Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995), 13–29; and idem, “The Dignity of the Human Person”: Commentary on Chapter I, Part I of *Gaudium et spes*, in *Commentary on*

Aquinas is a doctor in whom “human reason, as it were, ‘breathes’: it moves within a vast open horizon in which it can express the best of itself.”<sup>59</sup> The “breath” of Thomistic reason is precisely *faith*. Thus Aquinas’s particular achievement is to have specified the Christian “synthesis” in terms of the paradox of the unified-differentiation of philosophy and theology, a paradox the prime analogate of which is Christological. As the Pope states: “Saint Thomas’s idea concerning the relationship between philosophy and theology could be expressed using the formula that the Council of Chalcedon adopted for Christology: philosophy and theology must be interrelated ‘without confusion and without separation’.”<sup>60</sup> Thus a *communicatio idiomatum* of theology and philosophy is proposed as integral to how Aquinas’s thought embodies the “grandeur” of reason.

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What Benedict perceives as the Chalcedonian paradox of Aquinas’s understanding of the relation of philosophy and theology is substantiated by the implication of the Trinitarian nature of divine causality. In identifying this Trinitarian dimension of Thomistic causality, Emery and Rosemann destabilise the Neoscholastic pseudo-division of the treatise on God in the *Summa* according to which questions 2 through 43 of the *prima pars* are read as two discrete discourses: a “philosophical,” non-Trinitarian treatises *de Deo uno*; followed by a “theological” treatise *de Deo trino*. Emery states that he seeks to redress “the shortcomings of certain currents in Thomistic neo-scholasticism,” which insisted “too exclusively on the unity of operations of the Trinity” and thus have unwittingly leant credence to the false but prevalent view that “Saint Thomas has a monistic conception of divine creative activity.”<sup>61</sup> What Emery shows is to the contrary: Aquinas’s doctrine of the Trinity—far from being an isolated chapter of his “theology”—is itself integral to his understanding of creation as such, and thereby his Trinitarian theology underpins all he writes on the nature of divine causality outlined in the so-called “philosophical” treatises *de Deo uno*.<sup>62</sup> This means that the discourses *de Deo uno* and *de Deo trino* cannot be dissociated into a purely rationalistic scheme on the one hand, and a scheme based wholly on revelation on the other. Rather, as Emery demonstrates,

*the Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Herbert Vorgrimler et al., vol. 5 (Herder and Herder, 1969), 115–63.

<sup>59</sup> Benedict XVI, “Faith and Reason in Dialogue: Angelus, Memorial of St Thomas Aquinas,” §2.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Emery, “Trinity and Creation,” at 59, 69, 58.

<sup>62</sup> Emery, “Trinity and Creation,” 73: “The doctrine of the creative Trinity, in Saint Thomas, does not constitute an isolated chapter in theology. It provides a key to the interpretation of all reality.”

for Aquinas, the treatises intimately interlock according to the pattern of a “law of *redoublement*.”<sup>63</sup> According to this law of *redoublement*, the interconnection of the proper and the common, the difference and the unity of the Godhead, are simultaneously thought so as to avoid conflating the unity and distinction of Persons in God, while at the same time resisting the temptation to make the common essence “a reified ‘fourth’ in the Trinity.”<sup>64</sup> Thus *redoublement* is the model Aquinas himself gives by which to speak the mystery of the Holy Trinity. Emery writes: “In order to speak the Trinitarian mystery, it is necessary always to employ two words, two formulas, in a reflection in two modes that joins here the substantial (essential) aspect and the distinction of persons (relative properties). This is precisely what Thomas does in the structure of his treatises on God.”<sup>65</sup> In this way Aquinas’s Trinitarian theology is proposed in such a way that, in Desmond’s terms, we could speak of a mediation of *de Deo uno* and *de Deo trino* that preserves the *dia* of dialectical difference beyond the dialectic (essence-relation/being-person).<sup>66</sup> The Christian God is “only adequately expressed by the complex *redoublement* of our discourse joining the aspect of the divine substance and that of the relative property.”<sup>67</sup>

Emery’s notion of *redoublement* can be read as linking up with the ethos of the redoubling mediation of the *triplex via* outlined above, especially insofar as it exemplifies a non-collapsible “synthesis,” a mediation that preserves difference in terms of a differentiated-unity. Moreover, the law of *redoublement* evidences what Benedict intuits as the Chalcedonian interrelation of faith and reason in Aquinas (“without confusion and without separation”); and this all the more since the division of the treatises *de Deo uno* and *de Deo trino* is the fault-line separating a so-called purely “philosophical” speculation on God from the more fully “theological” reflection on the revelation of God as Triune. What Emery can thus be read as specifying is the *communicatio idiomatum* of philosophy and theology in Aquinas’s doctrine of God, which is shown to lie in the metaphysics of the Common Doctor’s notion of causality as occasioned by the eternal processions of the Persons of the Trinity. In this way Aquinas’s treatises on God bears witness to the mode by which theology and philosophy function in Aquinas as a “strange pair of

<sup>63</sup> Emery, “Essentialism or Personalism,” 178. Emery’s analysis of the Thomistic practice of *redoublement* in Aquinas’s doctrine of God is an expansion on the work of Ghislain Lafont, O.S.B., *Peut-on connaître Dieu en Jésus Christ?* (Paris: Cerf, 1969).

<sup>64</sup> Matthew Levering, *Scripture and Metaphysics: Aquinas and the Renewal of Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 197.

<sup>65</sup> Emery, “Essentialism or Personalism,” 178; as quoted in Levering, *Scripture and Metaphysics*, 215.

<sup>66</sup> See note 6 above.

<sup>67</sup> Emery, “Essentialism or Personalism,” 178.

twins, in which neither of the two can be totally separated from the other.”<sup>68</sup> Apprehending God causally, therefore, involves an organic understanding of the interrelated communication of ascending reason in descending faith. If “the *exitus* of the persons in the unity of essence is the cause of the *exitus* of creatures in a diversity of essence,”<sup>69</sup> then the rational apprehension *de Deo uno* involves the revelation *de Deo trino* (and vice versa).

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In the *Summa contra Gentiles*, Aquinas argues that there are three ways of knowing God: by the light of natural reason, by the gift of truth from God, and by a particular mystical grace whereby the mind is raised up by God to perfectly intuit those things revealed. The first two ways of knowing God are respectively “katabatic” and “anabatic” (*via qua descenditur et ascenditur*).<sup>70</sup> By the latter, God is known through the ascent of the intellect facilitated by reason; by the former, knowledge of God descends from God and is grasped through the gift of faith. In this way the *exitus et reditus* of creation is constitutive of an inverted *reditus et exitus* approach of the mind to God such that our noetic movement to God participates and mirrors the ontological relation of creation to Creator. Or, as Augustine puts it, we discover God through a double movement: *ad exterioribus ad interioria, ab inferioribus ad superiora*.<sup>71</sup> Desmond describes the first Augustinian movement—“from the exterior to the interior”—as coming to a mindfulness of “the dunamis of our openness.”<sup>72</sup> The noetic movement, beginning as a return of the mind to itself, opens into a “self-transcending” movement “from the inferior to the superior.” Desmond writes: “We are the interior urgency of ultimacy, this [other whom we meet in our inferiority] is ultimacy as the superior.”<sup>73</sup> On this scheme there is an interpenetrating continuity between the ascent of inferior reason and the descent of superior faith. Thus, as Catherine Pickstock describes Aquinas’s view, the intellect is “drawn upwards by divine light, while, inversely, revelation . . . [involves] the conjunction of radiant being and further illuminated mind.”<sup>74</sup> Herein, in the ascent of the mind illuminated in the double mediation of the

<sup>68</sup> Benedict XVI, “La Sapienza,” §10.

<sup>69</sup> Aquinas, *Super Sententiis*, lib. 1, d. 2, div. text. Cf. Emery, “Trinity and Creation: The Trinitarian Principle of the Creation in the Commentaries of Albert the Great, Bonaventure, and Thomas Aquinas on the Sentences,” trans. Heather Buttery, in *Trinity in Aquinas*, 33–70, here at 58.

<sup>70</sup> Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles* IV, c. 1. Cf. Nichols, *Discovering Aquinas*, 37–42.

<sup>71</sup> Augustine, *Enarratio in Psalmos*, 145.5 (PL 37.1887).

<sup>72</sup> William Desmond, *Perplexity and Ultimacy* (Albany: SUNY, 1995), 11.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Catherine Pickstock, “Duns Scotus: His Historical and Contemporary Significance,” *Modern Theology* 21 (2005): 543–84, at 548.

descent of the gift of faith in the midst of radiant being, we discover a criss-cross of the redoubling logic of the *triplex via*.

In the *triplex via* Aquinas discerns the heart of the Dionysian noetic, how God is “known through knowledge and through unknowing.”<sup>75</sup> As Sarracenus’s Latin translation of Denys puts it: we come to know God *in omnium ablatione et excessu et in omnium causa*.<sup>76</sup> Knowledge of God is “meta”-knowledge: it comes both from “between” and “beyond.”<sup>77</sup> The noetic way participates both in beings’ likeness to God and in beings’ *difference* from God, which means that the approach requires a mindfulness of being in the midst of cataphasis and apophasis such that neither can be thought of as the determinate way. Denys writes:

[W]e cannot know God in his nature, since this is unknowable and is beyond the reach of mind or of reason. But we know him from the arrangement of everything, because everything is, in a sense, projected out from him, and this order possesses certain images and semblances of his divine paradigms.<sup>78</sup>

The theological task thus is to “interpret all things of God in a way that befits God,”<sup>79</sup> to be mindful of being in the midst of equivocity and univocity within the analogical sympathy that draws the effect beyond itself.

In his commentary on *De divinis nominibus* Aquinas proceeds by arguing that Denys himself situates the *triplex via* as the third of three steps: first Denys proposes a “doubt,” second he “solves it,” and third he “infers a conclusion” (the *triplex via* being the inferred conclusion).<sup>80</sup> The doubt follows from how God knows God’s creation. If God is to be known purely in the manner that God knows all things (that is, in his essence),

<sup>75</sup> Denys, *De divinis nominibus*, 7.3 (PG 3.872A).

<sup>76</sup> Ibid. (PG 3.872A); Sarracenus’s translation is as quoted by te Velde in *Aquinas on God*, 76.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. Desmond, *God and the Between*, 123: “The metaxological approach to God is metaphorical in being a ‘crossing’ and a ‘carrying across’: *meta-pherein*. We are crossed by a difference, and ferried across that difference. As carrying one from here to there (*meta-phora*), immanent in metaphor is a *poros*, a way making us porous to the surprise of otherness. Relevantly, ‘meta’ can mean both ‘in the midst of’ and yet also ‘over and above.’”

<sup>78</sup> Denys, *De divinis nominibus*, 7.3 (PG 3.869CD).

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 7.2 (PG 3.869A).

<sup>80</sup> Aquinas, *Super De divinis nominibus*, cap. 7, l. 4. On the background and historical context of *Super De divinis nominibus*, see Torrell, *Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 1, *The Person and his Work*, 127–29. For an English translation of *Super De divinis nominibus*, see the appendix of Harry Marsh, Jr., “Cosmic Structure and the Knowledge of God: Thomas Aquinas’ *In Librum Beati Dionysii De Divinis Nominibus Expositio*.” I have followed this translation (with light modification) throughout.

then “God is not intelligible, but above intelligibles.”<sup>81</sup> And if, “all of our cognition is through intellect or sense,” then “we do not know [*cognoscere*] God . . . [because] God’s essence is unknown to every creature and exceeds not only sense, but also all human knowledge and also every angelic mind.”<sup>82</sup> To know God’s essence “cannot befit someone except by a gift of grace.”<sup>83</sup> And this last qualification (which is Aquinas’s gloss on the Dionysian paraphrase) brings the argument back to the three ways of knowing God outlined in the *Summa contra Gentiles*. Denys proposes the way of knowing through the ascent of reason in the descent of faith: the noetic of the created mind’s *reditus et exitus* toward God. The *triplex via* is thus situated within the intersection of the “anabatic” and “katabatic” ways to God, rooted in the ontological relation of fragile beings to the One Who Is. Knowledge of God-as-cause is both a work of faith and a work of reason because it is ontologically related to the procession and reversion of all things to and from God. From this, Aquinas argues, Denys “solves the proposed doubt.” He writes:

[T]he universe of creatures itself is proposed to us by God that through it we might know [*cognoscere*] God insofar as the ordained universe has certain images and similitudes, although imperfect ones, of divine things which are compared to it as principal exemplars.<sup>84</sup>

It is thus that Aquinas posits Denys’s *triplex via* as inferring the conclusion to the stated doubt.

The *triplex via* is the scheme by which the cosmos is read on the way to God. In response to the Dionysian injunction—“we must interpret the things of God in a way that befits God”<sup>85</sup>—Aquinas posits the *triplex via*:

And this [the Dionysian noetic to God] occurs in three modes: first and principally in the ablation of all things [*in omnium ablatione*], namely insofar as nothing of these which we see in the order of creatures do we esteem to be God or something befitting God; but secondarily through excess [*per excessum*], for we do not remove the perfections of creatures . . . from God because of some defect of God, but because God exceeds every perfection of the creature . . . third, according to the causality of all things [*secundum causalitatem omnium*], while we consider that whatever is in creatures proceeds from God as from a cause.<sup>86</sup>

<sup>81</sup> Aquinas, *Super De divinis nominibus*, cap. 7, l. 4.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Denys, *De divinis nominibus*, 7.2 (PG 3.869A).

<sup>86</sup> Aquinas, *Super De divinis nominibus*, cap. 7, l. 4.

Here, by a kind of reciprocity, the *in omnium ablatione/per remotionem* qualifies and is qualified by *per excessum/per eminentiam* such that any simple “synthesis” of *per causalitatem* with *per remotionem* is foreclosed. There can be no term of “synthesis” other than a mystical *per excessum*, a paradoxical passing beyond (ὑπέρ/*supra*): beyond both negation and attribution. In this way the “cause” (αἰτία) needs to be conceived as exceeding analogical assertion since the denial of all things to God has been overdetermined by an assertion of supra-eminence (*per excessum*): God is “above being,” not as meaning-less but as meaning-overfull.

On the logic of the *triplex via*, negation qualifies the meaning of attribution in the direction of an untotalisable excess. In the same way, attribution qualifies negation beyond pure apophasis such that one can say that attribution already “negates negation” in the direction of something like a “synthesis.” Here, however, the “synthesis” (unlike Hegel) is further negatively qualified by the sheer “mystery” of the divine cause which is “above every noetic,” beyond both negation and attribution. This leads the mind into a theoretical *reductio in mysterium*. As Denys argues in the closing of *De mystica theologia*, the noetic approach to the divine cause (αἰτία) involves both a cataphatic “letting stand” (θέσις) and an apophatic “remotion” (ἀφαιρέσις); and yet, every affirmation (θέσις) and all negation (ἀφαιρέσις) affirm and negate only what does not yet arrive at the cause. Denys writes: “we neither let stand [θέσις] nor do we negate [ἀφαιρέσις]—because it [αἰτία] is beyond all standing; the perfect and simple cause of all things is beyond every denial [ἀφαιρέσις], its eminence [ὑπεροχή] simply surpasses all things.”<sup>87</sup> Here “αἰτία” qualifies “θέσις,” and in turn “ὑπεροχή” qualifies “ἀφαιρέσις,” such that both attribution and negation find themselves to be negatively qualified by the unequalisable plenitude of the cause redoubling into a mediation *per excessum* (παρὰ ὑπεροχής).

On this reading the most radically “apophatic” knowledge will involve a move toward a paradox of “simple” unknowing: beyond the specific denial of this or that quality, into a hyper-unknowing that awakens to an ultimacy in which eminence (ὑπεροχή) and first cause (αἰτία) mutually qualify each other. Thus, within the *triplex via*, there is a complex interplay of redoubling reciprocities of qualification in which there are clearly three different operations: to affirm, to negate, and to ascribe adequate origin.

<sup>87</sup> Denys, *De mystica theologia*, 5 (PG 3.1048B): “ἀλλὰ, τῶν μετ’ αὐτὴν τὰς θέσεις καὶ ἀφαιρέσεις ποιοῦντες αὐτὴν, οὔτε τίθεμεν, οὔτε ἀφαιροῦμεν ἐπεὶ καὶ ὑπὲρ πᾶσαν θέσιν ἐστὶν ἡ παντελὴς καὶ ἐνιαία τῶν πάντων αἰτία, καὶ ὑπὲρ πᾶσαν ἀφαίρεσιν ἡ ὑπεροχὴ τοῦ πάντων ἀπλῶς ἀπολελυμένου καὶ ἐπέκεινα τῶν ὅλων.”

The negative and positive moments redouble in the causal logic that mediates and exceeds them both “between” and “beyond.” The *triplex via* is thus a movement toward a hyper-eminence in which God is realized as the One who is both the Wholly Other of creation and more intimate to creation than creation is to itself, he is causally “all in all” (*Deus est omnia in omnibus causaliter*).<sup>88</sup> The truth of Neoplatonist logic is, therefore, fulfilled in Scripture because the noetic way to God participates and anticipates the eschatological ingathering of the whole creation into the *totus Christus*: “the head over all things for the Church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all” (Eph 1:22–23).

### **Apophatic and Cataphatic: the *Triplex Via* as Continuity**

The centrality of the *triplex via* to Aquinas is not contended, even if it is the subject of a certain debate. Jean-Pierre Torrell writes that Aquinas “simultaneously repeats, extends, and modifies the triple way that the celebrated Areopagite proposed for approaching God.”<sup>89</sup> What Torrell suggests, primarily through reading Aquinas’s use of the *triplex via* in *In ad Romanos*, is that Aquinas represents both continuity and discontinuity with the Areopagite.<sup>90</sup> Here the contention of the literature arises; it concerns the nature of the balance of continuity and discontinuity between Denys and Aquinas. The basic question (if we acknowledge that there is modification and discontinuity) is this: Does Aquinas’s reading and use of the *triplex via* represent a rupture?—or does this discontinuity take place within a tradition of transformative community?

There are two main contentions of rupture. The first proposes that there is no *triplex via* in Denys; rather, on this view, Aquinas “corrupts” what is properly a *duplex via*. The Russian Orthodox theologian Vladimir Lossky is representative of this charge against Aquinas. The second contention, put forward by M.-D. Chenu and Étienne Gilson, holds that Aquinas’s *triplex via* stands Denys “on his head” by reversing the order of the original Dionysian operation. I submit that both of these positions are wrong.

(1) According to Lossky the *triplex via* is a glossed misreading of *De divinis nominibus*. For him a distinctly “third way,” a *via superlationis* or *eminentiae* beyond attribution and negation, far from being indigenous to the text

<sup>88</sup> Aquinas, *Super De divinis nominibus*, cap. 7, l. 4. Cf. Henri de Lubac, S.J., *The Discovery of God*, trans. Alexander Dru (New York: Kennedy & Sons, 1960), 67; and Augustine, *Confessions*, 3.6.11.

<sup>89</sup> Jean-Pierre Torrell, O.P., *Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 2, *Spiritual Master*, trans. Robert Royal (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 39.

<sup>90</sup> Torrell, *Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 2, *Spiritual Master*, 36–42; Aquinas, *In ad Romanos I*, lect. 6, nn. 114–15.

of the Areopagite is, rather, a Latin corruption.<sup>91</sup> In Denys, Lossky discerns a mere *duplex via*:

Dionysius distinguishes two possible theological ways. One—that of cataphatic or positive theology—proceeds by affirmations; the other—apophatic or negative theology—by negations. The first leads us to some knowledge of God, but it is an imperfect way. The perfect way, the only way which is fitting in regard to God, who is of His very nature unknowable, is the second—which leads us finally to total ignorance.<sup>92</sup>

According to Lossky, the apophatic way is superior to the cataphatic way because it is aware of the “total ignorance” which, on this view, is the end of every noetic approach to God. In this way a *duplex via* is discerned in terms of a dissociated twofold way wherein one *via* is deemed “imperfect” and the other “perfect.” But in dissociating “apophasis” from “cataphasis” thus, this *duplex via* loses the “between,” the mediation of the relation of apophatic and cataphatic toward the “beyond” who is God. Thus Denys is read as an equivocal thinker who, paradoxically, risks slipping into a kind of quasi-univocal negativity, since “nothing” now tends to become a kind of total predicate of the God whose “very nature,” according to Lossky, is “unknowable.” The apophatic, on this scheme, does not resolve the illusion of cataphatic “capture”; it merely repositions the noetic “capture of God” in the direction of pure negation.<sup>93</sup>

Lossky’s intention to maintain a dissociation of two *viae* is grounded in his anxiety that, if set to work together, the apophatic and cataphatic

<sup>91</sup> According to Lossky, Denys’s superlative usage of “ὑπέρ” and “ὑπεροχή” designates in all cases a transcendent passing beyond proper to the Areopagite’s apophatic theology and therefore indissociable from the Dionysian *via negativa*. Thus he concludes: “Je ne crois pas qu’on ait le droit de parler d’ébauche d’une ‘troisième voie’, qui serait une *via superlatiois* ou *eminentiae*, chez Denys lui-même. On l’admet habituellement, sans se douter à quel point on reste tributaire de la tradition ultérieure qui transforma—surtout en Occident—la doctrine de *Corpus dionysien*.” Vladimir Lossky, *Théologie négative et connaissance de Dieu chez Maître Eckhart* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1960), 21–22, n. 31. For a similar view, cf. Jean Vanneste, *Le Mystère de Dieu. Essai sur la structure rationnelle de la doctrine mystique du Pseudo-Denys l’Aréopagite* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1959), 113. Cf. O’Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas*, 31.

<sup>92</sup> Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, trans. “a small group of members of the Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius” (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2002), 25.

<sup>93</sup> On this point see T.-D. Humbrecht, “La théologie négative chez saint Thomas d’Aquin,” *Revue Thomiste* 93 (1993): 535–66, and 94 (1994), 71–99. Humbrecht shows how a “pure” negative theology is actually impossible, and that the *via negativa* in fact only functions in terms of a prior cataphatic knowledge.

will be transmuted into the two polls of a quasi-Hegelian dialectic. Lossky is not wrong to want to avoid reading Denys in this direction. The problem of the dialectical way, as Lossky seems to have apprehended, is that it thinks the poles of the dialectic by synthesizing their difference through a mediation premised on the elimination of difference according to the dictum first associated with Spinoza: *Omnis determinatio est negatio*.<sup>94</sup> The dialectic thus sets in motion a logic whereby being cannot “be” until it first eliminates its “other,” non-being. On this scheme, mediation and synthesis, at best, involve the sublation of ontological difference.<sup>95</sup> Alternately, and worse, the dialectical way may betray what Conor Cunningham has called a “univocity of non-being” in which *reditus* ontologically precedes *exitus* (that is, apophasis is cataphasis) such that “something is made nothing and then the nothing [is] approached as something.”<sup>96</sup> Lossky is therefore right to avoid reading Denys as a “dialectician.” He is wrong to attribute this error to Aquinas and to claim that in so doing

<sup>94</sup> Cf. G. W. F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, trans. A. V. Miller (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1969), 113.

<sup>95</sup> Cf. William Desmond, *Hegel's God: A Counterfeit Double?* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2003).

<sup>96</sup> Conor Cunningham, *Genealogy of Nihilism: Philosophies of Nothing and the Difference of Theology* (London: Routledge, 2002), 100–30, at 125. In *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, Slavoj Žižek summarises a thesis on behalf of a startling re-reading of Hegel that should be understood as correlative to Cunningham's critique. Žižek proposes that the antagonism of difference in the dialectic does not yield a positive “synthesis”; rather, “far from being a story of its [the dialectic's] progressive overcoming, dialectics is for Hegel a systematic notation of the failure of all such attempts—‘absolute knowledge’ denotes a subjective position which finally accepts ‘contradiction’ as an internal contradiction of every identity. In other words, Hegelian ‘reconciliation’ is not a ‘panlogistic’ sublation of all reality in the Concept but a final consent to the fact that the Concept is ‘not-all’ (to use this Lacanian term).” Thus, on Žižek's reading, Hegel's dialectic is no longer at the service of an Enlightenment progressivism, rather, now it is conceived as the great example of thought thinking the Lacanian “Real.” More recently Žižek has reiterated his position in *The Parallax View*, writing that, for Hegel, the “negation of negation” involves the “shift of perspective which turns failure into true success.” He adds: “Hegel's move is not to ‘overcome’ the Kantian division but, rather, to assert it ‘as such’, to drop the need for its ‘overcoming’, for the additional ‘reconciliation’ of opposites: to gain insight—through a purely formal parallax shift—into how positing the distinction ‘as such’ already is the looked-for ‘reconciliation’.” Here—amazingly—Žižek's “parallax view” (reducing the dialectic to a mere *apparent* change based, not on the position of the object, but on the subjective positioning of the object vis-à-vis the changed position of the subject looking at the object) corresponds perfectly with Cunningham's diagnosis of Hegel's dialectic in terms of the *Gestalt* logic of the “philosophies of Nothing.”

“Aquinas reduces the two ways of Dionysius to one, making negative theology a corrective to affirmative theology.”<sup>97</sup>

Aquinas is not Lossky’s “dialectician”: he is an analogical thinker who searches for “a term which . . . [can be] used in a multiple sense signif[ying] various proportions to some one thing.”<sup>98</sup> This analogical term is a mediating term that does not erase difference; rather, it affirms a community of meaning between differences in a relation of essential non-collapsibility. Through this logic Aquinas is able to predicate the unspeakable in a way that exceeds Lossky’s equivocity because Aquinas is able to think the negative and positive moments of predicating God at the same time, without resigning the mind to the illusion of either “pure” equivocation/negation, or “pure” univocation/attribution. This, I submit, is the achievement of the operation of the *triplex via*, more faithful to the Dionysian theology of causality than Lossky’s mystical apophatism of “total ignorance.”

Lossky’s radical apophatism and his insistence that Denys proposes a dissociated *duplex via* is palpably insensitive to the Neoplatonist metaphysics that underpin Denys’s thought; indeed, Lossky’s apophatism is expressive of his stated resolve to recover a supposedly “pure” Denys, “de-Platonised” (if not also “de-Latinized”).<sup>99</sup> Nevertheless, as Andrew Louth has written, Denys’s “language and categories are inconceivable except against the background of Procline-Neoplatonism.”<sup>100</sup> And this is especially true of Denys’s conception of causality.

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For Cunningham the *Gestalt* figure of the Duck/Rabbit is the logic of the dualism of nihilism according to which nothing can be thought of as something. But herein the dualism of “nothing” and “something” is revealed to be a mere *Gestalt* effect, betraying a more fundamental monism: we only ever see an aspect (either “Duck” or “Rabbit”) and never the alternative. More importantly, we never see the “One” upon which the two possible aspects are made possible: the “One” remains hidden, though not noumenally; rather, it is *only expressed* as one of two modes. Thus, according to Cunningham, the “One” of monism is a non-coincident “One”—it is neither a matter of reconciliation nor “synthesis”; and it is here that Žižek appears to be in full agreement. In this way Žižek’s “parallax view” is an *unheimlich* echo of Cunningham’s critique of “positive nihilism” (*unheimlich* because the *Gestalt* figure fully anticipates the “parallax view”). See Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (New York: Verso, 1989), at 6; idem, *The Parallax View* (London: MIT Press, 2006), at 27 and 28.

<sup>97</sup> Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 26.

<sup>98</sup> ST I, q. 13, a. 5.

<sup>99</sup> Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 29.

<sup>100</sup> Andrew Louth, *Denys the Areopagite*, (New York: Continuum, 2001), 14. Further on the Neoplatonism of Denys, see Sarah Klitenic Wear and John Dillon, *Dionysius the Areopagite and the Neoplatonist Tradition: Despoiling the Hellenes* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2007).

According to Procline-Neoplatonism, despite the radical declension between cause and effect, “The procession . . . in declension preserves [τῆ ὑφέσει σῶζει] an identity betwixt engenderer [cause] and engendered [effect].”<sup>101</sup> The preservation (σῶζω) of the identity of the cause in the effect makes it necessary to speak of a relationship of both similitude and alterity, of cataphasis and apophasis. Proclus concludes:

In so far, then, as it [the effect] has an element of identity with the producer, the product remains in it [the cause]; insofar as it differs it proceeds from it. But being like it, it is at once identical with it in some respect and different from it: accordingly it both remains and proceeds, and the two relations are inseparable.<sup>102</sup>

In other words, to speak of any cause through its effect is to speak of a relation of differentiated-likeness. And, hereby, through the logic of Procline-Neoplatonism, Denys acquires a grammar by which to articulate the noetic way to God, succeeding precisely where Lossky’s reading of Denys fails. Procline causal logic makes it possible to think the apophatic and cataphatic together, in a community of plurivocal communication. And this is the logic to which the Common Doctor of the Latin tradition is supremely attentive: a logic wherein “every effect . . . receives the similitude of the agent not in its full degree, but in a measure that falls short, so that what is divided and multiplied in the effects resides in the agent simply, and in the same manner.”<sup>103</sup>

(2) If Lossky represents one position of discontinuity between Aquinas and Denys on the *triplex via*, M.-D. Chenu and Étienne Gilson represent another (albeit one that favours Aquinas). The charge of Chenu and Gilson hangs on a citation of Denys in *Scriptum super Sententiis*: “Dicit enim quod ex creaturis tribus modis devenimus in Deum: scilicet per causalitatem, per remotionem, per eminentiam.”<sup>104</sup> Noting here the reversal of Denys’s order of operation, Chenu writes: “De facto, the entire Dionysian doctrine is thus reversed.”<sup>105</sup> Gilson’s reaction is more emphatic. Turning to the Dionysian text he exclaims: “how far we are from the text to which St. Thomas appeals!”<sup>106</sup>

<sup>101</sup> Proclus, *The Elements of Theology: A Revised Text with Translation, Introduction and Commentary*, trans. E. R. Dodds (Oxford: Clarendon, second edition, 1963), prop. 29. All quotations from Proclus follow Dodds’s translation.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., prop. 30.

<sup>103</sup> ST I, q. 13, a. 5.

<sup>104</sup> Aquinas, *Super Sententiis*, lib. 1, d. 3, q. 1 pr.

<sup>105</sup> Chenu, *Toward Understanding Saint Thomas*, 229, n. 51.

<sup>106</sup> Étienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of Saint Thomas Aquinas* (New York: Random House, 1956), 140. Torrell seems to tend to agree with Chenu and

According to Gilson, Aquinas overcomes a so-called “Dionysian obstacle” native to the order of the *triplex via*, wherein Denys supposedly moves from negation to eminence and only lastly to causality.<sup>107</sup> Gilson thinks this order of operation prioritises the *via negativa* in such a way that it betrays an inherent lack of community between cause and effect. On his view, Denys’s method of beginning with “sensible datum in order to ascend to its cause” is in reality not an ascent to the cause because the cause is beyond anything sensible.<sup>108</sup> Thus, “sensible datum” is said to only yield “Ideas” for Denys and therefore nothing of the cause itself. Gilson charges: “All that Denys will grant is that, beginning from things, we can arrive at a kind of knowledge of the Ideas of God.”<sup>109</sup> For Gilson, this is further confirmed in Denys’s singularly preferred divine name: “the good.” The implication of the Dionysian position, so Gilson reasons, is that perfection is not inherent to existence; and more, that the two are somehow divisible. Thus, the Dionysian order of operation of the *triplex via* is said to betray a noetic limit wherein God is confined to dwell in a narrow “transcendent” inaccessibility. God’s perfection is thus presumed to be posited as different and superior to God’s existence in such a way that God is known more properly by the “Idea” of perfection than the existence of beings. This apparent inaccessibility of the cause in Denys is what Gilson understands Aquinas to have solved in his supposed reversal of the *triplex via*, which, for Gilson, is coterminous with Aquinas’s insistence on the name “being” as the pre-eminent name of God. Gilson writes: “For Denys, God was *superesse*, because He was ‘not yet’ the *esse* . . . [while for] St. Thomas, God is the *superesse* because He is superlatively being: the *Esse* pure and simple.”<sup>110</sup>

Gilson’s estimation of the difference between Dionysian and Thomistic *superesse* is, in a qualified sense, not entirely false; but it is overstated and it misconstrues the causal logic of the *triplex via*. What Gilson evidently fails to

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Gilson on this point but with moderation and without making it the occasion of such radical discontinuity. Cf. Torrell, *Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 2, *Spiritual Master*, 39.

<sup>107</sup> Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, 140. This “Dionysian obstacle” could, for Gilson, be equally named a “Neoplatonic obstacle”—insofar as it contradicts Gilson’s deep commitment to Aristotelianism over and against Platonism. Cf. Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1952), 1–73. On the problem of Gilson’s understanding of Neoplatonism in Aquinas cf. W. Norris Clarke, S.J., “The Limitation of Act by Potency in St. Thomas: Aristotelianism or Neoplatonism?,” 65–88; and Wayne Hankey, “Denys and Aquinas: Antimodern Cold and Postmodern Hot,” in *Christian Origins: Theology, Rhetoric and Community*, ed. Lewis Ayres and Gareth Jones (New York: Routledge, 1998), 139–84, here at 146–48.

<sup>108</sup> Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, 140.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

fully appreciate is that “causality” is not at all confined to the “attributive” moment (*per causalitatem*). On the contrary, “causality” underpins the logic of both the attributive (cataphatic) and negative (apophatic) moments in Denys.<sup>111</sup> It is therefore hard to see how Denys’s apparent prioritizing of *per remotionem* could demote causality *tout court*.

In *quaestio* 12 of the *prima pars*, Aquinas writes that God is known through creatures,

so far as to be the cause of them all [*omnium est causa*]; also that creatures differ from Him [*et differentiam creaturarum ab ipso*], inasmuch as He is not in any way part of what is caused by Him; and that creatures are not removed from Him by any reason of any defect on His part, but because He superexceeds them all [*sed quia superexcedit*].<sup>112</sup>

In this passage Aquinas uses the order of operation of *Scriptum super Sententiis* (*per causalitatem*, *per remotionem*, *per eminentiam*). And then, in *quaestio* 13 Aquinas lists the order differently, writing that, “neither any Catholic nor pagan knows the very nature of God as it is in itself; but each one knows it according to some idea of causality [*causalitatis*], or excellence [*excellen-tiae*], or remotion [*remotionis*], as it is stated above [q. 12, a. 12].”<sup>113</sup> Aquinas himself refers back to *quaestio* 12 as if he were repeating an identical principle, which signals that for him diverse orders of operations in the *triplex via* still present the one noetic movement. What is more, in his commentary on the *triplex via* in the *Super De divinis nominibus*, Aquinas makes no attempt to clarify any order of operation contrary to Denys—indeed, against Gilson’s contention, Aquinas there states that negation is not only the first movement of the *triplex via*, but *primo quidem et principaliter*.<sup>114</sup>

Michael Ewbank has shown that Aquinas actually moves between five different orders of operation of the *triplex via* throughout his oeuvre; and these divers orderings are in each case most likely based on the particular context of the argument in which they are deployed.<sup>115</sup> No order

<sup>111</sup> Cf. O’Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas*, 36.

<sup>112</sup> ST I, q. 12, a. 12.

<sup>113</sup> ST I, q. 13, a. 10, ad 5.

<sup>114</sup> Aquinas, *Super De divinis nominibus*, cap. 7, l. 4.

<sup>115</sup> Michael B. Ewbank, “Diverse Orderings of Dionysius’s *Triples Via* By St. Thomas Aquinas,” *Medieval Studies* 52 (1990): 82–109. The five orders given by Ewbank are as follows: (1) *per remotionem*, *per eminentiam*, *per causalitatem* (cf. *Super De divinis nominibus*, cap. 7, l. 4.); (2) *per causalitatem*, *per remotionem*, *per eminentiam* (cf. *Super Sententiis*, lib. 1 d. 3 q. 1 pr.); (3) *per remotionem*, *per causalitatem*, *per eminentiam* (cf. *In Boethium Super de Trinitate*, 6.3); (4) *per eminentiam*, *per causalitatem*, *per remotionem* (cf. ST I, q. 13, a. 8, ad 2.); (5) *per causalitatem*, *per eminentiam*, *per remotionem* (cf. ScG III, c. 49).

should be read as fixed or normative. Moreover, not once does Aquinas comment on, or mention any implicit meaning in the order of operation of the *triplex via*. Rather, for Aquinas, the *triplex via* functions not through a strict order of operation, but, as O'Rourke describes it, as "a threefold variation . . . three paths which merely reflect differing moments of the causal relation."<sup>116</sup> Therefore, from the order of operation it is not clear how Aquinas might modify Denys's *triplex via*; moreover, the single text of *Scriptum super Sententiis* cannot sustain the weight of being posited as Aquinas's definitive word on Denys.<sup>117</sup> Despite Gilson's claim, one should conclude to the contrary: Aquinas did not privilege one particular order of operation of the *triplex via* and his re-ordering in *Scriptum super Sententiis* should not be read as "overturning" the Dionysian *via*.

### **Analogical Theology: From Neoplatonic Causality to the Thomistic Name of God**

"Plato corrected the error of the ancient natural philosophers, who did not distinguish between matter and form in generable and corruptible things, positing prime matter to be some body in act."<sup>118</sup> This judgement of Aquinas correlates with an earlier comment in *De divinis nominibus* where he writes that Denys "excludes a certain error. . . . For there were certain Platonists who reduced the processions of perfections into diverse principles."<sup>119</sup> Aquinas goes on:

And in order to exclude this he [Denys] says that God is truly praised as principal substance of all things [*principalis substantia omnium*] insofar as God is the principle of being to all things [*principium existendi omnibus*], and God is called the perfective cause of all things [*causa perfectiva omnium*] insofar as God gives all perfections to things.<sup>120</sup>

The essential continuity of the Platonic and Dionysian achievements is important. It signals that for Aquinas, the Dionysian corrective turns on a Platonic genealogy of transformation, of discontinuous-continuity that

<sup>116</sup> O'Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas*, 32.

<sup>117</sup> Further, *Scriptum super Sententiis* is Aquinas's first major work, which he began to compose sometime during his first stay in Paris (1252–54), some fifteen years before he started working on the *Summa* (1268), and at least ten years before his commentary on Denys (sometime between 1261–1268). See Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 1, *The Person and his Work*, 332, 333, and 346.

<sup>118</sup> Aquinas, *Super De divinis nominibus*, cap. 4, l. 3.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, cap. 1, l. 3.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

stretches back through Denys to Plato.<sup>121</sup> This is the context in which Aquinas understands the Dionysian installation of God as the principal substance (*principalis substantia*) and principle of being (*principium existendi*), and thus as completing Plato's refusal to conflate matter and form or posit prime matter as a body in act. An essential stage in the Platonic genealogy that Aquinas discerns moving towards Denys proceeds through the work of Proclus.<sup>122</sup>

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In proposition 18 of his *Elementatio theologia*, Proclus argues that the character of every effect pre-exists in its cause where it exists in "a higher reality than the character bestowed."<sup>123</sup> The character of the cause is different than the character of the effect because it *exceeds* the character of the effect. The cause is the perfect intensification of all the effect truly is. Within this logic of causality "either the two [cause and effect] are identical and have a common definition; or there is nothing common or identical in both; or the one exists primitively [πρώτως] and the other by derivation [δευτέρως]."<sup>124</sup> There are thus three possible ontological modes according to which an effect can exist in relation to its cause: univocally (by identical definition), equivocally (with nothing in common), or analogically (primitively and by derivation). Proclus writes:

[I]f they had a common definition [that is, if they were *univocally* related], the one could not be, as we have assumed, cause and the other resultant; the one could not be in itself and the other in the participant; the one could not be the author and the other the subject of a process. And if they had nothing identical [that is, if they were *equivocally* related], the second, having nothing in common with the existence of the first, could not arise from existence. It remains, then, that where one thing receives bestowal from another in virtue of that other's mere exis-

<sup>121</sup> My position here is essentially convertible with Wayne Hankey, who argues on behalf of a Neoplatonic genealogy of development in which the differences between Denys and Aquinas (as well as those among Plotinus, Porphyry, Iamblicus, and Proclus) "are best understood as moments in a continuous tradition." See Hankey, "Denys and Aquinas: Antimodern Cold and Postmodern Hot," 172.

<sup>122</sup> I am not trying to imply that Aquinas would offer a genealogy with the same names and dates that we would offer today. Only after Moerbeke's translation of *Elementatio theologia* in 1268 did Aquinas even read Proclus directly, though he did know Procline philosophy as it was mediated through the *Liber de causis*. And, of course, the *Corpus Dionysiacum* was, in the thirteenth century, still presumed to have been written by the first-century convert of the Apostle Paul (cf. Acts 17:34). See Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 1, *The Person and his Work*, 221.

<sup>123</sup> Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, prop. 18.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

tence, the giver possesses primitively the character, which it gives [that is, the one exists *analogically* in relation to the other], while the recipient is by derivation what the giver is.<sup>125</sup>

On this view, effects participate in the reality of their cause in such a way that, for there to be beings, *being must be analogical*.<sup>126</sup> In Aquinas this will come to mean that the *esse* of creatures is *esse-ad*.<sup>127</sup> Beings do not own their own existence, they receive it from an Other, from One in whom they participate by gift, from the One in whom they live and move and have their being (cf. Acts 17:28). And this ontological relationship is so profound that “the recipient is by derivation what the giver is.”

For Proclus, being is the most universal cause, the first in the Primordial Triad: “being,” “life,” and “intellect.” And yet, even as “being” is the most universal cause, nevertheless, it is below the divine realm of “the good,” and even the henads.<sup>128</sup> On the Procline view, the primacy reserved for “the good” resides above causality such that the First Principle is unknowable because unparticipated.<sup>129</sup> The difference between Aquinas and Procline-Neoplatonism, therefore, hinges on two issues: (1) multiple causality and (2) the situation of the One discretely above causality according to one version of the Neoplatonic axiom of “the good” being “beyond being.”<sup>130</sup> The

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Cunningham, *Genealogy of Nihilism*, 181–89. Cf. David B. Burrell C.S.C., *Analogy and Philosophical Language* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973); and idem, “From Analogy of ‘Being’ to Analogy of Being,” in *Recovering Nature: Essays in Natural Philosophy, Ethics and Metaphysics in Honor of Ralph McInerny*, ed. Thomas Hibbs and John O’Callaghan (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), 253–65.

<sup>127</sup> David B. Burrell C.S.C., “Act of Creation with its Theological Consequences,” in *Aquinas on Doctrine: A Critical Introduction*, ed. Thomas G. Weinandy, O.F.M., Cap, Daniel A. Keating, and John P. Yocum (London: T & T Clark, 2004), 27–44.

<sup>128</sup> Cf. Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, prop. 115.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., prop. 123.

<sup>130</sup> Cf. Plotinus, *The Enneads*, 3. 6. 4. Here importantly Proclus is already a modification of Plotinus in terms of the good and being. For Proclus the good is above being in the sense of being “beyond being” (ἐπέκειν τῆς οὐσίας/ὑπουσιῶς) by way of excess. On this Procline scheme the good is not necessarily dissociated from being *tout court* in the way that it is for Plotinus, for whom the One is a “hen” and therefore ontologically discrete. Thus Proclus already represents a more *relational* notion of the good and being, whereas Plotinus’s account of the One vis-à-vis being is more strictly henological. For this clarification I am indebted to a conversation with Adrian Pabst. Further, see the critique of Plotinus’s account in Cunningham, *Genealogy of Nihilism*, 3–32; and cf. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Idea of the Good in Platonic-Aristotelian Philosophy*, trans. P. Christopher Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press).

One would have to be “being” in order to be analogically predicated (for there cannot be an *analogia verbi* without *analogia entis*). Thus for Proclus, there is still an unbridgeable gap between the world and the One. For Aquinas, bridging this gap is the great Dionysian achievement: the unification of causality and the lifting of it into the First Principle who is both *ipsum esse per se subsistens* and *summum bonum*. Henceforth, from Denys, the *esse-ad* of creatures is a participation in the perfection of “the good” itself.<sup>131</sup>

For Aquinas, the Dionysian unification of Neoplatonist causality necessarily involves God properly understood as both the universal transcendent perfection (*summum bonum*) and the universal existent (*ipsum esse per se subsistens*). And yet, Denys does not homogenise the distinct processions of the triad: “being”—“life”—“intellect”/“wisdom.” On the contrary, he reads them as part of the causal hierarchy of perfection in God and reserves “the good” as the perfect name of God, which is “pre-eminently set apart for the supra-divine God from all other names.”<sup>132</sup> But what exactly does this mean? How can there be one cause and yet something of this cause remain unparticipatable? And how is Denys’s pre-eminent name of God reconcilable with Aquinas’s pre-eminent name? The answer here lies in the nature of the theology of participation, how for Aquinas and Denys creatures are *esse-ad* and God is *principalis substantia omnium*. Only through the theology of participation can one establish the nature of the relation of *ipsum esse per se subsistens* and *summum bonum*, a relation which is correlative to the Dionysian achievement of making the one Godhead *causa perfectiva omnium*.

Rudi te Velde has engaged these issues in *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas*.<sup>133</sup> He begins from Boethius’s question in *De hebdomadibus*: in what sense can things be said to be good? In *De veritate*, question 21, Aquinas argues that the answer lies in the convertibility of “good” and “being”: things are perfect insofar as they have being, insofar as they are *in actu*.<sup>134</sup> Thus, since act is the *ratio* of being, “being good” and “having being” are coterminous. And since Aquinas’s understanding of God as *ipsum esse per se subsistens* is rooted wholly in his conception of

<sup>131</sup> Aquinas, *Super librum de Causis*, prop. 3: “Dionysius . . . corrects this position [of Neoplatonic multiple causality]. . . . For it must be said that all these are essentially the first cause of all things itself, from which things participate all such perfections. . . . How this can be he shows subsequently from the fact that since God is being itself and the very essence of goodness, whatever belongs to the perfection of goodness and being belongs essentially to him as a whole.”

<sup>132</sup> Denys, *De divinis nominibus*, 4.1 (PG 3.693B).

<sup>133</sup> Rudi A. te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995).

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 8–20. Cf. David Burrell, “Act of Creation with its Theological Consequences,” 34–38.

being as the universal perfection, being is therefore the first term of perfection, the term *par excellence* of goodness itself: *nihil bonum nisi ens*.<sup>135</sup> The source of this Thomistic logic is the theology of causal participation Aquinas learns from Denys—and this is where Denys’s reserve of something unparticipatable in God is important.

According to te Velde, for Denys, God’s essence is not participated, the divine essence is *imparticipata et incommunicata*; what is participated, rather, is the *similitudo* the divine cause produces of itself in the created perfections.<sup>136</sup> On first glance, this suggests that something of God is “held in reserve” in such a way that a perfect intimacy of participation (theosis or union) is foreclosed—but in fact the contrary is the case. The distinction gives ontological depth to the nature of creaturely participation since by it the otherness of the creature—its *difference*—becomes integral to how it participates in God and how it analogously signifies God’s goodness. In other words, the creature’s perfection is neither contrastive to God, nor does it risk being homogenised into the divine “One” of God. The creature participates, not in God’s “essence,” but in the emanating perfections of God’s *esse*; and yet, paradoxically, these emanations are fully God himself. Difference is now the first term of likeness and union.<sup>137</sup> This metaphysical logic is expressive of the doctrine of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) according to which the difference between the creature and the Creator is always greater than their likeness.<sup>138</sup>

On the view here rehearsed, God is able to authentically express himself as *different* from himself in such a way that difference is fully *analogical* and not merely a Neoplatonist “declension.” This is the Dionysian logic out of which Aquinas formulates his theology of God as *ipsum esse per se subsistens*. As te Velde writes:

[T]he divine cause expresses itself in its effects *as distinguished from itself* and in each distinct creature the divine cause is distinguished from itself

<sup>135</sup> *ST* I, q. 5, a. 2, ad 4. Cf. te Velde, *Aquinas on God*, 85; and *ST* I, q. 5, a. 2: “Good is attributed to God inasmuch as all desired perfections flow from him as from the first cause.”

<sup>136</sup> te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas*, 92ff.

<sup>137</sup> Cf. David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 314. Or as Henri de Lubac puts it, the paradox of Christian union is that “the distinction between the different parts of a being stand out the more clearly as the union of these parts is closer.” Henri de Lubac, S.J., *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man*, trans. Lancelot Sheppard and Sister Elizabeth Englund, O.C.D. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 328.

<sup>138</sup> For the Lateran doctrine, see *Constitutiones*, 2. *De errore abbatissae Iochim*, in Norman P. Tanner, S.J. (ed), *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. 1, *Nicaea I to Lateran V* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1990), 231–33.

in a distinct way in accordance with the appropriate idea of this creature. So the negation in the effect of the identity of essence and *esse* in God is included in the likeness each creature has of God. This is exactly the reason of calling the likeness between God and creatures “analogous”: since it is not in spite of their difference that they are similar in a certain respect. They are different from one another in what they have in common, the one has *being* in identity with its essence, the other has *being* as distinct from its essence.<sup>139</sup>

Te Velde here establishes the fundamental continuity between Aquinas and the Areopagite on the analogous relation of difference and likeness between God and his creatures. However, where this logic leads Denys to name God pre-eminently “the good” (to signify something of his unparticipatable essence), it leads Aquinas to name God pre-eminently “being.”<sup>140</sup> And therefore (and second of all) it is precisely and paradoxically continuity with Dionysian logic that is the condition of the possibility of this Thomistic discontinuity.

The key to this reading lies in *caput* 5, *lectio* 1 of Aquinas’s commentary on *De divinis nominibus*. There Aquinas comments on this passage of the Areopagite:

The first gift therefore of absolute transcendent goodness is the gift of being, and that goodness is praised from those that first and principally have a share of being. From being and in being there is being itself [ἵστιν ἐξ αὐτῆς, καὶ ἐν αὐτῇ, καὶ αὐτὸ τὸ εἶναι]: the source of beings, and of all beings and whatever else has a portion of being. This characteristic is in it as an irrepressible, comprehensive, and singular feature.<sup>141</sup>

From being and in being there is “being itself,” *est ex ipsa et in ipsa per se esse*. Here *per se* is the crucial term for Aquinas, the term of operation by which Denys unites Neoplatonist causality into that cause which is the source of being and of all being and of whatever participates in being.<sup>142</sup> First of all, Aquinas perceives, if God is to be named through the logic of the *triplex via* it is most fitting to name God from his first and principal effect: *esse*. Thus every creaturely perfection is contingent first on this perfection (*esse*). This means that God, in whom all perfection resides, is first participated as being itself (*per se esse*). And this leads to the real heart of Aquinas’s reading, which turns on this *per se* and blends with the logic

<sup>139</sup> Te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas*, 116.

<sup>140</sup> Cf. Hankey, “Denys and Aquinas: Antimodern Cold and Postmodern Hot,” 169–73.

<sup>141</sup> Denys, *De divinis nominibus*, 5.6 (PG 3.820CD). Translation modified.

<sup>142</sup> Cf. te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas*, 261–65.

of the *triplex via*: the reality of participating being (*esse-ad*) is signified in relation to the perfection participated in a mode that is neither univocal (simply “attributive”) nor equivocal (simply “negative”). Rather, the reality of being *esse-ad* is signified by a real relation between terms such that the ontology of essential difference is named within the redoubling plurivocity of essential community, that is, within the paradox of a rhythmical synthesis *per eminentiam*.

For Aquinas the meaning of Denys’s *est ex ipsa et in ipsa per se esse* is thus suspended within the ontological redoubling of unequalisable significance inherent in *per se*, which analogically signifies God in himself and the created perfection in itself at the same time.<sup>143</sup> This is the operation by which Denys tensively unifies the discrete multiple causality of Neoplatonism and the realm of causality itself with the First Principle. Thus *per se* functions such that it signifies the apophysis of causal *exitus* in the cataphasis of effectual *reditus* through a mediation in which the *ultimacy* of the One who is “beyond” being is specified in the *intimacy* of every “between.” On this Dionysian logic, the creature can be named as fully participating in what God is, and yet, she can be named as participating in God differently. It is a logic whereby a conjunctive mediates an untotalisable difference in which the creature is *per se esse* by a mode of derivation (δευτέρως) that is, nevertheless, essentially related to how God is primitively (πρώτῳ) *per se esse*.<sup>144</sup> Mobilizing the Dionysian *per se* is, therefore, central to how Aquinas names God pre-eminently “being,” how he draws out and radicalises the *analogia entis* of Dionysian causal logic.<sup>145</sup> Now *per se* means both the supra-origin and the way of participation.

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If the great achievement of the Areopagite lies in the mode by which his causal metaphysics unite causality in terms of non-contrastive participation, then the first achievement of Aquinas lies in recognizing that “being” is the first perfection and therefore the pre-eminent name of God.<sup>146</sup> This

<sup>143</sup> Cf. Aquinas, *Super De divine nominibus*, cap. 5, l. 1: “For . . . the Platonists, whom Dionysius imitates in this work in many things, before all composed participants posited separate existences *per se*, which are participated by the composites. . . . And similarly they [the Neoplatonists] said that before these living composites there was a certain separated life, which they called life *per se*; and similarly wisdom *per se* and *esse per se*; but they posited these separated principles to be diverse from each other and from the first principle which they named the good *per se* or the One *per se*.”

<sup>144</sup> Cf. Denys, *De divinis nominibus*, 11.6 (PG 3.953C–956AD). Translation modified.

<sup>145</sup> Te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas*, 262–64.

<sup>146</sup> ST I, q. 4, a. 2: “Since therefore God is the first effective cause of things, the perfection of all things must pre-exist in God in a more eminent way. Dionysius

logic is rooted in what has been established as the “first meaning of the plurality of the world”: the communication of the goodness of the one cause through the multiplicity of creation. The second achievement of Aquinas is grounded in the “second meaning of the plurality of the world”: the eternal processions of the Persons of the Trinity.

Aquinas’s conviction that the Trinitarian processions are the cause of creation clarifies that the mode and reality of the self-communication of “the good” in creaturely emanation is not a declension; rather, creation is a created participation in a personal and free gift of God. It is thus that the Godhead manifests *ad extra* the glory of what he is *ad intra*: because the Word and Love of the Father are the *ratio* of creation, therefore being is “gift” in the economy of divine communication (*bonum diffusivum sui*). As Aquinas writes:

The divine Persons, according to the nature of their procession, have a causality respecting the creation of things. . . . God is the cause of all things by his intellect and will, just as the craftsman is cause of the things made by his craft. Now the craftsman works through the word conceived in his mind, and through the love of his will regarding some object. Hence also God the Father made the creature through His Word, which is His Son; and through his Love, which is the Holy Spirit.<sup>147</sup>

Here Aquinas is doing much more than simply stating that the relational difference *ad intra* is the cause of relational difference *ad extra*. First, by establishing creation in terms of the Logos, the intellect of the Father, Aquinas proposes that the trace of similitude that images forth in the created effect is the intelligent imprint of the craftsman-God such that the *difference* of the image cannot be reduced to ontological declension. On the contrary, the *sympathy* of the effect to the cause is, hereby, made an integral participation in the internal *ratio* of the interval between the Son and the craftsman-Father. Second, by further specifying the causality of the world in terms of the Father’s Love (his will), Aquinas specifies the *freedom* of the divine creative act. In this way creation can no longer be conceived in terms of necessary emanation; rather, from now on the mode of God’s gratuitous communication (*bonum diffusivum sui*) must be thought wholly in terms of God’s willful bestowal of the gift of being. Thus, Aquinas carefully uses the Trinitarian processions to further complete and qualify the Dionysian ontology of causality. But how does

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implies the same line of argument by saying of God (*Div. Nom.* v): *It is not that He is this and not that, but that He is all, as the cause of all.*”

<sup>147</sup> ST I, q. 45, a. 6.

this Trinitarian scheme transform the *analogia entis*? And how does created being analogically predicate the Triune God?

Matthew Levering has described the Thomistic pattern of *redoublement* as the means by which “the concept of Person as subsisting relation *integrates* the concept of [divine] ‘essence.’”<sup>148</sup> In this way Levering clarifies that divine relationality cannot be something “added” to the unity of the divine essence, nor can it be an “extra” of God; on the contrary, the divine relations are the divine being such that the essence in the Father is *paternitas*, just as in the Son the essence is *filiatio*.<sup>149</sup> According to the law of *redoublement*, therefore, the reality of the subsistent relations of the Trinity is that they are fully the divine being such that essence and relation, unity and triad overlap.<sup>150</sup> The Persons of the Trinity are fully expressive of the divine being. The divine being cannot be collapsed into the relationality of the Triune God nor can the relations be sublated into the divine being. The logic of *redoublement* thus requires a Chalcedonian logic—“without confusion and without separation”—whereby the unity of the divine being and the relationality of the Persons can be non-collapsibly thought at the same time. This is to hold tenaciously to the logic of Aquinas:

The relations in God, although they constitute the hypostases and thus make them subsist, do it however insofar as they are the divine essence; indeed, the relation insofar as it is relation does not have anything of what subsists or makes subsist: that belongs solely to the substance.<sup>151</sup>

For Aquinas, therefore, the Trinitarian relations subsist in the divine being, but they do not *derive* from that being. And so, as Levering shows, the divine being in Aquinas does not relate: the relations subsist in the divine essence as undivided and, thus, “God’s being is not a communion, because being is not what relates in God.”<sup>152</sup> In this way Levering critiques certain variants of “Trinitarian ontology,” showing how the development of such an ontology runs the risk of confusing the divine being (essence) with the relations of the Persons, conflating what is common in the Godhead with what is incommunicable. And so, in fidelity to Aquinas, it would seem that the *analogia entis* must pertain strictly to

<sup>148</sup> Levering, *Scripture and Metaphysics*, 215.

<sup>149</sup> Cf. *ST* I, q. 24, a. 4.

<sup>150</sup> Cf. Emery, “Essence or Personalism,” 181–82.

<sup>151</sup> Aquinas, *De potentia*, q. 8, a. 3, ad 7; as quoted in Emery, “Essence or Personalism,” 200. Cf. *ST* I, q. 28 a. 2: “in Deo non est aliud esse relationis et esse essentiae, sed unum et idem.”

<sup>152</sup> Levering, *Scripture and Metaphysics*, 228; cf. *ST* I, q. 30, a. 1, ad 3, and q. 31, a. 1, ad 4.

what is one in God.<sup>153</sup> And yet, the causal act that grounds the metaphysical reality of the *analogia entis* is Trinitarian: “The processions of the divine Persons are the cause of creation.”<sup>154</sup> There is therefore a mystical aporia at the heart of Thomistic causality: the divine processions are the condition of the possibility of creation; and yet, paradoxically, creation is analogically grounded in the divine unity. Or, as Emery puts it, “divine relation possesses the universal causality of the divine essence.”<sup>155</sup> This works to suggest that, at the most intimate level of created being, there may be something like a participational *redoublement* in the Trinitarian mode of the gift of *esse-ad*. And Levering seems to signal to this effect when he calls for a nuancing of the *analogia entis* in terms of the Triune gift of being.<sup>156</sup> Only thereby do we arrive at the sufficient paradox of being related to the God who is three-in-one (as opposed to a mere “communion” of three).

In realizing the *analogia entis* as the Trinitarian gift of the undivided being of God, we return to the middle “way” of the *quinque viae*: to the “metaphysical astonishment” of being’s “givenness as given into being,”<sup>157</sup> where to be is “to accept a gift from a source.”<sup>158</sup> Awakening to the givenness of being thus involves the astonishing recognition of the arrival of a genuine “Other” in the knowledge of the gift of a “happening”: the intentional grace of existence itself. Thus, the *analogia entis*—though conceived in terms of what is one in God—arrives, nevertheless, in terms of the relationality of *personhood*: as a gift from someone. And what is personal and relational in God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Hereby, the *redoublement* by which we are permitted to think the Trinity becomes the mode of thought—on a different plane—by which we think the gift of being in terms of the self-communication of “the good.”

The pattern of *redoublement* allows us to integrate the divine being into the “subsisting relations.” And this is the condition of the possibility of fully conceiving creation as *gift*, as arriving not merely as the emanation

<sup>153</sup> Levering, *Scripture and Metaphysics*, 228: “The analogy of being cannot be ‘Trinitarian,’ because the divine being is (necessarily) conceptually distinct from the relations in the divine being.”

<sup>154</sup> *ST I*, q. 45, a. 6, ad 1.

<sup>155</sup> Emery, “Trinity and Creation,” 72–73.

<sup>156</sup> Levering, *Scripture and Metaphysics*, 228. This nuancing is itself qualified so as to avoid the errors Levering perceives in “Trinitarian ontology.” He writes: “Although the gift of being is Trinitarian . . . the analogy of being pertains to the analogy, which must always be cautiously expressed, between infinite divine being, which is undivided and one, and creaturely being.”

<sup>157</sup> Desmond, *Is There a Sabbath for Thought?*, 13.

<sup>158</sup> Nichols, *A Grammar of Consent*, 83.

of an “essence,” but as genuinely given by someone who communicates his goodness. The pattern of gift concretises the analogy by which creation is “a participation in the fullness of the Trinitarian life of God.”<sup>159</sup> Levering writes:

The divine nature . . . “exist[s] in the Father by the relation of giver, and in the Son by the relation of receiver.” Given the identity of “being” and “Person,” despite the distinction of Persons, no inequality between giver and receiver is possible. Divine being subsists in the ordered Trinitarian relations. In this sense, which is the only theologically valid sense in which “Trinitarian ontology” could be understood, one sees fully that being exists in God in the relations, and vice versa.<sup>160</sup>

In the paradox of the interval of being’s givenness, the prime analogate of being is Trinitarian goodness (*bonum diffusivum sui*): being exists fully in God *in the communicative relations*, and being exists fully in the communicative relations *in God*. Participation is therefore mysteriously rooted in the personal (incommunicable) reality of the gift of being as such. And so, by gift, we specify the mode according to which the *analogia entis* is planted in the soil of what is most good and perfect in nature: the personal fulfillment of being that actualizes the gesture of being-given and being-received—*persona significat id quod est perfectissimum in tota natura*.<sup>161</sup> And this makes it possible to return to the Dionysian pre-eminent name, which was set apart from all other names to specify the supra-divine and unparticipatable “essence” of God. For the logic of *redoublement* extends precisely into the paradox of God signified by the Dionysian pre-eminent name, according to which God is *fully participated*, and yet the divine “essence” is *imparticipata et incommunicata*. For the Thomistic logic is that being arrives *as gift* out of the condition of the possibility of being in the interval of the Trinitarian processions. Thus the gift of being (the communication *ad extra* of the *sumum bonum* that is *ad intra*) arrives by means of a givenness rooted in the fact that the “subsisting relations” of God communicate fully, and fully are, the unparticipatable “essence” *as Father, as Son, and as Spirit*. God’s “essence” is, therefore, unparticipated just as the act of giving is un-giveable: what the Father gives the Son *paternally*, the Son receives *filially*; just as what God will give the creature uncreatedly, the creature will receive in the *difference* of being-created (hence the

<sup>159</sup> Emery, “Trinity and Creation,” 73.

<sup>160</sup> Levering, *Scripture and Metaphysics*, 230; quoting ST I, q. 42, a. 4, ad 2.

<sup>161</sup> ST I, q. 29, a. 3; cf. Adrian J. Walker, “Personal Singularity and the *Communio Personarum*: A Creative Development of Thomas Aquinas’ Doctrine of *Esse Commune*,” *Communio* 31 (2004): 457–79.

doctrine of the Fourth Lateran Council). And yet, what the Father gives the Son is precisely all the Godhead is (in God “no inequality between giver and receiver is possible”). To receive oneself as gift is always to receive oneself *as other*, as integrally different. In the same way, to participate in what most totally belongs to oneself is to participate in what is unparticipatable: *intimior intimo meo*.

The *analogia entis* is, hereby, rooted in the Trinitarian relation of the giver and the receiver, Father and Son. As David Hart suggests, because the Son is the true image of the Father “one may speak of God as a God who is, in himself, always analogous; the coincidence in God of mediacy and intimacy, image and difference, is the ‘proportion’ that makes every finite interval a possible disclosure—tabernacle—of God’s truth.”<sup>162</sup> The Trinity is the condition of the possibility of analogical being because the undivided being of God is fully communicated in the divine processions which are the *ratio* of the gift of creation itself. And if the truth of creation is internal to what Hart describes as “the endless articulation of the inexhaustible content of the Father’s likeness in the Son,”<sup>163</sup> then, in the Incarnation of the *Verbum*, the analogical interval between God and the world is perfected to subsist fully in the life of God himself. And this makes sense (in another way) of Emery’s claim: “in the mystery of the incarnation of the Son, the entire redeemed universe returns to its principle.”<sup>164</sup> If the Son is the *ratio* of the production of creatures, being himself the wisdom and art of the Father, he will by the same token manifest perfectly the pattern of the form of the creature’s return to God.<sup>165</sup> Thus, the Incarnate Son is the ground of all causal knowledge.<sup>166</sup> Jesus sums up the *exitus et reditus* of creation in himself: he is “‘the concrete analogy of being’ . . . since he constitutes in himself, in the unity of his divine and human natures, the proportion of every interval between God and man.”<sup>167</sup> The analogy of being is *analogia Christi*.

### Conclusion

The Thomistic postulation of “being” as the pre-eminent name of God, far from signalling a radical discontinuity with Denys, is in fact part of a

<sup>162</sup> Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite*, 186.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 185.

<sup>164</sup> Emery, “Trinity and Creation,” 69.

<sup>165</sup> David Burrell, “Act of Creation with its Theological Consequences,” 42; citing Emery, *La Trinité créatrice*, 270ff.

<sup>166</sup> Cf. Milbank and Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas*, 60ff.

<sup>167</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *A Theology of History* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), 29–70, n. 5. I am grateful to Chris Hackett for pointing this quotation out to me.

discontinuous-continuity that completes an indigenous Dionysian trajectory. To name God pre-eminently “being” is to name him from his first perfection, the original sign of the final cause: “Since *good* has the nature of the desirable, it expresses the status of a final cause.”<sup>168</sup> Thus, the recipient of being is by derivation what the giver is: *per se bonum* (cf. Gen 1:31).<sup>169</sup> This means a double name—“being good”—fittingly predicates the Triune cause in the redoubling relation of *exitus et reditus*. The name “being” already contains “the good [who] returns all things to itself and gathers together whatever may be scattered.”<sup>170</sup> The more the two names redouble, the more they bring to completion the plurivocal unity of cataphatic-*exitus* and the apophatic-*reditus*, correlating and expanding the *triplex via* into the metaphysical astonishment of the Christic communication of being’s givenness.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> ST I, q. 5, a. 2, ad 1. (Trans. Alfred J. Freddoso.) Here it should be noted that this is stated in the context of Aquinas posing the question as to whether “being” is the penultimate name to “the good.” Taking his *sed contra* from the *Liber de causis* he answers negatively: “prima rerum creaturarum est esse” (ST I, q. 5, a. 2, sed contra). Thus, we are concretely at the moment of discontinuity with the Areopagite, especially since Denys is quoted in the first objection of this article: “But Dionysius (*Div. Nom.* iii) assigned the first place, among other names of God, to his goodness rather than His being” (ST I, q. 5, a. 2, obj. 1). Aquinas is careful when responding to this objection to name it a misreading to posit the Dionysian sentiment against his own. Thus he defends Denys’s position: “Dionysius discusses the Divine Names (*Div. Nom.* i, iii) as implying some causal relation in God; for we name God, as he says, from creatures, as a cause from its effects. But goodness, since it has the aspect of desirable, implies the idea of a final cause” (ST I, q. 5, a. 2, ad 1). Cf. Aquinas, *Super De divinis nominibus*, cap. 1, l. 3.

<sup>169</sup> ST I, q. 5, a. 3: “Every being, as being, is good. For all being, as being, has actuality and is in some way perfect; since every act implies some sort of perfection; and perfection implies desirability and goodness.”

<sup>170</sup> Denys, *De divinis nominibus*, 4.4 (PG 3.700B).

<sup>171</sup> I am grateful to Augustine Thompson, O.P., who read the first drafts of this essay, provided generous criticism, and encouraged me to submit it for publication. I would also like to thank Matthew Levering and the editors of *Nova et Vetera*, as well as Peter M. Candler, Jr., Conor Cunningham, Willis Jenkins, John Milbank, Adrian Pabst, Eugene F. Rogers, Jr., and Adrian J. Walker—all of whom, either through comments on earlier drafts or relevant conversation, contributed to this essay’s published form. All errors are, of course, my own.