

ON DENYING THE RIGHT GOD: AQUINAS ON ATHEISM AND IDOLATRY

DENYS TURNER

Eadem est scientia oppositorum, says Aristotle in the Latin translation of the *Peri Hermeneias*¹ with which Thomas Aquinas was familiar: “one and the same is the knowledge of opposites”, or, “to know an affirmative proposition is to know what would count as its negation”. You would think, on that account, that a theologian as much preoccupied with the logic of “God exists” as is Thomas would accordingly have something to say about the logic of atheism, about the logic of the proposition “There is no God”. For, just as (in the spirit of Aristotle’s remark) the analytic philosophers used to ask concerning some proposed assertion or other, “that *as opposed to what?*”, so Thomas in that connection seemed often to share the analytic disposition.² Alas for the author commissioned to write on my subject, it is hard to find material in Thomas which relates in any very direct way to those issues of explicit theoretical atheism which arise for us today. We all know that professed atheism was not a theological issue in Thomas’ time, nor was it for several centuries thereafter, largely because there were no intellectuals professing it. Thomas evidently did not feel intellectually challenged by what we today know of as atheism and, for all that I will argue for a view which differs from them in many another respect, I do share the opinion of the theologians of the “nouvelle théologie” persuasion that even the famous “five ways” are not intended at least primarily as a response to an atheist challenge, but have rather different purposes.

I used to maintain that if not Aquinas, then Anselm thought that at least in principle a theologian needs to sort out what an atheist position looked like, for though he does not explicitly acknowledge Aristotle’s *mot* in that

Denys Turner
The Divinity School, University of Cambridge, West Road, Cambridge CB3 9BS, UK

place, Anselm does note in *Proslogion* 2 that the fool who says in his heart “there is no God” must know what he is denying—that is to say, must deny what the true believer affirms—if his denials are to have any properly atheistic effect. At any rate I took it to be Anselm’s view that there is not any real argument to be had with an atheist unless theist and atheist alike agree on what it *means* to say “God exists”—for they would have to agree on that much if the one is to be affirming what the other denies; and that if the atheist can be got to see what exactly it is that he is denying, his position can be shown to be logically self-defeating. But I have been persuaded by my colleagues in Cambridge, Anna Williams and Catherine Pickstock, that what is bothering Anselm in the *Proslogion* is not some atheistical position of *intellectual* denial, but rather the spiritual condition of the fool whose lips acknowledge God but whose *heart* is not in it: for it is “in his heart” that this fool says there is no God.³ On this account, therefore, what we get in the *Proslogion* is less a formal argument against professed atheism than a persuasion offered to the nominally professing theist that his life of indifference to God is a bundle of practical contradictions.

Knowing what Atheistically to Deny

Which considerations lead one back to Thomas and to the possibility that there is a parallel strategy in his theology, of promise for today’s author in pursuit of Thomas’ views on atheism. If Thomas has little—perhaps nothing—to say about atheism in any modern sense, does he not have a great deal to say about what might seem to be its equivalent in his time, namely idolatry? And there is indeed promise here, in so far as much of Thomas’ preoccupation with the logic of “God exists” seems to be motivated by a desire to insure against the innumerable ways in which one can “get God wrong”: worship the wrong God, pray to the wrong God, love the wrong God and even perhaps *deny* the wrong God—the latter, of course, being what the theist and a certain kind of atheist both do, the one in the conduct of good theology, the other concluding (mistakenly) that in seeing off an idolatry he has succeeded in seeing God off *tout court*. Hence, we might say that the value in Thomas’ account of the logic of “God exists” for us today, preoccupied as we are with all sorts of theoretical atheisms, lies in his setting some pretty high standards for truly atheistical denial: unless, dear atheist, you are denying what the true believer affirms, all you are doing is rejecting an idolatry that the true believer anyway rejects (I suppose Richard Dawkins springs to mind as being among the softer targets) and are engaging in the sort of conceptual ground-clearing which is the proper preliminary to any positive theology. Doing this is what we sometimes call today (as Thomas did in his) “negative theology”. To put it as briefly as I may, a true atheist has to work hard and fast at his denials if he is to keep up with Thomas’ “we do not know what God is”,⁴ never mind to get ahead of him

with a convincing “there is no God”. Most atheists of my acquaintance today know all too well what they are denying.

Of course to a simple-minded atheist of the Dawkins sort (a sort which elsewhere I have described as a “parasitical” or “mirror-image” atheist⁵) negative theology will seem like a mere intellectual evasion: he will naturally insist on some hard and limited proposition of the kind his sort of limited denials are good for, and negative theology can sometimes be mistakenly represented as if to disallow any affirmation of God, leaving the atheist with apparently nothing to do. But even those atheists who do take negative theology seriously, such as Jacques Derrida, and concede that a non-idolatrous God is going to have to be “on the other side of language”—or, as they acknowledge the pseudo-Denys to say, as speaking with an authentic theological voice, God is “beyond both similarity and difference”, which is the same thing—will balk at what appears to be surreptitious re-insertion of a spurious “hyper-essentiality” hidden in the “to be”: “to be on the other side of language” is, it would seem, an oxymoron. For on which side of language is this “to be” itself supposed to lie? If on the “inside of language”, then this may give us a notion of the divine existence which is intelligible, but just because it is intelligible must affirm an idolatrously onto-theological God, an instance of “being”. And if on the “other side of language” how can there be anything asserted by this “to be”? A God so different as to be “on the other side of language” is, therefore, reducible to the ultimacy not of God, but of “difference” itself: not, that is, that “there is” an ultimate difference, ontological or otherwise—for that would still seem to imply that there is a something or other which is “ultimately different”—but that it is difference itself which is ultimate, and so not God. It seems that the “to be” will have to go altogether, conceding its place at best to some God “without being”, as Marion would have us say.⁶

Of course Thomas does not know of such issues in those terms, but in his own terms he is perfectly alive to them. Today we might ask: Does negative theology, as a means of avoiding an idolatrous onto-theology, entail a merely vacuous God, a God of pure undifferentiation or—which might seem to be the opposite of that, but is not—a God who is nothing but difference itself, alterity as such, the *tout autre*, which, as Derrida says, could not be the “bringer of good gifts”,⁷ and so could not be God? But Thomas himself acknowledges that there is an equivalent problem with his doctrine of the divine simplicity—the root, as he says so clearly and emphatically, of his negative theology.⁸ And this is because, in turn, he locates the root meaning of God’s simplicity in the identity of God’s *essentia* and *esse*,⁹ to which doctrine the quasi-derridean objection rather obviously re-surfaces, one which Thomas takes seriously enough to feel constrained to offer a complex and difficult response. If God’s *esse* and God’s *essentia* were identical, he objects,¹⁰ if God is to be described as *ipsum esse subsistens*, it would seem to follow that God’s existence (*esse*) is an existence of no particular kind—“unspecific

existence". From that it would seem further to follow that the name "God" would simply name "existence in general", that is, unspecifically any kind of existence, whether created or uncreated—and this would appear fatally to break a firm rule of Thomas' own devising concerning the logic of *esse*: *esse per se convenit formae . . .*¹¹—it makes no sense to speak of *esse* but of no particular kind.

Now this would seem to be a telling objection, particularly as posed for so enthusiastic a follower of the pseudo-Denys as Thomas, for the pseudo-Denys's famous saying "there is no kind of thing that God is"¹² could easily be interpreted as entailing the consequence: "God exists, but his existence is of no kind; hence, God is, unspecifically, 'existence as such' ". In turn, that could be interpreted in one of two ways: either as meaning that "God" names the overarching category of "being" of which all beings other than God are instances, from which the pantheistic consequence would follow that all created beings are "instances" of God; or else as meaning that both God and creatures are instances falling under the general category of "being". Both would be forms, one supposes, of onto-theological error, since either way the difference between God and creatures would be reduced to that which could obtain between "beings" belonging to the same, albeit most general possible, category.

God as "Pure Act"

The objection can be put in another way, equally problematic for Thomas' negative theology and in turn for the doctrine of the divine simplicity, insofar as both are rooted in the related doctrine that God is "pure act". This is a closely related doctrine because, of course, for Thomas, the fundamental meaning of *esse* is as "act", "actualization", just as also the fundamental mean of "act" or "actualization" is that in which it is *esse* that actualizes. You refer to a thing's *esse* not when you consider it as this rather than that, nor when you consider it as this kind of thing rather than that kind of thing; nor even (in its most fundamental sense) when you consider its existence by contrast with *its* non-existence, but when you consider its existence by contrast with there being nothing at all: in short, for anything created, when you consider it precisely in its character *as* created. A thing's *esse* is what God has brought about so that it should be at all, and the divine action of creating is always set against the "background" of that *ex nihilo*—which is not, of course, a "background" at all, for "nothingness" is not some context within which God creates. As Thomas says, it is not the case that when God creates "out of nothing" the "nothing" is some sort of soupy negative "something" which God makes things out of. The negation, he says, negates the "out of" itself, as if to say: there is a sort of making here, but no "out of", just as when we say that a person is "speaking of nothing" we do not mean that "nothing" is the subject of his speech (as it might be with Heidegger) but that he is not

speaking at all.¹³ For which reason, when speaking of God “as the source of *esse*” as McCabe rightly says, we are speaking of “the being of the thing not just over against a world-without-it, but over against nothing, not even ‘logical space’”.¹⁴

Of course, for Thomas, “act” has many other meanings—or at least uses—than that of “act of existence”, for Thomas happily speaks, by extension from this primitive meaning, of how a person’s running is an act, in the sense that it is the “actualization” of a person’s potentiality to run when that person might have been sitting;¹⁵ or of the way in which a material object’s being red is the actualization of one of the colours it could be, and not others; or of the way in which my thinking about the square of minus one is the actualization of the intellect’s capacity to think indifferently about anything at all. But all these uses of the word “act” are parasitical upon a basic use and meaning, which is that according to which *esse* is the most fundamental actualization of anything at all. Why?

Because in every other, parasitical, use of “act”, what is actualized is some already existing potentiality. If Frieda runs, then Frieda existed in such and such a nature which can run; if the lintel is red, then the lintel existed in bare pine to be painted one colour or another; if I think of the square of minus one then I have a mind which could think of that, or of something else. But if what actualizes is a thing’s *esse*, and if the existence which *esse* denotes is that it exists rather than that nothing at all exists, then it cannot be the case that in the same sense there exists some potentiality which *esse* actualizes. God can do anything *possible*. But nothing is *potentially* creatable. For the potentiality which *esse* actualizes is brought about by its actualization: the potentiality only exists *as actualized*, and cannot exist prior to it, as it were “awaiting” actualization.

It does not of course follow from this that what exists cannot not have existed, nor that it cannot cease to exist. It is crucial to Thomas’ understanding of *esse* and *essentia* that they are “really distinct”, for anything at all which exists as an actualized potentiality has been caused to exist and can be caused to cease to exist, even were it the case, as he thinks it coherent counterfactually to say, that it has endlessly existed and will endlessly exist.¹⁶ The contingency of a created thing lies in its createdness, not in any finite parameter of endurance. That said—the real distinction notwithstanding—a thing’s *esse* is that by which the potentiality exists which it actualizes. It makes no sense to say of what *esse* makes to be that it in any way “exists” in potency “to be”.¹⁷

But if that is so, if *esse* is therefore to be understood in relation to the potentiality it actualizes, how can we in any way speak of God as “*ipsum esse subsistens*”, and so as “pure act”—as Thomas does? It is clear to Thomas why we must say that God is “pure act”. There cannot be anything in God which his existence “actualizes”, no potentiality of any sort, for God cannot be brought into existence or be caused to cease to exist, else God would be,

simply, a creature. On the other hand it seems hard to know what sense it makes to say that God is “pure act” but that there is nothing of which that act is the *actualization*, as if we were to say that Frieda is running, but that her running is not the exercise of any capacity to do so. For, as we have seen, *esse* is intelligible only as the function of some form. But God is not some kind of thing, possesses no “form” which his *esse* actualizes. So what sort of sense can we make of saying that God is *just* his actualization, *esse*, but nothing actualized?

It might seem that once again Thomas’ own argument has, by his own devising, maneuvered him into the jaws of the derridean trap. If we are to be permitted to say that God exists at all, the predicate “. . . exists” will have to retain some connections of meaning with our ordinary senses for the term as we know how to use it of creatures, even if falling infinitely short of God. And it will be enough to meet this condition that we know all alternatives to be worse, because falsifying of God, since to “fall short” of God is not the same as to speak falsely of God. But that “ordinary sense” in which we use it of creatures is, it would seem, intrinsically tied in with their creatureliness—*esse creaturae est creari*—as the actualization of a potency. But if it cannot be in that sense that God may be said to exist, what sense can there be left to the term “act” when, as Thomas says we must, we describe God as “pure act”? Is this an *aporia*, an impossible dilemma?

It would seem not. It is clear from Thomas’ latest writings—from the *Summa Theologiae* in particular—that far from seeing this problem as an intractable dilemma or theological blind-alley, the “pincer movement” which leads to it has been a carefully designed theological strategy, designed to manoeuvre the theologian into exactly that position where she ought to find herself—just in that place where, constrained by our ordinary discourse of “to be” we discover that that ordinary discourse is incapable of capturing the meaning it must nonetheless point to. Of course we could not know what it means to say that God is “pure act”, *ipsum esse subsistens*—Thomas is quite emphatic about this: “we cannot know the *esse* of God any more than we can know his essence”.¹⁸ In fact the statement’s incomprehensibility, “God is ‘pure act’ or *ipsum esse subsistens*”, is not an *aporia* that reduces Thomas’ theological metaphysics to absurdity. It is, on the contrary, a precise theological statement, intended to mark out with maximum clarity and precision the *locus* of the divine incomprehensibility, the *ratio Dei*, the most fundamental of the “formal features” of God, to use Burrell’s terminology.¹⁹ Since it is far from being the case that describing God as “pure act” gives us some firm purchase on the divine nature, one may go so far as to say that talking about God thus is a kind of “babble”: for to pretend that we remain in full command of the meaning of such words through any self-evidently meaningful extension of their ordinary senses is idolatrously reductive of theological language. It is only just *inappropriate* to call such theological speech “babble” in so far as, unlike mere babble, calling God by the name “pure

act", or *ipsum esse subsistens*, retains that degree of connection with the logic of our ordinary discourse which licenses us to derive, with consistency and coherence, what follows from saying it, and what does not. And once again, Thomas is emphatic: the proper response to this objection is not to abandon all talk about God as *esse*, confining the predication of *esse* to creatures, as some do, believing that to say that *esse* is predicable "in common" of God and creatures is bound to lead you through some form of "Scotist" univocity into an onto-theological outcome. At any rate, you cannot reasonably read Thomas as having allowed some such retreat from what is for him a central doctrine, given that he explicitly blocks that way out of the dilemma: "to be caused is not of the definition of being *simpliciter*, for which reason we can come to know of an uncaused being".²⁰

On the other hand, this strategy is not absurdly to attempt to eat one's cake and have it. We know that, insofar as a creature is "in act" it is, Thomas says, to that degree "perfect" and so "good" in some respect, *secundum quid*. From this we know that if God is "pure act" then God is wholly perfect and good in every respect, *simpliciter*. We know this because we know what *esse* as "act" means of a creature: it means the actualization of a potentiality. Hence, whatever "pure act" means, we know better than to attribute to God, in his character as pure act, anything which follows from a thing's having potentiality: so we cannot avoid saying both that God is "pure act" but that there is no potency in God of which *esse* is the actualization. But if for that reason we cannot know what "pure act" means, in the sense that we would if we possessed some concept of it, then it follows that we know no better what "wholly perfect" or "good *simpliciter*" mean than we know what "pure act" means, except that they must be true of God, which is enough to know that their contradictories are false.²¹ We can, in short, know enough about what God is to know what God is not; and so we know in saying anything we are entitled to say affirmatively about God—"God exists"—what we are denying in so saying. To that extent, theological talk has a grammar. It is a language. But that said, it is the grammar of a mystery, of language which breaks down according to determinable rules of breakdown. Theological speech is subject to a sort of *programmed* obsolescence. To be "theological" you have to get language to self-destruct.

An "Empty" God?

But does not so heavily negative a theology still leave us with a vacuous God of pure "undifferentiation", a *mere* "otherness"? The objection provides Thomas with an opportunity to clarify what could possibly be meant by the pseudo-Denys' famous *dictum*, God is not "any kind of thing",²² or that, as he himself puts it, God is *ipsum esse subsistens*. In agreeing to this statement of negative theology Thomas is not consenting to some notion—as one might be tempted to suppose—that the name "God" names an utterly empty cat-

egory. That we cannot form any “concept” of God is due not to the divine vacuousness, but, on the contrary, to the excessiveness of the divine plentitude. That excessiveness eludes our language because we could not comprehend it except in a surplus of description which utterly defeats our powers of unification under *any* conception, an excessiveness which is exactly captured in the full text of the dionysian formula: “There is no kind of thing which God is, and there is no kind of thing which God is not”. If ever there were a compendious statement of the relationship between the apophatic and the cataphatic in the pseudo-Denys’s writing, this is it: for it says that God is beyond our comprehension not because we cannot say anything about God, but because we are compelled to say too much. For the pseudo-Denys, and for Thomas following him, the “apophatic” consists in the *excessus* of the “cataphatic”.²³ It is not that, for Thomas, we are short of things to say about God: just that anything we do say of God falls short of him.

And so Thomas makes a distinction between two logically different kinds of “unspecificness”, or, as we might put it, two kinds of “undifferentiation”, or, as we might put it in a third set of terms, between two ways of being “beyond both similarity and difference”.²⁴ In the first kind of case, he explains, further specification is *excluded*, as “reason is excluded by definition from irrational animals”. In that case, he adds, the exclusion of the specification “rational” adds content to the concept “animal” since by virtue of the exclusion of the *differentia* “rational”, we know that what is referred to is, specifically, non-human animals—brutes. By contrast, in the second kind of case, “unspecificness” is achieved by *indifference to either inclusion or exclusion*, as when we speak of the *genus* “animal in general” indifferently as between “rational” and “non-rational”, between humans and brutes.

When we say, therefore, that God is *ipsum esse subsistens*—hence, that there is no kind of thing that God is—we could mean that God’s existence is “unspecific” in either sense. To mean it in the second sense would turn out to mean that God’s existence is such as to be indifferent to any kind of specification—and that, for sure, would be “onto-theological” error, since it would certainly entail that the name “God” named the entirely empty category of “*ens commune*”, as if God were some most general “concept” of which beings are “instances”—or, on the contrary, that God is just another “instance” of “beings” falling under that general concept.

And, of course, Thomas denies that the identity of *essentia* and *esse* in God entails that second kind of “unspecificness”. For God’s simplicity consists, on the contrary, in this alone, that in God all specification of this and that *is excluded*—“there is no kind of being that God is”, or, as we might put it, if “specificness” is excluded from God, then “exclusion” is excluded from God. The paradox is, therefore, that this kind of “unspecificness” of the divine *esse*, this “otherness”, this being “beyond similarity and difference”, is such as to be totally *inclusive*, which is the opposite of what one might have supposed.

For note that the specific difference “rational” divides the *genus* “animal” into exclusive species (“rational” and “non-rational”), such that, if the one then not the other: if any animal exists, then it is either a rational animal or a non-rational animal. Both belong to the same *genus*, but, of course, there cannot exist an animal which is, just, generically-an-animal, being neither rational nor non-rational. But if, *per impossibile*, a generic animal could exist, it could not exclude *either* “rational” or “non-rational”, for then it would have none of the character of either; it would have to be *both rational and non-rational* in some way which excluded the exclusion of each by the other, and thus allow for both in some non-disjunctive way.

No doubt, such a supposition of an actually existent *genus* is absurd, for a *genus* as such cannot exist. But the hypothesised absurdity brings out a central paradox of language about God of which, at this point in his argument, Thomas is acutely observant. For it is by virtue of the divine nature’s excluding every possible specification—that is to say, by virtue of excluding every *differentia* whatever—that God’s nature is such as to exclude all exclusion; hence, God stands in no relation of any kind of *exclusion* with anything whatever. God, as Eckhart says, is distinct in this exactly, that God alone is “indistinct”²⁵—not, as Thomas observes, by virtue of an “indistinctness” which is an excess of indeterminacy taken to the point of absolute generalised vacuousness, but by an excess of determinacy, taken to the point of absolutely total plenitude: “there is no kind of thing”, the pseudo-Denys says, “which God is not”, or, as Thomas himself put it, God is “virtually” everything that there is, containing, as it were, every *differentia* as the cause of them all, but such that “what are diverse and exclusive in themselves pre-exist in God as one, without detriment to his simplicity”.²⁶ That is why we cannot comprehend God: the “darkness” of God is the simple excess of light. God is not too indeterminate to be known; God is unknowable because too comprehensively determinate, too *actual*. It is in that excess of actuality that the divine unknowability consists.

If there are therefore no grounds in logic, and certainly none having the sort of idolatrous consequences which Marion fears, for disallowing Thomas to say, as he does with some essential clarifications and precisions of terms, that *esse* is predicable “in common” of God and creatures, what can justify our predicating *esse* of God? The full answer to this cannot be obtained until later in this essay, but what we can say in the meantime is that, whatever the grounds are on which we are enabled to understand created *esse* as that which stands against there being nothing at all, just the same are the grounds on which we are able to say that the *esse* of a creature is to be created. But in knowing that for anything to exist is for it to be created is thus far to understand the name “God” as the pure, undifferentiated, wholly inclusive “act” from which all exclusion is excluded, for he brings all things into existence and sustains them in it. We know God, in short, insofar as we know the *esse* of creatures, as creator of all things, “visible and invisible”, and as the exem-

plar and cause of all that is, so that whatever is true of a creature is in some way true of God.

And this is to know how to name the difference between God and everything which exists, which is the “difference” between the Creator and the creature. And just as we are compelled thus to name it, we do not, and could not, understand the difference that it names.

The “Five Ways”

This much, therefore, can be said about what on Thomas’ doctrine of God the atheist is going to have to deny if s/he is not to be engaged merely in the preliminary, and essentially theological, exercise of idolatry-busting: that the world, all that is, is created “out of nothing”. That, of course, is a statement about the world, a statement which it is possible to contest on common terms of disagreement with those who, like Aquinas, affirm it. But for all that it is a statement “about the world” it does not on that account fail to be a statement about God. On the contrary, it is just that sort of statement about the world which *is* the key to how we are to speak non-idolatrously about God. For which reason, on Thomas’ account of the logic of “God exists”, there is a genuine argument to be had with those who deny it, with atheists, which is, presumably, why he himself offers arguments in support of it, the famous “five ways”. It may be true—I am sure it is—that Thomas does not in fact offer the “five ways” by way of conducting a disputation with atheists; I am just as ready to concede that Thomas does not in fact set out the “five ways” as part of some programme of what we today would call a “philosophy of religion”, still less in pursuit of some “foundationalist” programme of philosophical, rational, theologically neutral underpinning for his larger Christian theological enterprise. I am happy to concede that, on the contrary, the sense and purpose of those “arguments” is to be sought entirely *within* those essentially Christian theological purposes of the *Summa Theologiae*. In such respects at least I have no dispute with the anti-foundationalist readings of the “five ways” which are to be found in the recent (though very differently argued) case made by writers in the “Radical orthodox” tendency,²⁷ by Anna Williams,²⁸ and earlier by de Lubac²⁹ and those of the school of “nouvelle théologie” (who undoubtedly source both). And according to all of these, to read the structural place of the “arguments for the existence of God” within the articulation of Thomas’ theology as if they were intended to be “free-standing”, theologically neutral, exercises in philosophical argument, is very fundamentally distorting of the carefully managed theological strategies of the *Summa Theologiae*. I agree: Thomas, nowhere perhaps, but certainly not in that later *Summa*, offers us a philosophy of religion.

But in thus far agreeing with what such theologians affirm about Thomas’ theological purposes, I do contest what they all take to follow from it by way

of consequent denial: namely that in setting out those “five ways” Thomas did not set out, and did not intend to set out, formally valid, rational proofs of the existence of God. It is one thing to say (as I do) that Thomas sees there to be reasons of faith, and purposes of theology, in showing that the existence of God can be proved by arguments which stand up on their own grounds of reason; it is quite another thing to say (as Milbank and others do) that the “five ways” stand up as proofs only as assuming faith by way of premise for their inferences. For one thing, that last proposition is simply incoherent. That cannot be regarded in *any* sense as “proof” which presupposes as premise that which it is supposed to entail as conclusion: such is simply the fallacy of *petitio principii*. Hence it is hard to know even what Milbank means when he says that in the *Summa Theologiae* Thomas is not to be construed as offering full-blown formal proofs, “but [only] weakly probabilistic arguments”.³⁰ If Milbank were right, then Thomas could not have been offering anything at all even by way of “arguments”, “strong” or “weak”, let alone “proofs”, and, given the obvious and vicious circularity involved, would have been a poor and foolish logician had he supposed that he was doing so. But Thomas is not a poor or foolish logician, and he says that the “five ways” represent five argument-strategies by which “*Deum esse probari potest*”.³¹ I know of no stronger mediaeval Latin technical term in point of apodeicticity than *probari*. One would therefore like to know what exegesis of this word is proposed by those who deny that Thomas’ “five ways” were meant as proofs in a formal sense, as of his equally emphatic statement that while the divine *esse* is unknown to us, “that God is can be known to be true . . . and we know this from his effects, as we showed in [ST 1a] q2 a.2”.³²

It follows from this—and if I am right it will also be true, though much more needs to be said than I have space to say here—that while undoubtedly Thomas *does not* argue with them, his account of the logic of “God exists” is such that for him *there is an argument to be had* with atheists, so long as they know what to deny. There are those who will be ill-informed as to what to deny, of course, but they can get it wrong along two distinct, though ultimately converging, lines: that of the naïve and plodding Dawkinsian atheists, who, misled perhaps by some theists into idolatrously supposing God to be “just another very big thing in the universe”, rightly propose to expel an interfering monster from it; and that of the sophisticated post-modern atheists who, in the intensity of their desire to escape from the grasping clutches of a merely idolatrous denial, take the desperate measure of making an absolute of denial itself, of “difference”, instead. On the score of the latter sort of atheist, Thomas at least does not feel the pressure to decide between permitting a strategy of proof, as if thereby risking an “onto-theological” God, and a theological apophaticism, as if thereby putting at risk the possibility of proof. Proof is not in itself “onto-theological”. Apophaticism is no excuse for abandoning a claim to proof. As I believe a

careful examination of the relationship between *Summa Theologiae* q2 a3 and *Summa Theologiae* q3 will show, what the proofs prove is that in showing God to exist we have finally lost control over the meaning of "exists". For Thomas the proofs prove an *unknowable* God, known to exist and known to be unknowable from the unutterable mystery that there is anything at all.

Analogy and Proof: Scotus and Milbank

But it is not only atheists who do not get the hang of this. Scotus did not, believing that the existence of God is demonstrable only if being is predicably univocally of both God and creatures, which, as Richard Cross says, undoubtedly reduces the apophatic pressure on Scotus by comparison with Thomas³³ and is undoubtedly onto-theological, as everyone since Heidegger has learned to say. But it is no better in itself to say, as Milbank does, that the existence of God could not be rationally demonstrable from creatures, since being is *not* predicably univocally of God and creatures, or that, as an interpretation of Thomas, since he thought that only analogy held between God and creatures, he could not have believed rational demonstration of God to be possible: no better than Scotus, because to say this is "Scotism". And it is not Thomas. In fact I cannot think of a more openly "Scotist" proposition than that on the grounds of which Milbank purports to demonstrate that Thomas could not have intended his five ways as formal rational proofs, namely, that since terms predicated of God and creatures are for Thomas predicably only analogically, and since (Milbank thinks) for Thomas there can be no strict demonstration of a proposition except from premises which are univocally related to that proposition, then formal demonstration of the existence of God from "creaturely" premises must be ruled out. As Milbank puts it:

... scientific demonstration proper depends, for Aquinas after Aristotle, on a univocity of terms answering to a univocity between causes and effects. For Aquinas, this contention disallowed a transgeneric "science" in the strictest sense ... Aquinas ... by identifying God with non-generic *esse*, and by specifically excluding God from *genus* and from substance in the sense either of distinct essence or self-standing individual ... also ensures that there can be only an analogical or not strictly scientific approach to the divine. Hence ... his "demonstrations" of God's existence can only be meant to offer weakly probable modes of argument and very attenuated "showings".³⁴

Thus Milbank. And so Scotus:

The active intellect and the sense image cannot give rise to a concept that, with respect to the object revealed in the sense image, is not univocal but rather, in accordance with an analogical relationship, is altogether other and higher than the object. It follows that such an "other",

analogous, concept will never arise in the intellect in our present state. Also it would thus follow that one could not naturally have any concept of God—which is false.³⁵

Thomas nowhere says any such thing—in fact, as we will see, he explicitly anticipates Scotus' objection, and rejects it, moreover in what can be construed as a "debate", of course *avant la lettre*, with Scotus about the logic of idolatry.

Scotus and Thomas on Idolatry

If Anselm's "fool", the atheist, is wrong to deny that there is a God, he must at least know what he denies, that is to say, "God exists" must mean the same to him as it does to the theist. And if God does exist, then the atheist is "wrong" in the plainest possible sense, in that what he says is straightforwardly false. That, as we have seen, is an unambiguous application of the Aristotelian principle, *eadem est scientia oppositorum*. But what are we to say about the idolater, the person who worships as God some finite, created object, "fire", "water", or a tree? In what way, precisely, does the idolater get God wrong? Are we to say that the idolater is no better in practice than an atheist, since he worships as if it were God something which is not and could not be God, and so, though nominally a theist, that he fails to acknowledge the existence of the one true God, infinite, Creator of all things visible and invisible, omnipotent, omniscient—which no water, or fire or tree could be? Or, are we to say that he cannot mean by the word "God" what the true believer means? That the idolater says "God exists" is neither here nor there on this account, if the idolater does not mean what the true believer means. If that were the case, then it would follow that the true believer and the idolater use the word "God" equivocally, that is to say, they do not truly disagree, for what the idolater affirms does not have the same meaning as what the true believer denies. In that case there could be no true *oppositio* because there is no *eadem scientia*.

Scotus' answer to these questions is simple, but crucial. The true believer and the idolater straightforwardly contradict one another. Therefore, he concludes, the true believer and the idolater must mean the same thing by "God", and the "... exists" in the utterance of either must be predicated univocally in both cases, for they could not be contradicting one another unless the existence predicated of a finite being claimed to be God, "fire" or "water" or whatever, were predicated in the same sense of the infinite being who is the one true God. For univocity of terms is defined thus: "I call a concept 'univocal' if it has that sameness of meaning which is required so that to affirm and deny it of the same subject amounts to a contradiction."³⁶

In truth there is some measure of agreement between Scotus and Thomas on how to respond to these questions. Thomas agrees in rejecting the posi-

tion that there is an equivocation between the true believer's and the idolater's use of the word "God", though Thomas is inclined to take the case for saying that they are equivocating more seriously than Scotus does. As Thomas puts it, it could very well seem that the idolater simply does not understand the word "God" at all, if he thinks that a bit of bronze could be the one true God:³⁷ and after all, we might ask how *could* you think that a finite being is the Creator of all things out of nothing? It might seem that the idolater must be thinking of some other meaning of the word "God" if his position is to be made intelligible.

But Scotus and Thomas are united in rejecting the understanding of idolatry according to which the idolater simply means something else than "God" when saying that an idol is God. Moreover, they partially agree on the grounds for rejecting the position. First Thomas points out, as Scotus also does, that equivocation does not derive from different subject-terms of predications, otherwise the predicate ". . . is a man" would be equivocal as predicated of Socrates and Plato: so, just because the Christian and the idolater predicate the name "God" of diverse individuals, it does not follow that the name is being used equivocally.³⁸ Equivocity derives from differences of meaning, not from differences of predication.³⁹ But secondly, Thomas agrees thus far with Scotus that there must be some relation of meaning between what the true believer and the idolater assert, because they contradict one another, which they could not do if they were using the word "God" equivocally. As Thomas says: "it is clear that the Christian who says that an idol is not God contradicts the pagan who says it is, because both use the name 'God' to signify the true God".⁴⁰ Beyond these points of agreement between them, however, Thomas and Scotus differ: for Scotus derives from them the conclusion that existence must be predicable not just non-equivocally—which is all Thomas believes the argument shows—but univocally of God and creatures, a conclusion which Thomas explicitly rejects. Let us therefore recall Scotus' argument.

Scotus says that both the true believer and the idolater are certain that God exists, but the idolater says that God is fire, while the true believer denies this, thus contradicting what the idolater says. But on the principle that the meaning of a predicate is univocal if and only if its affirmation and its negation of the same subject amounts to a contradiction, it follows that it must be in the same sense of ". . . exists" that the idolater and the true believer say that God exists. But since the true believer maintains that God is an infinite being and the idolater that God is a finite being, it follows that there must be a univocal meaning to the predicate ". . . exists" predicable in common of finite and infinite being.

Thomas' rejection of this argument anticipates Scotus' defence of it by some thirty years. Indeed if one did not know that Scotus was writing after Thomas, one might very well have supposed that Thomas' discussion of idolatry in the *Summa Theologiae* was written in explicit response to Scotus'

argument in the *Ordinatio*, so precisely in “Scotist” terms does Thomas identify the position he is rejecting. Thomas asks: *Is the name “God” used in the same sense of God, of what shares in divinity and of what is merely supposed to be God?* The question seems odd, but simply means: when “we”—that is, believing Christians, who possess the truth about God—speak about God, we do so in a certain sense. But Christians also have reason to speak of things other than God as having a divine character, for example, a soul in the state of grace may legitimately be described as in some sense sharing in the divine, and pagans call their idols “gods”, wrongly supposing them to be so. The question for Thomas, therefore, concerns what the relationship is between the meanings of the word “God” in these two cases of “sharing in the divinity” and “idoltrous supposition” on the one hand, and the meaning the word bears as naming the one true God on the other. So Thomas first sets out the case for the “Scotist” position that the word “God” must be used univocally:

It seems that the name “God” is univocally predicated of God in all cases, whether as of his [true] nature, whether as shared in, or whether in the suppositions [of the pagans]. For

1. Where there is diversity of meanings there can be no contradiction between an affirmation and its denial; for where there is equivocation there can be no contradiction. But when the Christian says, “an idol is not God”, he contradicts the pagan who says “an idol is God”. Therefore, “God” is predicated in either case in the same sense [*univoce*].

Now while Thomas concedes to this position (as I say, it is “Scotist” *avant la lettre*) that the idolater and the true believer cannot be using the name “God” equivocally, he will allow the argument no power to demonstrate that they are using the name univocally: the argument simply does not prove that conclusion. Thomas explains that if the idolater did not mean to affirm of fire or stone or a tree that it is “the one true God, almighty and worthy to be venerated above all else”,⁴¹ then what the idolater says would in fact be true. For in the case that the idolater meant by “God” something other and less than the one true God—for example, that the meaning of “God” is “finite being”—then it would be perfectly legitimate to say that fire is God: after all, the Bible, as Thomas points out, speaks of the “gods” of the gentiles, saying of them that they are in fact “demons” [Ps 95:51]. Hence, if the idolater is to be said to be “wrong about God” it must be because the idolater wrongly claims to be true of fire, or water, or a tree what the true believer claims to be true of the Creator of the universe, one God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This, then, is why Thomas agrees thus far with Scotus: it cannot be the case that the true believer and the idolater have an entirely different meaning for the word “God”, or else there would be no contradiction between them. The disagreement between the idolater and the true believer concerns what the name “God” could possibly be true of, the true believer

maintaining that it could not be true of fire or water or a of tree that it is “the one, true God”.

On the other hand, the difference between Thomas and Scotus emerges from consideration of the answers Scotus and Thomas give to the question: if the idolater is in some way “wrong” about God, in what way is he wrong? For Scotus, the idolater is “wrong” because, knowing what the word God means, he misattributes it to something which could not in *any* way be God in that sense: for there is no sense at all in which something other than God can be said to be “divine”.⁴² For Scotus, then, the idolater is wrong in the way the atheist is wrong, in that what he says is simply false. For Thomas, however, there is a genuine, if only derived and secondary, sense in which what the idolater calls “God” is truly divine. Therefore, Thomas says, as between what the idolater and the true believer affirm there is neither equivocity, nor univocity, but some analogy.

It is not possible here to say as much as is manifestly needed about what Thomas means by an “analogical” predication, and in this article Thomas gives but a broad and general account: a word is used analogically, he says, when “its meaning in one sense is explained by reference to its meaning in another sense”, explaining that, for example, we understand a healthy diet by reference to health in the body, of which health a healthy diet is the cause.⁴³ Now since the idolater would not be making a mistake in supposing a bronze statue to be God if he did not do so in *some* sense related to that in which the true believer uses the word “God”, it follows that the idolater is, as it were, playing the same game as the true believer, for he abides by the same rules for the meaning of the word “God”. Hence, if the idolater makes a theological mistake, he is still, we might say, “doing theology” even if he is playing on the losing team—unlike the atheist, for whom there is no theology to do, and will not play the game at all. If the idolater “gets God wrong” he does so not in the way in which the plain atheist does, who, understanding exactly what the theist understands by “God”, denies God’s existence. Rather, Thomas says, the idolater’s mistake is to suppose that that which does, genuinely, share in the divine nature—the bronze statue—is the divine being itself, and this mistake is like supposing that a diet is healthy in the same way in which a body is healthy—which, of course, it is not, for you cannot take a diet’s blood-pressure. Thus, the true believer knows *how* to say that the bronze statue is divine—by analogical extension from the true God—whereas the idolater does not.⁴⁴

One further difference between Thomas and Scotus emerges from this, a difference which turns out to be crucial from the point of view of the issue concerning the logical standing of the “five ways” considered as formal demonstrations of the existence of God. If Thomas maintains that the true believer and the idolater contradict one another (as Scotus does), but, unlike Scotus, maintains that the senses in which they use the name “God” are related analogically, not univocally, this is because Thomas does not accept

Scotus' definition of univocity in the first place. For Scotus maintained that a term is predicated univocally if its affirmation and negation of the same subject amounts to a contradiction. But Thomas argues that the affirmation and denial that a bronze statue is God amounts to a contradiction between predicates which are predicated in an analogical relation with one another. Therefore it cannot be entailed that, in principle, propositions may contradict one another if and only if they contain such terms as bear univocally the same meanings: there can be an *eadem scientia* between terms analogically related, and in this case there are. Scotus' argument fails.

Thomas and the Logic of Proof

But so then does Milbank's. If, for Thomas, there can be formal *contradiction* between two analogically related propositions, then it follows, and contrary to what Milbank claims, that there can be formally valid *inference* between premises and a conclusion analogically related to them across the "gap" between creatures and God. Why? For the reason which Scotus gives: if, on Scotus' account, an inference is valid only on condition that the terms related to one another by it are such that "to affirm and to deny [them] of the same subject amounts to a contradiction", then, on Thomas' account, that condition is met by terms which are related to one another analogically. Hence an inference will not, for Thomas, be invalidated by the fact that it connects terms logically related to one another by analogy if, as in the case in question of "God", to affirm and deny of a bronze statue that it is God amounts to a contradiction. As far as Thomas is concerned, all that is required for the validity of such inferences is that there should be no equivocation between premises and conclusion. That premises and conclusion are related analogically can therefore be no obstacle to the inference between them being logically valid.

If this argument may seem to relate with comparative indirectness to the issue of inference to an analogical conclusion, a second text, found in the *Summa Contra Gentiles* could not meet the point more squarely. There Thomas considers "the opinion of those who say that God's existence cannot be demonstrated but can be held by faith alone", and in the course of doing so entertains Milbank's Aristotelian objection to his own view that God's existence is demonstrable: ". . . if the principles of demonstration have their origin in knowledge of sense, as is shown in the *Posterior Analytics*, what wholly exceeds every sense and sensible thing seems to be indemonstrable. But the existence of God is such. Therefore it is indemonstrable".⁴⁵

But Thomas rejects this counterargument. If it were valid, he comments, it would prove too much. For on that account—"if there were no substance knowable beyond sensible substance"—then nothing beyond natural science would be knowable, which even Aristotle denies. He adds—in an oblique reference to the "derridean" objection—that it can be no further objection to

the validity of such proof that we cannot know the “essence” of God, and so cannot construct any non-equivocal sequence of premises entailing God’s existence, since in proofs of the kind in question it is the divine effects⁴⁶ which function as premises, not the divine nature.⁴⁷ For we cannot construct an argument for God’s existence out of premises definitive of the divine nature, as Anselm (on Thomas’ reading of *Proslogion*) supposed, that nature being unknown to us—we are in possession of no definition of God in the first place.⁴⁸ But if the arguments for the existence of God are constructed from premises descriptive of the effects of God in creation, and not from any definition of God, then of course the conclusion of such an argument will have to contain terms not univocally related to those of the premises: it could not be an argument for the existence of *God* if that were not so, but only for “just another, creaturely, being”. Hence, the only tests of such an argument’s validity could be those of ordinary logic: you could not rule out the argument’s validity on the grounds alone that the conclusion contained terms not univocally related to the terms of the premises. For that is pure Scotism. Milbank is of course quite right that Thomas is no “Scotist”. It is, however, less clear that on this point at least Milbank is not one himself.

The “Five Ways” and Idolatry

If, as I have conceded, Thomas does not offer the arguments of *Summa Theologiae* 1a q2 a3 by way of formal, philosophical response to an “atheist” in any modern sense, this is not to say that they do not stand up as formally valid proofs. Of course, in defending them against a particular case for denying their formal validity I have done nothing to show that they are valid and there is no space in an article such as this for any positive defence of their argument scheme. That is another story which belongs elsewhere. But if their purpose is not to conduct a polemic with the formal atheist, what are they doing at this early point in the *Summa*, what are their purposes in the wider theological scheme of that work? One purpose seems very clear, and would appear to belong within Thomas’ explicit intentions, at any rate to such as are evidenced by the close relation between question 2 of the *Prima pars*, which contains the “five ways” of showing that God exists, and question 3, which contains Thomas’ most emphatic statement of the divine unknowability, showing that we do not know what God is. A “rational” proof of the existence of God does not yield a God “within the bounds of reason”, an all-too knowable and idolatrous “something or other” contained within reason’s finite parameters, but, on the contrary, it yields a conception of reason which, in driving our knowledge of the world to the end of its tether, finally cracks that finite world open into a territory of a boundless unknowability which utterly transcends it: *et hoc omnes dicunt Deum*.⁴⁹ As I have said, in showing God to exist reason shows that we no longer know what “exists” means. I do not think that Thomas meant the “five ways” to

show anything much about God. But they are meant to show a lot about reason. And there is a strictly theological purpose in showing that much about reason, because it is only a conception of reason so “apophatically” construed that can serve the purposes for which it is needed in the theological articulation of Christian faith itself. The reason of the “rationalist” could not do the job at all.

But there is another, related, purpose for Thomas’ early inclusion of the “five ways” within the theological construction of the *Summa Theologiae*, which we may identify if we ask why it is, curiously, that in an age such as Thomas’, when theologians were not confronted by a serious intellectual challenge from atheists, rational arguments for the existence of God are standard and commonplace theological fare, whereas in our age, when atheism, often in explicitly philosophical and often militant forms, is widespread, theologians have by and large abandoned a rational and philosophical response. It might be said that the reason for this is that we no longer feel that rational proofs can do any good anyway: but I doubt it. I rather suspect that a combination of an intellectual habit of scepticism about reason (inherited uncritically by theologians from “kantian” epistemological assumptions) and complacency about faith, has led theologians to retreat into a position of fideistic invulnerability to philosophical counterargument in principle. Thomas blocks that line of retreat: and as to the false choices between rationalism and fideism, or between an idolatrous onto-theology and a post-modern nihilism, I guess he would have wished a plague to be visited on all their houses.

NOTES

- 1 *Peri Hermeneias*, 6, 17a 33–35.
- 2 For example, see *Summa Theologiae* 1a q58 a4 ad2.
- 3 I do think it worth noting that the distinction between “intellectual” atheism and atheism “of the heart” is more *ours* than any which Anselm would have accepted as a distinction in principle. There is no concept of “intellect” in Anselm which sets it in such contrast with affairs of the “heart” as that in which we tend to set it in today.
- 4 And on the score of this emphatic denial that we know what God is, it makes no difference whether we are on the ground of some purely rational conception of God, or of a revealed conception, known by faith: “we do not know what God is”, he says, “even by the revelation of grace. And so [by grace] we are made one with him as to something unknown to us—*quasi ei ignoto*”, *Summa Theologiae* 1a q12 a13 ad1.
- 5 See my published lecture “How to be an Atheist”, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. In short, atheisms of this kind simply mirror the idolatries they reject: if your theism is of a kind that requires a place for God to be found in the world, then inevitably God’s presence in the world is going to have to expel something else from it. And if the place you find for God in the world is such that, say, evolution has to be expelled from it to leave God some elbow room, as “creationists” appear to think, then, conversely, finding a place for evolution in the world will require expelling God from just that place. As Thomas would no doubt say, the common problem with both positions (for *eadem est scientia oppositorum*) is that of idolatrously supposing that if God exists then some place will have to be found for him in the world.
- 6 Jean-Luc Marion, *God without Being*, trans. Thomas a Carlson, (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1991).

- 7 Jacques Derrida, "How to avoid Speaking: Denials" in *On the Name*, ed. T. Dutoit, trans., David Wood, John P. Leavy and Ian McLeod, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), pp. 106–108.
- 8 *ST* 1a q3 *Prologue*.
- 9 *ST* 1a q3 a4 *corp*.
- 10 *ST* 1a q3 a4 obj. 2.
- 11 *ST* 1a q75 a6 *corp*.
- 12 *Divine Names*, 817D.
- 13 *ST* 1a q45 a1 ad3.
- 14 *God Matters*, (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1987), p. 69.
- 15 See *Expositio libri Boetii de Hebdomadibus*, lect. 2, intro., Latin text and trans, Janice S. Schultz and Edward Synan, (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2001), pp. 16–17.
- 16 *De Aeternitate Mundi contra Murmurantes*, in *Aquinas on Creation*, trans., Steven E. Baldner and William E. Carroll, (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1997), pp. 114–122.
- 17 This does not mean that created causes cannot cause something to be which did not previously exist. Of course parents can cause children to be. What Thomas means in saying that *esse* is the act of existence by contrast with nothing is that that there is anything at all rather than nothing is, and can be, brought about only by God. No more than any created cause, can parents bring anything about *ex nihilo*. But that created causality which truly causes something to be is itself caused to exist, as everything at all is caused to exist, and so is caused *ex nihilo*, by God alone.
- 18 *ST* 1a q3 a4 ad2.
- 19 David Burrell, "On distinguishing God from the world" in *Language, Meaning and God, Essays in Honour of Herbert McCabe OP*, ed. Brian Davies OP, (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1987), p. 77.
- 20 "... quia esse causatum non est de ratione entis simpliciter, propter hoc invenitur aliquod ens non causatum". *ST* 1a q44 a1 ad1.
- 21 Of course it does not follow from this that all language about God is logically negative—this conclusion is what Thomas denies in what he understands (correctly or otherwise) to be the position of Moses Maimonides. To confuse "apophaticism" with the view that all statements about God are logical negations is to reduce "apophaticism" to the standing of literal falsehood. If to say "God is good" means "God is not evil", then in any sense in which it is said "apophatically" that God is not good would thereby be reduced to the statement that God is evil.
- 22 *Divine Names*, 817D.
- 23 For a fuller discussion of this point, see my *Eros and Allegory*, (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1995), chapter two.
- 24 *ST* 1a q3 a4 ad1.
- 25 Sermon 83, *Renovamini Spiritu*, in *Meister Eckhart, The Essential sermons, commentaries, treatises and defense*, trans., Edmund Colledge and Bernard McGinn, (London: SPCK, 1981), p. 208.
- 26 "... quae sunt diversa et opposita in seipsis, in Deo praexistunt ut unum, absque detrimento simplicitatis ipsius". *ST* 1a q4 a2 ad1.
- 27 *Radical Orthodoxy*, eds. John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and Graham Ward, (London: Routledge, 1998).
- 28 A. N. Williams, *The Ground of Union: Deification in Aquinas and Palamas*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1999).
- 29 Henri de Lubac, *Surnaturel: Etudes historiques*, (Paris: Aubier, 1946; second edn, Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1991).
- 30 John Milbank, "Intensities", *Modern Theology* Vol. 15 no. 4 (October, 1999), p. 455.
- 31 *ST* 1a q2 a3 *corp*.
- 32 *ST* 1a q3 a4 ad2. There are complex and difficult issues here about the logic of *esse* in Thomas which I have much more to say about in a monograph *Why Anything?* forthcoming from Cambridge University Press in 2004.
- 33 Richard Cross, *Duns Scotus*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 39.
- 34 *Intensities*, pp. 454–455.

- 35 "Sed conceptus qui non esset univocus obiecto relucenti in phantasmate, sed omnino alius, prior, ad quem ille habeat analogiam, non potest fieri virtute intellectus agentis et phantasmatis; ergo talis conceptus alius, analogus qui ponitur, naturaliter in intellectus viatoris numquam erit,—et ita non poterit haberi naturaliter aliquis conceptus de Deo, quod est falsum", *Ordinatio* I d3 n. 36. Translation, William A. Frank and Allan B. Wolter, *Duns Scotus, Metaphysician*, (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1995). Otherwise known as the *Opus Oxoniense*, this work is Scotus' first commentary on the "Sentences" of Peter Lombard, begun at Oxford in the last years of the thirteenth century and completed, perhaps by 1304, in Paris. The edition of the text used for translations is found in *Doctoris Subtilis et Mariani, Joannis Duns Scoti Ordinis Fratrum Minorum Opera Omnia*, Civitas Vaticana: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1950.
- 36 *Ordinatio* I d3 25. My translation.
- 37 *ST* 1a q13 a10, *sed contra, praeterea*.
- 38 "... nomenclatura multiplicitas non attenditur secundum nominis praedicationem, sed significationem: hoc enim nomen *homo*, de quocumque praedicetur, sive vere, sive false, dicitur uno modo"; "... a multiplicity of names [equivocation] results not from the multiplicity of its predications, but from a multiplicity of meanings. For the word "man", whatever it is predicated of, whether truly or falsely, means just one thing." *ST* 1a q13 a10 ad1.
- 39 *Ibid.*
- 40 *Ibid.*
- 41 *ST* 1a q13 a10.
- 42 There is an important point implicit here. For Thomas, all creation is in some sense "divine", for all creation in one way or another participates in the divine nature. It is for this reason that the idolater is not unequivocally wrong. By contrast, the Scotist doctrine that the idolater is wholly wrong about God, involving as it does the rejection of all analogy between creatures and God, is bound to cause great difficulty in maintaining consistently any doctrine that creation participates in the divine nature.
- 43 *ST* 1a q13 a10 *corp.*
- 44 "... when the pagan says the idol is God he does not use the name as signifying a mere [false] supposition about God, for then what he says would be true; and even Christians use the word in this [secondary] sense, as when it is said in Psalm 95:51, 'all their Gods are devils'—"Cum enim paganus dicit idolum esse Deum, non utitur hoc nomine secundum quod significat Deum opinabilem: sic enim verum dicaret, cum etiam catholici interdum in tali significatione hoc nomine utitur, ut cum dicitur (Ps 95:51), *omnes dii gentium daemonia*", *ST* 1a q13 a10, *corp.*
- 45 *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 1.12.
- 46 This is an ellipsis. Kerr is, of course, right (see *After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism*, [Oxford: Blackwell, 2002], p. 59) that you cannot *prove* the existence of God from what you *know* are the divine effects, because that is simply to beg the question. But that is not Thomas' procedure. For Thomas, to prove the existence of God *is* to prove that creatures are "effects" of a divine creating causality.
- 47 *ST* 1a q2 a2 ad2.
- 48 *ST*, 1a q2 a1 *corp.*
- 49 It is sometimes objected that the God of Thomas' proofs could not be the "same" God as the God of faith, because no one of faith speaks of God as "first cause" or "prime mover" or "necessary being", and that Thomas is therefore unwarranted in saying of the God of his proof, *et hoc omnes dicunt Deum*. I think this is mistaken. The Latin should not be translated as "this is how all people speak of God", or even as "this is what all people *mean* when they speak of God", for manifestly they do not, and Thomas knows this. It should rather be translated as "this is the God all people speak of". The square of 1 is 1, and the square root of 1 is 1, but of course "square of ..." and "square root of ..." do not *mean* the same. In just the same way, Thomas maintains, the God of Trinitarian faith is the same God as the God of the proofs, though obviously to say "God is the prime mover" does not mean the same as "God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit".

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