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NAMING THE INEFFABLE: ST. THOMAS AQUINAS'S TEACHING ON THE DIVINE NAMES

Quem velatum nunc aspicio…
(St. Thomas Aquinas, "Adoro Te Devote")

Introduction

The question of how God can be named by us is in fact a question of the possibility of discourse about God at all, that is, in essence, a question of intelligibility. If one takes into account, on the one hand, the complex and varied structure of language and the absolute simplicity of God on the other, then it seems reasonable to ask whether we ever actually talk about God. The question thus formulated becomes even more relevant once we take into account the fact that our linguistic practice of naming God is characterized by a fundamental tension between the human world, in which names are anchored in human reality, and the reality of God who is not part of our world, but is its transcendent cause and principle.[1] There

[1] "…nomina, cum sint a nobis imposita, sic significant secundum quod res in cognitionem nostram cadunt. Cum igitur hoc ipsum quod Deus est, sit supra cognitionem nostram, ut ostensum est, cognitio autem nostra commensuretur rebus creatis, nomina a nobis imposita non sic significant secundum quod congruit divinae excellentiae, sed secundum quod convenit existentiae rerum creatarum. Esse autem rerum creatarum deductum est ab esse divino secundum quamdam deficientem assimilationem. Sic igitur, secundum quod qualitercumque similitudo est rerum creatarum ad Deum, nomina a nobis imposita de Deo dici possunt, non quidem sic sicut de creaturis, sed per quemdam excessum, et hoc significat quod dicit, quod Deus est *supersubstantialis substantia*; et similiter quod subdit quod est *intellectus non-intelligibilis*, idest non quales sunt intellectus qui

is no way to overcome this fundamental tension between the immanence of human language and the transcendence of God, between the multiplicity of diverse names and the simple unity of God.[2] The analysis of our naming of God presented here focuses on this tensed polarity of immanence and transcendence.[3]

The fundamental problem that is the subject of this paper is the question of whether we can formulate positive judgments about God. This issue is derived from Aquinas's own assertion that we can know whether God is (*an sit*), but we do not know what He is (*quid sit*). From this assertion, one can conclude that God is unknowable, so nothing can be said about God; the only way to know God is *via negativa*. Although St. Thomas draws heavily from Neoplatonic thought, he clearly modifies it and offers his own solution to certain issues, challenging "(neo)Platonic orthodoxy." In other words, Aquinas seeks to convey Neoplatonic content after elaborating it using Aristotelian instrumentarium. As a detailed analysis, we will look at the question of the divine names, on which Thomas elaborates in q. 13 of the *Theological Summa* and in his commentary to *The Divine Names* of the Pseudo-Areopagite. Here, the problem in question receives a profound interpretation not only semantically, but above all metaphysically.

The semantic analysis of human discourse about God seems to be systematically linked to the ontological study of God's mode of being (qq. 3–11) and the subsequent epistemological study of how God can be known (q. 12). The treatise on God is structured by a threefold division into "reality" (how God is in Himself), "knowledge" (how God is in our knowledge) and "language" (how God can be named).[4] This seems to be a simple and effective framework that

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intelliguntur a nobis; *et* est *verbum non-dicibile*, idest non qualia sunt verba quae a nobis dicuntur." Thomas de Aquino, *In librum Beati Dionysii De divinis nominibus expositio*, ed. Ceslas Pera, Taurini: Marietti, 1950, c. I, lec. 1 [29] (p. 9).

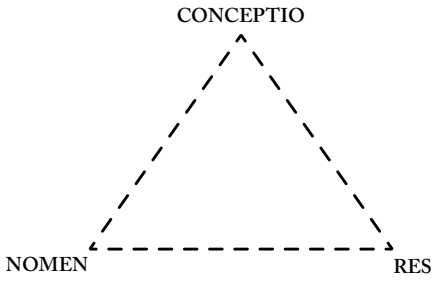
[2] The tension between the multiplicity of names and the absolute simplicity of God can only be overcome in an eschatological perspective. Cf. *ScGent*, I, c. 31: "Si autem ipsam essentiam prout est possemus intelligere et ei nomen proprium adaptare, uno nomine tantum eam exprimeremus. Quod promittitur his qui eum per essentiam videbunt, Zach. ult.: *in die illa erit dominus unus et nomen eius unum*" (Zech 14:9).

[3] R.A. te Velde, *Aquinas on God: The 'Divine Science' of the Summa Theologiae*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006, p. 97.

[4] *STh*, Ia, c. 3, pr.: "We have to consider what He is not (qq. 3–11); How He is known by us (q. 12); How He is named" (q. 13). A completely different interpretation of the structure of the *Summa theologiae* is given by Wayne J. Hankey, who argues that the opening statement of the *Summa*, "God is one," is a clear indication of Aquinas's reading of Proclus' *Elements of Theology*, and consequently of Thomas's dependence on Neoplatonism, especially Proclus. Cf. W.J. Hankey, "Aquinas' doctrine of God between ontology and henology" (paper read at the conference "La philosophie et la question de Dieu. Histoire, développement, perspectives," Université Laval, April 10–12, 2003, https://www.academia.edu/11753928/ Aquinas_doctrine_of_God_between_ontology_and_henology (accessed Feb. 5, 2024). According to him, the *Summa* as a whole and

does not raise any particular problems. However, it has some interesting aspects to consider, as they are relevant to the topic of the divine names.[5]

In the threefold scheme underlying inquiries concerning God, one can recognize the Aristotelian semantic triangle: things, concepts, and words. It seems that any description of meaning, and therefore of theological meaning, must include three aspects of the semantic relationship. In general, it should be said that words signify things, and therefore we can meaningfully talk about things using words combined into sentences. Yet the relationship between words and things is not a simple one-to-one relationship. Words are also related to the concepts by which things are represented in the mind. For Thomas, following in this regard Aristotle's account of signification at the beginning of *Peri hermeneias* [*On Interpretation*], any consideration of the semantic relationship between words and things must take a three-step form, including consideration of the relationship between words and concepts and the relationship between concepts and things.[6]



But how do concepts form in our minds and how does this result in predication, i.e., what we express in words? At this point, it is necessary to refer to Aquinas's

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the individual treatises contained therein describe the Neoplatonic structure of exit and return (*exitus*, *reditus*) by which all things except the One return to their principle. The first particular circle (that of the divine names, *STh*, Ia, q. 3–11) is constructed when starting from simplicity, we return to unity through the existence of God in all things. Subsequent circles, i.e., those described by internal actions, by the Trinity, by creation and ultimately by salvation, return to the principle through increasingly diverse processes. We have the unification of the Platonic dialectic of the one and the many with the Aristotelian logic of actualization as entelecheia in the Neoplatonic hierarchy. Hankey presents a similar interpretation in his other works as well, e.g. "The Concord of Aristotle, Proclus, the Liber de Causis & Blessed Dionysius in Thomas Aquinas, Student of Albertus Magnus," *Dionysius* 34 (2016), p. 137–209; *Aquinas's Neoplatonism in the Summa Theologiae on God: A Short Introduction*, South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2019.

[5] R.A. te Velde, *Aquinas on God*, p. 98.

[6] Aristotle, *Peri hermeneias* c. 1. Cf. Thomas de Aquino, *In Peri hermeneias* I, lec. 2, 15: "Voces significant intellectus conceptiones immediate et eis mediantibus res."

terminist semantics, since this seems to hold the key to the problem of predication of the names of God.

Thus, the structure of the presented article is as follows: in the introductory section, some elements of Aquinas's terminist semantics will be presented to explain how this semantic theory affects the application of triplex via to naming God, i.e., it is supposed to show how it is possible to predicate absolute and affirmative names of the very substance of God, even though we do not know His essence. After this first introductory section, the article follows Aristotle's triplex semantic model: the second section focuses on the explication of the question of what God is; the third section points out the possibility of us knowing God; and finally, the fourth section describes the models of predicating about God, i.e., I focus on the theory of analogy — of attribution and/or of proportion (*multa ad unum* and *unum ad alterum*).

Thus, according to Aristotle's findings that there are two operations of the mind, conceptualizing (*simplex apprehensio*) and judging (*iudicium*),[7] one must first determine what God is. Since it is impossible to formulate an essential definition of God, Thomas uses the Areopagite's *via negativa* expanding it to a *via triplex*, to establish some data about God; this *via triplex* enables us to speak about God *causaliter* (it points to God as the cause) and *substantialiter*, since it shows that all perfections in God exist in a primary and eminent way. This is the subject of the first two sections. Further on, I seek to show how Aquinas circumvents the Scylla of equivocation and the Charybdis of Platonic language supposing contradictions (being and non-being, substance and non-substance, etc.) through the distinction of *res significata* and *modus significandi*. Finally, Thomas's doctrine culminates in the theory of analogy, which makes it possible to formulate judgments about God by way of the analogy of proportion.[8]

1. The Main Components of Aquinas's Semantics

The fundamental question is whether a name can be given to God.[9] Our words are signs of our concepts, which in turn are likenesses of things. Thus, our words signify through the mediation of our concepts; we can know the nature or essence of a human being, and this essence is expressed through the meaning of the name "man." The reason why the name can express human nature in this way is that the name "man" signifies the definition of that nature, thereby making it known. In support of this semantic view, Aquinas cites Aristotle's position that the *ratio*,

[7] *In Peri hermeneias*, pr.
[8] Cf., e.g., *ScGent*, I, c. 34, 1; *STh*, Ia, q. 13, a. 5.
[9] *STh*, I, q. 13, a. 1.

which the name signifies, is the definition.[10] Therefore, it is necessary first to further define and distinguish within the names themselves into grammatical and logical modes on the one hand, and on the other to distinguish between concrete and abstract names; the term "man," after all, can signify a noun as a part of speech and be at the same time a subject or predicate in a statement, but it can also signify a concrete man, such as Phaedo, and can function as the equivalent of the abstract name "humanity," that is, to indicate the nature or definition (*ratio*) of something.

1.1. Grammatical Modes and Logical Modes

The semantic triangle presented above is an illustration of Aristotle's claim that spoken words directly signify our concepts and through them external, i.e., extra-mental, things; written words, in turn, are direct signs of spoken words and through them signify things both through spoken words and the concepts they signify.[11] In his commentary on this passage from *De interpretatione*, St. Thomas notes that "the things about which [Stagirite] promised to speak are either compound or uncompound signifying vocal sounds, [and so,] he precedes this with a discussion of how vocal sounds signify (*praemittit tractatum de significatione vocum*)."[12] The term "significatio" (*signifying*) appears here, which in the context of Aristotle's statement clearly indicates a causal relationship,[13] since words signify (*significant*) concepts in the mind (*conceptio intellectus*), and these are likenesses of things. In turn, "what is signified" (*significatum*) is what is conceptualized in the mind, and this conceptualization (*ratio*) is the likeness of the thing signified, i.e., this *res significata* is located in reality outside our mind.

The quote from Aristotle refers to "compound and non-compound signifying vocal sounds," that is, words. Words have their grammatical modes and logical

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[10] Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* III, c. 7 (1012a, 20–24); G.T. Doolan, "Aquinas on 'The Good' as the Principal Name of God: An Aristotelian Reading of Dionysius," *Analogia* 18–20 (2023), p. 16.

[11] *Expositio libri Peryermeneias*, I, lect. 2: "[16a3] Now, those that are in vocal sound are signs of passions in the soul. And those that are written are signs of those in vocal sound. [16a5] And just as letters are not the same for all men, so neither are vocal sounds the same. But the passions of the soul, of which vocal sounds are the first signs, are the same for all; and the things of which passions of the soul are likenesses are also the same." The English translation was prepared by Jean T. Oesterle (Marquette University, 1962). The dedication was translated by Joseph Kenny OP (1936–2013). They have been revised and edited by The Aquinas Institute.

[12] Ibidem, I, lect. 2 [11].

[13] *STh*, I, q. 39, a. 3: "[N]omina substantiva significant aliquid per modum substantiae: nomina vero adiectiva significant aliquid per modum accidentis."

modes depending on the aspect in which we consider these words. Aquinas distinguishes between different modes of signifying (*modus significandi*), some of which overlap: noun names signify in the manner of substance, adjective names, on the other hand, signify in the manner of accident (*adiective*).[14] Distinction within the parts of speech (noun, adjective) is the grammatical mode, while description in terms of substance and accident introduces metaphysical categories. Moreover, under further analysis, it can be seen that the noun and adjective terms of the grammatical mode can signify concrete (*in concreto*) or abstract (*in abstracto*), which in turn introduces the logical mode. And this mode of signifying appears to be central to Aquinas's semantics regarding Divine names.

1.2. Concrete and Abstract Modes as Logical Modes

> All words imposed by us to signify something complete and subsistent signify in the concrete, as befits composite things. Words imposed to signify simple forms signify something not as subsistent, but as that whereby something is, as "whiteness" signifies as that whereby something is white.[15]

Thus, a concrete term means something as composite and as existing, either as a subject or something in a subject, while an abstract term refers to something as simple and as that by which something is (*quo aliquid est*). Thomas points out that concretes are not subsistent forms; hence they are complete and subsistent only as composites. For this reason, in them the form is not what exists (*quod*); rather, the form is that by virtue of which something exists (*quo*). Aquinas highlights the fact that this metaphysical characterization of the forms of composite beings is reflected in our language. Whenever we use a word to designate something as a complete and existing being, we use a specific name that refers to the composite. In contrast, when we use a name to designate a simple form, it does not signify that form as existing, but as that by which something is (*quo*). An example is the name "whiteness" (*albedo*), which does indeed signify a form, but, more specifically, it signifies it as that by which something is white.[16]

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[14] *STh*, I, q. 13, a. 1, ad 2.

[15] *STh*, I, q. 13, a. 1, ad 2: "[O]mnia nomina a nobis imposita ad significandum aliquid completum subsistens, significant in concretione, prout competit compositis; quae autem imponuntur ad significandas formas simplices, significant aliquid non ut subsistens, sed ut quo aliquid est, sicut albedo significat ut quo aliquid est album."

[16] G.T. Doolan, "Aquinas on 'The Good'," p. 17.

Another example is "man" (*homo*) and "humanity" (*humanitas*),[17] which mean the same res (humanity inherent in composite things), but these terms differ conceptually (*conceptione* or: *ratione*): "humanity" means humanity as "that by which something is," while "man" means humanity as compositum and as existing. In this way, Aquinas indicates that the terms "humanity" and "man" signify the same nature, but while the term "humanity" signifies human nature *ut partem*, the term 'man' signifies human nature *ut totum*. Similarly, the *modi significandi* of abstract and concrete terms are said to differ insofar as the concrete term signifies *per modum completi participantis*, and the abstract term signifies *per modum diminuti et partis formalis*. The difference in denotation between the terms "human" and "humanity" explains why we refer to human being as "man" and not as "humanity," even though the term "man" means humanity, and human being is called "man" from its humanity.[18] Two terms, therefore, can signify the same *res* in different modes as the terms "man" and "humanity" do just that — as a concrete and as an abstract.[19]

Aquinas states that "every name is either abstract or concrete. But concrete names do not belong to God, since He is simple, nor do abstract names belong to Him, forasmuch as they do not signify any perfect subsisting thing."[20] Here we

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[17] *De ente et essentia*, c. 2: "Sic igitur patet quod essentiam hominis significat hoc nomen homo et hoc nomen humanitas, sed diversimode, ut dictum est: quia hoc nomen homo significat eam ut totum, in quantum scilicet non praecidit designationem materiae sed implicite continet eam et indistincte, sicut dictum est quod genus continet differentiam; et ideo praedicatur hoc nomen homo de individuis. Sed hoc nomen humanitas significat eam ut partem, quia non continet in significatione sua nisi id quod est hominis in quantum est homo, et praecidit omnem designationem; unde de individuis hominis non praedicatur. Et propter hoc nomen essentiae quandoque invenitur praedicatum de re, dicimus enim Socratem esse essentiam quandam; et quandoque negatur, sicut dicimus quod essentia Socratis non est Socrates."

[18] R.E. Vargas Della Cas, *Thomas de Aquino on the Apprehension of Being: The Role of Judgement in Light of Thirteenth-Century Semantics*, dissertation, Milwaukee, WI, Marquette University, 2013, p. 75. In what follows, the author also deals (in addition to nouns and adjectives) with verbs in the infinitive and their corresponding nouns and verb participles as concrete and abstract names, for example, "esse," "essendum" and "ens;" Aquinas contrasts the pair "esse" and "ens" and the pair "currere" and "currens" as denoting abstract and concrete, respectively.

[19] "The concrete term 'man' can be predicated of an individual man because it signifies human nature ut totum or per modum totius, that is, it signifies 'what has humanity' (*habens humanitatem*). The abstract term 'humanity', on the other hand, cannot be predicated of an individual man because it signifies human nature *ut partem* or *per modum partis*, that is, it signifies humanity as a form or as 'that by which' [man is man]. In the predication of a term, therefore, a distinction needs to be made between the *res significata* and the *modus significandi* of the term. Both belong to the conception signified" (Ibidem, p. 82).

[20] *STh*, I, q. 13, a. 1.

have a fundamental semantic problem for humans in naming God, because on the one hand God exists just like the created complex beings we know and name, but unlike them, God is a simple form. So we use abstract names to express this simplicity, but these simple forms, such as the aforementioned *albedo* and *humanitas* do not exist, while God does exist.[21] Concrete names must therefore be used to express this existence of God and His self-existence and perfection; so both abstract and concrete names mean something about God "although both these kinds of names fail to express His mode of being, forasmuch as our intellect does not know Him in this life as He is."[22]

The distinction introduced by Aquinas between *res significata* and *modus significandi* avoids, first of all, the real or apparent contradictions that the language of Dionysius the Areopagite's Neoplatonism seems to offer with regard to Divine names. Nevertheless, the problem does not disappear, because for Thomas our difficulty in naming God is primarily due to the imperfection of the *modi significandi* of the terms we use. Considering only the modes of signification (*modi significandi*), all of our terms are far too inadequate with regard to naming God, because we give (*imponere*) our terms meaning based on our modes of understanding. Even when we assign our terms to signify absolute perfections that are proper to God, such as "wisdom" and "goodness," our *modus intelligendi*, and therefore our *modus significandi* of these perfections, is always inadequate.

> Our terms have either a concrete or an abstract mode of signification. A concrete term predicated of God has the advantage of signifying what subsists, but the disadvantage of suggesting composition. An abstract term predicated of God has the advantage of simplicity, but the disadvantage of signifying as "that by which."[23]

In summary, the way we mark our words necessarily follows our way of understanding. Consequently, in every superior name of God there is an imperfection due to the *modus significandi* of that name. Thomas, however, makes it clear that there is no imperfection in its *res significata*, since it belongs to God in an eminent way. As an example, he gives the names "goodness" (*bonum*) and "goodness" (*bonitas*).[24] Both signify the *res significata* of formality, which is goodness.

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[21] Cf. G.T. Doolan, "Aquinas on 'The Good'," p. 18.

[22] *STh*, I, q. 13, a. 1, ad 2: "Quia igitur et Deus simplex est, et subsistens est, attribuimus ei et nomina abstracta, ad significandam simplicitatem eius; et nomina concreta, ad significandum subsistentiam et perfectionem ipsius, quamvis utraque nomina deficiant a modo ipsius, sicut intellectus noster non cognoscit eum ut est, secundum hanc vitam."

[23] R.E. Vargas Della Cas, *Thomas Aquinas on the Apprehension of Being*, p. 83

[24] *ScGent*, I, c. 30.

Assuming that the name "goodness" signifies its *res significata* as a simple form, Aquinas explains that it nevertheless necessarily follows our way of understanding, which means that the abstract way of signifying this name does not signify goodness as something that subsists. In contrast, the concrete name "good" does indeed signify the goodness of God as something that is subsistent, but it does so through concretization, (con)signifying composition rather than simplicity.[25]

> In this respect no term is becomingly applied to God, but only in respect of that which the term is employed to signify. Therefore, as Dionysius teaches (*Celestial Hierarchy* ii, 3), such terms can be either affirmed or denied of God: affirmed, on account of the signification of the term; denied, on account of the mode of signification.[26]

In the context of predication, therefore, we must either begin to deny or come up with yet another way of signification when we apply some terms to God. To clarify the difference in *modi praedicandi* when we predicate the same term for God and creatures, Aquinas introduces the concept of "analogy,"[27] but this will be discussed in the final section of this paper. Right now, let us delve into denial.

2. To Know What God Is Not

> Moreover, the idea of negation is always based on an affirmation, as evinced by the fact that every negative proposition is proved by an affirmative; therefore, unless the human mind knew something positively about God, it would be unable to deny anything about him. And it would know nothing if nothing that it affirmed about God were positively verified about him. Hence, following Dionysius (Div. Nom. xiii), we must hold that these terms signify the divine essence, albeit defectively and imperfectly, the proof of which is as follows.[28]

St. Thomas clearly states here that the condition for formulating negation is an affirmation that has been expressed prior to the negation, that is, a statement

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[25] Cf. G.T. Doolan, "Aquinas on 'The Good,'" p. 19.

[26] *ScGent*, I, c. 30: "Et quantum ad hoc nullum nomen Deo convenienter aptatur, sed solum quantum ad id ad quod significandum nomen imponitur. Possunt igitur, ut Dionysius docet, huiusmodi nomina et affirmari de Deo et negari: affirmari quidem, propter nominis rationem; negari vero, propter significandi modum."

[27] R.E. Vargas Della Cas, *Thomas Aquinas on the Apprehension of Being*, p. 84.

[28] *De Potentia*, q. 7 a. 5, co.: "Et praeterea intellectus negationis semper fundatur in aliqua affirmatione: quod ex hoc patet quia omnis negativa per affirmativam probatur; unde nisi intellectus humanus aliquid de Deo affirmative cognosceret, nihil de Deo posset negare. Non autem cognosceret, si nihil quod de Deo dicit, de eo verificaretur affirmative. Et ideo, secundum sententiam Dionysii, dicendum est, quod huiusmodi nomina significant divinam substantiam, quamvis deficienter et imperfect." Accessed January 6, 2025, https://aquinas.cc/la/en/ QDePot.Q7.A5.SC2.

of the existence of something by means of a judgment. Thus, we must first have a concept (*ratio*) that refers to some being. Simply put, the reverse order is impossible, since being is the first object of the intellect, as Aristotle says. It is therefore insufficient to speak of God only negatively, since all negatives presuppose a positive, in order to judge that certain properties are excluded from it. Speaking of God, it would even be impossible to deny anything unless we could also assert something about Him. On this note, Aquinas refers to Dionysius in Chapter 13 of *The Divine Names* to explain what it means, in his understanding, that names are being given to God truly, albeit imperfectly. Thus, a tension arises over the question of the possibility of formulating judgments about God; predication entails the question of a concept in the intellect, referring to some *res*. The problem of naming God thus brings us back to the semantic triangle: reality, concept, and name. Ultimately, therefore, the problem of predication must, to some extent at least, address ontological issues (the existence of an object and its qualities), epistemological issues (how the object exists in our mind, i.e., what concept we have in our minds), and finally semantic issues, i.e., the question of naming a particular object. Here the problem arises, because the object is God who is simple and perfect. Solutions to these issues are provided by Dionysius the Areopagite and Aquinas. But do their solutions converge, or does Thomas deviate from Dionysius' thought, or perhaps only modifies it?

> This solution of the question is confirmed by the words of Dionysius: *since all things are comprised in the divine nature simply and without limit, it is fitting that he should be praised and named on account of them all* [Pseudo-Dionysius, *De Divinis Nominibus* 1.3 (PG 3:589–90)]. He says *simply* because the perfections which are in creatures by reason of various forms are ascribed to God in reference to his simple essence; and he says *without limit* because no perfection found in creatures is equal to the divine essence, such that it enables the mind under the account of that perfection to define God as he is in himself. A further confirmation may be found in *Metaphysics* 5 [Aristotle, *Metaphisica* V, 16, 1021b 30–1022a 1], where it is stated that the simply perfect is that which contains the perfections of all genera, which words the Commentator expounds as referring to God.[29]

[29] "Haec autem solutio confirmatur per verba Dionysii, qui dicit, quod *quia divinitas omnia simpliciter et incircumfinite in seipsa existentia praeaccipit, ex diversis convenienter laudatur et nominatur. Simpliciter* dicit, quia perfectiones quae in creaturis sunt secundum diversas formas, Deo attribuuntur secundum simplicem eius essentiam: *incircumfinite* dicit, ad ostendendum quod nulla perfectio in creaturis inventa divinam essentiam comprehendit, ut sic intellectus sub ratione illius perfectionis in seipso Deum definiat. Confirmatur etiam per hoc quod habetur V Metaph., quod simpliciter perfectum est quod habet in se perfectiones omnium generum; quod Commentator ibidem de Deo exponit" (Ibidem).

2.1. The Aristotelian Model of Science

The theological *Summa* opens with the question of the status of theology as a science:. "Is sacred doctrine a science?[30] Thomas adopts Aristotle's theory of scientific knowledge, and Aristotle called science an axiomatic system of sentences, based on intuition of mathematical truths and experience, developed methodically by means of formal logic.[31] Aquinas successfully solved the problem posed by introducing two systems instead of Aristotelian single one. He did so by relativizing the very notion of an axiomatic system: philosophy, including all natural sciences and humanities, builds a system based on rational cognition, while theology constructs its system on the data of revelation, i.e. the dogmas of faith in this system work like axioms in secular sciences. Thomas's premise is the claim that there can be no contradiction between these systems, since both the world and revelation have a truthful God as their author.[32] Thus, if one's premise is eliminating contradiction and declaratively at least respecting the laws of logic, one is thereby implicating the human mind as a certain criterion for the truthfulness of the assertions derived. And at this point the problem of the very object of theology, i.e. God, arises: whether God exists (*quinque viae*) and what is this God. Seen in the light of the formal requirements of *scientia*, the study of God's mode of being should lead to an essential definition of God expressing what He is (*quid est*). Thus, the purpose of the study is to arrive at a conceptual description of the divine essence, which is to serve as the medium through which the proper attributes of the subject are proved; in the standard Aristotelian description of scientific knowledge, the proof (*demonstratio*) of the proper attributes should proceed from the definition of the subject's essence.[33]

> But our mind cannot be led by sense so far as to see the essence of God; because the sensible effects of God do not equal the power of God as their cause. Hence from the knowledge of sensible things the whole power of God cannot be known; nor therefore can His essence be seen. But because they are His effects and depend on their cause, we can be led from them so far as to know of God *whether He exists*, and to know of Him what must necessarily belong to Him, as the first cause of all things, exceeding all things caused by Him. Hence we know that His relationship with creatures so far as to be the cause of them all; also that creatures differ from Him, inasmuch as He is not in any way part of what is caused by

[30] *STh*, Ia, a. 2.
[31] J. Bocheński, *Zarys historii filozofii*, Kraków: Philed, 1993, p. 131.
[32] Cf. Ibidem, p. 132.
[33] R.A. te Velde, *Aquinas on God*, p. 72.

> Him; and that creatures are not removed from Him by reason of any defect on His part, but because He superexceeds them all.[34]

From this passage one can read that (i) *quid sit Deus* is beyond the reach of our intellect, and (ii) we can infer things about God on the basis of creation, i.e., His effects. Regarding the first remark, Aquinas refers to the Aristotelian pattern of seeking a definition of the object of science. The *quid sit* question posed requires a definition of essence. The search for a definition is to be carried out by means of a conceptual study of the characteristic and defining features of a thing's being; it is necessary to determine what constitutive elements make a thing a certain kind of being. According to Aristotle, in order to determine the essence of a thing, it must be placed within the categories that typify the basic modes of being. The search for a definition thus takes the form of a categorical analysis that seeks to establish the constitutive elements of essence, and aims to conceptually express the intelligibility inherent in the essence of the thing. Thus, if the question of the existence and essence of God is formulated, it is an ontological inquiry concerning the very reality about which the claims of the Christian faith are supposed to be true. The Aristotelian search for a definition of essence can be upheld with respect to the general goal of clarifying the intelligibility of things, but requires revision and transformation with respect to the logical requirements of definition. For there can be no proof or definition of God, since both procedures are discursive forms of knowledge corresponding to the complex essences of sensory things.[35] The Aristotelian model of seeking a definition must therefore be transformed and in a sense adapted to the single case of the divine essence, which does not fit into any genus and which cannot be positively identified in its essence through a category-based analysis of its essential constitution. The alternative way of identifying God's essence must therefore be indirect and negative with respect to the categorical structure of material reality as such.

Therefore, we cannot know what God is; only what He is not, because "the divine essence by its immensity surpasses every form to which our intellect reaches;

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[34] *STh*, Ia, q. 12, a. 12: "Ex sensibilibus autem non potest usque ad hoc noster intellectus pertingere, quod divinam essentiam videat: quia creaturae sensibiles sunt effectus Dei virtutem causae non adaequentes. Unde ex sensibilium cognitione non potest tota Dei virtus cognosci, et per consequens nec eius essentia videri. Sed quia sunt effectus a causa dependentes, ex eis in hoc perduci possumus, ut cognoscamus de Deo an est; et ut cognoscamus de ipso ea quae necesse est ei convenire secundum quod est prima omnium causa, excedens omnia sua causata. Unde cognoscimus de ipso habitudinem ipsius ad creaturas, quod scilicet est omnium causa; et differentiam creaturarum ab ipso, quod scilicet ipse non est aliquid eorum quae ab eo causantur: et quod haec non removentur ab eo propter eius defectum, sed quia superexcedit." Cf. *STh*, I, 13, 1; I, 13, 10 ad 5; I, 87, 7, ad 3; *In I Sent*. 22, 1, 2. Accessed January 6, 2025, https://aquinas.cc/la/en/ ST.I.Q12.A12.C.

[35] R.A. te Velde, *Aquinas on God*, p. 72–73.

and thus we cannot apprehend it by knowing what it is."[36] The key question, therefore, is in what sense does this "knowledge of what God is not" constitute true knowledge? In what sense can we still claim to have true knowledge of God if this knowledge consists mainly of knowing what God is not? What is the nature of the negative dimension of knowledge about God?

Undoubtedly, this negative formulation of *quomodo non sit* is an important feature of the thought of Thomas, who is acutely aware that the human intellect can in no way penetrate or comprehend the essence of God by means of the concepts it creates in knowing the nature of sensory reality. Besides, the formula *quomodo non sit* is an expression of the fundamental distinction between the world of creatures on the one hand, and God as the beginning and end of all creatures on the other. God is not part of the totality of all that exists; there is an essential boundary between the universe of creatures and the eternal One who stands apart from the whole of the universe.[37] Nevertheless, this distance of God from the world of creatures does not nullify His relation of being the cause of everything. This relation opens up the possibility of formulating statements about God. The negation by which God is distinguished from His creatures must somehow depend on the prior affirmation of God as cause. Thomas notes that negation with respect to an object must always be based on a prior assertion. Every negative proposition is verified, he says, by a positive proposition.

> Moreover, the idea of negation is always based on an affirmation, as evinced by the fact that every negative proposition is proved by an affirmative; therefore, unless the human mind knew something positively about God, it would be unable to deny anything about him.[38]

For Thomas, the path of negation in approaching God is grounded in causality. *Remotio* indicates that God must be separate from all things insofar as He is the cause of all things. *Via negationis* presupposes a prior affirmation of God as the

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[36] *ScGent*, I, c. 14. With regard to simple essences (or separate substances), there is no knowledge of what they are by definition; Thomas extends this inability to know the essence of immaterial forms to angels as well, i.a. in his *Super Boetium De Trinitate*, q. 6, a. 3: "Now knowledge by way of the sensible is inadequate to enable us to know the essences of immaterial substances. So we conclude that we do not know *what* immaterial forms are, but only that they are." Accessed January 6, 2025, https://aquinas.cc/la/en/ DeTrin.C2.Q6.A3.15.

[37] R.A. te Velde, *Aquinas on God*, p. 74. The author extensively discusses interpretations of Aquinas in the key of negative theology by scholars affiliated with the Thomas Institute at the University of Utrecht. Cf. Ibidem, p. 73 et seq.

[38] *De Potentia*, q. 7, a. 5: "Et praeterea intelectus negationis semper fundatur in aliqua affirmatione: quod ex hoc patet quia omnis negativa per afirmativam probatur; unde nisi intellectus humanus aliquid de Deo affirmative cognosceret, nihil de Deo posset negare."

cause on which all things depend in their existence. All negation in relation to God follows from the original negation that God, being the cause of all things, is not one of the things caused by Himself. Negation, therefore, is part of the way in which God's intelligibility is to be expressed from the viewpoint of His effects. It is therefore impossible to think and speak truly about God without allowing every predicate, derived from the effects, to pass through negation. When it is said that God is *X*, given that He expressed Himself in this way in creation, such a claim should be followed by a negation, denying that God is *X* in the same way that the effect is *X*. Negation is thus a constitutive part of God's intelligibility, since it can be formulated based on the existing effects.[39] This method of negation inspired by the teaching of the Areopagite receives a new formulation in Aquinas in his teaching of the so-called *via triplex*.

2.2. Via triplex

It has been established that the object that is God eludes the scientific procedure offered by the Aristotelian theory of knowledge, i.e. cognition by definition of His essence, which is a condition for proof (*demonstratio*) in the first place. Aquinas's method of knowing God by means of three operations, i.e. remotion,[40] eminence and causality, is interpreted as the Areopagite's most obvious and recognizable influence on Thomas.[41]

> Thereafter, it is necessary to inquire how we know God neither intelligible nor sensible nor anything existing of universally existing things. Therefore can it possibly be true to say that we know God, not from his nature? For this is unknown and exceeding every reason and mind; but from the order of the whole of all things, as proposed from him, having both certain images and assimilations of his divine exemplars, we ascend to that which is above all things by way and

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[39] R.A. Te Velde, *Aquinas on God*, p. 75.

[40] I use the term "remotion" as the equivalent of the Latin *remotio* for the reason that the translation of this word as "removal", "denial" or "negation" does not fully convey the meaning of the term. The Latin *remotio* is derived from the compound verb *re-moveo*, which means "to reverse," "to move backward," with a further meaning "to remove." In the texts analyzed by Aquinas, who follows the translation of John the Sarracen, the term is a translation of the Greek ἀφαίρεσις [afairesis] — "taking away," "taking back" — from the verb ἀφαιρέω — "I take away" — because αἱρέω means "I take," so the added preposition ἀπό as a prefix means "I take away/back something." In my view, the term *remotio* (ἀφαίρεσις) expresses (i) action [in the active sense] and the effect of the action [in the passive sense], (ii) the priority of affirmation [being] over negation [non-being], as the condition of all negation is the prior existence of something, (iii) a certain dynamic. Thus, for reasons of rendering adequately the thoughts of the analyzed authors, it seems justified to use an anglicized version of the Latin term *remotio*.

[41] Cf. F. O'Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionisius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas*, Leiden: Brill, 1992, p. 32.

> order according to virtue, in the removal of all things and by excess and in the cause of all things;[42]

This research procedure, given in the quotation from *The Divine Names* by Dionysius, is supposed to lead to the knowledge of God by man *in statu viae*, and is called *triplex via*; the kernel of this method seems to be the principle of causality, the other two operations (remotion and eminence) being but instances of this fundamental, causal relationship between God and creatures.

The path that leads to the knowledge of God is the path of *per medium creationis*, the indirect path from the world of sensory things; this *via media* from creatures to God is based on the principle of causality, because, insofar as sensory things are known to be effects of God, they lead us to the knowledge of the existence of God as their cause along with the knowledge of what must necessarily pertain to God as the cause of creation. What we can know about God, thus ascending from sense effects to their transcendent cause, is: (i) that He is the cause of all things; (ii) that creatures differ from Him because He is not one of their effects; (iii) that God differs not because He lacks a certain perfection, but because He surpasses all His effects in perfection. It may be interesting to contrast the passage from Dionysius quoted above with Aquinas's commentary on it:

> Therefore we do not know God, seeing his essence, *but* we know him *from* the order of the whole universe. For the universe of creatures itself is *proposed* to us by God in order that through it we might know God, inasmuch as the ordered universe has *certain* imperfect *images and assimilations of divine things* which are compared to them as exemplary principles to images. And therefore from the order of the universe, just as by a certain *way and order*, *we ascend* through intellect *according to* our *virtue* to God, who *is above all things*; and this in three ways: first of all and principally *in the removal of all things*, namely inasmuch as nothing of these things that we see in the order of creatures do we reckon God or befitting

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[42] *DeDivNom*, c. VII, lec. 4 (p. 273): "§ 3, 320. Praeterea inquirere oportet quomodo nos cognoscimus Deum neque intelligibilem neque sensibilem neque aliquid universaliter existentium existentem. 321. Numquid igitur verum est dicere quoniam Deum cognoscimus, non ex natura Ipsius? Ignotum enim est hoc et omnem rationem et mentem excedens; sed ex omnium totorum ordinatione, sicut ex ipso proposita et imagines quasdam et assimilationes divinorum ipsius exemplarium habente, ad illud quod est super omnia via et ordine secundum virtutem ascendimus, in omnium ablatione et excessu et in omnium causa;" Ἐπὶ δὲ τούτοις ζητῆσαι χρή, πῶς ἡμεῖς θεὸν γινώσκομεν οὐδὲ νοητὸν οὐδὲ αἰσθητὸν οὐδέ τι καθόλου τῶν ὄντων ὄντα. Μήποτε οὖν ἀληθὲς εἰπεῖν, ὅτι θεὸν γινώσκομεν οὐκ ἐκ τῆς αὐτοῦ φύσεως, ἄγνωστον γὰρ τοῦτο καὶ πάντα λόγον καὶ νοῦν ὑπεραῖρον, ἀλλ΄ ἐκ τῆς πάντων τῶν ὄντων διατάξεως ὡς ἐξ αὐτοῦ προβεβλημένης καὶ εἰκόνας τινὰς καὶ ὁμοιώματα τῶν θείων αὐτοῦ παραδειγμάτων ἐχούσης εἰς τὸ ἐπέκεινα 198 πάντων ὁδῷ καὶ τάξει κατὰ δύναμιν ἄνιμεν ἐν τῇ πάντων ἀφαιρέσει καὶ ὑπεροχῇ καὶ ἐν τῇ πάντων αἰτί [197.17–198.3]. Accessed January 6, 2025, https://aquinas.cc/la/en/ DeDivNom.C7.L3.26 (translated by Urban Hannon).

> God; whereas secondarily through excess: for we do not remove from God the perfections of creatures such as life, wisdom, and things of this sort, on account of a defect of God, but on account of the fact that he exceeds every perfection of a creature, therefore we remove wisdom from him, because he exceeds every wisdom; third, according to the causality of all things, while we consider that whatever is in creatures proceeds from God as from a cause. And therefore our knowledge has itself in a mode contrary to the knowledge of God: for God indeed knows creatures through his nature, yet we know God through creatures.[43]

We thus come to know God not by contemplating His essence, for this belongs to the nature of divine self-knowledge, but by reflecting on the order of the entire universe. Thomas points out that when God calls (produces) things into existence (*esse*), He not only gives them their being, but also produces that being along with order in things (*esse cum ordine in rebus*). Going further than Dionysius, Aquinas certainly argues that the universe of creatures is given to us by God (*est nobis a Deo proposita*) so that through it we may know Him; yet the key here is the concept of exemplarism, itself grounded in the principle of causality, which says that a well-ordered universe contains certain imperfect "images and similitudes of things divine;" such divine realities are compared to the universe as basic models for its images.[44] The first and fundamental move is to remove all things (*in omnium ablatione*) that we see in the order of creatures as not corresponding to God, i.e., that their cause, God, far exceeds the creature, that is, the effect. The second stride on the path of knowing God is to understand that the cause, God, exceeds all perfections of creatures, such as life, wisdom, etc., and thus the positive intention of the negative movement is taken into account by reducing all the positive substance of the effect to its cause; the cause is the effect in a more eminent way insofar as it possesses originally and excessively all the

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[43] *DeDivNom* c. VII, lec. 4, 729 (p. 274): "Non ergo cognoscimus Deum, videntes eius essentiam, *sed* cognoscimus ipsum *ex* ordine totius universi. Ipsa enim universitas creaturarum est nobis a Deo *proposita* ut per eam Deum cognoscamus, inquantum universum ordinatum habet *quasdam imagines et assimilationes* imperfectas *divinorum* quae comparantur ad ipsas sicut principalia exemplaria ad imagines. Sic ergo ex ordine universi, sicut quadam *via et ordine, ascendimus* per intellectum, *secundum* nostram *virtutem* ad Deum, qui *est super omnia*; et hoc tribus modis: primo quidem et principaliter *in omnium ablatione*, inquantum scilicet nihil horum quae in creaturarum ordine inspicimus, Deum aestimamus aut Deo conveniens; secundario vero *per excessum*: non enim creaturarum perfectiones ut vitam, sapientiam et huiusmodi, Deo auferimus propter defectum Dei, sed propter hoc quod omnem perfectionem creaturae excedit, propterea removemus ab eo sapientiam, quia omnem sapientiam excedit; tertio, *secundum causalitatem* omnium dum consideramus quod quidquid est in creaturis a Deo procedit sicut a causa. Sic ergo nostra cognitio, contrario modo se habet cognitioni Dei: nam Deus creaturas quidem per suam naturam cognoscit, nos autem Deum per creaturas."

[44] Cf. F. O'Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionisius*, p. 33.

perfections of the effect.[45] The third step is, "when we recognize that whatever is in creatures comes from God as the cause."[46] This last step is established in Questio 2 of the *Summa theologica* (*an Deus sit*), where Thomas argues for the existence of God as the first cause: given that sensory things reveal several ontological characteristics that are not intelligible on their own — being moved, being caused, being contingent, being more or less perfect, and being directed to an end-purpose — it is necessary to affirm evidentially the first being (unmoved, uncaused, most perfect, etc.) that is the cause of changing and contingent reality. At the end of his commentary on the above-quoted passage from *The Divine Names* by the Areopagite, Thomas concludes that our cognition works in the opposite way to the divine cognition: "For God indeed knows creatures through His nature, while we know God through creatures."[47]

Reason, therefore, proceeds from effect to cause, while the actual movement — the process of causality — proceeds from cause to effect. In its ascent to God, the process of reason begins with the effect and first determines the cause in its difference from the effect, and therefore as still dependent on the effect. The claim that the cause is not what the effect is, is not yet sufficient and adequate, because the effect is taken as the stable and positive basis from which movement toward the cause occurs, and is therefore not yet formally understood as the effect. In reality, however, the cause is prior to the effect and must therefore be defined as not being the effect exactly insofar as it is superior to the effect, accumulating in simple unity all the many and varied perfections on the side of the effect. The transition from negation to eminence is therefore crucial. This should be seen as the way in which the intellect is brought to the reflexive recognition that the starting point of its logical movement is in fact the effect of the actual motion of the cause. The lack (that which is negative) must be removed from the cause and placed on the side of the effect. Since negation cannot cancel the earlier and foundational affirmation with regard to God's being, the affirmation must be repeated through negation: the cause is not one of its effects, precisely to the extent that, as a cause, it surpasses all things caused by it and possesses within itself all the perfections of effects in a higher manner. Thus, it is possible to see that the negative aspect is an essential part of the threefold way of knowing God from His effects. What distinguishes it from any kind of "negative theology" is that the negative movement receives qualification through eminence. The

[45] Cf. R.A. Te Velde, *Aquinas on God*, p. 76.

[46] DeDivNom c. VII, lec. 4, 729 (p. 274): "dum consideramus quod quidquid est in creaturis a Deo procedit sicut a causa."

[47] *DeDivNom* c. VII, lec. 4, 729 (p. 274): "…nam Deus creaturas quidem per suam naturam cognoscit, nos autem Deum per creaturas."

logical movement of knowledge from effect to cause is not a reflection of the actual passage from cause to effect, but in the order of knowledge this inverted order of reality is recognized and receives its expression. In this sense, it can be said that the logical movement of the triple knowledge formally articulates the intelligibility of the cause on the basis of its reflection in the effect.[48]

Thus, we cannot know God directly as He is in Himself, but instead only know God indirectly, from the part of His creatures, "as their cause, through perfection and negation."[49] This threefold way *(triplex via*) of knowing God serves as a kind of directive in analyzing how names can be transferred from creatures to God.

3. Knowing the Unknowable

> We conclude, then, that in the case of immaterial forms we know that they exist; and instead of knowing what they are we have knowledge of them by way of negation, by way of causality, and by way of transcendence. These are the same ways Dionysius proposes in his *Divine Names*; and this is how Boethius understands that we can know the divine form by removing all images, and not that we know that it is.[50]

In this commentary on Boethius, Thomas clearly suggests that the Dionysian *triplex via* method enters in place of knowing by definition; the triple way of knowing God is presented as a kind of substitute for definitional knowledge of what God is.[51] The form of the created effect does indeed express something of God; it contains a certain "likeness" of God; not a perfect likeness through which we can see the divine essence as such, but nevertheless a likeness in which the cause is intelligibly present. This *triplex via* enables us to understand and predicate about God *causaliter*; this pointing to God as the cause entails at the same time understanding Him *substantialiter*. For in thinking of God from the perspective of His effect, one must conclude that negativity lies, indeed, on the side of effect. The positive purpose of negation must therefore be expressed by returning all the positive substance of the effect to the cause in a more perfect

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[48] R.A. Te Velde, *Aquinas on God*, p. 76–77.

[49] *STh*, I, q. 13, a. 1: "[Deus] cognoscitur a nobis ex creaturis, secundum habitudinem principii, et per modum excellentiae et remotionis."

[50] *Super Boetium De Trinitate*, q. 6, a. 3: "Ita ergo de formis immaterialibus cognoscimus an est, et habemus de eis loco cognitionis quid est cognitionem per negationem, per causalitatem, et per excessum; quos etiam modos Dionysius ponit in libro De divinis nominibus. Et hoc modo Boethius intelligit esse inspiciendam ipsam divinam formam per remotionem omnium phantasmatum; non ut sciatur de ea quid est." Accessed January 6, 2025, https://aquinas.cc/la/en/ DeTrin.C2.Q6.A3.20.

[51] R.A. Te Velde, *Aquinas on God*, p. 77.

way. God is not a negative transcendence, but an excessive transcendence, which means that He is distinguished from all things in that He is all things in an excessive way, which Thomas makes clear when he says that

> "these names are applied to God not as the cause only, but also essentially. For the words, *God is good*, or *wise*, signify not only that He is the cause of wisdom or goodness, but that these exist in Him in a more excellent way."[52] Aquinas thus concludes that the names of perfections *per viam eminentiae* in the order of being belong to God in the first place, since "perfections of this kind permeate from God into creatures" (*a Deo huiusmodi perfectiones in creaturas manant*), while in the order of cognition, the names we give to creatures come to the fore, since we first come to know creatures. The *ordo rerum* is thus the inverse of the *ordo cognitionis*, on which predication is based. However, there is still some inadequacy in naming "and therefore, although these terms which our intellect attributes to God from such conceptions do signify that which is the divine substance, yet they do not signify it perfectly as it exists in itself, but as it is understood by us."[53]

God is perfect, even totally perfect, and the attribute of perfection is linked to the relationship of causality. This means that in the reduction of effect to cause, the numerous and diverse perfections on the side of effect are being, as it were, condensed together and unified in the simple unity of cause. God is said to be perfect in the sense that the perfections of creatures, diverse in many kinds of things, are originally, as it were, fused into a unity and present in God as identical to His simple being.[54]

3.1. To Know Non-Being? The Areopagite vs. Aquinas

> God is not said to be not existing as if He did not exist at all, but because He exists above all that exists; inasmuch as He is His own existence. Hence it does

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[52] *STh*, Ia, q. 13, a. 6: "…quod huiusmodi nomina non solum dicuntur de Deo causaliter, sed etiam essentialiter. Cum enim dicitur Deus est bonus, vel sapiens, non solum significatur quod ipse sit causa sapientiae vel bonitatis, sed quod haec in eo eminentius praeexistunt."

[53] *De Potentia*, q. 7 a. 5, co.: "…et ideo licet huiusmodi nomina, quae intellectus ex talibus conceptionibus Deo attribuit, significent id quod est divina substantia, non tamen perfecte ipsam significant secundum quod est, sed secundum quod a nobis intelligitur." Thomas's further explanation in the same passage a little further on is also instructive: "Sic ergo dicendum est, quod quodlibet istorum nominum significat divinam substantiam, non tamen quasi comprehendens ipsam, sed imperfecte: et propter hoc, nomen Qui est, maxime Deo competit, quia non determinat aliquam formam Deo, sed significat esse indeterminate. Et hoc est quod dicit Damascenus, quod hoc nomen qui est, significat *substantiae pelagus infinitum*." Cf. *STh*, Ia, q. 13, a. 1: "Et sic patet quod voces referuntur ad res significandas, mediante conceptione intellectus."

[54] R.A. Te Velde, *Aquinas on God*, 80–81.

> not follow that He cannot be known at all, but that He exceeds every kind of knowledge; which means that He is not comprehended.[55]

Starting from the alternative assumption that God is the Pure Act of Existence,[56] it follows that He is rather "supremely"[57] or "infinitely" cognizable, and that this infinity is limited only by the creature's capacity to contain it,[58] just as the blinding light of the Sun cannot be seen by a bat due to the excess of radiance.[59] God is therefore supremely cognizable to Himself above the intellect and imperfectly cognizable to the human intellect through His action in participating beings, i.e., through "pouring in some way His likeness into all things."[60]

Another issue that Thomas has to deal with is the Areopagite's manner of expression, which implies a contradiction; so Thomas modifies the teaching or revises this manner of expression with regard to negative names and expressions, i.e., those denied with regard to God, such as "non-existence," "non-being," "non-substantivity," etc. Aquinas understands that by expressing himself in this way the Areopagite is just speaking *modo Platonicorum;* nevertheless, it seems to imply disrespect for, or even directly disrespects, the law of non-contradiction, and this may lead to the conclusion that there is some contradiction in God. Thomas resolves this issue using the instrumentarium of Aristotle's philosophy.[61]

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[55] *STh*, Ia, q. 12, a. 1, ad 3.

[56] *STh*, Ia, q. 12, a. 1, resp.: "…Deus, qui est actus purus absque omni permixtione potentiae, quantum in se est, maxime cognoscibilis est."

[57] *STh*, Ia, q. 12, a 1, resp.

[58] *STh*, Ia, q. 12, a. 7.

[59] *STh*, Ia, q. 12, a. 1, resp.: "Sed quod est maxime cognoscibile in se, alicui intellectui cognoscibile non est, propter excessum intelligibilis supra intellectum, sicut sol, qui est maxime visibilis, videri non potest a vespertilione, propter excessum luminis."

[60] *DeDivNom*, c. I, lec. 1, 30: "…*et* ipse *quidem* est *causa* existendi *omnibus*, transfundens in omnia aliqualiter suam similitudinem." Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Book of Causes*, statement 6.

[61] It appears essential to respect the laws of logic, which are based on being. It is on the foundation of "being" that the first operation of the intellect is the knowledge of *quidditas*, while the second operation is the formulation of judgments. The laws of non-contradiction and the excluded middle are not only laws of thought, but also laws of being, as Thomas expresses in his commentary to Aristotle's *Metaphysics*: *Sententia libri Metaphysicae*, l. 4, lec. 6, 605: "…sciendum est, quod, cum duplex sit operatio intellectus: una, qua cognoscit quod quid est, quae vocatur indivisibilium intelligentia: alia, qua componit et dividit: in utroque est aliquod primum: in prima quidem operatione est aliquod primum, quod cadit in conceptione intellectus, scilicet hoc quod dico ens; nec aliquid hac operatione potest mente concipi, nisi intelligatur ens. Et quia hoc principium, impossibile est esse et non esse simul, dependet ex intellectu entis, sicut hoc principium, omne totum est maius sua parte, ex intellectu totius et partis: ideo hoc etiam principium est naturaliter primum in secunda operatione intellectus, scilicet componentis et dividentis. Nec aliquis potest secundum hanc operationem intellectus aliquid intelligere, nisi hoc

Aquinas seeks to exonerate the Areopagite from teaching about the existence of real contradictions and clarifies Platonic language by introducing the distinction between *res significata* and *modus significandi*.

> Our knowledge of God is derived from the perfections which flow from Him to creatures, which perfections are in God in a more eminent way than in creatures. Now our intellect apprehends them as they are in creatures, and as it apprehends them it signifies them by names. Therefore in regards to the names applied to God, there are two things to be considered, namely, the perfections which they signify, such as goodness, life and the like, and their mode of signification. As regards what is signified by these names, they belong properly to God, and more properly than they belong to creatures, and are applied primarily to Him. But as regards their mode of signification, they do not properly and strictly apply to God; for their mode of signification applies to creatures.[62]

If language concerning God is to be meaningful, at least some names, such as "wise," "good," "life," or "power," must refer to Him in an absolute and affirmative way, signifying His substance — even if they fail to represent Him adequately. These names signify perfections (wisdom, life, and so forth) as they are found in creatures; but applied to God, they are to signify perfections that pre-exist in God Himself (*substantialiter*), although the mode of signifying (*modus significandi*) of these names remains tied to the limited and imperfect way in which the named perfections exist in creatures. One can see here the distinction between the *res* and *ratio* of a name. Some names signify (*res*) God in Himself, but according to the manner in which God is known by us (*ratio*); that is, based on His creatures, and thus according to the (imperfect) way creatures represent God. In sum, Thomas argues that *res significata* (the thing signified) is the meaning of the thing, as it were, in itself, and that *modus significandi* (the manner of signifying) is related to human cognition (*ratio*) and human way of naming, which is fraught with inadequacy and hence defective.

Additional light on the reading of Dionysius is shed by a passage in the *Summa contra Gentiles*, where the distinction between *res significata* and *modus significandi*

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principio intellecto. Sicut enim totum et partes non intelliguntur nisi intellecto ente, ita nec hoc principium omne totum est maius sua parte, nisi intellecto praedicto principio firmissimo."

62 *STh*, Ia, q. 13, a. 3, resp.: "…Deum cognoscimus ex perfectionibus procedentibus in creaturas ab ipso; quae quidem perfectiones in Deo sunt secundum eminentiorem modum quam in creaturis. Intellectus autem noster eo modo apprehendit eas, secundum quod sunt in creaturis, et secundum quod apprehendit, ita significat per nomina. In nominibus igitur quae Deo attribuimus, est duo considerare, scilicet, perfectiones *ipsas significatas*, ut bonitatem, vitam, et huiusmodi; et modum significandi. Quantum igitur ad id quod significant huiusmodi nomina, proprie competunt Deo, et magis proprie quam ipsis creaturis, et per prius dicuntur de eo. Quantum vero *ad modum significandi*, non proprie dicuntur de Deo, habent enim modum significandi qui creaturis competit."

is also applied. Thomas argues that what Dionysius says about God apart from assertions and denials, creates the context in which his assertions and denials can be seen as being made in different aspects.

> Accordingly, in every term employed by us, there is imperfection as regards the mode of signification, and imperfection is unbecoming to God, although the thing signified is becoming to God in some eminent way (for example, in the term 'goodness' or 'the good'). For goodness signifies by way of non-subsistence, and the good signifies by way of concretion. In this respect no term is becomingly applied to God, but only in respect of that which the term is employed to signify. Therefore, as Dionysius teaches (*Celestial Hierarchy* ii, 3; also *Divine Names* I, 5 [PG 3, 593 B–C]), such terms can be either affirmed or denied of God: affirmed, on account of the signification of the term; denied, on account of the mode of signification.[63]

Thus, a meaningful discourse on God requires that some things can be said about God, but at the same time that the elementary rules of logic are followed so that this discourse does not descend into the abyss of incomprehensibility. Thomas sees this perfectly in the language of the Areopagite and tries to solve these difficulties by, among other things, introducing the distinction between *res significata* and *modus significandi*, which makes it possible to interpret the teaching of Pseudo-Dionysius without falling into contradictions or a certain unintelligibility. Aquinas perfectly captures in this distinction the categorical property of language and human cognition and the extra-categorical nature of God. Thus, the name signifies something in a categorically limited way, signifying something as situated in a categorically differentiated structure of reality. However, when the name "wise" is said of God, then all categorical limitations and distinctions disappear, because in this case we intend to signify something that completely coincides with the being of God.[64] In God, being God, being wise and being as such are completely the same thing (due to His *simplicitas*). God's wisdom itself cannot be captured and expressed by language and transcends the categorical

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[63] *ScGent*, l. 1, c. 30: "Et sic in omni nomine a nobis dicto, quantum ad modum significandi, imperfectio invenitur, quae Deo non competit, quamvis res significata aliquo eminenti modo Deo conveniat: ut patet in nomine bonitatis et boni; nam bonitas significat ut non subsistens, bonum autem ut concretum. Et quantum ad hoc nullum nomen Deo convenienter aptatur, sed solum quantum ad id ad quod significandum nomen imponitur. Possunt igitur, ut Dionysius docet, huiusmodi nomina et affirmari de Deo et negari: affirmari quidem, propter nominis rationem; negari vero, propter significandi modum."

[64] *STh*, Ia, q. 13, a. 5: "whereas when we apply it [i.e. term 'wise'] to God, we do not mean to signify anything distinct from His essence, or power, or existence." Accessed January 6, 2025, https://aquinas.cc/la/en/ ST.I.Q13.A5.C.

structure of linguistic meanings (*excedentem nominis significationem*).[65] The name "wise," when applied to God, leaves the thing signified (that is, God's wisdom) unintelligible. What it means in God goes beyond the categorical definition of its proper meaning. In a sense, it signifies in God something above and beyond the conceptual content (*ratio concepta*) of the name.[66]

3.2. The Superior Metaphysics

The considerations so far have been meant to show that Thomas had to put significant effort into interpreting Pseudo-Dionysius in accordance with the doctrine of the Church. Aquinas's contribution consisted mainly in disambiguating some of the Areopagite's formulations that were questionable from the point of view of orthodoxy, and in making others more precise. Nevertheless, it seems that one of the more difficult tasks for Thomas was to interpret Dionysius' teaching in light of the latter's contestation or outright rejection of the principle of non-contradiction with regard to God.[67] In the context of the considerations carried out here, this is significant insofar as the rejection of the principle of non-contradiction is at the same time a rejection of the language of being, on which Aquinas builds following Aristotle. It is possible, however, to find evidence even in the Areopagite's text that may bear witness to his retreating from the rejection of the principle of non-contradiction. In Chapter VIII, he responds to the charge of a certain Elymas the Magus (this name appears in Acts 13:8) who refers to the passage from St. Paul stating that God "cannot deny Himself" (2 Tim 2:13) as a way of casting doubt on God's omnipotence; Dionysius' exegesis of this text shows that he does not believe in omnipotence without limitation, but in omnipotence consistent with God's nature as the Perfect One. For God to deny Himself would entail falling away from truth, and since "truth is an existent [i.e., it is a being],"[68] it would also entail falling away from being, which is impossible even for God, since "God cannot fall away from that which is [i.e., being] and

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[65] "Thus also this term *wise* applied to man in some degree circumscribes and comprehends the thing signified; whereas this is not the case when it is applied to God; but it leaves the thing signified as incomprehended, and as exceeding the signification of the name." (Ibidem).

[66] Cf. R.A. Te Velde, *Aquinas on God*, p. 106.

[67] This seems to be the interpretation adopted by John Scotus Eriugena, followed by Nicholas of Cusa with his flagship statement about God as "coincidentia oppositorum." Cf. A.P. Darley, "Predication or Participation? What Is the Nature of Aquinas' Doctrine of Analogy?" *Heythrop Journal* 57/2 (2016), p. 312–324.

[68] *DeDivNom*, textus Dionysii, [§ 6, 341] (p. 287): ...ἡ δὲ ἀλήθεια ὄν ἐστιν· καὶ ἡ τῆς ἀληθείας ἔκπτωσις, τοῦ ὄντος ἔκπτωσις· ["…veritas autem existens est et a veritate casus, ab existente est casus"].

is not an 'is-not' [i.e., non-being],"[69] which clearly indicates in the context of the discussion of God's power that He cannot be and not be at the same time. Dionysius justifies this by the perfect power of God, who cannot lack anything, including truth, knowledge or being. This is a startling text that is difficult to reconcile with his other claims regarding God as "beyond being."[70] Dionysius, therefore, can only deny the language of being by using the language of being, which tacitly testifies to the superiority of Aquinas's metaphysics of the Absolute Being. Aquinas's commentary on *The Divine Names* is quite telling in this regard:

> and he says that, since God is truth itself, that God should deny himself is nothing else than that God should cut himself off from the truth. Yet since the true is the same as being, it would follow that to cut off from the truth is the same as to cut off from being. Therefore that he says that God cannot deny himself is the same as if he were to say that God cannot fail of being. Yet this which is not to fail of being is the same as if he were to say that God is not non-being; by which indeed being itself rather is signified; just as if it should be said that God *cannot not be able*, this does not show that God is impotent, but that he is maximally powerful; and likewise, if it should be said that he does not know himself to be ignorant, such that he has the privation of knowledge, this is to have perfect science itself. Therefore through this: that God cannot deny himself, nothing of his power is detracted by the impossible, but it is the same as if it were to be said that God cannot not be true and being and powerful.[71]

Aquinas shows that the law of identity and the law of non-contradiction are identical to God's own integrity or faithfulness. God cannot contradict Himself, and so it follows that the laws of logic are necessary truths in the divine mind. This makes it possible to maintain a rational discourse about God for Aquinas as well, and explains why there is no ultimate conflict between the truths of faith

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[69] Ibidem: ...ἐκ τοῦ ὄντος ἔκπεσεῖν ὁ θεὸς οὐ δύναται καὶ τὸ μὴ εἶναι οὐκ ἔστιν. ["...ab existente cadere Deus non potest; et hoc non esse non est"].

[70] O'Rourke considers this passage an exception to the normal course of Dionysius' discourse and accuses him of referring to "an evidence to which, on his own terms, he is not entitled." Cf. F. O'Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, p. 202.

[71] *DeDivNom*, c. VIII, lec. 3 [767] (p. 288): "…et dicit quod, cum Deus sit ipsa veritas, Deum negare seipsum, nihil aliud est quam Deum decidere a veritate. Cum autem verum idem sit quod ens, sequitur quod excidere a veritate, idem sit quod excidere ab esse. Quod ergo dicit Deum non posse negare seipsum, idem est ac si diceretur: Deum non posse deficere ab essendo. Hoc autem quod est non deficere ab essendo, idem est ac si diceretur quod Deus non est non ens; quo quidem magis significatur ipsum esse; sicut et si dicatur quod Deus *non potest non posse*, non ostendit quod sit impotens, sed quod sit maxime potens; et similiter, si dicatur quod non cognoscit se nescire ita quod habet scientiae privationem, hoc est ipsum habere perfectam scientiam. Per hoc ergo quod Deus non potest negare seipsum, nihil detrahitur eius potentiae ab impossibili, sed idem est ac si diceretur, quod Deus non potest non esse verus et ens et potens."

and the truths of reason. This analysis shows that, for Aquinas, maintaining the laws of logic also with regard to God makes it possible to construct a theory of analogy as a means of rational discourse concerning God.

4. To Express the Ineffable

For Thomas, *ipsum esse per se subsistens* is the basic formula of "apprehending" God.[72] As the first being, God must be identical with His being (*ipsum esse*); this identity of being itself is not abstract, but the most concrete and fully determined; God is not simply a being without essence, but a being that has fully and completely "merged," and as such possesses, all the infinite fullness of being; hence God's being must be *subsistens* and *perfectus*.

Is it possible, therefore, to say anything about such a Being, and if it can be done, how to do it in order to express this Being in a fairly truthful, though inadequate, manner? The very condition of human speaking of God is the search for a relationship between the world and God as such; and this is where the concept of analogy comes in. Analogy is a key term in solving the problem of how the intangible and transcendent God can be named using names that are originally immersed in the tangible and immanent realm of the human world. It is by means of analogy that Thomas wants to explain how human discourse about God can in fact be discourse about God, thus not treating God as a special object among others.[73] Thomas says:

> Words are signs of ideas, and ideas the similitude of things, it is evident that words relate to the meaning of things signified through the medium of the intellectual conception. It follows therefore that we can give a name to anything in as far as we can understand it.[74]

Pseudo-Dionysius and Aquinas develop a complex logic of naming God that corresponds to their respective concepts of the knowledge concerning God. For Aquinas, there are no additional conditions to be met for negative names or

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[72] G.T. Doolan, "Aquinas on esse subsistens and the third mode of participation," *The Thomist* 82 (2018), p. 611–642. The author analyzes in detail the very formula "ipsum esse per se subsistens" and its relation to the world of creatures through participation; Doolan's text seems to be one of the better ones in recent years on the subject of participation in Aquinas. Cf. Idem, "Aquinas on the Divine Ideas as Exemplar Causes," Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2008.

[73] R.A. Te Velde, *Aquinas on God*, p. 97.

[74] *STh*, Ia, q. 13, a. 1, resp.: "…voces sunt signa intellectuum, et intellectus sunt rerum similitudines. Et sic patet quod voces referuntur ad res significandas, mediante conceptione intellectus. Secundum igitur quod aliquid a nobis intellectu cognosci potest, sic a nobis potest nominari."

negations uttered about God, since they deny either God's properties or a certain relation of God to creatures. Thus, names derived from remotion (*per remotionem*, *via remotionis*) are applied to God directly, without any special objections or reservations. Names derived from eminence (*via eminentiae*), however, require many additional, more precise determinations, and it is to the logic of names of this type that Aquinas devotes much space. Aquinas notes that "in the meaning of names, sometimes that from which the name comes is something else than that for which we use it."[75] This also applies to all names of God. For since it is impossible to know God's essence in this life, and therefore impossible to simply imagine Him, it is also impossible to name Him, since no name applied to Him can come from Him as He is in Himself. Divine names are, in view of this, given to God based on His creatures. Having thus defended the logical possibility of names being applied to God, Aquinas proceeds to explain how these names mean something when what they refer to is an unlimited and ineffable Being, as, being derived from creatures, they inevitably imply a kind of limitation. To solve this problem, Aquinas notes that names carry with them both *res significata* and *modus significandi*.[76] Some names, such as "being," "good," and the like, although they carry with them a limited *modus significandi*, as they derive from sense experience and are the product of a limited human intellect, in their "inner formal meaning"[77] they do not imply any limitation. Therefore, names such as these are spoken of God literally; names, therefore, that signify limitation can be applied to God. Finally, Aquinas provides a foundation for the meaning of these terms by distinguishing an intermediate term between univocality and equivocality, namely analogy.[78] Aquinas circumscribes his theological semantics of the predication of the Divine names with certain conditions.

As noted in the introductory section, for Aquinas, words have both logical and grammatical modes; for the question of the predication of God's names, the

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[75] *STh*, Ia, q. 13, a. 2, ad 2.

[76] *STh*, Ia, q. 13, a. 3, resp.

[77] Cf. R. Garrigou-Lagrange, *Reality: A Synthesis of Thomistic Thought*, translated by Patrick Cummins, New York: Vail-Ballou Press, Inc., 1950, p. 88.

[78] *STh*, Ia, q. 13, a. 5. Thomas is indebted to Aristotle for pointing out the relation of "many to one" (pros hen), for example, in the juxtaposition of specific goods that are called good in relation to a single idea (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1.6. 1096b 14–29), or in the many different categories, such as time, place, etc., which refer to substance by a certain way of ordering or organization, or refer to relations between similar parts in different animals, which can be seen as having a single function (H. Lyttkens, *The Analogy between God and the World*, Uppsala: Lundequist, 1953, p. 29–58). St. Thomas accepts this conception of the "pros hen" relation and applies the name of analogy to it, although he often uses the term *proportio* in the sense of just analogy. It should be noted here that Aristotle distinguishes "pros hen" from the meaning of analogy that is his own in *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.6. 1096b 25.

important modes are the concrete and abstract modes, which are logical modes, and it is these modes that Aquinas's Dionysian Divine naming negates. Concrete modes have the advantage of consignifying subsistence, but the disadvantage of consignifying composition; abstract modes have the advantage of consignifying simplicity, but the disadvantage of consignifying inherence. These defects must be negated, and therefore the modes must be negated by means of Divine naming. The semantic triangle presented in the introductory section clearly indicates this relationship that exists between *modi essendi*, *modi intelligendi* and *modi significandi*. The mind both reflects and reproduces the reality it understands: it understands the individual according to the universal *modus intelligendi*,[79] but this mode of understanding does not correspond to any external thing that is universal. The modes of meaning (*modi significandi*) follow the modes of understanding (*modi intelligendi*).

In the context of the theory of analogy and analogical predication as inherent in the names of God, it is important to note the discussion among terminist logicians regarding analogical terms, specifically the number of terms (*rationes*) involved. Aquinas is not clear on this issue, since at different periods of his work and in his various writings he gives different answers regarding this question: in *De principiis naturae* he speaks of a plurality of *rationes*, in the *Summa theologiae* we are told that neither one *ratio* nor diverse *rationes* are involved, in his commentary on the *Sentences*, he claims that only one *intentio* is involved which is used in different ways.[80] Thus, Thomas Aquinas himself seems to have given rise to a heated debate around the problem of analogy, hence the positions with regard to this issue are, both in the past and today, highly divergent.[81] Since a detailed analysis of this issue exceeds the scope and purpose of this presentation, the next

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[79] I owe the comments given in this paragraph to one of the anonymous reviewers of this article.

[80] Cf. R.E. Vargas Della Cas, *Thomas Aquinas on the Apprehension of Being*, p. 84–85.

[81] It is commonly said that Aquinas had no developed doctrine of analogy, and certainly no systematic approach to it. Mentions of analogy in Aquinas are always occasional — he invokes analogy to solve specific problems — and for this reason commentators hoping to formulate a Thomistic doctrine of analogy have had much to argue about. There is a very rich literature on analogy, to name just a few titles and names of reputable scholars discussing this issue: D. Burrell, *Aquinas: God and* Action, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979; Idem, *Analogy and Philosophical Language*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973; R.M. McInerny, *Aquinas and Analogy*, Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1996; B. Mondin, *The Principle of Analogy in Protestant and Catholic Theology*, 2nd ed., The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1968; I. Wilks, "Aquinas on Analogy: The Distinction of Many-to-One and One-to-Another," *The Modern Schoolman* 75 (1997), p. 35–53; J.P. Hochschild, *The Semantics of Analogy: Rereading Cajetan's De Nominum Analogia*, Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010.

section will focus solely on outlining the issue and presenting what seems likely to be Aquinas's solution in relation to the problem of the Divine names.

4.1. Analogy

Aquinas mentions analogy in his commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics* as one of the logical modes of second intentions[82] because, like the univocal universal term, it is also one thing that can be said of many:

> First, he indicates the different senses in which the term "one" is used; and second (1017a3), the different senses in which the term "many" is used, at *moreover, it is evident*. In regard to the first he does two things. First, he gives the different senses in which things are one from the viewpoint of nature, that is, according to the conditions found in reality; second (1016b31), from the viewpoint of logic, that is, according to the considerations of logic, at *further, some things*.[83]

The relation of "many to one" (*pros hen*), which Thomas adopts and applies to it the name of analogy, is clearly taken from Aristotle; Aristotle uses this relation in the juxtaposition of specific goods that are called good in relation to a single concept,[84] or in the many different categories (such as time, place, etc.) that refer to a substance by a certain way of organization, or in the relation between similar parts in different animals that can be considered to have the same function.[85]

Aquinas sees in this method of naming the potential for the seemingly hard-to-solve problem of how finite creatures can give true names to the infinite God,

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[82] Cf. *In I Metaphysics*, lec. 10 [158]. When I cognize a thing, I am in a real relation with the thing cognized and at the same time the thing is in a relation of reason with me. "First and second intentionality express two stages of this relation. First intentionality refers to the relation that a thing has to the mind, while second intentionality indicates the relation that a thing qua cognized has to the mind. Thus, first intentionality involves direct cognition, while second intentionality reflexive cognition. This theory of intentionality has two purposes: first, to de-psychologize the cognitive process and second, to allow the application of Aristotle's table of categories to the sphere of the mental" (F. Amerini, "Thomas Aquinas and Hervaeus Natalis on First and Second Intentionality," *Topoi* 41 (2022), p. 159). The function of signifying for Aquinas is the same as for Aristotle, whose main conflict with Plato was their disagreement over ontological realism. Plato (as understood by Aquinas) treated universals as real beings. For Aristotle and Thomas, names signify things as they are known, not as they exist, while Plato turns universal predicates into a metaphysical participation.

[83] "Primo ostendit quot modis dicitur unum. Secundo quot modis dicuntur multa, ibi, *palam autem, et quia multa*. Circa primum duo facit. Primo distinguit modos unius naturaliter, idest secundum conditiones in rebus inventas. Secundo vero logice, idest secundum intentiones logicales, ibi, *amplius autem alia* et cetera." *Sententia libri Metaphysicae*, lib. V, lec. 7 [848].

[84] Cf. *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1.6. 1096b 14–29.

[85] Cf. H. Lyttkens, *The Analogy between God and the World*, p.. 29–58.

since we can only name God as He is known, through His effects.[86] Aristotle's method, which Aquinas calls "analogy," becomes a way to explain how God and creatures can share the same names. Actually, it is only relevant to God's affirmative perfections, such as "wisdom," "goodness," "life," etc., because negative names or relations do not express what God is *substantialiter*,[87] if one may say so. Thus, analogy becomes a useful means between the equivocal, on the one hand, which leaves God completely unknown, thus contradicting Christian revelation, and the univocal on the other hand, which deprives God of being truly God.[88]

Analogical predication, therefore, is opposed to univocal and equivocal predication. It becomes obvious that equivocal naming of something does not apply to things in themselves, but rather to things known to the mind. Things become univocal or equivocal to us through our way of cognizing, and thus naming.[89] The difference between equivocal naming, univocal naming and analogical predication is that in equivocal predication, only the name remains the same, but the meanings and things signified are different, so, for example, the same word "feather" can mean a handwriting implement or a part of a bird's wing. In univocal predication , the name and its meaning are the same for more than one thing, for example, the word "animal" can be univocally referred to both a human and a horse or cat. In analogical predication, however, the name mainly refers to one thing, and, if taken separately, it would be understood to mean that particular thing, but the name can also be used secondarily for other things, as long as it refers to that first thing (*per prius et posterius*).[90]

"But when anything is predicated of many things analogically, it is found in only one of them according to its proper nature, and from this one the rest are

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[86] *STh*, Ia, q. 13, pr.; *ScGent*, I, c. 34, 6.

[87] *STh*, Ia, q. 13, a. 2.

[88] *ScGent*, I, c. 34, 1: "…ea quae de Deo et rebus aliis dicuntur, praedicantur neque univoce neque aequivoce, sed analogice: hoc est, secundum ordinem vel respectum ad aliquid unum."

[89] R.M. McInerny, *The Logic of Analogy: An Interpretation of St. Thomas*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1961, p. 68: "If man with his distinctive mode of knowing did not exist, there would be no equivocals, that is things named equivocally." Since analogy is sometimes placed by Aquinas (*STh*, 1a, q. 13, a. 10 ad 4) under the general name of "equivocation," i.e., a way of speaking in which things with a common name differ in the definition of that name (Aristotle, *Categories* 1a 21), it follows that the analogical meaning also refers to things known and named, and not to things independent of the mind. Hence the use of the expression *analogia dicuntur* in parallel with *aequivoca dicuntur* and *univocalia dicuntur* (R.M. McInerny, *The Logic of Analogy*, 75 and 77, quoting Thomas's *In XI Methaphysics*, lec. 3).

[90] The method taken from Aristotle, which Aquinas calls "analogy," becomes a way of explaining how God and creatures can have the same names. Actually, this is only relevant for God's affirmative perfections, such as "wisdom," "goodness," "life," etc., because, as mentioned above, negative names or relations do not express what God is intrinsically in His nature (*STh*, Ia, q. 13, a. 2; cf. *ScGent*, I, c. 34, 1).

denominated."[91] This is evident in Aquinas's most frequently invoked example of analogy, which is the use of the word "health." Here, the primary meaning is "proportion in the four humors" and refers primarily to an animal; nevertheless, health can be attributed to medicine secondarily because it causes, that is, is the cause of health, or to urine, which can be a sign of health in an animal. This example shows a common meaning, but this meaning is not equally shared, as is the case with univocal predication. The meaning is shared in different ways.[92] Medicine is not something that belongs to the genus of "healthy things;" it is not itself a special case of health. However, it can be called "healthy," because it is meaningfully related to the genus of healthy things, that is, living bodies. Analogy thus makes it possible to establish semantic links between different genera without denying the boundaries between them or expanding their scope so that they can overlap to some extent. By applying the name "health" to medicine, the meaning of the word "health" does not go beyond its proper application. The analogical meaning of health in relation to medicine (the cause of the health of bodies) includes a reference to the proper meaning of the word.

Generally speaking, analogy is the thesis (and theory) stating that names that are common to creatures and God are spoken of both analogically. At this point, it needs to be emphasized that there is a contemporary tendency to treat analogy merely as an imaginative linguistic tool with no ontological basis;[93] however, there are strong arguments that analogy as applied to the divine names is firmly rooted in the metaphysical conception of being as an intelligible aspect within which the world of creatures is positively related to its divine origin.[94] A similar thought is expressed by Milbank & Pickstock, who unequivocally state that "without ontological guarantee … [analogy] might be merely equivocal save for human delusion."[95] Thus, in Aquinas's theology, analogy cannot stand alone as a way of talking about God; it necessarily involves certain ontological assumptions.

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[91] *STh*, Ia, q. 16, a. 6, resp.

[92] *In I Sent*. d. 22 q. 1, a. 3, ad 2: "…dicendum quod aliter dividitur aequivocum, analogum et univocum. Aequivocum enim dividitur secundum res significatas, univocum vero dividitur secundum diversas differentias; sed analogum dividitur secundum diversos modos. Unde cum ens praedicetur analogice de decem generibus, dividitur in ea secundum diversos modos. Unde unicuique generi debetur proprius modus praedicandi."

[93] Burrell, in his *Aquinas: God and Action*, takes a Wittgensteinian turn. For him, *scientia divina* is a "grammar of the divine," a linguistic game (cf. Ibidem, 5 and 17). Referring to the *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus* of early Wittgenstein, Burrell writes: "…properly speaking, nothing can be said of God." (Ibidem, 25). It is so, because "All statements formed of subject and predicate — that is to say, all discourse — will falsify the reality which God is." (Ibidem, 25).

[94] R.A. Te Velde, *Aquinas on God*, p. 97.

[95] J. Milbank, C. Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas*, London: Routledge, 2002, p. 47.

Aquinas offers two different conceptions of analogy. One of them, the more commonly referred to and recognized, views analogy as a kind of relationship between different uses of a word. In this case, analogy is a linguistic phenomenon situated between two other linguistic phenomena, univocalness and equivocalness, as noted above. The other type of analogy is the analogy of proportion, which is related to Aquinas's metaphysical doctrine.[96]

> It follows, then, from what has been said (ch. 32–33) that those things which are said of God and other things are predicated neither univocally nor equivocally, but analogically, that is, according to an order or relation to some one thing. This happens in two ways. First, according as many things have a relation to some one thing: thus in relation to the one health, an animal is said to be 'healthy' as its subject, medicine as effective thereof, food as preserving it, and urine as its sign. Second, according as an order or relation of two things may be observed not to some other thing, but to one of them. Thus being is said of substance and accident insofar as accident bears a relation to substance, and not as though substance and accident were referred to a third thing. Accordingly, such names are not said of God and other things analogically in the first way, for it would be necessary to suppose something prior to God, but in the second way.[97]

Here, Thomas pinpoints the existence of two kinds of analogy: one when many things have a relation to one thing (*multa ad unum*), and the other when there is a relation of one thing to another (*unum ad alterum*). The former type of relation was identified by Cajetan as the so-called "analogy of attribution," which would correspond most generally to semantic analogy. In the "analogy of attribution," a univocal term has a different relationship to each of its analogates. According to Cajetan, the common term "healthy" has unequal relations with animal, urine and medicine, respectively, which share the predicate; this leads him to conclude that the analogical term of this type can only be used externally, since there is no univocality as far as the *res significata* is concerned.[98] Thus, in this type of

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[96] *STh*, Ia, q. 13, a. 5 resp. The same distinction can be found in *De Potentia*, q. 7, a. 7.

[97] *ScGent*, I, c. 34: "Sic igitur ex dictis relinquitur quod ea quae de Deo et rebus aliis dicuntur, praedicantur neque univoce neque aequivoce, sed analogice: hoc est, secundum ordinem vel respectum ad aliquid unum. Quod quidem dupliciter contingit: uno modo, secundum quod multa habent respectum ad aliquid unum: sicut secundum respectum ad unam sanitatem animal dicitur sanum ut eius subiectum, medicina ut eius effectivum, cibus ut conservativum, urina ut signum. Alio modo, secundum quod duorum attenditur ordo vel respectus, non ad aliquid alterum, sed ad unum ipsorum: sicut ens de substantia et accidente dicitur secundum quod accidens ad substantiam respectum habet, non quod substantia et accidens ad aliquid tertium referantur. Huiusmodi igitur nomina de Deo et rebus aliis non dicuntur analogice secundum primum modum, oporteret enim aliquid Deo ponere prius: sed modo secundo."

[98] Cf. T. de Vio Cajetan, *The Analogy of Names, and the Concept of Being*, translated by Edward

analogy, it is justified to apply the term "healthy" to these three things; however, this type of analogy does not apply to names pertaining to God and other beings, "since one would have to assume that there is something prior to God."[99] That leaves the second way of analogical predication, the analogy of proportion. The analogy of proportion provides an explanation of the proper relationship between God and creation from the metaphysical standpoint. We find this metaphysical aspect in naming God in Aquinas's commentary on the Areopagite's *Divine Names*: "For of God also we say this rightly, and He is praised on the basis of the universe of existing things according to the p r o p o r t i o n of all things of which He is the cause."[100]

In the quoted text of Pseudo-Dionysius, several elements draw attention: (i) God is the creator of the world and the author of its organization, (ii) the term "proportion" determining the relation of the Creator to the creature supposes some kind of similarity between the two, (iii) the Latin translation of John the Sarracen renders the Greek term ἀναλογία as *proportio*, which suggests that both the Areopagite and the translator diagnosed the kind of relation between the categorical and transcendental domains as proportionality. The concept of analogy, therefore, as applied to the predication of the divine names seems to be closely related to the fundamental distinction between the domain of categories and the transcendent domain. The inadequacy of the categorical limitation of creation in relation to God, who is an extra-categorical reality, indicates that the only possibility of predicating about God is some formula of proportion, or to be more precise, the analogy of proportion. This distinction between categorical and extra-categorical (*extra omne genus*) also implies a positive relationship: God is the supreme principle of all things contained in the various genera. This causal relationship forms the basis for the analogical naming of God based on creatures. "Thus whatever is said of God and creatures, is said according to the relation of a creature to God as its principle and cause, wherein all perfections of things pre-exist excellently."[101] Analogy, then, aims to articulate the commonality (and unity) of effect and cause: an effect is variously the same as its cause (precisely

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A. Bushinski and Henry J. Koren, Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2009, p. 15–23 [par. 8–22]. Joshua P. Hochschild calls this type of analogy, i.e., described by Cajetan as the analogy of attribution, the associative or linguistic analogy. Cf. Idem, "Proportionality and Divine Naming: Did St. Thomas Change his Mind about Analogy?" *The Thomist* 77/4 (October 2013), p. 531–558.

[99] *ScGent*, I, c. 34.

[100] *DeDivNom*, textus Dionysii„ c. VII, lec. 4 [323] (p. 273): Καὶ γὰρ ταῦτα ὀρθῶς περὶ θεοῦ λέγομεν καὶ ἐκ τῶν ὄντων ἁπάντων ὑμνεῖται κατὰ τὴν πάντων ἀναλογίαν ὧν ἐστιν αἴτιος ["Et enim et hoc recte de Deo dicimus et ex existentibus universis laudatur secundum proportionem omnium quorum est causa."]

[101] *STh*, I, q. 13, a. 5: "Et sic, quidquid dicitur de Deo et creaturis, dicitur secundum quod est

insofar as it is a being). If we formulate judgments about God (realizing the second operation of the intellect according to Aristotle's *On Interpretation*), then our *modus significandi* based on our limited ratio admittedly does not adequately capture the unlimited *res significata* (God); nevertheless, it is able to predicate the *perfectiones* recognized in the categorical reality about God proportionally, precisely by the analogy of proportion. Aquinas makes it clear that both the analogy of many to one (*multum ad unum*) and the analogy of one to another (*unum ad alterum*) are aspects of the analogy of attribution.[102] For example, medicine and food are analogically called healthy with respect to the health of an animal (*multum ad unum*); but if we narrow the example to one analogon and the main analogate, saying that the medicine and the animal are called "healthy," we have *unum ad alterum*. In other words, there is no third thing to which the two refer.

The names that Thomas analyzes fall into the category of affirmative names, i.e., those that carry some positive content about God, such as "good," "wise," "life," etc. Aquinas assumes that not all names spoken about God can be relative or negative, because then God would disappear behind the veil of his transcendence. Thus, there is a distinction between *res* (God) and *ratio*, that is, our imperfect cognition, in which God is represented far imperfectly; nevertheless, the kernel of Thomas's reasoning for rejecting the radical *via negativa* and accepting the possibility of positive language concerning God is to uphold the nature of intelligible language about God, which would otherwise be cancelled. Names such as "wise," "good," and "life" are properly (*proprie*) spoken of God, at least in terms of what they signify (*res significata*), and not in terms of the categorical manner in which they signify (*modus significandi*). What is signified by the name "good" or by the name "life," i.e. perfection, is to be truly present in God.[103]

From the viewpoint of *modus significandi*, on the other hand, names are spoken first and properly about creatures, from which they are secondarily transferred to God. In this sense, names cannot be spoken about God other than in an improper and derivative manner, since their *modus significandi* corresponds to how the signified perfections exist in the creatures. However, from the viewpoint of what the names signify, i.e. the perfections themselves, they properly belong to God, even more than to the creatures, and are applied primarily to Him.[104]

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aliquis ordo creaturae ad Deum, ut ad principium et causam, in qua praeexistunt excellenter omnes rerum perfectiones."

[102] I present this understanding of the *multum ad unum* and *unum ad alterum* analogies as aspects of the analogy of attribution thanks to an anonymous reviewer of this paper.

[103] Cf. R.A. Te Velde, *Aquinas on God*, p. 105–106.

[104] *STh*, I, q. 13, a. 3: "Quantum igitur ad id quod significant huiusmodi nomina, *proprie*

This typically scholastic way of distinguishing aspects (*in quantum*) reveals two sides of the movement between effect and cause: in the order of naming, we pass from creatures to God, applying to God the names that *per prius* belong to creatures. On the other hand, in the order of things, signified perfections pass from God to creatures and therefore belong *per prius* to God. With regard to the *modus significandi*, the name is spoken first in relation to the creatures and only secondarily to God; but the signifying reality (*res significata*) exists first and foremost in God, from whom it comes secondarily to His creatures.

The *ordo rerum* in this case is the exact reversal of the *ordo nominis*. In the process of naming, we move from effect to cause, from creatures to God. But in the process of creation itself, perfections pass from God to creatures. It should be noted here that this is not simply a matter of two separate orders standing side by side, the *ordo rerum* and the *ordo nominis*. It is within the framework of the *ordo nominis*, moving from effect to cause, that the inverted order must be taken into account with regard to the *res* that is signified by names. The reversal of order — as Rudi A. te Velde correctly points out — must be expressed by denying God a name in terms of His creative *modus significandi*, along with affirming that name in terms of His *res significata*.[105] The process of naming proceeds from effect to cause; thus, it begins with an inverted order in which the cause is not yet treated as a cause, and thus the name-giver does not yet realize that the order of naming is in fact an inverted order. The reversal is now accomplished by means of the threefold Dionysian path: God is wise, not in the sense in which a creature is said to be wise, but in the sense that the wisdom to be found in creatures pre-exists in God as the cause.

This reversal is crucial to understanding analogy as applied to the divine names, since Thomas intends to explain by analogy what happens to the meaning of the names when they are conveyed by the threefold way of causation, remotion and eminence (or *excessus*). This procedure ensures that certain names signify God *substantialiter* and pertain to Him *proprie*. In God there really is wisdom, life, goodness and so on, but not as multiple separate attributes, but as identical to His simple essence; it is God who is the cause of all being, and all being remains in relation to Him in the manner of effect to cause. This causal relationship, expounded at the beginning of Aquinas's account in the first part of the *via*, is therefore the basis for the analogy of God's names. In this way, every perfection pre-exists in God, and all names are uttered about God, having

competunt Deo, et magis proprie quam ipsis creaturis, et per prius dicuntur de eo. Quantum vero *ad modum significandi*, *non proprie* dicuntur de Deo, habent enim modum significandi qui creaturis competit."

[105] Cf. R.A. Te Velde, *Aquinas on God*, p. 107.

been subjected to the appropriate *via triplex* procedure, namely by analogy of proportion. The nucleus of this relationship from the ontological side is the principle of participation, i.e., the origin of the creature and its participation in the likeness (*similitudo*) of God's nature.

At the end of this section, it should be emphasized that the analogy *unum ad alterum* and the analogy *multa ad unum* appear in reality to be two perspectives or aspects of the analogy of attribution, which is due to the fact that the unity between the *rationes* or terms involved has stronger grounds than just their sharing of a single *res significata*. Aquinas makes it clear that the only thing that serves as a key for the *rationes* involved in analogical predication is not the nature signified, but the *ratio* according to which the term is predicated in the first place (*per prius*). Speaking of terms that are predicated analogically about many, Aquinas points out that a term of this kind must be predicated primarily about what is contained in the definition or *ratio* of the thing about which the term is predicated secondarily.[106] Therefore, the *ratio* according to which a term is predicated primarily must be contained in the *ratio* according to which the term is predicated secondarily. "The reason the 'primary ratio' is contained into the 'secondary rationes' is that the secondary rationes are the result of some qualification to the primary ratio."[107]

4.2. Being and Predication

> There is a twofold operation of the intellect, as the Philosopher says in *On the Soul*.[108] One is the understanding of simple objects, that is, the operation by which the intellect apprehends just the essence of a thing alone. The other is the operation of composing and dividing. There is also a third operation, that of reasoning, by which reason proceeds from what is known to the investigation of things that are unknown.[109]

As is clear from the testimony of Thomas, citing Aristotle, analogy in this distinction is that function of the intellect which is responsible for the formulation

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106 Cf. *STh*, I, q. 13, a. 6: "Thus, for instance, healthy applied to animals comes into the definition of healthy applied to medicine, which is called healthy as being the cause of health in the animal;" (sicut sanum quod dicitur de animali, cadit in definitione sani quod dicitur de medicina, quae dicitur sana inquantum causat sanitatem in animali).

107 R.E. Vargas Della Cas, *Thomas Aquinas on the Apprehension of Being*, p. 86.

108 *De anima* 6: 430a 26.

109 *In Peri hermeneias*, l. I, lec. 1, pr., [1]: "Sicut Philosophus dicit in III De anima, duplex est operatio intellectus: una quidem quae dicitur indivisibilium intelligentia, per quam scilicet intellectus apprehendit essentiam uniuscuiusque rei in se ipsa; alia est autem operatio intellectus componentis et dividentis; additur autem et tertia operatio ratiocinandi, secundum quod ratio procedit a notis ad inquisitionem ignotorum." Accessed January 6, 2025, https://aquinas.cc/la/en/ Peri.Bk1.

of judgments (*iudicium*), that is, "it is an operation of the intellect that consists in assembling and separating." True judgments, in turn, are based on the correspondence (*adequatio*) between sentences and reality,[110] which is why the word "truth" means "truth known"[111] by the intellect. If truth is to be "cognized," it must be based on extra-mental reality, which is consistent with Aristotle's principle that logic as such is based on being, not just language. Thomas, referring to Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, explicitly states: "Wherefore the first indemonstrable principle is that *the same thing cannot be affirmed and denied at the same time*, which is based on the notion of *being* and *not-being*: and on this principle all others are based, as is stated in *Metaph.* iv, text. 9."[112]

Thus, within the first operation of intellect, "being" is the first concept of intellect;[113] "first" not only means temporally first, but logically first. Logic thus participates in being. Nine of the Aristotelian categories referred to as "various modes of being" are attributed to *ousia*, the principal understanding of being; the third of these categories is the relation to which grammar is subsumed. Thus, it can be assumed that the ontological presupposition of logical analogy is participation;[114] universals participate in the subjects of which they are predicates, and these in turn participate in God.[115]

Therefore, in the special case of the divine names, analogical predication, although it is formally the intention of the second tier, presupposes the ontic likeness of the creature to the Creator.[116] Following this line of reasoning, one can assume that names as abstractions from effects derive from the imitation of these names (or rather concepts) and properties (such as "wisdom," "goodness," "being") in God Himself. Aquinas, in his *Commentary on Peter Lombard's Sentences*, makes clear the status of creation and its relation to the Creator:

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110 *STh*, Ia, q. 16, a. 2, resp.

111 Ibidem.

112 *STh*, Ia IIae, q. 94, a. 2, resp. This distinction made by Thomas between the "being" of reality and the "being" of the truth of judgment, which is based on the initial "being" of reality, is also pointed out by Gregory P. Rocca when he writes: "The actuality of the real, which the verb *to be* primarily signifies, is always presented throughout his works as the foundation and cause of the secondary meaning of *to be*, the truth of the proposition." Idem, *Speaking the Incomprehensible God: Thomas Aquinas on the Interplay of Positive and Negative Theology*, Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2004, p. 164.

113 *Sententia super Metaphisica* IV, lec. 6 [605].

114 Cf. B. Mondin, *The principle of analogy*, p. 65–66.

115 Cf. A.P. Darley, "Predication or Participation?" Here, I follow the argumentation of this author, which I find quite convincing.

116 *In I Sent*., d. 24. q. 1. a. 1, ad 4: "quamvis Deus et creatura non conveniant in aliquo uno secundum aliquem modum convenientiae, tamen est considerare communitatem analogiae inter Deum et creaturam, secundum quod creaturae imitantur ipsum prout possunt."

> The Creator and the created are traced back to something one not with a community of univocation, but one with a community of analogy. Now, such a community can occur in two ways: either due to certain things participating in something, one as prior and posterior, as potency and act participate in the account of being, and likewise substance and accident; or due to one thing receiving its existence and account from the other, and this is the analogy of what is created with its Creator. For what is created has existence only insofar as it comes from the first being, which is why it is called a *being* only insofar as it is an imitation of the first being. And so it is with *wisdom* and all other things that are said of what is created.[117]

Philosophically, this position is reflected in the formula *omne agens agit simile sibi*,[118] which means that a cause produces effects according to its nature. Effects exist prior within their cause, because for Aquinas the essence of efficient causality is to produce effects in the likeness of the cause. All being has its origin in God; our intellect, insofar as it apprehends that being, agrees with the thing cognized, i.e., the being apprehended in cognition, and so it predicates truth. Analogy, therefore, is a theory of formulating judgments that finds its metaphysical justification in the "community of analogy" of the Creator and the creature that participates in His nature.

Conclusions

(1) Analogy is primarily a matter of using concepts to formulate judgments, i.e., true statements; analogy arises as a second intention of the mind (*intentio secunda*); the doctrine of analogy extends the doctrine of modes of signification (*modi significandi*); analogy provides the means by which we transcend the limits of the imperfect *modi significandi* of the terms we use; and it is only in the context of the discussion about the Divine names that the doctrine of *modus significandi* and the theory of analogy connect in Aquinas.[119]

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[117] *In I Sent.*, pr. q. 1, a. 2 ad 2: "Creator et creatura reducuntur in unum, non communitate univocationis sed analogiae. Talis autem communitas potest esse duplex. Aut ex eo quod aliqua participant aliquid unum secundum prius et posterius, sicut potentia et actus rationem entis, et similiter substantia et accidens; aut ex eo quod unum esse et rationem ab altero recipit; et talis est analogia creaturae ad Creatorem: creatura enim non habet esse nisi secundum quod a primo ente descendit, nec nominatur ens nisi inquantum ens primum imitatur; et similiter est de sapientia et de omnibus aliis quae de creatura dicuntur." Accessed January 6, 2025, https://aquinas.cc/la/en/ Sent.I.Pr.Q1.A2.Rep1.

[118] *De Potentia*, 2, 2; 7, 5; *ScGent*, II, 21, 8; 22, 5; 40, 2; 43, 8; *STh*, 1a, 5.

[119] R.E. Vargas Della Cas, *Thomas Aquinas on the Apprehension of Being*, p. 87.

(2) Thomas makes a clear distinction between the order of cognition and the order of being. This distinction eliminates the contradiction between the ontological coincidence of the divine names with *res significata* — which refer to God literally and in a primary way, and to creatures secondarily by participation — and the epistemological path of ascent from names drawn from creatures as from things we know and name first, *per prius et posterius*, which are then abstracted and applied analogically to God. Aquinas makes this distinction clear: "In this second mode of analogical predication, the order according to name and according to reality is sometimes the same and sometimes not…"[120] With regard to the Divine names, unlike in other cases in which a term has different meanings that contain the same *res significata*, the different meanings of an analogous term are not the result of changes in the way *res significata* is signified. "The reason an analogous term retains its mode of signification throughout its various significations is that the secondary significations share in the conception primarily signified, and it is the primary conception that sets the mode of signification of the term."[121]

(3) Aquinas here follows Aristotle's epistemology rather than that of Plato; for Plato, true knowledge is participation (*methexis*) in ideas, while for Aristotle, *universale* is the predicate that is abstracted from prior sense experience.

(4) Names signify concepts in the mind that refer to things in the world; words (*modus significandi*) imperfectly signify true perfections in God (*res significata*), even to the extent that divine perfections are models that the human way of naming imitates. The identity of these two orders results in Platonism, whereas the result of the divergence of these orders is nominalism; Thomas, representing moderate realism, follows the middle way, which emphasizes the analogical order of cognition based on the order of being. The descriptions of analogy that Aquinas's texts provide tend to call it an analogy of meaning; nevertheless, this meaning is rooted in the reality of what he is talking about.[122] The theological basis for this in Aquinas is found in the *imago Dei*, which results in a certain (and imperfect) correspondence (*adequatio*) between thought and reality. In conclusion, the logic of analogy still requires metaphysical presuppositions, and in the special case of divine perfections, Aquinas justifies analogical predications on the basis of the creature's ontological participation in the Creator.[123]

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[120] *ScGent*, I, c. 34: "In huiusmodi autem analogica praedicatione ordo attenditur idem secundum nomen et secundum rem quandoque, quandoque vero non idem."

[121] R.E. Vargas Della Cas, *Thomas Aquinas on the Apprehension of Being*, p. 87–88.

[122] Cf. A.P. Darley, "Predication or Participation?"

[123] *STh*, Ia, q. 93, a. 4, resp.: "…cum homo secundum intellectualem naturam ad imaginem Dei esse dicatur, secundum hoc est maxime ad imaginem Dei, secundum quod intellectualis natura

Within God himself, according to Aquinas's teaching on simplicity, logic and being are not two separate things, for God is His own essence.[124] Although in the present life human beings may only know this simple God through a *modus significandi* that is complex and different from the *res significata* of God in Himself,[125] and although for human beings existence and essence will never be identical,[126] there remains for the believer the extraordinary epistemological hope[127] that God will be known in His *quidditas* in the life to come, according to Aquinas's understanding (departing from Pseudo-Dionysius) of the passages of Sacred Scripture.[128] This requires a full eschatological culmination of this participation in the Divine nature, by which God so transforms and indwells the intellect of the redeemed that their knowledge becomes like His own: "When a created intellect sees the essence of God, the very essence of God becomes the intelligible form of the intellect."[129]

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Deum maxime imitari potest. Imitatur autem intellectualis natura maxime Deum quantum ad hoc, quod Deus seipsum intelligit et amat. Unde imago Dei tripliciter potest considerari in homine. Uno quidem modo, secundum quod homo habet aptitudinem naturalem ad intelligendum et amandum Deum, et haec aptitudo consistit in ipsa natura mentis, quae est communis omnibus hominibus. Alio modo, secundum quod homo actu vel habitu Deum cognoscit et amat, sed tamen imperfecte, et haec est imago per conformitatem gratiae. Tertio modo, secundum quod homo Deum actu cognoscit et amat perfecte, et sic attenditur imago secundum similitudinem gloriae."

124 *STh*, Ia, q. 3, a. 3, resp.

125 *STh*, Ia, q. 13, a. 12.

126 *STh*, Ia, q. 12, a. 4, resp.

127 Cf. A.P. Darley, "Predication or Participation?"

128 Cf. e.g., 1 Cor 13:12; 1 Jn 3:2.

129 *STh*, Ia, q. 12, a. 5, resp.: "Cum autem aliquis intellectus creatus videt Deum per essentiam, ipsa essentia Dei fit forma intelligibilis intellectus."

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NAMING THE INEFFABLE: ST. THOMAS AQUINAS'S TEACHING ON THE DIVINE NAMES

Summary

The key issue of this paper is the question of whether we can formulate affirmative (positive) judgments about God. This issue is rooted in the assertions of Aquinas himself, who says that we can know that God is (*an sit*), but we do not know what He is (*quid sit*). Although St. Thomas draws considerably on the legacy of Neoplatonic thought, he clearly modifies it and introduces his own solutions to certain issues in defiance of Platonic and Neoplatonic "orthodoxy." The general thesis of this article is that Aquinas seeks to rework Neoplatonic content by applying to it Aristotelian instrumentarium. More detailed analysis concerns the divine names, which Thomas discusses in q. 13 of his theological *Summa* and in his *Exposition* on *The Divine Names* by Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, where this problem not only receives a profound interpretation in terms of semantics, but above all in terms of metaphysics. Aquinas, therefore, incorporates some elements of Neoplatonism into his teaching, but modifies them guided by at least three criteria: (i) the requirement of orthodoxy (in line with the professed religion), (ii) the accepted standards of the "modern science" of the time i.e. the paradigm of the Aristotelian theory of science, (iii) the condition of the coherence of the system, which requires the system to be free from logical contradictions. Thomas's modifications arise in general from his objective, which is divergent from that of Dionysius, and from the method adopted by Thomas in explaining philosophical and theological problems. The goal for the Areopagite is mystical union with God, while for Thomas it is instruction in, and explanation of, the *sacra doctrina*, i.e. the body of human knowledge concerning the revelation (*DeDivNom*, pr.); Thomas's method aims at greater precision in speaking and explaining the "sacred doctrine" using Aristotelian instrumentarium. Therefore,(i) he introduces the distinction into *res significata* and *modus significandi* in order to depart from the Platonic language of Dionysius, which is full of contradictions (God is "being" and "non-being," is "beyond being," etc.); (ii) predication in Thomas is not merely *causaliter* as in Dionysius, but also *substantialiter*, which makes it possible, when speaking of divine *perfectiones*, to determine them as belonging to God in a primary and substantial sense, and not merely as the cause of all perfection in the world; (iii) Aquinas highlights the ontic relation of the

creatures' dependence on God, determining this set of relations in accordance with the Areopagite as participation, but introduces analogy (of proportionality) as the way one can predicate about such relations; analogy is thus the way of predicating, but *cum fundamento in re*.

Keywords: predication, analogy, participation, Neoplatonism

Słowa klucze: predykacja, analogia, uczestnictwo, neoplatonizm