

AQUINAS AND THE FIVE WAYS

I

Do the well-known "five ways" in the *Summa of Theology* represent satisfactorily the attitude of Thomas Aquinas towards the demonstration of God's existence?¹ There are reasons for doubt. In their mode of expression, the "five ways" are puzzling. They are of conflicting historical provenance. They do not make clear whether they are more than one or just one proof, whether they are entirely metaphysical in character, or whether they need to be prolonged or completed to reach the Christian God.² Nowhere else in Aquinas is

1. *ST*, I, 2, 3, c. The impression that the five ways are the only ones recognized by Aquinas, and that all other variations have to be reduced in one way or another to their forms, stems from the Neoscholastic manuals. More than twenty-five years ago this attitude was characterized as "la fidélité opiniâtre des milieux thomistes à la formule des *quinque viae*" by Fernand Van Steenberghen, "Le problème philosophique de l'existence de Dieu," *Revue philosophique de Louvain*, 45 (1947), 5. It was accentuated when a writer who had a new proof of his own to advance felt compelled to designate it as a "sixth way," e.g., Josef Gretd, *Elementa philosophiae aristotelico-thomisticae*, 7th ed. (Freiburg i. Breisgau: Herder, 1937), Vol. II, pp. 199-201 (nos. 790-92); and Jacques Maritain, *Approaches to God*, trans. Peter O'Reilly (New York: Harper & Row, 1954), pp. 72-83. However, a comprehensive investigation of Aquinas's writings brings to light a number of other "ways" or arguments. These are grouped under eleven headings by Jules A. Baisnée, "St. Thomas Aquinas's Proofs of the Existence of God Presented in their Chronological Order," in *Philosophical Studies in Honor of the Very Reverend Ignatius Smith, O. P.*, ed. John K. Ryan (Westminster, Md.: Newman Press, 1952), pp. 63-64, listing frequency of occurrence. Accordingly "other independent proofs which he offers elsewhere" are recognized in Aquinas by Anthony Kenny, *The Five Ways* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), p. 1, and other recent writers. Thirteen "proofs" expressly rejected by Aquinas are listed by Robert Leet Patterson, *The Conception of God in the Philosophy of Aquinas* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1933), pp. 21-39.

2. See discussion on "The Enigma of the Five Ways," in Edward A. Sillem, *Ways of Thinking about God: Thomas Aquinas and Some Recent Problems* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1961), pp. 55-78. On the notion of one proof though expressed in five different ways, see Michel

this fivefold arrangement used. Even the fivefold grouping in the chronologically close *Summa against the Gentiles* differs significantly.³ The early commentary on the *Sentences* groups three "ways," all attributed to the pseudo-Areopagite⁴ but accepted by Aquinas as leading to God from creatures.⁵ The commentary also offers the Neoplatonic argument from observed plurality to a primal One.⁶ Elsewhere other groupings and other arguments are used.⁷

On the other hand, a single and differently worded demonstration from the accidental character of observed existence was presented in the early treatise *On Being and Essence*, and was used repeatedly in the commentary on the *Sentences*.⁸ Yet in the late *Compendium*

Guérard des Lauriers, *La preuve de Dieu et les cinq voies* (Rome: Università Lateranense, 1966). For the opposite view, namely that the five cannot be reduced to a single proof, cf. "L'une ne peut être ramenée à une autre, ni les cinq à une preuve unique qui les contiendrait toutes," Louis Charlier, "Les cinq voies de saint Thomas," in *L'existence de Dieu*, ed. le collège dominicain de théologie à La Sarte-Huy (Tournai: Casterman, 1961), p. 189.

3. *SCG*, I, 13. Chronologically, the usually accepted view places the version in the *SCG* about seven years ahead of that in *ST*. The later dating suggested for the *SCG* would not place it that many years after the *ST*. On the present state of the question, see Anton C. Pegis, "The Separated Soul and its Nature in St. Thomas," n. 35, to be published in *St. Thomas Aquinas 1274-1974: Commemorative Studies*, ed. Armand A. Maurer (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1974). This article adds new support for the earlier dating of the *SCG* from development of the Thomistic doctrine on the soul.

4. Aquinas, *In I Sent.*, d. 3, div. lae partis textus; ed. Mandonnet, I, 88. Cf. Pseudo-Dionysius, *On the Divine Names*, VII, 3; *PG*, 3, 872. In Pseudo-Dionysius the statement is brief, namely that we know God "in the removal and the exceeding of all things, and in the cause of all."

5. *In I Sent.*, d. 3, q. 1, a. 3, Solut.; 1, 96. Here *modi* is used for the *viae* described in the *div. lae partis textus* (supra, n. 4). There also, *modus* was used interchangeably for *via*.

6. *In I Sent.*, d. 2, q. 1, a. 1, Solut.; 1, 60-61. Cf. infra, n. 36.

7. See *In II Sent.*, d. 1, q. 1, a. 1, Solut. (2, 12-13); *De Pot.*, III, 5-6; and others listed in Baisnée, pp. 62-63. A discussion of the four *modi* (in the same sense as *viae*) of the Prologue to *On the Gospel of St. John* may be found in Cornelio Fabro, "Sviluppo, significato e valore della 'IV via,'" *Doctor Communis*, 1-2 (1954), 79-82.

8. *On Being and Essence*, IV, 6-7; trans. Armand Maurer, 2d ed. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1968), pp. 55-57. *In I Sent.*, d. 2, q. 1, a. 1, Contra (I, 59-60; cf. second *Praeterea*, p. 60); *In II*

of *Theology* only the argument from motion, the first of the "five ways," is found.⁹ The "ways," in fact, seem open to easy synthesis,¹⁰

Sent., d. 1, q. 1, a. 1, Solut. (2, 12-13). In the latter text it is attributed to Avicenna. The argument is used a number of times in the commentary on the *Sentences* to show that God alone is existence while all other things are composed of their nature and of the existence they acquire from him, again with occasional attribution of the argument in some way to Avicenna. The consequences from the arguments for God's existence in later works show clearly enough that Aquinas is placing them in this existential framework, e.g. in *SCG*, I, 22; *ST*, I, 44, 1, c; *Comp. Theol.*, XI. In this framework, to show that existence is a real nature is exactly the same demonstration as the proof for the existence of God. Hence the reasoning in *On Being and Essence* can conclude without further ado "and this is the first cause, or God" (no. 7; p. 57). The reasoning in *ST*, I, 3, 4, c, remains the same as in *On Being and Essence*. See also texts infra, nn. 20-21.

F. Van Steenberghen, "Le problème de l'existence de Dieu dans le 'Scriptum super Sententiis' de saint Thomas," in *Studia Mediaevalia in honorem . . . Raymundi Josephi Martin*, ed. B. L. Van Helmond (Bruges: De Tempel, 1948), pp. 331-49, in reaction to the "fétichisme des *quinque viae*" (p. 331, n. 1) and seeking to integrate the ways into the entire synthesis of Aquinas (p. 332), reduces the proofs in the commentary on the *Sentences* to two (p. 349). The first, the way of causality, is assigned its inspiration in Saints Paul, Ambrose, and Augustine, and is regarded by him as heralding the first three ways of the *Summa of Theology*. The second is called Neoplatonic in character, inspired by Pseudo-Dionysius and Augustine, and heralds the fourth way of the *Summa*. This assessment of Van Steenberghen does not take into account the possibility that what is common to all the Thomistic ways is the new and profoundly original thought of Aquinas, by reason of which the critique of the Anselmian argument "semble être le fruit de son génie personnel" (p. 349).

9. *Comp. Theol.*, I, 3, Verardo no. 4, and 11, no. 21. Despite earlier datings based on doctrinal comparisons, the evidence still seems to indicate a later dating, at Paris or Naples, 1269-1273. On this question see the forthcoming book of James A. Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas d'Aquino: His Life, Thought and Works* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1974), Chap. 8, no. 60. On the flexibility with which the fivefold arrangement was regarded at Paris in the years immediately before and after the death of Aquinas, see William Dunphy, "The *Quinque Viae* and Some Parisian Professors of Philosophy," to be published in *St. Thomas Aquinas 1274-1974* (supra, n. 3).

10. E.g., the "third way" takes over a demonstration from the second: "It is not possible, however, to go on to infinity in necessary things that have a cause of their necessity, just as it is not possible in efficient causes, as has been proven" (trans. Eugene Freeman & Joseph Owens, *The Wisdom and Ideas of Saint Thomas Aquinas* [New York: Fawcett World Library,

as well as to the suggestion that they do not really express Aquinas's own thought.¹¹

There is room, then, for an inquiry into the relation of Aquinas himself to the "five ways" of the *Summa of Theology*, quite apart from the question of their validity or nonvalidity as purely philosophical arguments.

II

First, there can be no doubt whatever that in the *Summa of Theology* Aquinas's own attitude towards the five ways is entirely positive. In answer to the formally placed question "Does God exist?" the sole and unequivocal answer given is: "That God exists can be proven in five ways" (*ST*, I, 2, 3, c). There is no hesitation or qualification of any kind. The answer to the question is affirmative, and the sole justification offered for the affirmative answer consists in the five ways of demonstration that follow. The five ways are accordingly regarded as sufficient for the demonstration in the context of Aquinas's own thought, for the *Summa of Theology* has to be viewed as a "personal" work and in no way a commentary on somebody else's text. Moreover, the conclusions of the five ways are the basis for the cogent positive theology about the attributes and operations of God that follows. According to all criteria, the reasoning here is that of Aquinas himself. The starting points of the rea-

1968], pp. 74-75). The fifth way falls into the framework of the first and third, *ST*, I, 2, 3, ad 2m. Cornelio Fabro, "Sviluppo," p. 80, can find that the second (*ex aeternitate*) way in *On the Gospel of St. John*, Prol., is a fresh synthesis of the first four ways of the *Summa of Theology*. Cf. Van Steenberghen's synthesizing of ways found in the commentary on the *Sentences* (supra, n. 8). The facile synthesizing and interchange of parts would suggest that the five assembly lines come from the same common design. On the problem—which goes back to Cajetan—of reaching a unique conclusion if the five ways are regarded as five different proofs, see Eric Lionel Mascall, *Existence and Analogy* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1949), pp. 70-76; Sillem, *Ways of Thinking about God*, pp. 29-30; Van Steenberghen, *Hidden God*, trans. Theodore Crowley (St. Louis: Herder, 1966), p. 159.

11. ". . . the Five Ways . . . do not seem to me to express the real nature of St. Thomas's own thought" (Mascall, *Existence and Analogy*, p. 176). Cf.: "They seem to be the result of a personal reflection by St. Thomas on the historical sources at his disposal; he gathered together what he considered best in tradition" (Van Steenberghen, *Hidden God*, p. 148).

soning, namely the conclusions of the five ways, are in consequence accepted by him as adequately demonstrated by these arguments.

All this is true and incontrovertible. Yet the suspicion arises that it is giving only one side of the question. In the *Summa against the Gentiles*, close enough in time to the *Summa of Theology*, four of these same five ways are presented as "arguments by which both philosophers and Catholic teachers have proved that God exists."¹² The way by means of contingency, which is omitted in the grouping in the *Summa against the Gentiles*, is given two chapters later in language that indicates the Latin Avicenna. Elsewhere (*De Pot.*, V, 3, c) it is explicitly attributed to Avicenna by Aquinas. It refers to Aristotle for the proof that an infinite series in efficient causes is impossible, and in general shows an easily recognizable Aristotelian background, even though its terminology and immediate formulation are Arabian in character.¹³

All the five ways of the *Summa of Theology*, then, are found introduced, in works that preceded this *Summa*, as arguments evolved by other thinkers. They are not presented as Aquinas's own formulations. This conclusion is fully as solid as the one drawn above about the personal acceptance on the part of Aquinas of the reasoning contained in those five ways. Moreover, there is not the least hint of any incompatibility in this twofold attitude. In the *Summa against the Gentiles*, just as in the *Summa of Theology*, Aquinas proceeds to use the conclusions of the ways to work out his own positive theology. The procedure is exactly the same whether the ways are labeled as those of other thinkers or simply as the five ways by which the existence of God may be proved. The external or internal provenance of the ways seems a matter of indifference as far as the points at issue for Aquinas are concerned.

This means, clearly enough, that the five ways have to be regarded both as the arguments of Aquinas himself and as the arguments of other thinkers. As in the case of motion and rest in Plato's *Sophist* (249CD), both sides of the question have to be accepted in order to save the phenomena. To see in the five ways the reasoning of other philosophers or theologians, then, is not automatically to

12. SCG, I, 13, init.; trans. Anton C. Pegis, in *On the Truth of the Catholic Faith* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1955), I, 85. For texts giving the historical sources of the "five ways," see René Arnou, *De quinque viis sancti Thomae* (Rome: Gregorian University, 1932).

13. On these questions about the third way, see *infra*, n. 25.

deny them the character of Aquinas's own thought. Yet the problem that is raised by this situation becomes difficult. How can arguments that did not prove the existence of God (in the Christian sense) be seen as identical with those that do?

The "first way" stems from Aristotle, with whom it reached a multiplicity of finite movements.¹⁴ Aquinas recognizes that the Aristotelian reasoning presupposed eternal cosmic motion and required souls in the heavenly bodies.¹⁵ Yet without these tenets, acknowledged as essential for Aristotle, he finds the argument much stronger!¹⁶ What has happened?

The nerve of the argument in both thinkers is that potentiality is actualized only by something already in actuality. For Aristotle, to be actualized meant to acquire form. For Aquinas, it meant to be brought into existence, since for him existence is the actuality of every form or nature.¹⁷ For Aquinas, consequently, the conclusion

14. For discussion of these points, see Jean Paulus, "La théorie du premier moteur chez Aristote," *Revue de philosophie*, 33 (1933), 259-94 and 394-424; and my article "The Reality of the Aristotelian Separate Movers," *Review of Metaphysics*, 3 (1950), 319-37.

15. See SCG, I, 13, Praedictos. Cf. "From this reasoning, then, it is evident that here Aristotle firmly thought and believed that motion must be eternal and also time; otherwise he would not have based his plan of investigating immaterial substances on this conviction" (*Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, XII, 5, Cathala no. 2496; trans. John P. Rowan [Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1961], II, 878).

16. "For, if the world and motion have a first beginning, some cause must clearly be posited to account for this origin of the world and of motion. That which comes to be anew must take its origin from some innovating cause; since nothing brings itself from potency to act, or from non-being to being. . . . if the prime mover is not held to be self-moved, then it must be moved immediately by something absolutely unmoved" (SCG, I, 13, 30-32; trans. Pegis). These observations show explicitly how the notion of a "cause" that brings things into being (*esse*) is involved in Aquinas's understanding of the argument from motion, and how easily the argument from efficient causality surfaces in the reasoning.

17. ST, I, 3, 4, c. Cf.: "Now no signate form is understood to be in act unless it be supposed to have *being*. . . . Wherefore it is clear that *being* as we understand it here is the actuality of all acts, and therefore the perfection of all perfections" (*De Pot.*, VII, 2, ad 9m; Dominican trans.). "However, the actuality which the verb 'is' principally signifies is the actuality of every form commonly, whether substantial or accidental" (*In I Periherm.*, lect. 5, Leonine no. 22; trans. Jean T. Oesterle). See also *Comp. Theol.*, I, 11 (no. 21).

reached by the argument can be located only in the unique subsistent existence that is recognized at once as the God seen in the patristic interpretation of "I am who am" (Exodus, 3:14) and described as the "unlimited and undetermined ocean of being."¹⁸ The argument, then, remained the same in structure and procedure when used by Aristotle to reach a multiplicity of celestial souls and finite separate substances, and when used by Aquinas to prove the existence of the unique and infinite God. But the respective assessments of actuality cause radical difference in the result of the demonstration.

No incompatibility could be felt in this double bookkeeping at an epoch in which each thinker used Aristotelian texts freely to support his own individual thinking. As Aristotle did in regard to his predecessors, the medievals believed they were stating clearly the same notions that the Greeks could express only imperfectly. True, Aquinas nowhere writes that he is proceeding in this manner. He regards the "five ways" definitely both as the arguments of other thinkers and as reasoning to which he himself unhesitatingly adheres. The historian is left with the task of explaining how the same argument can reach a radically different result in Aquinas from that of its source.

One historical fact that may be documented, however, is that Aquinas can regularly see in the acquiring of existence the probative force of the arguments of other thinkers, even though they themselves make no mention of the reception of existence. He finds three ways (called both *viae* and *modi*) in Pseudo-Dionysius (*On the Divine Names*, VII, 3; *PG*, 3, 871), and in all three sees the operative reason in the reception of existence: "And the reason for this is, that the existence of a creature is from another. Hence in this manner we are led to the cause from which it comes."¹⁹ In accordance with that norm he goes on to interpret the ways of knowing God that had been collected by Peter Lombard from Ambrose and Augustine. The same method of interpretation may be noted in

18. Gregory Nazianzenus, *Orat.*, XXXVIII, 7; *PG*, 36, 317B; John Damascene, *De Fid. Orth.*, I, 9; *PG*, 94, 836B.

19. "Et ratio hujus est, quia esse creaturae est ab altero. Unde secundum hoc ducimur in causam a qua est" (*In I Sent.*, d. 3, div. lae partis textus; 1, 88). Cf. Peter Lombard text, d. III, in the same Mandonnet edition of Aquinas's commentary, I, 80-81, for the sources also in Ambrose and Augustine.

a work of the middle period: ". . . philosophers as Plato, Aristotle and their disciples, attained to the study of universal being: and hence they alone posited a universal cause of things, from which all others came into being, as Augustine states."²⁰ Likewise one reads in the late period: ". . . and these were the Platonists. . . . Since therefore all things that exist participate being, and are beings by way of participation, there must be at the peak of all things something that is being by its essence, that is, its essence must be its being; and this is God. . . ." ²¹ These texts indicate sufficiently that Aquinas regularly sees in certain arguments of the philosophers and theologians the procedure that he himself formulates in the commentary on the *Sentences* and in *On Being and Essence*.²² His framework

20. *De Pot.*, III, 5, c; Dominican trans. On the equating, in Aquinas's own thought, of pure actuality with subsistent being, cf.: "Now there is a being that is its own being: and this follows from the fact that there must needs be a being that is pure act and wherein there is no composition" (*ibid.*).

21. ". . . et isti fuerunt Platonici. . . . Cum ergo omnia quae sunt, participant esse, et sint per participationem entia, necesse est esse aliquid in cacumine omnium rerum, quo sit ipsum esse per suam essentiam, idest quod sua essentia sit suum esse: et hoc est Deus. . ." (*In Ev. S. Joannis*, Prol.; ed. Vivès, 19, 670b).

22. See texts cited supra, n. 8. It has been traditionally argued that the procedure in each of the "five ways" is to establish first an existent nature, such as a primary movent or a first efficient cause, and only later (*ST*, I, 3, 4, c) reason that this essence is identical with its existence. The theological procedure, in which God is already accepted on faith as the source of revelation, places the questions in direct reference to the divine essence: "But about the divine essence, the first consideration is whether God exists; the second, how he exists, or rather how he does not exist" (*ST*, I, 2, init.). This direction towards the negative indicates clearly enough that even in the theological procedure the reasoning is in point of fact from the existence, which here is *not* other than the essence. The existence reached is *not* this or that. To interpret the procedure otherwise, not only gives rise to the problem of identifying five different conclusions with each other (see supra, n. 10), but falls into an even more serious difficulty. It means arguing from nature to existence, from the "what" to the "is," a procedure rejected by Aquinas in his critique of the Anselmian argument. In the present case the nature has already been shown to exist. To go on from there in an attempt to show that it is existence, would mean that existence necessarily appears in what is first known as a nature. But that is the ontological argument. Aquinas's procedure first reaches existence that is not actuating anything else, and then shows that here the existence itself is the nature that subsists.

is that the existence grasped in sensible things through judgment is not a constituent of the thing's nature but comes to the thing from something else and ultimately from subsistent being. He can accordingly regard these arguments as the demonstrations formed by other thinkers and at the same time, from his own and different viewpoint, as valid ways of proving God's existence.

The openness of the Aristotelian procedure from motion—as taken over in the first way in the *Summa of Theology*—to this two-fold interpretation is quite apparent. Sensible motion can be regarded as the acquiring of a new accident or as the acquiring of new being. Both are occurring for Aquinas in the process of movement. Both result concomitantly from the action of the efficient cause: "Further, to this genus of cause is reduced everything that makes anything to be in any manner whatsoever, not only as regards substantial being, but also as regards accidental being, which occurs in every kind of motion."²³ Approached only from the viewpoint of the new accident, as in Aristotle, the argument leads to a plurality of finite movements. Regarded from the standpoint of the new existence that keeps actuating potentiality in the thing being moved, as with Aquinas, the demonstration results in nothing less than the unique Christian God.

The "second way" in the *Summa of Theology* is explicitly based on efficient causality. A thing cannot be its own efficient cause, for in that case it would exist before itself.²⁴ Here as elsewhere with

23. *In V Metaph.*, lect. 2, no. 770; trans. Rowan. On the topic see my articles "Aquinas and the Proof from the *Physics*," *Mediaeval Studies*, 28 (1966), 119-50; "Actuality in the 'Prima Via' of St. Thomas," *ibid.*, 29 (1967), 26-46; and "The Starting Point of the *Prima Via*," *Franciscan Studies*, 5 (1967), 249-84. There is not the least question here of any "nonsensical view that when you have explained a particular motion at a particular time you have to explain also the occurrence of that motion" (Anthony Kenny, *The Five Ways*, p. 11, n. 1). The motion, like anything other than God, has both its nature and its existence, each requiring its own explanation. The motion itself is known through conceptualization and is explained through concepts. The existence is known through judgment and is explained through agents. Inference on the basis of the nature leads to a finite movent or movents, reasoning from the existence leads to subsistent being.

24. ". . . sic esset prius seipso, quod est impossibile" (*ST*, I, 2, 3, c). Existence, as the primary and basic actuality of the thing, has to precede the thing itself from the viewpoint of actuality, even though the thing as a potentiality formally determines the existence. While the "first way" en-

Aquinas, the operative notion in efficient causality is the bestowal of existence. A thing whose nature is not existence has to acquire existence from something else and ultimately from a cause that is existence. In this form the argument is obviously not Aristotelian, though it is attributed expressly to the Stagirite in the *Summa against the Gentiles* (I, 13, Procredit). The argument is found by Aquinas in the second book of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* (II, 994a5-7; 18-19). There efficient causality is explained only in terms of motion, and the requirement of a "first cause" for any series of causes is established. The argument is not directed by Aristotle towards proving the existence of God. Yet read with Aquinas's concept of efficient cause as the bestower of existence, that is exactly what it does prove.

The "third way" starts from the observable fact that some things come into being and perish. Their existence is accordingly contingent, dependent upon something that exists necessarily, and ultimately caused by something that has no cause for its own necessity. For the proof that a gradated series of necessary beings must have a first cause, it refers to the corresponding proof in the second way. The starting point of the argument is easily found in Aristotle.²⁵

visages the movement of things already in existence, such as the stone and the cane and the hand, the "second way" focuses on the acquisition of existence by the substances themselves. But both "ways" proceed in line of efficient causality. The overlapping of the two "ways" is noted by Kenny, *The Five Ways*, pp. 35-36. The first and quite traditional explanation he gives differs from mine inasmuch as he views the first way as starting from the effect, the second from the agent. Yet for Aquinas all the valid ways have to start from the effects, the sensible things: "But having seen sensible things, we arrive at God only by the procedure according to which these things are caused and everything caused comes from some agent cause" (Aquinas, *In I Sent.*, d. 3, q. 1, a. 2, Solut.; 1, 94). (Here the argument from efficient causality is explicitly attributed to Avicenna.)

25. See H. Holstein, "L'origine aristotélicienne de la 'tertia via' de saint Thomas," *Revue philosophique de Louvain*, 48 (1950), 354-70; and, on the Arabian background, my article "'Cause of Necessity' in Aquinas' *Tertia Via*," *Mediaeval Studies*, 33 (1971), 21-45. The literature on the "third way" is extensive, and in recent years has tended to predominate over the attention given the other four ways, apparently because its terminology is more adapted to bring it into line with the cosmological argument. However, even the structure of the "third way" is patently different from that of the cosmological argument. Nor is its basis "the thought that in the fullness of time every possible combination of things will turn up" (Wallace I. Matson, *The Existence of God* [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1965], p. 168).

The further development is attributed to Avicenna and is extended to meet the plurality of necessary beings as found in Averroës. The Arabian background is outlined in a work of Aquinas that may be dated after the *Summa against the Gentiles* and shortly before the first part of the *Summa of Theology*, namely *On the Power of God* (V, 3). This indicates sufficiently that the argument in the "third way" is looked upon as a proof given by other thinkers, quite as the other four ways were designated in the earlier *Summa against the Gentiles* (I, 13, init.). Yet in both these preceding works the operative force of the argument is seen in the acquiring of existence from a cause. The version expressly attributed to Avicenna states the contingency of things in the regular Thomistic observation that their existence is over and above (*praeter*) their essence: "Because seeing that being is something besides the essence of a created thing, the very nature of a creature considered in itself has a possibility of being" (*De Pot.*, V, 3, c; Dominican trans.). Similarly the *Summa against the Gentiles* states: "But what can be has a cause because, since it is equally related to two contraries, namely, being and non-being, it must be owing to some cause that being accrues to it" (I, 15, Amplius; trans. Pegis). Overtly, then, Aquinas in the "third way" is taking an argument that he attributes to Avicenna and is reading it in his own existential framework as outlined in *On Being and Essence*.

Rather, for Aquinas the basis is that all existent things cannot be contingent, since as contingent they do not account for their own existence. The starting point is the accidental character of their existence, quite as in *On Being and Essence*. Maimonides is not acknowledged as a source, and there are reasons for questioning any substantial influence of Maimonides's reasoning on Aquinas in this context—see L. Chambat, "La 'tertia via' dans saint Thomas et Aristote," *Revue thomiste*, 32 (1927), 334-35. For the contingency argument regarded as "the one basic argument featuring in the Five Ways in as many different guises," see Barry Miller, "The Contingency Argument," *The Monist*, 54 (1970), 360. The objections to the notion of contingency by D. F. Scheltens, "Contingency and the Proof for the Existence of God," *International Philosophical Quarterly*, 12 (1972), 577-79, do not come to grips with Aquinas's doctrine that existence is known by a nonconceptual act of the mind, namely by judgment. What is grasped through judgment lies outside all that is known through conceptualization. This is sufficient to account for contingency as Aquinas views it, and to validate the concept for him, even though a real distinction between a thing and its being is a conclusion drawn after the existence of God has been demonstrated.

The argument from the grades of being, which constitutes the "fourth way" in the *Summa of Theology*, is described in the other *Summa* as "gathered from the words of Aristotle" (SCG, I, 13, Potest; trans. Pegis) in the second and fourth books of the *Metaphysics*.²⁶ In neither place in Aristotle is there question of proving the existence of God, in the sense of the unique Christian Deity, but rather of a plurality of principles that "themselves are the cause of the being of other things" (*Metaph.*, II, 1,993b30; Oxford trans.). Yet Aquinas reads the argument as leading to a single being, namely "something that is for all existents the cause of existence and goodness and every perfection whatsoever." This is exactly what follows when graded existence is regarded as an actuality participated by subjects other than itself, as in *On Being and Essence* and the numerous passages in the commentary on the *Sentences*.

The "fifth way" is taken from "the directing of things" to an end. The argument is attributed to John Damascene, and in some manner to Averroës.²⁷ The starting point is particular, not universal: "certain things lacking knowledge, namely bodies on the level of nature, act on account of a goal." The conclusion is: "There is, then, an intelligent something by which all things of nature are directed to their goal. This we call God." The argument is hardly the one

26. II 1,993b23-31; IV 4,1008b31-1009a3. Aristotle's clearer formulation of the argument in his lost work *On Philosophy* based the argument on the grades of goodness. This was not available to Aquinas when writing the *Summa of Theology*, even though he includes transcendental goodness in the argument. It became known in Latin only after the translation of Simplicius's commentary on *De Caelo* by William of Moerbeke in 1271. It regarded the proof as taken from the second book of Plato's *Republic*. For the fragment, see W. D. Ross, *The Works of Aristotle*, Vol. 12, pp. 87-88. In Aquinas, however, the participation is not of Platonic forms, but of existence and its transcendental properties. On the existential character of the argument in Aquinas, see Cornelio Fabro, "Il fondamento metafisico della IV via," *Doctor Communis*, 18 (1965), 49-70.

27. SCG, I, 13, Ad hoc. In the works of Aquinas this argument enjoys the greatest frequency of all, occurring ten different times—see Baisnée, "Aquinas's Proofs of the Existence of God," p. 63. In the Prologue to *On the Gospel of St. John* it is called a "most efficacious way," and is located in "the whole course of nature" (ed. Vivès), 19, 669-70. Unlike the argument from design, this argument does not call on any analogy with mechanisms, but proceeds directly to seek out the cause of the behavior observed in the activities of natural things.

from design that has been made notorious by Kant and Paley. The presence of design in the universe is not the operative feature. It is rather the *directing* according to design, for this directing has to come ultimately from an immobile and self-necessary principle. In reply to the objection that agents less than God could ultimately account for the directing, Aquinas answers: "But all things mobile and capable of failing have to be accounted for by a first principle that is immobile and that is necessary by reason of its own nature, as has been shown" (*ST*, I, 2, 3, ad 2m). The cogency of the argument is accordingly seen by Aquinas in the manner in which it falls into the framework of the first and third "ways," which in turn is that of *On Being and Essence* and the commentary on the *Sentences*. In Damascene, on the other hand, the force of the argument lay in the requirement of an omnipotent power to hold together the jarring components of the universe and perpetually keep them from dissolution, while in Averroës the argument was insinuated by the metaphysician's need for the principle of finality to prove God's solicitude for the things of this world.²⁸

The "five ways," consequently, are arguments taken from other thinkers but understood by Aquinas in the framework of his own metaphysics of existence. The pattern is clear-cut. Existence is not contained within the natures of sensible things, it comes to them from an efficient cause, and ultimately from subsistent existence. Ways of embodying this demonstration are seen in traditionally accepted arguments. One way is seen in the Aristotelian argument from motion. There the actuality is different from the observed potentiality. It comes from something already actual in that regard, and ultimately from something that is actuality without potentiality. Where actuating takes place through existence, this way can lead only to subsistent existence. Similarly, where the being of sensible things is found caused, contingent, or participated, as in the second, third and fourth ways, it has to come from uncaused, self-necessary, and subsistent being. Finally, where things are found directed towards an end, the directing, if mobile and contingent in its existence, requires ultimately an absolutely immobile self-necessary principle, already located in subsistent existence. All five ways are probative for Aquinas, because all five can be understood as starting from ob-

28. Damascene, *De Fid. Orb.*, I, 3; *PG*, 94, 795D. Averroës, *In II Phys.*, t. 75 (Venice: apud Juntas, 1562), fol. 75v2.

served sensible things in which existence is other than nature, and as proceeding to existence identified with nature, which is the Judeo-Christian God as named in Exodus.

III

This understanding of the "five ways" can be tested by examining the arguments expressly rejected by Aquinas and those not included in his writings, as well as those not listed in the *Summa of Theology* but accepted by him elsewhere as valid. If those not accepted are such that they do not fit into the existential framework of *On Being and Essence*, while those accepted in other places do function in that framework, the criterion for a valid proof will appear quite convincingly to be its capability of being understood as the procedure from the accidental existence of sensible things to the subsistent existence of God.

The most notorious instance is the rejection by Aquinas of the Anselmian argument.²⁹ Its starting point is the notion of something than which nothing greater can be thought. It would be acceptable to Aquinas only if the real existence of the object concerned were already contained in the starting point. As this is not granted, the argument is rejected as invalid. The reason back of the rejection seems to be that perfection known merely by concepts, even if expanded to the infinite, will never contain existence, since existence is grasped originally by judgment and not by conceptualization. The argument patently cannot fit into the framework of *On Being and Essence*, for it is not explaining accidentally possessed existence through subsistent existence.

Also rejected is the argument that the existence of God is known through some likeness of him or some transcendental notion naturally implanted in human cognition. The reason for the rejection

29. On the history and the philosophical background of the Anselmian argument in the Middle Ages, see Anton C. Pegis, "St. Anselm and the Argument of the 'Proslogion,'" *Mediaeval Studies*, 28 (1966), 228-67; "The Bonaventuran Way to God," *ibid.*, 29 (1967), 206-42; "Towards a New Way to God: Henry of Ghent," *ibid.*, 30 (1968), 226-47; 31 (1969), 93-116; 33 (1971), 158-79; "Four Medieval Ways to God," *The Monist*, 54 (1970), 317-58. The well-known "coloring" of the argument by Duns Scotus, *Ord.*, I, 2, 1, 1-2, nos. 137-39 (ed. Vaticana, 2, 208.16-211.1), makes it accord with Scotus's own proof from God's possibility to his existence. For Aquinas's rejection of the argument, see *ST*, I, 2, 1, ad 2m.

is that the likeness does not make one aware of "God as he is in his own nature,"³⁰ and that a general notion does not show the existence of a designated particular (*ST* I, 2, 1, ad 1m). This is applied explicitly to the transcendental notions of truth and goodness that are present in every mind. Likewise the argument from divine illumination, namely that God as the intelligible light in which all things are understood should be immediately known just as the corporeal light is seen along with sensible things, is set aside on the ground that all human knowledge comes naturally from sensibly perceptible things.³¹ These arguments are classed as ones meant to make the existence of God self-evident to men. Aquinas regards them as *inferring* the existence of a personal God from a likeness or general notion. But they do not proceed by taking the existence of the image or the notion as something accidental and then by reasoning to subsistent existence. They could not do this without abandoning the quasi-immediate way of inferring God's existence. In consequence this way of arguing cannot be made to fit into the existential framework developed in *On Being and Essence* and in the commentary on the *Sentences*.

The present-day argument from religious experience would seem to come under this type of inference. Here the phenomena are finite manifestations. They are not to be identified with the infinite divine existence. They require some sort of inference if they are to attest the existence of a personal God. But the starting point is the nature of the phenomena, not their accidental existence.³²

Another argument not used by Aquinas is the inference from the alleged common consent of mankind.³³ This procedure could not by

30. *In I Sent.*, d. 3, q. 1, a. 2, ad 1m; 1, 94. Cf. *SCG*, I, 11, Ad quartam; *ST*, I, 2, 1, ad 3m.

31. *In I Sent.*, d. 3, q. 1, a. 2, ad 2m; 1, 94-95. *SCG*, I, 11, Ad quintam.

32. Given the difference between the nature of God and the nature of human cognitive activity, as known philosophically, it is hard to see how on the philosophical level any immediate experience of God could be possible: "If God does appear in human experience, in so doing he can neither violate his own being nor the characteristic operation of the consciousness of his human host" (Charles E. Meyer, *The Touch of God* [Staten Island, N.Y.: Alba House, 1972], p. 91). Mystical and supernatural manifestations lie beyond the range of philosophy. On the variations of the argument, see Ronald W. Hepburn, s.v. "Religious Experience," in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

33. Paul Edwards, s.v. "Common Consent Arguments for the Existence

any stretch of interpretation be brought under the reasoning from accidentally possessed existence to subsistent existence. Further, the moral argument, made prominent by Kant and used so powerfully by Newman, infers from one's consciousness of responsibility the God before whom one is responsible.³⁴ It is obviously not able to be read in the existential framework of *On Being and Essence*. Finally, the argument from design, in which the existence of God is inferred on the analogy of the universe with a mechanism, remains in the area of natures—as the designed mechanism of a watch requires a watchmaker, so the designed nature of the universe requires an intelligent cause.³⁵ The procedure is not from purposive actualization to subsistent existence. Consequently the argument cannot be brought under the existential interpretation of Aquinas. It is not the "fifth way," in which the analogy does not appear and where the example of the archer shooting the arrow is an instance of guiding that requires an immobile and self-necessary principle for its ultimate explanation.

On the other hand, there are arguments for the existence of God taken from preceding thinkers and recognized as valid by Aquinas, even though they are not listed under the "five ways" of the *Summa of Theology*. There is the Neoplatonic argument accredited to Pseudo-Dionysius and accepted by Aquinas as a demonstration.³⁶ It argues from cosmic multiplicity to a unique first principle, God. Since unity for Aquinas is a transcendental property of being, this argument

of God," in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2,154b, notes that there is "no full-length study in any language of the different forms of the Common Consent Argument." Basically it is an argument from authority, rather than a philosophical demonstration.

34. For an appreciation of the moral argument, see John-Henry Walgrave, "La preuve de l'existence de Dieu par la conscience morale et l'expérience des valeurs," in *L'existence de Dieu* (see supra, n. 2), pp. 109-32. On its forms, see Ronald W. Hepburn, s.v. "Moral Arguments," in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

35. For the use of this argument by Aristotle, see fragments in Ross, *The Works of Aristotle*, Vol. 12, pp. 85-86.

36. *In I Sent.*, d. 2, q. 1, a. 1, Solut.; 1, 60-61. *De Pot.*, III, 5, c; 6, c. In the latter work the argument is attributed to Plato, but is explained in terms of existence. Likewise in the article of the commentary on the *Sentences*, Contra, pp. 59-60, the argument is developed in terms of entity and existence. Clearly, it is understood by Aquinas not in the original Platonic sense of participation by way of formal causality, but as participation of existence by way of efficient causality.

is readily understood in terms of being. Being implies unity, so multiplied being means that being is participated by things other than itself. With the difference established in this manner between things and their being, the argument can easily be read in the metaphysical framework of *On Being and Essence*. Similarly, along with proofs from goodness and beauty, the Augustinian argument from truth is acceptable if understood in the sense that the limited truth knowable to man requires a primary and unlimited truth.³⁷ This regards truth as a transcendental property of being, and allows the argument to fit into the framework in which participated being grounds cogent reasoning to subsistent being.

The character of the arguments accepted by Aquinas and that of the ones rejected or unused by him, point alike to the same conclusion. Arguments taken from other thinkers are regarded as valid if they can be understood in the framework that starts with accidentally possessed existence and reasons to subsistent existence. Arguments that cannot be read in that way are not looked upon as valid. The reason, moreover, emerges clearly enough from the overall metaphysical tenets of Aquinas. For him the nature of God is existence, and the characteristic effect of God in creatures is existence.³⁸

37. "For every truth that our intellect can grasp is limited, since according to Augustine 'everything that is known is limited by the comprehension of the knower'; and if it is limited, it is determinate and particularized. Therefore the first and highest truth, which surpasses all understanding, has to be incomprehensible and unlimited; and this is God" (*On the Gospel of St. John*, Prologue; [Vivès], 19, 670b). See Aug., *De Civ. Dei*, XII, 19. Fabro, "Sviluppo," p. 82, regards this way as a "lieta novità" in Aquinas, carrying expressly the signature of Augustine. But that is no objection to its being read by Aquinas, just as in the case of the other ways, in his own understanding of being and its transcendental properties. The same procedure in regard to the transcendental property of goodness may be seen in *De Pot.*, III, 6, c, where the objective was to show that "all things must be traced to one first principle which is good" (Dominican trans.). A like argument in terms of beauty is given, *In I Sent.*, d. 3, div. lae partis textus, Quarta sumitur; 1, 89.

38. Accordingly for Aquinas there is no problem whatever in seeing that the result of the demonstration is the God of Judeo-Christian belief, the creator of heaven and earth, and whose first name is being. Hence he can terminate the proof in all its forms unhesitatingly with the words "and this we call God." His procedure does not at all encounter Pascal's inability to see in the metaphysical conclusion the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, an attitude still widely prevalent, e.g.: "that we can *show* that such a being

Existence is consequently the one philosophical path from immediately known things to God, at least by way of cogent reasoning. Other arguments may vividly suggest the existence of God, press it home eloquently to human consideration, and for most people provide much greater spiritual and religious aid than difficult metaphysical demonstration. But on the philosophical level these arguments are open to rebuttal and refutation, for they are not philosophically cogent. Remaining on the side of the nature of any observable object or event, one reaches cogently no further than a finite nature or agent. Only from the starting point of its existence, which is not a nature in the finite thing, does the human mind encounter with Aquinas a path for cogent reasoning to existence as a nature, that is, to the existence of God.

IV

Does this conclusion mean, then, that for Aquinas every cogent philosophical argument for the existence of God has to be metaphysical in character? The answer to this question, quite obviously, will depend on the acceptation given the term "metaphysical" in the context. If "metaphysical" is to have the same connotation as "ontological" here, then the demonstration of Aquinas is definitely not the type of argument that bears this connotation when one is speaking of arguments for the existence of God. The ontological argument does not proceed from what is grasped through judgment, but only from what is known through conceptualization. The demonstration of Aquinas, on the contrary, proceeds from the existence of sensible things. If "metaphysical" is meant to exclude sensibly existent things from the starting point of Aquinas, then it does not

is God does not seem likely when it is God as conceived by religious believers (rather than metaphysicians) who is to be identified" (James F. Ross, "On Proofs for the Existence of God," *The Monist*, 54 [1970], 217). Others consider the identification as "a species of idolatry" (Charles Hartshorne, "Present Prospects for Metaphysics," *The Monist*, 47 [1963], 190). But given the metaphysical background of Aquinas, there is in this identification no trace of any "exaggeration," not even, as suggested recently, of a "pardonable one" (Thomas P. M. Solon, "Some Logical Issues in Aquinas' Third Way," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association*, 46 [1972], 82). Against that background subsistent existence, as reached from the actual existence of sensible things, appears at once as identical with the creative and provident God of the Christian creeds.

apply to his demonstration. All five ways in the *Summa of Theology* start from things existent in the physical world.

If, on the other hand, the term "metaphysical" may be understood as referring to what is beyond the *nature* of physical things, namely to their existence, the demonstration of Aquinas is genuinely metaphysical. The first and the fifth ways, in regard to those who originally used the arguments, took their start on the plane of the philosophy of nature. But they both were open to interpretation on the plane of existence as the actuality towards which things were being moved and directed. The other three ways, starting respectively from the acquisition, contingency and participation of being, lend themselves at once to metaphysical interpretation. Functioning on the plane of existence and not of nature, the five ways are exemplifications of the same metaphysical procedure from accidentally possessed existence to its ultimate source, subsistent existence. They are not cosmological reasoning.

V

According to these considerations, each of the five ways expresses the original thinking of Aquinas, even though the arguments were taken from other sources in which they reach conclusions philosophically different from his. In this double provenance of the thought lies the "enigma" of the five ways. Despite formulation from their historical origin, all five start in the *Summa of Theology* from existents that possess being in accidental fashion, and proceed from there to existence that subsists. All function on the "existence" side of the "essence-existence" couplet. They are accordingly five different ways of incorporating the one basic demonstration.

But that demonstration may be embodied in a number of other ways, and in arrangements of ways different from that of the *Summa of Theology*. The number or arrangement used on any given occasion seems to have been a matter of convenience for the moment.³⁹

39. Cf.: "That there was nothing systematic about this alignment of *Five Ways* is clear from a study of the sources" (Van Steenberghe, *Hidden God*, p. 147). Yet it has been claimed that though there is only one proof involved, the five ways are necessary expressions of it: "*Les cinq voies* sont simplement les formes que prend nécessairement *la preuve*" (Guérard des Lauriers, *La preuve de Dieu et les cinq voies*, p. 6). The case, rather, is the opposite. The five different arguments found in preceding thinkers necessarily take on the one existential cast when they are assumed into the metaphysical thinking of Aquinas.

There is consequently nothing sacrosanct about the number five or the particular arrangement in the *Summa*. That *Summa* may indeed represent the height of Aquinas's achievement. But the fact that in subsequent writings he drew up proofs for the existence of God without any concern for aligning them with the fivefold procedure shows sufficiently that he himself did not give the five ways a privileged position. He never writes as though he had established five ways and only five for the demonstration of God's existence. Rather, the arrangement of the ways is left free, remaining flexible and open to wide change as occasion happened to demand.

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