

in his discussions of truth, but he reflects on the meaning of these terms elsewhere. Aquinas considers *adaequatio* when he asks whether there is mutual equality among the divine persons. There, Aquinas explains that adequation involves a “motion” and “approach” toward unity of quality or quantity.⁶⁶ Adequation is not a static state, but rather a dynamic process which achieves sameness in objects that formerly differed in the respect in which they are likened.⁶⁷ Aquinas considers the meaning of conformity similarly in a theological context when he asks whether the human will is able to be conformed to the divine will.⁶⁸ He says that, as the etymology of the word *conformitas* suggests, conformity is the state of two objects agreeing in so far as they have the same form.⁶⁹ He says conformity obtains in two ways: between two objects that are of the same kind, e.g. two white things, and when one object imitates another object that has a certain form essentially, e.g. a hot body, which has heat from another, considered in relation to fire, which has heat of itself.⁷⁰ The second kind of conformity is the result of a process of adequation. In becoming hot, for example, a body undergoes a change that results in a similarity of quality with that which heats it.

Aquinas’s thinking about the definition of truth, see John Wippel “Truth in Thomas Aquinas,” *The Review of Metaphysics* 43:3 (1990), pp. 565-567 and Lawrence Dewan, “St. Thomas's Successive Discussions of the Nature of Truth.” D. Ols (ed.), *Sanctus Thomas de Aquino Doctor hodiernae Humanitatis. Miscellanea offerta dalla Società Internazionale Tommaso d'Aquino al suo direttore prof. Abelardo Lobato, O.P. per il suo LXX gentiliaco* (Pontificia Academia de San Tommaso - Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano, 1995), pp. 153-158.

⁶⁶ *In I Sent.* 19.1.2 co. Interestingly, this discussion involving adequation occurs in the same distinction and just four questions prior to Aquinas’s discussion of truth.

⁶⁷ For literature on Aquinas’s understanding of *adequatio*, see Jan Aertsen, *op. cit.*; Christoph Kann, “Wahrheit als *Adaequatio*: Bedeutung, Deutung, Klassifikation,” *Recherches de Théologie et Philosophie Médiévales* LXVI:2 (1999): 209-224; Tobias Davids, “Wahrheit als Korrespondenz und Adäquation,” *Philosophisches Jahrbuch* (2006): 63-77.

⁶⁸ *In I Sent.* 48.1.1.

⁶⁹ *In I Sent.* 48.1.1 arg. 3: “conformitas ponit convenientiam duorum in forma una; sicut ipsum nomen ostendit.” Aquinas sometimes calls a form in one object that is like the form of another a *similitudo*. See *ST* I.4.3, c. and *De ver.* 8.8 c.

⁷⁰ *In I Sent.* 48.1.1. co.

Examining some key features of Aquinas's account of human cognition shows how he thought that conformity and adequation were apt descriptions of the relationship between intellects and things. On Aquinas's account of cognition, which depends heavily on Aristotle, cognition happens by an assimilation of the knower to the thing known.⁷¹ This process occurs through the knower's possession of the form of the thing known.⁷² Aquinas is clear that the way in which intellects possess forms must differ from the way in which forms exist in material things. If there were no difference between how forms existed in intellects and in material objects and cognition required possession of a form, an intellect would have to be heated in order to understand what hot is.⁷³ Although the form in the intellect does not cause it to materially possess a quality, it causes the intellect to have an act of cognition and makes that act of cognition to be a cognition of a particular thing.⁷⁴ When an intellect has a cognition of an apple, for example, the presence of the form of the apple in the

⁷¹ *De ver.* 8.5 c; *ScG* I.65; *ST* I.12.9 ad 1; *De ver.* 8,1 ad 7

⁷² *ST* I.75.5 c; *De ver.* 2.6, co. Aquinas attributes this view to Democritus and Empedocles in *ST* I.84.6 co.

⁷³ While it is clear what a form's existing in the intellect is not, Thomistic commentators have disagreed about how to positively understand what the knower's *possession* of the form amounts to and what the *sameness* of what is possessed is. Fortunately, these debates do not need to be resolved here. For a survey of the varying positions on these questions, see Jeffrey Brower and Susan Brower-Toland, "Aquinas on Mental Representations," forthcoming in *Philosophical Review*.

⁷⁴ *De ver.* 10.4, co.: "Responsio. Dicendum quod omnis cognitio est secundum aliquam formam quae est in cognoscente principium cognitionis. Forma autem huiusmodi dupliciter potest considerari: uno modo secundum esse quod habet in cognoscente, alio modo secundum respectum quem habet ad rem cuius est similitudo. Secundum quidem primum respectum facit cognoscentem actu cognoscere, sed secundum respectum secundum determinat cognitionem ad aliquod cognoscibile determinatum; et ideo modus cognoscendi rem aliquam est secundum condicionem cognoscentis in quo forma recipitur secundum modum eius." See also *De ver.* 2.5 ad 16 and 3.2 ad 5. Interpreters disagree on how to interpret the mode in which the form causes the intellect to know. Robert Pasnau understands the form to be an efficient cause of cognition. See his, *Theories of Cognition*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 113, 171, 176, 190, 198, 211. John O'Callaghan has criticized this reading. See his *Thomist Realism and the Linguistic Turn*, (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), pp. 175-182.

intellect is both what makes the intellect to be engaging in the activity of cognition and cognizing an apple rather than a dog. The form in the intellect, which in technical language is called the intelligible species, is not itself that which the intellect knows, but rather, it is that by which it knows an extra-mental object.⁷⁵ Aquinas says that in knowing an object through its form, the intellect forms its own "intention" or concept of the thing known, which the definition of the thing signifies. This intention allows the intellect to know the thing when it is absent and apart from individuating conditions. Aquinas also refers to this intention as a likeness (*similitudo*) of the thing known and says that through it too things are able to be cognized.⁷⁶ Interpreters of Aquinas's thought have debated about how one is to understand the intention or concept. John O'Callaghan, for example, has argued that the concept is the act of understanding that is informed by the intelligible form. The concept is not a "third thing" in addition to the intellect and the intelligible form that is produced by the intellect through its act of knowing.⁷⁷ Others, however, argue that

⁷⁵The intellect can, however, reflect on its own act of knowing and in this way, the species itself becomes a thing that is known. See *ST* 1.85.2 c; I.17, 3 co.

⁷⁶*ScG* I.53, n. 443 & 444: "Ulterius autem considerandum est quod intellectus, per speciem rei formatus, intelligendo format in seipso quandam intentionem rei intellectae, quae est ratio ipsius, quam significat definitio. Et hoc quidem necessarium est: eo quod intellectus intelligit indifferenter rem absentem et praesentem, in quo cum intellectu imaginatio convenit; sed intellectus hoc amplius habet, quod etiam intelligit rem ut separatam a conditionibus materialibus, sine quibus in rerum natura non existit; et hoc non posset esse nisi intellectus sibi intentionem praedictam formaret. Haec autem intentio intellecta, cum sit quasi terminus intelligibilis operationis, est aliud a specie intelligibili quae facit intellectum in actu, quam oportet considerari ut intelligibilis operationis principium: licet utrumque sit rei intellectae similitudo. Per hoc enim quod species intelligibilis quae est forma intellectus et intelligendi principium, est similitudo rei exterioris, sequitur quod intellectus intentionem formet illi rei similem: quia *quale est unumquodque, talia operatur*. Et ex hoc quod intentio intellecta est similis alicui rei, sequitur quod intellectus, formando huiusmodi intentionem, rem illam intelligat." See also *ScG* IV.11 n.6; *De ver.* 3.2. For further texts illustrating Aquinas's usage of *intentio* see the entry on this topic in Ludwig Schütz's *Thomas Lexikon*, which is available online at <http://www.corpusthomicum.org/tl.html>.

⁷⁷ See his *Thomist Realism and the Linguistic Turn*, pp. 26-28, 31-32, 168.

the concept is in fact a mental entity distinct from the intellect and intelligible species. They frequently cite two passages in which Aquinas claims that the concept is an "effect" of the intellect and that it is something "progressing" from the intellect.⁷⁸ However one chooses to understand the intention of the intellect, the intention is considered a likeness of the thing and thus, when the intention is present, the intellect can properly be said to conform to or be adequated with extra-mental things. Since both the species that causes the intellect to know and the intention that the intellect forms are likenesses of the thing known, the intellect conforms to or is adequated with reality both in its process of cognition and through its concept or intention. In the last chapter, I explained that Aquinas thought that a nature had existence both in things and in the intellect. When there is adequation or conformity between the nature that exists in the intellect and the one that exists in things, truth arises.

Even though the divine intellect does not rely on species or form concepts to know things, Aquinas thought that there was also a relationship between God's intellect and things that consisted in truth. This relation too was an instance of two concrete beings possessing the same form. Aquinas thought that since the divine intellect was the exemplar cause for natural things, the forms of natural things had a likeness to God's intellect. The forms of created things were said by Aquinas to pre-exist in God's intellect. In a later chapter, we will examine what the ontological status of these forms is. In any case, though, Aquinas thought that there was conformity

⁷⁸ *De ver.* 4.2: "Ipsa enim conceptio est *effectus* actus intelligendi." *De ver.* 4.2 ad 7: "...sed intellectus habet in se ipso aliquid progrediens ab eo, non solum per modum operationis sed etiam per modum rei operatae; et ideo verbum significatur ut res procedens..."

between natural things and God's intellect in virtue of the similitude to God's intellect that the forms of created things had. In the case of the truth that obtains between things and God's intellect, the relationship of adequation runs in the opposite direction from the adequation that occurs between human intellects and things. Human intellects are changed by coming to have the forms of things. God's knowledge produces the forms of things and it is the things themselves that are made in creation to be like God's intellect. Aquinas thought that when the human intellect produces an artificial thing, the thing is similarly conformed to the human intellect just as natural things conform to the divine intellect.⁷⁹

Since truth is essentially a relationship between intellects and things, Aquinas thought that if there were no intellects, there would be no truth.⁸⁰ Without intellects, the forms of things could not come to exist in another being's cognition and this is precisely what truth consisted in. Even if there were no intellectual *creatures*, there could still be truth because of the divine intellect's relation to things, but if *per impossible*, God's intellect ceased to be and things continued to exist, there would be no truth. Although there cannot be truth in the absence of intellects, Aquinas thought that truth properly is a feature of things—not just intellects. Because truth is fundamentally a relational notion, things are also called true when their forms exist in an intellect. Every existing being has a relation of conformity to God's intellect, so

⁷⁹ *De ver.* 1.2 co.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

every thing enters into a truth relation. Every material being is potentially true, as well, since all material beings can be potentially known by the human intellect.⁸¹

It is significant to note that according to what I have called Aquinas's ontological notion of truth none of the bearers of truth are propositionally structured entities. The human intellect is conformed to things in the relation of truth when it has a species or simple concept of an extra-mental being. Neither the species or the simple concept has a predicate-subject structure. Things are conformed to God's intellect in the relation of truth in virtue of the likeness their forms have to God. Of course, neither the created things nor God are propositionally structured. In addition to his ontological notion of truth which consists in a conformity between beings, Aquinas also held that assertions and denials were true if they said what is of what is and false if they said what is not of what is.⁸² Aquinas's notion of propositional truth, while distinct from his ontological notion of truth, must be understood in light of its dependence on his notion of ontological truth. On Aquinas's view, to form a proposition is to affirm the conformity between intellect and thing. The proposition affirms that an extra-mental thing *is* as the intellect understands it to be in its simple concept. Examining Aquinas's mature argumentation for why truth is primarily in the intellect's act of judgment makes this apparent.⁸³

⁸¹ *De ver.* 1.1 co.

⁸² *Meta.* IV.17, n. 736: "Nam verum est cum dicitur esse quod est, vel non esse quod non est. Falsum autem, e converso." See also *ScG* I, 59.

⁸³ I refer to what follows as Aquinas's *mature* argument because the way in which he argued for truth's being primarily in the intellect's second act developed throughout his career. In his earliest work, he argues that truth is the second act because it grasps a thing's existence and existence is the foundation of truth. See *In I Sent.* 19.5. ad 7; *In I Sent.* 38.1.3; *In I Sent.* 23.1.2 ad 1. Later in the *De veritate*, he argues that truth is primarily in the intellect's second act because it has something proper to

We have seen that, for Aquinas, a sufficient condition for an intellect's having truth is its having a likeness, i.e. the form of another being, present in it intentionally. Aquinas thought, as Aristotle did, that the senses too in their act of sensation bear a likeness to the thing sensed. Accordingly, Aquinas had to answer the question of why truth is considered primarily in the intellect rather than in the senses. In responding to this question in the *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas writes:

Since every true thing is true in so far as it has the proper form of its nature, it is necessary that the intellect, in so far as it is knowing, is true in so far as it has a likeness to the thing known, which is the form of the intellect in so far as it is knowing. And on account of this, truth is defined as the conformity of intellect and thing. Accordingly, to cognize this conformity is to cognize truth. The senses in no way know this conformity, for although vision bears a likeness to the visible thing, it does not nevertheless cognize the comparison that is between the thing seen and that which it itself apprehends regarding it. The intellect, however, is able to cognize the conformity of itself to the intelligible thing, but nevertheless it does not apprehend it when it cognizes what a thing is. Rather, when it judges the thing to be just as the form which it apprehended of the thing, then it first cognizes and asserts truth. And it does this by composing and dividing. For in every proposition, the intellect either applies some form signified by the predicate to some thing signified by the subject or it removes it from it.⁸⁴

itself which can be adequated to reality. Aquinas thinks that things must be diverse in order to be adequated. See *De ver.* 1.3 co. On the development of Aquinas's arguments, see Dewan, "St. Thomas's Successive Discussions of the Nature of Truth," pp. 158-165 and Goris, *Free Creatures of an Eternal God*, pp. 150-212.

⁸⁴ *ST* I.16.2 co.: "Cum autem omnis res sit vera secundum quod habet propriam formam naturae suae, necesse est quod intellectus, in quantum est cognoscens, sit verus in quantum habet similitudinem rei cognitae, quae est forma eius in quantum est cognoscens. Et propter hoc per conformitatem intellectus et rei veritas definitur. Unde conformitatem istam cognoscere, est cognoscere veritatem. Hanc autem nullo modo sensus cognoscit, licet enim visus habeat similitudinem visibilis, non tamen cognoscit comparisonem quae est inter rem visam et id quod ipse apprehendit de ea. Intellectus autem conformitatem sui ad rem intelligibilem cognoscere potest, sed tamen non apprehendit eam secundum quod cognoscit de aliquo quod quid est; sed quando iudicat rem ita se habere sicut est forma quam de re apprehendit, tunc primo cognoscit et dicit verum. Et hoc facit componendo et dividendo, nam in omni propositione aliquam formam significatam per praedicatum, vel applicat alicui rei significatae per subiectum, vel removet ab ea." See also *De Int.* 1.3, n. 6 & 9.

Aquinas argues here that what distinguishes the intellect's conformity to things from the senses' conformity to things is the intellect's ability to cognize its conformity to things. Not only does the intellect conform to a thing, but it also cognizes that it conforms to a thing. The senses perceive the redness and hardness of an apple, but they cannot recognize the forms of redness and hardness that exist in them as likenesses of an apple. The intellect, however, is able to cognize the likenesses it has of the forms of objects and assert that these forms belong to particular extra-mental objects. In forming a proposition, the intellect asserts that the likeness it has in itself is in fact a likeness of a specific object. The proposition the *Apple is red* is formed by the intellect's cognizing the form of red that it understands and asserting that it inheres in an apple. Aquinas similarly expresses this view in his *Commentary on the Metaphysics*:

When the intellect has the concept of that which is animal, rational and mortal, it possesses in itself a likeness to man, but not for this reason does it cognize itself to have this likeness, since it does not judge man to be animal, rational, and mortal. And therefore truth and falsity is in that second operation of the intellect alone, according to which not only does the intellect possess a likeness to the thing understood, but it also reflects upon that likeness, knowing and judging it.⁸⁵

In asserting that *Man is a rational mortal animal* the intellect is reflecting on its simple concepts of rational, mortal, and animal and judging that they belong to man.

These concepts themselves already conform to man. In judgment, the intellect asserts

⁸⁵ *In Meta.* 6.4, n. 1236. "Cum enim intellectus concipit hoc quod est animal rationale mortale, apud se similitudinem hominis habet; sed non propter hoc cognoscit se hanc similitudinem habere, quia non iudicat hominem esse animal rationale et mortale: et ideo in hac sola secunda operatione intellectus est veritas et falsitas, secundum quam non solum intellectus habet similitudinem rei intellectae, sed etiam super ipsam similitudinem reflectitur, cognoscendo et diiudicando ipsam."

that conformity. Knowledge of the subject *man* is presupposed by the judgment. It is not complete knowledge of what it is to be a man that is presupposed, but rather a simple understanding of the essence of man as distinct from other beings. What is asserted in the proposition is that this being known as man has certain forms.⁸⁶

This understanding of how propositions are formed affects how we should understand Aquinas's "correspondence" theory of truth. I suspect that many readers assume that when Aquinas claims that truth is a conformity of intellect and thing, he means that truth is a conformity between a proposition and an existing thing or aspect of reality.⁸⁷ There is textual evidence for this interpretation. In the *De veritate*, for instance, Aquinas argues that truth is primarily in judgment because in judgment the intellect gains something of its own that can be adequated to a thing.⁸⁸ This argument suggests that it is the proposition itself that is adequated or conformed to reality in the relation that is truth because the proposition is what is constituted in judgment. In later works, however, Aquinas never repeats this argument. If the proposition itself is that which conforms or is adequate to reality, then knowing the conformity that

⁸⁶ Harm Goris has argued that Aquinas's mature account on how singulars are known (*ST* Ia.86.1) supports the interpretation of the proposition as the affirmation of the conformity of what the intellect understands with a real thing. See his "A Reinterpretation of Aquinas' Correspondence Definition of Truth," M. C. Pacheco; J. F. Meirinhos (eds.), *Intellect et imagination dans la Philosophie Médiévale. Actes de XIème Congrès International de Philosophie Médiévale, Porto, 26 au 30 août 2002 organisé par la Société Internationale pour l'Étude de la Philosophie Médiévale*, t. 3 (Rencontres de Philosophie Médiévale, 11: Brepols, Turnhout, 2006) 1431-1446.

⁸⁷ If one read the claims *veritas est adaequatio* (or *conformitas*) *intellectus et rei* out of context, this would appear to be a valid possible interpretation since the term *intellectus*, in addition to meaning the intellectual power, is sometimes used to mean that which the intellect understands. Consider for example *De Int.* 1.6, n. 2: "...nomen vel verbum significat simplicem intellectum, oratio vero significat intellectum compositum." In *ST* I.40.3 co., Aquinas quickly shifts from one usage to another: "remanet seorsum in intellectu nostro et intellectus circuli et intellectus aeris."

⁸⁸ *De ver.* 1.3, co.

consists in truth would be to know that a proposition conforms to reality. This is how Joseph Owens understood Aquinas's conception of knowing truth. Owens writes:

For knowing truth, the separate cognition of the two objects is required. The one object is the existence actually synthesizing the components in the thing that is being apprehended. The other object is the judgment in the sense of the proposition that represents this synthesizing. When asked if it is true that the cat is on the mat, you see the two objects are the judgment "The cat is on the mat" and the actual presence of the cat on the mat at the moment. You compare the two objects, and if they correspond you see that the judgment is true.⁸⁹

Owens's interpretation may be an adequate explanation of the view that Aquinas held in the *De veritate*; however, it does not capture the view Aquinas held when writing the *Summa*.⁹⁰ As I mentioned above, it seems that Aquinas held when writing the *De veritate* that the proposition is what conforms with reality, so to know the conformity between intellect and thing on this view is to know the conformity between a proposition and reality as Owens explains. We saw, however, in a passage quoted earlier from the *Summa Theologiae*, that there Aquinas held that it was not the proposition, but the form that is understood that conforms to reality. In the later *Summa*, Aquinas claimed that the intellect knows truth "when it judges the thing to be just as the form which is apprehended of a thing". The comparison that consists in knowing truth then on Aquinas's mature view is a comparison not between a complex judgment and a thing, but rather between a simple form and a thing. In Owens's

⁸⁹ "Judgment and Truth in Aquinas," *Mediaeval Studies* 32 (1970): 138-158, p. 156. On Owens's view and rival conceptions of judgment in other Thomistic commentators, see Patrick Lee, "Aquinas on Knowledge of Truth and Existence" *New Scholasticism* 60:1 (1986): 46-71.

⁹⁰ *De ver.* 1.9 may be able to be read as a corrective to the *De ver.* 1.3 text. In 1.9, Aquinas gives the argument that he gives in later texts for why truth is primarily in the intellect, namely because the intellect knows its correspondence with reality. He does not clarify though in this text whether it is the proposition or the simple concept that is known to correspond with the thing.

example, the likeness the intellect has of being on the mat is known to be in fact a likeness of the cat when the intellect judges *The cat is on the mat*. Making this judgment itself is what knowing truth consists in. There is no further judgment that is needed to determine that this judgment corresponds to reality. To assert the judgement is to assert the conformity. In addition to being at odds with Aquinas's latest texts, Owens's own interpretation runs into philosophical difficulties. If every judgment needed to be verified by another judgment that compared it to reality, there would be an infinite sequence of judgments and no truth could ever be known.

Aquinas's latest thinking about what knowledge of truth consists in shows that in his final view the proposition itself was not considered a *relata* in the relation of conformity between intellect and thing. Rather, the proposition expressed that relation. In the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Aquinas writes, "Only the complex is able to be called true or false *in which is designated the comparison of the incomplex to the thing* by the notion of composition and division."⁹¹ The *incomplex* here refers to the intellect's simple concept and the *complex* is the proposition. In the proposition, the subject stands for the extra-mental thing and the predicate signifies the form understood by the intellect.

One may wonder how Aquinas's description of the proposition as expressing the intellect's conformity with reality relates to his other description of the proposition as saying that it is of what is.⁹² According to this latter description of the

⁹¹ Italics are mine. *ScG* I.59, n. 496: "...sed tantum complexum, in quo designatur comparatio incomplexi ad rem per notam compositionis aut divisionis."

⁹² See, for example, the texts cited in fn. 82.

proposition, it seems that the proposition does not express anything about the intellect's relation to reality, but rather it expresses a subject's objective possession of a property. In the *De Interpretatione*, Aquinas comments on the relation of these to descriptions of the proposition when he writes, "...the philosopher says in the sixth book of his *Metaphysics* that truth is in the mind alone, namely in its knowing truth. To know the aforementioned relationship of conformity, however, is nothing other than to judge something to be so in reality or not..."⁹³ Aquinas identifies the intellect's knowing its own conformity to reality with the intellect's act of judging that something is the case in reality. When the intellect asserts that its simple apprehension of *rational* conforms to *man*, the intellect is also expressing that the formal features of rationality are objective features of man. The intellect's simple concepts only conform to reality if the formal features of those concepts are also features of the object in reality to which the intellect conforms. Accordingly, every assertion that the intellect is in conformity with reality is also an assertion that reality objectively is a certain way. Propositions are not themselves considered to be the *relata* related to reality in the relation of conformity, as simple concepts are. Yet, since propositions make assertions about the way reality is, a proposition's relationship to reality can be considered. I now turn to examine the relationship of propositions to reality.

⁹³ *De Int.* 1.3, n. 9: "...philosophus dicit in VI metaphysicae quod veritas est solum in mente, sicut scilicet in cognoscente veritatem. Cognoscere autem praedictam conformitatis habitudinem nihil est aliud quam iudicare ita esse in re vel non esse...."

II. The relation of the proposition to reality

A key reason why propositions themselves do not conform to reality is that propositions do not share the same formal structure as real objects in the world.

Aquinas thought that while the structure of the proposition has a basis in the structure of reality, it does not perfectly mirror that structure in the same way that the simple form in the intellect conforms to the form in the thing. The proposition does not have the same form as any material being in reality because the proposition is not the result of the intellect's abstracting a form from an object, but rather it comes about from the intellect's actively judging an abstracted form. Accordingly, some features of the proposition arise from the nature of human intellection alone. In the *Summa*

Theologiae, Aquinas writes:

It is necessary for the human intellect to come to intellectual understanding by composing and dividing. For since the human intellect passes from potentiality into actuality, it has a certain likeness to generable things, which do not have their perfection immediately but instead acquire it successively. In the same way, the human intellect does not immediately come to a perfect cognition of a thing in its first apprehension of it. Instead, it first apprehends an aspect of it, viz., the 'what-ness' (*quidditas*) of the thing itself, which is the first and proper object of the intellect; and then it comes to understand the properties, accidents, and relations associated with the thing's essence (*circumstantes rei essentiam*). Accordingly, it must necessarily (a) compose one apprehended thing with another or divide one apprehended thing from another and (b) proceed from one composition or division to another, i.e. reason discursively.⁹⁴

⁹⁴ *ST* I.85.5, co.: "...intellectus humanus necesse habet intelligere componendo et dividendo. Cum enim intellectus humanus exeat de potentia in actum, similitudinem quandam habet cum rebus generabilibus, quae non statim perfectionem suam habent, sed eam successive acquirunt. Et similiter intellectus humanus non statim in prima apprehensione capit perfectam rei cognitionem; sed primo apprehendit aliquid de ipsa, puta quidditatem ipsius rei, quae est primum et proprium obiectum intellectus; et deinde intelligit proprietates et accidentia et habitudines circumstantes rei essentiam. Et

Aquinas thought that before experiencing an object, the human intellect had no cognition of it. It had the potential prior to experience, however, to know all that is knowable about any material object. In first experiencing an object, the intellect moves from potentially knowing it to actually knowing it. It does not, however, grasp all that is knowable about the object at once. On Aquinas's account, the human intellect first grasps a basic concept of an object's essence as distinct from other essences in the world. It then apprehends other attributes of the object and composes these attributes with it. By this process of composing and dividing, the intellect successively comes to have a more perfect conception of the thing known. This passage highlights that it is because of the human intellect's own limitations in knowing that it must come to know objects successively in virtue of different cognitive acts. No feature of the known object necessitates that it be known by composition and division. Even complex objects are in principle able to be completely known by one simple act. Aquinas claims that the divine and angelic intellects know material beings in all of their complexity immediately through one simple apprehension.⁹⁵

Although material objects are able to be known in a more economical way, Aquinas does not think that it is contrary to the nature of material beings to be known by composing and dividing. While the composition and division of the proposition arises from the nature of the intellect, in most cases it is a response to a composition

secundum hoc, necesse habet unum apprehensum alii componere vel dividere; et ex una compositione vel divisione ad aliam procedere, quod est ratiocinari." (Trans. Alfred Freddoso.)

⁹⁵ See, for example, *ST* I.85.5 co.

in the thing known. Material beings are composed of both matter and form and substance and accident. In a material being, matter is ontologically distinct from form, as accidents are from substances.⁹⁶ It is the real distinction of these constituents of the material being that causes the intellect to form the distinct concepts that it composes and divides. This is to say that the intellect's conceiving of man and his whiteness separately responds to a real distinction between the human form and the form of whiteness.

Aquinas thought that not every subject-predicate combination in the intellect, however, corresponded to a real composition in the thing known. In the case of the intellect's composing *man* with *man* to form the identity claim *Man is man*, for example, there is no corresponding composition in the thing which these terms signify.⁹⁷ Similarly, Aquinas thought that no real distinctions in God corresponded to the diverse conceptions that the intellect formed of God.⁹⁸ Aquinas thinks that

⁹⁶ For citation of relevant texts and a full discussion of Aquinas's views on the distinction of matter and form, see Wippel's, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, pp. 296-312.

⁹⁷ *In Meta.* 6.4 n. 1241: "Deinde cum dicit quoniam autem *excludit ens verum et ens per accidens a principali consideratione huius doctrinae*; dicens, quod compositio et divisio, in quibus est verum et falsum, est in mente, et non in rebus. Invenitur siquidem et in rebus aliqua compositio; sed talis compositio efficit unam rem, quam intellectus recipit ut unum simplici conceptione. Sed illa compositio vel divisio, qua intellectus coniungit vel dividit sua concepta, est tantum in intellectu, non in rebus. Consistit enim in quadam duorum comparatione conceptorum; sive illa duo sint idem secundum rem, sive diversa. Utitur enim intellectus quandoque uno ut duobus compositionem formans; sicut dicitur, homo est homo: ex quo patet quod talis compositio est solum in intellectu, non in rebus. Et ideo illud, quod est ita ens sicut verum in tali compositione consistens, est alterum ab his quae proprie sunt entia, quae sunt res extra animam, quarum unaquaeque est *aut quod quid est*, id est substantia, aut quale, aut quantum, aut aliquod incomplexum, quod mens copulat vel dividit." See also *ST I.13.12*, co.

⁹⁸ See for example *ScG I.3*. In certain contexts, however, Aquinas admits that there is a foundation in God for the distinct *rationes* that the intellect forms of divine attributes. In *In I Sent.* 2.1.2 co., he writes: "Sic ergo dicendum est, quod in Deo est sapientia, bonitas, et huiusmodi, quorum quodlibet est ipsa divina essentia, et ita omnia sunt unum re. Et quia unumquodque eorum est in Deo secundum sui verissimam rationem, et ratio sapientiae non est ratio bonitatis, in quantum huiusmodi, relinquitur quod sunt diversa ratione, *non tantum ex parte ipsius ratiocinantis sed ex proprietate ipsius*

cases like these prove that the composition of the terms in the intellect cannot be an exact mirror of the composition in things. Even in the many cases in which the composition of terms in the intellect responds to a composition in things, Aquinas maintained that there is a difference between the composition in the intellect and the composition in the thing. Aquinas writes:

The likeness of a thing is received into the intellect according to the intellect's own mode and not according to the mode of the thing. Hence, even though there is something on the part of the thing that corresponds to the intellect's composition and division, it is not present in the thing in the same way that it is present in the intellect.... the intellect's composition differs from the thing's composition by the fact that the items composed in the thing are diverse from one another, whereas the intellect's composition is a sign of the identity of the items that are composed. For the intellect composes in such a way as to affirm that a man is white, i.e., that a man is a thing that has (an instance of) whiteness (*homo est albus, id est habens albedinem*)—and not in such a way as to affirm that a man is (an instance of) whiteness (*homo est albedo*). For that which is man is the same subject as that which has the whiteness.⁹⁹

For Aquinas what makes the composition of the intellect different from the composition in things is the element of identity that is present in the intellect's composition. In the intellect's proposition, that which the subject term stands for and that which the predicate is true of is identical in reality. This is to say that *man* and *the thing that has whiteness* is one and the same. Elsewhere Aquinas describes the

rei..." (Italics are mine.) Allan Wolter has suggested that this idea expressed by Aquinas maybe a forerunner of Scotus's "formal distinction." See Wolter's, "The formal distinction," in *The Philosophical Theology of John Duns Scotus*. Ed. Marilyn Adams, (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell, 1990).

⁹⁹ *ST* I.85.5 ad 3: "...similitudo rei recipitur in intellectu secundum modum intellectus, et non secundum modum rei. Unde compositioni et divisioni intellectus respondet quidem aliquid ex parte rei; tamen non eodem modo se habet in re, sicut in intellectu..... Tamen differt compositio intellectus a compositione rei, nam ea quae componuntur in re, sunt diversa; compositio autem intellectus est signum identitatis eorum quae componuntur. Non enim intellectus sic componit, ut dicat quod homo est albedo; sed dicit quod homo est albus, idest habens albedinem, idem autem est subiecto quod est homo, et quod est habens albedinem...." (Trans. Alfred Freddoso)

subject and the predicate of a proposition as "signifying the same thing according to reality in a way, and diverse things according to reason." This is to say that while the form of man is not identical to the form of whiteness, both of those forms belong to the same supposit if the predication *Man is white* is true.¹⁰⁰ In the real object, there is no identity between the elements that are composed in material composites. The substance of man and his whiteness together form a unified being, but when considered in themselves as constituents of this being, they are in no way identical.

Aquinas's emphasis on the element of identity between the subject and the predicate of a proposition is consonant with his understanding of the proposition as an act of knowing the conformity between the intellect's simple apprehension and the extra-mental object. The predicate term of the proposition signifies the form understood by the intellect and the subject stands for the extra-mental object. There is a certain identity between the subject and the predicate of the proposition because the form understood by the intellect is a likeness of the extra-mental thing, i.e. there is conformity between intellect and thing.

Although the element of identity that pertains to the intellect's composition makes it differ from the composition in the real thing, the passage quoted above also notes that there is something in the intellect that responds to the composition in the

¹⁰⁰ *ST* I.13.12, co.: "...in qualibet propositione affirmativa vera, oportet quod praedicatum et subiectum significant idem secundum rem aliquo modo, et diversum secundum rationem. Et hoc patet tam in propositionibus quae sunt de praedicato accidentali, quam in illis quae sunt de praedicato substantiali. Manifestum est enim quod homo et albus sunt idem subiecto, et differunt ratione, alia enim est ratio hominis, et alia ratio albi. Et similiter cum dico homo est animal, illud enim ipsum quod est homo, vere animal est; in eodem enim supposito est et natura sensibilis, a qua dicitur animal, et rationalis, a qua dicitur homo. Unde hic etiam praedicatum et subiectum sunt idem supposito, sed diversa ratione."

thing. Aquinas exploited a difference that he and many of his contemporaries thought held between the function of the subject and the predicate terms of propositions to explain how the composition in the proposition is like the composition in things. Aquinas thought that the subject terms of propositions stood for concrete objects, while predicate terms signified forms that inhered in these objects. He thought that these differing functions that the predicate and subject terms have were analogous to the roles that matter and form play in the composition of a material object.¹⁰¹ In the ontological order, matter is the supposit in which form inheres. Similarly, the subject term stands for that concrete thing that the predicate is true of. In this way, the subject is said to be understood "materially". Form in the ontological order is not itself something that subsists, but it inheres in a subsisting being. Similarly, the predicate of a proposition does not stand for a concrete being, but rather it signifies a property that is true of a concrete being. For this reason the predicate is said to be taken "formally."

In the *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas relates the material and formal features of the terms of propositions to the technical notions of supposition and signification. Aquinas writes: "the term placed in the subject is understood materially, that is for the supposit, the term posited in the predicate is understood formally, that is for the nature signified."¹⁰² The distinction between the supposition and signification of terms was a well-known innovation of of the 12th and 13th century terminist

¹⁰¹ *In I Sent.* 4.2.2, co.; *De Int.* 1.8, n. 9; *ST IIIa.* 16.7 ad 4.

¹⁰² *ST IIIa.* 16.7 ad 4: "... terminus in subiecto positus tenetur materialiter, idest pro supposito, positus vero in praedicato, tenetur formaliter, idest pro natura significata."

logicians.¹⁰³ Supposition was the property of a term in virtue of which it stood for an object. A term had supposition if it referred to one or more concrete extramental objects. In the proposition *Man is snub-nosed*, the term *Man* stands for an individual concrete man. This is to say that it has personal supposition. A proposition's truth-value depends on the supposition of its subject term. In the aforementioned proposition, if *Man* supposits for Socrates the proposition is true, but if it supposits for Aristotle, perhaps it is false.¹⁰⁴

A term's signification, on the other hand, was determined independently from its supposition. No matter what *Man* supposits for, it always signifies the same thing, i.e. rational animal nature. The signification of a term is not merely its meaning. Paul Spade explains that signification "is a psychologico-causal property of terms".¹⁰⁵ The signification of a term is what it causes in the intellect of the one who hears it, as well as what is in the intellect of the one who speaks it. The signification of a term in this sense must be distinguished from another sense in which Aquinas claims that things are signified by terms. The concept in the intellect that is signified by the term is a concept of some concrete nature. Aquinas claims that the concrete nature that is conceptualized is also mediately signified by a term. So, strictly speaking, terms signify both intellectual concepts and concrete natures. Aquinas makes this clear in

¹⁰³ On this see Ernest A. Moody, *Truth and Consequence in Mediaeval Logic*, (North Holland Publishing Co.: Amsterdam, 1953), pp. 18-26; Jan Pinborg, *Logik und Semantik im Mittelalter: Ein Überblick*, (Frommann-Holzboog: Stuttgart: 1972).

¹⁰⁴ In rare cases in which terms referred to themselves as terms, the term had what was known as material supposition. In the proposition *Man is a noun*, *Man* has material supposition. It does not stand for a concrete individual man.

¹⁰⁵ "The Semantics of Terms," in *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*, eds. Kretzmann, Kenny, and Pinborg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 188.

the *Summa Theologiae* when he writes: "The *ratio* that a name signifies is the intellect's concept of the thing signified (*res significata*) by the name."¹⁰⁶ The distinction between the signification and the supposition of a term regards the term's signification of a conception of the intellect. It is meant to distinguish the property the term has that allows it to bring an understanding to mind from its ability to stand for an object. Aquinas's claim that terms also signify concrete natures will be relevant to this study later.

We can explain Aquinas's dictum "the subject is taken materially and predicate is taken formally" in terms of supposition and signification: General terms in the subject place of a proposition both supposit for some concrete object and signify a nature. Predicate terms, however, only signify a nature. In the proposition *Man is rational*, the term *man* stands for concrete individuals that have human nature. The term, *rational* in this proposition, however, does not stand for concrete rational things. It only signifies rational nature conceived by the intellect. So the proposition *Man is rational* asserts that rational nature is a constituent of a human being. The reason that the predicate term does not supposit for a concrete object is that a predicate is always understood as being a characteristic of something. To understand something as a predicate is to understand it as inhering in something else, not as

¹⁰⁶ ST I.13.4 co. : "Ratio enim quam significat nomen, est conceptio intellectus de re significata per nomen." Here Aquinas claims that the conceptions of the intellect are the primary significates of terms: ST I.5.2, co.: "Ratio enim significata per nomen, est id quod concipit intellectus de re, et significat illud per vocem, illud ergo est prius secundum rationem, quod prius cadit in conceptione intellectus."

subsisting on its own.¹⁰⁷ The significance of Aquinas's thinking about the predicate can be grasped when his view is contrasted with the competing theory of his time, i.e. the identity theory of predication. On this theory, predicate terms also have supposition. In the proposition *Man is rational*, for example, the identity theorist holds that both *man* and *rational* stand for concrete objects. *Man* stands for a concrete being that has human nature and *rational* stands for a concrete being that has rational nature. The proposition as a whole asserts that the concrete being with human nature is identical to the concrete being with rational nature.¹⁰⁸

In his *Commentary on the Metaphysics*, we learn of a significant consequence that Aquinas thought followed from his adoption of the inherence theory of predication. He explains that because there is an analogous relationship between the subject and predicate terms of a proposition and the matter and form of composite objects, something that is composed as matter and form in the real object must be the cause of the truth of the proposition:

¹⁰⁷ We saw in the passage quoted above on p. 60 that Aquinas was careful to state that it is the descriptive name *that which is having whiteness* that refers to the same thing as *man*. He did not claim that the predicate *white* itself refers to the same thing as the term *man* because *white* as a predicate does not supposit for an object. If a predicate *x* is true of an object *y*, however, then the corresponding description *thing having x* will be able to supposit for object the *y*. See P. T. Geach, "Form and Existence," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 55 (1955), pp. 251-272. Even in the case of identity statements such as *Man is man*, Aquinas did not think that the predicate term stood for a concrete subject. The predicate term *man* signified the rational nature. The identity of *Man* with himself was explained as the inherence of human nature in a thing that is a man, i.e. that thing which has human nature inhering in it. See Hermann Weidemann, "The Logic of Being," in *Thomas Aquinas Contemporary Philosophical Perspectives*, ed. Brian Davies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 77-96, esp. p. 84.

¹⁰⁸ Some have argued against my reading that Aquinas held the identity theory of predication at least in some passages. See John Malcolm, "A Reconsideration of the Identity and Inherence Theories of the Copula", *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 17:4 (1979): 183-400.

It is necessary that truth and falsity which is in speech or opinion is reduced to the disposition of the thing as its cause. When the intellect forms a composition it grasps two, one of these has itself formally with respect to the other. Accordingly, it grasps it as existing in the other. For this reason, the predicate is understood formally. And therefore, if such an operation should be traced to a thing as its cause, it is necessary that in composite substances the very composition of form and matter, or that which is related as form and matter, or also the composition of accident and subject, serves as the foundation and cause of truth of the composition which the intellect forms within itself or expresses in speech. Just as when I say *Socrates is a man* the truth of this enunciation is caused by the composition of the human form with the individual matter through which Socrates is *this* man. And when I say *man is white* the cause of this truth is the composition of whiteness with the subject, and it is similarly in other cases. And the same is evident in division.¹⁰⁹

Aquinas begins this passage with the assumption that the way things are is the cause of the truth of propositions. He does not argue for this here. If this starting point is accepted, though, reflecting on the way that the subject and predicate are related to each other leads to the conclusion that the precise disposition of things that causes truth must be a composition. If the subject and predicate are related to each other as substrate and that which inheres, a predicate will be truly affirmed of a subject when some property of the thing that is an analogate for the predicate term truly inheres in something that corresponds to the subject term.

¹⁰⁹ *In Meta.* IX.11.1998: “Oportet enim veritatem et falsitatem quae est in oratione vel opinione, reduci ad dispositionem rei sicut ad causam. Cum autem intellectus compositionem format, accipit duo, quorum unum se habet ut formale respectu alterius: unde accipit id ut in alio existens, propter quod praedicata tenentur formaliter. Et ideo, si talis operatio intellectus ad rem debeat reduci sicut ad causam, oportet quod in compositis substantiis ipsa compositio formae ad materiam, aut eius quod se habet per modum formae et materiae, vel etiam compositio accidentis ad subiectum, respondeat quasi fundamentum et causa veritatis, compositioni, quam intellectus interius format et exprimit voce. Sicut cum dico, Socrates est homo, veritas huius enunciationis causatur ex compositione formae humanae ad materiam individuaem, per quam Socrates est hic homo: et cum dico, homo est albus, causa veritatis est compositio albedinis ad subiectum: et similiter est in aliis. Et idem patet in divisione.”

In concluding our discussion of the relationship of propositions to things, we can bring together the element of sameness and the element of difference that Aquinas thought held between the composition in the intellect and in the thing. Aquinas thought that the composition *Socrates is man* does not precisely reflect any composition in reality. The term *Socrates* supposits for the being Socrates that is composed of matter and form and the term *man* signifies human nature. What human nature inheres in is the same thing as what the subject term stands for. This is the element of identity in the intellect's composition. In reality, there is no composition between Socrates *and* human nature. Human nature is an essential part of Socrates, not something composed with him to form a third thing. In the structure of the proposition, *Socrates* is related to *man* as matter is to form. Because the subject and the predicate have this relation of substrate and inhering form, it has a similarity to the composition of Socrates's individual matter with his human form. This ontological composition is the cause of the intellectual proposition's truth. There is not a one-one correspondence, however, between the terms of the proposition and the elements in the real composition that causes its truth. *Socrates* does not stand for Socrates's matter, but rather for the being Socrates that is a composite of matter and the human form. This composite includes within it what is predicated of it, i.e. human nature.

III. Conclusion: Implications of Aquinas's account of propositional truth

We are now in a position to draw some conclusions from the features of Aquinas's account of truth that we have discussed. These conclusions will be of importance for the remainder of this study. First, we have seen that Aquinas thinks that propositional truth is founded on ontological truth. A proposition is the intellect's act of recognizing that the simple likeness by which it understands is in fact a likeness of a certain thing that it already knows. If the intellect was unable to be conformed to extra-mental objects by receiving likenesses of their forms, there could be no propositional truth because the intellect would have no likenesses by which to know. A consequence of this dependence of propositional truth on ontological truth is that the intellect can only form propositions about existing natural kinds or individuals and the kinds or individuals that the imagination invents by combining the natures and properties of actually existing beings.¹¹⁰ While the imagination can combine elements of real essences to create composite essences of fictional beings, the intellect cannot form a simple concept of a nature of a nonexisting kinds. All concepts of nonexisting kinds that are able to be the subjects of propositions are composites of elements of existing things united by the imagination. The only unity the gold and mountain have, for example, is the unity that is accorded to them by the imagination when it creates the concept of a gold mountain. Gold and mountain have no unity in reality the way that features of real natures do. It is important to note that Aquinas only speaks of the concepts of fictional beings as existing in the imagination.

¹¹⁰ *De ver.* 8.9 co.: "...videmus quod imaginatio nostra format novam speciem, ut montis aurei, ex speciebus quas prius apud se habebat, scilicet montis et auri; et similiter intellectus ex formis generis et differentiae format definitionem speciei." See also *De ver.* 8.5 co. and 19.1 co.

He never describes them as being in the intellect as he does with the concepts of real natures.¹¹¹ Intellectual knowledge cannot be had of these empty kinds because there is no real nature to know. Aquinas's account of natures and cognition precludes the possibility of there being a human science of purely possible creatures. Accordingly, in the remainder of this dissertation when I discuss necessary propositions about creatures in the human intellect, the examples I use will always be about actual creatures. When the question is asked of whether a proposition about a natural kind can remain true when no instances of the kind exist, it will be assumed that an instance of the kind existed at some time in the actual world. The existence of a member of the kind at some time in the world is sufficient for human intellects to form a concept. Aquinas would not deny that we can form propositions about dinosaurs even though no dinosaurs currently exist. By reading books, doing archaeology, and other activities, human beings can come to have concepts of dinosaurs, although they have not personally experienced them. The question that will arise later, though, is what are these concepts a likeness of, if no dinosaurs exist now? How does the intellect conform to the world in this case?

The second significant feature of Aquinas's account of propositional truth is that the very existence of propositions is contingent on the existence of human

¹¹¹ Here Aquinas claims that the imaginative power suffices to combine elements of real forms to create new ones. *ST Ia.78.4 co.*: "Avicenna vero ponit quintam potentiam, mediam inter aestimativam et imaginativam, quae componit et dividit formas imaginatas; ut patet cum ex forma imaginata auri et forma imaginata montis componimus unam formam montis aurei, quem nunquam vidimus. Sed ista operatio non apparet in aliis animalibus ab homine, in quo ad hoc sufficit virtus imaginativa."

intellects or other rational intellects.¹¹² We have seen that for Aquinas it is not necessary that the complex objects in the world be known propositionally. Propositions are formed because of the unique way in which the human intellect comes to know by composing and dividing. If there were no human beings or other rational creatures, there would be no propositions. A proposition for Aquinas is not a necessarily existing abstract object as many contemporary analytic philosophers think. According to Aquinas, a proposition is a concrete accident that inheres in the created intellect when it joins or divides two simple concepts. Given this, there is a sense in which asking whether *Man is rational* would be true if no men had ever existed is a *per impossible* question because without existing human intellects, this proposition itself would not exist. Aquinas is clear that other intellects do not know by forming propositions, although they are able to know the content that is expressed by propositions.¹¹³ On the Thomistic account, it cannot be asked whether some proposition *x is y* is true in world *w* without considering whether any *x*'s exist in *w* or whether humans (or some other rational creature) exist in *w* because the existence of a rational intellect and the existence of *x* at some time *t* in a world is a necessary condition for the truth of a proposition *x is y* in that world.

The third significant point that follows from Aquinas's propositional account of truth is that the foundation of the truth of propositions about composite objects is

¹¹² A rational intellect, according to Aquinas, is one that knows propositionally, i.e. by joining and dividing simple concepts. Angels are intellectual creatures, but not rational creatures since they do not know propositionally.

¹¹³ Not all medievals shared this view. Scotus, for example, thought that God willed states of affairs to be by joining and dividing subject and predicate terms and he knew which states of affairs were actually by knowing what his will joined and divided. Accordingly, since necessarily God knows whatever is the case, there necessarily are propositions. See, for example, his *Lectura* I.38-40.

some composition in the object. More specifically, if a proposition is true, there must be elements in the object that are related to each other as substrate and that which inheres. Accordingly, when we seek the ontological foundation for necessary truths, what we are in search of is some composition that is necessary in the things these truths are about. Now that these general points have been made about Aquinas's notion of propositional truth, we can turn to examine his thought on necessary truths.

CHAPTER FOUR

NECESSARY PROPOSITIONS ABOUT CONTINGENT BEINGS

In the last chapter, we saw some of the key features of Aquinas's thinking about propositional truth. In this chapter, we turn now to look at the distinctive features that Aquinas thought belonged to propositions that expressed a subject's necessary possession of an accident, essential feature, or power. We learned in the previous chapter that Aquinas thought that the ontological cause of the truth of propositions about a subject's possessing a certain form was some composition in reality. In this chapter, we will complete our understanding of Aquinas's thinking on the cause of propositional truth by learning what he understood to be the ontological grounding of necessary propositions.

I. *Per se* propositions

It is clear that Aquinas thought that necessary propositions differed from other propositions. When he considers Aristotle's four-fold division of propositions in his *De Interpretatione* commentary, he claims that an additional fifth classification must be added to take into account the difference between necessary and impossible propositions, on the one hand, and contingent propositions, on the other. Aristotle

distinguished propositions according to whether they are simple or conjunctions of multiple propositions; affirmative or negative; universal, particular, indefinite or singular; and past, present, or future.¹¹⁴ The fifth division of propositions that Aquinas added distinguished propositions according to their content. Aquinas writes:

This division is made according to the relationship of the predicate to the subject. If the predicate is in the subject *per se*, the enunciation is said to be necessary or natural in matter, as it is with *man is an animal* or *man is risible*. If indeed the predicate is *per se* repugnant to the subject as if excluding the *ratio* of it, the enunciation is said to be impossible or remote in matter, as when it is said *man is an ass*. If indeed in a middle way the predicate is related to the subject in such a way that it is neither *per se* repugnant to the subject nor *per se* in it, the enunciation is said to be possible or contingent in matter.¹¹⁵

What sets necessary and impossible propositions apart from contingent ones is the relationship between the subject and the predicate. Aquinas describes the relationship of the predicate to the subject in a necessary proposition as being *per se* in it.¹¹⁶

There were three ways in which Aquinas, following Aristotle, thought that a predicate could be *per se* in a subject.¹¹⁷ In the first way, when something that is contained in

¹¹⁴ *De Int.* I, 13.2, 3. For Aristotle's explanation of these divisions, see ll. 17a15-17a20; 17a38-17b12; 18a28-18b20.

¹¹⁵ *De Int.* I, 13.3: "... quidem divisio attenditur secundum habitudinem praedicati ad subiectum: nam si praedicatum *per se* insit subiecto, dicitur esse enuntiatio *in materia necessaria* vel *naturali*; ut cum dicitur, *homo est animal*, vel, *homo est risibile*. Si vero praedicatum *per se* repugnet subiecto quasi excludens rationem ipsius, dicitur enuntiatio esse *in materia impossibili* sive *remota*; ut cum dicitur, *homo est asinus*. Si vero medio modo se habeat praedicatum ad subiectum, ut scilicet nec *per se* repugnet subiecto, nec *per se* insit, dicitur enuntiatio esse *in materia possibili* sive *contingenti*."

¹¹⁶ Aquinas likewise thought that whatever was necessarily in a subject belonged to it *per se*, i.e. there is a mutual entailment between necessary inherence and *per se*ity. *ScG* II.55, n. 1299: "Quod *per se* alicui competit, de necessitate et semper et inseparabiliter ei inest: sicut *rotundum* *per se* quidem inest circulo, *per accidens* autem aeri; unde aes quidem fieri non rotundum est possibile, circulum autem non esse rotundum est impossibile."

¹¹⁷ Technically there are four ways in which Aquinas and Aristotle claim that something can be *per se*, however, I will only discuss three of these ways since one of the ways, i.e. a subject's existing in itself, is not a mode of predication, but rather a mode of being.

the definition of a subject is predicated of the subject, this is a *per se* predication. An example of such a *per se* proposition is *Dogs are sentient*. Similarly, when the definition itself of a subject is predicated of the subject, it is predicated *per se* in the first mode.¹¹⁸ So the proposition *Man is a rational animal* is also *per se* in the first way. In the second way, a proposition is *per se* if the proposition's subject enters into the definition of its predicate as the matter or subject in which it exists. The proposition *Socrates's nose is snub* is *per se* in the second way since snubness cannot be defined without mentioning a nose. *Propria* or necessary accidents are predicated *per se secundo modo* of their subjects because a proper accident cannot be defined without mention of the subject in which it exists. The proposition *Man is risible*, for example, is *per se secundo modo* since being a property of man is part of the definition of risibility.¹¹⁹ It is important to note, however, that the subjects of *per se secundo modo* propositions can be defined without mentioning the predicates of these propositions. A nose, for example, can be defined without mentioning snubness. Essential attributes, which are included in the definition of subject, are always predicated *per se primo modo*. In the third and final way of *per se* predication, a predicate is said *per se* of a subject if the subject is the proper cause of the predicate. In this way, effects are predicated of their proper causes. *Fire heats* is a proposition that is *per se* in this third way.

There is an evident correspondence between the modes of *per se* predication and the ways in which absolute necessity arises in creation, which we discussed in

¹¹⁸ *PA* I, 10.3.

¹¹⁹ *PA* I, 10.4.

chapter two. When attributes, actions, or passions that are absolutely necessary to a being are predicated of it in a proposition, that proposition will be *per se* in one of these three ways.

II. Structural differences of *per se* propositions

In the last chapter, we saw that propositions in general have a structure that is analogous to a material composite. The subject of the proposition plays the role of matter and the predicate has the role of form because the property that the predicate signifies inheres in what the subject stands for. In the proposition a *Man is white*, for example, *Man* supposits for a concrete object having a human form and *white* signifies a form that inheres in this object. This proposition represents the judgment that the form of white is also a constituent of the thing that has the form of humanity. In this proposition no assertion is made about what the relationship is between the form of humanity and the form of white. All that is affirmed in the proposition is that the form of whiteness and the form of humanity meet in the same subject. The same is true of the proposition *Man is an animal* when the term *man* is similarly understood as standing for concrete individuals having a human form. The proposition only asserts that in these human supposits, the animal form is also found. The matter-form structure of the proposition cannot capture the *per se* relation between the subject and predicate even in cases where it is present. This is because in a *per se* proposition the predicate is attributed to the subject because of the subject's form.¹²⁰ When the

¹²⁰ *De pot.* 8.2 ad 6: “Per se autem praedicatur aliquid de aliquo, quod praedicatur de eo secundum propriam rationem; quod vero non secundum propriam rationem praedicatur, sed propter rei

subject is taken materially, though, as in the normal structure of the proposition, the proposition cannot express anything about the relationship between the form of the subject and the form of the predicate.

Aquinas recognized that in certain cases the subject terms of propositions could be taken formally. Aquinas explains that through “reduplication” a qualifier can be added to the subject of a proposition to indicate whether it is taken materially or formally. An example of a reduplicative proposition is: *Man as man is rational*. Adding the qualifier *as man* to the subject of this proposition indicates that there is a connection between man and rational precisely because of the human form. Man and rational are not connected merely because there is a supposit that has a human form and a rational form. The material connection between these forms in suppositis is posterior to the formal connection between them.

A reduplicative qualifier can be used to indicate that the subject is taken materially. This is the case in this false proposition “Christ as *this* man is God.” For the most part, though, a reduplicative qualifier indicates that the subject is to be taken formally. The issue of whether the subject term was taken materially to supposit for a substance or whether it was taken formally to signify a nature was central to Christological questions and it is in this context that we find texts relevant to Aquinas’s thinking on the structure of *per se* propositions. In the *Summa Theologiae* Aquinas considers the question of whether Christ as man is a creature. He explains

identitatem, non etiam praedicatur per se.” For an excellent discussion of *per se* propositions, see Peter Hoenen, S.J., *Reality and Judgement according to St. Thomas*, (Henry Regener Co.: Chicago, 1952), pp. 95-136. See also Robert W. Schmidt, *The Domain of Logic according to Saint Thomas Aquinas*, (Marinus Nijhoff: The Hague, 1966), pp. 228-231.

that the truth of this proposition cannot be determined independent of determining the force of the qualifier “man”. He writes:

I respond that it must be said that when it is said 'Christ, insofar as he is a man,' this name 'man' is able to indicate by reduplication either the *ratio* of the supposit or the *ratio* of the nature. If indeed it indicates the *ratio* of the supposit, then 'Christ, insofar as he is a man, is a creature' will be false since the supposit of the human nature in Christ is eternal and uncreated. If in fact the *ratio* of human nature is indicated, then this statement is true because in virtue of the *ratio* of human nature, or according to human nature, being a creature belongs to Christ, as it is said above. It must be understood, nevertheless, that a name added in reduplication is more properly understood to indicate the nature rather than the supposit, since the reduplicated name is added as a predicate, which is understood formally....¹²¹

This passage highlights that when reduplication is used it indicates the precise feature of a thing in virtue of which it possesses the predicate that is attributed to it. Through reduplication, it can be indicated that something possesses a property precisely in virtue of the form it has. Reduplication is used to indicate that a proposition is *per se* because in a *per se* proposition the predicate is true of the subject because of the form of the subject.¹²²

¹²¹ *ST IIIa.16.10 co.*: “Respondeo dicendum quod, cum dicitur, Christus secundum quod homo, hoc nomen homo potest resumi in reduplicatione vel ratione suppositi, vel ratione naturae. Si quidem resumatur ratione suppositi, cum suppositum humanae naturae in Christo sit aeternum et increatum, haec erit falsa, Christus, secundum quod homo, est creatura. Si vero resumatur ratione humanae naturae, sic est vera, quia ratione humanae naturae, sive secundum humanam naturam, convenit sibi esse creaturam, ut supra dictum est. Sciendum tamen quod nomen sic resumptum in reduplicatione magis proprie tenetur pro natura quam pro supposito, resumitur enim in vi praedicati, quod tenetur formaliter....” Aquinas also appeals to reduplication in *In III Sent.* 11.3 and 10.1.1 when he analyzes the questions of whether Christ as man is God and whether Christ as *this* man is God. On Aquinas’s interpretation of propositions in Christological discussions, see Henk J.M. Schoot, *Christ the Name of God: Thomas Aquinas on Naming Christ*, (Leuven: Peeters, 1993). On reduplication in medieval logic, see Allan Bäck, *On Reduplication: Logical theories of qualification*, (E.J. Brill: Leiden, 1996).

¹²² *In III Sent.* 12.1.1 ad 6: “...ad veritatem propositionis sufficit quod praedicatum conveniat subjecto; nec oportet quod conveniat ei ratione formae significatae vel appositae, nisi sit praedicatio

Like propositions that are discussed in Christological debates, propositions that have a general term, such as *man* or *dog*, as their subjects have a certain ambiguity to them. A general term, like *man*, can supposit for one or more substances that have the nature that is signified by the term, such as Socrates, Plato and Thomas, or a general term can simply signify the nature. So when the proposition *Man is an animal* is considered, it is unclear whether the proposition expresses that Socrates and Plato, for example, have the form of animality inhering in them or that there is a formal connection between the form of man and the form of animality. This ambiguity can be clarified by using reduplicative qualifiers. The proposition with *Man as man* as its subject expresses claims about the form of man, while propositions with *Man as this man* express claims about particular men.

Aquinas makes clear that when an attribute is predicated of a subject *per se* it is possible that the attribute belongs to the subject only in virtue of a certain essential part that it has. It is not the case that the subject must possess the attribute in virtue of all that belongs to it essentially. He writes:

To the second question it must be said that from the fact that some predicate is *per se* it is not necessary that what is *per se* predicated belongs to the subject according to all that is implied by the name of the subject, but it suffices if it belongs to it *per se* according to some part of it, just as reasoning belongs to man *per se* not insofar as he has a body, but insofar as he has a soul accordingly this is true: “Man is a reasoning being.”¹²³

per se....” *In III Sent.* 11.1.4 ad 6: “Ad sextum dicendum quod *ad veritatem propositionis* sufficit quod praedicatum conveniat subjecto *quocumque modo*. Sed ad hoc quod *propositio* sit *per se*, oportet quod conveniat sibi *ratione formae importatae per subjectum*. Unde haec est vera: *Deus est passus*; non tamen est *per se*. Et quia reduplicatio exigit locutionem *per se* veram, ideo non est similis ratio de reduplicacionibus et propositionibus quae sunt sine reduplicacione.”

¹²³ *In III Sent.* 10.1.1 qc. 2 co.: “Ad secundam quaestionem dicendum quod ad hoc quod aliqua praedicatio sit *per se*, non oportet quod praedicatum *per se* conveniat subjecto secundum omne

A reduplication can be used to pick out the precise form of a subject in virtue of which an attribute is predicated of it *per se*. This is the case in the example “A line, as extended, is divisible”. This usage of reduplication is important because it implies that propositions that have proper names as their subjects can also, through reduplication, express formal connections. The proposition *Socrates as man is rational* indicates a formal connection between two forms inhering in Socrates.

In addition to reduplication, Aquinas thought that there was another way in which a *per se* connection between the forms in a subject could be expressed in a proposition. Aquinas thought that conditional propositions expressed a necessary connection between their antecedents and consequents. Aquinas writes:

Since every true conditional is necessary, it follows from the fact that the antecedent is posited that the consequent is necessarily posited. For example, this is true, ‘If Socrates runs, then he moves’. I hold therefore that whatever runs necessarily will move while it runs.¹²⁴

What is significant about the antecedent ‘If Socrates runs’ is the verb ‘runs’. The subject Socrates is not as important. What the conditional is expressing is that there is a necessary connection between the form of running and the form of motion. If a supposit is running, it will also have the form of motion. It is only incidental that the

quod in nomine subjecti implicatur; sed sufficit si *secundum aliquid* eorum sibi per se conveniat. Sicut ratiocinari per se convenit homini, non in quantum habet corpus, sed in quantum habet animam; unde haec est per se: *Homo ratiocinatur.*”

¹²⁴ *In Meta.* VI.3 n. 1198: “Cum enim quaelibet conditionalis vera sit necessaria, oportet quod ex quo antecedens est positum, quod consequens ex necessitate ponatur. Sicut haec est vera, si Socrates currit, movetur. Posito ergo quod currat, necesse erit ipsum moveri, dum currit.” *ST Ia.86.3 co.*: “Sicut hoc ipsum quod est Socratem currere, in se quidem contingens est; sed habitudo cursus ad motum est necessaria, necessarium enim est Socratem moveri, si currit.”

supposit that these two forms inhere in is Socrates. The second form would inhere in whatever has the first form. Aquinas explicitly claims that neither a true antecedent nor a true consequent is required for the truth of the conditional. All that is required for the truth of the conditional is a necessary connection between the antecedent and the consequent.¹²⁵

In this section, we have learned that there is a crucial difference between propositions that express a *per se* connection and those that do not. In the case of a proposition that only expresses a material connection, that which is signified by the predicate inheres in that for which the subject stands. In a proposition expressing a *per se* connection, however, it is the necessary connection between that which is signified by the subject and the predicate that is of importance. A proposition expressing material connection is adequated to or in conformity with a composition in the subject or subjects that it is about. Aquinas argues that a matter-form-like composition causes the truth of these propositions since the subject and predicate of these propositions are related to each other as matter and form. In a proposition expressing a necessary relation, there is no relation of matter and form between that which is signified by the predicate and the subject. This is because both the predicate and the subject are taken formally. We saw in the last chapter that the reason Aquinas thought that a composition in reality is the foundation for the truth of predications is because of the matter-form relationship between subject and predicate.

¹²⁵*In III Sent.* 12.2.1 co.: “Tamen sub conditione potest concedi quod peccare potuit, scilicet si voluisset; quamvis hoc antecedens sit impossibile; quia ad veritatem conditionalis non requiritur neque veritas antecedentis neque veritas consequentis, sed necessaria habitudo unius ad alterum.”

Since in the case of propositions expressing a necessary connection this matter-form relation does not obtain between the subject and predicate of the proposition, it is not going to be a *composition*, i.e. an inherence relation, that grounds the truth of a necessary proposition. In the next section, we will see what it is in reality that Aquinas thought grounded the necessary connection between the form signified by the subject and the form signified by the predicate in a *per se* proposition.

III. The ontological ground for necessary connections between forms

Aquinas does not explicitly raise the question of how the ontological realities underlying essential predicates are "held together," but a certain argument that he made for the unicity of substantial forms gives insight into his thinking on this matter. The question of whether a material substance had one or more substantial forms was fiercely debated at both Oxford and Paris in the 1270s and 1280s.¹²⁶ The debate centered on this issue: In any matter-form composite does one substantial form or more than one substantial form account for the essential features that a substance has? For example, does one substantial form account for the fact that an animal is sentient, and another account for the fact that it engages in vegetative activities and a third account for the fact that it has corporeity, or does one form alone account for the fact that the animal is sensitive, vegetative, and corporeal? Answering this question involved metaphysical, physical, logical and theological considerations. It is outside

¹²⁶ For an excellent overview of this debate and references to secondary literature see Wippel's *The Metaphysical Thought of Godfrey of Fontaines*, (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1981), pp.314-47.

the scope of this project to examine all of the complexities involved in this debate. What is most relevant to reconstructing Aquinas's view on the ontological basis for the *per se* connection between essential predicates is a particular argument he made for the unicity of substantial form, which, as is well known, was his position in this debate.¹²⁷

Aquinas argued that if a substance had its essential features from distinct substantial forms, its essential attributes would not be predicated of it *per se*. Aquinas thought the unicity of form was the ontological basis for *per se* predication. Once diverse substantial forms were posited, *per se* predication was destroyed. Aquinas argues for this as follows: If there are multiple substantial forms in a being, either those forms are ordered to each other or not. If they are not ordered to each other, the forms are only predicated of each other *per accidens*, in the way whiteness is predicated of a sweet thing. If the diverse forms are ordered to each other, a kind of *per se* predication arises, namely *per se* predication of the second mode, but this is not the right kind of *per se* predication for an essential proposition.¹²⁸ An example

¹²⁷ For Aquinas's position on unicity of Wippel's *Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas* ch. 9, section 3 on unicity of substantial form.

¹²⁸ *ST Ia.76.3 co*: "Quae enim sumuntur a diversis formis, praedicantur ad invicem vel per accidens, si formae non sint ad invicem ordinatae, puta cum dicimus quod album est dulce, vel, si formae sint ordinatae ad invicem, erit praedicatio per se, in secundo modo dicendi per se, quia subiectum ponitur in definitione praedicati. Sicut superficies praeambula est ad colorem, si ergo dicamus quod corpus superficiatum est coloratum, erit secundus modus praedicationis per se. Si ergo alia forma sit a qua aliquid dicitur animal, et a qua aliquid dicitur homo, sequeretur quod vel unum horum non possit praedicari de altero nisi per accidens, si istae duae formae ad invicem ordinem non habent; vel quod sit ibi praedicatio in secundo modo dicendi per se, si una animarum sit ad aliam praeambula. Utrumque autem horum est manifeste falsum, quia animal per se de homine praedicatur, non per accidens; homo autem non ponitur in definitione animalis, sed e converso. Ergo oportet eandem formam esse per quam aliquid est animal, et per quam aliquid est homo, alioquin homo non vere esset id quod est animal, ut sic animal per se de homine praedicetur." Aquinas also makes this argument in *ScG II.58* and *Q Q. De A.*, 11, co.

Rather, it is a consequence of the subject's existing as what it is. Because the subject's causation of its proper accidents in virtue of its substantial form is necessary, whenever a certain substantial form is present, the forms of the accidents proper to it are also necessarily present. Strictly speaking, the form's power to necessarily cause its proper accidents may be impeded by a defect of matter, so in some cases, the form of a proper accident may not be present in a substance while a substantial form of given kind is. An example of this is a human being who lacks the ability to laugh because of certain physical disabilities. Even when the proper accident is not actually realized in a subject because of an external impediment, the substantial form still retains the power to produce this accident. It is this power of substantial forms to cause their subject's proper accidents that serves as the ontological underpinning for necessary propositions which predicate proper accidents of their subjects.

VI. Conclusion: The cause of the truth of *per se* propositions

In this chapter, we completed our picture of Aquinas's account of the ontological cause of the truth of propositions. In the last chapter, we saw that Aquinas claimed that propositions that are about composite substances were caused to be true by a composition in the thing that the truth is about.¹⁴⁴ In this chapter, we

¹⁴⁴ *In Meta.* IX.11.1898: “Oportet enim veritatem et falsitatem quae est in oratione vel opinione, reduci ad dispositionem rei sicut ad causam. Cum autem intellectus compositionem format, accipit duo, quorum unum se habet ut formale respectu alterius: unde accipit id ut in alio existens, propter quod praedicata tenentur formaliter. Et ideo, si talis operatio intellectus ad rem debeat reduci sicut ad causam, oportet quod in compositis substantiis ipsa compositio formae ad materiam, aut eius quod se habet per modum formae et materiae, vel etiam compositio accidentis ad subiectum, respondeat quasi fundamentum et causa veritatis, compositioni, quam intellectus interius format et exprimit voce. Sicut cum dico, Socrates est homo, veritas huius enunciationis causatur ex

have seen what Aquinas understood as the cause of the truth of necessary propositions. Since Aquinas thought there were varying types of necessary propositions, it is not surprising that not all necessary propositions have the same cause in reality for their truth. A necessary proposition in which an element of a thing's definition is predicated of it, i.e. a *per se primo modo* proposition, is caused to be true by the substantial form the subject and predicate of the proposition signify. In the case of the proposition *Man is rational*, for example, *man* and *rational* signify man's one substantial form. When the two different concepts that are joined by the intellect correspond to one substantial form, the intellect's judgment is necessarily true. In other *per se* predications in which the subject and the predicate do not signify the same form, the proposition is made true by the causal connection between the two forms. In the proposition *Man is risible*, for example, it is not the fact that the form of risibility happens to inhere in something that also has the human form that makes this proposition necessarily true. It is rather the ability of the human form to necessarily produce the form of risibility that guarantees the necessary truth of this proposition.

It is not surprising that *per se* propositions are caused to be true by forms, rather than constituents of objects that are in matter-form-like compositions.

Aquinas's reason for thinking that a composition in a thing is the cause of the truth of a contingent proposition is that the subject and predicate of these propositions are

compositione formae humanae ad materiam individuaem, per quam Socrates est hic homo: et cum dico, homo est albus, causa veritatis est compositio albedinis ad subiectum: et similiter est in aliis. Et idem patet in divisione.”

related to each other as matter and form. We have seen, however, that in a *per se* proposition, the subject and predicate are not related to each other in this way. In a *per se* proposition, both the subject and the predicate are taken formally. The subject and predicate of the *per se* proposition are joined in virtue of what they are in themselves and not merely because they happen to exist in the same subject, as is the case in contingent compositions.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE PERPETUAL TRUTH OF NECESSARY PROPOSITIONS

In the last chapter, we analyzed Aquinas's thinking on necessary truths. I argued that according to Aquinas's view the causes or foundations in reality for the truth of *per se* propositions are the forms that are the *res significata* of the terms of those propositions. In this chapter, I will reconstruct Aquinas's account of how necessary propositions can remain true both before and after the existence of the subjects they are about. Aquinas believed that the forms which are the *res significata* of the terms of propositions are themselves contingently existing beings. The existence of a form depends on the existence of the material substance to which it belongs. The substantial form of almost every material being comes to exist when the substance it belongs to is generated and ceases to exist when that substance perishes. There is one exception to these claims. Aquinas held that the substantial form of a human being is the rational soul and that the rational soul is not subject to generation or corruption. The rational soul is created immediately by God and the only way that it can cease to exist is through annihilation by God.¹⁴⁵ When a human being dies, its substantial form continues to exist. Accordingly, this form can continue to ground

¹⁴⁵ See for example *ST* Ia.75.6 co.

truths about human beings. In the case of all other material beings, the substantial form does not outlast the substance, so the difficulty of accounting for essential truth after the being has perished arises. If the substantial form of a dog is the cause of the truth that *Dogs are sentient* and that substantial form depends on the existence of a dog for its existence, how can *Dogs are sentient* remain true in the absence of dogs? This question is one that plagued later medieval thinkers. In Francisco Suárez's *Metaphysical Disputation XXXI*, we get his account of the debate among his contemporaries about the perpetual truth of necessary propositions. In treating of this debate, Suárez also takes the occasion of explaining and criticizing what he takes to be Aquinas's view on this question. In the first part of this chapter, I will outline Suárez's account of Aquinas's view. I will then show why Suárez's interpretation of Aquinas fails. In the rest of the chapter, I will go on to provide my own positive reconstruction of Aquinas's account of how necessary truths remain true even after the subjects they are about perish.

I. Suárez's account of Aquinas's view

Suárez considers the difficulty of how necessary propositions about creatures, which are required for scientific demonstration, can be perpetually true in *Metaphysical Disputation XXXI* because there Suárez is considering the manner in which the essences of finite beings exist. The precise question that he is considering is whether the essences of finite beings exist independently of the finite individuals that instantiate them. Suárez, remaining faithful to a genuinely Thomistic

metaphysic, answers this question negatively. The strongest objection that he raises to this position is that if the essence perishes with the individual, then essential propositions cannot be perpetually true.¹⁴⁶ This is because there would be no subject of which essential attributes could be predicated. Suárez's own solution to this difficulty is not of immediate interest to us at this point. For now, it is his treatment of Aquinas's position that is under consideration.

After discussing the opinion of some "modern theologians" who hold that essential propositions begin to be true when creatures begin to be and cease to be true when creatures perish, Suárez goes on to discuss Aquinas's position. Suárez writes the following about Aquinas's view:

It is not enough if someone were to respond with St. Thomas in I, q. 10, a. 3, ad 3, q. 16, a. 7, ad 1, and q. 1 *de Veritate*, a. 5, ad 11, and a. 6, ad 2 and 3 that when the existence of creatures is destroyed, those enunciations are true not in themselves (*in se*), but in the divine intellect. [This reply fails] because not only do enunciations in which essential attributes are predicated have perpetual truth in the divine intellect in this way, but so also do all true accidental or contingent enunciations.¹⁴⁷

According to Suárez, Aquinas held that, for example, when all rabbits were destroyed the proposition *rabbits are sentient* only remained true in the divine intellect and not in itself. It is not entirely clear what Suárez means by the phrase true *in itself*, which

¹⁴⁶ The word that Suárez uses in discussing this difficulty is in fact *perpetua*. Norman Wells, for example, has translated *perpetua* as "eternal" in his translation of *Disputation XXXI* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1983). Likely he did this to make more explicit the link between this discussion and the modern discussion of eternal truths. This practice, however, can lead to confusion because 'eternal' has a wider range of meanings than 'perpetual'. See my discussion below in the final section of this chapter.

¹⁴⁷ *Disputationes Metaphysicae XXXI*, 12.40: "Nec satis est si quis respondeat cum D. Thom., I, q. 10, a. 3, ad 3, q. 16, a. 7, ad 1, et q. 1 de Veritate, a. 5, ad 11, et a. 6, ad 2 et 3, destructa creaturarum existencia, has enuntiationes esse veras, non in se, sed in intellectu divino. Quia hoc modo non solum huiusmodi enuntiationes in quibus attributa essentialia praedicantur, sed omnes etiam accidentales seu contingentes quae verae sunt, habent veritatem perpetuam in intellectu divino."

is contrasted with being true in the divine intellect. Suárez, like Aquinas, does not admit that propositions could exist apart from intellects. So Suárez likely did not mean by true *in themselves* that the enunciations had truth apart from any intellect since this would require that a proposition has existence independent from an intellect. Perhaps what Suárez meant to by calling a proposition true in itself is that it is true in any intellect that thinks it regardless of its being known by the divine intellect. According to the view that Suarez imputes to Aquinas, what guarantees the necessity of propositions that enter into scientific demonstrations is the fact that they are eternally known by God, not some feature possessed by the proposition in itself.

Suárez is not impressed with this solution. He thinks that God's perpetual knowledge of a proposition cannot make it the case that it is a necessary truth since contingently true propositions are also perpetually known by God. There must be some additional feature that is proper to necessary truths alone that distinguishes them from contingent ones. Suárez suggests a reply on behalf of Aquinas's so-called position, but only to go on to show where it fails. He writes:

You might say that there is a difference because although all of these truths are perpetually in the divine intellect, they are not, nevertheless, there with the same necessity. For those truths in which an essential feature is attributed to a subject are in the divine intellect in such a way that they are unable not to be in it. Accordingly, they are simply necessary and necessary without any supposition. But indeed other contingent truths, although they always were in the divine intellect, they are not, however, there with absolute necessity, but only on the supposition that they would be at some future time.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁸ Ibid: "Quod si dicas esse differentiam, quia, licet omnes sint perpetuo in intellectu divino, non tamen cum eadem necessitate; nam illae veritates in quibus praedicatum essentiale tribuitur subiecto ita sunt in intellectu divino ut non potuerint non esse in illo, unde sunt simpliciter necessariae et absque ulla suppositione; at vero aliae veritates contingentes, licet semper fuerint in divino intellectu, non tamen cum absoluta necessitate, sed solum ex suppositione quod in aliquo tempore futurae essent..."

Suárez says that this response only makes the position more objectionable because it further brings out the differences between necessary and contingent truths. Necessary truths do not depend at all on what is made by God to exist in time. Even if God did not create, he still would know necessary truths to be true, according to Suárez. This shows too that necessary truths are true in abstraction from time.¹⁴⁹ Further on, though, Suárez writes:

Again, neither are those enunciations true because they are known by God, but rather they are known because they are true, otherwise no reason would be able to be given for why God necessarily knows these are true. For if the truth of these came forth from God himself, it would happen from the will of God. Accordingly, it would not come forth from necessity, but voluntarily. Again because the divine intellect is compared with respect to these enunciations as merely speculative, not as operative. The speculative intellect however presupposes the truth of its object, it does not make it. Therefore, enunciations of this kind which are said to be in the first, or even in the second mode of predicating *per se*, have perpetual truth not only as they are in the divine intellect, but also according to themselves and prescinding from the divine intellect.¹⁵⁰

This passage makes clear again that God's knowledge cannot be the cause of an enunciation's necessity because God knows contingent enunciations as well as necessary ones. Suárez then claims that God cannot be the cause of necessary truths because the only way that God can cause things is with his will. God's will is free

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid: "Rursus neque illae enuntiationes sunt verae quia cognoscuntur a Deo, sed potius ideo cognoscuntur quia verae sunt, alioqui nulla reddi posset ratio cur Deus necessario cognosceret illas esse veras; nam, si ab ipso Deo proveniret earum veritas, id fieret media voluntate Dei; unde non ex necessitate proveniret, sed voluntarie. Item, quia respectu harum enuntiationum comparatur intellectus divinus ut mere speculativus, non ut operativus; intellectus autem speculativus supponit veritatem sui obiecti, non facit; igitur huiusmodi enuntiationes quae dicuntur esse in primo, immo etiam quae sunt in secundo modo dicendi *per se*, habent perpetuam veritatem, non solum ut sunt in divino intellectu, sed etiam secundum se ac praescindendo ab illo."

and is, thus, able not to cause whatever it causes. So, if God causes a truth to be true, that truth cannot be necessary since it is possible for it not to have been caused to be true. With Suárez's next claim, we see the relevance of the fact that necessary truths do not depend on anything that happens in time for their truth. Things that happen in time are related to the divine intellect as operative or practical. God is the craftsman that creates these things and thus, makes the truths about them to be true. Necessary truths, however, do not depend for their truth on anything that is made by God. Suárez supposes that they are true even in the case where God does not create anything. So Suárez concludes that God does not cause necessary truths to be true, but rather his knowing them as necessary presupposes that they are in themselves necessarily true.

III. Does Suárez get Aquinas right?

Suárez's assessment of the position that he describes as Aquinas's is certainly correct. It is doubtful, however, that he has accurately reconstructed Aquinas's thinking on this issue. Suárez cites four passages from the *Summa Theologiae* and the *De veritate* where he claims that Aquinas holds the view that he has attributed to him.¹⁵¹ Each of these texts is a reply to an objection and little attention has been paid to the context in which the objections arise. Careful analysis of the context of the texts that Suárez cites reveals that Aquinas's intention in claiming that truth is only eternal in the divine intellect was other than the one that Suárez attributed to him.

¹⁵¹ See fn. 2.

The first point to be noted is that Aquinas never makes the claim that propositions are only *perpetually* true in the divine intellect. In the texts cited by Suárez, Aquinas claims that truth is only *eternal* in the divine intellect. It is significant that Aquinas uses the term *eternal* rather than the term *perpetual* when he describes the mode of truth that is only in the divine intellect. There is an important difference between the technical meanings of these terms. Eternity, according to its primary meaning, is a mode of atemporal being that is proper only to God. Being perpetual is not a mode of existence that is unique to God or even one that is attributable to God since it can only be predicated of beings that are subject to time. Being eternal, however, is a mode of existence that only belongs to God. For Aquinas, truth only exists in intellects and in things. Accordingly, if truth is to be either perpetual or eternal, that in which it exists must be either perpetual or eternal. It is clear, then, why Aquinas would claim that truth is only eternal in the divine intellect.

In *Summa Theologiae* I.16.7, from which Suárez cited, Aquinas explains in the body of the text that truth can only be eternal in the divine intellect because the divine intellect is the only eternal intellect. In *Summa Theologiae* I.10.3, which Suárez also cites, Aquinas is trying to show that nothing outside of God has eternal existence. An objector claims that necessary truths are eternal and to this Aquinas replies that necessary truths have eternal existence only in the divine intellect since it is the only eternal intellect.¹⁵² In *De veritate* I.5 ad 11, Aquinas argues that it does

¹⁵² See *ST* Ia.10.3 arg. 3 and ad 3.

not follow from the fact that there are many eternal truths in God's intellect that there are many eternally true things. He explains that truth can be in an intellect without there being a corresponding true thing.

It is not surprising that Aquinas would have argued against the thesis that there are many eternal truths. In 1241, just a few years before Aquinas's arrival at the University of Paris, the chancellor of the university condemned the thesis that many truths have existed from eternity.¹⁵³ The modern editors of the condemnations suggest that the target was Stephen of Venice (Stephanus Varnesia), one of the first Dominican masters in Paris, who taught there until 1248. The historical proximity of this condemned view to Aquinas may explain why he repeatedly argues against the view that there are many eternal truths.

From Aquinas's claim that truth is eternal only in the divine intellect, it does not follow that necessary truths have their necessity because they are eternally known by God. Moreover, it does not follow that necessary truths cannot be perpetually true outside of God's intellect. If there were a perpetually existing intellect outside of the divine intellect, then necessary truths could be perpetual in this intellect while they are eternal only in the divine intellect. Additionally, nothing prevents a necessary truth from being true in a created intellect whenever it exists even if the truth is eternally true only in the divine intellect.

¹⁵³ *Chartularium Universitatis Parisiensis*, vol. 1, ed. H. Denfile and A. Chatelain, Paris 1889, 170-72. The latest research indicates that Aquinas's first academic year at the University of Paris was 1246. See Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas: The person and his work*, revised ed., trans. Robert Royal, (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996, 2005), vol. 1, pp. 19-24.

III. Did Aquinas hold that necessary propositions are perpetually true?

We have seen that in claiming that truth is eternal only in the divine intellect, it was not Aquinas's intention to suggest that necessary propositions are perpetually true only in the divine intellect. This still leaves open the question, however, of whether Aquinas in fact thought that necessary propositions were true whenever they were thought by an intellect, regardless of whether their subjects existed. In order to answer this question, we must analyze texts that speak more explicitly to this matter. There is at least one text in Aquinas's corpus that suggests that he thought that essential truths were subject to change upon the corruption of the subjects they are about. In the *De veritate*, Aquinas writes:

To the fourth it must be said that while a thing remains, its essential characteristics are unable to be changed.... From this it does not follow that the truth of a thing is in no way mutable, but only that a thing is immutable with respect to its essential characteristics given that the thing remains. Change happens to essential characteristics, nevertheless, through the corruption of the thing. But with respect to accidental characteristics, change is able to happen even with the thing remaining, and so with respect to the accidental, there is able to be change in the truth of a thing.¹⁵⁴

It appears that Aquinas is asserting in this text that the truth-values of propositions about the essential attributes of things change when the thing perishes. After all, he claims in this text that the truth of a thing is able to be changed with respect to its

¹⁵⁴ *De ver.* 1.6 ad 4: "Ad quantum dicendum quod manente re non potest fieri circa eam mutatio quantum ad ea quae sunt sibi essentialia, sicut enuntiationi est essenziale ut significet illud ad quod significandum est instituta: unde non sequitur quod veritas rei nullo modo sit mutabilis, sed quod sit immutabilis quantum ad essentialia rei remanente re, --in quibus tamen accidit mutatio per rei corruptionem--. Sed quantum ad accidentalia, mutatio potest accidere etiam manente re: et ita quantum ad accidentalia potest fieri mutatio veritatis rei."

essential attributes through the corruption of the thing. Yet, I think that when read carefully and in context, this statement does not imply that the truth of necessary propositions is mutable. What is important to recognize about this passage is that Aquinas is talking about ontological truth, i.e. the truth of a thing, and not propositional truth. Ontological truth, as was explained in chapter three, is the property that belongs to a thing when it is in conformity with either the divine or a human intellect. If a thing does not exist, it cannot possess this characteristic. Since things always possess their essential attributes as long as they exist, the truth that the thing possesses in virtue of its essential attributes only ceases when the thing is destroyed. Since Aquinas thinks that the human intellect can be in conformity to things that do not exist, the fact that a thing perishes and thus, lacks ontological truth, does not imply that the human intellect cannot form a true proposition about it.¹⁵⁵

There is explicit textual evidence which shows what Aquinas's view was on the perpetual truth of necessary propositions. In his *Commentary on the Metaphysics*, Aquinas makes clear that necessary and impossible propositions are *always* true or false. Their truth-values do not admit of change:

But in those things which are unable to be otherwise, namely those which are always composed or divided, it is not possible that the same opinion or saying is sometimes true and sometimes false, but that which is true is always true and that which is false is always false. For example, *man is an animal* is true, this, however is false: *man is an ass*.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵ See for example *De ver.* 1.5 ad 2.

¹⁵⁶ *In Meta.* IX.11 n. 1900: “Sed in his quae non possunt aliter se habere, scilicet quae semper componuntur vel dividuntur, non est possibile quod eadem opinio vel oratio quandoque sit vera, quandoque falsa; sed quae est vera, semper est vera; et quae est falsa, semper est falsa. Sicut haec est vera, homo est animal; haec autem falsa, homo est asinus.”

In the *De interpretatione* Aquinas claims that the tense of a necessary or impossible proposition does not affect its truth-value. The proposition *Man will be a rational animal* is just as true as *Man is a rational animal*. This is a significant claim because Aquinas thought that future contingent propositions lacked truth-values and he is denying this is the case with necessary propositions. Aquinas writes, “For in necessary matter all affirmative propositions are determinately true and all negative propositions are determinately false, just as it is with past and present propositions so it is with future ones.”¹⁵⁷ If a future-tense necessary proposition can be determinately true, this shows that a necessary proposition’s truth is not dependent on the existence of that which it is about.

Reflecting on the structure of necessary propositions reveals why necessary propositions do not depend on the existence of the subjects they are about for their truth-values. A contingent proposition, such as *A white thing is sweet*, is true if the form signified by the predicate and the form signified by the subject inhere in the same substance. That substance must exist in order for these forms to inhere in it. In a necessary proposition, however, what is expressed is not that two forms exist in the same subject, but rather that there is a connection between the two forms themselves. This connection is independent of the forms’ existing in any subject.

¹⁵⁷ *De Int.* I.13 n. 5: “Nam in materia necessaria omnes affirmativae determinate sunt verae, ita in futuris sicut in praeteritis et praesentibus; negativae vero falsae.”

The question still arises, though, of what the ontological grounding is for the truth that there is a connection between forms when the forms themselves do not exist. Even when it is granted that the truth of *Dogs are sentient* does not depend on the existence of a substance in which the forms of man and rational exist, the question still arises of what the ontological grounding is of this truth when no substantial forms of human beings exist. It is to this question that we now turn.

II. Truths about the past

We must recognize that necessary propositions about subjects that have perished form a subset of a larger class of true propositions. Aquinas thought that there were many true propositions about things that are not. In Aquinas's ontology, properties such as evil or blindness are not themselves real forms that inhere in objects, but are rather the privations of positive forms, such as good and sight. Although evil and blindness are not themselves positive realities, Aquinas still thought that there could be true propositions about evil and blindness.¹⁵⁸ Likewise, Aquinas thought that there could be both necessary and contingent truths about past and future things that do not now exist. Earlier we saw that the foundation for every propositional truth, according to Aquinas, was a conformity between an intellect and a thing. The question arises then of how Aquinas can maintain that there are true propositions about what is not, if there is no thing for the intellect to conform to in

¹⁵⁸ On Aquinas's account of truths about privations, see my "Thomas Aquinas on Truths about Nonbeings," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association*, 80 (2006): 101-113.

order to provide a foundation for the true proposition. Aquinas explains that it is not a necessary condition for the relation of adequation that the thing to which the intellect is adequated exists. He writes in the *De Veritate*:

For there to be an adequation or commensuration of an intellect to a thing, it is not required that both of the extremes are actual. For our intellect is able to be adequated to those things that will be in the future, but are not now. Otherwise, this would not be true: The antichrist will be born. Accordingly, this is true from the truth that is in the intellect alone, even when the thing itself is not.¹⁵⁹

Aquinas is essentially denying here his earlier claim in the *De Veritate* that “to every true act of understanding there must correspond some being.”¹⁶⁰ True acts of understanding about future and past things, as well as truths about privations and negations do not correspond to any actually existing being. When an intellect has a form or a simple concept of a nonbeing it is because of the intellect’s own activity. Aquinas writes: “Accordingly, if a nonbeing is adequated to any intellect, it is not on account of the nonbeing itself, but rather on account of the intellect itself that grasps the intelligible character (*ratio*) of the nonbeing in itself.”¹⁶¹ Through remembering or combining and dividing concepts of things it has experienced, the intellect can come to have concepts of things that do not exist.¹⁶² Although Aquinas allows for the

¹⁵⁹ *De ver.* 1.5, co.: “In hac autem adaequatione vel commensuratione intellectus ac rei non requiritur quod utrumque extremorum sit in actu: intellectus enim noster potest nunc adaequari his quae in futurum erunt nunc autem non sunt, aliter non esset haec vera 'antichristus nascetur'; unde hoc denominatur verum a veritate quae est in intellectu tantum, etiam quando non est res ipsa....” See also *ST Ia.16.5 ad 3, Ia.16.7 ad 4.*

¹⁶⁰ *De ver.* 1.2 ad.1: “eo quod cuilibet intellectui vero oportet quod respondeat aliquod ens, et e converso.”

¹⁶¹ *De ver.* 1.5 ad 2: “...unde quod intellectui cuicumque aequetur non est ex ipso non ente sed ex ipso intellectu qui rationem non entis accipit in se ipso.”

¹⁶² In certain cases, the nonbeing serves as an exemplar or pattern for the concept that the intellect forms. *De ver.* 1.8 ad 6: “Ad sextum dicendum quod non esse non est causa veritatis propositionum negativarum quasi faciens eas in intellectu, sed ipsa anima hoc facit conformans se non

intellect to be adequated with something that does not exist, the question still remains of what existing thing or composition in reality is the cause of the truth of a proposition that is based on the intellect's adequation with nonbeing.

We can gain insight into Aquinas's thinking on present and past truths by considering a reply he gives to an objection that is embedded within a larger medieval debate about tense and truth. This debate was over whether propositions with different tenses signify the same content or *enuntiabile*, which is perpetually true. Peter Lombard, for example, expresses this position in his *Sentences*. He claims that when the prophets uttered that *Christ will be born* they were asserting the same thing as later believers who said that *Christ has been born* and the content of these assertions is eternally true.¹⁶³ The school of Bernard of Chartres adopted this position and its advocates came to be known as *nominales*.¹⁶⁴ The opposing position held the tense of a proposition affected the content that it asserted. The proposition *Christ has been born*, therefore, asserts something different from the proposition *Christ will be born*. Before Christ was born the latter of these propositions was false and the former was true, but after Christ was born, the truth-values were reversed. This is the position that Aquinas adopts.

Aquinas considers the following objection from the nominalist's perspective:

Besides where there is the same cause there is also the same effect.
But the same thing is the cause of the truth of these three propositions:

enti quod est extra animam: unde non esse extra animam existens non est causa efficiens veritatis in anima sed quasi exemplaris; obiectio autem procedebat de causa efficiente.”

¹⁶³ Bk. I, d. 41.

¹⁶⁴ On this, see M.D. Chenu, “Grammaire et théologie aux XII^e et XIII^e siècles,” *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire moyen âge*, (1936): 5-28 and Kneale and Kneale, *The Development of Logic*, (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1962), 238-241.

Socrates sits, Socrates will sit, and Socrates sat. Therefore, the truth of these is the same. But it is necessary that one of these is true. Therefore, the truth of these propositions remains immutably.¹⁶⁵

What is of most interest to us is the objector's claim that the cause of future and past propositions about Socrates's sitting is Socrates's actual present act of sitting. In Aquinas's reply, he accepts this claim, although he adds an important qualification.

He writes:

To the fourth, it must be said that the sitting of Socrates which is the cause of the truth of this proposition *Socrates sits* does not have the same status while Socrates sits, after he will have sat and before he sits. Accordingly, also the truth caused by Socrates' sitting has different statuses and is signified in different ways by present, past and future tense propositions. Hence, it does not follow that although one of the three propositions [i.e. either the present, past or future tense proposition] is true, that the same truth remains invariably.¹⁶⁶

In order to understand what Aquinas thought to be the cause of past and future propositions, we must understand what status he thought that an event has before and after it happens.

In contemporary philosophy, there is a well-known debate about the existential status of non-present events. Presentists or A-theorists hold that only the present exists. The past and future have no reality. They believe that this account of time best captures the real change that occurs in the temporal order. Eternalists or B-

¹⁶⁵ *ST Ia.16.8 arg. 4*: “Praeterea, ubi est eadem causa, et idem effectus. Sed eadem res est causa veritatis harum trium propositionum Socrates sedet, sedebit, et sedit. Ergo eadem est harum veritas. Sed oportet quod alterum horum sit verum. Ergo veritas harum propositionum immutabiliter manet.”

¹⁶⁶ *ST Ia.16.8 ad 4*: “Ad quartum dicendum quod sessio Socratis, quae est causa veritatis huius propositionis, Socrates sedet, non eodem modo se habet dum Socrates sedet, et postquam sederit, et antequam sederet. Unde et veritas ab hoc causata, diversimode se habet; et diversimode significatur propositionibus de praesenti, praeterito et futuro. Unde non sequitur quod, licet altera trium propositionum sit vera, quod eadem veritas invariabilis maneat.”

theorists, on the other hand, think that the past and future exist on par with the present.¹⁶⁷ For the eternalist, the terms ‘present’ or ‘now’ are indexicals that pick out the time that an utterance occurs. So when one says that an event is happening ‘now’ or that it is ‘present’, one is not stating that the event has some ontological privilege, but rather one is claiming that the event occurs at the same time as one’s utterance.¹⁶⁸

In the above passage from Aquinas, it appears that he is advocating a B-theory of time since he claims that even the past and the future have a status. There has been much debate, however, about whether Aquinas in fact held this view of time. Throughout his corpus, there are many passages in which Aquinas expresses the view that the future and past are not actual as the present is.¹⁶⁹ What motivates some to claim that Aquinas held the B-theory or eternalist view of time is his account of God’s knowledge of contingents.¹⁷⁰ In several places, Aquinas claims that God knows which contingents obtain because all contingents are eternally present to him.¹⁷¹ It seems that if future contingents are eternally present to God, then future contingents must exist eternally. If God knew from eternity who would win the U.S. presidential election in 2008 because this event is eternally present to him, then it seems that this event must have existed from eternity. John Duns Scotus believed that Aquinas’s account of God’s knowledge of contingents entailed that all times simultaneously

¹⁶⁷ For more on these theories and suggestions for further reading, see Ned Markosian’s entry “Time” in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/time/>).

¹⁶⁸ See Michael J. Loux, *Metaphysics: A contemporary introduction*, Second ed., (New York: Routledge, 1998, 2002), pp. 221-222.

¹⁶⁹ See for example *De ver.* 1.5 ad 7, *In Physic.* VI.7, *Super Io.* I.1.

¹⁷⁰ See for example William Craig, “Was Aquinas a B-Theorist of Time?,” *The New Scholasticism* 59 (1985): 475–83.

¹⁷¹ See, for example, *De ver.* 2.12 co.

exist and, because he found this view of time untenable, he rejected Aquinas's account.

Recently Brian Leftow, Brian Shanley and Kevin Staley have given different arguments for the conclusion that Aquinas's view about how God knows contingents is compatible with his denial the past and future exist on par with the present.¹⁷² I think that Shanley's argument is the most faithful to Aquinas's thought. According to Shanley, the causal nature of God's knowledge must be taken into account when interpreting Aquinas's claim that contingents are eternally present to God's knowledge. When discussing God's knowledge of contingents, Aquinas claims that the knowledge of God is the cause of the things that he knows.¹⁷³ This is to say that it is in virtue of creating contingent reality that God knows it in all of its details. The time in which things occur is itself a detail of reality created by God since it is God who causes different events to be at different times. God, for example, eternally causes x to happen at t_1 and y to happen at t_2 . It does not follow from the fact that God eternally causes x and y that x and y eternally exist or that x and y exist simultaneously because part of what God causes in causing x and y is their occurrence at a particular time. We can imagine cases in which a creature could simultaneously cause different effects to obtain at different times, so it does not seem contradictory that God could eternally cause different effects to obtain in different temporal instants. Shanley claims that it is only from the perspective of being eternally caused

¹⁷² Brian Leftow, "Aquinas on Time and Eternity", *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, 64:3 (1990): 387-399; Brian Shanley, "Eternal Knowledge of the Temporal," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, 71:2 (1997): 197-224.

¹⁷³ See for example *ST* Ia.14.8

by God that contingent objects are eternally present to God.¹⁷⁴ Shanley also makes the point that there can be no temporal relation between time and eternity. Time and eternity are related only because the eternal is the cause of the temporal.¹⁷⁵ There are still many details to be worked out in Aquinas's account of God's knowledge of future and past contingents, which go beyond the scope of this project.¹⁷⁶ Shanley's work shows that there are resources in his thought to explain how he consistently thought both that the future, as such, is not and that the future is eternally present to God.

If Aquinas did not in fact hold the B-theory of time, then the "different statuses" that Aquinas claims that the past and the future have cannot be explained as the past and future having a kind of actual existence as the present does. In his *Commentary on the Metaphysics*, Aquinas claims that past events, although they do not have existence in the present, retain a kind of status in the present since they once existed and true propositions can be formed about them in the present time. Aquinas writes, "...that which is past now is in some way. I say this in so far as a past event has occurred or is past. For although the life of Caesar is not now in the present, it is, nevertheless, in the past since it is true that Caesar lived."¹⁷⁷ Here Aquinas is clear that the life of Caesar does not exist in the present when the proposition *Caesar*

¹⁷⁴ In *De ver.* I.5 ad 11, Aquinas makes clear that God is eternally conformed to the natures of things, although they do not eternally exist.

¹⁷⁵ See his "Eternal Knowledge of the Temporal".

¹⁷⁶ Shanley has examined some of these issues in his unpublished Ph.D dissertation "Thomas Aquinas on God's eternal knowledge of the future," (University of Toronto, 1994).

¹⁷⁷ *In Meta.* VI.3, n. 1199: "...hoc quod praeteritum est iam est secundum aliquem modum. Hoc autem dico in quantum est factum vel praeteritum. Licet enim vita Caesaris non sit nunc ut in praesenti, est tamen in praeterito. Verum enim est Caesarem vixisse."

existed is true. So the difficulty remains of what causes the truth of the proposition *Caesar existed* when Caesar is dead. I think that Aquinas thought that the cause of a future or past tense proposition's truth did not have to exist contemporaneously with the true future or past tense proposition. This is built into his understanding of what the perfect future tense signifies. He writes in his *Commentary on the Gospel of John* that the perfect past tense "indicates that something has existed, is now determined, and has now ceased to be".¹⁷⁸ If a perfect past tense proposition indicates that something has ceased to be and it is possible for perfect past tense propositions to be true, then Aquinas must have thought it possible for a proposition to be true while that which it signifies or that which causes its truth ceases to exist. Although Socrates's sitting may not exist when *Socrates will sit* and *Socrates sat* are true, I think that Socrates's sitting is considered by Aquinas to be the cause of truth of these propositions because it was or will be the cause of truth of the corresponding present tense proposition *Socrates sits*. Aquinas explicitly claims in his *Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics* that the truth of a past tense proposition depends on the truth of a corresponding present tense proposition at the time that event it expresses actually occurred. It is now true that 'Socrates sat', for example, because at some earlier time, it was true that 'Socrates sits'.¹⁷⁹ If *Socrates sits* is true at time t_1 , then *Socrates will sit* was true at every time before t_1 and *Socrates sat* will be true at every time after t_1 . So in causing *Socrates sits* to be true at t_1 , the sitting of Socrates also causes *Socrates*

¹⁷⁸ *Super Io.* 1.1: "praeteritum autem perfectum designat aliquid extitisse, et esse iam determinatum, et iam defuisse."

¹⁷⁹ *In Ethic.* I.15 n.9: "...veritas autem propositionis de praeterito dependet ex veritate propositionis de praesenti. Ideo enim aliquid verum est fuisse, quia verum fuit esse."

will sit and *Socrates sat* to be true.¹⁸⁰ Since, however, Socrates's sitting has a different status, i.e. it does not exist, before and after Socrates sits, *Socrates will sit* and *Socrates sat* mean something different and have a different truth-value from *Socrates sits*.

III. The truth of necessary propositions after their subjects perish

While necessarily true propositions about subjects that no longer exist have features in common with propositions about the past, there are some relevant differences that need to be taken into account. The proposition *Socrates sits* is false once Socrates's sitting ceases to exist.¹⁸¹ The perfect past tense proposition *Socrates sat* becomes true. *Socrates sits* cannot be true at the same time that *Socrates sat* is true because the former signifies that Socrates's sitting exists at the time of the proposition's truth, while the latter signifies that Socrates's sitting has ceased to be when the proposition is true.

It is different, however, with necessary propositions. We saw above that Aquinas thinks that propositions such as *Dogs are sentient* are perpetually true. What is relevant about this proposition is that it is in the present-tense. If this present-tense

¹⁸⁰ The view that I am attributing to Aquinas is similar to the view expressed by Alfred Freddoso in his introduction to his translation of Part IV of Molina's *Concordia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988). Freddoso writes: "...there are *now* adequate metaphysical grounds for the truth of a past-tense proposition *Pp* just in case there *were* at some past time adequate metaphysical grounds for the truth of its present tense counterpart *p*. Likewise... there are *now* adequate metaphysical grounds for the truth of a future-tense proposition *Fp* just in case there *will* be at some future time adequate metaphysical grounds for the truth of its present-tense counterpart *p*. So in order for propositions about the past or future to be true now, it is not required that any agent *now* be causing them to be true. Rather, it is sufficient that some agent has caused or will cause the corresponding present-tense propositions to be true" (pg. 72).

¹⁸¹ Since sitting is a repeatable action, the proposition in question should be implicitly understood as *Socrates sits for the last time*.

proposition is perpetually true, this implies that it is true even before or after any dogs exist. This marks a difference between necessary and contingent propositions because present-tense contingent propositions are not true before or after what they signify exists. It is the future and past-tense contingent proposition that has truth in these cases. With necessary propositions, however, it is the present-tense proposition that is perpetually true.

This seems to pose a difficulty for explaining the cause of the truth of these propositions once the beings that they are about have perished. It seems that a previously existing form of a dog cannot be the cause of the truth of the proposition *Dogs are sentient* after no forms of dogs exist. This is because, according to Aquinas, the form of a dog would have a different status after it ceases to exist from the status it had when it existed. Accordingly, the truth caused by it would also have a different status after it ceased to exist. The truth that the form of a dog that once existed, but now no longer exists, would cause is the truth of the proposition *Dogs were sentient*—not the truth of the proposition *Dogs are sentient*. This latter truth can only be caused by a presently existing human form.

This difficulty can be addressed by considering what Aquinas says elsewhere about present-tense propositions. In his *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, Aquinas explains that the present-tense is the proper tense for designating eternal things. Aquinas writes: “But concerning the notion of the present, the present tense is most fitting to designate eternity, because it signifies that something is in act, which always

belongs to eternal things....”¹⁸² Aquinas uses the word "eternal" in a number of ways. In its most proper sense, it refers to the atemporal existence that is proper to God.¹⁸³ In a secondary sense, it is used to designate those things that exist perpetually.¹⁸⁴ Less frequently, Aquinas uses the term 'eternal' to refer to universals.¹⁸⁵ Universals are eternal not in the positive sense of existing at all times, but rather in the negative sense of abstracting from all times and places.¹⁸⁶ Truths about essences are eternal in this sense. The proposition *Dog is an animal* does not assert that there is now an existing form of a dog and an existing form of animal that are one in the same way that the contingent present-tense proposition *Socrates is sitting* asserts that there is an existing being Socrates who is now in the seated position. What the proposition *Dog is an animal* asserts is that there is a connection between the form of dog and the form of animal that abstracts from time and place. The present-tense of a *per se* proposition indicates its truth does not depend on when and where it is uttered.

¹⁸² *Super Io.* 1.1: “Sed quantum ad rationem praesentis competit maxime ad designandum aeternitatem praesens tempus, quod signat aliquid esse in actu, quod semper convenit aeternis....”

¹⁸³ See for example *ScG* I.15.

¹⁸⁴ This is the sense in which 'eternal' is used in the discussion about the eternity of the world. The sense in which the world could have possibly been eternal differs from the sense in which God is eternal since the world, even being eternal, would still have created existence from God that is subject to motion and change. See Aquinas's *De aeternitate mundi*.

¹⁸⁵ *In I Sent.* 19.5.3 ad 3: "Sicut enim dicimus de universalibus, quod sunt incorruptibilia et aeterna, quia non corrumpuntur nisi per accidens, scilicet quantum ad esse quod habent in alio, quod potest non esse; ita etiam est de veritate et falsitate, quod consideratae secundum intentiones suas, non accidunt eis corruptio per se, sed solum secundum esse quod habent in alio...."

¹⁸⁶ *ST* Ia.16.7 ad 2: "Ad secundum dicendum quod aliquid esse semper et ubique, potest intelligi dupliciter. Uno modo, quia habet in se unde se extendat ad omne tempus et ad omnem locum, sicut Deo competit esse ubique et semper. Alio modo, quia non habet in se quo determinetur ad aliquem locum vel tempus, sicut materia prima dicitur esse una, non quia habet unam formam, sicut homo est unus ab unitate unius formae, sed per remotionem omnium formarum distinguendum. Et per hunc modum, quodlibet universale dicitur esse ubique et semper, in quantum universalia abstrahunt ab hic et nunc. Sed ex hoc non sequitur ea esse aeterna, nisi in intellectu, si quis sit aeternus." *PA* 1.42 n. 6. Maurer discusses this passage and others in his "St. Thomas and Eternal Truths."

The ontological grounds or the cause of the truth of a present-tense *per se* proposition when the forms it signifies do not exist are the forms that once existed or will exist at some time in the actual world. Since the connection between forms that are *per se* related to one another does not depend on the fact that they coincide in a particular subject at a certain time or place, the forms themselves, both before and after they exist, are a sufficient cause of the present-tense truth that asserts this connection. It is true that like the status of Socrates's sitting, the status of the form of man is different both before and after it exists. The truth that the form of dog causes, however, does not change in status after the form ceases to exist as the truths caused by Socrates's sitting change after it ceases to exist. This is because unlike the connection between Socrates and sitting, the connection between dog and animal abstracts from all time and place. In the last chapter, we saw that the ontological reason for the unalterable connection between the form of dog and the form of animal is the fact that those forms are identical.

We saw in the last chapter that a *per se* connection between forms could also be expressed by a conditional proposition. *Dog is an animal* expresses the same truth as the proposition *If there is a dog, then it is an animal*. Conditional propositions about subjects that do not exist have the same grounds as their present-tense counterparts since these conditional propositions also express a connection between forms.

III. Objections to this account

I have claimed that the ontological grounds or the cause of the truth of propositions about beings that no longer exist or will exist are the forms of those beings when they exist. This is to say that if there were only one dog form that only existed for one instant, it would be both the necessary and sufficient cause of the perpetual truth of the propositions *Dog is an animal* and *If there is a dog, then it is an animal*. The obvious objection to raise to this account is that it does not provide an explanation for what causes or grounds necessary truths about beings that never exist at any time in the actual world. Since the forms of nonexistent possible creatures never exist in this world, there are no grounds for necessary propositions about them. It might not seem problematic to give up truths about nonexistent possibles, but it also follows from what I have given as Aquinas's account that if man never existed in this world then *Man is an animal* would not be true. This seems like too much to accept since it implies that a necessary truth is possibly not true and this is a contradiction.

In response to this worry, it is helpful to recall Aquinas's account of propositional truth, which I explained in chapter three. According to Aquinas, a human intellect is a necessary condition for the existence of propositional truth since subjects and predicates are only joined and divided because of the human intellect's unique mode of knowing. In addition to this, the human intellect can only form propositions about subjects whose forms it is able grasp.¹⁸⁷ The human intellect can

¹⁸⁷ Strictly speaking, the imagination can form concepts of fictional kinds, such as golden mountains. As I explained earlier, though, there cannot be science of these fictional beings, since there are no genuine natures to know. Real universals are the object of science.

only grasp the forms of actually existing beings. All of this implies that there can only be propositions about beings that exist at some time. If there can only be propositions about actually existing beings, then an account of the cause of propositions about nonexistent possibles is not needed. If there were no human beings in this world, the proposition *Man is an animal* would not be false; rather, it simply would not exist and thus, would have no truth-value.

IV. Conclusion

We now have a full account of Aquinas's thinking on necessary propositions of the human intellect about contingent beings. We have seen how Aquinas thinks that *per se* propositions remain true even after their subjects perish. It is not the case as Suárez claimed that Aquinas held that once the subjects of necessary propositions perished, those propositions are only true in the divine intellect. Aquinas can account for how necessary propositions remain true in created intellects even after their subjects perish. Since Aquinas can account for the perpetual truth of necessary propositions, he is able to maintain that science of extinct creatures is possible.

In the remaining two chapters of this study, we will examine divine intellect's knowledge of truth. We will consider whether the perfect divine intellect is able to know more necessary truths than only those that are about creatures that exist at some time in the actual world. If Aquinas does in fact accord this knowledge to God, we will consider what the grounds for it are.

CHAPTER SIX

DOES GOD KNOW POSSIBLE CREATURES?

In the previous chapters, I argued that the ontological grounds for necessary truths about contingent beings are the forms of these beings themselves. Since these forms of contingent beings, which ground necessary truths, also exist contingently, there are times when a necessary proposition is true and yet its grounds are nonexistent. I claimed that in these cases when the form of a being that a necessary proposition is about does not exist, the proposition conforms to a form that existed at some other time. I noted that this solution could not explain truths about merely possible beings that never exist at some time in the actual world.

I claimed that explaining the grounds of necessary propositions about possible creatures is not a genuine problem for Aquinas's metaphysics. According to Aquinas's view, there is no science of fictional beings that the imagination invents since they do not have genuine natures that can be known. Even if it is possible for there to be more knowable natural kinds than those that exist in this world, there can be no propositions about these empty kinds. This is because the existence of propositions depends on the human intellect's joining a predicate to a subject and the

human intellect cannot form simple concepts of natures that never exist at any time. Since it is well known that Aquinas admits of other intellects in his ontology, namely divine and angelic intellects, the question arises of whether these intellects can have knowledge of these purely possible kinds and what their ability to have knowledge of these possible beings implies for our question on the grounds of necessary truths about contingent beings. Consider the following: Let us suppose that God has perfect knowledge of every possible creature that includes knowledge of each of its attributes. It follows from this that even if a man were never to exist, God would know man to be rational. Since it is supposed that man never exists at any time in the actual world, the grounds for God's knowledge of man as rational cannot be the actually existing form of man. It seems then that if God's knowledge, even if it is non-propositional, has a ground other than actually existing beings, then there must be another, perhaps necessarily existing, ontological ground for truths about contingently existing beings. In the following chapters, we will examine various aspects of God's knowledge of truths about creatures and their implications for determining the ontological grounds of truth about contingent beings.

In setting up the difficulty above that God's knowledge of possible creatures may pose for my interpretation of Aquinas, I have only *supposed* that God knows truths about possible creatures. I have not asserted as a matter of fact that this was Aquinas's view. That is because scholars of Aquinas's thought have debated at length about the authentic interpretation of Aquinas's position on whether or not God knows possibles. The implications that God's knowledge of possible creatures has for the

grounding of necessary truths can only be explored once it is established that God knows possible creatures. In this first chapter on God's knowledge of creatures, I will attempt to resolve this debate.

I. God's knowledge of creatures

Before attempting to adjudicate the scholarly debate about whether Aquinas thought that God had knowledge of possible creatures, it is necessary to examine Aquinas's account of how God knows creatures in general. The philosophical tradition of which Aquinas was a part struggled to explain how God could know things other than himself. Aristotle had described God as self-thinking thought. He thought that if God had knowledge of things other than himself, it would involve a mutability and potentiality that was incompatible with God's perfection.¹⁸⁸ The neo-platonic tradition beginning with Plotinus and extending to Proclus and Pseudo-Dionysius re-shaped the problem of explaining God's knowledge of creatures. In the neo-platonic framework, the first being was seen as an intelligent cause of lower beings in an emanative scheme. Accordingly, some knowledge of the lower could be ascribed to the higher in virtue of its causality, but this knowledge did not extend to every singular being in the created world as the Christian doctrine of divine providence requires.¹⁸⁹ The objections raised in Aquinas's accounts of God's

¹⁸⁸ See his *Metaphysics* XII, 7 and 9 (esp. 1047b 33-35) and *Eudemian Ethics* VII, 12, 1245b 14-19. Interestingly, Aquinas interprets Aristotle as having a position on divine knowledge identical to his own. See his *In Meta.* XII.11.

¹⁸⁹ On neoplatonic accounts of divine knowledge, see R.T. Wallis, "Divine Omniscience in Plotinus, Proclus and Aquinas," in *Neoplatonism and Early Christian Thought*, ed. H.J. Blumenthal and R.A. Markus (London: Variorum Publications LTD. 1981), 223-235.

knowledge make clear that he had both the difficulties of the Aristotelian tradition and those of the neo-platonic tradition in mind when he attempted to explain God's knowledge of things other than himself. According to Aquinas, humans have cognitive access to objects through a reception and assimilation of the intelligible species of the known object. God's perfection rules out that he depends on objects outside of himself, as humans do, in order to have knowledge. Accordingly, an alternative explanation is required to account for God's knowledge of creatures.

Aquinas discusses God's knowledge of things other than himself in each of his major works.¹⁹⁰ In each case, Aquinas appeals to God's causality to explain his knowledge of other things. In virtue of God's own perfect self-knowledge, God knows all to which his causal powers extend. According to Aquinas's understanding of causality and participation, in order for a cause to communicate perfection and existence to an effect, the effect must pre-exist in the cause.¹⁹¹ Aquinas often uses the example of fire that causes something else to be hot. The fire is able to cause heat only because it is actually hot itself. Since all perfections that God causes pre-exist in him, in knowing himself perfectly, God knows all other things. Unlike the neo-platonic divine beings who only emanate the being below them, Aquinas thought that God's causality extends to every aspect of every created being. Since God's causality extends even to the individuating features of creatures, i.e. matter, God knows

¹⁹⁰ See *In I Sent.* 35.1.3; *De ver.* 2.5; *ST Ia.*14.5; *ScG I.*49.

¹⁹¹ See, for example, *ScG I.*49 and *ST Ia.*14.6.

creatures not in a general way, but as individualized particulars.¹⁹² Aquinas describes God's knowledge of creatures as the knowledge that an artificer has of the artifact that he makes.¹⁹³ In Aquinas's thought, the relationship of divine knowledge to its object is the reverse of the relationship of human knowledge to its object. While human knowledge follows upon the reception and assimilation of its object, divine knowledge is the cause of the very existence of its object. God's knowledge is prior to the existence of the created things that he knows. While our intellect requires multiple intelligible species in order to know multiple objects, Aquinas is clear that there is only one "means" in virtue of which God knows all other things in their multiplicity. The divine essence is the one single principle that causes the divine intellect to know all else.¹⁹⁴

Aquinas's lengthy discussions of the divine ideas are central to understanding his view of God's knowledge of things other than himself.¹⁹⁵ Aquinas says that a form that is in the intellect has two roles. First, it is the principle by which a thing is known and secondly, it is the very thing which is known as it exists in the intellect.

¹⁹² See for example *In I Sent.* 36.1.1. For an account of Aquinas's conception of the causal relationship between God and the world, see Cornelio Fabro, *Participation et causalité selon s. Thomas d'Aquin* (Louvain: Publications Universitaires, 1961), esp. 397-409.

¹⁹³ See for example *De ver.* 2.5.

¹⁹⁴ See for example *In I Sent.* 35.1.2 ad 4.

¹⁹⁵ For literature on God's ideas in Aquinas see V. Boland, *Ideas in God According to Saint Thomas Aquinas: Sources and Synthesis*. (Studies in the History of Christian Thought, 69: E. J. Brill, Leiden - New York - Köln, 1996); L.B. Geiger, "Les idées divines dans l'oeuvre de s. Thomas," A. A. Maurer (ed.), *St. Thomas Aquinas 1274-1974: Commemorative Studies*, t. 1 (Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, Toronto, 1974) 175-209; J.F. Wippel, "Thomas Aquinas on the Divine Ideas," (Étienne Gilson Series, 16: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, Toronto, 1993); G. Doolan, "Aquinas on Divine Ideas as Exemplar Causes," (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2008). Not all scholars have agreed about the importance of Aquinas's discussion of the ideas. Gilson, for example, has argued that the ideas are remnants of Augustine and not a genuinely Thomistic doctrine. See his *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. L.K. Shook, (New York: Random House, 1956), pp. 103-103. Doolan addresses this view in his *Aquinas on Divine Ideas as Exemplar Causes*, pp. 111-117.

In God, the divine essence is the only means by which any thing is known, but since God knows many things, the forms of these many things can be described as existing in God's intellect.¹⁹⁶ It is these forms of things known or *rationes* existing in God's intellect that Aquinas calls the divine ideas. Aquinas claims that God's having many ideas is not incompatible with divine simplicity since it is by means of only one species that God knows many things.¹⁹⁷ This one species is the divine essence itself so even it does not imply composition in God. Perfect knowledge of God's own essence yields to him a distinct idea of every creature since perfectly knowing his own essence implies knowledge of all of the ways that it can be imperfectly imitated or participated in.¹⁹⁸

It is important to note that God's knowledge of the ways his essence can be imitated just is his knowledge of creatures. It is not as if God knows the ways his essence can be imitated and then by knowing these "ways" he consequently knows creatures. Scotus later showed, in objecting to Henry of Ghent, that this latter view is

¹⁹⁶ See for example, *De ver.* 3.2 co.: "Forma enim in intellectu dupliciter esse potest. Uno modo ita quod sit principium actus intelligendi, sicut forma quae est intelligentis in quantum est intelligens, et haec est similitudo intellecti in ipso; alio modo ita quod sit terminus actus intelligendi, sicut artifex intelligendo excogitat formam domus; et cum illa forma sit excogitata per actum intelligendi et quasi per actum effecta, non potest esse principium actus intelligendi ut sit primum quo intelligatur sed magis se habet ut intellectum quo intelligens aliquid operatur...." Doolan notes that Aquinas's considering an idea as that which is understood in the *De veritate* marks a difference from his earlier *Sentences* discussion of ideas in which he presents ideas as mediums by which God knows creatures. See his *Aquinas on Divine Ideas as Exemplar Causes*, p. 93.

¹⁹⁷ See for example *ST Ia.* 15.2 co.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*: "Unde plures ideae sunt in mente divina ut intellectae ab ipso. Quod hoc modo potest videri. Ipse enim essentiam suam perfecte cognoscit, unde cognoscit eam secundum omnem modum quo cognoscibilis est. Potest autem cognosci non solum secundum quod in se est, sed secundum quod est participabilis secundum aliquem modum similitudinis a creaturis. Unaquaeque autem creatura habet propriam speciem, secundum quod aliquo modo participat divinae essentiae similitudinem. Sic igitur in quantum Deus cognoscit suam essentiam ut sic imitabilem a tali creatura, cognoscit eam ut propriam rationem et ideam huius creaturae. Et similiter de aliis. Et sic patet quod Deus intelligit plures rationes proprias plurium rerum; quae sunt plures ideae."

problematic.¹⁹⁹ When a "way in which God's essence can be imitated" is conceived of as a notion distinct from the proper notion of the creature, it is essentially the notion of a relation between God and the creature. God, however, would not be able to know this relation between himself and the creature unless he had a proper notion of the creature itself. This is because knowledge of a relation presupposes knowledge of each of the *relata* involved. Knowing then a "way in which his essence can be imitated" cannot yield God knowledge of the creature if he does not already have it. When, however, the "way in which God's essence is imitated" is conceived of as identical with the proper notion of the creature itself, it can be seen how God can have this notion simply by knowing himself. By considering certain of his own perfections in various combinations, God has concepts of ways that he is able to be imitated. God has ideas of things other than himself in the same way that one who has an idea of a man has an idea of animal or one who has an idea of the number three also has an idea of the number two. By negating certain perfections possessed by man, one understands an animal and similarly, by negating perfections from the number three one has the idea of two. Aquinas claims that God has the idea of a plant by knowing his own essence as imitable by life, but not by cognition. Likewise, he has the idea of an animal by knowing his essence as imitable by cognition, but not by intellectual understanding.²⁰⁰ God's knowledge of things other than himself does not

¹⁹⁹ *Ordinatio* I, d. 35-36; *Rep.* IA, d. 36.

²⁰⁰ *ScG* I.54, n. 449, 451: "Intellectus vero ea quae sunt in esse coniuncta, interdum disiunctim accipere potest, quando unum eorum in alterius rationem non cadit. Et per hoc in ternario potest considerare binarium tantum; et in animali rationali id quod est sensibile tantum. Unde intellectus id quod plura complectitur potest accipere ut propriam rationem plurimorum, apprehendendo aliqua illorum absque aliis. Potest enim accipere denarium ut propriam rationem

involve knowledge of a relation. It is direct cognition of the divine essence considered under some limitation. God's essence considered under various limitations is identical with the very forms of creatures.

II. Does God have ideas of possibles? Aquinas's Voluntarism

Despite the fact that Aquinas explicitly claims that God has ideas of possible creatures that never exist at any time, there is much debate in the secondary literature about God's knowledge of possible creatures.²⁰¹ The notion that God's ideas yield knowledge of a quantifiable domain of distinct possible creatures has been challenged. Aquinas is clear that God's ideas give him knowledge of creatures in their singularity, so it would seem that if God has ideas of possible creatures, then he knows a set of distinct possible individuals. Yet, there is room to raise questions about the content God's knowledge of merely possible creatures since Aquinas claims that God's ideas of merely possible creatures differ from those ideas of things that are

novenarii, una unitate subtracta; et similiter ut propriam rationem singulorum numerorum infra inclusorum. Similiter etiam in homine accipere potest proprium exemplar animalis irrationalis inquantum huiusmodi, et singularum specierum eius, nisi aliquas differentias adderent positivas.... Divina autem essentia in se nobilitates omnium entium comprehendit, non quidem per modum compositionis, sed per modum perfectionis, ut supra ostensum est. Forma autem omnis, tam propria quam communis, secundum id quod aliquid ponit, est perfectio quaedam: non autem imperfectionem includit nisi secundum quod deficit a vero esse. Intellectus igitur divinus id quod est proprium unicuique in essentia sua comprehendere potest, intelligendo in quo eius essentiam imitetur, et in quo ab eius perfectione deficit unumquodque: utpote, intelligendo essentiam suam ut imitabilem per modum vitae et non cognitionis, accipit propriam formam plantae; si vero ut imitabilem per modum cognitionis et non intellectus, propriam formam animalis; et sic de aliis. Sic igitur patet quod essentia divina, inquantum est absolute perfecta, potest accipi ut propria ratio singulorum. Unde per eam Deus propriam cognitionem de omnibus habere potest.”

²⁰¹ For Aquinas's claim that God knows possibles, see for example *De ver.* 3.3 ad 3; *De ver.* 3.6 co.; *ST Ia.* 15.3 co. and ad 2. As is clear from these texts, Aquinas thought that an idea could serve two functions. First, it could be a principle for knowing and second, it could be a principle for making something, or an exemplar. In the latter texts, Aquinas claims that there are ideas of possible things that never are in time only *qua* cognitive principles and not *qua* exemplars.

actual at some time. Consider the following passage from the *De veritate*, for example:

Accordingly, since God has virtually practical cognition of those things which he is able to make, even though he does not make them and will not make them, it follows that there are able to be ideas of that which is not, nor was, nor will be. These ideas, however, are not of the same kind as of those things which are, or will be, or have been because those things which are, or will be, or have been are determined to be produced by a decree of the divine will. Those things, however, which neither are, nor will be, nor have been are not determined to be produced by a decree of the divine will and so things of this kind have in a certain way indeterminate ideas.²⁰²

Here Aquinas claims that God's ideas of merely possible creatures are "in a certain way indeterminate". Unfortunately Aquinas never clarified the precise manner in which ideas of merely possible things are indeterminate. Accordingly, it has been left to his commentators to debate about this. Not only do those who question whether God knows distinct possible creatures rely on passages such as this one to bolster their view, but they also appeal to Aquinas's other philosophical commitments in order to show that he could not have held that there are distinct possible individuals for God to know. In what follows, I will present the arguments of those who deny that God has knowledge of distinct possible individuals.

James Ross has been the most enthusiastic interpreter of Aquinas who attributes to him the view that God does not know a domain of merely possible

²⁰² *De ver.* 3.6 co.: "...unde cum Deus de his quae facere potest quamvis nunquam sint facta nec futura habeat cognitionem virtualiter practicam, relinquitur quod idea possit esse eius quod nec est nec fuit nec erit: non tamen eodem modo sicut est eorum quae sunt vel erunt vel fuerunt, quia ad ea quae sunt vel erunt vel fuerunt producenda determinatur ex proposito divinae voluntatis, non autem ad ea quae nec sunt nec erunt nec fuerunt, et sic huiusmodi habent quodammodo indeterminatas ideas."

creatures.²⁰³ Ross calls the "establishment" interpretation of Aquinas's view on the possibles "photo-exemplarism" and he claims that according to this view, God knows possibles as "tin soldiers spread out on a carpet". Ross challenges this view because he believes that it is both inconsistent in itself and incompatible with Aquinas's other philosophical commitments. Ross thinks that exemplarism is inconsistent because there cannot be a domain of all of the possible ways that God can be imitated or of all of the possible things that God can make. This is because being cannot be exhausted by all possible kinds and natures cannot be exhausted by all possible individuals.²⁰⁴ Ross thinks that even an infinity of possible human beings would not exhaust "being human." He claims that "this is because an actual infinity need not be the *same* as all the humans there *might* have been *instead*. No matter how many there are, there might have been others *instead*. All possible humans are not compossible."²⁰⁵ Next, Ross argues that God cannot know possible individuals since the principle of individuation is *materia signata quantitate*. Ross thinks that it follows from this that only actual beings are able to be individuated since individuation is by limitation of

²⁰³ See his "Aquinas' Exemplarism, Aquinas' Voluntarism," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 64 (1990): 171-198. Ross wrote this article in reaction to John Wippel's "The Reality of Nonexisting Possibles According to Thomas Aquinas, Henry of Ghent, and Godfrey of Fontaines," *The Review of Metaphysics* 34 (1981): 729-758. Lawrence Dewan and Armand Maurer have challenged Ross's view. See their respective "St Thomas, James Ross, and Exemplarism: A Reply," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, 65 (1991): 231-4. and "James Ross on the Divine Ideas: A Reply" *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, 65 (1991): 213-220; and Ross's reply to them in this same journal issue pp. 213-220. Not only does Ross advocate this view as an interpretation of Aquinas, but he also argues for it as a philosophical position in its own right. See his "God, Creator of Kinds and Possibilities", pp. 351-34, *Rationality, Religious Belief and Moral Commitment*. eds. Robert Audi and William J. Wainwright, Cornell University Press: Ithaca, New York, 1986.

²⁰⁴ "Aquinas's Exemplarism; Aquinas's Voluntarism," 173-174.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 189.

being.²⁰⁶ Despite his objections, Ross cannot deny the numerous passages in which Aquinas claims that God has ideas of possibles. Ross has a way of reading Aquinas's claim that God knows merely possible creatures that is sympathetic with anti-exemplarism. He writes, "...God's knowing what *might* be is virtual and the objects are indefinite, like impersonations of W.C. Fields which are never to be attempted."²⁰⁷ So instead of knowing a "rank and file" of distinct individual ways his essence might have been imitated, God, in knowing his own essence, eminently knows every possible imitation of it.

Ross's positive explanation of his own view consists in his "voluntarism." On Ross's reading of Aquinas, God creates the content of the natures with the individuals. This amounts to the claim that in creating men, God determines the content of human nature. Ross's argument is two-fold. First, he cites passages in which he thinks that Aquinas claims that the reason why a given creature is such and such depends to an extent on other creatures and ultimately on the will of God.²⁰⁸ In the second part of his argument, Ross goes even further to claim that absolute possibility and impossibility are also posterior to creation. Aquinas claims that certain "kinds" are impossible because they imply being and non-being at the same time, while those that do not make this implication are possible. It seems that this absolute possibility and impossibility of certain natures is "pre-given" independent of God's actions. Ross, however, argues that whether or not a given nature implies

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 174.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 182.

²⁰⁸ *De Pot.*, 3.17, co.

being and nonbeing together depends on what else God makes. Thus, possibility *ad extra* is consequent to the will of God.²⁰⁹

Ross is not the first interpreter of Aquinas to attribute "voluntarism" to him. Beatrice Zedler and Gerard Smith have also argued that for Aquinas an object's possibility depends on God's will. Although they are often mentioned with Ross, their view differs significantly from his. Zedler and Smith first took the occasion to write about Aquinas's view of the possibles in attempt to offer a contrast to Avicenna's position.²¹⁰ They think that a key difference between Avicenna and Aquinas is that on Avicenna's view possibles are possible in themselves, solely in virtue of what they are. For Aquinas, on the other hand, something cannot be understood as possible apart from a cause that is able to produce it.²¹¹ Zedler explains of possible creatures that "however compatible their intelligible notes might be (and whether or not they ever actually exist), if God could not freely will to give them actual being, they would not be possible existents."²¹² Zedler and Smith's view is that both the existential and essential meaning of possibility must be taken into account when determining the origin of possibility. Accordingly Zedler gives a two-fold answer in reply to the question of why possibles are possible. She writes:

Why then for St. Thomas are the possibles possible? Because, founded on the divine essence they are known by God as ways in which that essence can be imitated *and* because God is able to give

²⁰⁹ "Aquinas's Exemplarism; Aquinas's Voluntarism," 191-4.

²¹⁰ See G. Smith, "Avicenna and the Possibles," *The New Scholasticism* 17 (1943): 340-357. Zedler, "Another look at Avicenna," *The New Scholasticism* 50 (1976): 504-521. Zedler later published a paper solely on Aquinas in order to explicate and defend her and Smith's earlier remarks on Aquinas. See her "Why Are the Possibles Possible?," *The New Scholasticism* 55 (1981) 113-130.

²¹¹ "Why are the possibles possible?," 128-129; "Avicenna and the Possibles," 353.

²¹² "Why are the possibles possible?," 130.

them actual existence and can freely will to do so. If one thus takes account of the existential as well as the essential meaning of possibility, there should be no feeling of surprise at Fr. Smith's saying that God is the cause of possibility of the possibles.²¹³

This quote from Zedler brings out the difference between the position of Zedler and Smith and that of Ross. Ross, as explained, thinks that the natures of creatures at least to some extent are freely constituted by choices of the divine will. Accordingly, one cannot speak of *x* or *y* as being possible antecedent to God's creative act of will because there is no definite nature of *x* or *y* until God decides what he will create. On Zedler and Smith's view, the content of natures is founded on God's essence independent of any decision. These natures cannot be understood as possible, however, apart from the divine power that is able to cause them. Smith explains:

...the intelligible content of a subject of existence, e.g. a possible man as distinguished from a possible cabbage, can be understood without understanding a cause through which it can be. But any intelligible content as being able to be, that content cannot be understood as being able to be, except through a cause able to make that content exist.²¹⁴

Whether or not Zedler or Smith's reading of Aquinas is correct, these authors cannot be appealed to as corroborating Ross's interpretation of Aquinas.²¹⁵ All three authors

²¹³ Ibid., 127-128.

²¹⁴ "Avicenna and the Possibles," 355.

²¹⁵ I think Zedler and Smith are in fact mistaken in their reading of Aquinas on the origins of possibility. For literature that has been critical of their reading, see Wippel, "The Reality of Non-existing Possibles" 169-171; Lawrence A. Dewan, "St. Thomas and the Possibles," *The New Scholasticism* 53 (1979): 76-85. Another scholar who shares Smith and Zedler's view, whom both cite, is A. Forest. In his *La structure métaphysique du concret selon saint Thomas d'Aquin* (Paris, 1956), he writes, "Pour saint Thomas, ce qui fait que les notions sont possibles, c'est qu'elles ne sont pas contradictoires, autrement dit, qu'elles sont de l'être et par là une imitation du premier être. Mais ce qui fait que les possibles sont tels, c'est qu'ils procèdent d'une volonté qui les constitue librement en accord avec la sagesse" (p. 153).

may be called voluntarists, but Ross's voluntarism is very different in character. Ross is unique in claiming that the content of created natures depends on God's choices.

It is most crucial to address Ross's voluntarism since it his interpretation of Aquinas that has consequences for necessary truths about creatures. If Ross is correct that God creates the natures of things in creating individuals, then there are no necessary truths even for God to know about things that never are. Ross writes: "When God knows forever *Men are sentient* what he knows is not a relation among divine ideas, but rather something about things of a real nature: i.e., that to be human is to be sentient. Yet, there is no real nature unless there are individuals."²¹⁶ Ross also clarifies that truths about creatures that we regularly call necessary truths are not in fact absolutely necessary. They are only necessary given a certain choice of God's will.²¹⁷

III. Response to Ross

Ross claims that there is textual evidence in Aquinas's corpus for his views. So in order to determine the validity of Ross's interpretation, each of those texts must be examined. To bolster his claim that the content of created natures depends on what else God makes, Ross cites a passage from Aquinas's *De potentia* in which he claims that although the whole universe is caused by God, particular effects within the universe can be traced back to created causes. Aquinas writes, "For when one speaks of the production of some singular creature, the reason why the creature is so

²¹⁶ "Aquinas's Exemplarism; Aquinas's Voluntarism," 181.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 196.

is able to be assigned to some other creature or even to the order of the universe to which each creature is ordered as a part to the form of the whole.”²¹⁸ For this passage to support Ross's claim that the content of the natures of creatures depend on what else God makes, Aquinas must be claiming that *essential* features of creatures depend on other creatures or the order of the universe as a whole. It seems, however, that Aquinas is only talking about accidental features here because in the rest of the passage the aspects of creatures that he mentions are quantity and place.²¹⁹ These and other accidental features of creatures could clearly depend on other creatures and the order of the universe while the essential features that belong to their natures remain prior to and unalterable by creation.

Ross claims without citing any passages that *magnets attract iron* is one such example Aquinas gives of a natural necessity that depends on what else God makes. I have in fact located a few passages where Aquinas claims that a magnet's attracting iron depends on the celestial bodies. Consider this passage for example from Aquinas's treatise against the Averroists *De unitate intellectus*:

We see in many cases that some form is indeed the act of a body made of mixed elements, but nevertheless it has some power that is not the power of any element, but it belongs to such a form from a higher principle, such as the celestial bodies, e.g. magnets have the power of attracting iron, and jasper of restricting blood.²²⁰

²¹⁸ *De pot.* 3.17 co.: "Cum enim loquimur de productione alicuius singularis creaturae, potest assignari ratio quare talis sit, ex aliqua alia creatura, vel saltem ex ordine universi, ad quem quaelibet creatura ordinatur, sicut pars ad formam totius." Ross also cites *De pot.* 1.3, co., but I cannot see what in this passage would support his view.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²²⁰ *De unitate intellectus*, c.1 co.: "Videmus enim in multis quod aliqua forma est quidem actus corporis ex elementis commixti, et tamen habet aliquam virtutem quae non est virtus alicuius elementi, sed competit tali formae ex altiori principio, puta corpore caelesti; sicut quod magnes habet

This passage appears to support that at least in some cases, natural necessities depend upon what else is created. It seems that if there were no “higher principles,” then the lower forms would not have the powers that belong to them in virtue of these principles. The issue of lower bodies possessing powers in virtue of higher is a matter that Aquinas treats at greater length in a letter dedicated explicitly to this topic, which is known as *De operationibus occultis naturae*.²²¹

In this letter, which is addressed to a “soldier beyond the mountains”, Aquinas explains that there are certain actions of natural bodies that are able to be explained in virtue of the elements (earth, air, water, fire) that compose them. A stone, for example, moves downward because of the element of earth dominating in it. Other actions, however, cannot be explained in terms of the elements. Some examples Aquinas gives are the magnet’s attraction of iron, the ebb and flow of the tides, and the powers of certain medicines to purge humors. These actions, Aquinas claims, must be explained by a higher principle.²²² He then explains that there are two ways that a higher agent can produce the action of a lower agent. The higher agent can

virtutem attrahendi ferrum, et iaspis restringendi sanguinem.” See also *ScG* III.92 n.8; *De ver.* 5.10 ad 5 and 22.13 co.

²²¹ For an English translation of this text and analysis of the historical background and content of it, see Joseph Bernard McAllister’s dissertation *The Letter of Saint Thomas Aquinas De Occultis Operibus Naturae Ad Quemdam Militem Ultramontanum*, vol. XLII of The Catholic University of America Philosophical Studies, (CUA Press: Washington, D.C., 1939). The Leonine edition of the text was not completed at the time of McAllister’s study. I refer to this text by the title used in the Leonine edition from which I quote.

²²² *De operationibus occultis naturae*: “Quaecumque igitur actiones et motus elementarum corporum sunt secundum proprietatem et virtutem elementorum, ex quibus huiusmodi corpora componuntur, huiusmodi actiones et motus habent manifestam originem, de qua nulla emergit dubitatio. Sunt autem quaedam huiusmodi corporum quae a virtutibus elementorum causari non possunt: puta quod magnes attrahit ferrum, et quod quaedam medicinae quosdam determinatos humores purgant, et a determinatis corporis partibus. Oportet igitur huiusmodi actiones in aliqua altiora principia reducere.”

either impress a form in a lower agent from which the lower agent then acts or it can move the lower agent solely in virtue of its own power the way that a carpenter uses a saw.²²³ Aquinas thinks that one can tell in which way a lower agent's act is caused by a higher agent by examining whether the action is always produced by members of the same species. If all agents of a certain kind perform the same action, then it must follow from some form impressed in it by a higher agent. If the action happens irregularly and is not performed by all members of the same species, then it must be attributed to the higher agent using the lower agent as an instrument.²²⁴ Aquinas thought that magnets and certain natural objects that had medicinal effects were the types of bodies that had forms implanted in them by higher bodies. Although the forms through which they caused their "occult" actions and effects came to them from a higher cause, Aquinas thought that these actions were to be considered natural since they follow from an intrinsic principle.²²⁵ Aquinas also describes these actions as following from the agent's species.

²²³ Ibid.: "Est autem considerandum, quod aliquod agens inferius secundum superioris agentis virtutem dupliciter agit vel movetur. Uno quidem modo in quantum actio procedit ab eo secundum formam vel virtutem sibi impressam a superiori agente, sicut luna illuminat per lumen a sole receptum. Alio vero modo inferius agens agit per solam virtutem superioris agentis, nulla forma recepta ad agendum, sed per solum motum quo a superiori agente movetur, sicut carpentator utitur serra ad secandum: quae quidem sectio est principaliter actio artificis, secundario vero serrae in quantum ab artifice movetur: non quod talis actio sequatur aliquam formam vel virtutem quae in serra remaneat post motionem artificis."

²²⁴ Ibid.: "Primo quidem, quia praedictae operationes quae non consequuntur aliquam formam impressam, non inveniuntur communiter in omnibus quae sunt eiusdem speciei: non enim omnis aqua fluit et refluit secundum motum lunae, nec omnia mortuorum ossa apposita sanant aegrotos. Quaedam vero operationes occultae in quibusdam inveniuntur corporibus, quae similiter conveniunt omnibus quae sunt eiusdem speciei, sicut omnis magnes attrahit ferrum. Unde relinquitur huiusmodi operationes consequi aliquod intrinsecum principium quod sit commune omnibus habentibus huiusmodi speciem."

²²⁵ Ibid.: "Actiones vero quas supra diximus consequi corporum formas, sunt naturales, utpote ex principiis intrinsecis procedentes."

It might seem that Aquinas's belief that higher agents have the ability to give natural or essential powers to lower agents proves Ross's point that the natures of things are not constituted prior to creation. If the celestial bodies have the power to cause the property of attracting iron to be part of a magnet's nature, then it seems that the content of a magnet's nature depends on whether or not celestial bodies exist, which is contingent on God's creative choice. There are some alternative interpretations, however, of this phenomenon. First, it may be the case that magnets have as a part of their nature the potency to receive the form that allows them to actually attract iron. What is essential to the magnet is the power to attract iron, but the form infused by the heavenly body is needed in order for the magnet to actually attract iron. We saw earlier in chapter one that Aquinas thought that objects could essentially possess powers without actually being able to exercise them. The actions that are caused by these powers are natural even if they require a condition outside of the agent. If it is the case that Aquinas believed that magnets, for example, have essentially the power to attract iron, then the celestial bodies do not have any effect on the nature of the magnet by giving it the condition needed to exercise this power. There is also a second way to interpret the case of the magnet and the heavenly bodies that avoids Ross's desired conclusion. Let us suppose that the existence of a certain essential feature of a magnet depends on the existence of the heavenly bodies. Since an object cannot exist without what is essential to it, we can conclude that magnets can only exist in worlds in which the heavenly bodies exist. Magnets have a fixed and pre-given nature prior to creation, but this nature can only be instantiated in

worlds where the heavenly bodies exist. Something just like a magnet, but lacking the property of attracting iron can exist in worlds without the heavenly bodies, but it is not a magnet. The texts do not clearly indicate how to interpret Aquinas's position on the ability of higher bodies to affect the essences of lower bodies. It must be kept in mind, though, that there are only a handful of qualities of natural bodies that Aquinas claims are derived from forms infused by higher bodies. Most qualities of natural bodies are in no way traced back to other creatures.

The next argument of Ross's that must be addressed is his claim that there are no ideas of possible individuals since possibles cannot be individuated. He reasons that since *materia signata quantitate* is the principle of individuation, only actual creatures can be individuated. It should be noted that this argument cannot be construed as an argument against there being distinct ideas of species since species are not diversified according to matter. God only needs to have distinct ideas of species for there to be implications for the ontological grounds of essential truths. Nevertheless, I will still address this argument since the responses to it are apparent. Ross does not completely explain how it follows from *materia signata quantitate* being the principle of individuation that possibles cannot be individuated. His argument can be fleshed out, however, by explaining what *materia signata quantitate* is. *Materia signata*, or designated matter, is the matter that one grasps with the external senses. It is the matter that one can point to in an actually existing individual. Undesignated matter by contrast is the matter that belongs to the definitions of material creatures. It is part of a human being's definition, for example,

to have flesh and bones, but not any specific flesh and bones, such as the flesh and bones that belong to Socrates. Matter is rendered designated or subject to three-dimensions by quantity, which is an accident of matter that is individuated of itself.²²⁶ It is clear that possible creatures have no physical dimensions and lack spatial location. If it is these features that render a material substance individual and these features only belong to actual creatures, then it seems that there cannot be any individuation prior to creation. This argument fails, however, because a form need not actually be determined by matter in order for there to be an idea of it as determined by matter. God can have an idea of a form limited by designated matter without that form's actually being so. It seems that God would be able to conceive of a human being that is a particular size and shape and in location even if it doesn't exist in the same way that we are able to conceive of non-existent objects under determinate dimensions. I, for example, can imagine two cubes of different sizes sitting on different parts of my desk. The cubes need not actually exist for my intellect to have distinct ideas of them. God, through conceiving of every possible dimension and spatial location that could limit a nature, is able to know all of its individual instantiations. Aquinas is clear that in knowing composites, God also

²²⁶ For citation of the relevant texts for Aquinas's views on individuation and analysis of historical developments in his position, see Wippel's *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 351-375. It should also be noted that there is not universal consensus among Thomistic scholars about the principle of individuation. Joseph Owens has argued that although it is by matter that individuals are recognized, in the ontological order, it is *esse* that is the first cause of individuation. See, for example, his chapter "Thomas Aquinas" in *Individuation in scholasticism : the later Middle Ages and the counter-reformation (1150-1650)*, ed. J.J.E. Gracia, New York: SUNY Press, 1994, 186. Jan Aertsen also argues for this position. See his "Die Thesen zur Individuation in der Verurteilung von 1277, Heinrich von Gent und Thomas von Aquin," in *Miscellanea Mediaevalia* 24 (Berlin-New York, 1996), pp. 249-265, esp. 259-260.

knows their matter.²²⁷ There is a further argument that can be made in response to Ross's point about individuation. In the *Summa contra Gentiles* Aquinas claims that the ultimate foundation for the diversity of creatures is God's intention. He writes:

Diversity and inequality is therefore in created things not from chance; not from matter, nor on account of the intervening of any causes or merits, but from the proper intention of God willing to give to the creature perfection of the sort that it was possible for it to have.²²⁸

If the cause of diversity among creatures is not matter, but rather God's desire to create things with the diverse perfections that they are able to have, then the fact that possibles are not material objects does not entail that there is no numerical diversity of possible objects. If God knows all of the possible ways that he could intend creatures to have perfections, then God knows individual possible creatures.

There does not seem to be compelling argument for the conclusion that God does not know possible creatures. It seems then that it is most reasonable to accept at face value Aquinas's claim that God has ideas of things that are not, never have been and never will be. Ross suggests that God knows merely possible creatures eminently

²²⁷ *De ver.* 3.5 co.: "Nos autem ponimus materiam esse causatam a Deo, unde necesse est ponere quod aliquo modo sit eius idea in Deo, cum quidquid ab ipso causatur similitudinem ipsius utcumque retineat. Sed tamen si proprie de idea loquamur, non potest poni quod materia prima habeat per se ideam in Deo distinctam ab idea formae vel compositi, quia idea proprie dicta respicit rem secundum quod est producibilis in esse, materia autem non potest exire in esse sine forma nec e converso, unde proprie idea non respondet materiae tantum neque formae tantum, sed toti composito respondet una idea quae est factiva totius et quantum ad formam et quantum ad materiam. Si autem large accipiamus ideam pro similitudine vel ratione, tunc illa possunt per se distinctam habere ideam quae possunt distincte considerari quamvis separatim esse non possint, et sic nihil prohibet materiae primae etiam secundum se ideam esse."

²²⁸ *SCG* II.45, n.1227: "Est igitur diversitas et inaequalitas in rebus creatis non a casu; non ex materiae diversitate; non propter interventum aliquarum causarum, vel meritorum; sed ex propria Dei intentione perfectionem creaturae dare volentis qualem possibilem erat eam habere." Kevin White discusses similar comments that Aquinas makes in his commentary on Boethius's *De Trinitate*. See his "Individuation in Aquinas's *Super Boetium De Trinitate* Q. 4," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, 69 (1995): 543-556. See especially pp. 549-550.

in the same way that one who knows W.C. Fields knows every possible W.C. Fields impersonator. Aquinas, however, seems to deny this in his *De potentia dei*. There, he claims that God has “thought out” ideas of possible creatures. Aquinas denies that there is any distinction in God’s knowledge between actual and habitual knowledge. Everything he knows, he actually knows and he has “thought out” ideas of all that he knows.²²⁹ We saw that Aquinas holds that the ideas of merely possible creatures are indeterminate.²³⁰ There is no incompatibility, however, between an idea’s being “thought out” and indeterminate. God can have a notion of a specific individual while some of its accidental features remain indeterminate. It is true that certain accidental features of creatures depend on God’s creation, while its essential features and necessary accidents are determined independent of any act of God. In the *De veritate*, Aquinas writes that “although that which neither is, nor was, nor will be does not have determinate *esse* in itself, it nevertheless exists determinately in God’s cognition.”²³¹ Aquinas claims that since God is the creator of all that is, his knowledge of a thing does not depend on its actual existence.²³²

²²⁹ *De pot.* I.5 ad 11: “Ad undecimum dicendum, quod in hac quaestione versatur, utrum eorum quae nec sunt, nec erunt, nec fuerunt, quae tamen Deus facere potest, sit idea. Videtur dicendum, quod si idea secundum completam rationem accipiatur, scilicet secundum quod idea nominat formam artis, non solum intellectu excogitatam, sed etiam per voluntatem ad opus ordinatam, sic praedicta non habent ideam; si vero accipiatur secundum imperfectam rationem, prout scilicet est solum excogitata in intellectu artificis, sic habent ideam. Patet enim in artifice creato quod excogitat aliquas operationes quas nunquam operari intendit. In Deo vero quidquid ipse cognoscit, est in eo per modum excogitati; cum in ipso non differat cognoscere actu et habitu. Ipse enim novit totam potentiam suam, et quidquid potest: unde omnium quae potest habet rationes quasi excogitatas.”

²³⁰ See the text quoted in fn. 15.

²³¹ *De ver.* 3.6 ad 1: “...quamvis quod nec est nec fuit nec erit non habeat esse determinatum in se, est tamen determinate in Dei cognitione.”

²³² *De ver.* 2.8: “...apud intellectum divinum vel artificis indifferenter est cognitio rei sive sit sive non sit.”

IV. Possibles and Creation

Some scholars think that affirming that possibles are individuated prior to their existence has disastrous effects on the religious doctrine of creation. Consider the following lengthy quote from Fr. David Burrell:

Can one speak of individuals constituted *before* they exist; is it coherent to speak in this sense of “individual essences”? Again, one need not picture them over against the creator; in fact, one may consider them to be “in the mind of God,” thereby preserving, it seems, the primacy of the One from whom everything comes. Yet the questionable metaphysical point does not lie in the picturing, but in the assertion that “they” are what they are *before* their coming into existence. And since “coming-into-existence” does not represent a change in *them*, any more than the act of creating involves motion, we quickly realize that any talk of “individual essences,” or of “exemplars” of individuals in the mind of God, makes the act of creating into that of a demiurge. And it makes little difference whether the demiurge is gleaning, as it were, from its own intellectual constructs, because what is at stake is the role which *existing* plays (or not) in individuating and, as a result, the primacy of *this* world as God’s creation. For if we can speak of individuals as fully constituted short of “their” coming into existence, then *existing* is indeed an “accident” (or in the undifferentiated discourse of contemporary metaphysicians, a *property*), for it is something which “happens to” the already constituted individual: namely, its “actualization.”²³³

Burrell claims that if possible creatures are individuated prior to creation, then the creator is nothing more than a demiurge. What is distinctive of Plato's demiurge in the *Timeaus* is that it "creates" the world from pre-existing materials. The God who has exemplar ideas of creatures is like a demiurge, according to Burrell's opinion, because in his creative act, he does not determine the content of essences, but rather

²³³ David Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, (University of Notre Dame Press: Notre Dame, Indiana, 1993), pp. 43-44.

actualizes a content that is already pre-given. Burrell does not think it matters whether these pre-given essences are thoughts of God or self-subsisting independent of God. What is significant is the fact that their content is predetermined and existence comes to them from without as a "accident."

I think that Burrell's concerns about creation are unfounded. The fact that God is able to conceive of that which he is able to make independent of his actually making it does not imply anything about the relationship of essence and existence in the actual thing produced by God. The mere fact that God can conceive of individual things that he can make is compatible with God creating both the essence and the existence of these individuals *ex nihilo*. Aquinas denies the inference from God's knowledge of an essence to the essence's existence. Aquinas claims that whether or not something exists is irrelevant to God's knowledge of it.²³⁴ Even though God does not freely determine the content of essences through the act of creating, the content of creaturely essences is still traced back to God. Every created essence is what it is because it is a way of imitating God's essence. Being a human is being a rational animal because rational animals are imitations of God's essence. If God did not exist, rational animals would not be possible. Aquinas thought that exemplar causality was a genuine type of causality and things depended on their exemplars for their possibility. Unlike Plato's demiurge, God is the ultimate cause of the content of created essences even though he does not cause this content through willing.

²³⁴ See for example the texts quoted in fn. 231 and 232.

V. Conclusion

In this chapter, we have seen that textual evidence supports that Aquinas held that God has distinct ideas of merely possible creatures. We have also seen that the arguments to the contrary can be adequately answered. In the next chapter, we will see if God's knowledge of possibles has the drastic consequences that Ross claims. Ross thinks that admitting that God knows possible creatures has serious implications for the grounding of essential truths. Ross implies that if God knows possible creatures, then divine ideas will be the realities to which necessary truths about creatures conform.²³⁵ Since divine ideas have no being of their own except for the being of God himself, God will be the *res* to which all essential truths are adequate. This is a startling conclusion and in the next chapter, we will determine if it was one that Aquinas held.

²³⁵ "Aquinas's exemplarism; Aquinas's voluntarism," 196.

CHAPTER SEVEN

GOD AND THE GROUNDS OF NECESSARY TRUTHS ABOUT CREATURES

It is not difficult to see why one may think that God is the ground of all necessary truths about creatures if God has knowledge of possible creatures prior to creation. If God has ideas about possible creatures, it seems that God knows truths about creatures. Every truth is adequate to some thing that is its ontological ground and antecedent to creation nothing except for God exists. It seems to follow from this that God must be the ground for the truth he knows about creatures. If God is the ground of truths about creatures before creation, shouldn't he also ground necessary propositional truths after creation too? In this chapter, I will explore whether God's having ideas of creatures prior to creation entails that created realities are not in fact the ontological grounds for necessary propositions about themselves. There are many thinkers who have claimed that God is the ontological ground of necessary truths, yet their explanations of how God grounds necessary truths diverge. Descartes famously claimed in at least one place that necessary truths were true because of a decision of

God's will.²³⁶ More recently, Alvin Plantinga raised the question at the end of his influential 1980 Aquinas Lecture, "Does God Have a Nature?," of whether *necessarily* $7+5=12$ can be explained or made true by the necessary truth *it is part of God's nature to believe that* $7+5=12$ and John Peterson has argued on the basis of Thomistic principles that "the fact which is the ground, measure, and model of a true statement exists *a priori* or *ante rem* in God's mind."²³⁷ Interpreters of Aquinas who agree that God grounds necessary propositions also disagree about the precise feature of God that allows him to play this function. We saw that Ross implied that for those who interpret Aquinas as holding that God has ideas of possible creatures, these ideas are the *res* to which necessary propositions conform. In his unpublished doctoral dissertation of this year, James Stone explicitly defends the view that, according to Aquinas, God's ideas serve as the ontological ground of necessary propositions.²³⁸ In recent literature, another view of how God serves as the ontological grounding of necessary truths according to Aquinas has also emerged, namely that truths about what is necessary and possible are grounded by God's power. In this chapter, I will consider whether either of these views presents a more plausible interpretation of Aquinas than the view that I have advanced.

²³⁶ A Mersenne Amsterdam, 27 Mai 1630, in *Descartes, Correspondance*, eds. C. Adam and G. Milhaud, (Paris: Alcan) 1836, pp. 141-142: "Je vous répons que c'est 'in eodem genere causae' qu'il a créé toutes choses, c'est-à-dire 'ut efficiens et totalis causa.' Car il est certain qu'il est aussi bien auteur de l'essence comme de l'existence des créatures: or cette essence n'est autre chose que ces vérités éternelles; les quelles je ne conçois point émaner de Dieu comme les rayones du soleil mais je sais que Dieu est auteur de toutes choses et que ces vérités sont quelque chose, et par consequent qu'il en est auteur...."

²³⁷ Alvin Plantinga, *Does God Have a Nature?*, (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1980): 140-146; John Peterson, "Truth and Divine Ideas," *The Thomist* 65 (2001): 583-592, p. 592.

²³⁸ James Stone, "The foundation of universal and necessary propositions in select writings of Thomas Aquinas," unpublished Ph.D dissertation, Fordham University, 2008.

I. Does God's power ground necessary truths?

Recently, Brian Leftow has argued that, according to Aquinas, it is in virtue of God's power that necessary truths about creatures are true. The following quote from Leftow summarizes this view:

For Thomas, before God makes some dogs, every possible dog exists in God's power, and only there. Every possible dog is a mammal. This makes it the case that necessarily, dogs are mammals. So before God makes dogs, the contents of the deity alone make this outer-most necessary. Or: it is not in God's power to bring it about that some dog is not a mammal. So every possible dog is a mammal, and the rest goes as before. If the contents of deity make a proposition necessary, they suffice for its being true.²³⁹

Leftow thinks that the fact that none of the dogs that exist in God's power are not mammals, which is to say that God cannot bring it about that there is a dog that is not a mammal, explains why it is necessarily true that there are no dogs that are not mammals. Leftow supports his claim textually by citing Aquinas's claim in the *Summa Theologiae* that "something is said 'able to be created' not through a passive power, but only through the active power of the creator."²⁴⁰ Leftow thinks that in this text Aquinas is making the positive claim that statements about what is possible, such as *Tony Blair is able to exist*, are true in virtue of God's power. This is the only textual evidence that Leftow seems to give for his view. Leftow's interpretation of Aquinas essentially claims that a state of affairs *p* is possible *because* God is able create *p* and a state of affairs *n* is necessary *because* God cannot bring about the

²³⁹ Brian Leftow, "Aquinas on God and Modal Truth". S. Brower-Toland (ed.), "Sixth Henle Conference: Medieval Metaphysics, Part II." *The Modern Schoolman* 82/2 (2005), 177.

²⁴⁰ *ST* Ia.75.6 ad 2: "...posse creari dicitur aliquid non per potentiam passivam, sed solum per potentiam activam creantis...." Leftow, 180.

contradictory state of affairs ($\sim n$). I have emphasized *because* above since the crucial feature of Leftow's account is that the scope of God's power explains why certain things are possible while others are not. Aquinas, however, seems to state that the explanatory order between what is possible and God's power runs in the reverse direction from Leftow's view. It is not the case that certain things are possible because God is able to do them, but rather certain things fall under the scope of God's power because they are possible in themselves.²⁴¹ In the *Summa Theologiae* Aquinas claims that the scope of the possible is whatever does not imply a contradiction and it is with respect to all of those things that do not imply a contradiction that God is said to be omnipotent.²⁴² What is possible is defined independently of God's power and in turn, serves to define the scope of God's power. Aquinas explicitly claims in the *Summa Theologiae* that "the absolutely possible is said neither according to superior causes, nor according to inferior causes, but according to itself."²⁴³ This implies that the relationship of God's power to a thing does not make it the case that the thing is possible. Aquinas also clarifies that it is not in virtue of God's power that he is able

²⁴¹ Jeff Brower raises this objection to Brian Leftow. See his "Aquinas's Metaphysics of Modality: Reply to Leftow", *The Modern Schoolman* 83 (2005): 210-212. Brower writes, "If anything, what's possible would appear to constrain God's power, not the other way around....When Aquinas says that God can do all things "that are possible *in themselves* or "that don't imply a contradiction," this suggests that he too thinks of God's power as being "constrained" by what is possible, and hence of the order of explanation as running from possibility to God's power" (pp. 205-6). Leftow has a reply to Brower in the same journal issue. See his "Power, Possibilia and Non-Contradiction," *The Modern Schoolman* 83 (2005): 231-243.

²⁴² *ST* Ia.25.3: "Unde quicquid potest habere rationem entis, continetur sub possibilibus absolutis, respectu quorum Deus dicitur omnipotens.... Quaecumque igitur contradictionem non implicant, sub illis possibilibus continetur, respectu quorum dicitur Deus omnipotens. Ea vero quae contradictionem implicant, sub divina omnipotentia non continentur: quia non possunt habere possibilitatem rationem. Unde convenientius dicitur quod possunt fieri, quam quod Deus non potest ea facere."

²⁴³ *ST* Ia.25.3 ad 4: "...possible absolutum non dicitur neque secundum causas superiores, neque secundum causas inferiores, sed secundum seipsum."

to do certain things, but rather it is in virtue of God's nature that his power extends to certain effects. He writes, "For God makes something because he wills to make it; he is not therefore able to make it because he wills, but because he is such in his nature."²⁴⁴

In his commentary on Aristotle's *De Interpretatione*, Aquinas makes a similar claim about the necessary. He denies that the necessary also cannot be defined with respect to a power. It is not the case that an effect e is necessary because its contradictory $\sim e$ cannot be brought about by any power, but it is rather the case that the contradictory of an effect cannot be brought about by any power because it is necessary.²⁴⁵ The fact that no power can bring about the contradictory of an effect gives us epistemological evidence that the effect is necessary. Aquinas is clear, however, that it does not provide an ontological explanation for why the effect is necessary.

Aquinas's texts leave no doubt that he did not hold the view that Leftow ascribes to him. Aquinas is very clear that God's, or any other agent's, power cannot explain why a given being or property or effect of a being is necessary or possible. Aquinas is clear that a thing is necessary or possible in virtue of its own nature. It is because a thing is what it is that it is able to be or not able to be. Now we move on to consider the suggestion that it is God's ideas ground necessary truths.

²⁴⁴ *ST Ia.25.5 ad 1*: "Ideo enim Deus aliquid facit, quia vult: non tamen ideo potest, quia vult, sed quia talis est in sua natura."

²⁴⁵ *De Int. 1.14, n. 8*: "Stoici vero distinxerunt haec secundum exteriora prohibentia. Dixerunt enim necessarium esse illud quod non potest prohiberi quin sit verum; impossibile vero quod semper prohibetur a veritate; possibile vero quod potest prohiberi vel non prohiberi... [N]on enim ideo aliquid est necessarium, quia non habet impedimentum, sed quia est necessarium, ideo impedimentum habere non potest."

III. Does God's essence ground necessary truths?

Claiming that God's ideas ground necessary truths is really to claim that necessary truths are grounded by God's essence since God's ideas are in reality one in being with his essence. It seems that God's essence may be the grounds for all truths about creatures since it is God's essence that grounds his own knowledge of possible creatures. Aquinas claims that in knowing his essence as limited in a particular way, God knows particular creatures.²⁴⁶ He also claims that the forms of creatures pre-exist in God who is their cause.²⁴⁷ Since God's own essence contains all perfections of creatures, God can know creatures by knowing his own essence. I argued earlier in this dissertation that necessary propositions about creatures are adequate to the forms of the creatures that they are about. The form of a dog, for example, is what grounds the truth that *A dog is a mammal*. Aquinas holds, however, that the form of a dog, in so far as it is a perfection, pre-exists in God's own essence.²⁴⁸ Before dogs existed, the perfections of a dog were part of God's essence and if dogs become extinct, these perfections will continue to exist in God. Why then, should we not consider forms as existing in God to be the ontological ground of necessary propositions, such as *A dog*

²⁴⁶ *ScG* I.54 n.451: "Divina autem essentia in se nobilitates omnium entium comprehendit, non quidem per modum compositionis, sed per modum perfectionis, ut supra ostensum est. Forma autem omnis, tam propria quam communis, secundum id quod aliquid ponit, est perfectio quaedam: non autem imperfectionem includit nisi secundum quod deficit a vero esse. Intellectus igitur divinus id quod est proprium unicuique in essentia sua comprehendere potest, intelligendo in quo eius essentiam imitetur, et in quo ab eius perfectione deficit unumquodque: utpote, intelligendo essentiam suam ut imitabilem per modum vitae et non cognitionis, accipit propriam formam plantae; si vero ut imitabilem per modum cognitionis et non intellectus, propriam formam animalis; et sic de aliis. Sic igitur patet quod essentia divina, inquantum est absolute perfecta, potest accipi ut propria ratio singulorum. Unde per eam Deus propriam cognitionem de omnibus habere potest." See also *De ver.* 2.4 ad 2 and *De ver.* 3.2, co.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁸ See the text quoted above.

is a mammal? In this section we will determine whether the form existing in itself or the form existing in God should be properly considered the ground of necessary propositions about creatures.

In certain contexts, Aquinas describes the nature of a creature as existing in God as prior to and explanatory of the creature's nature as it exists in the actual creature. In question one, article one of the eighth *Quodlibetal Question*, Aquinas is pressured with the odd question of "whether the number six, according to which all creatures are said to be perfect, is the creator or a creature."²⁴⁹ There Aquinas explains that there is a hierarchy of the various ways in which a nature can be considered. At the bottom of the hierarchy is the nature as understood in the human intellect. Above that is the nature as it exists in created things. Prior to both of these is the nature absolutely considered, which is indifferent to being in the mind and in things. At the top of the hierarchy is the nature as it exists in the divine intellect. He claims that that which is prior is the *ratio* for the posterior. The reason that Socrates and Plato are rational is that rationality belongs to human nature absolutely considered. The reason that rationality belongs to human nature absolutely considered and as it exists in individuals is that it belongs to God's idea of human nature.²⁵⁰ It seems that if the natures of things exist both in God and in the things

²⁴⁹ *QQ.* 8.1.1: "...an senarius numerus, secundum quem omnes creaturae dicuntur esse perfectae, sit creator vel creatura;"

²⁵⁰ *QQ.* 8.1.1 co.: "Vnde uniuscuiusque nature causate prima consideratio est secundum quod est in intellectu divino; secunda vero consideratio est ipsius nature absolute; tertia secundum quod est in rebus ipsis uel in mente angelica; quarta secundum esse quod habet in intellectu humano.... In hiis semper id quod est prius est posterioris ratio, et remoto posteriori remanet prius, non autem e converso; et inde est quod hoc quod aliquid competit nature secundum absolutam considerationem, est ratio quare competit nature alicui secundum esse quod habet in singularibus, et non e converso: ideo enim

themselves and the nature as it exists in God is prior, as this text claims, then the nature as it exists in God should be the ground of necessary propositions about creatures. The nature as it exists in God does not depend on anything prior, so it seems that it would be the ultimate reality which guarantees the truth of necessary predications about creatures. Whether or not a creature exists, its nature exists in God, and so claiming that this nature grounds all truths about the creature neatly explains how these truths can persist after the creature has perished.

Although this view has its advantages and some textual support, we must consider whether it is on the whole a solution that is faithful to Aquinas's thought. Aquinas addresses another question that is related to the issue of whether the natures of creatures existing in God or in the creatures themselves are the ground of the truth of necessary propositions. In the *De veritate*, he asks "whether things are more true in the Word or in themselves."²⁵¹ By "the Word", Aquinas means the second person of the Trinity. Things as they are "in the Word" are things as they exist in God. In answering this question, Aquinas says that the truth of things must be distinguished from the truth of predication since the word "true" in the initial question could refer to either one of these types of truth. In chapter three, I explained that Aquinas thought that there was a property that belonged to things in virtue of their conforming

Socrates est rationalis quia homo est rationalis, et non e converso; unde, dato quod Socrates et Plato non essent, adhuc nature humane rationalitas competeret. Similiter etiam intellectus divinus est ratio nature absolute considerate, et in singularibus, et ipsa natura absolute considerata et in singularibus est ratio intellectus humani et quodammodo mensura ipsius." For literature on this text, see Kevin White's "Creation, Numbers, and Natures", in *Medieval Masters: Essays in Memory of Msgr. E. A. Synan*. Edited by R. E. Houser. Houston: Center for Thomistic Studies, 1999, 179-90.

²⁵¹ *De ver.* 6.4 For literature on this text and those that follow in this section, see Jan Aertsen, *Nature and Creature: Thomas Aquinas's Way of Thought*, (Brill: Leiden, 1988), 180-182. This section of his book is entitled "Are things more true in themselves than in the exemplars?"

to an intellect. This is the truth of things. Something is said to be true according to the truth of predication when a name applies to it truly.²⁵² Aquinas says that the natures of things existing in themselves are more true according to the truth of predication than the natures as they exist in God. He writes: “For the name ‘man’ is more truly predicated of the thing which is in its proper nature than that which is in the Word.”²⁵³ Earlier in this article he explains why names refer more properly to things existing in their own nature, as opposed to in the Word. He writes:

On account of the distance of the caused thing from its cause, is truly predicated of the caused thing that is not predicated of its cause.... this indeed only happens when the mode of the causes is more sublime than those things that are predicated of the effects.²⁵⁴

When a cause causes an effect that falls short of its own perfection, the effect possesses attributes that differ from the cause. Accordingly, certain names will apply truly to the effects, but not to the cause. Although, the divine essence is the exemplar cause of human beings, the name ‘man’ cannot be truly predicated of the divine nature because the divine nature contains far more perfection than what this name implies.

Later, in the *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas takes up the issue of whether things existing in the divine mind are more truly what they are than those things existing in

²⁵² The truth of predication differs from the truth that inheres in intellects, i.e. logical truth, that Aquinas usually contrasts with ontological truth in his discussions of truth.

²⁵³ *De ver.* 4.6 co.: “verius enim praedicatur homo de re quae est in propria natura quam de ea secundum quod est in Verbo...”

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*: “...et propter istam distantiam causae a causato aliquid vere praedicatur de causato quod non praedicatur de causa.... quod quidem non contingit nisi quia modus causarum est sublimior quam ea quae de effectibus praedicantur...”

themselves.²⁵⁵ There Aquinas explains that all things have uncreated being in the divine mind. This is because God's ideas have no being distinct from God's own being. Things existing in themselves have created being, which is less noble than God's own uncreated being. Yet, Aquinas claims that natural things are more truly what they are when they exist in themselves. This is because it belongs to their natures to be material. He writes:

Just as a house has being more nobly in the mind of the artificer than in matter, but nevertheless 'house' is said more truly of that which is in matter than that which is in the mind because the former is a house in act, while the latter is a house in potency.²⁵⁶

What Aquinas means in claiming that an actually existing creature is more properly a thing of its kind than God's idea of that creature, is that the term that is used to signify creatures of a given kind applies more properly to material creatures of that kind than to the divine exemplar for that kind. The term *dog*, for example, is more

²⁵⁵ *ST Ia.18.4 ad 3*

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*: "Sicut domus nobilius esse habet in mente artificis, quam in materia, sed tamen verius dicitur domus quae est in materia, quam quae est in mente; quia haec est domus in actu, illa autem domus in potentia." This is the full text of Aquinas's reply: "Ad tertium dicendum quod, si de ratione rerum naturalium non esset materia, sed tantum forma, omnibus modis veriori modo essent res naturales in mente divina per suas ideas, quam in seipsis. Propter quod et Plato posuit quod homo separatus erat verus homo, homo autem materialis est homo per participationem. Sed quia de ratione rerum naturalium est materia, dicendum quod res naturales verius esse habent simpliciter in mente divina, quam in seipsis, quia in mente divina habent esse increatum, in seipsis autem esse creatum. Sed esse hoc, utpote homo vel equus, verius habent in propria natura quam in mente divina, quia ad veritatem hominis pertinet esse materiale, quod non habent in mente divina. Sicut domus nobilius esse habet in mente artificis, quam in materia, sed tamen verius dicitur domus quae est in materia, quam quae est in mente; quia haec est domus in actu, illa autem domus in potentia." It must be noted that Aquinas's view has shifted somewhat from his view in the *De veritate*. There, he claimed that things in themselves were more true according to the truth of predication because they fall short of their cause and accordingly, names are applied more properly to them than to their cause. Here, Aquinas claims that an immaterial object existing in the divine mind is more true according to every mode of truth. Presumably, this includes the truth of predication.

truly a name for a material creature that barks and chases its tail than for the divine essence that is the exemplar of this being.

Aquinas's claims in his discussion of whether things in themselves are more true than their counterparts existing in the divine mind have implications for our question of which of these realities grounds necessary propositions. Earlier I argued that the ontological grounds for a necessary proposition's truth is the identity in reality of the form signified by the proposition's subject and its predicate. The question arose, however, of whether the form that guarantees the necessary truth of a proposition was the form as it exists in God or as it exists in itself. It is clear from the texts that we have just examined that this form must be the nature as it exists in itself in created things and not that nature as it exists in the divine mind, which is the exemplar cause of created things. Aquinas's view of how language works rules out that the terms of propositions can apply in their primary signification to divine ideas. According to Aquinas, we name as we know. The primary significates of the terms we use, therefore, can only be objects known by the human intellect. Because the divine nature transcends the human intellect, man cannot cognize the divine nature in this life. It follows from this that the terms of human language cannot properly signify the divine nature. The names that we impose on things signify perfections under limitation since these are the only perfections that we know.

In addition to this epistemological reason for why human terms cannot primarily signify the divine essence, there is a parallel ontological reason regarding the divine essence itself. All of the perfections existing in God are identical with one

another and the divine essence. The divine intellect can conceive of distinct ideas of creatures because it can conceive of its undifferentiated perfection under certain limitations. There are no divisions, however, between perfections inherent in the divine nature. The limitations of the divine nature that the divine intellect conceives of are rational constructions, not real limitations that divide one perfection from another in the divine essence. Terms of human language, however, such as *dog* or *horse*, signify a certain set of perfections, e.g. the powers to sense and metabolize, as limited from other perfections, such as the power to know. In the divine essence, perfections are not received or limited, so the terms of human language, which have the concept of limitation built into their signification, cannot properly refer to God's perfections.

III. An objection

One might counter my claim that God cannot ground propositions about creatures since the terms of propositions do not primarily signify God's essence by arguing that the truth of a proposition is able to be caused by an object other than that which is the primary signification of the proposition's terms. According to this objection, although the terms of necessary propositions about creatures do not signify perfections in God, nevertheless, God's perfections are the cause of the truth of necessary propositions about creatures. This view may seem plausible, since we can come up with other examples of entities that cause the truth of propositions and are not immediately signified by the terms of the proposition. The cause of the truth of

the proposition *Socrates is white*, for example, is the inherence of the form of whiteness in Socrates's matter. The term *Socrates* does not signify Socrates's matter and, yet, Socrates's matter is an element of the composition that causes this proposition's truth.

When one reflects on what Aquinas understands a necessary proposition to be, one will see that this objection fails. I argued earlier that Aquinas thought that the necessity of an essential proposition was guaranteed by the fact that the subject and the predicate signify the same thing in reality. Because an essential proposition's signification is inextricably linked to its necessary truth, a necessary proposition's truth cannot be grounded by something other than what its terms signify. *Man is rational*, for example, is necessarily true because *man* and *rational* signify what is one in reality. It is the unity of the *res significata* that grounds this proposition's necessary truth. A relationship between objects other than the *res significata* cannot ground the necessity of the truth of an essential proposition.

IV. Conclusion

In this chapter, we have seen that the fact that God is able to know every possible imitation of his essence does not imply that God's essence is the ontological ground for necessary *propositions* about creatures. While God's essence, in so far as it serves as an exemplar for all created beings, grounds the non-propositional truths that he knows about possible creatures, the actual creatures themselves ground the necessary *propositions* that the human intellect forms about creatures. We need not

seek any further cause beyond the form of man existing in created men for why *rational* is predicated necessarily of *man*. *Rational* is a necessary attribute of man *because* the rational form is necessarily one with the human form *because* they are identical. There is no cause for their oneness, just as there is no cause that makes Cicero and Tully one. Just as no fact about God explains the truth of the proposition *Cicero is Tully*, so no fact about God is needed to explain why *Man is rational* is necessary. Moreover, because of the propositional structure of human knowing, nothing other than the objects that are signified by the terms of necessary propositions can guarantee the truths of these propositions. While God's essence serves as the exemplar of all creatures and functions to give God knowledge of non-propositional truths about possible creatures, God's essence cannot play the role of grounding the necessity of the propositional truths that are the conclusions and premises of human science.

CONCLUSION

In this dissertation, I have argued that, according to Thomas Aquinas, the *res* to which the human intellect is adequated when it knows an essential proposition is the contingently existing created form of the subject of the proposition. The particular feature of a created form that guarantees the necessary truth of essential predications is its unicity. The main evidence for this interpretation of Aquinas is his own claim that *per se primo modo* predication can only arise when the subject and the predicate of the proposition signify the same substantial form. The form signified by *dog* and *sentient* in the proposition *Dogs are sentient*, for example, is one and the same form. The proposition *Dogs are sentient* cannot be other than true because the identity of the form signified by *dog* and *sentient* makes it necessarily one in reality.

I argued that if it were the case that no dogs existed, the proposition *Dogs are sentient* could still remain true in virtue of the human intellect's adequation to forms of dogs that existed in the past. I reasoned that Aquinas held this position since he makes clear in several texts that he thought that truths about the past were grounded by the beings that existed in the past and caused the corresponding present tense propositions to be true in the past.

I do not claim that all *truths* known by *every* kind of intellect are grounded in the contingent substantial forms of creatures. My claim in this dissertation is limited

to the *propositional* truths known by the human intellect, which comprise our human science of creatures. My attempt to locate the ontological grounds for necessary propositions in Aquinas's thought is informed by Aquinas's own conception of what a proposition is. An essential proposition is the human intellect's uniting a concept that it acquired from its simple apprehension of a material being to its concept of the material subject itself. These essential propositions are necessarily true since both of the concepts that are united are concepts of one and the same reality. The possibility of there even being necessary essential propositions depends on the human intellect's ability to form multiple concepts of one and the same reality. If the human intellect could not form multiple concepts of one reality, it could not use multiple terms to signify that reality. Thus, there could be no propositions in which the subject and predicate terms had the same signification. Once essential propositions are formed by the human intellect, nothing other than the reality that the terms of these propositions signify is required to account for the necessity of their truth.

There is no need to appeal to God to explain why *Man is an animal* or *Dogs are sentient* is necessarily true. The necessity of these propositions is grounded in the forms of the created realities themselves. This is not to deny that, for Aquinas, God is both the efficient and exemplar cause of the contingent forms that ground necessary propositions and that God's own knowledge of truths about creatures is grounded in his essence. While God is the ultimate cause of created reality, once creatures exist, they are sufficient to cause the truth of the propositions that are formed about them, even the necessary ones.

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