

Eric McLuhan

Bloomfield, Ontario
Canada

ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, DRAMATIST?

William Shakespeare is generally credited with inventing the standard five-act play, which has served as a mainstay for dramatists for five centuries and continues to do so in ours. Evidently, however, the five-act tradition does not begin with Shakespeare: it dates at least from early Roman drama. Thomas W. Baldwin found that the five acts were oft used in Roman theatre and searched critical history to discover terms that describe that tradition.¹ He traced the matter as far back as Horace who, in the *Ars Poetica* (*Epistula ad Pisones*), urged the use of exactly five acts for a drama:

neve minor neu sit quinto productior actu
fabula quae posci volt et spectanda reponi.²

It was not original with Horace, however. He adapted the notion directly from a declaration by his contemporary, Cicero, that every act of rhetoric had an inherent five-division structure. Somewhat earlier,

© Eric McLuhan, 2016.

¹ Thomas W. Baldwin, *Shakespeare's Five-act Structure: Shakespeare's Early Plays on the Background of Renaissance Theories of Five-act Structure from 1470* (Champaign, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1963).

² Lines 189–190: Let a play which would be inquired after, and though seen, represented anew, be neither shorter than nor longer than the fifth act.

others, including both Terence and Plautus, had used the five-act structure in their plays.³

Between Shakespeare and Horace, we find St. Thomas Aquinas, who has never been accorded any acknowledgement of his work as belonging to dramatics.⁴ In fact, there are numerous reasons for dismissing such a contention as preposterous. For one, there is no evidence that St. Thomas ever displayed interest in the delights of secular literature. Nor has there been any suggestion that he wrote using common literary forms, except perhaps for his sacred poems. It may also be objected that although clearly some of his writings on theology were directed at a lay audience, those texts were obviously not intended to amuse or to entertain but rather to instruct the reader. In one or another sense, all of his work had as its object the edification of the reader. It is plain that St. Thomas composed the *Summa contra Gentiles* for teachers to use: in it he sets out material for teachers to use in discussion with “gentiles” and in refuting errors. Its stated purpose is didactic and not for entertainment. St. Thomas, speaking in the first person (which is rare for him), remarks in that *Summa* that

I have the confidence to embark upon the work of a wise man, even though this may surpass my powers, and I have set myself the task of making known, as far as my limited powers will allow, the truth that the Catholic faith professes, and of setting aside the errors that are opposed to it.⁵

A third reason: aside from those works directed at a lay audience, the remainder were clearly composed to elucidate obscure matters or re-

³ More on this later. The five-division structure is synchronic and has no connection to the seven sequential parts of an oration (from exordium to peroration). There are strong suggestions that knowledge of the five divisions was tacit among rhetoricians before Cicero and extended back as far as Isocrates.

⁴ It is a suggestive coincidence that each of these men was working at the height of a major renaissance.

⁵ St. Thomas Aquinas, *On the Truth of the Catholic Faith (Summa contra Gentiles)*, trans. Anton C. Pegis (New York: Doubleday, Image Books, 1956), Book I, Ch. 2, 62.

solve disputes; these works were directed to his students and colleagues in the university.

Notwithstanding these and similar contentions, there is one aspect of St Thomas's work that has not received due scrutiny as a literary form, one with solid dramatic qualities and structure: the Article. St. Thomas was evidently the first to use this particular form of argument and as a consequence it has been named for him. It has a peculiar dialectical pungency and efficacy—indisputably not in any way related to entertaining or delighting a reader but well adapted to moving and instructing. The Article is as Thomistic as the syllogism is Aristotelian. This particular mode of argument was evidently original with St. Thomas: he did not derive it from the work of any other writer, yet its inner movement is of the essence of dialectic, from the opening proposition to opposing objections, then "to the contrary" position as found in orthodoxy, and then the writer's resolution, and so on. It is a variation on the classic *sic-et-non*, a reasonable, balanced to and fro of the sort beloved by disputants. No parallel or even parody of this Article is to be found in any known literature before or since the thirteenth century.

Yet it is manifestly a literary form, one that demands encyclopedic knowledge of the *translatio studii* to be effective: encyclopedic wisdom is the hallmark characteristic not of dialectic but of grammar. And the largest influence on St. Thomas's intellectual life was his mentor, Albertus Magnus, renowned as the greatest grammarian of his age. Furthermore, grammar and rhetoric had for centuries been associated as natural and inseparable complements. I would contend that part of the sheer power of the Article resides in the fact that it has two levels of operation. The surface is composed of the dialectical to-and-fro adumbrated above. But under that surface lies a rhetorical structure constructed along the lines of the five divisions of the rhetorical *logos* as laid out by Cicero and Horace. Is the Article, then, to be viewed as primarily a sequential construct or a simultaneous one in accord with the five divisions of rhetoric? Or can it be both?

St. Augustine had based his ideal Christian, the *doctus Christianus*, on Cicero's ideal rhetorician, the *doctus orator*, a man of encyclopedic wisdom and eloquence. Cicero had derived his ideal by grammatical means, from the Roman translation of the Greek word, *logos: ratio et oratio*, reason and speech. On this ideal complementarity of wisdom and eloquence was founded the West's tradition of Christian humanism and learning. The twinned arts of rhetoric and grammar had, continuously from Cicero to St. Augustine and onward to the sixteenth-century Renaissance, been treated as natural complements. The tradition of encyclopedic education for the ideal man—prince, poet, or Christian—continues unbroken from Isocrates to Erasmus. Cicero's ideal statesman/orator served as the model for the medieval theologian and prince alike largely owing to St. Augustine:

How this came about is discussed by H.-I. Marrou in *St Augustin et la fin de la culture antique*, a study of the traditional education of the ancient world as it was adapted to the business of educating the great Christian exegetist and the great preacher. Thus the main stream of classical culture flows in the channel of scriptural exegesis as practised by the encyclopaedic humanist, a stream which was much reduced in volume by the scholastic theologians between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries but which reached new levels with the Erasmian effort to restore the "old theology."⁶

It is not surprising then that St. Thomas, as a *doctus-orator-theologus*, would draw on the resources of the full trivium. Before going further I should point out that St. Thomas was not the first to make analytical use of the five divisions of classical rhetoric in this manner. Writers deployed them from time to time in both sacred and secular literature, and they have been continuously in use in literature and the arts from ancient times to our own. Two precedents are the *Pentateuch*

⁶ Herbert M. McLuhan, "Henry IV, a Mirror for Magistrates," *University of Toronto Quarterly* XVII:2 (January 1948): 159. Henri-Irénée Marrou, *Saint Augustin et la Fin de la Culture Antique* (Paris: Éditions E. de Boccard, 1938).

of the Old Testament, the five books of which are patterned after the five divisions of rhetoric so that they form a simultaneous whole; and Cicero's five books on oratory, the three of *De Oratore* along with the *Brutus* and *Orator*, which Cicero noted formed a single work. Subsequent to St. Thomas, the Tridentine Mass was deliberately shaped using the five divisions of rhetoric: the first two divisions structure the first part of the Mass, "The Mass of the Catechumens;" in the remaining "Mass of the Faithful," the Offertory, Canon, and Communion perform the functions of elocutio, memoria, and delivery. The Mass, of course, is a single complex prayer.⁷ In our time, the five divisions have been used extensively by poets such as W. B. Yeats, T. S. Eliot, and Ezra Pound.

St. Thomas used the five divisions analytically, rather like a microscope, to turn the gaze inward upon a matter and anatomize it. He used them in a parallel manner when he turned the gaze outwards, towards his audience. In both cases, however, the form of the operation is that of the word (*logos*) understood through rhetoric.

Professor Étienne Gilson often remarked that the Thomistic article presents "one of the big mysteries" of medieval philosophy: where did Thomas get that article? By any measure, the article seems rather an odd and convoluted form to use in structuring an argument—when compared, say, to the syllogism or other (and more efficient) scholastic forms of article or dialectical procedure. And why did he use it some times and not others? When looked at from outside philosophy and theology, from the standpoint of literature, the article makes another kind of sense:

Anyone familiar with the persistent use which Joyce makes of the labyrinth figure as the archetype of human cognition will have noticed the same figure as it appears in the dramatic action

⁷ For a fuller discussion, see "The Theories of Communication of Judaism and Catholicism," in Marshall and Eric McLuhan, *Theories of Communication* (New York: Peter Lang, 2011), Appendix Five, 227–232.

of a Thomistic “article.” There is first the descent into the particular matter of the “objections.” These are juxtaposed abruptly, constituting a discontinuous or cubist perspective. By abrupt juxtaposition of diverse views of the same problem, that which is in question is seen from several sides. A total intellectual history is provided in a single view. And in the very instant of being presented with a false lead or path the mind is alerted to seek another course through the maze. Baffled by variety of choice it is suddenly arrested by the “sed contra” and given its true bearings in the conclusion. Then follows the retracing of the labyrinth in the “respondeo dicendum.” Emerging into intellectual clarity at the end of this process it looks back on the blind alleys proffered by each of the original objections. Whereas the total shape of each article, with its trinal divisions into objections, respondeo, and answers to objections, is an “S” labyrinth, this figure is really traced and retraced by the mind many times in the course of a single article. Perhaps this fact helps to explain the power of Thomas to communicate a great deal even before he is much understood. It certainly suggests why he can provide rich esthetic satisfactions by the very dance of his mind—a dance in which we participate as we follow him.

His “articles” can be regarded as vivisections of the mind in act. The skill and wit with which he selects his objections constitute a cubist landscape of great intellectual extent seen from an airplane. The ideas or objects in this landscape are by their very contiguity set in a state of dramatic tension; and this dramatic tension is provided with a dramatic peripeteia in the respondeo, and with a resolution in the answers to the objections.⁸

The drama of dialectical oppositions plays on the surface of the article in the contradictions between topic and objections, objections and Sed Contra and replies to objections. But beneath this surface tension there lies a different structure, and another drama, a further unity. The five

⁸ From Herbert M. McLuhan, “Joyce, Aquinas and the Poetic Process,” *Renascence* IV:1 (Autumn 1951): 3–11.

elements of St. Thomas's article comprise a simultaneous order since they too use the rhetorical pattern.

In keeping with rhetorical form, each article begins with a quest—an *inventio*. With this opening “Utrum” (“Whether . . .”), the topic is located, placed on centre stage: and discovered *via* doubt, not propositional certainty:

1. Whether God can do what nature cannot . . .
2. Whether God's power is infinite . . .
3. Whether there be but one God . . .

The second element, the list of objections, provides the *ground* for the enterprise, the direction for the quest (*quaestio*) and the formal cause for the article. Here St. Thomas parades the ignorance—the *in*-disposition (*dispositio*)—that will be used to probe and to wrinkle out the truth. St. Thomas's audience is put front and centre every time in the objections: it is the target of the article as a *logos* and its ignorance supplies the form. Limning the ignorance in the objections is a technique for manipulating the probe of *inventio* across the bounding line between ignorance and truth, anticipating the *Respondeo* and, as a sort of exploratory gloss, the subsequent replies to the objections.

The third component of the Thomistic article always begins with the words, *Sed contra* . . ., and offers a statement of the true path. The words may come from Thomas's own reason or from an indisputable authority. (Occasionally, the *Sed contra* takes the form of another extreme view—the authority's—which is not always in harmony with Thomas's own views.) This is the *elocutio* moment, that of showing-forth or bestowing of right reason. It is normally brief, having the character of epiphany. This and the fourth element comprise a turn or reversal that flips the reader back across the bounding line that circumscribes the ignorance limned in the earlier parts of the article. The *Respondeo*, which complements the *Sed contra*, brings to bear on the quest the full measure of wisdom and eloquence, tradition and reason. It supplies the *memoria* function in the rhetorical *logos*. In the last section, the objec-

tions are “delivered” systematically, one by one, in the light of the foregoing.

The foregoing explains not only the source and the structure of the celebrated article, but also why it had that particular pattern and had to have all five elements. But why bother to pattern the article after a rhetorical *logos* at all?

The reasons are spelled out in St. Augustine’s *De Doctrina Christiana*. Augustine frequently reiterates the traditional Ciceronian formula for the ideal orator as a man of encyclopedic wisdom and eloquence as that of his ideal Christian teacher. Martianus Capella immortalized this pairing in his monumentally popular *De nuptiis mercurii et philologiae*.⁹

“We have all known,” writes Prof. Muller-Thym, “St. Augustine’s dependence on Cicero in many details.”

By a stroke of sheer genius Henri-Irénée Marrou read in St. Augustine this remarkable sentence:

“O, would that on both these matters (i.e., de vi et potentia animae) we could question some most learned, and not only that, but most eloquent, and wholly most wise and perfect man.”

For who can this *doctissimus* and *eloquentissimus* be if not the *doctus orator*, the *vir doctus et eloquens* of Cicero? And thence, after a most remarkable reading of all the text of St. Augustine, we are forced with Marrou to the conclusion that all his life St. Augustine was a grammarian and an eloquent man in the best Ciceronian and Quintilianian sense of the word. It was the whole gamut of grammatical technique he applied to the exegesis of Scripture. It was a reworked *puerilis institutio* and *politior humanitas* whose treatises he began to write, but which were not completed. Cicero wanted to become an historian; St. Augustine did become one, in the best Latin and Roman tradition in the *De Civitate Dei*. And to make clear to Christians the state of and the

⁹ More copies of this work survive than of any other: it was a kind of fourth-century *Finnegans Wake*.

preparation for Christian eloquence, as Cicero had written *De Oratore*, St. Augustine wrote that charter of Christian education, the *De Doctrina Christiana*. Here, in a word, was a man in whom eloquence was coming back to life in the purity of the Ciceronian ideal. But instead of addressing men to guide them toward the common good of the city, as Brutus, Cassius, and Cicero had done, Augustine and the Christian orators had to resort to eloquence to guide the Christians to God, the common good of the City of God.¹⁰

St. Augustine is wary of the power of rhetoric, which so easily can shift its effect from neutral teaching to active (even if inadvertent) persuasion, with unfortunate results. The difficulty is simply stated: any conversion that owes its impetus to a rhetor's pressure is to that degree not a valid conversion. The impetus must come from inside the convert, not from outside.

According to the textbooks, rhetoric persuades by one of the three established routes: *ethos* (appeal through character), *pathos* (appeal through sentiment), or *logos* (appeal through reason). These routes are as commonplace as the seven-stage layout of an oration from exordium to peroration. But behind this civilized cliché lies the raw power of primal utterance. Thomas's *article* sidesteps the conventional routes to persuasion; instead, it deploys the rhetorical *logos* in attack mode, not so much to change the reader's mind or thinking as to set the reader himself to rights. It brings the ancient integral *logos* to bear on the reader's faculties, not one at a time as with the usual modes of rational appeal, but from all sides at once. Thomas's *article* is neither neutral nor passive nor objective, but an active agent on the attack. It functions medicinally. The form of the *article*—its formal cause—is the ancient rhetorical *logos*, the *logos prophorikos* of the Stoics.¹¹

¹⁰ Bernard J. Muller-Thym, "St. Thomas and the Recapturing of Natural Wisdom," *The Modern Schoolman* (May 1941): 65–66.

¹¹ See the Note at the end of this essay.

In their medicinal aspect, then, the five divisions of Thomas's article function as follows.

1. The "Utrum" (*inventio*) identifies the area of weakness or illness addressed by the physician.
2. The objections (*dispositio*) detail the wounds, the forms the disease takes.
3. *Sed contra* (*elocutio*) by way of contrast puts the healthy condition on display.
4. *Respondeo* (which could be written using the familiar R-sub-x) gives the medicinal prescription.
5. The replies to the objections (delivery) show the medicine being applied to the wounds, the healing process.

St. Thomas's radical article tackled head-on the problem St. Augustine identified. St. Thomas did not invent the technique of using rhetoric therapeutically: medicinal literature and poetry has a long and varied tradition. A principal function of literary satire is therapeutic—and it could well be said that there is a large satiric (in the serious sense) dimension to the Thomistic article. Another well-known "medicinal" work, Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*, uses the same five-part structure.

That Thomas deployed the article in some of his works and not in others suggests that an exact decorum governs how and when it may be used. It appears in works throughout his career, e.g., from the *De Veritate* (1256–1259) and *Quodlibetal Questions* (1256–1259) to the *Summa Theologiae* (1266–1273), so it is not just something he stumbled across mid-career. (More likely the basic knowledge formed part of his training by Albertus Magnus.) It was not used, on the other hand, in discursive writings, such as the *Summa contra Gentiles*, and would have been inappropriate there: that *summa* is intended to supply teachers with material to heal not *their* ills (so there is no need to apply the medicine to *them*) but the mental "ills" or misconceptions of their audiences. Obviously, this very large and complex matter merits a separate study.

He employs traditional rhetoric, not to persuade in the expected manner, but both analytically, where the *logos* of being or of creation is concerned, and prescriptively, in shaping the celebrated article. In both cases, the form (formal cause) is the *logos prophorikos*, the rhetorical *logos*. The Thomistic article, then, is an active agent to be applied therapeutically, to cure an illness of the understanding or the imagination—to restore the patient’s mental and spiritual balance and empower him or her to recover right reason. For example, he used rhetoric as much more than a persuasive *logos* when he applied it analytically to the problem of proving to a skeptical inquirer that God exists.

As an exegetical performance, St. Thomas’s doctrine of the “five ways” of proving God’s existence¹² derives from the conventional understanding of the natural world as a speech uttered by God at the Creation: when God said “let there be—,” He was not posing a suggestion but simultaneously naming and creating each thing. The universe then is a sort of text, the Book of Nature written (as it were) in parallel to the text of Holy Scripture. Since Nature and Scripture were written in parallel, they called for same or parallel methods of explicating texts. St. Thomas’s “five ways” of proving the existence of God begin with the Book of Nature, that is, with reference to experience of the natural world, of things, and of the senses. Alan of Lille encapsulates this conventional understanding of the Book of Nature, with the familiar mnemonic,

Omnis mundi creatura
 Quasi liber et pictura
 Nobis est et speculum . . .¹³

¹² *Summa Theologiae*, Part I, Q. 2, A. 3.

¹³ *Patrologia Latina*, CCX, 579 A. Cited in Ernst R. Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. W. R. Trask (New York and Evanston: Harper & Row, Harper Torchbooks / The Bollingen Library, 1953), 319; and *vide* page 326 for a brief overview of the medieval trope of the world as a book.

The traditional Doctrine of the *Logos* held, among other things, that God created the natural order by uttering it, that the Divine *fiat* itself was the act of creation; name and thing were identical and univocal. To utter the name, “tulip,” or “whale,” or “light” was to utter tulip, whale, or light, to bring them into being. From this awareness flowed a powerful rationale for the traditional science of names and etymologies as directly related to understanding material essences and as embodying esoteric knowledge. Equally, it explains Thomas’s preference for Realism over Nominalism.¹⁴

St. Thomas’s technique in this Article is to work backwards from the utterance to the existence of the utterer. Of the arts of the *logos* as then practiced (the trivium), only one provided the necessary tools for examining the relation of an utterance to its utterer. Dialectic, as the science of abstract thought and of testing for truth, is unsuitable. Grammar had several facets, including encyclopedic humanism, natural science, and the sciences of etymology and multi-leveled signification. While basic to interpreting both “texts” (Scripture and Nature), grammar yet did not provide any means to deduce from the character of either “book” the nature or existence of its Author. Rhetoric, on the other hand, specifically concerns itself with relations between utterances and utterers, and it was to this science of the *logos* that St. Thomas turned to find his “five ways.” *To be* is an act; indeed, it is the ultimate act, and we know from *Genesis* that it is a rhetorical act.

From Isocrates to Cicero, rhetoricians had investigated the character of rhetorical utterances, and of the rhetorical *logos*, for clues to its structural composition and the source of its power to transform. Cicero,

¹⁴ So, Chesterton pointed out: “Everyone knows that the Nominalist declared that things differ too much to be really classified; so that they are only labeled. Aquinas was a firm but moderate Realist, and therefore held that there really are general qualities; as that human beings are human, and other paradoxes. To be an extreme realist would have taken him too near to being a Platonist. He recognized that individuality is real, but said that it coexists with a common character making some generalisation possible . . .” Gilbert K. Chesterton, *St. Thomas Aquinas* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 2009), 113–114.

followed by Quintilian reported that the rhetorical *logos* had five, and only five, components or “divisions:”

And, since all the activity and ability of an orator falls into five divisions, I learned that he must first hit upon what to say; then manage and marshal his discoveries, not merely in orderly fashion, but with a discriminating eye for the exact weight as it were of each argument; next go on to array them in the adornments of style; after that keep them guarded in his memory; and in the end deliver them with effect and charm . . .¹⁵

The five divisions are, in fact, nothing else than the five mental faculties of man, perceived comprehensively. The *logos*, especially as understood by the pre-Socratics, includes them all, but rhetoric and later philosophy alike tended to fragment and specialize the *logos*. Both the ideal poet and orator shared the encyclopedic training indispensable to true eloquence.

In Book I of *The Institutes of Oratory*, Quintilian sets forth the program for schooling in eloquence, which includes the study of languages and the cultivation of both Grammar and Rhetoric:

This profession may be most briefly considered under two heads, the art of speaking correctly and the interpretation of the poets; but there is more beneath the surface than meets the eye. For the art of writing is combined with that of speaking, and correct reading precedes interpretation, while in each of these cases criticism has its work to perform . . . Nor is it sufficient to have read the poets only; every kind of writer must be carefully studied, not merely for the subject matter, but for the vocabulary; for words often acquire authority from their use by a particular author. Nor can such training be regarded as complete if it stop short of music, for the teacher of literature has to speak of metre and rhythm: nor again if he be ignorant of astronomy, can he understand the

¹⁵ Cicero, *De Oratore: Books 1–2*, trans. E. W. Sutton, H. Rackham (Loeb Classical Library 348; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, and London, 1942; rpt. 1967), I, xxxi, 142; 99.

poets; for they, to mention no further points, frequently give their indications of time by reference to the rising and setting of the stars. Ignorance of philosophy is an equal drawback.¹⁶

In Book III, following Cicero (who, in turn, continued the program of Isocrates), he presents the divisions of rhetoric and their basic characters:

The art of oratory, as taught by most authorities, and those the best, consists of five parts: *invention*, *arrangement*, *expression*, *memory*, and *delivery* or *action* (the two latter terms being used synonymously). But all speech expressive of purpose involves also a subject and words. If such expression is brief and contained within the limits of one sentence, it may demand nothing more, but longer speeches require much more. For not only what we say and how we say it is of importance, but also the circumstances under which we say it. It is here that the need of arrangement comes in. But it will be impossible to say everything demanded by the subject, putting each thing in its proper place, without the aid of memory. It is for this reason that memory forms the fourth department. But a delivery, which is rendered unbecoming either by voice or gesture, spoils everything and almost entirely destroys the effect of what is said. Delivery therefore must be assigned the fifth place.¹⁷

It was in accordance with the structure indicated by these traditional five divisions, still current in classical training in Albertus Magnus's day, that St. Thomas shaped his Article. Cicero maintained that these five processes pervaded every aspect of every speech, from the whole down to the least detail. St. Thomas, taking him literally, worked backwards and used each division of the rhetorical *logos* as a route to demonstrate the existence of the speaker.

St. Thomas's "first way" is the "argument from motion":

¹⁶ Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, In four volumes, trans. H. E. Butler (Loeb Classical Library; Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1963), Book I, 63.

¹⁷ Id., Book III, iii, 1–3, I, 385.

It is certain, and evident to our senses, that in the world some things are in motion. Now whatever is in motion is put in motion by another, for nothing can be in motion except it is in potentiality to that towards which it is in motion; whereas a thing moves inasmuch as it is in act. For motion is nothing else than the reduction of something from potentiality to actuality. But nothing can be reduced from potentiality to actuality, except by something in a state of actuality. Thus that which is actually hot, as fire, makes wood, which is potentially hot, to be actually hot, and thereby moves and changes it. Now it is not possible that the same thing should be at once in actuality and potentiality in the same respect, but only in different respects. For what is actually hot cannot simultaneously be potentially hot; but it is simultaneously potentially cold. It is therefore impossible that in the same respect and in the same way a thing should be both mover and moved, i.e., that it should move itself. Therefore, whatever is in motion must be put in motion by another. If that by which it is put in motion be itself put in motion, then this also must needs be put in motion by another, and that by another again. But this cannot go on to infinity, because then there would be no first mover, and, consequently, no other mover; seeing that subsequent movers move only inasmuch as they are put in motion by the first mover; as the staff moves only because it is put in motion by the hand. Therefore it is necessary to arrive at a first mover, put in motion by no other; and this everyone understands to be God.¹⁸

By “motion,” he explains, he means “the reduction of something from potentiality to actuality.” The argument turns on the necessity of there being a “first mover” who is “put in motion by no other,” and who is responsible for bringing things into a created state: an inventor. The “first way” derives from the process of invention—*inventio*.¹⁹

¹⁸ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Part I, Q. 2, Art. 3, Respondeo.

¹⁹ For an extended commentary on each of the five proofs, see Étienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1956, Rpt. 2010), Chapter III, 59–83.

St. Thomas's "second way is from the nature of the efficient cause:"

In the world of sense we find there is an order of efficient causes. There is no case known (neither is it, indeed, possible) in which a thing is found to be the efficient cause of itself; for so it would be prior to itself, which is impossible. Now in efficient causes it is not possible to go on to infinity, because in all efficient causes following in order, the first is the cause of the intermediate cause, and the intermediate is the cause of the ultimate cause, whether the intermediate cause be several, or only one. Now to take away the cause is to take away the effect. Therefore, if there be no first cause among efficient causes, there will be no ultimate, nor any intermediate cause. But if in efficient causes it is possible to go on to infinity, there will be no first efficient cause, neither will there be an ultimate effect, nor any intermediate efficient causes; all of which is plainly false. Therefore it is necessary to admit a first efficient cause, to which everyone gives the name of God.²⁰

Of the four causes—formal, efficient, material, final—only the efficient cause operates sequentially. The other three are simultaneous, fully present from the first moment. Now, dialectic, the governing art of the time and the scholastic's main mode of exposition, reserves for itself only two of the five rhetorical divisions: *inventio* and *dispositio*, matter and arrangement. In dialectic and rhetoric, the convention of *dispositio* was that of logical, linear sequence in argument and of efficient cause in reason and science. Via efficient cause, the "second way" links directly to *dispositio*.

St. Thomas's "third way is taken from possibility and necessity," and is concerned with observation of modes of being:

We find in nature things that are possible to be and not to be, since they are found to be generated, and to corrupt, and consequently, they are possible to be and not to be. But it is impossible for these always to exist, for that which is possible not to be at

²⁰ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Part I, Q. 2, Art. 3, Respondeo.

some time is not. Therefore, if everything is possible not to be, then at one time there could have been nothing in existence. Now if this were true, even now there would be nothing in existence, because that which does not exist only begins to exist by something already existing. Therefore, if at one time nothing was in existence, it would have been impossible for anything to have begun to exist; and thus even now nothing would be in existence—which is absurd. Therefore, not all beings are merely possible, but there must exist something the existence of which is necessary. But every necessary thing either has its necessity caused by another, or not. Now it is impossible to go on to infinity in necessary things which have their necessity caused by another, as has been already proved in regard to efficient causes.²¹

These various modes and degrees of being and of not-being are taken as manifesting, as “showing forth,” a fundamental and original of being:

[as the paragraph concludes] . . . we cannot but postulate the existence of some being having of itself its own necessity, and not receiving it from another, but rather causing in others their necessity. This all men speak of as God.²²

The third division of the rhetorical *logos*, *elocutio*, embraces the same two concerns—“showing-forth” or “speaking-out” (*e-loqui*), and the “modes” or figures of that speaking-out in the sense of con-figurations

²¹ Id. The same matter formed an argument in the *Summa contra Gentiles* (Book III, Part 2, Chapter 97, para. 13): “Hence, the fact that creatures are brought into existence, though it takes its origin from the rational character of divine goodness, nevertheless depends solely on God’s will. But, if it be granted that God wills to communicate His goodness to His creatures by way of likeness as far as it is possible, then one finds in this the reason why creatures are of divers kinds, but it does not necessarily follow that they are differentiated on the basis of this or that measure of perfection, or according to this or that number of things. On the other hand, if we grant that, as a result of an act of divine will, He wills to establish this particular number of things, and to bestow on each thing a particular measure of perfection, then as a result one finds the reason why each thing has such and such a form and such and such matter . . .”

²² St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Part I, Q. 2, Art. 3, Respondeo.

of speech²³ and postures of the mind as realized in the modes or configurations of beings in creation. Each rhetorical figure is a vivisection of the mind and sensibilities in action. The “third way,” then, derives from *elocutio*.

St. Thomas’s “fourth way” is a much simpler matter. As Thomas remarks, “the fourth way is taken from the gradation to be found in things.” The concern is not, as might appear superficially, with some sort of simple hierarchical arrangement:

Among beings there are some more and some less good, true, noble and the like. But “more” and “less” are predicated of different things, according as they resemble in their different ways something which is the maximum, as a thing is said to be hotter according as it more nearly resembles that which is hottest; so that there is something which is truest, something best, something noblest and, consequently, something which is uttermost being; for those things that are greatest in truth are greatest in being, as it is written in *Metaph. ii*. Now the maximum in any genus is the cause of all in that genus; as fire, which is the maximum heat, is the cause of all hot things. Therefore there must also be something which is to all beings the cause of their being, goodness, and every other perfection; and this we call God.²⁴

Some have adduced as a source here St. Anselm’s “ontological argument;”²⁵ I propose instead (or in addition) that St. Thomas here argues that the observables in the created order, to the degree that they have being, are redolent of the fount and maximum of all being and all good and all perfection. This principle of redolence, of recall, derives from the fourth division of rhetoric, *memoria*.

²³ In the first Book of the Old Testament, *Genesis*, the creation takes place as each being is “spoken,” that is, uttered: so beings, their degree, intensity, hierarchy, configurations, and organization, are as it were, “figures” or tropes of that mode of Divine speech.

²⁴ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Part I, Q. 2, Art. 3, Respondeo.

²⁵ See Frederick C. Copleston, *Aquinas* (Great Britain: Penguin Books, New York: Viking / Penguin, 1955), 112.

St. Thomas's "fifth way" is "taken from the governance of the world:"

We see that things which lack intelligence, such as natural bodies, act for an end, and this is evident from their acting always, or nearly always, in the same way, so as to obtain the best result. Hence it is plain that not fortuitously, but designedly, do they achieve their end. Now whatever lacks intelligence cannot move towards an end, unless it be directed by some being endowed with knowledge and intelligence; as the arrow is shot to its mark by the archer. Therefore some intelligent being exists by whom all natural things are directed to their end; and this being we call God.²⁶

This concern, with "conduct" and "governance" and being "shot to the mark"²⁷ has its locus in the fifth and final division of rhetoric, *pronuntiatio* or delivery. Just as the five divisions of rhetoric form a simultaneous whole, so do the five proofs cited above. None of the arguments was entirely new, but Thomists agree that St. Thomas developed and arranged them in this article to form a "coherent whole."²⁸ The Thomistic Article is actually not a logical proof although it contains quite a lot of logic, since it does not follow a logical progression but keeps folding back on itself like an organism. It is not logical so much as organic. It is designed to act on its audience as a simultaneous whole, much like a chord in music, or a molecule composed of atoms in a certain pattern and not a sequence, or a medicinal compound. The Article, then, is designed to act on the whole man instead of merely the

²⁶ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Part I, Q. 2, Art. 3, Respondeo.

²⁷ A clear reference to the discussion of *hamartia* in Aristotle's *Poetics*. *Hamartia* meant "off the mark," "off-centredness;" literally, eccentricity.

²⁸ Copleston, *Aquinas*, 127. Copleston remarks further, "Does any particular argument possess a special or pre-eminent importance? Modern Thomists often assert that the third proof, bearing explicitly on the existence of things, is fundamental. But if we look at the two *Summas*, we do not find Aquinas saying this. So far as he gives explicit preference to any particular proof it is to the first, which he declares, somewhat surprisingly, to be the clearest" (Id., 127).

logical faculties by changing not so much what he knows as how he knows, and in this it is consonant with the aims of classical Ciceronian rhetoric.

St. Thomas, in using rhetoric thus, has simply applied the traditional divisions of the integral *logos* analytically instead of prescriptively—in the way a rhetor would normally employ them—to the grammatical Doctrine of the *Logos*. He retraced the labyrinth of a speech and its speaker, a procedure that in our time inheres in that literary discipline called Practical Criticism. Another novelty of the “five ways” is that they are empirical, based on reading and “criticism of text” of the Book of Nature: all begin with direct experience: “In the world of sense . . .;” “It is certain and evident to our senses that in the world . . .;” “We find in nature . . .”

To sum up: St. Thomas used the five divisions of rhetoric in at least two ways. He employed them to structure the Article, making it a novel dramatic form with dramatic power and efficacy. He also used it occasionally to structure his argument within the frame of the Article, as exemplified in his discussion of the five ways to prove the existence of God. (Another such interior use, for example, occurs in *De Potentia Dei*, Book I, Question 3, Article 4.) The rhetorical *logos* has traditionally been used to *transform the audience*, whereas the aim of the dialectical *logos* is principally to *change the minds* of the readers and hearers. Consequently, the Article has an additional medicinal and therapeutic dimension. Varro wrote six-hundred-some Menippean satires,²⁹ making him the most prolific satirist in that or any other species of satire. St.

²⁹ Ulrich Knoche observes that “the catalogue of Varro’s writings in Jerome contains mention of 150 books of Menippean satires. Not a single satire has survived complete and none can be reconstructed in detail. What we have consists of about 90 titles and 600 fragments. These have been preserved mainly through the old grammarians, especially Nonius, while a certain number have been added by Gellius, Macrobius, and others.” He adds, “in Latin only Seneca’s *Apocolocyntosis* provides a clear idea of the nature of the genre,” and calls Varro’s satires “pamphlets”—the modern equivalent would be something akin to the comic book. Knoche, *Roman Satire*, trans. Edwin S. Ramage (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1975), 53.

Thomas invented a new form of drama, the content of which is dialectical argumentation, and penned hundreds upon hundreds of these peculiar Articles—the precise number of them is unknown—making him the most prolific dramatist of all time.

Note

The introduction of the phonetic alphabet had transformed the experience of speech and language in the ancient world and re-balanced the senses in the *sensus communis*. Suddenly, with the introduction of separate characters for vowels, there was introduced a radically new way to experience words. Before the alphabet, before the introduction of syllabaries words and speeches could be heard and conned mimetically; after the first syllabaries, they could be both heard and seen on the page; lacking spaces between words, without accent marks to tell the reader where to insert vowels or which to use, and with all the ambiguities inherent in writing with morphemes, reading automatically demanded vocal performance. But with the alphabet a further dimension appeared: the word in the mind, before speech. Hitherto there had been only one mode of thinking, that is, thinking in images. The phonetic alphabet made possible the interiorizing of words without speech for the first time.

The pre-Socratic philosophers gradually developed theories of language to exploit the new senses of language and its significance: the integral *logos* had been shattered and each of the philosophies propounded its own systematic theory of the *logos*. Eventually, it was the Stoics' three-fold *logos* that gripped the western imagination, providing a structure for such diverse matters as the three strains of satire—Horatian, Juvenalian, and Menippean—and even the trivium, the pattern of intellectual activity for the subsequent fifteen hundred years.

The Stoic threefold *logos* mirrors exactly the new experiences of the word made available by the phonetic alphabet.³⁰

This experience had three aspects. First there is the spoken word; second, the word on the page or on clay tablets; and third, the explosive new form, the silent word, the word in the mind before speech—thinking in words made possible by the abstract power of the alphabet. The silent word is that of Dialectic, the *logos endiathetos*,³¹ the word in the mind, without speech. It is the skill of thinking in words and sentences. It is no exaggeration to say that the Stoic threefold *logos* provides the etymology of the trivium. So Dialectic places its emphasis on mental verbal processes, on logic and philosophy, and thinking aright. The written word is that of Grammar, the *logos spermatikos*³²—the *logos* as seeds embedded in things, the seeds from which things grow and derive their essential nature. Consequently, Grammar places its emphasis on etymology and interpretation of both the written book and the Book of Nature. Grammar bridged the arts (four-level exegesis, the four senses of Scripture) and the sciences (four sciences: arithmetic, geometry, music, astronomy; and four causes: formal, efficient, material, final—all in analogical “proper proportion”). A grammarian regarded all of Nature and every written text as his province. Grammar necessarily entailed encyclopedism. The spoken word is that of Rhetoric, the *logos prophorikos*.³³ So Rhetoric emphasizes transformation—of audience—and decorum (and all five divisions: invention, disposition, elocution, memory, delivery). *Mimesis* survived in Rhetoric as the agent of transforming audiences. Based on the Roman translation of *logos*, Cicero and Quintilian yoked together oratory and encyclopedism, Eloquence and Grammar, Mercury and Philology as the backbone

³⁰ *Laws of Media: The New Science* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), by Marshall and Eric McLuhan, provides an extended treatment of this transformation.

³¹ λόγος ἐνδιάθετος.

³² λόγος σπερματικός. “Grammar” derives from Greek, *grammatika*, meaning “of or pertaining to letters or literature” (*Oxford English Dictionary*).

³³ λόγος προφορικός.

of any serious cultural or intellectual enterprise. This alliance was cemented by Martianus Capella's satiric allegory, *De Nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii*. Note that the narrator is Dame Satire in person. Martianus set the trivium and quadrivium in the pattern that has persisted for the last seventeen centuries.

ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, DRAMATIST?

SUMMARY

The article begins with the statement that there is one aspect of St Thomas's work that has not received due scrutiny as a literary form, one with solid dramatic qualities and structure: the Article. The Article is as Thomistic as the syllogism is Aristotelian. This particular mode of argument was evidently original with St. Thomas: he did not derive it from the work of any other writer, yet its inner movement is of the essence of dialectic, from the opening proposition to opposing objections, then "to the contrary" position as found in orthodoxy, and then the writer's resolution, and so on. It is a variation on the classic *sic-et-non*, a reasonable, balanced to and fro of the sort beloved by disputants. No parallel or even parody of this Article is to be found in any known literature before or since the thirteenth century. The author aims to show that part of the sheer power of the Article resides in the fact that it has two levels of operation. The surface is composed of the dialectical to-and-fro adumbrated above. But under that surface lies a rhetorical structure constructed along the lines of the five divisions of the rhetorical *logos* as laid out by Cicero and Horace.

KEYWORDS: St. Thomas Aquinas, article, rhetoric, invention, disposition, elocution, memory, delivery.

REFERENCES:

- Aquinas, St. Thomas. *Summa Theologiae*. New York: Benziger Brothers, Inc. (Dominican translation, in 3 vols.), 1947.
- Aquinas, St. Thomas. *On Being and Essence / De Ente et Essentia*. Trans. George G. Leckie. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1937; Rpt., 1965.
- Aquinas, St. Thomas. *Summa contra Gentiles (On The Truth of the Catholic Faith)*. *Book One: God, Newly Translated, with an Introduction and Notes by Anton C. Pegis*. New York: Doubleday / Image Books, 1955. *Book Two: Creation, Newly Translated, with an Introduction and Notes by James F. Anderson*. Image Books, 1956. *Book Three; Providence, Part I, and Book Three: Providence,*

- Part II*, [both] *Newly Translated, with an Introduction and Notes by Vernon J. Bourke*. Image Books, 1956.
- Augustine, St. *De Doctrina Christiana*, any edition.
- Baldwin, T. W. *Shakespeare's Five-act Structure: Shakespeare's Early Plays on the Background of Renaissance Theories of Five-act Structure from 1470*. Champaign, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1963.
- Boethius, *Tractates, Consolatione Philosophiae*, Trans. H. F. Stewart, E. K. Rand, S. J. Tester. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann, Ltd: Loeb Classical Library. Or any edition.
- Capella, Martianus. *De Nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii* (The Marriage of Mercury and Philology). Ed. Adolfus Dick, 1925. Rpt. Stuttgart: B. G. Teubner, 1969. Trans. William Harris Stahl, Richard Johnson, E. L. Burge, *Martianus Capella and the Seven Liberal Arts*. 2 vols. New York: Columbia University Press, 1970.
- Chesterton, G. K. *Saint Thomas Aquinas—The Dumb Ox*. New York: Doubleday / Image Books, 1956.
- Chenu, M. D. "The Plan of St. Thomas' *Summa Theologiae*," in *Cross Currents*, Vol. II, No. 2. New York: Cross Currents Corporation, Winter, 1952.
- Cicero. *De Oratore*. 2 vols. Trans. and Introd. by E.W. Sutton and H. Rackham. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1942, 1967–8.
- Cicero. *Brutus and Orator*. Trans. G. L. Hendrickson and H. M. Hubbell. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1939, 1971.
- Copleston, F. C. *Aquinas*. Great Britain: Penguin Books, New York: Viking / Penguin, 1955.
- Curtius, E. S. *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*. Trans. Willard R. Trask. New York and Evanston: Harper & Row, Harper Torchbooks / The Bollingen Library, 1953.
- Gilson, Étienne. *Being and Some Philosophers* (Second Edition) Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1949, 1951.
- Gilson, Étienne. *The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy*. Trans. A. H. C. Downes. New York, 1936.
- Gilson, Étienne. *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1956, Rpt. 2010.
- Horace, *Ars Poetica (Epistula ad Pisones)*. In *Horace: Satires, Epistles and Ars Poetica*. Trans. H. R. Fairclough. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1925.
- Knoche, Ulrich. *Roman Satire*. Trans. Edwin S. Ramage. Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1975.
- Marrou, Henri-Irénée, *Saint Augustin et la Fin de la Culture Antique*. Paris: Éditions E. de Bocard, 1938.
- McLuhan, H. M. "Henry IV, a Mirror for Magistrates." Toronto: *University of Toronto Quarterly*, Vol. XVII, No. 2, January, 1948.

-
- McLuhan, H. M. "Joyce, Aquinas and the Poetic Process." *Renascence*, Vol. IV, No. 1, Autumn, 1951, pages 3–11.
- McLuhan, M. and Eric McLuhan. *Laws of Media: The New Science*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988.
- Muller-Thym, Bernard J. "St. Thomas and the Recapturing of Natural Wisdom," in *The Modern Schoolman*. St. Louis, MO: St. Louis University Press, May, 1941.
- Plautus. *Plautus*. Trans. Paul Nixon. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1921. 1967.
- Terence. *Terence*. In two vols. Trans. John Barsby. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Quintilian. *Institutio Oratoria*. Trans. H. E. Butler. 4 vols. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, Mass. And London, 1920–1922.
- Weisheipl, James A. *Friar Thomas D'Aquino*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1974.