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## **St. Thomas' Proof for the Lord of Lords from the Cause of Causes**

**Abstract.** In this study I examine the argument for the existence of God from finality formulated by St. Thomas Aquinas in the prologue to his commentary *Super Evangelium Sancti Ioannis*. Of particular interest is accounting for his characterization of this argument as the *via efficacissima*. I suggest two reasons for this appellation: first, philosophically, because this demonstrates the existence of God from the cause of causes and thus supplies intelligibility and explanation even for the *via manifestior* of efficient causality. Second, theologically, because its conclusion imparts an understanding of God as the Lord of Lords, by whose Divine Providence the world is ordered and governed. In this way, then, Thomas philosophically begins to explicate the theological implications of the *Verbum* of St. John's Gospel.

**Keywords:** Thomas Aquinas; Gospel of John; Medieval Commentaries; Scriptural Exegesis; Final Causality; Teleology; Divine Providence.

*Vidi dominum sedentem super solium excelsum et elevatum,  
et plena erat omnis terra maiestate eius,  
et ea quae sub ipso erant, replebant templum.*  
Is. VI: 1.

**T**hough there is general agreement as to the importance of the Thomistic arguments for the existence of God, there is a tendency to focus on the "Five Ways" of the *Summa theologiae* to the exclusion of other formulations and, in particular, to focus on the arguments *ex motu* found therein. This study seeks to counteract these tendencies by investigating the argument from finality as formulated in the prologue to his commentary *Super Evangelium Sancti Ioannis*. Here St. Thomas presents four arguments for the existence of God. The focus of this study is the first, an argument that proceeds from the order of the natural world to the existence of God as Lord through final causality. The reasoning of this argument is succinct and one must look elsewhere for

elaboration, in particular his treatments of natural teleology and divine providence.

The particular purpose of this study is to account for Thomas' characterization of this argument from finality as *via efficacissima*. A phrase rarely seen within the Thomistic corpus, I suggest two reasons for its employment here: first, given his philosophical theory of causality, because this argument is of particular philosophical strength insofar as it demonstrates the existence of God from the cause of causes. Second, given the theological context of this commentary, because this argument is of particular theological value because its conclusion imparts an understanding of God not only as first mover but also as the Lord of Lords, the providential governor of the world. In exploring this phrase I thereby seek to explain Thomas' repeated invocation of final causality when proving the existence of God and how this argument is a paragon example of his philosophical and theological synthesis.

The commentary on the Gospel of John was composed during Thomas' second period of teaching at Paris and is counted by Torrell as "among the most fully finished and most profound that he has left us."<sup>1</sup> The context of this work is theological but it would be a mistake to ignore its philosophical elements. As Weisheipl expresses this point, Thomas' theology "was not only biblical and patristic, but also logical and philosophical" yet while he "absorbed and refined the philosophy of Aristotle" he nonetheless "never put this philosophy ahead of his Catholic faith."<sup>2</sup> The argument from finality found in the prologue is one such example of Thomas' philosophical theology. Here he employs final causality philosophically to demonstrate the existence of God but immediately connects this conclusion to the *Verbum* of the Gospel of John.

The prologue begins by explaining the contemplative nature of this gospel, structured along a three-fold division suggested by Isaiah 6: 1. First, this contemplation is high (*I saw the Lord seated upon a high and lofty throne*); second, it is full (*and the whole earth was full of his majesty*); third, it is perfect (*and those things that were under him filled the temple*). Thomas assigns these three aspects of contemplation to various sciences, but notes that John's contemplation *contains all together what the aforementioned sciences have separated, and therefore*

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<sup>1</sup> J.-P. Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, v. 1: *The Person and His Work* (198–201). Indeed, M.-D. Philippe goes so far as to call this "the theological work par excellence by Saint Thomas." (Cited in Torrell, 200).

<sup>2</sup> J. A. Weisheipl, "An Introduction to the Commentary on the Gospel of Saint John of St. Thomas Aquinas" In *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John* (15).

*it is most perfect.*<sup>3</sup> The perfection of contemplation concerning the ultimate end is assigned to moral science. The fullness of contemplation concerning things proceeding from God is the domain of natural science. The height of contemplation belongs to metaphysics. It is the aspect of height this is of particular concern, because under this canopy Thomas formulates arguments for the existence of God, a theological employment of philosophical argumentation.

The height of contemplation, he explains, consist in the contemplation and knowledge of God. Thomas further subdivides *I saw the Lord seated upon a high and lofty throne* into four “heights”: that (1) of authority, (2) of eternity, (3) of dignity, and (4) of truth. Corresponding with each is an argument for the existence of God, which rise “above whatever had been created— mountains, heavens, angels—and reached the Creator of all.”<sup>4</sup> As he explains:

...in this contemplation of John on the incarnate word a fourfold height is designated. Of authority, whence he says *I saw the Lord*, of eternity, when he says *seated*, of dignity or of nobility of nature, whence he says *upon a high throne*, and of incomprehensible truth, when he says *lofty*. It is in these four ways that the ancient philosophers arrived at knowledge of God.<sup>5</sup>

To address each of these arguments is beyond the scope and intent of this study. Thus for present purposes I will focus on the first argument—from the height of authority—that proves the existence of God from finality. Despite a tendency to focus on the arguments from efficient causality *ex motu*, an examination of Thomas' arguments for the existence of God reveal that those from final causality are those most often employed. As Jules Baisnée outlined

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<sup>3</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Super Evangelium S. Ioannis Lectura*, prologue, n. 9: “Sed notandum quod diversimode diversae scientiae istos tres modos contemplationis sortiuntur. Perfectionem namque contemplationis habet scientia moralis, quae est de ultimo fine; plenitudinem autem scientia naturalis, quae res a Deo procedentes considerat; altitudinem vero contemplationis inter scientias physicas habet metaphysica. Sed Evangelium Ioannis, quod divisim scientiae praedictae habent, totum simul continet, et ideo est perfectissimum.” (Translations my own unless otherwise noted).

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Super Evangelium S. Ioannis Lectura*, prologue, n. 2: “Tunc ergo homo oculos contemplationis in excelso elevat, quando videt et contemplatur ipsum rerum omnium creatorem. Quia ergo Ioannes transcendit quicquid creatum est, scilicet ipsos montes, ipsos caelos, ipsos Angelos, et pervenit ad ipsum creatorem omnium[.]”

<sup>5</sup> *Super Evangelium S. Ioannis Lectura*, prologue, n. 2: “In hac autem contemplatione Ioannis circa verbum incarnatum quadruplex altitudo designatur. Auctoritatis, unde dicit vidi dominum, aeternitatis, cum dicit sedentem, dignitatis, seu nobilitatis naturae, unde dicit super solium excelsum, et incomprehensibilis veritatis, cum dicit et elevatum. Istis enim quatuor modis antiqui philosophi ad Dei cognitionem pervenerunt.”

in his comparative study, there are no fewer than twelve works in which the existence of God is proven; arguments from finality appearing in eight of them while arguments from motion are found in six.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, the ten arguments from finality outnumber the seven from motion.

This argument resembles those from finality found in his earlier *Summa contra gentiles* and the “Fifth Way” of the *Summa theologiae* and these texts can help elucidate this formulation. The argument from his commentary on John begins with the claim that *we see the things in nature act on account of an end and achieving useful and certain ends.*<sup>7</sup> Although this premise is unexplained in this commentary, a truncated argument in support is given in the parallel premise of the “Fifth Way”:

...things which lack intelligence, such as natural bodies, act for an end, and this is evident from their acting always, or nearly always, in the same way, so as to obtain the best result. Hence it is plain that not fortuitously, but designedly, do they achieve their end.<sup>8</sup>

Here Thomas invokes the inability of chance to account for the order of nature, a claim proven within Aristotle’s defense of natural teleology in the *Physics* and in Thomas’ own commentary on this work. The regularity of nature and the *per accidens* causality of chance are central to defending the claim that natural beings act for an end, the starting point of the argument for God from finality. These are themes expounded on within *Commentaria in octo libros Physicorum Aristotelis* and provide the necessary background support for this claim. To these works, then, one must turn for elaboration.

In the *Physics*, nature is generally defined as “a source or cause of being moved and of being at rest in that to which it belongs primarily, in virtue of itself and not in virtue of a concomitant attribute.”<sup>9</sup> More specifically, nature encompasses both matter and form, the two *per se* principles of natural be-

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<sup>6</sup> J. Baisnée, “St. Thomas Aquinas’s Proofs of the Existence of God Presented in Their Chronological Order.” *Philosophical Studies in Honor of the Very Reverend Ignatius Smith, O. P.* For a listing of passages, see 62–64.

<sup>7</sup> *Super Evangelium S. Ioannis Lectura*, prologue, n. 3: “Videmus enim ea quae sunt in rebus naturalibus, propter finem agere, et consequi utiles et certos fines.”

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I. ST I, q. 2, a. 3c: “...aliqua quae cognitione carent, scilicet corpora naturalia, operantur propter finem, quod apparet ex hoc quod semper aut frequentius eodem modo operantur, ut consequantur id quod est optimum; unde patet quod non a casu, sed ex intentione perveniunt ad finem.”

<sup>9</sup> Translation by R. P. Hardie & R. K. Gaye, from *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, R. McKeon, editor. .

ings presented earlier in book I, chapter 7 and identified respectively with potency and act. Though matter is constitutive of natural beings, its dependence on form leads Aristotle to insist that nature more properly refers to form, that by which a thing exists in actuality. This understanding of nature as matter and form lay the foundation for the arguments in book II, chapter 8 that nature is a cause that operates for a purpose. Rejecting the infrequency of chance to account for the regularity of nature, the arguments for finality culminate in the concise reasoning that form is an end; an end is a cause 'for the sake of which'; therefore, form is a cause 'for the sake of which.' This argument explicitly invokes the principles of nature and concludes to an immanent final causality. Thomas associates this argument particularly with generation (the coming to be of new natural beings) but because the premises come from the principle of nature itself, and "the nature (*ratio*) of an end is that other things come to be for the sake of something" it follows both that "to be and to come to be for the sake of something should be found in natural things."<sup>10</sup>

The teleology of nature argued for in the *Physics* supports Thomas' claims in the prologue to John that *we see the things in nature acting for an end, and attaining to ends which are both useful and certain* and that the *whole course of nature advances to an end in an orderly way*. An argument for the existence of God is not within *Physics* II, 8 nor does Thomas explicitly formulate one in his commentary. He does, however, indicate that natural teleology is the necessary background to an argument from the existence of God from finality. As Thomas explains:

nature is among the number of causes which act for the sake of something. And this pertains to the question of providence. For things which do not know the end do not tend toward the end unless directed by one knowing, like the arrow by the archer. Hence if nature acts for an end, it is necessary that it be ordered by someone intelligent; this is the work of providence.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Commentaria in octo libros Physicorum Aristotelis*, vol. II. Lib. II, lectio 13, n. 260: "Dicit quod cum natura dicatur dupliciter, scilicet de materia et forma, et forma est finis generationis, ut supra dictum est; hoc autem est de ratione finis, ut propter ipsum fiant alia; sequitur quod esse et fieri propter aliquid, inveniatur in rebus naturalibus."

<sup>11</sup> *Commentaria in octo libros Physicorum Aristotelis*, lib. II, lectio 12, n. 250: "...natura est de numero illarum causarum quae propter aliquid agunt. Et hoc valet ad quaestionem de providentia. Ea enim quae non cognoscunt finem, non tendunt in finem nisi ut directa ab aliquo cognoscente, sicut sagitta a sagittante: unde si natura operetur propter finem, necesse est quod ab aliquo intelligente ordinetur; quod est providentiae opus."

Thomas uses this reasoning in his argument for God in the commentary on John. Having asserted that nature operates for an end, he next claims that natural beings lacking intelligence are unable to direct themselves and must be directed by something intelligent. This premise is similarly unelaborated on within the scriptural commentary. But Thomas' SCG conclusion that this order takes place by a being that "governs them as Lord" indicates an invocation of providence—already referenced in the *Physics* commentary—while adding that it belongs to the Lord to govern those under his authority.<sup>12</sup> There is textual continuity throughout these works concerning final causality, unconscious natural teleology, and the necessity of an intelligent orderer of nature manifest in Thomas' example of an arrow and archer, something invoked here in the *Physics*, in the *Summa theologiae* argument from finality, and the SCG treatment of providence.<sup>13</sup>

Now, although it seems clear that an arrow cannot of itself be directed to an end (there is nothing about an arrow that would make it fly through the air by itself, much less be directed to a particular target), it is less obvious why natural beings—which seem to be ordered to an end on account of their form—also depend on an intelligent orderer. Indeed, this is precisely an objection raised by Thomas in the ST. Invoking a principle of parsimony, it seems unnecessary to suppose the existence of God, for "natural things can be reduced to a principle which is nature."<sup>14</sup> To understand the premise of his argument from finality (and, for that matter, Thomas' reply to this objection) requires an understanding of how the end functions as a cause. Broadly speaking, here *end* refers to that which a being tends or moves toward; importantly, it need not be understood only as something intended consciously by the one moving toward

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<sup>12</sup> Thomas Aquinas. *Summa contra gentiles III*. Roma: Commissio Leonina, 1926. SCG III, 64, n. 12: "...regis enim et domini est suo imperio regere et gubernare subiectos."

<sup>13</sup> ST I, q. 2, a. 3, c: "Ea autem quae non habent cognitionem, non tendunt in finem nisi directa ab aliquo cognoscente et intelligente, sicut sagitta a sagittante." SCG III, 16: "Eodem modo ordinantur in finem ea quae cognoscunt finem, et ea quae finem non cognoscunt: licet quae cognoscunt finem, per se moveantur in finem; quae autem non cognoscunt, tendunt in finem quasi ab alio directa, sicut patet de sagittante et sagitta. Sed ea quae cognoscunt finem, semper ordinantur in bonum sicut in finem: nam voluntas, quae est appetitus finis praecogniti, non tendit in aliquid nisi sub ratione boni, quod est eius obiectum. Ergo et ea quae finem non cognoscunt, ordinantur in bonum sicut in finem. Finis igitur omnium est bonum."

<sup>14</sup> ST I, q. 2, a. 3, obj. 2: "Praeterea, quod potest compleri per pauciora principia, non fit per plura. Sed videtur quod omnia quae apparent in mundo, possunt compleri per alia principia, supposito quod Deus non sit, quia ea quae sunt naturalia, *reducuntur in principium quod est natura*; ea vero quae sunt a proposito, reducuntur in principium quod est ratio humana vel voluntas. Nulla igitur necessitas est ponere Deum esse."

it. Indeed, for Thomas “it does not matter whether the being tending to an end is knowing or not.”<sup>15</sup> The main crux of this argument, then, is the dependence of unconscious natural teleology on an intelligent orderer. One reason to make this claim is that, for Thomas, the end is understood as a “good” not, of course, good in a moral sense, but in the ontological sense of something desirable or perfective and to be pursued.<sup>16</sup> Yet the end does not yet even exist and non-cognitive natural beings cannot intend non-existent ends, let alone apprehend these ends as goods. But the end must be intended in some way for it to serve as a cause of movement.<sup>17</sup> In the case of the arrow, the end is intended by the archer, who is able to direct the arrow. Natural but unconscious beings are incapable of intending a nonexistent end and cannot apprehend the end. But because they do act and move for an end there must be something to account for this regularity. Although this is brought about through the natural inclination of form, there must be some existent ordered that directs them to their end through form. Thomas answers the objection in the ST by applying the conclusion of the argument from finality: since nature “works for a determinate end under the direction of some superior agent, it is necessary that things done by nature be traced back to God as first cause.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> SCG III, 2, “Nec differt, quantum ad hoc, utrum quod tendit in finem sit cognoscens, vel non: sicut enim signum est finis sagittantis, ita est finis motus sagittae.”

<sup>16</sup> SCG III, 16: “...Eodem modo ordinantur in finem ea quae cognoscunt finem, et ea quae finem non cognoscunt: licet quae cognoscunt finem, per se moveantur in finem; quae autem non cognoscunt, tendunt in finem quasi ab alio directa, sicut patet de sagittante et sagitta. Sed ea quae cognoscunt finem, semper ordinantur in bonum sicut in finem: nam voluntas, quae est appetitus finis praecogniti, non tendit in aliquid nisi sub ratione boni, quod est eius obiectum. Ergo et ea quae finem non cognoscunt, ordinantur in bonum sicut in finem. Finis igitur omnium est bonum.”

<sup>17</sup> On this point, see J. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*: “The form of the statue cannot do this, since it does not actually exist until the statue itself is produced. Hence in addition to matter and form there must be some efficient or moving or agent cause. But as Aristotle states in *Metaphysics* II, what acts does so only be tending toward something. Therefore, there must also be a fourth cause or principle—that which is intended by the agent. This we call the end.” (481) Further, “An agent does not act in a given way unless it is influenced by an end. Noncognitive agents cannot explicitly know their ends. Hence the only way of accounting for the ability of an end to influence such an agent is to appeal to an inclination which is impressed upon the agent by some intelligent being. Such an intelligent being can, of course, have in mind the end of the noncognitive agent’s action.” (483–84)

<sup>18</sup> ST I, q. 2, a. 3, ad 2: “Ad secundum dicendum quod, cum natura propter determinatum finem operetur ex directione alicuius superioris agentis, necesse est ea quae a natura fiunt, etiam in Deum reducere, sicut in primam causam. Similiter etiam quae ex proposito



Thomas similarly concludes in his commentary on John that *the movement of natural things to a certain end indicates that there is something higher, by which natural things are directed to an end and are governed and, furthermore because the whole course of nature proceeds to an end and is directed we have to posit something higher which directs and governs them as Lord: and this is God.*<sup>19</sup> This divine ordering by the Lord is brought about through his providence, something also explicitly invoked within the argument from finality in the SCG.<sup>20</sup> Although the initial formulation of premises seemed to proceed from the ordering of individual natural beings, the reasoning of the argument includes *the whole course of nature* such that Thomas can further connect this conclusion to the opening of the Gospel: *John shows that he has knowledge about the word when he says: he came into his own, namely into the world, because the whole universe is his own.*<sup>21</sup>

Having examined the reasoning behind this argument, one can now understand why this argument is called the *via efficacissima*. Fernand van Steen-

fiunt, oportet reducere in aliquam altiore causam, quae non sit ratio et voluntas humana, quia haec mutabilia sunt et defectibilia; oportet autem omnia mobilia et deficere possibilia reduci in aliquod primum principium immobile et per se necessarium, sicut ostensum est.”

<sup>19</sup> *Super Evangelium S. Ioannis Lectura*, prologue, n. 3: “Et hinc est quod ipse motus rerum naturalium in finem certum, indicat esse aliquid altius, quo naturales res diriguntur in finem et gubernantur. Et ideo cum totus cursus naturae ordinate in finem procedat et dirigatur, de necessitate oportet nos ponere aliquid altius, quod dirigat ista et sicut dominus gubernet: et hic est Deus.”

<sup>20</sup> SCG III, 64: “Ostensum est quod Deus est primum movens non motum. Primum autem movens non minus movet quam secunda moventia, sed magis: quia sine eo non movent alia. Omnia autem quae moventur, moventur propter finem, ut supra ostensum est. Movet igitur Deus omnia ad fines suos. Et per intellectum: ostensum enim est supra quod non agit per necessitatem naturae, sed per intellectum et voluntatem. Nihil est autem aliud regere et gubernare per providentiam quam *movere per intellectum aliqua ad finem*. Deus igitur per suam providentiam gubernat et regit omnia quae moventur in finem: sive moveantur corporaliter, sive spiritualiter, sicut desiderans dicitur moveri a desiderato.” SCG I, 13: “Ad hoc etiam inducitur a Damasceno alia ratio sumpta ex rerum gubernatione: quam etiam innuit Commentator in II physicorum. Et est talis. Impossibile est aliqua contraria et dissonantia in unum ordinem concordare semper vel pluries nisi alicuius gubernatione, ex qua omnibus et singulis tribuitur ut ad certum finem tendant. Sed in mundo videmus res diversarum naturarum in unum ordinem concordare, non ut raro et a casu, sed ut semper vel in maiori parte. Oportet ergo esse aliquem cuius providentia mundus gubernetur. Et hunc dicimus Deum.”

<sup>21</sup> *Super Evangelium S. Ioannis Lectura*, prologue, n. 3: “Et haec gubernandi auctoritas in verbo Dei demonstratur, cum dicit dominum; unde in Ps. LXXXVIII, 10 dicitur: tu dominaris potestati maris; motum autem fluctuum eius tu mitigas; quasi dicat: tu es dominus et universa gubernas. Hanc cognitionem manifestat Ioannes se habere de verbo, cum dicit: in propria venit, scilicet in mundum; quia totus mundus est suus proprius.”



berghen suggests that the phrase is meant to convey that this argument is “the most striking and most accessible to the simple.”<sup>22</sup> Though granting that this argument is striking insofar as it argues from the natural and unconscious teleology of the natural world, the reasoning for each premise is hardly simple. The first premise requires a thorough investigation of what nature and natural teleology entail. The second premise is intelligible only when recognizing the kind of causality that the end exerts and the way divine providence is brought about. It seems unlikely, then, that this argument is the most accessible. Indeed, Thomas himself calls the “First Way” from motion in the *Summa theologiae* the more manifest (*manifestior*) way of proving the existence of God, not the “Fifth Way” from finality. Rather, I suggest that this argument merits the appellation of *via efficacissima* on account of the preeminence of final causality and the theological importance of providence.

The phrase *via efficacissima* is rarely found within the Thomistic corpus.<sup>23</sup> It is, though, used in the context of arguments for the existence of God in both the *Summa contra gentiles* and his commentary on book VIII of Aristotle's *Physics*. In these passages, it is used to explain that the strongest argument for the existence of God from motion assumes the eternity of the world.<sup>24</sup> They

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<sup>22</sup> F. van Steenberghen, *La Problème de l'Existence de Dieu dans les Écrits de S. Thomas D'Aquin*. 277: “...dans la somme, la preuve par la finalité est déclarée *via efficacissima*. Peut-être parce qu'elle est la plus frappante et la plus accessible aux simples.”

<sup>23</sup> A passage using *efficacissima* that I will not address is found in Thomas' *Sententia Ethic* (lib. 2, lectio 11, n. 8) but this does not concern an argument for the existence of God. Briefly, though, the connotation of *efficacissima* in this passage is that which is most able to attain an end and in this sense it seems consonant with its use in the SCG and *Physics* Commentary.

<sup>24</sup> *Commentaria in octo libros Physicorum Aristotelis*, lib. VIII, lectio 2, n. 17: “Sed si quis recte rationes hic positas consideret, huiusmodi rationibus veritas fidei efficaciter impugnari non potest. Sunt enim huiusmodi rationes efficaces ad probandum quod motus non inceperit per viam naturae, sicut ab aliquibus ponebatur: sed quod non inceperit quasi rebus de novo productis a primo rerum principio, ut fides nostra ponit, hoc iis rationibus probari non potest; quod patet singulas illationes hic positas consideranti. Cum enim quaerit, si motus non semper fuit, utrum moventia et mobilia semper fuerunt vel non: respondendum est quod primum movens semper fuit; omnia vero alia, sive sint moventia sive mobilia, non semper fuerunt, sed inceperunt esse a causa universali totius esse. Ostensum est autem supra, quod productio totius esse a causa prima essendi, non est motus, sive ponatur quod haec rerum emanatio sit ab aeterno, sive non. Sic ergo non sequitur quod ante primam mutationem sit aliqua mutatio. Sequeretur autem si moventia et mobilia essent de novo producta in esse ab aliquo agente particulari, quod ageret aliquo subiecto praesupposito, quod transmutaretur de non esse in esse, sive de privatione ad formam: de hoc enim modo incipiendi procedit ratio Aristotelis.” SCG I, 13, n. 30: “Et ad hoc dicendum quod *via efficacissima* ad probandum Deum esse est ex suppositione aeternitatis mundi, qua posita, minus

are not positive claims but rather efficacious suppositions, aimed at mounting arguments for the existence of God even when supposing the eternity of the world. Thomas makes this claim because, while it is obvious that what begins to move or exist is dependent on a cause, it is decidedly not obvious that what exists eternally would also be caused eternally. If one can prove the existence of God even from an eternal world then one has defended in the strongest way the necessity of God's existence from efficient causality. This argument would be irresistible, he explains, because "if the existence of a first principle follows even this supposition it is clear that the existence of a first principle is entirely necessary."<sup>25</sup> A related use of this phrase is in his treatise *De aeternitate mundi* and again concerns the eternity of the world. There it is used not to suppose the eternity of the world, but rather in passing to note that there is no inherent contradiction in claiming that the world is eternal. If there were a contradiction it would be *efficacissima* in disproving this claim simply to point out the contradiction.<sup>26</sup>

In each of these uses, the implication of *efficacissima* is its ability to convince or efficacy in argumentation. They do not constitute, however, positive claims. In the SCG and *Physics* commentary Thomas supposes but does not affirm the eternity of the world. In the *De aeternitate* he shows that a contradiction would be effective but denies that there is any such contradiction. His use of the phrase *via efficacissima* in the commentary on John, however, is a positive characterization of the argument. Here he is not supposing the ordering

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videtur esse manifestum quod Deus sit. Nam si mundus et motus de novo incoepit, planum est quod oportet poni aliquam causam quae de novo producat mundum et motum: quia omne quod de novo fit, ab aliquo innovatore oportet sumere originem; cum nihil educat se de potentia in actum vel de non esse in esse."

<sup>25</sup> *Commentaria in octo libros Physicorum Aristotelis*, lib. 8, lectio 1, n. 6: "Haec enim via probandi primum principium esse, est efficacissima, cui resisti non potest. Si enim mundo et motu existente sempiterno, necesse est ponere unum primum principium; multo magis sempiternitate eorum sublata; quia manifestum est quod omne novum indiget aliquo principio innovante. Hoc ergo solo modo poterat videri quod non est necessarium ponere primum principium, si res sunt ab aeterno. Unde si etiam hoc posito sequitur primum principium esse, ostenditur omnino necessarium primum principium esse."

<sup>26</sup> Thomas Aquinas. *De aeternitate mundi*. Roma: Commissio Leonina, 1976: "Sic ergo patet quod in hoc quod dicitur, aliquid esse factum et nunquam non fuisse, non est intellectus aliqua repugnantia. Si enim esset aliqua, mirum est quomodo Augustinus eam non vidit: quia hoc esset efficacissima via ad improbandum aeternitatem mundi, cum tamen ipse multis rationibus impugnet aeternitatem mundi in undecimo et duodecimo de Civ. Dei, hanc etiam viam omnino praetermittit? Quinimmo videtur innuere quod non sit ibi repugnantia intellectuum: unde dicit decimo de Civ. Dei, 31 cap. de Platonicis loquens: id quomodo intelligant, invenerunt non esse hoc, scilicet temporis, sed substitutionis initium."

of nature or the eternity of the world but rather is arguing from the order of nature to the existence of God, the providential orderer. I suggest, then, two reasons for Thomas to claim that this argument is the *via efficacissima*. First, philosophically because final causality is the cause of causes, granting intelligibility and efficacy to the efficient, formal, and material cause. Second, theologically because the conclusions of this argument imports an understanding of God as the providential orderer of nature, the Lord of Lords.

The final cause is the cause of causes for Thomas because it is that which is needed for the other causes to come into effect. As he explains,

...this species of cause is the most powerful among the causes: for the final cause is the cause of the other causes. For it is manifest that the agent acts for the sake of the end; and likewise it was shown above in regards to artificial things that the forms are ordered to use as to an end, and matter to form as to an end. And to this extent the end is called the cause of causes.<sup>27</sup>

This view of finality is a central feature of the Thomistic theory of causality.<sup>28</sup> The efficient cause is efficacious only when there is an end to be attained and matter is ordered to form also under the aspect of finality.<sup>29</sup> In other words, the final cause is needed for the other three causes to be causative. For Thomas, then, the final cause is the cause of the causes. This is, I suggest, the philosophical warrant for characterizing this argument as the *via efficacissima*. Indeed, within the broader context of causality the efficient cause—which grounds the *manifestior via* of the ST—is itself dependent on a cause for explanation.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> *Commentaria in octo libros Physicorum Aristotelis*, lib. II, lectio 5, n. 186: "...haec species causae potissima est inter alias causas: est enim causa finalis aliarum causarum causa. Manifestum est enim quod agens agit propter finem; et similiter ostensum est supra in artificialibus, quod formae ordinantur ad usum sicut ad finem, et materiae in formas sicut in finem: et pro tanto dicitur finis causa causarum."

<sup>28</sup> Even as early as his commentary on the *Sentences* he refers to the end as the most efficacious (Cf. *Super Sent.*, lib. 3 d. 27 q. 1 a. 3 arg. 5).

<sup>29</sup> As George Klubertanz puts this point, one function of the final cause "...is to give the ultimate determination to the efficient cause, and to do this the telic cause itself must be a determinate goal." See his "St Thomas' Treatment of the Axiom, 'Omen Agens Agit Propter Finem.'" *An Étienne Gilson Tribute* (105).

<sup>30</sup> As Thomas reiterates in the SCG III, 17, 9: "...Finis inter alias causas primatum obtinet, et ab ipso omnes aliae causae habent quod sint causae in actu: agens enim non agit nisi propter finem, ut ostensum est. Ex agente autem materia in actum formae reducitur: unde materia fit actu huius rei materia, et similiter forma huius rei forma, per actionem agentis, et per consequens per finem. Finis etiam posterior est causa quod praecedens finis intendatur ut finis: non enim movetur aliquid in finem proximum nisi propter finem postremum. Est

This argument from finality, then, is the most efficacious insofar as it proceeds from the cause of causes, providing explanation even for arguments for God from efficient causality.

Theologically, this argument is also the most efficacious because its conclusion imparts an understanding of God as Lord, exercising perfect dominion over all things.<sup>31</sup> This divine direction encompasses beings ordered to an end on account of their nature because the very ordering of nature “must be directed to the end by Him Who gives things principles through which they act.”<sup>32</sup> Indeed, the being whose existence is proven through final causality is the Lord of Lords, for all other beings capable of directing themselves or others to an end are ultimately and radically dependent on divine order:

...who is in all ways perfect in Himself, and Who endows all things with being from His own power, exists as the Ruler of all beings, ruled by none other; nor is there anything excused from His rule, just as there is nothing that does not re-

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igitur finis ultimus prima omnium causa. Esse autem primam omnium causam necesse est primo enti convenire, quod Deus est, ut supra ostensum est. Deus igitur est ultimus omnium finis.” See also: SCG III, 17, 4: “...quolibet genere causarum causa prima est magis causa quam causa secunda: nam causa secunda non est causa nisi per causam primam. Illud igitur quod est causa prima in ordine causarum finalium, oportet quod sit magis causa finalis cuiuslibet quam causa finalis proxima. Sed Deus est prima causa in ordine causarum finalium: cum sit summum in ordine bonorum. Est igitur magis finis uniuscuiusque rei quam aliquis finis proximus.” De principiis naturae 29: “Unde finis est causa causalitatis efficientis, quia facit efficiens esse efficiens: similiter facit materiam esse materiam, et formam esse formam, cum materia non suscipiat formam nisi per finem, et forma non perficiat materiam nisi per finem. Unde dicitur quod finis est causa causarum, quia est causa causalitatis in omnibus causis.”

<sup>31</sup> SCG III, 1, prologue: “Unum esse primum entium, totius esse perfectionem plenam possidens, quod Deum dicimus, in superioribus est ostensum, qui ex sui perfectionis abundantia omnibus existentibus esse largitur, ut non solum primum entium, sed et principium omnium esse comprobetur. Esse autem aliis tribuit non necessitate naturae, sed secundum suae arbitrium voluntatis, ut ex superioribus est manifestum. Unde consequens est ut factorum suorum sit dominus: nam super ea quae nostrae voluntati subduntur, dominamur. Hoc autem dominium super res a se productas perfectum habet, utpote qui ad eas producendas nec exterioris agentis adminiculo indiget, nec materiae fundamento: cum sit totius esse universalis effector.”

<sup>32</sup> SCG III, 1, 3: “Eorum autem quae per voluntatem produciuntur agentis, unumquodque ab agente in finem aliquem ordinatur: bonum enim et finis est obiectum proprium voluntatis, unde necesse est ut quae ex voluntate procedunt, ad finem aliquem ordinentur. Finem autem ultimum unaquaeque res per suam consequitur actionem, quam oportet in finem dirigi ab eo qui principia rebus dedit per quae agunt.”

ceive its being from Him. Therefore as He is perfect in being and causing, so also is He perfect in ruling.<sup>33</sup>

At this point one can return to Thomas' claim that the contemplation of John is not only as *high* but also *full*. Contemplation is full when someone can *consider all the effects of the cause itself*.<sup>34</sup> The order of providence understood as the exercise of final causality extends not only to all things in the world but even to the very exercise of efficient, formal, and material causality. Thomas himself does not explicitly apply the argument from finality to the fullness of John's contemplation. But finality, I suggest, informs our understanding of the fullness of contemplation because of the privileged status of the cause of causes by which we arrive at the existence of God as Lord. Hence the conclusion of this argument from the height of authority is shown to be *in the Word of God when he says, Lord*.<sup>35</sup>

In this study, I have sought to explain the reasoning behind Thomas' argument for the existence of God from final causality with particular concern to explain why this is the *via efficacissima*. Although presented concisely in this commentary, an investigation of Thomas' other treatments of natural teleology and divine providence explicate the premises of his argument. I have suggested that this characterization is made both because of Thomas' view of the Cause of Causes and because the conclusion further imparts an understanding of God as the Lord of Lords. Thomas thus evidences his employment and enrichment of philosophical argumentation, ultimately identifying the conclusion reached with the *Verbum* revealed in the beginning of the Gospel of John.

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<sup>33</sup> SCG III, 1, 3: "Necesse est igitur ut Deus, qui est in se universaliter perfectus et omnibus entibus ex sua potestate esse largitur, omnium entium rector existat, a nullo utique directus: nec est aliquid quod ab eius regimine excusetur, sicut nec est aliquid quod ab ipso esse non sortiatur. Est igitur, sicut perfectus in essendo et causando, ita etiam et in regendo perfectus."

<sup>34</sup> *Super Evangelium S. Ioannis Lectura*, prologue, 7: "...Tunc enim contemplatio ampla est, quando in causa potest aliquis considerare omnes effectus ipsius causae..."

<sup>35</sup> Thomas continues: "Quia ergo Ioannes Evangelista elevatus in contemplationem naturae divini verbi et essentiae est, cum dicit: in principio erat verbum, et verbum erat apud Deum, statim virtutem ipsius verbi secundum quod diffundit se ad omnia, nobis insinuat, cum dicit: omnia per ipsum facta sunt." (*Super Evangelium S. Ioannis Lectura*, prologue, n. 7).

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