

Why the Five Ways? Aquinas's Avicennian Insight into the Problem of Unity in the Aristotelian Metaphysics and *Sacra Doctrina*

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Abstract: This paper will argue that the order and the unity of St. Thomas Aquinas's five ways can be elucidated through a consideration of St. Thomas's appropriation of an Avicennian insight that he used to order and unify the wisdom of the Aristotelian and Abrahamic philosophical traditions towards the existence of God. I will begin with a central *aporia* from Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. Aristotle says that the science of first philosophy has three different theoretical vectors: ontology, aitiology, and theology. But how can all three be united into a single Aristotelian science? In his *Metaphysics of the Healing*, Avicenna resolved the impasse by taking the ontological vector as the subject of metaphysics. He then integrated the question of the four first causes into the penultimate stage of his demonstration for the existence of God, thereby placing aitiological and theological questions among the ultimate concerns of a unified Aristotelian metaphysics. In the five ways, St. Thomas integrated Avicenna's Aristotelian search for the first four causes into the last four of his five ways, by showing that each of the four aitiological orders terminate in an ultimate first cause that we call God. Finally, by appending the proof from the *Physics* to the beginning of the five ways, St. Thomas was able to show that the ultimate aim of both natural philosophy and metaphysics is the divine first principle, which is the beginning and subject of *sacra doctrina*.

The Abrahamic philosophical tradition has proposed a variety of ways to demonstrate the existence of God. With so many ways to choose from, why did Saint Thomas Aquinas select the five ways to be the philosophical cornerstone of his *Summa theologiae*? The proper interpretation of the five ways remains an ongoing debate. Though any explanation ultimately must be theological,¹ Brother Thomas does acknowledge that the five ways are *praeambula fidei* taken from philosophy, which have been assimilated into his theological science.² If this is the case, then perhaps a partial explanation for these five ways can

be found through exploring their native place within Aquinas's natural philosophy and metaphysics.

While most interpretations tend to examine each of the five ways individually, I offer here a complementary approach that interprets the unity of the five ways as a complete whole. For the sake of spatial considerations, however, I will focus my attention on the last four ways. Unfortunately, this way of proceeding forces me—in this study—to take for granted that the first way is a theological hybrid of the way from the *Physics*, that is, it begins in natural philosophy and ends in metaphysical theology. I will argue that the remaining four of the five ways should be regarded as a fourfold unit aimed at a sapiential answer to the aitiological concerns of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. The *Metaphysics* poses a problem for all its would-be commentators: how can the science of the ultimate first four causes be reconciled with an ontological science of being *qua* being and a theological science of divine causes? This study contends that the five ways should be understood, first, as central to Aquinas's philosophical solution to the problem of unity in the Aristotelian metaphysics, and, second, as illustrating the unity and the subordination of the philosophical sciences' natural knowledge of God to the science of *sacra doctrina*.

To defend this proposal I must hazard a speculative reconstruction of Aquinas's metaphysical science. But, unlike most overtly Aristotelian reconstructions of a "Thomistic" metaphysics, I will follow Aquinas's own Avicennian suggestions concerning the subject, principles, and ultimate objects of inquiry proper to the science of metaphysics.³ In other words, my reconstruction of Aquinas's metaphysics follows the model of Avicenna's own scientific presentation of Peripatetic first philosophy in the *Metaphysics of the Healing*, in contrast to many other reconstructions that adopt as their model those collated *logoi* by Aristotle, which came to be called *Metaphysics*. Let us now turn our attention to the problem of unity within Aristotle's *Metaphysics*.

Aristotle and the Unity of Metaphysics' Ontological, Aitiological, Theological Aims

The ordered collection of *logoi* by Aristotle that bears the title *Metaphysics* have confronted some of the greatest philosophers with innumerable questions, puzzles, and seemingly irresolvable difficulties. Throughout this recondite collation of *logoi*, Aristotle patiently addresses problems within the framework of a scientific study of being; however, the coherence and unity of the doctrines found within these different treatises remains less than perspicuous.⁴ A central difficulty is found in the fact that Aristotle's many proposals for a unified metaphysical science seem to be fundamentally problematic. Aristotle proposes at least three apparently incompatible trajectories for the study of being: the aitiological, ontological, and theological. We are told that first philosophy is wisdom, because it is a science of first principles and causes,⁵ but Aristotle also says that the study of being *qua* being is concerned with the most universal knowledge and so it is not like those many particular sciences; rather, it is a universal science of being.⁶ Third, the study of being is also called a

divine science, a theology, because God is thought to be one of the ultimate causes and principles, and, above all, it seems that God would possess such a science.⁷ Now any two of these approaches might be reconcilable, but given all three, there is no clear *prima facie* answer that reveals how they can be unified within the scope of a single science. If metaphysics is a universal science because its subject is *universal* being, then it becomes unclear how its subject could also be separate substances or theological beings, since these are *particular* kinds of beings. But if the ultimate causes or divine beings are the subject of metaphysics, how can first philosophy be called a universal science of being in contrast to all those particular sciences of being?⁸

The prevailing answer of Aristotle's early Greek commentators was to characterize the Aristotelian metaphysics as a theology, and that its claims to a universal science of being *qua* being are justified *because* theological beings are the first universal eternal principles, and so the universal causes of all other beings.⁹ Consequently, because the divine beings are separate substances, it turns out that the Aristotelian *Metaphysics* is principally a theological ousiology.¹⁰ On this interpretation, the ontological trajectory is elided into or sublimated within the trajectory of Aristotle's theological ousiology.¹¹

Even if we grant this theological interpretation of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, one still might wonder if first philosophy can achieve an unqualified unity. It remains obscure how the study of the ultimate causes in this divine science presents a way to God. Does the ultimate trajectory of Aristotle's metaphysical aitiology synchronize with the trajectory of its central task as a metaphysical theology? Since the *Metaphysics* is called a divine science, and Aristotle has identified scientific knowledge with the knowledge of causes,¹² it seems reasonable to suppose that the study of ultimate first causes will line up perfectly with the theological character of first philosophy.¹³ The study of the first causes should provide us with knowledge of the divine eternal causes, thereby certifying the scientific character of metaphysics as a divine science. What are the causes that provide us with knowledge of divine beings?

It is well known that Aristotle distinguishes four causes: material, formal, moving, and final. Indeed book A of the *Metaphysics* is dedicated to reiterating, as metaphysical principles, the four causes that were established in the *Physics*. It was the task of the natural philosophy of the *Physics* to introduce the four causes, but it belongs to the aitiological task of metaphysics to address the question of the ultimate first causes and to establish that all four orders of causality are finite. This aitiological endeavor is addressed in *Metaphysics* α 2, which opens with the claim that "clearly there is some principle ($\alpha\rho\chi\eta$ $\tau\iota\varsigma$), and the causes of things are not infinite."¹⁴ If we read α 2 as continuous with α 1—which contains such contentions as the claim that the science of truth is the science of causes, and that the most true beings are the unchanging causes of all inferior beings and their truth—then we are likely to conclude that α 2's arguments for the impossibility of an infinite regress in each order of causality also aim to show that eternal beings exist and that they are the causes of being and truth. Said otherwise, "After having identified the science of truth with the science of causes, Aristotle proceeds to demonstrate that first causes exist. He

shows that in the lines of material, formal, efficient, and final causality there must always be a first uncaused cause, both in kind and number.”¹⁵

Questions about the continuity among the chapters of α as well as its place within the *Metaphysics* present any interpretation with a number of difficulties that I cannot address here.¹⁶ Nevertheless, there are a few problems we must take up. First, if Aristotle has sought to establish a first uncaused cause in each of the four lines of causality, there is no explicit mention of divine beings to be found in α 2. Second, it is not clear whether Aristotle sought to establish four different *kinds* of uncaused causes or some uncaused and eternal principles that are the first causes of all four orders of causality.¹⁷ The question we must ask is: do all four causes lead us to some ultimate first causes that can be identified with divine beings? In other words, do all four causes provide us with four distinct ways to the existence of, at least, one divine first principle?

While the conclusions of *Metaphysics* α remain obscure, the arguments for the immovable first mover from the *Physics* and the divine beings from *Metaphysics* Λ give us reason to believe Aristotle thought that we can arrive at the existence of a divine being through moving and final causes. But do these two ways to separate substances *completely* unite Aristotle’s aitiological proposal to follow the four orders of causality to their ultimate divine first causes? In *Metaphysics* Λ , Aristotle does identify the first ultimate final causes with the divine eternal separate substances,¹⁸ but the way to the unmoved mover from the *Physics* has been interpreted variously as a way from the movement of agent causality and as from final causality. Scholars also disagree about its conclusion; does it reach a non-divine, yet animated, cosmic first principle or a divine first principle? If both texts are given the most robust interpretations available, it seems that Aristotle might be able to integrate moving and formal causality into the causality of some ultimate divine final cause.¹⁹ But even if we grant this tenuous solution, it remains unclear exactly how Aristotelian material causality could be derived from the causality of divine beings. In other words, how could the first, uncaused, eternal material cause from *Metaphysics* α 2 be anything other than prime matter, which is not divine? And, if it is prime matter, how can it be reduced to or accounted for by any other line of causality? Matter is, of course, subordinated to formal act, but this does not account for its eternal and ungenerated existence.²⁰ Material causality remains an obstacle to any attempts to establish the unity of the aitiological and theological trajectories of Aristotle’s metaphysical divine science.

In short, because the God of Aristotle is one of the causes and one of the principles of all things, but not *the* cause nor *the* principle of all things, there remains in the Aristotelian domain of being something which the God of Aristotle does not account for, which is matter, and for this reason the metaphysics of Aristotle cannot be reduced to unqualified unity.²¹

Aristotle might be able to defend the position that the divine eternal principles are the first agent and formal-cum-final causes, but material causality remains an outlier

and a serious lacuna within the *Metaphysics*. Hence, not all of the first causes of Aristotle's metaphysical aitiology can be derived from or identified with the divine causes established in his metaphysical theology. In the end, it is not clear how Aristotle's metaphysical theology can unite its aitiological study of the four first causes of being with separate divine beings. This was one among a number of maladies that the Peripatetic *Healing* of Avicenna sought to remedy. But to understand properly how his *Metaphysics of the Healing* administered this cure, we first must grasp Avicenna's diagnosis of the ailment.

Avicenna: Four First Causes and One Efficient Way to God's Existence

The *Metaphysics of the Healing* proposes to be a scientific study of being *qua* being after the manner of a Peripatetic science.²² But the work is no mere commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. In fact, Avicenna intrepidly aims to improve the science of Aristotle by deploying his own philosophical insights into the necessity of existence found in all beings, and by establishing a scientific Aristotelian metaphysics that follows the scientific directives set forth in Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*.

The first ambiguity of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* that Avicenna aims to resolve concerns the problem: what is the subject of metaphysics? Having suffered years of perplexity about this question in his teenage years, the precocious Avicenna finally discovered the proper prescription in Al-Fārābī's *Intentions of the Philosopher*. This work made clear to the adolescent Avicenna that the subject of metaphysics is neither the ultimate causes nor God, but is being as being, that is, being in general, and that the first causes and God are the ultimate objects of metaphysical inquiry. The significance of this point should not be overlooked, for it provides the cornerstone of Avicenna's metaphysics and allowed him to bring into scientific unity the whole of Peripatetic first philosophy. The ontological trajectory of the *Metaphysics* is re-defined by Avicenna and is taken as the *subject* of metaphysics, and the aitiological and theological vectors are placed at the end of metaphysics as its ultimate *objects of inquiry*.²³ It is in Avicenna's detailed account of the aitiological and theological approaches' rendezvous that will provide us with sufficient signals for understanding why Aquinas chose his five ways.

After establishing the subject and principles in book one of his metaphysics, Avicenna sets out to study the many objects of inquiry which follow upon being as being as so many quasi-species and quasi-properties of being.²⁴ By so doing, he introduces a regimented order into the topics taken up by Aristotle's demonstrative metaphysical science of being as being. He begins with substance and moves on to treat accidents, the one and the many, act and potency, universals, causality, and also the errors of the Platonists. By the time we arrive at book eight of the *Metaphysics of the Healing*, Avicenna has established numerous demonstrations concerning what follows upon being, yet nothing explicitly has been demonstrated with respect to the ultimate causes of being, or with respect to the existence of God. Book eight begins, "Now that we have arrived at this stage in our book, it behooves us to conclude it

with [the question] of the knowledge of the First Principle of all existences.”²⁵ But before demonstrating the existence of God, Avicenna must resolve the aitiological lacuna of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*.

The first thing we ought to do in this is to show that the causes are in all respects finite, that in each of their classes there is a first principle, that the principle of all of them is one, that He differs from all [other] beings, and that He alone is the necessary existence, and that, in the case of every [other] being, the beginning of its existence is from Him.²⁶

Rather than wedging the treatment of the impossibility of an infinite regress into the beginning of his metaphysical science, Avicenna explicitly redistributes *Metaphysics* α’s treatment of the finitude of the four causes into the initial stages of his demonstration for the existence of God. But whereas the unity of Aristotle’s aitiology and theology remained schismatic, or at least ambiguous, Avicenna provides a very precise answer to the question of how the first four causes can all be connected to the causality of the divine being. After showing that there must be a first efficient cause of existence, as well as first material, formal, and final causes, Avicenna takes up the Aristotelian *aporia* and provides an answer, which despite its precision, is astonishingly brief.

If we say [that something is] a first efficient principle—rather, a first absolute principle—then it must necessarily be one. If, however, we say [it is] a first elemental principle and a first formal principle and the like, [such a principle] would not have the same necessity of being one as the necessity of this in the necessary existence. [This is] because none of [these causes] would be a first absolute cause because the necessary existence is one and has the status of the efficient principle. Hence the one, the necessary existence, would also be a cause of these first [causes].²⁷

Nothing could be more Avicennian than to solve a metaphysical difficulty by appealing to his favorite primordial metaphysical principle “the necessary.” What is significant for the purposes of this study is the way Avicenna has integrated the first and ultimate four Aristotelian causes into his metaphysical treatment of God’s existence. Avicenna spends the first part of book eight demonstrating that all four lines of causality are finite and terminate in a first cause—just as Aristotle had done in *Metaphysics* α.2. He then unites his metaphysical study of the ultimate causes with his demonstration for the existence of the divine being by *identifying* the first efficient cause of existence with God, the one necessary existence through itself.²⁸ The chief unifying maneuver occurs next. Because God is the first efficient cause of existence, this means that God causes the existence of the first causes in the other orders of final, formal, and material causality. Hence, Avicenna is able to channel together both the aitiological and theological currents of his metaphysics by identifying the one divine being with the first efficient cause, an identification that even allows him to mop up the first material cause left out to dry by Aristotle’s theological ousiology.

We should not allow the efficiency of Avicenna's argument to confuse us about what he has and has not accomplished. First, despite the misinterpretations of some readers of Avicenna, we must recognize that there is no demonstration for the existence of God by way of possibility and necessity anywhere in the *Metaphysics of the Healing*.²⁹ Rather, Avicenna's approach to the existence of God requires that we first demonstrate the finitude of the four causal orders,³⁰ then show that God is the first efficient cause of existence, and then, finally, we must establish that God, the first efficient cause, is the ultimate cause of the existence of the first material, formal, and final causes.

In short, Avicenna succeeds in uniting the ontological subject of his metaphysical science with the aitiological and theological objects of inquiry through his innovative integration of the aitiological vector into the early stages of his demonstration for the existence of God. Said otherwise, the culmination of Avicenna's ontology of possible existences shifts to address certain ultimate aitiological concerns that all terminate in the existence of a first efficient cause, which is God, whose very exalted name announces the arrival of Avicenna's metaphysical theology. As far as solutions to the problem of unqualified unity in Aristotelian metaphysics go, Avicenna's theological integration of the four first causes might seem like a radical solution, yet, as we will see, the five ways of Thomas Aquinas went one step further.

Thomas Aquinas: Four First Causes within the Five Ways to God's Existence

Brother Thomas was aware of the fact that the Abrahamic philosophical tradition contained a multitude of ways that all promised to establish the existence of God. In fact, Aquinas had argued for the existence of God in many different settings and employed a number of different ways to do so.³¹ What we want to know is why he chose the five ways of the *Summa theologiae* to be among the philosophical *praeambula fidei* of his sacred theology? Answers to this question are legion. To cut through the ranks, we turn again to the problem that beset the unity of the *Metaphysics*.

Following Avicenna, Aquinas contends that the subject of metaphysics is neither God nor the ultimate causes, but is being as being, or common being. "Consequently, [divine beings] are the objects of the science that investigates what is common to all beings which has for its subject being as being."³² Philosophical theology is the fruition of the scientific wisdom called metaphysics. Yet, for Brother Thomas, the philosophical way to knowledge of God is not exclusive, for God also has revealed Himself to mankind so that, through faith, we have a way to consider divine things in themselves, and not just as the principles of other beings.

Accordingly, there are two kinds of theology or divine science. There is one that treats of divine things, not as the subject of the science but as the principles of the subject. This is the kind of theology pursued by philosophers and that is also called metaphysics. There is another theology . . . taught in Sacred Scripture.³³

Whereas metaphysics or philosophical theology studies common being as its subject and separate divine beings as the ultimate principles of its subject, the theology of Sacred Scripture or *sacra doctrina* studies separate divine beings as its subject. So how does this division help us to understand the five ways found in the *Summa theologiae*?

We must first recognize that, even though the *Summa theologiae* takes it as a matter of faith that God exists and is the subject of sacred theology, the rational arguments found in the philosophical theology of metaphysics are not irrelevant to sacred theology. A higher science, like sacred theology, whose subject is God, can make use of the principles, demonstrations, and conclusions found in any lower science, such as metaphysics, whose cause and ultimate object of inquiry is God.³⁴ In *ST I.2.2 ad 1m*, Aquinas acknowledges that the five ways, like other preambles to the articles of faith, are doctrines taken from the philosophical sciences that are assimilated into sacred theology, just as faith and grace presuppose the knowledge and nature they perfect. Now it belongs to the philosophical science of metaphysics to establish the first ultimate causes and the existence of God. But where exactly do the demonstrations for God's existence fit within Aquinas's metaphysics?

I suggested earlier that attempts to erect St. Thomas's metaphysical science should not use the loosely bound order of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* as a model, but instead should base their reconstructions on the systematic metaphysical science found in Avicenna's *Metaphysics of the Healing*. We can now provide a number of reasons that fortify this suggestion. First, there is no clear model set forth in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. In fact, it leaves unresolved the very problems that the different answers of Avicenna and Averroes intended to resolve. Second, it is because of these ambiguities in the *Metaphysics* that, despite being very different interpretations of the same work, the distinct positions of Avicenna and Averroes specified for scholastics two alternative models of the subject, principles, and order of Aristotelian metaphysics. Third, whenever Aquinas actually compares various Aristotelian interpretations of Aristotelian metaphysics, his own position on the subject, principles, and objects of metaphysical inquiry is always thoroughly Avicennian.³⁵ Given these historical facts, we have good reasons for following St. Thomas and looking to Avicenna as a model for Aquinas's Aristotelian metaphysics, instead of trying to use Aristotle to answer questions for St. Thomas that Aristotle himself neither asked nor answered.

Now, no less than Avicenna, St. Thomas saw the need to unite the metaphysical inquiry of ultimate causes with the existence of God as the culminating goal of metaphysics. We already have seen that Avicenna's solution consisted in establishing that there are four first causes, that God should be identified with the first efficient cause, and, finally, that God is the first efficient cause of the existence of the lesser first causes. As a philosopher, Aquinas simply could adopt the answer that Avicenna gives to the *aporia* of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*; however, this would not settle the greater difficulties that confront Brother Thomas the theologian. To resolve the problem of unity in the ontological, aitiological, and theological trajectories of metaphysics does not complete the further task of sacred theology to unite *all* the philosophical sciences under the ultimate end of God Himself, the subject of sacred theology. How did St. Thomas accomplish such an enterprise?

I submit that the five ways of St. Thomas provide the cornerstone to this ambitious theological endeavor of the *Summa theologiae*. In short, not only do the five ways resolve the aporetic tensions of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, but they also provide a way for sublimating the ultimate trajectories of natural philosophy and metaphysics into the higher ends of sacred theology. Let us explicate these two points in succession.

If we examine the last four of the five ways within their native metaphysical context, a striking resemblance emerges between the argumentative goals of these four ways with the four causes of Aristotle and the attempts of *Metaphysics* α 2 and *Metaphysics of the Healing* VIII.1–3 to establish a first in each of the four lines of causality. This is why the point of departure for the last four of the five ways is taken from the effects of efficient, material, formal, and final causality. In the last four ways, Aquinas shows that the ultimate trajectory of each of the four orders of causality must culminate in a first uncaused cause. And, just as in Avicenna, St. Thomas's account reveals that the aitiological pursuit of the four ultimate causes can be integrated into the theological approach to God's existence, an integration that also resolves the *aporia* of unity in the Aristotelian metaphysics. Yet, a salient difference between the solutions of Avicenna and Aquinas should not be overlooked. For Avicenna, it was only the first efficient cause that was identified with God. The first material, formal, and final causes were all caused by the absolutely first efficient cause, i.e., God. In the five ways Aquinas goes beyond Avicenna and uncovers a way to show how *each* of the four orders of causality provide distinct ways, not just to a first cause, but also to a first uncaused transcendent cause that is identified with God Himself.

But there still is one more respect in which Aquinas goes beyond Avicenna. Contrary to Avicenna, St. Thomas defends the position that the argument from motion in the *Physics*—once properly theologized by a metaphysical injection of act and potency—is able to terminate in a first principle that is identified with God.³⁶ In short, even though the five ways share a common trajectory as arguments for the existence of God, they, in fact, do commence with five different points of departure, that, by five different routes, ultimately terminate in a first principle that is identified with God. "Each of the five ways truly ends up with the existence of a being such that the name 'God' cannot be denied to it, whatever else the name ought to signify. The five ways are, accordingly, at one and the same time both independent and complementary."³⁷

More significantly, this point helps us to see the way in which the subject and principles studied in both natural philosophy and metaphysics ultimately provide us with ways to the existence of God that can be assimilated into sacred theology.³⁸ The five ways provide not only a solution to the problem of unity in metaphysics, but they also serve as the opening gambit to Aquinas's theological science, for the five ways make perspicuous that the ultimate conclusions of natural philosophy and metaphysics are oriented to the knowledge of God, the subject of sacred theology. And because the ultimate conclusions of the philosophical sciences are directed towards the subject of sacred theology, there can be no objection to the gratuitous perfection and integration of their doctrines into the higher science of sacred theology as preambles of faith.³⁹

Finally, and for the sake of our more suspicious readers, let us first point out that these apparently speculative connections between the five ways and the first causes of the four orders of causality is made clear in Aquinas's later treatment of God and creation. Because "God is the efficient, the exemplar and the final cause of all things, and primary matter is from Him, it follows that the first principle of all things is only one in reality."⁴⁰ Questions two and forty-four of the *Summa theologiae* simply articulate two different directions on the same path; the former brings us from creation to God, while the latter convey us from God to creation. In short, the four causes of the five ways and the creation of the causes and effects within each of the four orders of causality serve as complementary bookends to the whole of Aquinas's treatment of God as one, triune creator.⁴¹

Second, if our reader is still doubtful about the Avicennian connections made above, I ask that he consider the following facts. Not only does the whole of question two of the *Summa theologiae* exhibit an Avicennian influence, but even St. Thomas's approach to the divine essence in questions three through six follow the exact same order of topics set out in the Vizier's metaphysical theology. After demonstrating God's existence, Aquinas, like Avicenna, goes on to demonstrate that God is simple, that as pure existence God is pure perfection, and because goodness in general is connected with perfection and existence, God must be goodness itself as He is existence and perfection in itself.⁴² In short, it is quite clear that Avicenna provided the model for the set of questions St. Thomas selected to treat at the beginning of the *Summa theologiae*.

Thomas Aquinas: Intrinsic and Extrinsic Material and Formal Causes

Let us conclude this all too cursory investigation with an additional clarification of how the five ways bear upon the problem of the unity within Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. I have argued that Aquinas looks to the aitiological concerns of metaphysics with the four ultimate causes as his point of departure for the second through the fifth of the five ways. Most readers of St. Thomas agree that the second, fourth, and fifth ways bear a clear resemblance or connection to efficient causality, formal or exemplar causality, and final causality, respectively.⁴³ But what justification is there for believing that the third way, from possibility and necessity, presents an argument to God's existence on the basis of a first cause in the order of material causality? In order to answer this question, I must begin with the point of departure of the fourth way.

A distinguishing characteristic of St. Thomas's arguments for God's existence is that they all advance from the extrinsic causes of some effect to God's existence as first cause. Unlike the extrinsic causality of efficient and final causes, material and formal causes are both intrinsic causes inasmuch as their combined causality results in the effect that is a composite hylomorphic substance. Formal causes, however, can be considered in two ways, as intrinsic or extrinsic causes. The ultimate or first intrinsic formal causes are the substantial forms of substances, but these intrinsic first causes are effects with respect to the extrinsic formal causes that they imitate.

Such extrinsic formal causes are also known as exemplar causes, and the first ultimate exemplar cause is God.⁴⁴ Instead of rearticulating the well-known doctrine that the first intrinsic formal cause of all substances is its substantial form, the point of departure of the fourth way simply assumes this. This assumption allows St. Thomas to begin with an extrinsic consideration of the formal effects of substances inasmuch as they are formally definite or finite perfections that imitate some infinite exemplary perfection. In short, it is on the basis of the causal connection between intrinsic formal perfections and extrinsic exemplar causality that allows St. Thomas to follow the order of finite formal causes to the first exemplar cause, which is God.

The third way begins by supposing a similar shift from an intrinsic to an extrinsic consideration of material causality. And, like in the fourth way, the third way assumes that we are familiar with the Aristotelian doctrine that prime matter is the first intrinsic material cause. St. Thomas is quite sympathetic to difficulties concerning the doctrine of prime matter. After all, it did take philosophers a long time to discover that God is the first extrinsic cause of the existence of prime matter.⁴⁵ Despite such difficulties, it nevertheless remains the case that it is manifestly stupid to hold that God Himself is prime matter.⁴⁶ This being so, how does prime matter bring us to God as the ultimate extrinsic cause of the first intrinsic material cause? For St. Thomas, all hylomorphic substances are composed with prime matter, and because of this composition with the first intrinsic material cause all physical beings have the potentiality to corrupt. Consequently, all hylomorphic substances are mere possible existents, which is the extrinsic effect entailed by being a thing composed with the first intrinsic material cause. Now an extrinsic causal explanation is needed once we recognize that an extrinsic consideration of material substances reveals that they are all possible existents. In short, the first intrinsic material cause compels us to look for an extrinsic cause that accounts for all possible existents, that is, all beings composed of prime matter. And this is precisely what is assumed in the third way's introductory observation that it is possible for some beings to exist or not to exist. In short, possible existents generate and corrupt.

There is also compelling textual evidence supporting our contention that possible existents signal material causality for St. Thomas. It is undoubtedly the case that the structure of the third way was influenced by the argument of the Abrahamic philosopher, Moses Maimonides. Nevertheless, we should not overlook the third way's connection with Aquinas's earlier critique of the Avicennian doctrine of possibility, and the presentation of his own view. In *De potentia* 5.3, Aquinas rejects Avicenna's position that locates possibility for nonexistence in *all* quiddities or common natures other than God, who alone is necessary existence through himself. Aquinas claims to follow the account of Averroes instead, and situates the principle of possibility for nonexistence, not in the quiddity or common nature of every thing other than God, but in those natures that include matter. This is because prime matter, the first material cause, is pure potentiality open to alternative substantial forms, that is, it has the potentiality to corrupt and the possibility for nonexistence. In fact, not even materiality in general is sufficient to show that all physical beings have a passive potentiality for corruption and nonexistence; prime matter is the essential element

required for holding that all physical beings are possible existents, i.e., possibles in the sense of having a passive potentiality not to exist. Hence, for St. Thomas there are beings other than God that have necessary existence by their nature, yet, unlike God, they are not the cause of their necessary existence.⁴⁷

In brief, St. Thomas clearly holds that the possibility for nonexistence is nested within material causality. Accordingly, we have very strong textual evidence for holding that the third way does, in fact, take its point of departure from material causality. The third way then goes on to show that the possibility rooted in material things ultimately demands, not only that there be necessary existents, but that there exist a being whose necessary existence is not caused, and this is God. It is in this somewhat circuitous way that Aquinas ultimately establishes God's existence by starting first with the order of material causality in all possible existents and ultimately concluding with the existence of God as the first uncaused necessary existent that is the cause of all possible existents and caused necessary existents.⁴⁸

Still, one might object that there is nothing in the third way that uniquely focuses our attention on material causality and that the efficient causality of existence seems to play a significant role in bringing us from beings that are necessary existents through another to a being that is necessary existence in itself. While I am willing to concede the latter point, I think that the former claim—that material causality is not salient to the third way—is simply false. The point of departure of the third way is intelligible only if we concede that material causality is the distinguishing characteristic of possible existents. Neither formal nor efficient causality distinguish possible existents from beings that are necessary existents through another, for the putative reason that both possible and necessary existents have form and existence. But the one factor that indisputably distinguishes them is that all necessary existents are completely separate from prime matter, whereas all possible existents are composed with prime matter. In short, Thomas holds that prime matter is the fundamental distinguishing factor of all possible existents, and this is why I have argued that material causality is the point of departure of the third way.

Conclusion

In this study, I have argued that Avicenna provided St. Thomas with a key insight that allowed him to use the five ways to unify and order the otherwise divergent aitiological and theological goals of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, as well as to unify the ends of the philosophical sciences with the subject of sacred theology. In other words, the five ways solve two problems of unity, one in metaphysics and a second in sacred theology. The last four ways resolved the metaphysical problem of unity, while all five ways were needed to answer the second problem of unity.

In evaluating an interpretation of St. Thomas, we should distinguish between two questions: First, does it solve the philosophical or theological problem at issue? Second, does it elucidate the intentions of St. Thomas? With respect to the former, this interpretation of the five ways does provide an elegant solution to the problem of unity in Aristotelian metaphysics and *sacra doctrina*, and in a way that is consistent

with the thought of Thomas Aquinas. Concerning the second, any attempt to illuminate the implicit intentions of St. Thomas is very difficult. His sapiential vision was able to harmonize the rich resources of his intellectual forebears in the service of ordering all of being to the first cause of being. Indeed, the order found in any question or set of questions from the *Summa theologiae* reveal the real subtlety of the Angelic Doctor's thought. But did he intend the order of the five ways to address the aforementioned problems? In this study, I have provided a rough sketch of the evidence that supports the contention that St. Thomas did intend the five ways to resolve such problems. He knew the Aristotelian problematic and Avicenna's solution; he frequently repeated his own commitment to the Avicennian solution, and often in the context of discussing its connections to the theological problematic. St. Thomas also clearly intended for the conclusions of the five ways to provide the causal foundations for our theological knowledge of God, including our knowledge of God as creator, and just as the four causes play a prominent role in his doctrine of creation, it is reasonable to hold that they perform a similar function in the *via affirmationis* or *via causalitatis* of the five ways.

It belongs to wisdom to order all things and to eliminate obscurity. This study has attempted to make clear the subtle unity, order, and purpose found within the sapiential gambit of Saint Thomas Aquinas's *Summa theologiae*. It is in the five ways that Brother Thomas was able to establish a first divine principle that could order the wisdom of the Aristotelian and Abrahamic philosophical traditions towards the existence of God, the subject of *sacra doctrina*.

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Notes

1. See Etienne Gilson, *Thomism: The Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas*, translation of *Le Thomisme*, sixth ed., trans., Laurence K. Shook and Armand Maurer (Toronto: PIMS, 2002), 75–83 (henceforth: *Thomism*).

2. See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I.2.2 ad1; *ST* II-II.2.10 ad2; *In de Trinitate*, II.3.

3. See Thomas Aquinas, *In I Sent.*, Prol., q. 1, a. 2; q. 1, a. 3, qc. 1; *In de Trinitate*, V.1, ad 9; V.4; *In meta.*, *Proem*. Even as late as the commentary on the *Metaphysics*, Aquinas still will draw upon Avicenna to clarify or re-interpret the text of Aristotle. See, e.g., *In VI Meta.*, lt. 6, n. 1165. For recent discussions on the relationship between Avicenna and Aquinas on the subject and principles of metaphysics, see R. E. Houser, "The Real Distinction and the Principles of Metaphysics: Avicenna and Aquinas," in *Laudemus viros gloriosos: Essays in Honor of Armand Maurer CSB*, ed. R. E. Houser (Thomistic Studies Series) (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007): 75–108 (henceforth: *Real Distinction*); idem, "Aristotle and Two Medieval Aristotelians on the Nature of God" *International Philosophical Quarterly* 51.3 (2011): 355–375; Joseph Owens, "Aquinas as Aristotelian Commentator," *Thomas Aquinas 1274–1974: Commemorative Studies*, ed. Armand Maurer (Toronto: PIMS, 1974), 213–238. John F. Wippel, "Thomas Aquinas and Avicenna on the Relationship

between First Philosophy and Other Theoretical Sciences: A Note on Thomas's *Commentary on Boethius's De Trinitate*, Q. 5, art. 1, ad 9," in *Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas I* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1984), chap. 2, pp. 37–53; idem, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2000) (henceforth: *Metaphysical Thought*), 3–62 (esp. 11–22); idem, "The Latin Avicenna as a Source for Thomas Aquinas's Metaphysics," in *Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas II* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007), chap. 2, pp. 31–65; idem, "Thomas Aquinas, Siger of Brabant, and Their Use of Avicenna in Clarifying The Subject of Metaphysics," in *Metaphysics. The Paideia Project: Proceedings of the 20th World Congress of Philosophy*, Vol. II (1999), 15–26. On the project of reconstructing a Thomistic metaphysics, see John F. Wippel, "Thomas Aquinas and the Problem of Christian Philosophy" in *Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas I*, 22–33.

4. This paper's interpretation of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* relies heavily upon the erudite studies of Joseph Owens and Lloyd Gerson. See Joseph Owens, *The Doctrine of Being in the Aristotelian Metaphysics*, 3rd. ed. (Toronto: PIMS, 1978) (henceforth: *Doctrine of Being*); idem, *Aristotle's Gradations of Being in Metaphysics E–Z* (South Bend, IN.: St. Augustine's Press, 2007); Lloyd P. Gerson, *Aristotle and Other Platonists* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005).

5. See Aristotle, *Metaphysics* A 1, 981b26–982a3; A 2, 982a5; A 3, 983a24–25; A 10, 993a13–27; α 1, 993b20–32; Γ 2, 1003b19–22; E 1, 1025b3–4.

6. See *Metaphysics* Γ 1, 1003a20–26; E 1, 1025b8–11; K 3, 1060b31–36. See also A 2, 982a22–b10; K 3, 1061a8–18; K 3, 1061b3–18; K 4, 1061b18–34.

7. See *Metaphysics* A 2 983a5–12; infra n11.

8. The aitiological approach has its own unique set of difficulties spelled out in the *aporiae* of books B and K. Also see infra n11.

9. See Alexander of Aphrodisias, *In Metaphysics* 245.33–246.6. Also see, Gerson, *Aristotle and Other Platonists*, 180. It should be noted that Owens and Gerson both argue that the universality of the *Metaphysics* depends on Aristotle's doctrine that being is $\pi\rho\acute{\omicron}\varsigma$ $\epsilon\nu$. See Gerson, *Aristotle and Other Platonists*, 179; Owens, *Doctrine of Being*, xx; chap. 3.

10. See *Metaphysics* E 1, 1026a16–24.

11. After Aristotle states that first philosophy is a universal science of being *qua* being, he redirects what we might take to be his *prima facie* ontological suggestions, and gives them an aitiological and theological twist. See *Metaphysics* Γ 1, 1003a26–33; Γ 2, 1003a34–25; E 1, 1026a24–36; K 7, 1064a29–1064b14; Owens, *Doctrine of Being*, chaps. 7 and 19.

12. *Posterior Analytics* I. 2, 71b10–72b4; *Metaphysics* A 3, 983a24–983b1.

13. *Metaphysics* E 1, 1026a16–24.

14. *Metaphysics* α 2, 994a1–3. (Apostle, slightly modified). See Lloyd Gerson, "Causality, Univocity, and First Philosophy in *Metaphysics* ii," *Ancient Philosophy* 11.2 (1991): 331–349; Joseph Owens, "The Present Status of Alpha Elatton in the Aristotelian *Metaphysics*" *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* Issue 2 (1984): 148–169.

15. Gerson, *Aristotle and other Platonists*, 187.

16. See supra n14. Many of the ingredients proper to later philosophical demonstrations of God's existence, such as those of Avicenna and Thomas Aquinas, can be found in this second chapter of Alpha Elatton. See Amos Bertolacci, *The Reception of Aristotle's Metaphysics in*

Avicenna's Kitāb al-Shifā': A Milestone of Western Metaphysical Thought (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2006), 57–58, 313–315, and 323–326; idem, “Avicenna and Averroes on The Proofs of God's Existence and The Subject Matter of Metaphysics,” *Medioevo. Rivista di Storia della Filosofia Medievale* 32 (2007): 61–98, esp. 78–80. Herbert Davidson, *Proofs for Eternity, Creation and the Existence of God in Medieval Islamic and Jewish Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 281–310. For a comparison of Avicenna and Aquinas, see R. E. Houser, “The Language of Being and the Nature of God in the Aristotelian Tradition,” *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 84 (2010): 113–132.

17. For an account of some Neoplatonic interpretations of *Metaphysics* α, see Gerson, *Aristotle and Other Platonists*, 180–188; see also Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing*, trans. and ed. Michael E. Marmura (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2005), VIII.1–3; Aquinas, *In II Meta.*, lt. 2–4.

18. *Metaphysics* Λ 7, 1072b1–13.

19. For two different speculative reconstructions of the causality attributable to divine beings in Aristotle's theology, see Owens, *Doctrine of Being*, chap. 19; Gerson, *Aristotle and Other Platonists*, 200–204ff.

20. Like form, matter is neither generated nor corrupted; rather composites are generated and corrupted, see *Physics* I. 9, 191b35–192b5.

21. Etienne Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: PIMS, 1952), 156.

22. See Michael Marmura, “Avicenna on the Division of the Sciences in the Isagoge of his *Shifā'*,” *Journal of the History of Arabic Science* 4 (1980): 241–251; Amos Bertolacci, “The Structure of Metaphysics Science in the *Ilāhiyyāt* (Divine Science) of Avicenna's *Kitāb al-Šifā'* (*The Book of the Cure*)” *Documenti e Studi sulla Tradizione Filosofica Medievale* 14 (2003): 227–262; Olga Lizzini, “Utility and Gratuitousness of Metaphysics: Avicenna, *Ilāhiyyāt* I, 3,” *Quaestio* 5 (2005): 307–344; Houser, *Real Distinction*.

23. See Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Healing*, I.1–3.

24. *Metaphysics of the Healing* I.2.12–13 [13]. At I. 4, Avicenna presents his own “table of contents” of the various *quasi*-genera and *quasi*-species sought in this science.

25. *Metaphysics of The Healing*, VIII.1.1 [327].

26. *Metaphysics of The Healing*, VIII.1.2 [327] (Marmura trans., modified).

27. *Metaphysics of The Healing*, VIII.8.5 [342] (Marmura trans., modified).

28. God is the first efficient cause because of the connection Avicenna makes between the “the necessary” and “existence.” Earlier he had established that “the necessary” means “the assuredness of existence” (*Metaphysics of The Healing*, I.5.20 [36]), and that necessary existence in itself must be one, uncaused, peerless, and simple (ibid., I. 6–7, esp. I.7.13–14 [47]). Avicenna does not deny that God is a final cause; on the contrary, he clearly holds the good is desired as an end, and that God is the most pure good (ibid., VIII.6.2–4 [355–356]). Nevertheless, in the *Metaphysics of the Healing*, Avicenna does not attempt to demonstrate the existence of God on the basis of final causality. See Robert Wisnovsky, “Final and Efficient Causality in Avicenna's Cosmology and Theology,” *Quaestio* 2 (2002): 97–123.

29. Davidson, Houser, and Bertolacci all provide healthy antidotes to such mistaken interpretations of Avicenna's *Metaphysics of the Healing*, I.6–7. See supra n16, and my forthcoming, “Where Does Avicenna Demonstrate the Existence of God?”

30. *Metaphysics of the Healing* VIII.1.8–9 [329].

31. See 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): 29–64.

32. *In de Trinitate*, V.4. All quotations from this work will be taken from Thomas Aquinas, *The Division and Methods of the Sciences, Questions V–VI of the Commentary on Boethius’ De Trinitate*, trans. Armand Maurer, 4th ed., (Toronto: PIMS, 1986).

33. *In de Trinitate*, V.4 (Maurer trans.). See *In I Sent.*, Prol., q. 1, a. 2; q. 1, a. 3, qc. 1; *In de Trinitate*, V.1, ad 9; *De veritate*, 14.9; *SCG* I. 3–4; II.4; *ST* I.1.1, ad 3; I.1.7.

34. See *ST* I.1.1; I.1.7; *DV* 14.9, ad 3.

35. Compare St. Thomas’s presentation of the subject, principles, ends of metaphysics, and the names of metaphysics (e.g., first philosophy and divine science) in the *proemium* to his commentary on Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* with Avicenna’s *Metaphysics of the Healing*, I.1.9–10 [1]; I.2.18 [11]; I.3.12–16 [21–23]. See Stephen F. Brown, “Avicenna and the Unity of the Concept of Being,” *Franciscan Studies* 25 (1965): 117–150; Timothy B. Noone, “St. Albert on the Subject of Metaphysics and Demonstrating the Existence of God” *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 2 (1992): 31–52; Bertolacci, “Avicenna and Averroes on The Proofs of God’s Existence and The Subject Matter of Metaphysics.” For additional secondary literature on this topic, see *supra* n3.

36. Interpretations of the five ways should distinguish between the argument’s point of departure (e.g., the evidence that needs to be explained), its *modus operandi* (e.g., the kind(s) of causal series at work in the proof), its proximate trajectory (e.g., the conclusion that there is some first cause), and its many remote trajectories (e.g., the way a particular proof and its conclusion will be employed in St. Thomas’s account of divine simplicity, divine perfection and God’s creative act). The point of departure of the first way is from natural philosophy, yet it immediately turns to defend the premise “everything moved is moved by another” by way of the properly metaphysical division between act and potency (see *In de Trinitate*, V.1, ad 6; *In meta.*, Proem; *In XII meta.*, lt. 4, n. 2482). This is a particularly significant detail if we compare it to the first way from *SCG*. In *SCG* I.13, Aquinas presents three arguments to defend the same premise; the first two arguments are clearly drawn from natural philosophy, but the third draws upon *Physics* 8.5, 257a39 and the division between act and potency. This provides the argument with a more universal field of application that allows it to extend beyond the cosmological horizon of natural philosophy; with act and potency in hand the premises now can apply to immaterial beings and conclude with a being that must be a separate first mover that is an absolutely unmoved pure actuality, in contrast to a mere first mover of the cosmos—a distinction Aquinas addresses at the end of the second way from motion found in *SCG* I.13 (see David Twetten, “Clearing a ‘Way’ for Aquinas: How the Proof from Motion Concludes to God,” *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 70 (1996): 259–278, esp. 269–271). But the arguments from motion in *SCG* I.13 are important for another reason as well. As Gilson points out (*Thomism*, 79), unlike the other ways, St. Thomas does not actually mention the kind of causality involved in the first way; yet, in *SCG* Aquinas explicitly asserts the importance of *Metaphysics* XII’s use of final causality for showing that the first mover is immobile and pure act. Taken together, these points further substantiate the contention that the first way is not an argument taken from natural philosophy *simpliciter*. For others who, at least, agree with this last point, see Owens, “The Conclusion of the *Prima Via*”; Dewan, “St. Thomas’s Fourth Way and Creation,” 376n17; Twetten, “Clearing a ‘Way’ for Aquinas,” 267–271; Wippel, *Metaphysical Thought*, 420–421, n59; 444–459 (esp. 456–457); Rudi TeVelde, *Aquinas on*

God: The "Divine Science" of the Summa Theologiae (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), 48–60; Thomas J. White, *Wisdom in the Face of Modernity: A Study in Thomistic Natural Theology* (Sapientia Press, 2009), 205–216, 234–245.

37. Gilson, *Thomism*, 80. Many have questioned whether the five ways, taken individually or collectively, demonstrate the existence of *God*, and if they do, some wonder whether they demonstrate the existence of one and the same *God*. These problems are far too complicated to address adequately here. Many of these concerns have been deftly handled in David Twetten, "To Which 'God' Must a Proof of God's Existence Conclude for Aquinas?" in *Laudemus Viros Gloriosos: Essays in Honor of Armand Maurer, CSB*, ed. R. E. Houser (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 146–183.

38. The inquiries into *ens mobile* and the four causes begin in natural philosophy, but are transposed into a metaphysical horizon, either by the ontological consideration of *ens commune* as divided into act and potency, or by an aitiological consideration of the first and ultimate causes, respectively. The ultimate destination of all these investigations is *ens divinum* (see *In I sent.*, Prol. 4), which is the apogee of metaphysical theology and the subject of sacred theology. Even the subject of mathematics finds its causal foundation in *God* as the first principle of all beings (see *ST I.44.1*, ad 3).

39. See *ST I.1.3*, ad 2.

40. *ST I.44.4*, ad 4 (my translation).

41. We should not overlook the significance of the connection between the four causes in the five ways and their relation to Aquinas's treatment of creation in q. 44, which is set up in terms of the four causes, as well as the similar doctrines we find in *De potentia 3.5*; *In de causis I*; *In II meta.*, lt. 2–4; *In V meta.*, lt. 2–3. Note also the order from efficient to material, formal, and final causes in the last four of the five ways and *ST I.44.1–4*. Why does it not follow the proper order of the causes from material to formal, efficient, and final causes? I submit, it is because St. Thomas is following Avicenna's order from *Metaphysics of the Healing*, VIII.1–3.

42. See Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing*, VIII.6. For a more detailed demonstration of this last point, along with a comparison of the doctrines found in St. Thomas's earlier works, see the article by R. E. Houser in this volume as well as R. E. Houser, "Aristotle and Two Medieval Aristotelians on the Nature of God," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 51.3 (2011): 355–375.

43. See also *ST I.44.1*; 3–4.

44. See *DV 3.3*; *SCG I.26*; *In II meta.*, lt. 4, n. 320–329; *In V meta.*, lt. 2, n. 764; *ST I.14.6*; 15.1–3; *In Iohannis*, Prol. It is surprising that Dewan overlooks the fact that "formality," when taken in terms of exemplar causality, includes all perfections of being, including goodness and existence (see Dewan, *Five Ways*, 10n39). Consequently, his dismissal of the fourth way's use of "formal" causality was premature (see *ST I.6.4*; Wippel, *Metaphysical Thought*, 469–479; esp. 472–474). For a clarification of this aspect of divine exemplar causality, see Mark Jordan, "The Intelligibility of the World and the Divine Ideas in Aquinas," *Review of Metaphysics* 38 (1984): 17–32 (esp. 21–23).

45. See *De potentia 3.5*; *ST I.44.2*.

46. See *SCG I.17*; *ST I.3.8*.

47. "Accordingly a possibility of non-being is in the *nature* of those things alone whose matter is subject to contrariety of forms: whereas it belongs to other things by their nature to

exist of necessity, all possibility of nonexistence being removed from their nature.” Thomas Aquinas, *On the Power of God (Quaestiones disputatae de potentia dei)*, trans. English Dominican Fathers (Newman Press, 1932), q. 5, a. 3. St. Thomas distinguishes two senses of possible: (1) absolute and (2) by power or potentiality. The latter is divided into possible by (2a) active potentiality and (2b) passive potentiality. This quote from *De potentia* is locating the possibility for nonexistence within the nature of material things because they have prime matter, which is the first passive potentiality (see *STI*.44.2, ad 2), and this is the meaning of possible existent identified in the opening of the third way. These divisions are essential for understanding the differences between Avicenna and Aquinas on possibility. Like Avicenna, Aquinas holds that the common nature of any creature, as considered in itself, is existentially neutral; however, unlike Avicenna, St. Thomas holds that the existential neutrality of a created nature does not entail that it has a potentiality or possibility for nonexistence. For Aquinas, some creatures are essentially necessary—though none are existentially necessary—and other creatures are essentially possible. The former are immaterial creatures, whereas the latter are material and are called “possible existents” in the third way. See *DV* 5.2, ad 6; *STI*. 25.3; 46.1 obj. 1 and ad 1; 50.5, ad 3; 75.6; *De potentia* 5.3, ad 2; *In I de caelo*, lt. 25; lt. 29, nn. 284–285; *In VII meta.*, lt. 6, n. 1388. For studies on the meaning of “possibility” in St. Thomas, see Joseph Owens, “Cause of Necessity’ in Aquinas’ *Tertia Via*,” *Mediaeval Studies* 33 (1971): 21–45; Lawrence Dewan, “St. Thomas and the Possibles,” *The New Scholasticism* 53 (1979): 76–85; John F. Wippel, “The Reality of Nonexisting Possibles according to Thomas Aquinas, Henry of Ghent, and Godfrey of Fontaines,” *Review of Metaphysics* 34 (1981): 729–758.

48. Allow me to summarize briefly how this study’s interpretation is similar to and different from others. Unlike Elders and others, I agree with Gilson, Owens, and Wippel that it is completely unreasonable to maintain that Aquinas thought that the five ways were the only ways to demonstrate God’s existence. I also agree with Wippel and others that there are five distinct arguments in the five ways. Like Kenny, I think that the point of departure of the third way is from material causality. Unlike Elders and Kenny, I do not attempt to reduce the five ways to the four causes, but have identified the point of departure of four of the five ways with the effects of the four causes. Not only does the first way not mention causality, it clearly is more concerned with act, potency, and motion. Hence, I agree with Wippel that, “As for the former suggestion, that the five ways can be reduced to some single logical scheme, some have attempted to reduce all five of them in some way to the four causes. Such attempts strike me as forced. First of all, there is the obvious point that there are five ways but only four supreme kinds of causes.” (Wippel, *Metaphysical Thought*, 498). My view also dodges Wippel’s other objections to using the four causes to interpret the five ways and introduces a connection between the five ways and Avicenna’s demonstrations, which is not addressed by Wippel. Many Thomists have raised reasonable doubts about some attempts to find a unifying principle in the five ways (see Owens, “Aquinas and the Five Ways,” 141; Wippel, *Metaphysical Thought*, 500); I hope that this study has provided a reasonable alternative interpretation of their unity.

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