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Divine Immutability and the Variability of Creation: A Thomistic Reconciliation

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Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION

Thomas Aquinas is famous for the rigor with which he practices natural theology—the study of God by the natural light of human reason without the aid of supernatural revelation. His rigor is such that one may be inclined to think that the conclusions he arrives at are indisputable, without any need for further development. But such intellectual contentment has been called into question by philosophers who have further reflected upon certain of Aquinas's core theistic doctrines only to discover that seemingly some of them conflict with each other.

One example is the apparent incompatibility between divine immutability (God's unchangeableness) and the variability of creation (variation among God's effects *within* an order of providence and the possible variability of the orders of providence themselves). When considered on their own, these two doctrines seem reasonable, given Aquinas's metaphysical assumptions. But when taken *together,* they appear to conflict, thus dealing an irreparable wound to Aquinas's theism.

God's immutability is an essential component of Aquinas's theism.[1] He affirms this in the *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 9, art. 1, "God is entirely immutable."[2] Aquinas arrives at this conclusion based on the premise that God is pure act as the primary being. Aquinas reasons that since God is pure act, and "everything that is changed in whatever manner is in some way in potency," it follows that God can in no way change.[3]

Aquinas also holds that God is the creator of all that is.[4] He argues in *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, qu. 44, art. 1, that "it is necessary to say that anything that in any way is has its *esse* from God."[5] Aquinas begins his reasoning with the principle that whatever is found in something by way of participation "necessarily is caused in it by that to which it belongs essentially."[6] He then calls to mind his prior argument in *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 11, aa. 3-4 that in principle God *alone* has *esse* essentially, from which he concludes that every being other than God is not their own *esse*

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[1] As a historical point, the immutability of God is also an infallible doctrine of the Catholic Church. See the creedal statement of the Fourth Council of Constantinople (869-870) in Norman Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* (Franklin: Sheed & Ward, 1990), p. 161; the confession of faith from the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) in Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils,* p. 230; the confession of faith at the First Vatican Council (1869-1870) in Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils,* p. 805.

[2] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (Turin: Marietti, 1926), Ia, qu. 9, art. 1: "Deum esse omnino immutabilem." All translations of Aquinas's works are mine unless otherwise noted. Aquinas affirms God's immutability in several of his other works. See his *In Librum Beati Dionysii De Divinis Nominibus Expositio* (Turin: Marietti, 1950), Cap. 9, Lect. 2; *Summa Contra Gentiles* (Rome: Leonine, 1961), Lib. 1, Cap. 14, 45, 63, 83, 99, Lib. 2, Cap. 35, 85, Lib. 3, Cap. 62. 94, 98, Lib. 4, Cap. 31; *Commentary on the First Letter to Timothy* (Turin: Marietti, 1953), Cap. 4, Lect. 3; *Scriptum Super Sententiis I* (Parma, 1856), dist. 8, qu. 3. art. 1-2; *Super Boethium De Trinitate* (Decker, 1959), qu.5, art. 4: "dicendum quod necesse est dicere omne quod quocumque modo est, a Deo esse."

[3] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, qu. 9, art. 1: "Omne autem quod quocumque modo mutatur, est aliquo modo in potentia." Aquinas argues for divine immutability along other lines as well. For details see Chapter 1 of this thesis.

[4] It is worth noting as a historical point that God as Creator of the world is also a doctrine affirmed by the Catholic Church. The Fourth Lateran Council's confession of faith states: "We firmly believe and simply confess that there is only one true God . . . one principle of all things*, creator of all things invisible and visible, spiritual and corporeal*." Quoted in Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils,* p. 230; emphasis added. The First Vatican Council re-affirmed this teaching in its profession of faith saying God is the "creator and lord of heaven and earth." Quoted in Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils,* p. 805.

[5] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 44, art. 1: "necesse est dicere omne quod quocumque modo est, a Deo esse."

[6] Ibid. (emphasis added): "Si enim aliquid invenitur in aliquo per participationem, *necesse est quod causetur in ipso ab eo cui essentialiter convenit*."

but has *esse* by way of participation. This allows Aquinas to conclude that *every* being has its *esse* from God, and thus can affirm God as "the Creator of the world."[7]

As mentioned above, when considered on their own, these two doctrines seem reasonable, given the metaphysical assumptions that Aquinas makes. But when taken *together*, they appear to conflict. One proposed conflict, traditionally more common, arises from a consideration of variation *within* the created order. Things come into existence and go out of existence. Given that God is the cause of all that exists, it would seem God changes in his acts, acting to cause one thing at one moment in time, ceasing that act at another moment in time, and engaging in a new act to cause something else at some other moment in time.[8]

Many have dealt with this objection by appealing to God's single *eternal* act of will.[9] God does not act in a way that his causal action can be located *in* time even though His effect is located in time. Accordingly, we cannot point to some moment in time before which God does not act and after which he does. This is because God is taken to be eternal, and therefore does not exist or act in the flow of time.[10] He is entirely outside the succession of moments in time, having all moments of time (our before and after) present to him simultaneously.[11] Consequently, God does not have a "before" and an "after." He is the *creator* of the "before" and "after." On this view, it is not correct to assume, as the objection does, that God begins to act after a certain time before which he did not act. God acts with one eternal and immutable act of the will by which he specifies and wills *every* aspect of a thing's being, including the moment of time at which a thing will come into existence, the moments at which it will begin to act and cease to act, and the moment at which it will go out of existence.[12]

The above appeal to God's eternity and his single eternal act of intellect and will suffices to address the relevant objection to divine immutability from variation *within* this created order. God will not change since he eternally wills effects with all their specifications of being, including their temporal mode. But such an appeal only preserves divine immutability *to an extent*. God's

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[7] Ibid., qu. 46, art. 2: "Deum esse creatorem mundi."

[8] See Richard Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 221; and Nelson Pike, *God and Timelessness* (New York: Schocken Books, 1970), 106-107.

[9] See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 46, art. 1 ad 6; George Hayward Joyce, *Principles of Natural Theology* (Veritatis Splendor Publications, 2013), Chap. 14, #3, Kindle; Brian Davies, *Thinking about God* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2011), 153-54; Eleonore Stump, *Aquinas* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 150-151; Steven J. Duby, "Divine Immutability, Divine Action, and the God-World Relation," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 19, no. 2 (2017): 145-162 [161]; Edward Feser, *Five Proofs of the Existence of God* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2017), 201; William E. Mann, *God, Modality, and Morality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 49; Timothy Pawl, "Divine immutability," *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, https://iep.utm.edu/div-immu/; [accessed on February 13, 2021]; E.L. Mascall, *The Openness of Being: Natural Theology Today* (Santa Anna, CA: Westminister Press, 1972), Chap. 10; Danielle Helen Adams, "The Metaphysics of Divine Causation," (PhD diss., The University of Leeds, 2016), 113-114.

[10] See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 10, art. 2; Garigou Lagrange, *God: His Existence and His Nature: A Thomistic Solution to Certain Agnostic Antinomies,* Vol. II (St. Louis, MO: B. Herder Book Co., 1936), 50-54; Paul Helm, *Eternal God: A Study of God Without Time* (Oxford Scholarship Online, 2003); Feser, *Five Proofs of the Existence of God,* 29; Joyce, *Principles of Natural Theology,* Chap. 10; Bernard Boedder, *Natural Theology* (Veritatis Splendor Publications, 2012), Bk. II, Chap. 2, Kindle; Gaven Kerr, *Aquinas and the Metaphysics of Creation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 56; Stump, *Aquinas,* Chap. 3.

[11] See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 14, art. 13: "non tamen Deus successive cognoscit contingentia, prout sunt in suo esse, sicut nos, sed simul."

[12] This line of reasoning is found in Aquinas's response to the question of whether God's effects are eternal on the basis that God's divine action is eternal. See Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Lib. 2, Cap. 35. See also Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Lib. 1, Cap. 76; *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 46, art. 1 ad 1; Ia, qu. 19, art. 5 ; Ia, qu. 14, art. 13; Boedder, *Natural Theology*, Bk. 1, Chap. 4, Section 11.

eternity and single act of creation establishes that God is immutable relative to the variation of created effects only within *this* order of providence—things coming into existence and going out of existence, having their places in *this* successive order of things within the flow of time. It still leaves open the question of whether God would be immutable relative to a variation of providential orders.

A central doctrine within classical theism is that God could have done other that what he did.[13] Aquinas affirmed this doctrine in several places throughout his writings.[14] This possibility of variation among created orders poses two major difficulties for divine immutability. The first is what I will call the "difficulty of potentiality," which can be divided into a *weak* and *strong* version.[15] The weak version asserts that if God were free to have created otherwise, then that would entail a prior openness to alternative orders for Him to choose from, and given that He chose one over the other, He must have moved from "a state of potentially willing something to a state of actually willing it," from deliberation to actualization.[16] But to move from potentiality to actuality entails change, which divine immutability excludes.

The *strong* version does not locate the problem in the prior openness to alternatives and the *movement* from potentiality to actuality. Rather, it focuses on the modal status of "could have" in the claim that God, from all eternity, "could have" created differently. If God "could have" created differently, then it seems there would be contingency in the divine will, and if contingency, then some unactualized potentiality.[17] But, of course, the classical view of divine immutability does not allow for unactualized potentiality, since an unactualized potentiality would entail God's

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[13] God's freedom to create, and thus the freedom to have created an order of providence other than he did, is also an essential doctrine of the Catholic Church. The First Vatican Council declared, "[B]y *an absolutely free plan*, together from the beginning of time brought into being from nothing the twofold created order" (emphasis added). First Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith *Dei Filius,* Chapter 1, April 24, 1870, available online at https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/teachings/vatican-i-dogmatic-constitution-dei-filius-on-the-catholic-faith-241. See also *The Catechism of the Catholic Church,* 2nd ed., (Citta del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), par. 295.

[14] See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 19, art. 3; Ia, qu. 25, art. 1, 5; *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Lib. 1, Cap. 81, Lib. 2. Cap. 22, 23; *Quaestiones Disputatae De Potentia* (Turin: Marietti, 1953)*,* qu. 3, art. 15.

[15] This division is taken from W. Matthews Grant. See W. Matthews Grant, "Aquinas, Divine Simplicity, and Divine Freedom," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 77 (2004): 129-144.

[16] Grant, "Aquinas, Divine Simplicity, and Divine Freedom," 130. Several authors have considered this version of the difficulty from potentiality. See Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 1, Cap. 82; Laura Garcia, "Divine Freedom and Creation," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 42, no. 167 (1992): 191-213; Helm, *Eternal God*; Grant, "Aquinas, Divine Simplicity, and Divine freedom"; Barry Miller, *A Most Unlikely God: A Philosophical Enquiry into the Nature of God* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996), 104; Michael Dodds, *Unchanging God of Love: Thomas Aquinas and Contemporary Theology on Divine Immutability,* 2nd ed. (Washing, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2008), 170-171; Lagrange, *God and His Existence,* vol. 2, 351.

[17] For authors who have advocated for this version of the difficulty, or at least see it as a serious challenge, see Ryan T. Mullins, *The End of the Timeless God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 140; Keith Ward, *The Concept of God* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1974), 157; Brian Leftow, "Is God an Abstract Object?" *Noûs* 24, no. 4 (1990): 581-598 [594-95]; Christopher Hughes, *On a Complex Theory of a Simple God: An Investigation in Aquinas' Philosophical Theology* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), 108. For authors who have responded to this version of the difficulty, see W. Matthews Grant, "Aquinas, Divine Simplicity, and Divine freedom," 130; Matthew Levering, *Engaging the Doctrine of Creation: Cosmos, Creatures, and the Wise and Good Creator* (Ada, MI: Baker Academic, 2017), 83; Steven Nemes, "Divine Simplicity Does Not Entail Modal Collapse," in *Roses and Reasons: Philosophical Essays* (Madrid, Spain: Eikon, 2020), 108; Steven J. Duby, "Divine Simplicity, Divine Freedom, and the Contingency of Creation: Dogmatic Responses to Some Analytic Questions," *Journal of Reformed Theology* 6 (2012):115-142 [124]; *Divine Simplicity: A Dogmatic Account* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016), 179; James Dolezal, *God without Parts: Divine Simplicity and the Metaphysics of God's Absoluteness* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011), 204.

being *subject* to change. This does not fit with the classical view because God is not only immutable in fact but also in *principle*—that is to say, God is not even *subject* to change (this will be defended in Chapter 1 of this thesis).

The second major difficulty that arises from trying to hold together divine immutability and the variability of creation is what I call the "difficulty of counterfactual difference."[18] When one considers the counterfactual of God having created differently than he did (to have *chosen* to create some different order of providence), it seems there would have been some corresponding difference within him. A different choice, so it seems, entails a difference within the agent. Michael Dodds explains the difficulty this way:

> Some contemporary theologians have concluded that since God chose to create this world rather than some other, he must now be 'different' from what he 'might have been' had he chosen otherwise. But if choice entails a difference in God, God must be changeable.[19]

The emphasis on a different choice is why the above appeal to God's eternity is not sufficient to solve this sort of difficulty. The appeal to God's eternity and omnipotence in response to the objection from the variability of effects *within this* created order works because such a response entails a single act of the will. However, when it comes to a different created order, it would seem there would have to be a different act within God. Again, if God were to act differently in creating a different order of providence, it seems God would *be* different.

This directly conflicts with the classical doctrine of divine immutability. Aquinas teaches that "in order that there be change, one same thing must be otherwise than it was before."[20] If "being otherwise than before" is essential to change, and God *could* be different than he is now—as the "difficulty of counterfactual difference" suggests—then it follows he would be subject to change. But, as mentioned above, divine immutability not only entails that God does not change in fact, but that he cannot change *in principle*—that is to say, he is not subject to any change or alteration *whatsoever* (see Chapter 1 of this thesis). Therefore, it appears the doctrines of divine immutability and the variability of creation are incompatible.

The purpose of this thesis is to dissolve the apparent incompatibility and show how one can affirm *both* divine immutability and the variability of creation. The possibility that God create differently than he did (or not create at all) neither introduces potency within God nor entails that God would be different than he is if he were to have created differently. In short, the variability of creation does not require a theist to reject the classical doctrine of divine immutability.

In Chapter One, I establish precisely the type of divine immutability that this paper seeks to defend, what one might call a *strong* view of divine immutability—the view that no variation *whatsoever* can exist within God's being (he must remain entitatively the same, the same irrespective to any and all relations), whether we speak of God's being relative to *this* created order, some *other*, or *no* order whatsoever. I begin by presenting a variety of Thomistic arguments for divine immutability: from God's pure actuality, God's absolute simplicity, and God's perfection. I then proceed to address a claim made by some philosophers that Aquinas's view of divine immutability does not require one to affirm that God must remain entitatively the same if

[18] The literature that addresses this problem is detailed below when I outline the two different versions of the "difficulty of counterfactual difference."

[19] Dodds, *The Unchanging God of Love,* 172.

[20] Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 2, Cap. 2.

he were to have created differently. Rather, so it is argued, Aquinas's view only entails that God remain the same relative to *this* created order.[21] I conclude that such a claim is incompatible with the metaphysics that undergirds Aquinas's view of divine immutability. This being the case, I conclude that we must affirm the *strong* view of divine immutability.

In Chapter Two, I provide a *general* defense of the compatibility of divine immutability and the variability of creation. I show that the key to such a defense is the Thomistic doctrine that God's relation to creation is not a real relation but one of reason. I begin the chapter with a brief explanation of the different kinds of relations—real and logical—and then provide arguments for why all the possible ways in which God's relation to creatures could be real cannot apply to God; thereby concluding that God's relation to creatures is only one of reason. I then discuss precisely what God's relation of reason to creatures entails and draw out the implications of holding this doctrine, especially as it relates to affirming both divine immutability and the variability of creation.

Three objections to the doctrine of relations outlined in chapter two are addressed as well. Each of them argues that if God were only logically related to his creation (having no real relation), then unfavorable consequences would ensue. I show why each of the alleged unfavorable consequences do not follow, thereby diffusing the challenges against divine immutability.

In Chapter Three, I shift the focus and begin to deal with the difficulties that arise for divine immutability from the variability of creation. The specific difficulty I deal with is what I called above the "difficulty of potentiality." I begin by articulating two versions of this difficulty: the *weak* version and the *strong* version. As stated above, the weak version says that if God were free to create otherwise, then that would entail a prior openness to alternative orders for him to choose from, and given that he chose one over the other, he must have moved from deliberation to actualization, from "a state of potentially willing something to a state of actually willing it."[22] The *strong* version identifies the problem in God's seemingly *current* potentiality that is unactualized, which is embedded in the modal status of "could have" in the claim that God, from all eternity, "could have" created differently. If God "could have" have created differently, then it seems there would be contingency in the divine will, and if contingency, then some unactualized potentiality.

In response to the *weak* version, I show that its implied assumption—namely, that free will entails mutability—is false. And I do so by taking into consideration the different ways this assumption can be read. My response to the *strong* version of the "difficulty of potentiality" is a bit trickier. It requires showing that "possibility" and "could have" in the statement "It's possible that God could have created differently" does not entail unactualized potentiality within God.

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[21] See Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, "Absolute Simplicity," *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers* 2, no. 4 (1985): 353-382. Although much of what Stump and Kretzmann say in this article seems to indicate that they are denying God must remain entitatively the same if he were to have created differently, there is evidence that perhaps they are not. Stump restates this view in her *Aquinas,* 113. I will address this issue in Chapter 1. For authors who interpret Stump and Kretzmann to be saying that God would not be entitatively the same, see Helm, *The Eternal God*; James Ross, "Comments on 'Absolute Simplicity'," *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers:* 2, no. 4 (1985): 383-391. For an author who interprets Stump in *Aquinas* to mean that God would not be the same, see Dolezal, *God Without Parts*, 197-198. For more authors who make the claim that Aquinas's divine immutability does not require that God be entitatively the same if he were to have created differently, see Peter Laughlin, "Divine Necessity and Created Contingence in Aquinas," *The Heythrop Journal* 50, no. 4 (2009): 648-657; Tim Pawl, "Divine Immutability," *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* [accessed December 9, 2021], https://iep.utm.edu/div-immu/; Dodds, *Unchanging God of Love,* 174-175; Carl J. Peter, "Divine Necessity and Contingency: A Note on R.W. Hepburn 33, no. 1 (1969): 150-161.

[22] W. Matthews Grant, "Aquinas, Divine Simplicity, and Divine Freedom," 130.

In Chapter Four, I introduce and explain in detail the second major difficulty that arises from affirming both divine immutability and the variability of creation: the "difficulty of counterfactual difference." There are two forms that this difficulty takes, each of which arises from a particular reason why one might think God's choice to create a different order entails a difference within his being.

The first is what I call the "identity problem."[23] It is part and parcel of classical theism that God's acts are identical to his very being.[24] This follows from the doctrine of divine simplicity, which says there can be no real distinction whatsoever that bears upon the divine being.[25] As such, there can be no real distinction between his operations, like producing things (*producere res*), and his being.[26] Given this identity of God's acts with his being, it seems that if God were to will a different created order (or no created order at all) he would *be* different. But the possibility to be different entails the possibility to change, which is incompatible with the strong view of divine immutability put forward in this thesis.

The second form that the "difficulty of counterfactual difference" takes is what I call the "specification problem."[27] Central to Aquinas's action theory is that "a difference of objects makes

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[23] This problem is generally at the center of arguments from modal collapse. See Mullins, *The End of the Timeless God,* 138; "Classical Theism" in *The T&T Clark Handbook of Analytic Theology*, ed. James M. Arcadi and James T. Turner (New York T&T Clark, 2021), 94-95; Thomas V. Morris, *Anselmian Explorations: Essays in Philosophical Theology* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987), 109; Robert M. Burns, "The Divine Simplicity in St. Thomas," *Religious Studies* 25, no. 3 (1989): 271-293 [281]; Helm, *Eternal God*, 177. However, it is also seen as a problem for God being the same with a variation of created orders. For authors who affirm that the problem is real, see Katherine Rogers, "Traditional Doctrine of Divine Simplicity," *Religious Studies* 2 (1996): 165-186, 178; David Ray Griffin, *God, Power, and Evil: A Process Theodicy* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1976), 77; Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics,* prop. XXXIII, bk. 1, in *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, ed. and trans. by Edwin Curley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 438; David Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West: Metaphysics and the Division of Christendom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 247; Dodds *Unchanging God of Love,* 171. For authors who recognize the problem but think that it is only apparent and solvable, see Levering, *Engaging the Doctrine of Creation,* 83; Jeffrey Brower, "Simplicity and Aseity," in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology*, ed. Thomas P. Flint and Michael C. Rea (Oxford: Oxford University Pres, 2009), 105-128 [118]; W. Matthews Grant, "Aquinas, Divine Simplicity, and Divine Freedom."; Dolezal, *God Without Parts,* 188; W. Matthews Grant, "Divine Simplicity, Contingent Truths, and Extrinsic Models of Divine Knowing," *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers* 29, no. 3 (2012): 254-274 [255]; Mark Spencer and W. Matthews Grant, "Activity, Identity, and God: A Tension in Aquinas and his Interpreters," *Studia Neoaristotelica* 12, no. 2 (2015): 5-61 [12]; Mark Spencer, "Divine Causality and Created Freedom: A Thomistic Personalist View" *Nova et Vetera* 14, no. 3 (2016): 919-963 [921].

[24] See Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Lib. 2, Cap. 10 (emphasis added): "Patet etiam ex praedictis quod multitudo actionum quae Deo attribuitur, ut intelligere, velle, producere res, et similia, non sunt diversae res: cum quaelibet harum *actionum in Deo sit ipsum eius esse*, quod est unum et idem." See also Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu.13, art. 7 ad 1; *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 1, Cap. 92; Lib. 2, Cap. 23. For the identity between God's act of understanding, specifically, and His being, see Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 14, art. 4; qu. 18, art. 3; *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 1, Cap. 45. For the identity between God's act of volition, specifically, and His being, see Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 19, art. 1; *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 1, Caps. 73, 74, 81. Related is Aquinas's teaching that God's power is identical to His being. See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 25, art. 1; qu. 41, art. 4 ad 3; *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 2, Caps. 9, 10; *De Potentia,* qu. 1, art. 1 ad 6 and 8; art. 2.

[25] See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 3, arts. 1-8.

[26] See Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Lib. 2, Cap. 10.

[27] The specification problem is not *generally* appealed to specifically as an attack on divine immutability. However, there are a few who have made the argument. See Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West,* 262; William J. Hill, "Does the World Make a Difference to God?" *The Thomist* 38, no. 1 (1974):146-164, 157. Baruch Spinoza articulates the problem but appeals to it for a different end: it leads to a form of "divine voluntarism." See Spinoza, *Ethics,* prop. XXXIII, bk. 1, in *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, 437-438. John Knasas articulates Spinoza's objection in "Contra Spinoza: Aquinas on God's Free Will," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 76, no. 3 (2002): 417-429, 422.

a difference of species in actions."[28] In other words, the object of an act specifies the *kind* of act it is. Given this principle of action specification taught by Aquinas, some argue the "difficulty of counterfactual difference" arises.[29] If God were to have created differently, he would have directed his will to a different object. Since different objects entail different volitional acts, and God's acts of will are identical to his being, it seems to follow that God would have been different had he willed a different created order. With the two forms of the "difficulty of counterfactual difference" established, I move to solve these alleged problems in the subsequent chapters.

Chapter Five is devoted to my proposed solution to the "identity problem," key to which is drawing a distinction between that in virtue of which God brings about an effect—God's pure acting power—and the effect itself. As I show, along with several other Thomistic authors,[30] the "identity problem" arises only if one rigidly designates the divine essence with the phrase "God's

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For Thomistic authors who have identified this as a problem to be dealt with, see Knasas, "Contra Spinoza," 427-429; Spencer and Grant, "Activity, Identity, and God," 10-13; W. Matthews Grant, *Free Will and God's Universal Causality: The Dual Sources Account* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 77. The more common place where the specification problem rises is as an assumption made in modal collapse arguments. See Mullins, *The End of the Timeless God,* 138. The effect would be just as necessary as the acting power in virtue of which God brings an effect about if and only if the effect specifies the nature of the divine action itself. This is not brought out by Mullins and others who make the modal collapse argument, but it is present as an assumption. Some Thomists have pointed this out. See, for example, Christopher Tomaszewski, "Epp. #66—Simplicity & Modal Collapse w/ Christopher Tomaszewski," interview by John DeRosa, Classical Theism, October 21, 2019, audio, https://www.classicaltheism.com/modalcollapse/; [accessed on November 2, 2021]; "COMMENTARY Bonus|Tomaszewski responds to Mullins' on Modal Collapse," interview by John DeRosa, Classical Theism*,* October 21, 2021, audio, https://www.classicaltheism.com/christophercommentary/, [accessed on November 2, 2021]; Robert Koons, "God as Pure Act: The Modal Collapse Argument," The Rigorist Thomist*,* June 22, 2021, http://robkoons.net/the-rigorous-thomist/category/modal-collapse, [accessed on November 2, 2021].

[28] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia IIae, qu. 18, art. 5: "[D]ifferentia obiecti facit differentiam speciei in actibus."

[29] See resources in footnote #27.

[30] See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 45, art. 3; *De Potentia* qu. 3, art. 3, 15 ad 8; Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate* (Rome: Leonine, 1970), qu. 23, art. 3, 4; *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Lib. 2, Cap. 10, 13, 57; Matthew R. McWhorter, "Aquinas on God's Relation to the World," *New Blackfriars* 94, no.1049 (2012): 3-19 [3-4]; Steven Nemes, "Divine Simplicity Does Not Entail Modal Collapse," 111-114; William E. Mann, *God, Modality, and Morality,* 51-56; John DeRosa, "A Reply to Mullins' Reply to Feser," http://www.classicaltheism.com/mullins/ [accessed October 31. 2021]; Dwight R. Stanislaw*, De Artifice Divino*: A Thomistic Account of God's Creative Act," (MA thesis, Cromwell, CT: Holy Apostles, 2019), 42-44, 46-48, 62; Alexander Pruss, "On Two Problems of Divine Simplicity," in *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Jonathan L. Kvanvig (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 150-167 [157-160, 163]; Spencer and Grant, "Activity, Identity, and God," 37-38; W. Matthews Grant, "Aquinas, Divine Simplicity, and Divine freedom," 136-137; "Divine Simplicity, Contingent Truths, and Extrinsic Models of Divine Knowing," 254 note 2; Henri Grenier, *Thomistic Philosophy, Vol. II: Metaphysics,* trans. by J.P.E. O' Hanley (Charlottetown, Canada: St. Dunstan's University, 1948), 329; Miller, *A Most Unlikely God,* 106-108; Michael Miller, "Transcendence and Divine Causality," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 73, no. 4 (1999): 537-554; David Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 3rd ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2016), 96-99, 137, 153, 149-150; Peter Totleben, "The Palamite Controversy: A Thomistic Analysis," (MA thesis, Washington, DC: Dominican House of Studies, 2015), 69-70; Stump and Kretzmann, "Absolute Simplicity," 356; Christopher Tomaszewski, "Collapsing the Modal Collapse Argument: On an Invalid Argument Against Divine Simplicity," *Analysis* (2018):1-10; Vincent Michael Dever, "Divine Simplicity: Aquinas and the Current Debate" (PhD. Diss., Marquette University, 1994), 164-165, 168-169, 178-179; Stephen L. Brock, *Action and Conduct: Thomas Aquinas and the Theory of Action* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2021), 51-58, 78; David Mahfood, "Divine simplicity into the negative zone," Electic Orthodoxy*,* August 25, 2019, https://afkimel.wordpress.com/2019/08/25/divine-simplicity-into-the-negative-zone/, accessed October 31, 2021; Boedder, *Natural Theology,* Bk. 2, Chap. 1, #147, Kindle; Thomas Loughran, "Efficient Causality and Extrinsic Denomination in the Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas" (PhD. Diss., Fordham University, 1969).

acts" *and* at the same time includes within that phrase the effects that God brings about.[31] Once the proper designation of the divine essence is made, then the problem dissolves.

Finally, in Chapter Six, I provide two approaches to solving the alleged "specification problem," one negative and the other positive. The negative approach exposes the assumption of the objection that God's volitional activity is subject to being specified by creatures in the way that creaturely volitional activity is subject to being specified. But, as I shall argue, this assumption makes too haste of a transfer of a creaturely order of volitional specification to the divine order and thus commits the fallacy of accident. Also, I argue that classical theists have a principled reason to reject such a transfer. The reason is this: all the things that make human acts of will subject to specification—*potency* to determination, *dependency* in being on that which specifies, the *addition* of actual being, *movement* in being assimilated to the effect, formal *transitive* activity, and being in a *genus*—can in principle be denied of God who is "pure act" (*actus purus*)."[32]

My second approach is more positive. It is central to Thomistic doctrine that the divine essence *alone* specifies the divine will as its formal/primary object, with creatures serving as secondary objects of the divine will that do *not* specify it. In other words, God's single act of creation, which would be numerically the same if He were to have created a different order of providence, is formally nothing more than God's willing himself, even if He would have willed a counterfactual order of providence. But how is one to understand this? There are four explanatory paths that I articulate, each of which is found in the writings of Aquinas.[33] The first path is that God wills *to manifest* His divine goodness in creatures.[34] The second is that God wills creatures only because the being and the goodness that is found in the creature is a manifestation of the being and goodness of God himself, although in a limited or restricted mode.[35] The third path is that God wills Himself as the *end* of all creatures.[36] The fourth is that God's willing creatures is mediated *through* willing Himself.[37] On all four accounts God wills creatures while the divine essence

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[31] For a treatment on rigid and non-rigid designation, see Tomaszewski, "Collapsing the Modal Collapse Argument," 5-6.

[32] Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 1, Cap. 16; See also *I Sent.* dist. 2, qu. 1, art. 1 ad 2; *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 3, art. 2; Aquinas, *De Veritate*, qu. 8, art. 1; *De Potentia,* qu. 1, art. 1.

[33] The references in Aquinas for these four paths will be noted in the relevant Chapter.

[34] For authors who follow Aquinas in this line of reasoning, see Tyler R. Wittman, *God and Creation in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas and Karl Bath* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 108; John F. McCormick, *Natural Theology* (Chicago, IL: Loyola University Press, 1943), 153-154; Philip Donnelly, "Saint Thomas and the Ultimate Purpose of Creation," *Theological Studies* 2, no. 1 (1941): 53-83, 60-69; John F. Wippel, "Thomas Aquinas on God's Freedom to Create or Not," in *Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas II* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 229-230; Brian Davies, *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 147; Lagrange, *The One God,* 506; Dolezal, *God Without Parts,* 179-182; Grenier, *Thomistic Philosophy: Volume II—Metaphysics*, 277, 329; Hugh J. McCann, *Creation and the Sovereignty of God* (Bloomington, IND: Indiana University Press, 2012), 229; Totleben, "The Palamite Controversy," 94-95.

[35] For authors who have followed Aquinas in this line of reasoning, see Wippel, "Thomas Aquinas on God's Freedom to Create or Not," 230; Dolezal, *God Without Parts,* 183; Joyce, *Principles of Natural Theology,* Chap.14; Brian Leftow, "Aquinas on God and Modal Truth," *The Modern Schoolman* 82, no. 3 (2005): 171-200 [173-174]; Brian Davies, *The Reality of God and the Problem of Evil* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2006), 127-128; Miller, *A Most Unlikely God*, 109-110.

[36] For a detailed explanation of this line of argumentation, see Wittman, *God and Creation,* 103-106; John F. Wippel, "Thomas Aquinas on the Ultimate Why Question: Why Is There Anything at All Rather than Nothing Whatsoever?", *The Review of Metaphysics* 60, no. 4 (2007): 731-753, 747-748. "Thomas Aquinas on God's Freedom to Create or Not," 231; Davies, *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas,* 147; Levering, *Engaging the Doctrine of Creation*, 101-102; Totleben, "The Palamite Controversy," 94-95.

[37] For authors who articulate this line of argumentation, see Knasas, "Contra Spinoza,"; Dolezal, *God Without Parts,* 182; Dever, "Divine Simplicity," 136-137.

remains the formal/primary object of the divine will, thereby, so I argue, positively solving the specification problem.

My conclusion for this thesis will be quite simple. I will summarize the doctrines of divine immutability and the variability of creation, along with the argumentation for the doctrine of divine immutability and why we should affirm a strong view of divine immutability. I will then summarize the alleged conflicts that result from combining these two doctrines and their resolutions. With the doctrine of divine immutability shown to be defensible on its own, and with the alleged tensions that divine immutability has with the variability of creation shown to be dissolvable, the Thomist has every reason to affirm both divine immutability and the variability of creation and no reason to reject one in favor of the other. The variability of creation does *not* introduce in fact variation (change) within God nor the possibility thereof.

Let us proceed now to Chapter 1.

Chapter One
Divine Immutability

Divine immutability presupposes an understanding of what constitutes change. For Aquinas, "We say to be moved [changed] is said to be ordered in a way different now than before."[1] In other words, change occurs when a real difference comes about within a thing. That real difference, metaphysically speaking, is the actualization of some potential.[2] Before water becomes hot, for example, it is not actually hot but only in potency to acquiring such heat.[3] After the water becomes hot and change occurs, the water's potential for heat is actualized, thus making the water *actually* hot. Such a metaphysics of change leads Aquinas to define motion as the reduction of a potential to "the incomplete act which is motion" (*Actum imperfectum qui est motus*).[4]

This understanding of change is what philosophers call "intrinsic change," which contrasts with "extrinsic change."[5] Intrinsic change occurs when the actualization of a potential takes place

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[1] Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Lib. 1, Cap. 83: "[M]overi dicimus quod aliter se habet nunc et prius."

[2] See Aquinas, *Commentaria in octo libros Physicorum* (Turin: Leonine, 1954), Lib. 3, Lect. 2. In *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, qu. 2, art. 3, Aquinas defines motion, also understood as change, as "nothing other than to draw forth something from potency into act" (*Movere enim nihil aliud est quam educere aliquid de potentia in actum*). For a detailed study of change as the actualization of a potency, see Edward Feser, *Scholastic Metaphysics: A Contemporary Introduction* (Piscataway, NJ: Editiones Scholasticae, 2014), 34-44.

[3] Aquinas uses this very example to illustrate "motion" or change in his *In libros Physicorum* (Turin: Leonine, 1954), Lib. 3, Lect. 2. In *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 2, art. 3, Aquinas uses the example of wood.

[4] Aquinas, *In III Phys.,* Lect. 2; Cf. Lib. 5, Lect. 2; *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 2, art. 3; *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 3, Cap.4.

[5] Brian Leftow, "Immutability," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, accessed December 19, 2021, https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/immutability/. "Intrinsic" here is not meant to signify what is *essential* to a thing. Rather, it is meant to signify what is *within* a thing as opposed to what is external to it. To stay consistent with the authors cited throughout this dissertation, the term "intrinsic" will be used in this way unless otherwise noted. Although Aquinas does not use the language of "intrinsic" and "extrinsic" change, he does affirm what these terms signify. For example, in *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, qu. 14, art. 15 ad 1, Aquinas teaches that the names that signify God's relation to creatures, such as "Lord" and "Creator," are "attributed to God *variously*, according to the *variation* of creatures" (*varie* de Deo dicuntur*,* secundum *variationem* creaturarum"; emphasis added). In other words, as change occurs among God's effects, so too can the attribution of names like "Lord" and "Creator." Aquinas bases this conclusion on the premise that these names "import the relation *consequent* upon the acts which are understood as terminating in the creatures themselves" ("important relationes quae *consequuntur* actus qui intelliguntur in Deo esse*"*; emphasis added). So, God without creation is not "Creator" but with the beginning of creation he becomes "Creator." For Aquinas, this change of attribution does not signify a change *within* God. He provides the principle for this conclusion in *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, qu. 13, art. 2: "Nominibus quae de Deo dicuntur . . . quae relationem ipsius ad creaturam significant, *manifestum est quod substantiam eius nullo modo significant*" (emphasis added). Many authors have labeled these kinds of attributions as "Cambridge properties," an extended use of the label "Cambridge change" coined by Peter Geach. See Peter Geach, *God and the Soul* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), 71-72. For further discussion about "Cambridge properties" and their relation to God, see Miller, *A Most Unlikely God*, 6, 107-108, 145-146; Stump, *Aquinas,* 125-126; Stump and Kretzmann, "Divine Simplicity," 354, 372; Feser, *Five Proofs of the Existence of God*, 197. Cambridge properties are also referred to as "extrinsic properties." See Brian Weatherson, "Intrinsic vs. Extrinsic Properties," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* Fall 2008 Edition, ed. E. N. Zalta, http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/intrinsic-extrinsic/, accessed October 3, 2023. If the attribution of names like "Lord" and "Creator," i.e., Cambridge properties, do not signify God's substance, then a change in attribution does not bring about any real difference *within* God, which is just another way of saying that there is no "intrinsic change." The change that occurs—God becoming "Lord" or "Creator"—is merely *extrinsic*. Aquinas makes this distinction even clearer in *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, qu. 13, art. 7 where he is answering the question of whether names which imply relation to creatures are predicated of God temporally. He writes, "Et sic nihil prohibet huiusmodi nomina importantia relationem ad creaturam, praedicari de Deo ex tempore, non propter aliquam mutationem ipsius, sed propter creaturae mutationem; sicut columna fit dextera animali, nulla mutatione circa ipsam

within the thing, resulting in the entity gaining or losing some inhering property.[6] For example, if I learn something new, I change interiorly because there is new knowledge that I have within me. What was potential is now actual. Similarly, when I eat food, my potential to expand quantitatively is actualized and a change happens within me.

Extrinsic change, on the other hand, is a change that occurs not within an entity but extrinsic to the entity.[7] The change in truth-value for a proposition concerning the entity in question changes not because of some change in the thing itself but rather because of some change in something else outside it. To use an example inspired by Aquinas, when Socrates moves to the left of a pole, the pole becomes "a pole with Socrates on its left."[8] A *real* change has occurred. What was true of the pole, "the pole is not a pole with Socrates on its left," is now false: "the pole *is* a pole with Socrates on its left." But notice the change occurs entirely within *Socrates*. The pole itself is not affected. The change predicated of the pole, therefore, is entirely extrinsic to it. The truth-value of the pole and its relation to Socrates changes on account of a change within Socrates, which for Socrates is an intrinsic change.[9]

Aquinas's doctrine of divine immutability, as will be shown below, precludes all change *within* God. God as pure actuality has no potential that could be actualized. Since all intrinsic change entails an actualization of some potential within the thing that changes, it follows that God cannot undergo any intrinsic change.

This view of divine immutability, however, does not require that extrinsic change be excluded from being predicated of God.[10] For example, before Socrates begins to worship God at

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existente, sed animali translato." In the relation between God and the creature, the only change that takes place is in the creature (*propter creaturae mutationem*), which means the change is *extrinsic* to God. There is no *intrinsic* change because there is no change *within* God (*non propter aliquam mutationem ipsius*). What I have referred to here as "extrinsic change" is also called "Cambridge Change." Peter Geach coined this phrase seemingly due to the influential Cambridge University philosophers Bertrand Russell and J.M.E. McTaggart often appealing to this extrinsic kind of change in their work. See Geach, *God and the Soul,* 71-72; Cf. Chris Mortensen, "Change and Inconsistency," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, accessed on March 9, 2022, https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/change/. For further reading on "extrinsic/Cambridge change" and its relation to God, see Geach, *God and the Soul*, 71; James Ross, "Creation," *The Journal of Philosophy* 77, no. 10 (1980): 614-629, 624-625; Brower, "Simplicity and Aseity," 105-128, 124; Grant, "Aquinas, Divine Simplicity, and Divine Freedom," 143, note 31; "Divine Simplicity, Contingent Truths, and Extrinsic Models of Divine Knowing," 254, note 2; Feser, *Five Proofs of the Existence of God*, 197; Miller, *A Most Unlikely God*, 15, note 3; McCann, *Creation and the Sovereignty of God,* 53-54; Brian Leftow, *Time and Eternity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 309-311; E.R. Wierenga, *The Nature of God* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 171-172; Brian Page, "The Creation Objection Against Timelessness Fails," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* (2022), https://doi.org/10.1007/s11153-022-09844-z.

[6] Leftow, "Immutability."

[7] See Ibid.

[8] Aquinas uses the example of a man and a pillar in *De Potentia*, qu. 7, art. 10. As mentioned above, he also uses the example of an animal and a pillar/column in *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 13, art. 7. Geach also uses the example of a man and a column. See Geach, *God and the Soul*, 71-72.

[9] My intention with this example is to focus only on the *meaning* of "intrinsic" and "extrinsic" change and not the *grounds* for why extrinsic change can be predicated of God without intrinsic change. The metaphysics of the God-creature relation (that God has a relation of reason to creatures and creatures have a real relation to God) that grounds the attribution of extrinsic change to God without intrinsic change is the topic of Chapter 2. This is important because as we will see in Chapter 2 there are some cases where in a relation between two relata extrinsic change is predicated of one without intrinsic change and yet that relata stands in a real relation to the other that does undergo intrinsic change. For example, Socrates may change and come to the same weight as Plato without Plato changing in his weight. Even though we can predicate "extrinsic change" to Plato (he has gone from being not equal in weight to Socrates to being equal in weight to Socrates) without intrinsic change, Plato still has a real relation to Socrates in that Plato and Socrates are related by quantity, which is a relation of the same order.

[10] See the references in note #5.

time *t*, God was *not* "the God who is worshipped by Socrates." When Socrates begins to worship God at time *t*, God *becomes* "the God who is worshipped by Socrates." But there is nothing in this predication of change to God that necessitates change *within* God, since the truth-value of the predications can be accounted for entirely by the change that takes place within Socrates—moving from not worshipping God to worshipping him.[11] The change predicated to God is "a logical parasite of the real changes in [Socrates]."[12] Since no change in God is necessarily required to ground the truth-value of different predications to God relative to his creatures, it follows that extrinsic change is consistent with Aquinas's doctrine of divine immutability.[13]

Aquinas's doctrine of divine immutability and its exclusion of intrinsic change becomes clear when we consider the arguments that he gives for it. Such arguments need to be considered with respect to an issue that some philosophers have raised concerning his thought on this matter. It is suggested that Aquinas's doctrine of divine immutability does not require one to affirm what I called in the Introduction the *strong* view of divine immutability—the view that God must remain entitatively the same if he were to have created differently or not created at all. Rather, this claim suggests that Aquinas's view only entails that God not undergo intrinsic change *over time*, and thus the doctrine only requires that God remain entitatively (intrinsically) the same relative to *this* created order. We might call this a *weak* view of divine immutability.

It is necessary to consider this view given the main question of this thesis: does the variability of creation pose a threat to *divine immutability*? That question is asked with a *strong* view of divine immutability in mind. It is also asked with Aquinas's particular view of change in mind: "We say to be moved [changed] is said to be ordered in a way different now than before."[14] It is not the *temporal* note that is at issue ("now" and "before"). Rather, it is the *difference* note that is at issue. Therefore, our study of Aquinas's doctrine of divine immutability must extend beyond God's immutability relative to this created order and consider God's immutability relative to other created orders (or no created order at all). My claim, which I will defend below, is that the metaphysics that leads Aquinas to conclude that God is immutable necessitates that God be entitatively (intrinsically) the same if he were to have created a different order or no order at all.[15]

I have divided the chapter up into three sections. In section one, I will survey three key arguments that Aquinas gives in the *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 9, art. 1. I conclude that these

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[11] Aquinas uses a similar line of reasoning in the *prima pars* of his *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 9, art. 1. He writes, "Sic dicitur Deus appropinquare ad nos vel recedere a nobis, inquantum percipimus influentiam bonitatis ipsius, vel ab eo deficimus." From this it follows that we can predicate change to God on account of the change that occurs within us. On supposition that we receive his goodness, we can truthfully predicate of God that he is approaching us (*appropinquare ad nos*). If we were to then reject his goodness, we could truthfully predicate of God that he is withdrawing from us (*recedere a nobis*). The change predicated of God, however, would be entirely accounted for by the change in us. The change predicated of God would be an instance of what was referred to above as "Cambridge change." See also *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, qu. 13, art. 7 ad 2.

[12] Leftow, "Immutability."

[13] This doctrine of extrinsic denomination will become relevant in chapter five when I respond to the objection that identifying God's "act of creation" with his essence necessitates that God be different if he were to have created a different created order. For a detailed treatment on extrinsic model of divine predication relative to God and his acts, see Grant, *Free Will and God's Universal Causality*, Chapters 4-5.

[14] Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 1, Cap. 83: "[M]overi dicimus quod aliter se habet nunc et prius."

[15] For other authors who have affirmed this strong view of divine immutability, see Thomas Gornall, *A Philosophy of God* (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 1962), 74; Joseph Rickaby, *Of God and His Creatures* (London: Burnes and Oates 1905; reprint, Westminster, Md.: Carroll Press, 1950), 63; Dolezal, *God Without Parts,* Chapters 6 and 7; Grant, "Aquinas, Divine Simplicity, and Divine Freedom"; Barry Miller, *A Most Unlikely God,* 107-108; Thomas Weinandy, *Does God Change? The Word's Becoming in the Incarnation* (Still River, MA: St. Bede's Publications, 1985).

arguments successfully prove God to be incapable of undergoing intrinsic change. In section two, I will elaborate on the claim that Aquinas's view of divine immutability does not require one to affirm the *strong* view of divine immutability, which would exclude counterfactual difference within God if He were to have created differently. I critique this claim in section three and show that Aquinas's metaphysics of God that leads him to conclude that God is immutable necessitates that God be entitatively (intrinsically) the same whether he created a different order of providence or no order at all.

I.
Three Arguments for Divine Immutability

As mentioned above, Aquinas gives three metaphysical arguments for divine immutability in *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 1, art. 9:

1. The argument from God being pure actuality (Section I.A.),
2. The argument from divine simplicity (Section I.B.), and
3. The argument from divine perfection (Section I.C.).

Each argument is based on an understanding of divinity and shows that such an understanding is incompatible with intrinsic change. I will walk through each argument in turn and defend the principles that each relies on, showing that such arguments are successful in proving the metaphysical necessity of God being immutable.[16]

I.A.
The Argument from Pure Actuality

The first truth about divinity that excludes mutability is pure actuality. God as pure actuality can be seen in what Aquinas proves in each of his five ways—namely, that He is the "primary being" (*primum ens*).[17] To see how God as "primary being" entails that he is pure act,

[16] Aquinas presents the above three arguments for divine immutability elsewhere in the corpus of his writings. For the argument from pure actuality, see *I Sent.*, dist. 8, qu. 3, art. 1, 2; *De Trinitate*, qu. 5, art. 4; *Expositio super Iob ad litteram* (Rome: Leonine, 1965), Cap. IV, vv.17-18; *De Potentia*, qu. 6, art. 6; Aquinas does not present a formal argument for divine immutability from pure actuality in his *Summa Contra Gentiles*. Perhaps this is because in chapter thirteen of book one his argument for God's existence from motion leads him to conclude that there must exist a "primary mover that is not moved by another" (*primum movens quod non movetur ab alio*). He later argues, in chapter sixteen, that God is pure act (having no passive potency), and one of the arguments that he gives is from the fact that God is immoveable: "Unumquodque, sicut natum est agere inquantum est actu, ita natum est pati inquantum est potentia: nam motus est actus potentia existentis. Sed Deus est omnino impassibilis ac immutabilis, ut patet ex dictis. *Nihil ergo habet de potentia, scilicet passive.*" Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 1, Cap.16; emphasis mine. Concerning his argument from divine simplicity, I identified only one other place in the corpus of his writings where he appeals to divine simplicity to establish divine immutability. See Aquinas, *De Divinis Nominibus*, Cap. 9, Lect. 2: "Quandoque vero variabilitatis principium est compositio alicuius rei ex diversis, sicut corpora mixta variabilia sunt, non solum quia sunt materialia, sed etiam quia sunt ex contrariis composita; et ad hoc excludendum dicit: *simplicissimum*" (emphasis in original). Aquinas's argument from God's perfection in being is found in the following places: *In I Sent.,* dist. 3, qu. 3, art. 1; dist. 8, qu. 3, art. 1, 2; *De Divinis Nominibus,* Cap. 9, Lect. 2; *De Trinitate*, qu. 5, art. 4; *De Potentia,* qu. 3, art. 5; *In Libros Aristotelis De Caelo et Mundo Expositio* (Rome: Leonine, 1886), Lib. 1, Lect. 21.

[17] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 9, art. 1 (emphasis added): "Respondeo dicendum quod ex praemissis ostenditur Deum esse omnino immutabilem. Primo quidem, quia supra ostensum est esse aliquod *primum ens*, quod

we can begin with a principle that Aquinas articulates: "potency is *posterior* to act ."[18] This follows upon a more fundamental principle, a principle that some have identified as the principle of causality: "That which is in potency is not brought into act except through a being in act."[19] It is evident that if this principle is true, then the principle that potentiality is *posterior* to actuality (or to state it differently— "act is *prior* to potency" [*actus est prior potentia*][20]) is true. How is one to defend the truth of the principle of causality?

Consider that when something undergoes change, it receives actuality. It cannot receive such actuality from itself because that would entail the thing being in potency to that actuality insofar as it receives it and at the same time and in the same respect having such actuality insofar as the thing gives the actuality to itself. Therefore, the thing either receives the actuality from something outside itself actualizing its potential (as the causal principle states), or it receives its actuality from nothing, what one might call the "Brute Fact" option.[21] As will be shown below, the "Brute Fact" option does not work because it entails a contradiction, which we cannot accept.

We can start with this principle: whatever actuality is received it is not had in virtue of a thing's own essence. The key here is the idea that to receive actuality is to stand in a relation of potency to that actuality.[22] This is necessarily true since a thing cannot receive that which it already has.[23] But to be in potency to some actuality is to not have that actuality essentially, since nothing

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Deum dicimus, et quod huiusmodi primum ens oportet esse purum actum absque permixtione alicuius potentiae." Some have argued that "primary being" here does not refer to God arrived at in all five ways but rather only the fourth way. See Michael Dodds, *The Unchanging God of Love*, 99. For the view that Aquinas arrives at God as primary being (pure actuality) not just in the Fourth Way, see John Knasas, *Thomistic Existentialism & Cosmological Reasoning* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2019); David Tweeten, "Clearing a 'Way' for Aquinas: How the Proof from Motion Concludes to God, *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 70 (1996):259-278.

[18] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, qu.9, art. 1 (emphasis added): "[Q]uod huiusmodi primum ens oportet esse purum actum absque permixtione alicuius potentiae, eo quod *potentia simpliciter est posterior actu*." Cf. Qingyun CAO, "Aristotle's Concept of Potentiality in 'Metaphysics' Book θ," *Frontiers of Philosophy in China* 7, no. 4 (2012): 550-571.

[19] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 3, art. 1: "[Q]uia quod est in potentia, non reducitur in actum nisi per ens actu." In this article, Aquinas identifies this premise as the premise upon which he bases his conclusion that potentiality is posterior to act. He does this as well in *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 3, art. 1. Aquinas also articulates this principle in his *De Principiis Naturae* (Rome: Leonine, 1992), Cap. 3. For reference to this principle as the "principle of causality," see Feser, *Scholastic Metaphysics*, 105-108; Garrigou Lagrange, *Christ the Savior,* in *Garrigou-Lagrange O.P. Collection 16 Books* (Aeterna Press, 2016), Chap. 11, Kindle Edition.

[20] Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 1, Cap. 16; Cf. *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 3, art. 1; Ia, qu. 82, art. 3 ad 2; *De Malo,* qu. 2, art. 4, arg. 12; Aquinas, *In VIII Physic.,* Cap. 14.

[21]Aquinas offers a defense of this principle in *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Lib. 1, Cap. 16. In reference to that which is reduced from potentiality to actuality in motion, he writes, "Now it does not reduce itself from potentiality to actuality, because that which is potential is not yet, wherefore neither can it act" ("Non autem educit se de potentia in actum: quia quod est potentia, nondum est; unde nec agere potest"). Here Aquinas assumes there are only two options: either the reduction from potentiality to actuality is due to the thing itself or it is due to a cause outside itself. He does not consider the option of whether it is due to nothing. It is my opinion that the nothing option must be proven false for the principle of causality to be fully defended. For this reason, I present what follows as an argument for this principle. What I have called here the principle of causality is expressed differently by Aquinas in other places. "Omne enim quod alicui convenit non secundum quod ipsum est, per aliquam causam convenit ei." Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 2, Cap. 15. See also Aquinas, *De Ente Et Essentia* (Baur, 1933)*,* Cap. 4.

[22] See Aquinas, *De Ente,* Cap. 4 (emphasis mine): "Omne autem quod recipit aliquid ab alio est *in potentia respectu illius*, et hoc quod receptum est in eo est actus eius."; Cf. *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, qu. 107, art. 3; IaIIae, qu. 22, art. 1; *Suppl.* qu. 70, art. 3 obj 4. See also John Wippel, "Thomas Aquinas and the Axiom That Unreceived Act is Unlimited," *The Review of Metaphysics* 51, no. 3 (1998): 533-564, 537.

[23] I reserve my defense of this claim for the material below.

can be in potency to what it has in virtue of its own essence. For example, a triangle cannot be in potency to having three straight sides because having three straight sides is what it means to be a triangle. Similarly, a human being cannot be in potency to having rationality because having rationality is essential to what it means to be a human being. Therefore, whatever actuality a thing receives such actuality is not had in virtue of the thing's own essence.[24] In other words, there is a real distinction between the thing's essence and the actuality received.

Now, on supposition that such received actuality came from nothing extrinsic to it, such actuality would be dependent on nothing *whatsoever*—nothing intrinsic or extrinsic. It would not be dependent on the thing itself as its efficient cause because, as shown above, a thing cannot give itself actuality as an efficient cause lest we end up in a contradiction. Nor would this received actuality be dependent on an extrinsic cause, since the supposition is that it is received from nothing.

Here is where a key step in the argument comes to light: If the actuality of a being is not dependent on anything *whatsoever*—neither its own essence (as an efficient cause) or an extrinsic cause—and yet has the received actuality, then such a being must be *identical* to such actuality. Consider that if a being were dependent on something to have its actuality, whether its own essence or some extrinsic cause, it would stand in a relation to its actuality as one of potency to act. As Aquinas writes, "[E]verything which receives something from another is in potency with respect to that thing."[25] Dependency and potency are logically tied up with one another. This being the case, to say that a being is *not* dependent on anything to have its actuality

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[24] The idea of received actuality, and its distinction from the thing that receives it, can also be analyzed through the Thomistic notion of *participation.* For Aquinas, whatever receives actuality is not that actuality according to its total power. See Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Lib. 1, Cap. 43: "Omnis actus alteri inhaerens terminationem recipit ex eo in quo est: quia quod est in altero, est in eo per modum recipientis. Actus igitur in nullo existens nullo terminator." For a detailed survey of the principle of received act not being found according to its total power in the corpus of Aquinas's writings, see Wippel, "Thomas Aquinas and the Axiom That Unreceived Act is Unlimited," 118, 128-130, 173, 306-309; W. Norris Clarke, "The Limitation of Act by Potency: Aristotelianism or Neoplatonism, *The New Scholasticism* 26, no. 2 (1952): 167-194; "The Meaning of Participation in St. Thomas," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 26 (1952): 147-157. For a view that denies Aquinas held to this principle, see Rudi teVelde, *Participation and Substantiality in Aquinas* (Boston, MA: Brill, 1995), 151-154. For Wippel's response to teVelde, see his *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas: From Finite Being to Uncreated Being* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press*,* 2000), 128 (note 92) and 129-130. Furthermore, Aquinas teaches that whatever receives actuality, and thus is not that actuality according to its total power, is said to *participate* in actuality rather than be identical to actuality itself. Aquinas articulates the principle that undergirds this line of reasoning in his commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. He writes, "Quod enim totaliter est aliquid, non participat illud, sed est per essentiam idem illi. Quod vero non totaliter est aliquid habens aliquid aliud adiunctum, proprie participare dicitur." Thomas Aquinas, *Sententia libri Metaphysicae* (Turin: Marietti, 1950), Liber I, Lect. 10. The Italian Thomist Cornelio Fabro provides commentary specifically on this line of reasoning in his *La nozione metafisica di partecipazione secondo S. Tommaso d'Aquino,* II edizione (Torino: Societa Editrice Internazionale, 1949), 316-317. See also Cornelio Fabro, *Participation et Causalité Selone S. Thomas D'Aquin* (Louvain: Universitaires De Louvain and Paris: Béatrice-Nauwelaerts, 1961). Another exhaustive treatment of Aquinas's teaching on participation is L. B. Geiger, *La Participation Dans La Philosophie de S. Thomas d'Aquin* (Parish: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1942). For a more condensed but deep treatment on Aquinas's notion of participation, and a summary of the contributions made by Fabro and Geiger to interpreting Aquinas's teaching on participation, see Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 94-131. For a brief summary of Aquinas's theory of participation and its Neoplatonic roots, see Clarke, "The Meaning of Participation in St. Thomas." Given that a thing participates in its actuality, so Aquinas reasons, the thing must be really distinct from its actuality because whatever participates is really distinct from that in which it participates.

[25] Aquinas, *De Ente* Cap. 4: "Omne autem quod recipit aliquid ab alio est in potentia respectu illius." Cf. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 149, 150.

is to say that such an entity does *not* stand in a relation to its actuality as one of potency to act. Eliminate dependency and potency goes with it.

Now, the elimination of potency in the relation of a being to its actuality can mean only one thing: the being would be *fully* actual with respect to the actuality under consideration, in which case such an entity just would be its actuality. To eliminate the distinction between potency and act is to end up with act. Therefore, if a being is not dependent on anything to have its actuality and yet has actuality, then such an entity must be identical to its actuality.

The inherent contradiction of the "Brute Fact" option now comes to light. Recall, wherever there is received actuality there is a real distinction between the thing's essence and the received actuality. This means that such an entity is not identical to its actuality. Yet, the "Brute Fact" option asserts that this changed being is not dependent on any cause whatsoever, not itself or an extrinsic cause. But as was shown above, this is tantamount to saying such a being does not stand in a relation to its actuality as one of potency to act, which in turn means such a being is identical to its actuality. So, the "Brute Fact" option is nothing more than the affirmation of a contradiction: the being is not identical to its actuality (insofar as its essence is distinct from its actuality) and identical to its actuality (insofar as it is not dependent on anything to have its actuality) at the same time and in the same respect. Since the "Brute Fact" option entails a contradiction, we must reject the "Brute Fact" option as a viable option to account for why a being has its actuality when it does not have its actuality in virtue of its own essence. It cannot be that *nothing* accounts for it. Therefore, we can affirm the Thomistic principle that whatever actuality is received it is received from a cause outside itself, or as Aquinas puts it, "That which is in potency is not brought into act except through a being in act."[26]

Based on this principle, God "must be pure act" insofar as he is the "primary being."[27] God, as the primary being that is the cause of all else that is, cannot have any aspect of his being that is posterior to anything because if that were true there would be some prior actuality that his own actuality would depend upon (per Aquinas's principle that potentiality is necessarily posterior to actuality), thus making him the uncaused cause that is caused, which is absurd. Therefore, God has no potentiality, in which case he is pure actuality.[28]

So how does one get from God's being pure actuality to God being unchangeable? The answer lies in something that we have already seen about the nature of change, viz that it involves potency. As Aquinas writes, "[E]verything that is changed in whatever manner is in some way in potency."[29] Consider, for example, a piece of wood that becomes hot.[30] For the

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[26] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 3, art. 1: "[Q]uia quod est in potentia, non reducitur in actum nisi per ens actu."

[27] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 9, art. 3. Cf. Ia, qu. 2, art. 3.

[28] Aquinas not only reasons to God as pure actuality based on the posteriority of potency to act. He also reasons to God as pure actuality based on the idea that "everything which is *per aliud* is reduced to that which is *per se*" ("Et quia omne quod est per aliud reducitur ad id quod est per se sicut ad causam primam"). Aquinas, *De Ente,* Cap. 4. As shown above, whenever something undergoes change it necessarily receives actuality from a cause outside itself—i.e., from another (*per aliud).* Given Aquinas's principle, the *per aliud* actuality must have its origin in that which is *per se* actuality, which simply means pure actuality that subsists. For a book length treatment on the *per aliud/per se* principle and its relation to God, see Dennis Bonnette, *Aquinas's Proofs for God's Existence: St. Thomas Aquinas on: "The Per Accidens Necessarily Implies the Per Se"* (Martinus Nijhoff: The Hague, 1972). See also Gaven Kerr, *Aquinas's Way to God: The Proof in De Ente Essentia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 121-149.

[29] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia., qu. 9, art. 1: "Omne autem quod quocumque modo mutatur, est aliquo modo in potentia." See also Aquinas, *De Principiis Naturae*, Cap. 1; Aquinas, *III Phys.,* Cap. 3; Lib. 7, Cap.1.

[30] Aquinas uses this example to exemplify change, or motion, in the First Way of his proofs for God's existence. See *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, qu. 2., art. 3.

wood to take on the accidental form of heat, it cannot already have the form of heat since a thing cannot acquire that which it already has (as mentioned above). Aquinas, following Aristotle, calls this lack of form "privation (*privatio*)" or "non-being in act" (*non esse actu*)."[31] Such privation is essential to all change.

Now, the wood, when not actually hot, not only lacks the form of heat but also has a *potential* to receive such an accidental form. For example, it is correct to say that the wood is not a dog and that the wood is not hot. But the privation (is *not*-ness) in each case is different. The wood has no potential whatsoever to become a dog given its nature as wood. But it does have potential to take on the form of heat. The difference between the two is that being a dog relative to the wood is a contradiction (to be a dog is not to be wood and to be wood is not to be a dog), whereas being hot relative to the non-hot wood is an opposite or a contrary (the wood can be hot or not hot and still be wood). So, when the wood takes on the form of heat and change occurs, something comes from what is not—no heat—but not in the sense of coming into being from sheer nothingness, since the wood had the potency to receive the form of heat.

To deny this principle would entail a contradiction. If a piece of wood were to become hot when it was already actually hot, then it would have been in potency to the form of heat insofar as it comes to receive heat and not in potency to the form of heat insofar as it was already hot. This would be tantamount to saying that the piece of wood is hot and not hot at the same time and in the same respect, which is a violation of the principle of non-contradiction. Therefore, the piece of wood becomes hot if and only if it initially lacked the form of heat with a potential to receive such a form and then such potential is reduced to a state of actuality such that the wood becomes actually hot. Hence Aquinas's statement, "Motion [change] is nothing other than to draw forth something from potency into act."[32]

Potentiality is also involved when the wood changes from a state of being hot to a state of not being hot, or at least being at a lower temperature. The wood can only lose its state of hotness if it has an inherent potency to lose it and receive a different form. If its state of hotness were essential to what it was, then it would be purely actual with respect to its hotness. Furthermore, the wood can only acquire a lower temperature if it lacks that temperature, and thus stands in a relation of potentiality to that lower temperature. So, change necessarily involves potentiality.

We are now able to make our conclusion with Aquinas that "it is impossible for God to change in whatever manner."[33] The reasoning is as follows:

Premise 1:	If a thing changes or is subject to change, it has potentiality.
Premise 2:	God has no potentiality.
Conclusion:	Therefore, God does not change nor is he subject to change.

The form of the argument is valid. Premise one was proven true above by showing how its denial results in a contradiction, thus rooting its truth-value in a first principle of being: the principle of non-contradiction. Premise two was also proven true by showing how its denial results in a

[31] Aquinas, *De Principiis Naturae,* Cap. 1. See also *In I Phys.,* Lect. 13. Cf. Aristotle, *Physics* I, Chap. 8, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle,* Vol. 1, ed. Jonathan Barnes (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984). For a general summary of Aquinas's teaching on the necessity of privation for change, along with the two other principles—form and matter, see Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 297-198.

[32] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, qu. 2., art. 3: [M]overe enim nihil aliud est quam educere aliquid de potentia in actum."; Cf. Ia, qu. 61, art. 1 ad 2; Ia, qu. 75; art. 1 ad 1; *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Lib. 1, Cap. 16.

[33] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, qu. 9, art. 1. "impossibile est Deum aliquo modo mutari."

contradiction, for God to have potentiality would entail him being the uncaused cause that is caused.[34] Given that both premises are reducible to first principles, they must be true. With true premises and valid form, the conclusion that God does not change must be true.

I.B.
An Argument from Divine Simplicity

The second argument that Aquinas gives for divine immutability in Ia, qu. 9, art. 1 is from divine simplicity, a doctrine that states God's being is not composed in any way whatsoever. Aquinas argues for this doctrine at great length (eight articles) in question three of the *prima pars*. There are five ways in which something can possibly be composed in its being: matter-form, supposit-nature, essence-existence, species-genus, substance-accidents. Aquinas addresses each

[34] I am assuming for the sake of this thesis that Aquinas's has successfully demonstrated that God is the primary being in his five ways explained in *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, qu. 2, art. 3.

form of composition individually and shows why they each cannot apply to God.[35] There is a more fundamental way, however, in showing why they cannot be applied to God.[36]

Each form of composition—regardless of which kind it is—necessarily involves potentiality.[37] Consider that whatever is composite is *posterior to* the component parts. [38] This means the whole stands to the parts as potentiality to actuality. Recall from above, actuality is prior to potentiality. Also, whatever is composite is caused, which relates the composed entity to its

[35] God cannot be composed of matter and form because matter stands in a relation of potentiality to form. Since God has no potentiality, He cannot be composed of matter and form. See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 3, arts. 1-2. Cf. Ia, qu. 66, art. 2; *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Lib. 2, Cap. 89. God cannot be composed of supposit and nature because a distinction between supposit and nature is only for beings who have something qua individual that does not belong to the *ratio* of its essence but is added thereto. Since in God there is *absolutely nothing* in Him qua individual that is not also in his essence—no accidents, no individual matter, not even *esse*, since he is subsistent being itself, it follows that in God supposit and nature are not distinct but identical. See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 3, art. 3. In this article, Aquinas's explicit language suggests that he thinks supposit and nature are identical in God *because* God is not composed of matter and form, as if only those things composed of matter and form have a real distinction between supposit and nature. Aquinas writes, "Et sic, cum Deus non sit compositus ex materia et forma, ut ostensum est, oportet quod Deus sit sua deitas." But one may argue that his conclusion, "oportet quod Deus sit sua deitas," is based on the more fundamental principle that states supposit and nature are distinct in things where the individual has more in it qua individual than is found in the ratio of its essence. This is supported by Aquinas's own reasoning in the article under consideration. After Aquinas establishes that "[I]n eo quod est homo, includuntur, unde id quod est homo, habet in se aliquid quod non habet humanitas," he concludes based on this premise, "Et propter hoc non est totaliter idem homo et humanitas." One would expect this to be the form of reasoning Aquinas would intend to use when arguing for God to be identical to his nature. Further evidence for this view is found in Aquinas's *Quaestiones De Quolibet* (Turin: Marietti, 1956), II, qu. 2, art. 2, where he argues that supposit and nature are not identical in angels, beings which are not composites of matter and form. His reason for this conclusion is that there is something constitutive of the angel qua individual that does not belong to the ratio of its essence—namely its *esse*. As such, in angels supposit and nature are distinct. For further details on this passage from *Quodlibet* II, and this line of reasoning found elsewhere in Aquinas's writings, see Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas,* 244-246. If this is the path that Aquinas intends to take in *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 3, art. 3, then in God there would be identity between supposit and nature because there is absolutely *nothing* in God qua individual that is not also in his essence—no accidents, no individual matter, not even *esse*. This is because God's *esse* is his essence (see Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, qu. 3, art. 4). For evidence that Aquinas, earlier in his career, seemingly held a contrary view, namely, that nature and supposit are identical in angels along with God, see Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 238-243. For a discussion on a possible reconciliation of the apparently opposing views, see Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas,* 247-253.God cannot be composed in any of the remaining three ways because each one involves a mixture of potentiality and actuality. In things whose essence is distinct from its existence (and thus have to receive their existence) essence stands in a relation of potentiality to existence. See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 3, art. 4. Cf. Aquinas, *De Ente,* Cap. 4. Differences in things that constitute their species relate to that which constitutes the genus as actuality to potentiality. See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 3, art. 5. Subjects in which accidents inhere are "compared to its accidents as potency to act" (*comparatur ad accidens, sicut potentia ad actum*). Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 3, art. 6. Since God is pure actuality, and all these remaining forms of composition entail potentiality (essence-existence, genus-species, substances-accident), it follows that in God no such composition exists: He is not composed of essence and existence, He is not composed of genus and species, and He is not composed of substance and accident.

[36] See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 3, art. 7

[37] See W. Norris Clarke, *The One and the Many: A Contemporary Thomistic Metaphysics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 157-158.

[38] See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, qu. 3, art. 7; *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. I, Cap. 18; Feser, *Five Proofs,* 69-71; Réginald Garigou-Lagrange, *The One God: A Commentary on the First Part of St. Thomas' Theological Summa,* trans. by Dom. Bede Rose (St. Louis, MO: B. Herder Book, 1943), 191-192; Réginald Garigou-Lagrange, *God, His Existence, and His Nature: A Thomistic Solution of Certain Agnostic Antinomies,* Vol. I, trans. by Dom. Bede Rose (Albany, NY: Preserving Christian Publications, Inc., 1993), 198; Joyce, *Principles of Natural Theology,* Chap. 10; Clarke, *The One and the Many,* 183.

cause as potentiality to actuality because every effect is dependent on its cause.[39] Finally, whatever is composed has some part which is not wholly itself, which, again, makes the whole stand in a relation to that part as potency to act because the whole is dependent on that part.[40] But God, as shown above, is pure actuality with no potentiality. Therefore, God cannot be composed in any way whatsoever.

With divine simplicity in place, the next move is to show how such simplicity excludes mutability. The interpretative key is that whatever is changed, or "moved," necessarily is composed.[41] The principle that grounds this is that "everything which is moved [changed] in some respect remains the same and in some respect passes away."[42] Consider, for example, a leaf on a tree the color of which changes from being green to brown.[43] The leaf insofar as it is a leaf does not change. In other words, it is still a leaf, which means it remains the same as to its *substance*. If after the change the leaf had changed with respect to every aspect of its being that constitutes it as a leaf (its substantial being), then the entity after the change would have been something entirely different, in which case the leaf would not have changed but rather would have substantially corrupted and its remaining matter would have been informed by something else.[44] The leaf, however, does change with regard to its color, which is an *accidental* feature. For the leaf to change with respect to one aspect of its being—its accidental features—but not another aspect of its being—its substance—necessarily means it is composed of parts: substance and accident.

Even more fundamentally, however, to have one part remain the same and another pass away entails an admixture, or composition, of act and potency.[45] The thing would be in act insofar as it exists as an instantiation of its kind (what it is)—that part of its being that would remain the same through the change. But it would be in potency insofar as it is able to lose that aspect of its being that would pass away in the change (or gain some new actuality), thus making a real difference to the thing.

Potency also would be mixed with actuality in the thing if the thing were subject to *substantial* change, a change that does *not* involve the thing remaining the same through the change but becoming something entirely different. The leaf, for example, would be in act insofar as it exists yet would have a potency to go out of existence insofar as it will eventually corrupt and become dirt. To have an admixture of actuality and potentiality is to have *composition* of act and

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[39] See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, qu. 9, art. 1; Lagrange, *The One God*, 192. Joyce, *Principles of Natural Theology,* Chap. 3; Clarke, *The One and the Many,* 183.

[40] See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, qu. 3, art. 5, 7; Anselm, *Proslogion,* Cap. XVIII, in *Proslogium, Monologium; an appendix, In behalf of the fool, by Gaunilon; and Cur Deus homo,* trans. by Sidney Norton Deane (Aeterna Press, 2015); *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* "St. Anselm," accessed March 12, 2022, https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/anselm/.

[41] See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, qu. 9, art. 1; Feser, *Scholastic Metaphysics,* 171-174; Clarke, *The One and the Many,* 119.

[42] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 9, art. 1: "*[O]mne quod movetur, quantum ad aliquid manet*, *et quantum ad aliquid transit*, sicut quod movetur de albedine in nigredinem, manet secundum substantiam. Et sic in omni eo quod movetur, attenditur aliqua compositio" (emphasis added). See also Leftow, "Immutabiliity."

[43] In *Summa Theoogiae*, Ia, qu. 9, art. 1, Aquinas uses the example of a thing being moved from whiteness to blackness. In *Commentaria in octo libros Physicorum,* he uses the example of a man remaining the same through the change of becoming musical—Lib. 1, Lec. 12. Although these examples are representative of an accidental change where secondary matter changes and the substance remains the same, the principle also applies for substantial change since primary matter remains through the change while the substance does not. See Feser, *Scholastic Metaphysics,* 171-174.

[44] See Leftow, "Immutability."

[45] See Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas,* 306.

potency. Since being subject to change entails an admixture of actuality and potentiality, it follows that whatever is subject to substantial change is composed of act and potency.

Now, it has already been proven that there is no composition in God with regard to metaphysical parts: matter-form, supposit-nature, essence-existence, species-genus, substance-accidents. There can be no composition in God also with regard to act and potency, since, as we have proven above, God is pure actuality. From here, the inference to God as unchangeable is simple. If change necessarily entails composition—whether it is composition of metaphysical parts (like substance and accidents) or composition of act and potency, and there is no composition in God—whether by way of metaphysical principles or by way of act and potency, then, as Aquinas concludes, "it is clear that God cannot be moved [changed]."[46] We can formalize this reasoning as follows:

Premise 1:	If a thing undergoes change, it is composed.
Premise 2:	God is not composed.
Conclusion:	Therefore, God does not undergo change.

Given that the premises are true (as shown above) and the form is valid, the conclusion necessarily follows and is true.

I.C.
An Argument from Infinite Perfection

The third argument that Aquinas gives for divine immutability proceeds by way of God's infinite perfection, which, for Aquinas, means that God "comprehends in himself all the fullness of perfection of total being."[47] There are two ways that we prove this. The first is by way of establishing why it is that God is taken to be perfect. We can start with the question, "What does it mean to be perfect?" Aquinas can provide some assistance in answering this question. For Aquinas, a thing is perfect in proportion to its state of actuality.[48] For example, an oak tree by nature is ordered to sink roots deep into the ground to provide stability for itself and take in nutrients from the soil. To the extent that an oak tree *actually* does this, it approaches its perfection. To the extent that it lacks in achieving these ends set for it by nature, it is imperfect. As Aquinas states, "it is said the perfect thing is that for which nothing is lacking according to the measure of its perfection."[49]

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[46] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 9, art. 1: "[M]anifestum est quod Deus moveri non potest."

[47] Ibid. (emphasis added): "Deus autem, cum sit infinitus, *comprehendens in se omnem plenitudinem perfectionis totius esse*, non potest aliquid acquirere, nec extendere se in aliquid ad quod prius non pertingebat." Lagrange affirms this line of reasoning in volume two of his *God, His Existence, and His Nature*: "When we say that God is immutable, we do not mean that He is therefore inert. We affirm, on the contrary, that as He is plenitude of being or pure act." Réginald Garigou-Lagrange, *God, His Existence, and His Nature: A Thomistic Solution of Certain Agnostic Antinomies,* Vol. II, trans. by Dom. Bede Rose (Albany, NY: Preserving Christian Publications, Inc., 1993), 171; See also Clarke, *The One and the Many,* 220.

[48] See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 4, art. 1: "Secundum hoc enim dicitur aliquid esse perfectum, secundum quod est actu."; Cf. *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 1, Cap. 43; Feser, *Five Proofs,* 30; Joyce, *Principles of Natural Theology,* Chap. 9.

[49] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, qu. 4, art. 1 (emphasis added): "Secundum hoc enim dicitur aliquid esse perfectum, secundum quod est actu, nam *perfectum dicitur, cui nihil deest secundum modum suae perfectionis*."

Now, God is "maximally in act (*maxime esse in actu*)."[50] This is so because as we proved above potentiality necessarily is posterior to actuality, and God, as "the primary being," or as Aquinas states in Ia, qu. 4, art. 1, "the first active principle" (*primum principium activum*), there can be nothing prior to him. Given Aquinas's principle that a thing is perfect in proportion to its state of actuality, it follows that God is "maximally perfect (*maxime esse perfectum*)" *because* he is "maximally actual (*maxime esse in actu*)."[51] God, therefore, lacks nothing of the mode of his perfection, which is pure actuality. To God belongs the fullness of actuality.

From actuality we can move to being, or *esse*. Consider Aquinas's principle that something is in act only insofar as it has *esse* (the act of being). This is so because, as Aquinas teaches, *esse* is the "the act of all acts" (*actualitas omnium actuum*).[52] There is no actuality without *esse*. It follows, therefore, that if God is most perfect with regard to actuality itself, lacking nothing that belongs to the fullness of actuality, then it follows that he is most perfect with regard to being itself (*ipsum esse*), lacking nothing that belongs to the fullness of being.[53] This is just another way of saying that in God exists "all the fullness of perfection of total being."[54]

The second way to prove that God "comprehends in Himself all the fullness of perfection of total being" is by unpacking God's infinity.[55] We can start with the principle that whatever is finite is received by (or determined to) another.[56] Consider Aquinas's example of the form of whiteness. Whenever we come across a particular white thing we realize that the form of whiteness is not found according to its fullness or plenitude. Rather, it is limited and does not have whatever is possible to have of the perfection of whiteness because it is *this* white thing and not *that* white thing. It is circumscribed to or limited by a *particular* way of being white, which means it is finite.

We are able to make this judgment about the finitude of whiteness because the form of whiteness considered in itself contains "nothing but the notion of and the power of whiteness."[57] If there were such a thing as subsistent whiteness—a whiteness that is per se existent and not received by any particular thing, it would be whiteness according to the "total power of

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[50] Ibid.

[51] *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, qu. 4, art. 1.

[52] Aquinas, *De Potentia,* qu. 7, art. 2, ad 9: "Hoc quod dico esse est actualitas omnium actuum, et propter hoc est perfectio omnium perfectionem." See also *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 3, art. 4. For further reading on Aquinas's view of *esse* as the act of all acts, see Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 174; Joseph Owens, *An Interpretation of Existence* (Houston TX: Center for Thomistic Studies, 1985), 52-53, 79; *An Elementary Christian Metaphysics* (Houston TX: Center for Thomistic Studies, 1985), 60-67, 74; Gaven Kerr, "Thomist *Esse* and Analytical Philosophy," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 55, no. 1 (2015):25-48.

[53] See *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Lib. 1, Cap. 28. Aquinas employs a similar line of reasoning in *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, qu. 4, art. 2 where he argues that God lacks nothing of the perfection of being because he is "ipsum esse subsistens" ("subsistent being itself"). See also Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas,* 173, 493.

[54] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, qu. 9, art. 1 (emphasis added): "Deus autem, cum sit infinitus, *comprehendens in se omnem plenitudinem perfectionis totius esse*, non potest aliquid acquirere, nec extendere se in aliquid ad quod prius non pertingebat."

[55] Ibid.: "comprehendens in se omnem plenitudinem perfectionis totius esse." See also Lagrange, *God, His Existence and Nature,* Vol. II, 47-48; Joyce, *Principles of Natural Theology,* Chap. 10.

[56] See Clarke, *The One and the Many,* 220. This principle is similar to the one we discussed above in Section I.A. concerning received actuality not being self-subsistent.

[57] Wippel, "Thomas Aquinas and the Axiom That Unreceived Act is Unlimited," 563.

whiteness" (*totum posse albedinis*).[58] In other words, it would "not be limited from having whatever is able to have of the perfection of whiteness."[59] This is just another way of saying that whiteness not received is infinite. So, wherever whiteness is received into a particular thing it is limited or finite.

Similarly, for any particular thing that exists we see that *esse* is not found according to its "total power" (*totam potestatem*) or plenitude.[60] Being is only found according to *this* mode of being (e.g., a tree) or *that* mode of being (e.g., a bird).[61] It is circumscribed and thus limited or finite. The reason for this judgment is that the notion of *esse* (being) considered in itself contains nothing but the notion of and the power of being.[62] In itself *esse* is not determined to any *one* thing.[63] As Aquinas writes, "[I]t is infinite and is possible to be participated in an infinite number of ways."[64] As such, *esse* considered absolutely without being received by a particular thing has the note infinity.[65] Only when it is received is it found to be finite.[66]

Now, God is "subsistent being" itself, which means he is not received in (or determined to) any subject. Since to not be received in (or determined to) any subject is to be infinite, it follows that God is "infinite."[67]

It follows from this view of infinitude that the divine being must entail the entirety of the perfection of being. Consider what we said above: finite being entails a determination or limitation of being. If being is limited or determined to one mode of excellence rather than some other, then it necessarily follows that whatever has that mode of being does not have being according to its "total power" (*totam virtutem*).[68] Since God is *not* determined to one mode of excellence rather than some other, then his mode of being is being according to the "total power of being itself" (*totam virtutem ipsius esse*), which means he contains within himself the whole perfection of being.[69]

The question now is how to get from God's infinite perfection to his immutability. The answer is that whatever undergoes change necessarily does not possess being according to the total

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[58] Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Lib. 1, Cap. 28: "[S]icut, si esset aliqua albedo separata, nihil ei de virtute albedinis deesse posset; nam alicui albo aliquid de virtute albedinis deest ex defectu recipientis albedinem, quae eam secundum modum suum recipit, et fortasse non secundum totum posse albedinis."; Cf. Lib. 1, Cap. 43.

[59] Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* Lib. 1, Cap. 43: "[S]i albedo esset per se existens, perfectio albedinis in ea non terminaretur, quominus haberet quicquid de perfectione albedinis haberi potest."

[60] Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* Lib. 1, Cap. 28: "[N]am res secundum quod suum esse contrahitur ad aliquem specialem modum nobilitatis maiorem vel minorem, dicitur esse secundum hoc nobilior vel minus nobilis. Igitur si aliquid est cui competit tota virtus essendi, ei nulla nobilitatum deesse potest quae alicui rei conveniat. Sed rei quae est suum esse, competit esse secundum totam essendi potestatem." See also Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas,* 175.

[61] See Clarke, *The One and the Many,* 89.

[62] See Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Lib. 1, Cap.43; Cf. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas,* 174.

[63] See Aquinas, *In I Sent.,* dist. 43, qu. 1, art. 1; dist. 8, qu. 2, art. 1; dist. 8, qu. 5, art. 1 sed contra; *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Lib. I, Cap. 43; *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 7, art. 1; *Compendium Theologiae* (Turin: Marietti, 1954)*,* Lib. 1, Cap. 18. See also Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas,* 128.

[64] Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Lib. 1, Cap. 43: "Ipsum esse absolute consideratum infinitum est: nam ab infinitis et infinitis modis participari possibile est."

[65] See Ibid.

[66] See Wippel, "Thomas Aquinas and the Axiom That Unreceived Act Is Unlimited."; *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas,* 128-130.

[67] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, qu. 7, art. 1. Cf. Wippel, "Thomas Aquinas and the Axiom That Unreceived Act is Unlimited"; *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas,* 128-130.

[68] Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 1, Cap. 28.

[69] Ibid.

power of being. Recall how Aquinas defines change: "We say to be moved [changed] is said to be ordered in a way different now than before."[70] This is necessarily true, since, as we proved above, to say that something acquires a new aspect of being that it already has entails a contradiction. Recall the example of the hot piece of wood. If one were to argue that the piece of wood acquires the form of heat (an aspect of being) even though it already has heat, then one would be saying that the wood is in actuality with respect to hotness insofar as it already has heat and not in actuality with respect to hotness insofar as it acquires the actuality of heat, which means it would be hot and not hot at the same time and in the same respect. Since this conclusion entails a contradiction, it is necessarily true that whatever undergoes change acquires some aspect of being that it did not yet have.

Now, to lack some aspect of being is not to have being according to the total power of being, which is just another way of saying that something is not infinitely perfect. But God *must* have being according to the total power of being given that he is "subsistent being itself." Since whatever is changed entails not having being according to the total power of being, it follows that God cannot change. We might summarize our reasoning as follows:

Premise One:	Whatever is changed does not have being according to the total power of being.
Premise Two:	God has being according to the total power of being.
Conclusion:	Therefore, God cannot change.

In light of the above three arguments, it becomes evident that to affirm mutability within God—whether in factuality or possibility—entails a contradiction. To say God (pure actuality) is subject to change is tantamount to saying that God is pure actuality and not pure actuality at the same time and in the same respect. In the first argument, we made this explicit by showing that the very notion of change itself necessarily involves potentiality. In the argument from divine simplicity, potentiality is seen to be involved with change because whatever changes is composed, and such composition metaphysically entails potentiality. That change involves potentiality is also seen in the argument from divine perfection. As we saw, whatever undergoes change does not have being according to its "total power" (*tota virtu*s).[71] But to not have being according to its total power means such a thing is in potency to some aspect of the perfection of being that it does not have.

Given that all three arguments show that change involves potentiality, to say that God is subject to change is to say that God, the purely actual being, is not purely actual, which is a contradiction. Since whatever entails a contradiction cannot be true, and mutability within God entails a contradiction, it is not true that God is mutable—that is to say, God must be immutable.

II.
Divine Immutability and Counterfactual Difference

One might think that with the above three metaphysical arguments in hand, there is no more need for discussion concerning Aquinas's view of divine immutability. But as pointed out in the beginning of this chapter, it is necessary to consider whether these arguments provide grounds

[70] Ibid., Lib. 1, Cap. 83: "[M]overi dicimus quod aliter se habet nunc et prius."
[71] Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 1, Cap. 28.

for the view that God would be entitatively (intrinsically) the same if he were to have created differently, what I called above the *strong* view of divine immutability. This is contrasted with a *weak* view of divine immutability, which, as mentioned above, suggests that Aquinas's view only entails that God not undergo intrinsic change *over time*, and thus the doctrine only requires that God remain entitatively (intrinsically) the same relative to *this* created order.[72]

Timothy Pawl is one philosopher who seems to interpret Aquinas's view of divine immutability in this way. He writes, "Difference across possible worlds does not entail difference across times."[73] For Pawl, the only thing that Aquinas's view of immutability rules out is "difference across times," and thus he concludes "divine immutability is not inconsistent with counterfactual difference."[74] This does not mean that Pawl thinks God *in fact* would be entitatively different if he were to have created differently. He just thinks it is the doctrine of divine simplicity—the idea "that God is uniquely metaphysically simple"—rather than the doctrine of divine immutability that excludes God from being entitatively different if he were to have created differently or not created at all.

Perhaps the most notable philosophers who concur with Pawl that Aquinas's view of divine immutability *does not* entail a strong view of divine immutability is Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann. In their 1985 paper, "Divine Simplicity," they set out to argue that God's necessary existence does not entail a logical necessity to create. For Stump and Kretzmann, "God's willing to create is necessary, but only conditionally."[75] This means that although we can say "it might have been the case that God willed not to create" (God's willing to create is not logically necessitated) we cannot accurately say that "God could have willed not to create" or that "it is not possible that not willing to create ever be correctly ascribed to him."[76] Notice how this view of immutability as stated applies merely to *this* created order: given that God wills to create, he cannot change his will and not create. In other words, God cannot be different relative to *this* world, or as Stump and Kretzmann describe it, "an initial world-state."[77] This view does *not* exclude God's being different relative to different created orders or the non-existence thereof—different initial world-states.

Stump and Kretzmann recognize this. But they do not seem to suggest that it is due to Aquinas's view of conditional necessity being a limited or restricted view of immutability. Rather, they seem to suggest that Aquinas's view on conditional necessity *exhausts* Aquinas's position on God's immutability, which allows for God to be contingent with respect to a different created order or "initial world-state." As Stump and Kretzmann put it, "According to this account, one we think is faithful to the spirit of Aquinas's position on these issues [God's not being able to change his will], God is not the same in all possible worlds."[78] Stump and Kretzmann further state their position:

> When Thomas maintains that there is only necessity in God, and that whatever is true of him is essentially true of him, we take him to mean the following: Within any initial-state set of possible worlds God's nature is fully and immutably determinate, and it is so as a

[72] See note #21 of the Introduction.

[73] Pawl, "Divine Immutability." See also Stump, *Aquinas,* 111-113.

[74] Pawl, "Divine Immutability."

[75] Stump and Kretzmann, "Divine Simplicity," 369.

[76] Ibid.

[77] Ibid. Stump and Kretzmann describes God's immutability within an initial world-state as excluding God being different in terms of "branching time-lines emanating from a single possible initial world-state."

[78] Ibid.

> consequence of the single, timeless act of will in which God wills goodness (himself) and whatever else (if anything) he wills for the sake of goodness in that initial-state set.[79]

Notice the assertion that God's nature is "fully and immutably determinate" *only* with reference to an "initial-state set." This means that God is only necessary (not contingent) with respect to "possible worlds consisting of the branching time-lines emanating from a single possible initial world-state—an initial-state set."[80]

Based on what Stump and Kretzmann argue, it would seem they are denying what I have labeled in this thesis the *strong* view of divine immutability—that God must remain entitatively the same if he were to have created differently.[81] Some philosophers have interpreted them as such.[82] However, there is evidence that perhaps Stump and Kretzmann are only saying God would be different by way of extrinsic denomination, and thus, to use the label mentioned above, would only undergo "extrinsic change." Stump and Kretzmann write,

> Even if we should go so far as to say that with regard to some but not all of its objects God's will itself might have been different from what it is, this counterfactual claim shows us again only a logical distinction and not a metaphysical difference within the divine will itself; for even with regard to the objects of the will which might have been other than they are, there is no mutability in the will.[83]

Here they seem to affirm that there would be no "intrinsic change" in God if the divine will were to have different created objects, or a collection of those objects in a different created order (something extrinsic to God).

Stump and Kretzmann seem to drive a deeper wedge between what is within God and what is extrinsic and push contingency to that which is extrinsic:

> [T]he logical distinction between conditionally and absolutely necessitated aspects of the divine will does not reflect a metaphysical difference in which one part of the divine will is more mutable or less ineluctable than another. What the logical distinction does pick out is solely a difference in the ways in which the single immutable act of divine will is related to the divine nature and to other things. But the mere fact that one thing is related in different ways to different things does not entail that it has distinct intrinsic properties, only distinct Cambridge properties. The difference between the relationship of the divine will to the divine nature and the relationship of the divine will to creatures stems not from a metaphysical difference in the divine will itself but from metaphysical differences among the diverse objects of that will.[84]

Notice Stump and Kretzmann explicitly state that the logical distinction between God's willing himself and willing creatures does not entail "distinct intrinsic properties." Rather, such a

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[79] Ibid.

[80] Ibid.

[81] Stump repurposes the argument she makes with Kretzmann in her book *Aquinas,* 113.

[82] For authors who interpret Stump and Kretzmann to be saying that God would not be entitatively the same, see Helm, *The Eternal God*; Ross, "Comments on 'Absolute Simplicity'"; Grant, "Aquinas, Divine Simplicity, and Divine freedom," 135; Dolezal, *God Without Parts*, 197-201.

[83] Stump and Kretzmann, "Absolute Simplicity," 372.

[84] Ibid.

distinction only entails "distinct Cambridge properties." By "Cambridge properties" Stump and Kretzmann seem to mean what Thomists traditionally have called a relation of reason, a relation where there is no foundation in either one or both of the relata that make up the relation. I will discuss this in more detail in Chapter 2. Suffice to say, *that* Stump and Kretzmann seem to be saying that only God's "Cambridge properties" differ with different created objects, they seem to be pushing all metaphysical difference to the extrinsic side of the God-creation relation. In other words, whatever change is predicated of God is what we called above an "extrinsic change," also known among philosophers as a "Cambridge change."[85]

It is ambiguous as to which of the above interpretations Stump and Kretzmann intend. If by "God is not the same in all possible worlds" Stump and Kretzmann simply intend to say that God would not be the same insofar as he would be denominated differently with different "Cambridge properties," then they would be excluded from those philosophers who deny Aquinas's view as entailing the strong view of divine immutability. If, on the other hand, they do intend to suggest that Aquinas's view allows for God to be intrinsically different if he were to have created differently, then they would serve as a target for what follows in this chapter. Regardless, I will now respond to the claim that Aquinas's view of divine immutability does not exclude God being entitatively the same if he were to have created differently.[86]

III.
A Defense of the Strong View of Divine Immutability

At the beginning of this chapter, I quoted Aquinas's definition of change from his *Summa Contra Gentiles*: "We say to be moved [changed] is said to be ordered in a way different now than before."[87] It is true that this definition entails a note of temporality: "different *now* than *before*" (*aliter se habet nunc et prius*). Given this note of temporality, it is easy to see how one might be inclined to think that Aquinas's denial of change in God applies only to change across time. But the temporal note of the above definition is not what is at issue for Aquinas: it is the *difference* note. Aquinas's doctrine of divine immutability, therefore, does not apply only to God's being across time. It *also* applies to God's being in relation to counterfactual differences.

My defense of the strong view of divine immutability will proceed in two steps. First, I will articulate the viable ways in virtue of which God *could* be different within himself (Section III.A). Second, I will argue why the metaphysics upon which the Thomistic doctrine of divine immutability rests excludes the application of any such ways of differentiation within God (Section III.B).

III.A.
Accounting for Counterfactual Difference

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[85] See the references in note 56 of this chapter.

[86] W. Norris Clarke is another philosopher who has contributed to the discussion on divine immutability and counterfactual difference. In his essay, "A New Look at the Immutability of God," he argues that although there would be no difference in "God's own intrinsic real being" if God were to have created differently, there would be "determinate contingent modifications of the field of *intentional* or *cognitive being within God* (or, more accurately, by determinate contingent *differentiation* of his intentional consciousness" (emphasis added). W. Norris Clarke, *Explorations in Metaphysics: Being— God—Person* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 183-210. It is unclear as to whether Clarke takes this to mean that God's difference would be intrinsic or extrinsic. Clarke's view will be explained in more detail in note 43, Chapter 5 of this essay.

[87] Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Lib. 1, Cap. 83: "[M]overi dicimus quod aliter se habet nunc et prius."

We can start with a question that James Dolezal poses in responding to this issue: "What is it about God that is 'not the same' in different possible worlds?'[88] *That* God would have to be not the same is clear, for to deny a lack of sameness is to affirm sameness.[89] Moreover, the lack of sameness would have to be due to something *within* God. Given what was said above concerning God and "Cambridge properties," if the counterfactual difference only entails an extrinsic difference—God having different "Cambridge properties" and thus not being the same relative to creation, then there is no conflict with Aquinas's view of divine immutability. So, the only type of differentiation that is suitable for this counter view is differentiation within God—that is to say, God would be counterfactually not the same within Himself.

This lack of sameness can be one of two types. It will be either what Aquinas, following Aristotle, calls "difference" (*differentiam*) or what he calls "diversity" (*diversitatem*).[90] By "difference," Aquinas means differentiation by some differentiating factor. Concerning things that agree in something, he writes, "[I]t is necessary that there is something to be assigned in them according to which they are different."[91] An added element to what constitutes "difference" is commonality. A differentiating factor is needed because the things compared "agree in something" (*in aliquo convenient*)[92] hence the need that "there is something to be assigned in them according to which they are different."[93] Aquinas uses the example of two things that have the same genus but are distinguished by specific differences.[94]

Aquinas, again, following Aristotle, distinguishes "difference" from what he calls "diversity" (*diversitatem*). Diversity, for Aquinas, is differentiation in virtue of two things being distinct from each other "absolutely" (*absolute*).[95] He gives the example of rationality and irrationality. Unlike man and horse, which are common insofar as they are animal but distinguished in virtue of their specific difference, rationality and irrationality "do not differ more from each other by any other differences."[96] In the words of Aquinas, rational and irrational would be "diverse of themselves" (*diversa seipsis*).[97] They are "absolutely distinct" (*diversum absolute*).[98] There is nothing about them that is common and therefore there is no need to look for some factor in them to differentiate one from the other.

If God, counterfactually speaking, were to lack sameness within Himself in virtue of being "different" (*differentiam*), then his difference would be due to either one of three things.[99] First,

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[88] Dolezal, *God Without Parts,* 199.

[89] See Sullivan, "Aquinas and the Principle of Sufficient Reason," 234.

[90] Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 1, Cap. 17; cf. *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, qu. 3, art. 8 ad 3; Aristotle, *Metaphysics,* X, Chap. 3, 1054b25-35, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle,* Vol. 1 ed., Jonathan Barnes (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984).

[91] Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 1, Cap. 17: "Differentia igitur in his quaerenda est quae in aliquo conveniunt: oportet enim aliquid in eis assignari secundum quod different."

[92] Ibid.

[93] Ibid.

[94] See Ibid.

[95] Ibid.: "[D]iversum autem aliquid absolute dicitur, ex hoc quod non est idem."

[96] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 3, art. 8, ad3 (emphasis added): "Homo enim et equus differunt rationali et irrationali differentiis, quae quidem differentiae *non differunt amplius ab invicem aliis differentiis*."

[97] Ibid.

[98] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, qu. 3, art. 8 (emphasis added): "[N]am, secundum philosophum X Metaphys., *diversum absolute* dicitur."

[99] Lack of sameness that involves bodies is excluded here since the conception of God assumed in this thesis is essentially an immaterial being. Differentiation as regards to place, like angels who "by their finite power are able to come into contact with certain places which prior they did not come into contact with (*virtute sua finita possunt*

the difference could be due to an accidental feature. Aquinas defines an accident as "a certain form making being in act according to *accidental being*."[100] As a "form making being in act," accidents *modify* substantial *esse* in some way or another without making the substance be of a different kind. So, perhaps God remains *substantially* the same in creating world *alpha* or creating world *beta* but has different cognitional or volitional acts, which would be real determinations of his being. This differentiation is like counterfactual differences for human beings. If Judas would have willed to repent, he would have been *really* different than he was in willing to remain in his sin. But he still would have been *substantially* a human being.

Second, the difference could be in virtue of what Aquinas calls "diverse being according to kind."[101] Such differentiation would come about by "some differences added" (*aliquas differentias additas*)[102] to the divine being itself, constituting an "essential specification" (*designatione essentiali*) likened to the specification of a genus by differences.[103] Consider, for example, how the added feature of rationality to the genus animality results in a specific kind of thing—namely, rational animal. Not adding the feature of rationality to the genus of animality results in specifically a different kind of thing: a brute (non-rational animal). This is so because, as Aquinas teaches, a difference added to or subtracted from a definition changes its species just as a unit added to or subtracted from a number changes its species.[104] By "diverse being according to kind" (*diversum esse secundum speciem*), Aquinas means that perhaps two things can differ insofar as the *esse* that each has is itself essentially a different kind of *esse*, like a rational animal is different from a non-rational animal. Applying this manner of differentiation to God, perhaps God would be different in creating a different order in virtue of some feature that would determine or specify the divine *esse* itself, making God's being "diverse being according to kind" (*diversum esse secundum speciem*).[105]

Third, the difference could be due to a different nature, since, as Aquinas teaches, "things may differ because they have diverse natures."[106] The new nature received would be the differentiating factor distinguishing God's inner state in creating world *alpha* and creating world

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attingere quaedam loca quae prius non attingebant)," is also easily excluded from God since God "by His infinity fills all places" (*qui sua infinitate omnia loca replet*)—Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, qu. 9, art. 2. Change within a being that involves potentiality to an end in choice for good or evil is also easily excluded from God since he is his own end—see Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 19, art. 1 ad 1. Finally, there is the possibility of difference as to *esse*. In other words, if God could *per impossible* be reduced to non-existence—that is to say, if he could go out of existence—then we would have to predicate to Him change within himself to some degree (although technically it would not be considered "change" but annihilation). This way of difference is not a viable option for this counter view because God is "subsistent being itself," which metaphysically necessitates his existence to be *absolutely* necessary. I say "absolutely" because Aquinas views angels and the celestial bodies as necessary beings—beings that have no natural potential to go out of existence but nevertheless are dependent on God for their *esse*. That such beings are dependent on God for their existence, they are not *absolutely* necessary. See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, qu. 9, art. 2.

[100] Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Lib. 1, Cap. 23 (emphasis added): "[E]eo quod accidens quaedam forma est faciens esse actu secundum *esse accidentale*."

[101] Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Lib. 1, Cap. 26 (emphasis added): "[I]ta quod rebus diversis sit *diversum esse secundum speciem*."; cf. Lib. 2, Cap. 15.

[102] Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 1, Cap. 26 (emphasis added).

[103] Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Lib. 1, Cap. 24.

[104] See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, qu. 5, art. 5: "[S]icut enim unitas addita vel subtracta variat speciem numeri, ita in definitionibus differentia apposita vel subtracta."; Cf. *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Lib. 2, Cap. 15.

[105] Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 1, Cap. 26; emphasis added; Cf. Lib. 2, Cap. 15.

[106] Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Lib. 1, Cap. 26 (emphasis added): "Relinquitur ergo quod *res propter hoc differant quod habent diversas naturas*, quibus acquiritur esse diversimode."; Cf. Lib. 1, Cap. 26.

beta. This would also entail a different act of being because being is diversified by the nature into which it is received. As Aquinas writes, "[T]his being is distinguished from that being, inasmuch as it is of such and such a nature."[107] Perhaps God would be different in creating world *beta* than he is in creating world *alpha* because he would have a different nature and thus a different act of being, like I as an existing supposit united to human nature would be different if I were to take on the nature of dog and thus have being according to the dog mode.

The only other way that God could lack intrinsic sameness in creating world *alpha* versus creating world *beta* is by way of "diversity." Given what was said above concerning diversity, God's inner difference in creating world *alpha* versus creating world *beta* would have to be in virtue of God's *esse* being "absolutely distinct" (*diversum absolute*),[108] each instance of *esse* being diverse by its very self and not by some further differentiating factor, like a nature.[109] Such diversity of *esse* is the very difference between *esse divinum* and *esse creatum*—divine being and created being.[110]

III.B
Why Counterfactual Difference Cannot be Applied to God

With the viable ways in which God might lack sameness within Himself elucidated, I will now show why they cannot be applied to God. There are two approaches that one could take. One approach is to address each of the ways individually and provide arguments as to why they cannot be applied to God. A second approach is to provide one all-encompassing argument that shows why none of ways in which God might be different within Himself—regardless of which one considers—can be applied to God. I will take the latter, more principled, approach. As I will show, there is a common thread that runs through each of the ways in which God might lack sameness within Himself and my argument will establish that such a thread unravels when applied to God. I will conclude that Aquinas's metaphysics upon which I have based divine immutability demands the *strong* view of divine immutability.

The common thread that runs through each of the ways that God might lack sameness within Himself is the contraction or limitation of *esse*. The reason is because wherever there is a lack of sameness there is something that has *esse* not according to its total power (*tota virtus*).[111] Whether the differentiation is due to an accident, *esse* being specified by an added feature to make

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[107] Aquinas, *De Potentia,* qu. 7, art. 2 ad 9: "Et per hunc modum, hoc esse ab illo esse distinguitur, in quantum est talis vel talis naturae."

[108] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 3, art. 8.

[109] See Ibid.; Cf. *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Lib. 1, Cap. 17.

[110] For the absolute distinction between divine being (*esse divinum*) and created being (*esse creatum*), see Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 7, art. 2 ad 1: "[Q]uod hoc est contra rationem facti, quod essentia rei sit ipsum esse eius, quia esse subsistens non est esse creatum." In his *respondeo* of this previous article, Aquinas identifies *esse subsistens* with *esse divinum*. He writes, "Cum igitur *esse divinum non sit esse receptum in aliquo, sed ipse sit suum esse subsistens*, ut supra ostensum est; manifestum est quod ipse Deus sit infinitus et perfectus." Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* qu. 7, art. 1; emphasis added. See also qu. 8, art. 1; qu. 18, art. 4 ad 3; *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Lib. 1, Cap. 26; Lib. 2, Cap. 37; *De Divinis Nominibus*, Cap. 5, Lect. 2.

[111] See Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 1, Cap. 28: "[N]am res secundum quod suum esse contrahitur ad aliquem specialem modum nobilitatis maiorem vel minorem, dicitur esse secundum hoc nobilior vel minus nobilis. Igitur si aliquid est cui competit tota virtus essendi, ei nulla nobilitatum deesse potest quae alicui rei conveniat." For an articulation of the same idea but from a different perspective, see Wippel, "Thomas Aquinas on the Distinction and Derivation of the many from the one: A Dialectic Between Being and Nonbeing," *Review of Metaphysics* 38, no.3 (1985): 563-590; *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas,* Chap. 7.

it "diverse being according to kind,"[112] a supposit taking on another nature, or *esse* being of the created order, *esse* will be found in a way such that it is not "realized in its unlimited fullness."[113]

Consider, for example, differentiation by way of an accident. Suppose one leaf on the tree outside is green and another is brown.[114] They differ, among other things, by way of accidental features: they each have a different color. The brown leaf's color is *not* the other. Inasmuch as color modifies the brown leaf's *esse* to a *brown* leaf mode of being, which makes it *not* a green leaf mode of being, the leaf's *esse* is not *esse* according to the whole possibility of being, since the leaf stands in a relation of potentiality to the actuality of having a *green* leaf mode of being. This applies even if we consider the leaf by itself and a counterfactual difference. The leaf is green now, if we consider it in the spring or summer, but we know it will be golden in the fall. Considered as such, the leaf still stands in a relation of potentiality to the actuality of having a *golden* leaf mode of being, and thus lacks the fullness of being.

A similar line of reasoning applies to differentiation by way of "diverse being according to kind" (*diversum esse secundum speciem*).[115] *Esse* of *this* kind or *that* kind would entail a restriction of what is possible for *esse,* not dissimilar to how the species rational animal entails a restriction of what is possible for the genus animal. The whole of animality is not found in a rational animal because animality is found also in non-rational animals as well.[116] If *esse* could be differentiated into various kinds by added differences like the differences that constitute a species within a genus, then whatever instance of *esse* one would encounter, that instance would not be *esse* according to the full realization of *esse*. It would be restricted or limited to that *specific* kind.

Esse would also not be found according to its full realization if a supposit were to take on a different nature than what it had. The reason is that *esse* follows the union of supposit and nature such that being is attached to *that* nature.[117] So, for every distinct supposit-nature entity, there is a distinct act of being. Recall from above, Aquinas teaches, "[T]his being is distinguished from that

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[112] Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Lib. 1, Cap. 26.

[113] Wippel, "Thomas Aquinas and the Axiom That Unreceived Act Is Unlimited," 564.

[114] Aquinas employs a similar line of reasoning in his *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Lib. 1, Cap. 28. There he argues that a particular white thing lacks something of the possibility of whiteness because that which receives whiteness receives it according to its limited mode. "[S]omething of the possibility of whiteness is lacking to a particular white thing through a defect in the recipient of whiteness, which receives it according to its mode and, maybe, not according to the whole possibility of whiteness."

[115] Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Lib. 1, Cap. 26.

[116] See Aquinas, *Expositio libri Boetii De ebdomadibus* (Turin: Marietti, 1954), Lect. 2: "[E]t ideo quando aliquid particulariter recipit id quod ad alterum pertinet, universaliter dicitur participare illud; sicut homo dicitur participare animal, quia non habet rationem animalis secundum totam communitatem."

[117] A supposit is a complete nature that subsists. It is not an individuated nature that is abstracted from its being. As Aquinas writes, the suppositum of a nature is "an individual *subsisting* in that nature" (*individuum subsistens in natura illa*). Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, IIIa, qu. 2, art. 2; emphasis added. For a discussion on why a supposit and the nature that it is united to cannot be abstracted from its being, see Joseph Owens, *An Elementary Christian Metaphysics,* 152-153, 152 note 15. This principle can also be teased out of Aquinas's response to an objection concerning whether there is only one *esse* in Christ, found in *Summa Theologiae*, IIIa, qu. 17, art. 2 ad 2. Aquinas affirms what the objection states: "being follows upon nature; for being is from form" (*esse consequitur naturam; esse enim est a forma*)." Aquinas's elaborates further in his first response, writing, "[B]eing follows nature, not as something having being, but as that by which something is, but it follows the person, on the other hand the hypostasis, as having being" (*esse consequitur naturam, non sicut habentem esse, sed sicut qua aliquid est, personam autem, sive hypostasim, consequitur sicut habentem esse*). Even though Aquinas here only speaks of *esse* following the supposit in a nature that is a person, the same reasoning would apply to *any* being that is composed of a supposit and nature, which is any being that is not God (See Aquinas, *Quodlibet* II, qu.2, art. 2). For further elaboration on this point, see Lawrence Dewan, *Form and Being: Studies in Thomistic Metaphysics* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2006), 233, note 15.

being, inasmuch as it is of such and such a nature."[118] The being of a stone is differentiated from the being of a man because of the different natures that being actualizes.[119]

Now, for *esse* to be attached to, or received in, a nature is for *esse* to be limited, or as Barry Miller puts it, "bounded."[120] Recall the principle argued for above: whatever is received by another is necessarily finite.[121] The *esse* received into the tree nature and that makes the tree an existing substance, for example, is of a tree mode and *not* a bird mode, like the bird perched on its branch. Consequently, *esse* in the tree is not realized in its fullness—it is limited or restricted to that nature. Aquinas uses the example of a human being and a horse but sees the principle applying to all creatures. He explains, "Indeed the being of man is bounded to the species of man, because it is received into the nature of the human species; and the same is true for the being of a horse, or of any creature."[122] If *esse* is limited, then there is something of the possibility of being that is lacking. It is not found in its full realization.[123]

We can go one step further. The *esse* of the tree not only lacks the fullness of being in that there is some aspect of being that the tree lacks relative to the bird, but also that the tree, insofar as it is a being, stands in a relation of potentiality to a more *perfect* mode of being, since a bird mode of being is more perfect than a tree mode.[124] But to lack a more perfect or excellent mode of *esse* is to not realize *esse* in its fullness.

Finally, if the supposit of the tree were to take on the nature of a bird, the *esse* of the tree supposit now united to bird nature would still fall short of the totality of being because it would take on a bird mode of esse, which is *not* the tree mode of *esse*. Again, for something of the whole of *esse* to be lacking in a particular thing is to not realize *esse* in its unlimited fullness.

The same line of reasoning applies to *esse creatum* in relation to *esse divinum*. *Esse creatum,* regardless of the nature in which it is found, is a realization of *esse* that is *not* according to the total power of esse. It is limited *esse*, or bounded *esse*. That is its very nature as *esse* creatum.

Each of the above ways of differentiation entail a contraction or limitation of being that makes it such that *esse* is not realized according to its full realization, or as Aquinas puts it, "the total power of being itself" (*totam virtutem ipsius esse*).[125] For every instance where something can be said not to be the same within itself there is a *lack* of the perfection of being.

But God, as we have proven above, cannot lack any perfection of being. He can lack nothing that belongs to the full realization of being because he lacks nothing that belongs to the

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[118] Aquinas, *De Potentia,* qu. 7, art. 2 ad 9: "Et per hunc modum, hoc esse ab illo esse distinguitur, in quantum est talis vel talis naturae."

[119] See Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 2, Cap. 52 (emphasis added): "Esse autem, inquantum est esse, non potest esse diversum: potest autem diversificari per aliquid quod est praeter esse; sicut *esse lapidis est aliud ab esse hominis*."

[120] Barry Miller, *The Fullness of Being: A New Paradigm for Existence* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002), 97-99. See also Wippel, "Thomas Aquinas and the Axiom That Unreceived Act Is Unlimited."

[121] See note 24 of this chapter for references.

[122] Aquinas, *De Potentia*, qu. 1, art. 2: "Esse enim hominis terminatum est ad hominis speciem, quia est receptum in natura speciei humanae; et simile est de esse equi, vel cuiuslibet creaturae."

[123] Aquinas employs this line of reasoning in his argument for why an angel as a subsistent form is not infinite, concluding, "Hence its being is simply not able to be infinite," based on the premise, "[I]ts being is received and restricted to a defined nature." Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, qu. 7, art. 2: "[S]ed quia forma creata sic subsistens habet esse, et non est suum esse, necesse est quod ipsum eius esse sit receptum et contractum ad determinatam naturam. Unde non potest esse infinitum simpliciter."

[124] See Clarke, *The One and the Many,* 152; Dewan, *Form and* Being, 196-197. Edward Feser articulates this principle of the hierarchical modes of being in his analysis of Aquinas's Fourth Way for proving God's existence. See Edward Feser, *Aquinas: A Beginner's Guide* (Oxford: One World, 2010), Chap.3.

[125] Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 1, Cap. 28; Cf. Lib. 1, Cap. 43

total power of actuality. Also, God is not received into any nature and thus is not limited by such a nature, which, again, means He lacks nothing according to the total power of being. Since God must *be* the "total power of being itself," and the lack of sameness within a thing entails a lack of the total power of being, it follows that God cannot be differentiated within Himself. It is metaphysically impossible, therefore, for God to be different within Himself relative to different created orders, and not just in fact, but in principle—he is not even *subject* to being different within Himself. In the words of Dionysius, quoted by Aquinas, "God always has Godself *in the same way*."[126]

This means that Aquinas's doctrine of divine immutability, and the metaphysics of divinity upon which such a doctrine rests, demands the affirmation of the *strong* view of divine immutability: "God is *entirely* unchangeable."[127]

IV.
Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that God must be immutable. To this end I followed Aquinas's three arguments: from God as pure actuality, from God as absolutely simple, and from God as infinitely perfect. I showed that each aspect of divinity necessarily precludes change in God, since to affirm change in God would amount to affirming a contradiction. If God were to change within Himself, or be subject to change, then God would be purely actual and not purely actual, absolutely simple and not absolutely simple, infinitely perfect and not infinitely perfect, at the same time and in the same respect. Since we cannot affirm a contradiction, it follows that God is immutable.

I then argued that such a view of God's immutability necessarily entails that he be entitatively the same relative to a different created order, or no order at all. This was in response to a view posed by some philosophers that Aquinas's doctrine of divine immutability only precluded change in God relative to *this* created order (*across time*) and not relative to some other created order (*across possible worlds*), or no order at all. Given that such differentiation metaphysically requires the lack of something according to the total power of being, it follows that God cannot be differentiated because his nature *is* the total power of being itself, or "subsistent being itself" (*ipsum esse subsistens*).[128] In the words of Aquinas, God is "*omnino immutabilis*"—*entirely* or *altogether* unchangeable.[129]

The above conclusion, however, only shows that if we accept the metaphysics of divinity that undergirds the doctrine of divine immutability, we must *affirm* the strong view of divine immutability. But as indicated in the Introduction to this essay, the variability of creation seems to conflict with this strong view of divine immutability. Therefore, if a theist wishes to affirm both

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[126] Aquinas, *De Divinis Nominibus,* Cap. 9, Lect. 2: "[E]xcludit motum alterationis et augmenti et diminutionis, cum dicit quod *semper habet secundum eamdem formam stare*, quia scilicet non mutatur de forma in formam." Translation by Harry C. March, Jr, *Cosmic Structure and the Knowledge of God: Thomas Aquinas' In Librum Beati Dionysii De Divinis Nominibus Expositio,* dissert. (Graduate School of Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee, 1994), 491; emphasis added.

[127] Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Lib. 2 , Cap. 85 (emphasis added): "Deus autem est *omnino* invariabilis."

[128] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia qu. 4, art. 2 ad 3.

[129] Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* (emphasis added), Lib. 1, Cap. 14. See also Lib. 3, Caps. 94, 98; Lib. 4, Cap. 31; *Commentary on the First Letter to Timothy*, Cap. 6, Lect. 3. Cf. *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Lib. 1, Cap. 63 (emphasis added): "quia divini intellectus cognition est *omnino invariabilis*"; Cap. 99 (emphasis added): "Deus *omnino immobilis* est"; Lib. 2, Cap. 85 (emphasis added): "Deus autem est *omnino immobilis*."

doctrines, which classical theists like Aquinas wish to do, it is necessary to give an argument that shows the compatibility of the two doctrines. To this we turn in the next chapter.

Chapter Two
A General Argument for the Compatibility of Divine Immutability and the Variability of Creation

Given the arguments presented in the previous chapter, Aquinas's doctrine of *strong* divine immutability has strong rational justification behind it. But, as mentioned in the Introduction, this intellectual contentment has been called into question in light of the central doctrine within classical theism that God could have done other than he did—what I have called the variability of creation. This possibility of variation among created orders poses two major difficulties for divine immutability. The first is what I have called the "difficulty of potentiality" and the second is what I have called the "difficulty of counterfactual difference."

The difficulty of potentiality asserts that if God were able to have done other than he did some potentiality would necessarily be introduced into God's being. The difficulty of counterfactual difference asserts that if God were to have chosen to create differently, there necessarily would be some corresponding difference within him.

Both difficulties, of course, directly conflict with the classical doctrine of divine immutability. Recall from Chapter One, Aquinas teaches that "We say to be moved [changed] is said to be ordered in a way different now than before."[1] If being "ordered in a way different now than before" is essential to change, and God *could* be different than he is now—as both the "difficulty of potentiality" and the "difficulty of counterfactual difference" suggests—then it follows he would be subject to change. But divine immutability, as we argued in the previous chapter, not only entails that God does not change within Himself in fact, but that he cannot change *in principle*—that is to say, he is not subject to any change or alteration within Himself *whatsoever*. Therefore, it appears that the doctrine of the variability of creation poses a threat to the doctrine of divine immutability.

The difficulty of potentiality and the difficulty of counterfactual difference each merit specific responses, which will be given in future chapters of this thesis. There is a more general response, however, that diffuses the challenge that both difficulties pose to divine immutability and provides a rationale as to how one can affirm *both* the doctrine of divine immutability and the variability of creation. This more general response is the subject of the present chapter.

The response is based on the Thomistic doctrine of relations. The argument is as follows:

Premise One: If God's relation to creatures is not a real relation but one of reason, then the variability of creation would not make God subject to being entitatively different than he is now.

Premise Two: God's relation to creatures is not a real relation but one of reason.

Conclusion: Therefore, the variability of creation does not make God subject to being entitatively different than he is now.

As may be surmised, the above argument presupposes a grasp of the doctrine of relations. What is a relation? What is a *real* relation? What is a relation of *reason*? Which type of relation does God have with creation, since we must affirm that He has *some* kind of relation as the one who creates,

[1] Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Lib. 1, Cap. 83: "[M]overi dicimus quod aliter se habet nunc et prius."

loves, knows, wills, governs, and redeems the world?[2] Also, it is necessary to explain why it is the case that God's lack of a real relation with creation preserves his immutability, which pertains to premise one. Such prerequisite knowledge is necessary to see the truth of premise two, which carries the weight of the argument.

The above prerequisite knowledge concerning the Thomistic doctrine of relations will be dealt with in section one of this chapter. I will explain what a relation is and its various kinds. Upon elucidating the doctrine of relations, the truth of premise one will become clear—God's lack of a real relation to creatures would preserve His immutability against the alleged threat that the doctrine of the variability of creation poses.

Section two will be devoted entirely to defending premise two of the above argument. I will begin by articulating all the ways in which God's relation to creatures could possibly be a real relation. I will then show why God's being *ipsum esse subsistens* excludes each from being applied to God, thus concluding that in principle God's relation to creatures cannot be a real relation but one of reason.

Finally, in section three, I will consider three objections to premise two. The first argues that God's lack of a real relation to creatures falsifies any predication that we make of God in relation to creatures, such as "Creator." The second asserts that such a lack makes the universe unintelligible. The third claims that God's lack of a real relation to creatures makes God too remote and impersonal, undermining divine acts of knowing, willing, and loving for creatures. I will argue that all three objections fail to undermine the Thomistic doctrine that God's relation to creatures is not a real relation but one of reason.

I.
The Thomistic Doctrine of Relations

There are several parts to our inquiry into the Thomistic doctrine of relations. First, there is the *ratio* of relations (Section I.A). Second, there are the different types of relations (Section I.B), of which there are two: logical (Section I.B.1) and real (Section I.B.2). Then there is the application of such a doctrine to the topic of this dissertation—namely, divine immutability and the variability of creation (Section I.C). We can begin our inquiry with the *ratio* of relations.

I.A
The *Ratio* of Relations

Aquinas defines the proper meaning, or ratio, of a relation as signifying only "a respect to another."[3] By *ratio* Aquinas simply means what the intellect understands by way of the signification of any name.[4] A parallel can be drawn with Aquinas's understanding of the nature of a thing considered absolutely or in itself; irrespective of whether it exists in the real world or only

[2] See Brian Shanley, *The Thomist Tradition* (Berlin, Germany: Springer Science+Business Media Dordrecht, 2002), 59; Kerr, *Aquinas and the Metaphysics of Creation,* 82; Weinandy, *Does God Change?*, 90.

[3] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 28, art. 1 (emphasis added): "Ea vero quae dicuntur ad aliquid, significant *secundum propriam rationem solum respectum ad aliud.*"

[4] See Aquinas, *I Sent*., dist. 2, qu. 1, art. 3: "... ratio, prout hic sumitur, nihil aliud est quam id quod apprehendit intellectus de significatione alicujus nominis: et hoc in his quae habent definitionem, est ipsa rei definitio . . . . Sed quaedam dicuntur habere rationem sic dictam, quae non definiuntur, sicut quantitas et qualitas, et hujusmodi, quae non definiuntur, quia sunt genera generalissima." See also Mark Henninger, "Aquinas on the Ontological Status of Relations," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 25, no. 4 (1987): 491-515.

in the mind as thought. Consider, for example, humanity.[5] We can think of humanity as including both rationality and animality without considering whether human nature is instantiated in a real person or merely in a thought.

Now, in the case of humanity its *ratio* just so happens to be its very definition—genus plus specifying difference. The *ratio* of a relation, on the other hand, is not identical to its definition because there is no definition proper for relation, as is the case for *all* the Aristotelian categories.[6] The *ratio*, then, simply refers to that which the intellect grasps in understanding what the concept signifies. For relation, the *ratio* is "reference to another" (*ad aliud refertur*).[7] So, wherever there is an order of one thing to another there is a relation.[8]

I.B.
The Different Types of Relations

The order of one to another, or the reference of one to another, can be one of two types: logical or real. If the reference to another is logical, then the relation is called a relation of *reason*, or a *logical* relation. If the order that one has to another is real, then it is called a *real* relation. Each of these types of relation require explanation.

I.B.1
Relations of Reason/Logical Relations

A relation of reason, or a logical relation, is a relation that does not posit any order in reality. Rather, it posits an order only in reason.[9] As Aquinas puts it, "the respect to another signified through relation is itself said to be only in the apprehension of reason comparing one to

[5] This example is taken from Henninger, "Aquinas on the Ontological Status of Relations," 497.

[6] See Etienne Gilson, "Quasi Definitio Substantiae," in *St. Thomas Aquinas 1274-1974: Commemorative Studies,* Vol. 1, eds. A. Maurer *et al* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1974), 111-131; Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas,* 228-237; Kerr, *Aquinas and the Metaphysics of Creation,* 146-148.

[7] Aquinas, *I Sent.* dist. 26, qu. 2, art. 1, corp. See also dist. 20, qu. 1, art. 1; *Quodlibet* IX, qu. 2, art. 3; *De Veritate* qu.1, art. 5 ad 16. For authors who affirm this Thomistic teaching about the *ratio* of a relation, see Henninger, "Aquinas on the Ontological Status of Relations," 498; Marianne Miller "Problem of Action in the Commentary of St. Thomas Aquinas on the Physics of Aristotle—Part II," *The Modern Schoolman* 23, no. 4 (1946): 200-226; Clifford G. Kossel, "The Principles of St. Thomas's Distinction Between the *Esse* and *Ratio* of Relation—Part II," *The Modern Schoolman* 24, no. 2 (1947): 93-107; R. J. Matava, *Divine Causality and Human Free Choice: Domingo Banez Physical Premotion and the Controversy* de Auxiliis *Revisited* (Boston: Brill, 2016), 269; David Svoboda, "Aquinas on Real Relation," *AUC Theologica* 6, no.1 (2016): 147-172; Weinandy, *Does God Change?*, 88; David Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 96; Kerr, *Aquinas and the Metaphysics of Creation* 82; Owens, *An Elementary Christian Metaphysics,* 179-180; Peter Coffey, *Ontology or The Theory of Being* (New York: Longmans, Green and Col, 1918), 337.

[8] See Constantine Cavarnos, *The Classical Theory of Relations by Constantine* (Belmont, MA: Institute for Byzantine & Modern Greek, 1975), 69.

[9] See Aquinas, *De Veritate* qu. 1, art. 5 ad 15 (emphasis added): "Unde inveniuntur quaedam relationes, quae nihil in rerum natura ponunt, sed *in ratione tantum*." *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 28, art. 1 (emphasis added): "Considerandum est quod solum in his quae dicuntur ad aliquid, inveniuntur aliqua *secundum rationem tantum*, *et non secundum rem*."

another."[10] In other words, the reference, or the order, that one thing has to another exists *only* in the intellect.[11]

There are three kinds of logical relations, each of which are defined by the conditions necessary for there to be a relation of reason. Mark Henninger, summarizing Aquinas, articulates these conditions as follows: "A relation R of *a* to *b* is of reason only if either (1) *a* and/or *b* is not real, or (2) *a* and *b* are not really distinct, or (3) there is no real foundation in *a* for R."[12] The first type of relation has to do simply with *concepts,* like when we compare man to animal as species to genus.[13] An example of the second type of logical relation is the relation that a person has to himself—"the relation of self-identity."[14] A person can think of himself as if he were a distinct thing and affirm the relation that he has to himself, even though he is not distinct from himself in reality; hence the affirmation, "I am identical to myself."[15]

The common example that instantiates the third kind of logical relation is the knowable object known by the knower. The object known has a reference (an order) to the knower only insofar as the mind imputes such a relation to it.[16] There is nothing within the object known that can serve as a foundation in virtue of which it is related to the knower, unlike the knower whose act of knowing serves as a foundation in virtue of which he is ordered to the object known. This being the case, the relation that the object known has to the knower is one that exists entirely in and is dependent on a mind.[17]

I.B.2

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[10] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, qu.28, art. 1 (emphasis added): "Aliquando vero respectus significatus per ea quae dicuntur ad aliquid, est *tantum in ipsa apprehensione rationis* conferentis unum alteri." See also *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu.13, art. 7 (emphasis added): "Quandoque enim ex utraque parte est res rationis tantum, quando scilicet ordo vel habitudo non potest esse inter aliqua*, nisi secundum apprehensionem rationis tantum.*"

[11] See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 28, art. 1 (emphasis added): "Ex duobus igitur ultimis apparet quod relatio illa prioritatis nihil ponit in rerum natura, *sed in intellectu tantum.*" For further resources on Aquinas's teaching on the relation of reason, see Henninger, "Aquinas on the Ontological Status of Relations," 498; Earl Muller, "Real Relations and the Divine: Issues in Thomas's Understanding of God's Relation to the World," *Theological Studies* 56 (1995): 673-695; Dever, "Divine Simplicity," 173-179; Weinandy, *Does God Change?*, 88-89; Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action,* 96-97; Brock, *Action and Conduct*, 71; Matava, *Divine Causality and Human Free Choice,* 270-271; Simon Oliver, *Creation: A Guide for the Perplexed* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2017), 49-50; McWhorter, "Aquinas on God's Relation to the World," 2-3; Kerr, *Aquinas and the Metaphysics of Creation,* 83; Owens, *An Elementary Christian Metaphysics,* 188-189; Coffey, *Ontology,* 337-341; Ross, "Creation," 625-626; Wittman, *God and Creation*, 119-123; Loughran, "Efficient Causality and Extrinsic Denomination," 44-46.

[12] Henninger, "Aquinas on the Ontological Status of Relations," 494. See also Mark G. Henniger, *Relations: Medieval Theories 1250-1325* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 7. For Aquinas's articulation of the different kinds of logical relations, see Aquinas, *De Potentia* qu. 7. art. 11; *De Veritate* qu.1, art. 5 ad 15.

[13] See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 13, art. 7; Wittman, *God and Creation,* 119; Kerr, *Aquinas and the Metaphysics of Creation,* 83; Oliver, *Creation,* 49; Thomas Loughran, "Efficient Causality and Extrinsic Denomination," 45.

[14] Henninger, "Aquinas on the Ontological Status of Relations," 494, note 11.

[15] This second type of logical relation is affirmed by Aquinas in the following places: *In I Sent.*, dist. 26, qu. 2, art. 1; *De potentia*, qu. 7, art. 11 ad 3; *Summa Theologiae*. Ia, q. 13, a. 7; In *1 Sentences*, dist. 26, qu. 2, art. 1. See also Kerr, *Aquinas and the Metaphysics of Creation,* 83.

[16] See Aquinas, *De Potentia*, qu. 7. art. 11: "Et sic cum quodam ordine ad scientiam, nomen scibilis relative significat; et est relatio rationis tantum."

[17] Aquinas elsewhere identifies the relation that the object known has to the knower to be one of reason. See Aquinas, Ibid., qu. 7, art. 10. For other resources that appeal to the relation between the known and the knower as one of reason, see Henninger, "Aquinas on the Ontological Status of Relations," 499; Thomas Loughran, "Efficient Causality and Extrinsic Denomination," 46; Dever, "Divine Simplicity," 176; Coffey, *Ontology,* 344; Wittman, *God and Creation,* 121.

Real Relations

In contrast to a relation of reason, a real relation is one in which the order that one thing has to another does *not* exist in and is *not* dependent on a mind imputing such order. Rather, the order to the other posits something in reality—namely, an extramental foundation that inheres in the subject (a feature about the subject) in virtue of which it is related to (ordered to) the other extreme of the relation, called the term.[18] The extramental foundation that serves as a ground for the real relation can be of different kinds.

First, it could be an accidental feature, like a thing's weight (quantity) or color (quality).[19] For example, when Socrates (the subject) grows and becomes equal in size to Plato (the term of the relation), Socrates comes to have a relation of equality with Plato in virtue of his quantity, which is an accident for Socrates. Also, when Socrates's skin tone becomes darker after sunbathing in the sun (an accident), and thus becomes the same as Plato's complexion, Socrates has a relation of similarity or likeness with Plato in virtue of the accident of quality. Since the thing in virtue of which Socrates is related to, or ordered to, Plato—namely, his quantity and quality—is extramental and a reality that inheres within Socrates, the relation is real.

The relation of equality and similarity that Plato has to Socrates would also be real. The reason is that the foundation for his relation of equality and similarity to Socrates is the same as that of Socrates's relation to Plato: quantity and quality. Whenever two terms of a relation have the same kind of foundation for their relation to each other, such a relation is called a "mutual relation" (*mutual realis relatio*).[20] Aquinas explains a mutual relation as follows: "In those things where a mutual real relation is to be found the reason of order of one to the other is the same in each part."[21]

Second, the extramental foundation could be the thing's *nature* itself, and it can ground a real relation in two ways. One way is for a thing to have the same nature as the other term within a procession. If something proceeds from a principle and that thing's nature is of the same order as its principle, then the proceeded thing is really related to the principle from which it proceeded. The real relation runs in the opposite direction as well: the principle that is of the same nature as the thing that proceeds from it is really related to the thing that proceeds. Aquinas articulates this principle when he answers the question of whether the relations in the Trinity are real: "But when something proceeds from a principle of the same nature, it is of course necessary that both the one

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[18] See Aquinas, *De Potentia*, qu. 7, art. 9: "[Q]uod in eis aliqua res sit relatio." For further resources that affirm a real relation involving some extramental foundation in the subject of a relation, see G. P. Klubertanz, *Introduction to the Philosophy of Being,* 2nd ed. (New York: Meredith, 1963), 270; Muller, "Real Relations and the Divine," 676; Henninger, "Aquinas on the Ontological Status of Relations," 492-494; Weinandy, *Does God Change?*, 89; Coffey, *Ontology,* 341-344; Wittman, *God and Creation,* 114; Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action,* 96; Clifford Kossel, "St. Thomas's Theory of the Causes of Relation," *The Modern Schoolman* 25, no.3 (1948): 151-172, 152.

[19] See Aquinas, *De Potentia,* qu. 7. art. 10; *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 13, art. 7; *I Sent.,* dist. 5, qu.1, art. 1; *V Metaphys.*, Lects. 11 and 17; Henninger, "Aquinas on the Ontological Status of Relations"; Weinandy, *Does God Change?*, 89; Kerr, *Aquinas and the Metaphysics of Creation,* 83; Montague Brown, "The Relation Between God and Human Beings: The Difference It Makes to Human Happiness," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 66 (1992): 163-173, 164; Kossel, "St. Thomas's Theory of the Causes of Relation," 152-153; Svoboda, "Aquinas on Real Relation," 157, note 33;

[20] Aquinas, *De Potentia,* qu. 7, art. 10. See also Henninger, "Aquinas on the Ontological Status of Relations," 494; Svoboda, "Aquinas on Real Relation", 164; Dever, "Divine Simplicity," 174; Muller, "Real Relations and the Divine," 20-21.

[21] Aquinas, *De Potentia* qu.7, art. 10: "[I]n illis tantum mutua realis relatio invenitur in quibus ex utraque parte est eadem ratio ordinis unius ad alterum."

proceeding and that from which it proceeds agree in the same order and thus it is necessary that they have a real respect to each other."[22] Given that the Son and the Holy Spirit are of the same nature as the Father, and they both proceed from the Father, it follows, according to Aquinas's principle, that the relations that the Son and the Holy Spirit have with the Father (*filiation* for the Son to the Father, *spiration* for the Holy Spirit to the Father) are *really* related to the Father. Aquinas also employs this principle to assert that a human son is really related to his human father and vice versa. The reason, Aquinas argues, is that a real relation exists when "a condition is between two things according to some reality belonging to each."[23] Since the proceeding son is of the same nature as the source of his procession, the father, the son is really related to the father, and the father is really related to the son.

A second way that a thing's nature can ground a real relation is by way of natural necessity—where the thing *by nature* is ordered to the other.[24] Such an order is not the product of some mutual interaction of one thing upon another but exists in virtue of the reality itself as essentially relative to some other.[25] Aquinas uses the example of a heavy body (*corpore gravi*), in which he believes is found "an inclination and order to the center place" of the earth and "whence in a certain respect is in itself with respect to the center place."[26] Other examples would include matter and its relation to form, as well as a faculty's relation to its natural object.[27] Although matter is really a distinct principle from form, and we can think about matter as separate from form, matter cannot *be* without form.[28] There is no such thing as matter existing in the real world without form. Its very nature entails being united to form in order to be.

Similarly, we distinguish a faculty from its natural object but the very nature of the faculty in its real being has an order to its natural object. Take the generative power, for example. By its very nature it is directed to generating children. The power of sight is naturally directed to seeing color.[29] The intellect is naturally ordained to the object of truth.[30] The will is naturally ordered to the object of the good. In all these cases, the power has a real relation to its object because the order to its object is something constitutive of the power itself, and thus exists in the real world independent of a mind.

Third, the extramental foundation could be the very being of the thing itself, like in the case of a creature and its relation to God. The creature is related to God solely in virtue of its very

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[22] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 28, art. 1: "Cum autem aliquid procedit a principio eiusdem naturae, necesse est quod ambo, scilicet procedens et id a quo procedit, in eodem ordine conveniant, et sic oportet quod habeant reales respectus ad invicem."

[23] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu.13, art. 7 (emphasis added): "Quaedam vero relationes sunt, quantum ad utrumque extremum, res naturae, *quando scilicet est habitudo inter aliqua duo secundum aliquid realiter conveniens utrique*."

[24] See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 28, art. 1: "Qui quidem respectus aliquando est in ipsa natura rerum; utpote quando aliquae res secundum suam naturam ad invicem ordinatae sunt."

[25] See Hill, "Does the World Make a Difference to God?", 154.

[26] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 28 art. 1: "Sicut in corpore gravi est inclinatio et ordo ad locum medium, unde respectus quidam est in ipso gravi respectu loci medii."

[27] See Hill, "Does the World Make a Difference to God?", 154.

[28] See Aquinas, *VII Metaphys.* Lect. 2: "Materia enim non potest per se existere sine forma per quam est ens actu." See also, Gaven Kerr, "Aquinas: Metaphysics," *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, https://iep.utm.edu/thomas-aquinas-metaphysics/, accessed March 31, 2022; Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas,* 296-326.

[29] See Aquinas, *V Metaphys.,* Lect. 17: "Et similiter de visu patet quod non dicitur ad videntem, sed ad obiectum quod est color vel aliquid aliud tale."

[30] See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 82, art. 4 ad 1: "[I]psum intelligere, et obiectum eius, quod est verum."

esse, which, as mentioned above, is *esse creatum*.[31] Participated *esse* of its very nature is that which is received from *ipsum esse subsistens*—subsistent being itself. So *esse creatum* of its very nature has a relation to God. Since the foundation for the creature's relation to God is extramental and rooted in the creature itself (via the creature's *esse* that God gives to actualize the creature), the relation that the creature has to God is real.

Such creaturely dependence on God leads to a fourth kind of extramental foundation: dependency. Aquinas frequently identifies dependency as a foundation for a real relation.[32] For example, when speaking of a non-mutual relation, where only one of the terms depends on the other—like in the example of the knower and the thing known, he writes, "In the one that depends on the other a real relation is to be found."[33] In other words, for A to be really related to B A's status must really depend on B such that B makes a real difference to A.[34]

Such dependency can be cashed out in two ways. The first is by way of an effect's dependency on an efficient cause.[35] Since without the cause the effect cannot be, the effect's perfection depends on the cause's causal activity. This being the case, the effect has an order to the cause that's real and not dependent on a mind. The knower knows the object *because* the object exercises an influence on the sensory apparatus of the knower actualizing certain potentials within the knower. The creature comes to be *because* God creates it. The father makes a son come to be *because* of the father's generating activity. The tides rise and fall *because* of the moon's gravitational pull.[36] The order that the knower has to the object known, the creature to God, the son to the father, and the tide to the moon is an order that does not require a mind to be imputed. It exists in the real world, and thus is a real relation.

The second way that one term in a relation can depend on the other, and thus have an order to the other, is by way of final causality. As Aquinas writes concerning creatures, "[A]ll creatures are ordered to God both as to a beginning *and as to an end*."[37] The relation that creatures have to God "as to their beginning" refers to their dependency on God as effect to cause. The relation that creatures have to God "as to an end" refers to their dependency on God as that in which they find their perfection.[38]

This notion of final causality can also apply to a cause in relation to an effect. The dependency that such a cause would have on its effect would consist in the cause acquiring some

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[31] See Aquinas, *De Potentia* qu. 7. art. 10: "Deus autem non agit per actionem mediam, quae intelligatur a Deo procedens, et in creaturam terminata: sed sua actio est sua substantia, et quidquid in ea est, est omnino extra genus *esse creati, per quod creatura refertur ad Deum*" (emphasis added).

[32] See Aquinas, *De Potentia,* qu. 3, art. 3; qu.7, arts. 9, 10; *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 13, art. 7; qu. 28, art. 1.

[33] Aquinas, *De Potentia,* qu. 3, art. 3 (emphasis added): "Nam in omnibus quae secundum respectum ad invicem referuntur, quorum unum ab altero dependet, et non e converso, *in eo quod ab altero dependet, relatio realiter invenitur*."

[34] See Montague Brown, "The Relation Between God and Human Beings."

[35] See Aquinas, *De Potentia,* qu. 3, art. 3: "[S]ciendum est, quod cum relatio realis consistat in ordine unius rei ad rem aliam . . . Oportet namque id quod semper habet rationem patientis et moti, sive causati, ordinem habere ad agens vel movens, cum semper effectus a causa perficiatur, et ab ea dependeat: unde ordinatur ad ipsam sicut ad suum perfectivum." Cf. *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 13, art. 7.

[36] This example is taken from Brown, "The Relation Between God and Human Beings," 164.

[37] Aquinas, *De Potentia,* qu. 7, art. 9 (emphasis added): "Omnes autem creaturae ordinantur ad Deum et sicut ad principium *et sicut ad finem*, nam ordo qui est partium universi ad invicem, est per ordinem qui est totius universi ad Deum."

[38] See Walter Kern, "God-World Relationship," in *Sacramentum Mundi*, Vol. II, ed. Karl Rahner (London-New York, 1968), pp. 403-406.

good so as to achieve its perfection in producing the effect.[39] The example of parents generating children serves as an example. Consider that the natural end of a power is what is good for the power, since the good has the nature of an end.[40] Also, that which is good for a power is *perfective* of the power because the good acquired constitutes the perfection of a thing.[41] Now, the generative powers of parents are naturally ordered to the end of generating children. Therefore, the generation of children is perfective of the parents' generative powers. Since the perfection of a power is also the perfection of the subject to whom the power belongs, it follows that generating children is perfective of the parents. The parents, therefore, have a real order to their children inasmuch as they find their perfection in producing them.

In sum, a real relation exists if and only if in one of the terms there is an extramental foundation in virtue of which that term is referred to (ordered to) the other. Such a foundation can be either an accidental feature within the term (e.g., quantity or quality), the nature of the thing itself, the being of the thing, or the thing's dependency on another—whether by way of efficient or final causality. If no such extramental foundation exists within a term in a relation, then such a term does not have a real relation to the other but only a relation of reason.

I.C.
The Thomistic Doctrine of Relations Applied

Here is where the truth of premise one in the above argument begins to shine through. For the subject of a relation to be referred to (ordered to) its term and yet have no real relation to it means that there is nothing about *the subject itself* in virtue of which it is related to the other. In such a relation, the reference to the other would be neither in virtue of an accidental feature within the subject, the subject's nature, the subject's being, nor the subject's dependency on the other. The order that the subject would have to the other necessarily would be due to something *extrinsic* to the subject.

In some cases, the order would be *entirely* due to a mind, like in the case of a *pure* logical relation. A *pure* logical relation would be a relation where either conditions one or two of the three conditions for a logical relation mentioned above are met: either it is a relation where the two terms of the relation are not real, like in the case when we compare man to animal as species to genus (a relation where only concepts are involved), or where the terms of the relation are not really distinct, like in the relation that a person has to himself—"the relation of self-identity."[42] Other cases, however, involve a logical relation that is *mixed* with a real relation, what some have called a "mixed" or "non-mutual" relation.[43] In such a relation, the relation of reason that term A has to term B results from a real relation that term B has to term A. The order that term A has to term B

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[39] See Aquinas, *De Potentia,* qu. 7, art. 10: "Agentia autem, sive moventia, vel etiam causae, aliquando habent ordinem ad patientia vel mota vel causata, in quantum scilicet in ipso effectu vel passione vel motu inductis, attenditur quoddam bonum et perfectio moventis vel agentis." See also Susan C. Selner-Wright, "Thomas Aquinas on the Acts of Creation and Procreation," *The National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly* 3, no. 4 (2003): 707-716, 709; Wittman, *God and Creation,*117.

[40] See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* IaIIae, qu. 94, art. 2: "[B]onum habet rationem finis."

[41] See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 5, art. 1: "Sed bonum dicit rationem perfecti." See also *De Veritate,* qu. 21, art. 3 ad 2.

[42] Henninger, "Aquinas on the Ontological Status of Relations," 494, note 11.

[43] See Loughran, "Efficient Causality and Extrinsic Denomination," 206; Weinandy, *Does God Change?*, 88-95; Kossel, "St. Thomas's Theory of the Causes of Relation," 153; Matava, *Divine Causality and Human Free Choice*, 271; Oliver, *Creation: A Guide for the Perplexed,* 49; Dodds, *Unchanging God of Love,* 166.

is still imputed by a mind—and thus is a relation of reason—but it is *grounded* in the real relation that term B has to A, whether that be due to an accidental feature in B, B's nature, B's very being, or some dependency that B has on A.

The stock example that illustrates this sort of relation is that of a knower and the object known, an example mentioned above in passing. Both the knower and the object known have a reference (a relation) to the other. The knower is referred to the object known (has a relation to) insofar as he is "he who knows the object," and the object known has a reference to the knower insofar as it is "an object known by the knower." The reference that one has to the other, however, is different for each. The knower is referred to the object known in virtue of the extramental foundation within himself, namely, the accidental feature of his act of knowing. Given that objects specify an act of intellection, the knower's knowing act necessarily has an order to the object known. Since the knower's reference to the object known is due to something real about the knower, his relation to the object known is real.

The opposite is true for the object known: it is *not* referred to the knower in virtue of some extramental feature within itself. The order that the object known has to the knower is due to a mind that imputes such an order to the object known. Nevertheless, a mind imputes this order *because* the knower is really related to the object known. This is the reason why such a relation is not a *pure* logical relation.

In this kind of a relation, a *mixed* relation, a change in the term that has a real relation to the other—whether the term itself changes, a different term takes its place, or the term simply stops existing—would not thereby entail change within the term that only has a relation of reason. The change would be entirely *extrinsic* to the term in which the relation is one of reason. This would be so because the order that the term in which the relation is one of reason has to the other exists only insofar as the other term is really ordered to it. If there is nothing about a subject in virtue of which it is ordered to a term but is ordered to the term merely in virtue of the term's relation to the subject, then a change in the relation will be only in virtue of a change in the term and not in virtue of anything within the subject.

Take again the example of the object known and the knower. When the knower stops knowing the object, the relation that the object has to the knower as "object known by the knower" ceases to exist. But this relation changes only because of something different about the *knower*: the knower stops knowing the object. The object known remains the same within itself. The only difference with regard to the object known is what the mind imputes to it: it is no longer an object known by the knower.

The above explanation of change within a mixed relation provides justification for premise one in the above argument: If God's relation to creatures is not a real relation but one of reason, then the variability of creation would not make God subject to being entitatively different than he is now. The reason is because on this supposition the relation that God would have to creatures would be had not in virtue of some extramental foundation within God himself (a feature, characteristic, or property), but would be imputed to him entirely in virtue of the real relation that creatures have to him. This being the case, if something were to be different on the creature side of the God-creature relation, nothing would be different on the God side of the God-creature relation. The change would be entirely extrinsic to God, which as I argued above, is not incompatible with the strong view of divine immutability.[44]

[44] For further resources on how a denial of God having a real relation to creatures preserves divine immutability in the face of the variability of creation, see Grant, "Aquinas, Divine Simplicity, and Divine Freedom," 136-137; "Must a Cause Be Really Related to Its Effect? The Analogy between Divine and Libertarian Agent

So much for premise one. We now turn to premise two.

II.
The Nature of God's Relation to Creation

Recall, premise two of this chapter's main argument is that God's relation to creation is not a real relation but one of reason. Given the truth of premise one (as shown above), if we can prove that premise two is true, then the conclusion, "the variability of creation does not make God subject to being (or in fact be) entitatively different than he is now," necessarily follows. The path that shall be taken to this end will consist in recalling the various ways in which God can be really related to creatures and then showing why each in principle cannot apply to God, thus concluding that God's relation to creation is not a real relation but one of reason.

Following what was said above, there seems to be four ways that God possibly could be related to creatures with a real relation. First, he could be related by way of an accidental feature within him, such as quantity or a quality. Second, his order to creatures could be in virtue of his *nature* as God. Third, he could be really related in virtue of the kind of *esse* that belongs to him: *esse divinum*. Fourth, he could be ordered to creatures in virtue of some dependency that he has on creatures, whether that be by way of efficient causality (having some aspect of his being efficiently caused by creatures) or final causality (finding his perfection in creatures as his end).

That God cannot be related to creatures by way of an accidental feature like quantity needs no explanation, since most theists, whether classical or not, accept God as an immaterial being. All accidental features that belong to physical beings, like the quality of complexion, is also easily ruled out because the dimensive quantity of matter serves as the subject of all other material accidents, just as surface is the subject of color.[45] The reason for this is that accidental forms naturally inhere in something as in a subject.[46] Considered in themselves, forms, whether accidental or substantial, belong to no single thing. This being the case, they must be individuated by something other than themselves. For accidental forms, such an individuating principle is the subject in which they inhere.[47]

Now, as Aquinas argues, the subject of *material* accidental forms is the dimensive quantity of matter that a particular thing has.[48] A thing's complexion, for example, is a quality *of* the bulk of material quantity (the dimensive quantity) that makes up the thing. The place that a particular thing occupies is due to the extension of the dimensive quantity of its matter. Material accidental forms, therefore, inhere within the dimensive quantity of matter as a subject.

So, if God is free from matter, then he would be free from all accidental features that belong to physical beings. Since God is free from matter, as most theists agree, it follows that God must be free from *any* accidental feature that belongs to a physical being, such as quantity.

Causality," *Religious Studies* 43, no. 1 (2007): 1-23, 1-2; Dever, "Divine Simplicity," 181-182; Kerr, *Aquinas the Metaphysics of Creation,* 87; Totleben, "The Palamite Controversy: A Thomistic Analysis," 97; Jacob Spencer, "A Defense of the Metaphysics of Divine Simplicity as Explained by Thomas Aquinas" *Aporia* 30, no. 1 (2020): 1-11, 7-8; Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Grace and Freedom: Operative Grace in the Thought of St. Thomas Aquinas* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1971), 104, quoted in Spencer and Grant, "Activity, Identity, and God," 32; Shanley, *The Thomist Tradition,* 59.

[45] Aquinas uses this example within the context of his argument that dimensive quantity serves as the subject of all other material accidents. See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* IIIa, qu. 77, art. 2.

[46] See Ibid.

[47] See Ibid.: "subiectum sit principium individuationis accidentium."

[48] See Ibid.

Perhaps, though, God could have an accidental feature within him like an act of intellection or volition, and that would serve as the foundation in virtue of which he is really related to creatures.[49] This cannot be, for *any* accidental feature within God would entail composition within Him (substance and accident), which as we saw in the previous chapter God's absolute simplicity rules out.[50] Recall, composition necessarily involves potentiality.[51] Since God is pure act with no passive potentiality, God cannot be composed in any way whatsoever, which excludes the possibility of God having an accidental feature, like an act of intellection or volition, within him in virtue of which he is really related to creatures. This is the basis upon which Aquinas concludes that such divine acts are identical to God's being.[52]

The remaining ways in which God could be really related to creatures—by way of nature, being, efficient causality, and final causality—can be denied application to God based on God's being as *esse divinum*, or *ipsum esse subsistsens*. As *ipsum esse subsistens*, God cannot possibly be related to creatures by nature. Recall from above, there are two ways that a thing's nature can ground a real relation: either by having the same nature as the other term within a procession (like a father and a son) or by being *essentially* ordered to the other, such that the relation to the other

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[49] Ryan Mullins views God's intentional act of creation in this way, arguing that such an act is within God and is that in virtue of which the property "Creator" is rightly predicated of God. In his contributing chapter to *The T&T Clark Handbook of Analytic Theology*, Mullins writes, "One would naturally think that when God creates a universe, God would acquire *the accidental property creator*, and the universe would have the property creation. This is because *the property creator* is not some pseudo-Cambridge property because it is *grounded in God's free intentional act to create* a universe. *Intentional actions are intrinsic* to agents, and thus cannot be extrinsic, or merely Cambridge, properties." Mullins, "Classical Theism," 93 (emphasis added). Mullins does not infer from this view of God's volitional act that God would be different if He were to have created differently. Rather, he argues that God's intentional act of creation is incompatible with divine simplicity. However, such a view of God's act of volition *could* be used to provide grounds for thinking that God *would* be different if he were to have created differently. Danielle Adams is one such person who makes this connection: "Nonetheless, surely the counterfactual that, had God not created the world, he would have been in a different intrinsic mental state is true – presumably, he would have had different desires, intentions, etc." Adams, "The Metaphysics of Divine Causation," 121. Now, someone might object that God's act of Creation cannot be intentional if God does not have an intention that He forms within Himself, like is the case for *human* intentional action. But such an objection would wrongly extrapolate a *human* mode of intentional action (where the agent formulates an intention within himself to will some exterior act that is distinct from the agent) and transfer it over to the divine mode of intentional action. Such a move would be guilty of the fallacy of accident. All that is necessary for the act of creation to be considered intentional on God's behalf is that the creature come to be by way of intellect and will, that the willing of creatures be not naturally necessary but voluntary, and that there be a reason for the bringing about of such creatures. As I argue below in Section III.C of this chapter, God's willing of creatures is *not* of *natural necessity*. Rather, God's willing of creatures proceeds by intellect and will and the willing is entirely free. And as I argue in Chapter 3, Section I and Chapter 5, Section III.B, God does have a *reason* (that on account of which) for willing creatures: His very own divine essence/goodness. Thus, the coming to be of creatures in virtue of God as Creator is intentional, even though such activity on the God side of the equation, which just is God Himself, is not a volitional act over and above the divine essence itself. For authors who defend the intentional nature of God's creative action in a way that is consistent with the doctrine of divine simplicity, see Grant, *Free Will and God's Universal Causality,* 58-61, 147-148; Timothy O'Connor, "Simplicity and Creation," *Faith and Philosophy* 16, no.3 (1999): 405-412; Brower, "Simplicity and Aseity," 119-120; McCann, *Creation and the Sovereignty of God,* 231; Alexander Pruss, "Divine Simplicity and the Responsibility of Creation," August 30, 2021, https://alexanderpruss.blogspot.com/2021/08/divine-simplicity-and-responsibility.html, accessed October 3, 2023.

[50] For other arguments as to why God cannot have any accidents, see Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 1, Cap. 23; *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 3, art. 6.

[51] See Clarke, *The One and the Many*, 157-158. See also my defense of this principle in Chapter One of this thesis.

[52] See note #24 of the Introduction for citations from Aquinas's work concerning this doctrine.

would enter into the very definition of the thing (like a natural body and its relation to the center of the earth, matter and its relation to form, or a faculty and its relation to its natural end).

Now, God cannot be related to creatures by way of having the same nature or essence as creatures because God's essence is pure *esse* itself, not bounded to any particular essence like everything else is. As shown in the previous chapter, God is *esse* according to the total power of *esse*, not limited to or bounded by any mode of *esse*, or an essence, whatsoever. Every creature, on the other hand, is limited to or bounded by some mode of *esse*—that is to say, a nature/essence. As Aquinas writes, "the creature proceeds from God in diversity of nature."[53] Since God's *esse* is not bounded by any nature, and every creature's *esse* is bounded by a nature, it follows that God cannot have the same nature as any creature, in which case God cannot be related to creatures by having the same nature.

The second way of being related to creatures by nature is also excluded from God—that is, by way of being *essentially* related to the other such that the relation to the other constitutes the very intelligibility of the thing's essence. If God were essentially related to creatures, then his being, *esse divinum*, which is identical to his nature, would be unintelligible without *esse creatum.* But it has been shown in the previous chapter that *esse creatum,* by definition, is *esse* that is received within some nature or essence, restricting it in a way such that it is not *esse* according to its total power, whereas *esse divinum*, or *ipsum esse subsistens*, is *esse* that is not received into a particular nature or essence and thus is *esse* according to its total power. Therefore, *esse creatum* in principle cannot constitute the intelligibility of *esse divinum*. This being the case, God, whose nature is *ipsum esse,* in principle cannot be related to creatures by way of being essentially ordered to creatures.[54]

The fact that *esse creatum* does not constitute the intelligibility of *esse divinum* not only serves as a reason why God cannot be related to creatures in virtue of his nature; it also serves as a reason why God cannot be related to creatures in virtue of his being. Recall, God's being is identical to his nature—both really and logically. Given the transitivity of identity, what cannot be predicated of one, God's nature, cannot be predicated of the other, God's being.[55] So, if God's nature cannot be referred to creatures such that creatures constitute the very intelligibility of His

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[53] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 28, art. 1: "[C]reatura procedat a Deo in diversitate naturae." Consulted translation: *Summa Theologica,* trans. by Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Benzinger Bros. 1947).

[54] In *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 2, Cap. 12, Aquinas provides another line of reasoning as to why God cannot be essentially related to creatures. He begins with the principle that whatever is essentially related to another depends on the other in some way, whether for its existence or for its intelligibility: "Quod autem ipsum quod est ad aliud dicitur, quodammodo ab ipso dependet: cum nec esse nec intelligi sine eo possit." Given this principle, Aquinas reasons that if God were essentially related to creatures, then he would depend on them in some way, thus making him be such that he does not exist necessarily of himself: "Oporteret igitur quod Dei substantia ab alio extrinseco esset dependens. Et sic non esset per seipsum necesse-esse." Since God necessarily exists through himself, as Aquinas points out, Aquinas concludes that the relation to creatures is not something real in God: "Non sunt igitur huiusmodi relationes secundum rem in Deo." For further commentary on this argument, see Grant, "Aquinas, Divine Simplicity, and Divine freedom," 137.

[55] For a resource that deals with the transitivity of identity as it relates to God, and in particular the Trinity, see Timothy Pawl, "Conciliar Trinitarianism, Divine Identity Claims, and Subordination," *An International Journal for Philosophy of Religion and Philosophical Theology* 4, no. 2 (2020): 102-128. For a general philosophical account of the principle of the transitivity of identity, see *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* "Transworld Identity," revised version November 7, 2017, https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/identity-transworld/, accessed on April 22, 2022; "Identity Over Time," revised version October 6, 2016, https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/identity-time/, accessed on April 22, 2022.

essence, then God's being, *esse divinum,* cannot be referred to creatures such that the being of creatures, *esse creatum,* constitutes the very intelligibility of His being.

God's being is not only not referred to creatures because *esse creatum* does not enter into the intelligibility of *esse divinum*; it also is not referred to creatures because *esse divinum* does not depend on *esse creatum* for its existence. If God's being, *esse divinum,* were dependent on creatures for its existence, then God would not be *ipsum esse subsistens*, since the very notion of *ipsum esse subsistens* is that which exists through itself and *not* through another.[56] But God, as the "primary being," is *ipsum esse subsistens.* Therefore, God cannot be dependent on creatures for His *esse*. Given that God is not dependent on creatures for His *esse*, it follows that His *esse* is not that in virtue of which He is related to creatures.

The above reasoning eliminates at least one of the ways in which God might be related to creatures by way of dependency—namely, efficient causality. But, as mentioned above, there is another way a subject can be related to its term by way of dependency, and that is by way of final causality. Is it possible that God could be related to creatures insofar as creatures are that in which God finds his perfection? The answer is no, and the reason is that no being, or perfection, can accrue to God.[57] Final causality necessarily implies that the agent pursuing the end is disposed to accrue some new aspect of being for itself that it did not have before.[58] To find perfection in some good implies that the good pursued was not previously had. So, if no being or perfection of being can accrue to God given the nature of His being as *ipsum esse subsistens,* then nothing, including creatures, would be able to serve as an end for His perfection except himself. God would have to be His *own* end. This is precisely how Aquinas articulates God's willing of Himself.[59] The ultimate end of God's willing is God Himself.[60] The reason is that God is "the highest good" (*summum bonum*).[61] If creatures cannot serve as ends of God's own perfection, then it would follow that God is not related to creatures by way of final causality.

There are three principled reasons as to why no being, or perfection, can accrue to God. First, God is pure act.[62] As mentioned above, final causality, at least in beings that are not the *summum bonum,* implies that an agent pursues some good in order to achieve a level of perfection for its being, an aspect of being that it did not have originally. This necessarily implies that the agent pursuing the good stands in a relation to the good as that of potency to act.

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[56] This is the same argument from Aquinas mentioned above in note #54 from *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 2, Cap. 12.

[57] Aquinas affirms this idea in several places throughout his corpus, but he does so for different purposes. For example, in *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 1, Cap. 81, he utilizes this idea for the sake of arguing that God is not naturally necessitated to will creatures: "Cum igitur divina bonitas sine aliis esse possit, quinimmo *nec per alia ei aliquid accrescat*; nulla inest ei necessitas ut alia velit ex hoc quod vult suam bonitatem" (emphasis added). The other purposes for which Aquinas uses this idea will be identified below.

[58] See Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 3, Cap. 18.

[59] See Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 1, Cap. 75.

[60] See Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 1, Cap. 75 (emphasis mine): "Unicuique volenti principale volitum est suus ultimus finis: nam finis est per se volitus, et per quem alia fiunt volita. *Ultimus autem finis est ipse Deus*: quia ipse est summum bonum, ut ostensum est. Ipse igitur est principale volitum suae voluntatis"; *Summa Theologliae,* Ia, qu. 19, art. 2: "Sic igitur vult et se esse, et alia. Sed se ut finem, alia vero ut ad finem."

[61] Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 1, Cap. 75.

[62] Aquinas appeals to God's pure actuality when to show that God cannot accrue anything to himself through his activity of creating creatures in *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 3, Cap. 18: "Deus autem qui est primum agens omnium rerum, *non sic agit quasi sua actione aliquid acquirat*, sed quasi sua actione aliquid largiatur."

In the case of God, the good that He wills as an end is identical to His very self. He is the "*summum bonum*."[63] Therefore, the good willed is not sought to be achieved but is had essentially. This means that God, ontologically speaking, cannot be in potency to possessing his end and thus cannot be in potency to achieving His perfection. He is by nature purely actual with regard to His perfection. If it were true that God finds his perfection in producing creatures, then God's relation to creatures, and thus His perfection, would be one of potency to act. But in God there is no passive potency, and thus He cannot be in potency to his perfection. Therefore, in principle God cannot find his perfection in creatures, which in turn implies that God is not related to creatures by way of final causality.

Second, God's *esse* is ontologically distinct from any creature's *esse*.[64] God's *esse* is infinite and created *esse* is finite. God's *esse* is subsistent, a creature's *esse* is non-subsistent. As subsistent *esse*, God's *esse* is a nature or essence. A creature's *esse*, because it is received, is not a nature or essence, but is other than a nature or essence as its act.[65] Given this diverse order of *esse* between God and creatures, *esse creatum* can never involve *esse divinum*. Finite *esse* can never involve infinite *esse.* Participated *esse* can never involve subsistent *esse*, which is another way of saying that *esse creatum* can never be found as a nature or an essence like subsistent *esse*.[66] This being the case, *esse creatum* cannot add to *esse divinum* no more than apples being added to a basket of oranges makes for more oranges.[67] Or, as E.L. Mascall puts it, "Finitude and infinity simply do not add together."[68] The ontological divide between the two orders of *esse* demands that "what takes within the ontological order of creation cannot wash back into God's own singular ontological order in which he alone exists."[69] Since *esse creatum* cannot add to *esse divinum*, it follows that no creature can serve as an end in which God achieves His perfection. God, therefore, cannot be related to creatures by way of final causality.

The third reason why creatures cannot be an end for God is because God, in the words of Aquinas, "includes in His perfection the perfections of all things,"[70] such that all "perfections pre-

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[63] Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 1, Cap. 75.

[64] Aquinas connects the inability for creatures to add something to God and the diverse orders of being between God and creatures in *De Potentia,* qu. 1, art. 2, ad 7 (emphasis added): "Deus est distinctus ab omnibus rebus, et hoc eo ipso quia *nihil addi ei est possible.*" See also qu. 10, art. 1. For other authors who appeal to this line of reasoning to justify the claim that *esse creatum* cannot add to *esse divinum*, see John F. X. Knasas, "Aquinas and Finite gods," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 53, no. 88 (1979): 88-97, 93; "Aquinas, Analogy, and the Divine Infinity," *Doctor Communis* 40, no. 1 (1987): 64-84, 79; Joseph Owens, *An Interpretation of Existence* (Houston, TX: Center for Thomistic Studies, 1985), 89-92; *An Elementary Christian Metaphysics*, 108-109; Declan Kane, "The Subject of Predicamental Action According to John of St. Thomas" *The Thomist* 22, no. 3 (1959): 366-388, 369; Mascall, *The Openness of Being,* 273; Weinandy, "God and Human Suffering," 106-07; Steven Long, *Analogia Entis: On the Analogy of Being, Metaphysics, and the Act of Faith* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2022), 31-32.

[65] For evidence that Aquinas viewed *esse* within creatures to be an act of a nature and not a nature itself, see Aquinas, *I Sent.*, lib. 1*,* dist. 19, qu. 2, art. 2, dist. 23, qu. 1, art. 1, *II Sent.*, dist. 3, qu. 1, art. 1, ad. 4; *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, qu. 76, art. 6. For commentary on this view of Aquinas, see Knasas, "Aquinas and Finite gods," 93; "Aquinas, Analogy, and the Divine Infinity," 79; *Thomistic Existentialism*, 33, 35, 55-56, 58-59, 108; Owens, *An Elementary Christian Metaphysics*, 108; *Being and Some Twentieth-Century Thomists,* Chap. 6; Gaven Kerr, "Thomist *Esse* and Analytical Philosophy," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 55, no. 1 (2015): 25-48.

[66] See Ibid.; Knasas, "*Contra* Spinoza," 427.

[67] Example taken from Knasas, "*Contra* Spinoza," 427.

[68] Mascall, *The Openness of Being*, 273.

[69] Weinandy, "God and Human Suffering," 107.

[70] Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 1, Cap. 40: "[C]um sit simpliciter perfectus, sua perfectione omnes rerum perfectiones comprehendit."

exist in God" (*perfectiones in Deo praeexistunt*).[71] In other words, there is no perfection of being that a creature could possibly add to God because creatures "contain nothing which is not [already] found in an infinitely higher manner in [God]."[72] Cardinal Journet captures this truth in a very provocative way: "God is the creature infinitely . . . [He] is more really the creature than the creature can possibly be."[73]

This must be true given that God, who is *ipsum esse subsistens,* possesses *esse* according to its total power. To say that a creature could be an end for God and thus add some aspect of being to God by which He is perfected is to say that God is limited from having whatever is able to be had of *esse*—i.e., not having *esse* according to its total power. Since this cannot be, it follows that no creature can serve as an end in which God is perfected. Consequently, God cannot be related to creatures by way of final causality.

Given the above arguments, we can conclude that premise two of this chapter's main argument is true: God's relation to creatures is not a real relation. All the ways in which He could possibly be related to creatures with a real relation are excluded from Him because he is *ipsum esse subsistens*. As *ipsum esse subsistens*, God is absolutely simple and thus cannot have any accidents—whether quantity or a quality—in virtue of which he might be related to creatures. He cannot be related to creatures by nature, or his being, because such a supposition would necessitate that *esse creatum* constitute the very intelligibility of *esse divinum* or make *esse divinum* depend upon *esse creatum* for its existence*,* both of which cannot apply to *ipsum esse subsistens*. Moreover, *ipsum esse subsistens* cannot be related to creatures as effect to cause because *ipsum esse subsistens* is the "primary being" from which all other beings derive their *esse* as an effect. Finally, *ipsum esse subsistens,* insofar as it is *esse* according to its total power, cannot lack any perfection of being and thus cannot have an order to a creature as to an end.

At this juncture someone may object that I have only excluded from God several kinds of relation but have not provided a *principled* approach that would exclude *any* and *all* real relations

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[71] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 13, art. 14. See also Ia, qu. 19, art. 3; *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 1, Cap. 30, Lib. 3, Cap. 18. In *Quaestiones disputatae de malo* (Turin: Marietti, 1953), qu. 5, art. 1 ad 4, Aquinas's focus is on God's goodness, and how no participated good can add to God's goodness which is subsistent goodness. He states the same in *De Potentia,* qu. 7, art. 10. This applies to the present idea of perfection because Aquinas identifies the good with perfection. See, for example, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 6, art. 3: "Unumquodque enim dicitur bonum, secundum quod est perfectum." See also *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 1, Cap. 40. For other authors who argue that no perfection can accrue to God because all perfection subsists in him infinitely, see Knasas, "Aquinas and Finite gods," 92; "Aquinas, Analogy, and Divine Infinity," 83; Owens, *An Interpretation of Existence,* 92-95; Lagrange, *God, His Existence, and His Nature,* Vol. II, 49; Brother Benignus, *Nature, Knowledge, and God: An Introduction to Thomistic Philosophy* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2010), 518-519; James Francis Anderson, *The Cause of Being: The Philosophy of Creation in St. Thomas* (St. Louis, MO: B. Herder Book, Co, 1952), 146; McCormick, *Natural Theology*, 106-107; Dever, "Divine Simplicity," 172. For further explanation of how all creaturely perfections exist in God independent of its application to the current conclusion, see Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 4, art. 2; qu. 13, arts. 2, 5; qu. 14, art. 6; IaIIae, qu. 2, art. 5 ad 2; *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 1, Caps. 28, 29, 30, 31, 40, 49; *De Potentia,* qu. 3, art. 15, qu. 7, art. 5; Lagrange, *The One God,* 206; Dever, "Divine Simplicity," 82, 109, 123; John F. Wippel, "Thomas Aquinas on Our Knowledge of God and the Axiom that Every Agent Produces Something Like Itself," *American Catholic Philosophical Association Proceedings* 74 (2001): 81-101; Michelle Panchuk, "The Simplicity of Divine Ideas: Theistic Conceptual Realism and the Doctrine of Divine Simplicity," *Religious Studies* 57, no. 3 (2021): 385-402; Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 490; Lawrence Dewan, "St. Thomas, Norman Kretzman, and Divine Freedom in Creating," *Nova Et Vetera* 4, no. 3 (2006): 495-514, 513.

[72] Joyce, *Principles of Natural Theology,* Chap. 9.

[73] Cardinal Charles Journet, *The Dark Knowledge of God,* trans. by James F. Anderson (London: Sheed and Ward, 1948), 11.

that God might have with something other than himself, regardless of the basis in virtue of which the real relation is had. Is there such a principled approach?

We can answer in the affirmative. Like how potency is involved in *any* way one tries to account for God being different than He is now, potency is present for *any* type of real relation that one might try to ascribe to God, at least a real relation that would refer God to something *other than himself*, i.e., a creature. I emphasize *something other than himself* because I affirm with Aquinas that within the Godhead there exists real relations.[74] God the Father is *really* related to God the Son, the Son to the Father, and the Father and Son to the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit to the Father and the Son.

The foundation in virtue of which God might have *any* kind of real relation to a creature is going to be either accidental or essential. This disjunction exhausts all the possibilities—there is no tertium quid. If the foundation for the real relation is an accident (e.g., quantity, quality, act of intellection or volition), then God would be actualized in some respect by that accident, since accidents actualize in some respect the subject in which they inhere.[75] Of course, this would make God's relation with the creature one of potency to act.[76]

If the foundation for the real relation, on the other hand, is essential (e.g., God's being, God's nature, God's dependency on the creature by way of efficient or final causality), then God's very being would in some way refer to the creature. If God's very being of its nature referred to the creature (something *other than himself*), then God would be *dependent* on that creature, either for his existence or his intelligibility. Whatever is essentially referred to something *other than itself* depends upon that thing in some respect, either for its existence or intelligibility. Again, I emphasize *something other than himself* because, as mentioned above, within the Godhead there exists real relations. The reason why these real relations do not entail ontological dependency is because the three subsisting relations of paternity, filiation, and spiration are *identical* to the divine essence, which in turn is identical to *esse divinum.*[77] There can be no dependency to that which something is identical to.

Now, if God were to depend on something else for either his existence or intelligibility, then His relation to that thing would be one of potency to act. Therefore, if God were really related to something other than Himself, and the foundation of the real relation were essential, then God's relation to that thing would be one of potency to act, in which case passive potency would be introduced into God. But as I have shown throughout so far, God is *purus actus*, which means he in principle can have no potency, at least no potency that requires a principle of act to actualize it (*passive* potency). Therefore, it follows that God in principle cannot have a real relation with anything other than Himself whose foundation is essential.

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[74] For Aquinas's treatment on the real relations of paternity, filiation, and spiration within the Godhead, see Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 28, arts. 1-4. For a book length analysis of Aquinas's treatment of the real relations within the Godhead, see Gilles Emery, *The Trinitarian Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

[75] See Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 1, Cap. 23: "[A]ccidens quaedam forma est faciens esse actu secundum esse accidentale." For other arguments as to why accidents within God would entail potency, see the rest of *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 1, Cap. 23; Cap. 35; Lib. 2. Cap. 12; *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 3, art. 6.

[76] See Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 1, Cap. 23.

[77] That the real relations in God are identical to the divine essence, see Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 28, art. 2: "[S]ic manifestum est quod relatio realiter existens in Deo, est idem essentiae secundum rem; et non differt nisi secundum intelligentiae rationem." That the divine essence is identical to *esse divinum,* see *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 3, art. 4; *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 1, Cap. 22.

Given that all the ways in which God could possibly have a real relation with creatures is excluded from God given the metaphysics of divinity as presented throughout thus far, and that in principle no real relation to something other than himself, regardless of its kind and its foundation, whether accidental or essential, can be ascribed to God, it follows that God's relation to creatures is not a real relation.[78] Since God's relation to creatures is not real, the relation that he does have must be one of reason. The reference that He has to creatures is imputed by a mind due to the real relation that the creature has to Him.

With both premises of the main argument now shown to be true, the conclusion necessarily follows: the variability of creation does not make God subject to being entitatively different than he is now. Without an extramental foundation on the God side of the relation between God and creatures in virtue of which God can be related to creatures, there is nothing *about God* in virtue of which He is ordered to creatures. The order is imputed to Him entirely in virtue of the real relation that creatures have to Him. Therefore, a change on the creature side of the relation would not entail a change on the God side of the God-creature relation. As stated above, the change would be entirely extrinsic to God, which, again, is not incompatible with the strong view of divine immutability.[79]

III.
Objections

Completing a positive argument for a conclusion is never good enough because there are always counter arguments that critics pose as to why one should not assent to the conclusion. I will focus on three counter arguments that have been put forward against the above conclusion that God's relation to creation is a relation of reason. They are as follows:

1. The denial of a real relation of God to creatures falsifies God's causal relation to creation (Section III.A).
2. The denial of a real relation of God to creatures makes the universe unintelligible (Section III.B).
3. The denial of a real relation of God to creatures makes God completely impersonal and remote (Section III.C).

I will examine each objection in the sections below and show why each fails to undermine the conclusion that God's relation to creation is not real but one of reason.

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[78] The above argumentation suffices as an adequate response to objections that claim an appeal to God's relation of reason to creation is "*ad hoc*." It also provides a response to Mullins' other objection that the notion of God having a relation of reason to creation is "unintuitive." See Mullins, "Classical Theism," 93. But given the metaphysics of divinity articulated above, one should expect that *esse divinum* is going to yield unintuitive consequences. See also Edward Feser, "The Neo-Classical Challenge to Classical Theism," *Philosophy Compass* (2022): e12863, https://compass.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/phc3.12863.

[79] For further resources on how a denial of God having a real relation to creatures preserves divine immutability in the face of the variability of creation, see Grant, "Aquinas, Divine Simplicity, and Divine Freedom," 136-137; "Must as Cause Be Really Related to Its Effect?," 1-2. Dever, "Divine Simplicity," 181-182; Kerr, *Aquinas the Metaphysics of Creation,* 87; Totleben, "The Palamite Controversy: A Thomistic Analysis," 97; Spencer, "A Defense of the Metaphysics of Divine Simplicity," 7-8; Lonergan, *Grace and Freedom*, 104, quoted in Spencer and Grant, "Activity, Identity, and God," 32; Shanley, *The Thomist Tradition,* 59.

III.A
The Falsification of God's Causal Relation to Creation Objection

The first objection has been put forward by more than one critic of classical theism.[80] However, for the purposes of this thesis, I choose William Lane Craig's formulation as illustrative of the objection. In his 2000 paper, "Timelessness, Creation, and God's Real Relation to the World," Craig argues that to say God's relation to creation is not real is to say that God's causal relation to creation is not real. He writes,

> If the relation of some cause to its effect is unreal, then the cause has in particular no causal relation to its effect; that is to say, the cause is not a cause, which is self-contradictory ... . In truth there is no real cause in such a case, only a real effect. But it seems unintelligible, if not contradictory, to say that one can have real effects without real causes. Yet this is precisely what Aquinas affirms with respect to God and the world. Words like 'First Cause' and 'Creator' are only extrinsic denominations applied to God, that is, predicates which do not correspond to any real property but which are appropriate in virtue of real properties in creatures . . . Thomism denies that God is literally the cause of the world, though the world is the effect of God – which seems contradictory or meaningless.[81]

For Craig, if God's causal relation to creation is not real, at least in the sense that he thinks it is not real, then it would be *false* to say that God is the Creator of the world, which clearly conflicts with traditional theism.

The first thing that we can say in response is that the denial of a real relation between God and creatures, at least in the mind of Aquinas and for thinkers that follow him, does not mean that there is *no* relation whatsoever. In the eleventh chapter of book two in his *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Aquinas asks specifically whether something can be said of God in relation to creatures and answers in the affirmative along six lines of reasoning.[82] Aquinas asks the same question in question seven, article eight of his *De Potentia* and, again, answers in the affirmative.[83] So, at least for Aquinas, and those who adopt his view, the issue is not a matter of whether it is true or false as to whether God has a relation to creatures. For Aquinas, *that* God is related to creatures—as in the case of being their Creator—is something that we can truly predicate of God.[84]

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[80] See William Lane Craig, "Timelessness, Creation, and God's Real Relation to the World," *Laval th´eologique et philosophique* 56, no. 1 (2000), 100–101; Mullins, *The End of the Timeless God,* 122-123.

[81] Craig, "God's Real Relation to the World," 100–101.

[82] See Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 2, Cap. 11. The six reasons Aquinas gives are as follows: 1) God is the principle from which his effects proceed; 2) Creatures are dependent upon God; 3) God as agent produces somethings like Himself; 4) God knows creatures; 5) God is the first mover; and 6) God is the first being and supreme good. For authors who follow Aquinas in affirming *that* there is a relation between God and creatures, see Kerr, *Aquinas and the Metaphysics of Creation,* 82; Dever, "Divine Simplicity," 161; Grant, *Free Will and God's Universal Causality*, 57; Weinandy, *Does God Change?* 94-95; Anthony J. Kelly, "God: How Near a Relation?" *Thomist* 34, no. 2 (1970): 191-229, 217-219; Martin J. De Nys, "God, Creatures, and Relations: Revisiting Classical Theism," *The Journal of Religion* 81, no. 4 (2004): 595-614, 596-597; Feser, "The Neo-Classical Challenge to Classical Theism."

[83] See Aquinas, *De Potentia,* qu. 7, art. 8: "[A]d summam Dei simplicitatem consequitur quod infinitae habitudines sive relationes existant inter creaturas et ipsum, secundum quod ipse creaturas producit a seipso diversas, aliqualiter tamen sibi assimilatas." See also qu. 7, art. 10: "Si autem per proportionem intelligatur habitudo sola, sic patet quod est inter creatorem et creaturam; in creatura quidem realiter, non autem in creatore."

[84] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 13, art. 7; qu. 45, arts. 1-8.

In his assessment of the Thomistic denial of a real relation between God and creatures, Craig fails to distinguish between a logical term in a *pure* logical relation and a logical term in a mixed relation.[85] Recall from above, in a *pure* logical relation the order that each term has to the other arises *entirely* from a mind that imputes such an order *without* any correspondence to the real world. For example, it is the mind that imputes the order that man has to animal as species to genus as well as the order that animal has to man as genus to species. *Both* orders arise from man's conceptual understanding and has no grounding in reality; the reason being that the terms in the relation—the species of man and the genus of animal—are not *things* that exist in the real world. The same is true for the relation of self-identity. The mind alone imputes the order that each extreme—I and myself—has to the other. This is *not* the case for a mixed relation. Thomas Weinandy explains,

> [T]he logical term is related not because man establishes the relation in his mind, but because *in reality* some second term is really related to it as it is in itself and not by any mediating action, and thus *in reality* the logical term is actually related.[86]

Weinandy's description of the logical term being "actually related" nicely captures the Thomistic position. It excludes any notion of the predication of the relation to the logical term being false (not conforming to the real world) while at the same time preserving the notion that there is no extramental foundation in the logical term in virtue of which it is related to the other. To use the example of the knower and the object known, the object known is *actually* (truly) related to the knower—i.e., it is part of the real world that the object known has a relation to the knower as that which is known by the knower—but it is related as such not in virtue of some extramental foundation in itself but in virtue of the real relation that the knower has to it—a real relation that arises from the accidental quality of the knower's act of knowing it, a quality that depends for its existence on the object known. So, the language of "actual relation," in the words of Weinandy, gives "the full meaning to the concept 'logical relation' *as used in a mixed relation*."[87]

Such is the Thomistic understanding of God's logical relation in the relation He has to creatures. It is *actual* in that the imputed relation to God, whether it be "Creator" or "Lord," belongs to the real world; it conforms to an objective reality. The objective reality to which the imputed relation conforms is the real relation that the creature has to God. God is truly "Creator," for example, in virtue of a creature being ordered to God by way of its *esse*, which it receives from God as its source. Aquinas uses this same line of reasoning when he justifies the attribution of the name "Lord" to God: "God simply is named Lord by which the creature is subjected to him."[88] This is why Aquinas concludes that "God is named relatively to the creature due to the fact that the creature is referred to himself."[89] This is no different than the relation that we impute to the

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[85] This line of reasoning is taken from Weinandy, *Does God Change?,* 94-95.

[86] Weinandy, *Does God Change?*, 94.

[87] Weinandy, *Does God Change?*, 95; emphasis added.

[88] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 13, art. 7 ad 5: "[Deus] enim modo dicitur dominus, quo creatura ei subiecta est."

[89] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 13, art. 7: "Deus dicatur relative ad creaturam, quia creatura refertur ad ipsum"; See also *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 2, Cap. 13 (emphasis added): "Cum igitur ostensum sit quod non sint in ipso realiter, et tamen dicuntur de eo, relinquitur quod et *attribuantur solum secundum intelligentiae modum, ex eo quod alia referuntur ad ipsum*." For authors who follow Aquinas in this line of reasoning, see Weinandy, *Does God Change?,* 94-95; Knasas, "Aquinas and finite gods," 90; De Nys, "God, Creatures, and Relations," 599; Kelly, "God: How Near a Relation?" 218; Dever, "Divine Simplicity," 176-180; Long, *Analogia Entis,* 70; D.J. Wennemann,

object known when it is known by the knower. Aquinas explains, "Indeed, as the knowable is named relatively not because the thing itself refers to knowledge but because knowledge refers to it, as is held in *V Metaphysics,* in this manner God is named relatively because the creature refers to himself."[90]

Moreover, just as the knower's act of knowing serves as the objective reality to which the imputed relation to the object known ("known by knower") corresponds, so too the creature's real relation to God is that which serves as the objective reality to which the imputed relation to God ("Creator" or "Lord") corresponds. Again, Aquinas writes, "[I]n relations of this kind [temporal relations ascribed to God, like "Creator" and "Lord"] something from the part of a thing is corresponding to them, namely the relation of the creature to God."[91] Having an objective reality to which the imputed relation to God can correspond gives justification for a true predication of a relation between God and creatures.[92] Therefore, even though God's relation to creatures is logical (a relation that the mind imputes), it is *actual* (the mind only imputes the relation because it grasps the real relation that the creature has to God), or in the words of Aquinas, "God is Lord not only according to thought but *in reality*."[93]

Now, for some the idea that the mind can conceive of God as having a relation to creatures and yet that conceived relation not have a direct correspondence within God might seem strange or odd.[94] One would be in good company, since Craig thinks Aquinas's doctrine of God's relation to creatures is "startling," "unusual,"[95] "extraordinarily implausible,"[96] and "quite incredible."[97] But this would be no stranger than the mind conceiving of a relation that the object known has to the knower while at the same time acknowledging there is no direct correspondence to something in the object known in virtue of which it is related to the knower. Sometimes our mode of understanding something is not the same as its mode of existence and yet a true predication can still be made of the thing.

Another example, one that Aquinas uses, is that of genus.[98] When we think of a man and a horse, the intellect grasps the animal nature of each—the genus of animal. But the conceived genus does not correspond to a thing outside the mind that is a genus. That does not mean, however, that there is nothing in reality to which the concept of the genus of animal corresponds. The man and

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"Saint Thomas's Doctrine of Extrinsic Denomination as Mediate Correspondence in Naming God Ex Tempore," *The Modern Schoolman* 65 (1988): 119-129, 122-124; Loughran, "Efficient Causality and Extrinsic Denomination in the Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas," 211-212; Spencer and Grant, "Activity, Identity, and God," 30-31.

[90] Aquinas, *De Potentia,* qu. 11, art. 11 ad 1: "Sicut enim scibile dicitur relative, non quia ipsum referatur ad scientiam, sed quia scientia referatur ad ipsum, ut habetur V Metaph., ita Deus dicitur relative, quia creaturae referuntur ad ipsum." Consulted translation: *Quaestiones Disputate De Potentia Dei,* trans. by English Dominican Fathers (Westminister, Maryland: Newman Press, 1952). Cf. *Summa Theologiiae,* Ia, qu. 1, art. 7; *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 2, Cap. 13.

[91] Aquinas, *De Potentia,* qu. 7, art. 11: "In huiusmodi relationibus aliquid respondet ex parte rei, scilicet relatio creaturae ad Deum." See also *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 2, Caps. 13 and 14; *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, qu. 13, art. 7.

[92] See Feser, "The Neo-Classical Challenge to Classical Theism"; M. Whitfield, "Aquinas on Relations," *European Journal of the Study of Thomas Aquinas* 38, no. 1 (2020): 15-32.

[93] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 13, art. 7 ad 5 (emphasis added): "Deus non secundum rationem tantum, sed *realiter* sit dominus." Consulted translation: Benzinger Bros. 1947.

[94] See Mullins, "Classical Theism," 93.

[95] Craig, "God's Real Relation to the World," 97.

[96] Ibid., 98.

[97] Ibid., 99.

[98] See Aquinas, *De Potentia,* qu.1, art. 1.

the horse themselves play that role. Thus, it is true to predicate of man and horse that they are both animals.

The type of correspondence in the above two examples is what Aquinas calls a *mediate* correspondence, which he contrasts with an *immediate* correspondence.[99] Immediate correspondence, or more precisely conformity, occurs when the intellect conceives the form of a thing that exists outside the mind, such as a man or a horse. Such mental conceptions of extra-mental reality are called "first intentions."[100] *Mediate* correspondence occurs when the intellect conceives something about extramental reality but as mediated through what it conceives in first intentions. Such mental concepts are called "second intentions," "*concepts* about certain sorts of relations among anything and everything (words, concepts, things) involved in the human way of knowing."[101] In other words, what the mind conceives corresponds to reality because what it conceives is tied up with something else that does have an immediate correspondence.

In the case of the object known, the mind's generation of a second intention idea that the object known has a relation to the knower is mediated through the first intention conception of the knower's act of knowing the object known. In the case of the genus of animal, the mind generates the idea and thus understands something true about man and horse but does so only through the mediation of the first intention conception of the forms of man and horse.

If one can accept that our minds conceive a known object's relation to a knower and the genus of animal without a direct and immediate correspondence to something in reality, but yet these concepts still have a foundation in reality, then one should have no trouble accepting that our minds can conceive God as having a relation to creatures without a direct and immediate correspondence in God and yet still have a foundation in reality.

III.B
The Unintelligible Universe Objection

Craig puts forward another objection to the Thomistic denial of a real relation between God and creatures in the same paper mentioned above. He argues that to affirm what I have called the *strong* view of divine immutability in the face of the variability of creation is to make creation "unintelligible."[102]. First, Craig rightly acknowledges Aquinas's strong view of divine immutability, writing, "In all these worlds God never acts differently, He never cognizes differently, He never wills differently; He is just the simple, unrelated act of being."[103] Based on this understanding of divine activity, Craig concludes, "Thomas's doctrine of creation makes it

[99] Aquinas employs this difference between immediate and mediate correspondence in his argument that power signifies something real in God but is not something distinct from the divine essence. See Aquinas, *De Potentia* qu.1, art. 1 ad 10. For authors who comment on Aquinas's distinction between immediate and mediate correspondence, see Dever, "Divine Simplicity," 159-160; Loughran, "Efficient Causality and Extrinsic Denomination," 113-120.

[100] Joseph Bobik, *Aquinas on Being and Essence: A Translation and Interpretation* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1965), 17.

[101] Ibid. For evidence that Aquinas distinguished between 'first intention' and 'second intention' concepts, though not using these words, see Ralph W. Clark, "A Note: Aquinas on Intentions," *The Thomist* 40, no. 2 (1976): 303-310.

[102] Craig, "God's Relation to the World," 109.

[103] Ibid. I take "unrelated" here to mean "having no real relation." If by "unrelated" Craig means "no relation whatsoever," then this would be one aspect of Aquinas's doctrine that he does not "rightly acknowledge."

unintelligible why the universe exists rather than nothing."[104] In the end, Craig thinks such a conclusion makes "the existence of the universe absurd."[105]

There are many problems with Craig's objection.[106] However, I will only focus on three here, each of which are Thomistic in their approach. The first problem is that it is Craig's denial of God having a relation of reason with creation that ends in absurdity, since, as will be shown below, it ends in denying the existence of the universe. Consider that Craig's objection implies that there must be some *feature within* God in virtue of which this world is brought about, whether it be an act of cognition or volition ("He never cognizes differently, He never wills differently"). This feature, as Craig envisions it, would be considered an accident given the mental framework of Aquinas, since an accident is something that is *non-essential* (accidental) to an agent and thus can come and go without the agent ceasing to be.[107] *That* Craig objects to God remaining exactly the same is evidence of this.

Now, wherever there is an accident there is a mixture of act and potency within the subject in which the accident inheres. The reason is that accidents stand in a relation to the subject in which they inhere as one of act to potency.[108] Also, wherever there is an accident there is actuality, or being, that is not had in virtue of what the thing is, since an accident, by definition, is something that actualizes the subject in which it inheres but does not belong to the essence of the thing.[109] If actuality, or being, is not had in virtue of the essence of a thing, that thing must receive its new actuality from some cause outside itself.[110]

Given the above two entailments of an accident, it follows that having an accident necessarily precludes an entity from being pure *esse* itself. First, a being that is pure *esse* just is pure actuality, and thus cannot be in potency to receiving any new actuality.[111] Second, a being that is pure *esse* is an entity for which essence and *esse* are identical, which means that such a being in principle cannot be in potency to receiving any new *esse.* A thing cannot be in potency to that which it is essentially (e.g., a triangle cannot be in potency to having three straight sides). Since Craig's objection demands an accidental feature within the Creator in virtue of which the Creator creates, and having an accidental feature necessarily precludes an entity from being pure *esse*, it follows that Craig's objection demands that the Creator cannot be pure *esse*.

But the whole point of Aquinas's project of philosophical arguments for God's existence, in particular his argument in the *De Ente Et Essentia*, is to demonstrate that nothing would exist without such a primary cause that is pure *esse*.[112] In other words, to deny the existence of a Creator that is pure *esse* is to deny the existence of the very created order of being. On Aquinas's view,

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[104] Ibid. 110.

[105] Ibid. 111.

[106] See Grant, "Must a Cause Be Really Related to Its Effect?".

[107] See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* IIIa, qu. 2, art. 6 obj 2: "[O]mne quod advenit alicui post esse completum, advenit ei accidentaliter, hoc enim dicimus accidens quod potest alicui et adesse et abesse praeter subiecti corruptionem."

[108] See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 3, art. 6: "quia subiectum comparatur ad accidens, sicut potentia ad actum."

[109] A thing cannot be without that which it is has essentially. An accident is something that a thing can be without. Therefore, an accident is not had essentially. See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 44, art. 1 obj. 1: "Nihil enim prohibet inveniri rem sine eo quod non est de ratione rei, sicut hominem sine albedine."

[110] See Chapter 1, Section I.A for my defense of this principle.

[111] *That* pure *esse* is pure actuality follows from Aquinas's constant teaching that *esse* is the "act of all acts." See note 52 of chapter one.

[112] See Aquinas, *De Ente Et Essentia,* Cap. 4. For a book length treatment of this argument, see Kerr, *Aquinas's Way to God*.

therefore, Craig's objection ends up denying the existence of the universe, which is absurd. So, as mentioned above, it is Craig's denial of God's relation with creation being one of reason that leads to absurdity, not Aquinas's claim that God's relation with creation is one of reason.

This leads to a second problem with Craig's objection: it is the denial of a Creator being pure *esse* that makes the universe unintelligible, not the denial of God's relation with creation being one of reason. Given Aquinas's argumentation in his *De Ente et Essentia,* to assert that a creature can exist without a primary cause that is pure *esse* is to assert that *esse* can be found in a creature without a source from which the creature receives its *esse.* The reason for this is that, as Aquinas argues, pure *esse* alone accounts for the *esse* that is found in a being for whom *esse* and essence are not identical, which is the case for any being other than pure *esse*—that is to say, a creature.[113] But to say that a creature can exist without a source from which it receives its *esse* is tantamount to saying that the creature depends on nothing, and thus has no cause, when the nature of its *esse* demands that it does. This view, then, ends with no explanation as to why the universe exists rather than not. In the words of Craig, such a position is "unintelligible."

The above two problems taken together constitute a third: Craig's objection begs the question against Aquinas. The idea that God would have to have within himself an accidental feature in virtue of which He creates would be true *if and only if* there could be no being such that it is pure *esse*. But that is precisely what Aquinas's argument in his *De Ente* attempts to prove, which provides an intelligible explanation as to why this created order exists rather than not. Moreover, it is God as pure *esse* that serves as the very basis for Aquinas's doctrine that God's relation with creation is not real but one of reason.[114]

Craig's objection, therefore, argues against God's relation with creation being one of reason by assuming that God cannot have a relation with creation that is one of reason. Given the circular reasoning embedded in Craig's objection (begging the question), his objection fails as a reason to reject the Thomistic doctrine that God's relation with creation is not real but one of reason.

III.C
The Impersonal and Remote God Objection

The third objection to the Thomistic denial of a real relation between God and creatures perhaps hit closest to the heart. It would seem to entail a static God who is completely impersonal—not really engaged with our destiny—and remote. Schubert Ogden was one author who made such a claim.[115] For Ogden, to deny that we and our various actions make a difference

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[113] This follows from the metaphysical impossibility of there being more than one being that is pure *esse*. See Chapter 6, Section II.D of this thesis.

[114] See above in this Chapter, Section II.

[115] See Schubert Ogden, *The Reality of God and Other Essays* (London: SCM press, 1997). For authors who argue for a similar view, but with a focus on God's knowing and willing his creatures, see Bulton Z, Cooper, *The Idea of God: A Whiteheadian Critique of St. Thomas Aquinas's Concept of God* (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1974), 5-6; Chester P. Michael, *A Comparison of the God-Talk of Thomas Aquinas and Charles Hartshorne* (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms, 1975), 189; Walter E. Stokes, "Is God Really Related to this World?" *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 39 (1965), 145-151; "God for Today and Tomorrow," *New Scholasticism* 43 (1969): 351-78. For authors who zero in on God's remoteness, see Isaak Dorner, *Divine Immutability: A Critical Reconsideration*, trans. Robert R. Williams and Claude Welch (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 81; W. Kneale, "Time and Eternity in Theology," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 61 (1960-1961), 87-108, 99-101; Nicholas Wolterstorff, "God Everlasting," in *God and the Good*, eds. Clifton J. Orlebeke and Lewis B. Smedes (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975), 181-203; and Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism*, 211-222.

to God, which is involved in the denial that God has a real relation to creatures, is to deny that God is "genuinely related to our life in the world."[116] Such traditional theism, in the eyes of Ogden, removes God from any and all genuine relationships with creatures and thus makes him a static and indifferent God.[117]

Another author who held similar views was Charles Hartshorne, which he discussed thoroughly in his book *The Divine Relativity*.[118] Walter E. Stokes sums up Hartshorne's view nicely:

> His criticism of the traditional theistic view of this relation is that it regards God as somehow indifferent to persons and to the interrelations of things; it regards God as being what He is eternally, whether He creates this world or no world at all; it regards Him, not as a subject or person, but as a thing, not conceived at all with relations to persons.[119]

This view of God being "wholly absolute," led Hartshorne to conclude "that God does not know or love or will us, his creatures."[120] Craig has followed suit, writing in reference to Aquinas's teaching that God knows, wills, and loves the world, "this is precisely what Aquinas's doctrine of no real relation of God to the world denies."[121] Given that such a view is incompatible with religious doctrines of God's knowing and willing creation, particularly the human race, the above authors reject the idea that God's relation to creatures is one of reason and is not a real relation.

As we begin our response, it is important to recall precisely what the Thomistic denial of a real relation of God to the world means. It simply means that there is no extramental feature about God in virtue of which He is related to creatures. As shown above, He is not related by some accidental feature within him, whether quantity or quality. He is not related to creatures by nature or his *esse*. He is not related to creatures by way of dependence, whether efficient or final causality. To say that God is not related to creatures in these ways, at least at face value, does not entail that God is static or not intimately involved in the lives of humans. The only way such denials could lead to God not being involved in our lives through knowing us and willing us is if one believes that God can only know and will creatures, and particular human beings, on condition that his act of knowing and willing creatures are specified by creatures. Such a view will be taken up in chapters four and six.

A second response is that it is God's creative act itself that makes God *most* intimate to us.[122] Consider that for a cause to bring about an effect, it must be present to that effect and act

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[116] Ogden, *The Reality of God and other Essays*, 47.

[117] For commentary on Ogden's view, see Kelly, "God: How Near a Relation?".

[118] See Charles Hartshorne, *The Divine Relativity: A Social Conception of God,* 2nd ed. (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1964), 1-59; "The Dipolar Conception of Deity," *The Review of Metaphysics* 21, no. 2 (1967): 273-289.

[119] Stokes, "Is God Really Related to this World?", 145-146.

[120] Hartshorne, *The Divine Relativity,* 16.

[121] Craig, "God's Real Relation to the World," 108.

[122] For authors to argue along these lines, see McWhorter, "Aquinas on God's Relation to the World"; Dodds, *Unchanging God of Love,* 168-169; Knasas, "Aquinas and Finite gods," 89-90; De Nys, "God, Creatures, and Relations"; Anderson, *The Cause of Being,* 139-147; Weinandy, *Does God Change?*, 92-93; "God and Human Suffering: His Act of Creation and His Acts in History," in *Divine Impassibility and the Mystery of Human Suffering* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2009), 107; Oliver, *Creation*, 49-50; Totleben, "The Palamite Controversy," 77; Catherine M. Lacugna, "The Relational God: Aquinas and Beyond Catherine M. Lacugna," *Theological Studies* 46 (1985): 647-663.

upon it, touching it by its power.[123] God, who is *ipsum ess subsistens*, is the cause of the *esse* of everything that exists.[124] Therefore, God must be present to every creature.

Now, God's presence to creatures as their cause is *most* intimate for three reasons. First, simply by causing the *esse* of a creature God is intimately present. This is so because the creature's *esse* is the "most intimate aspect" of a creature, its "core and center."[125]

The second reason that God is most intimately present to creatures is that His presence to the creature as its cause of being is a "non-mediated presence"[126]—that is to say, His presence is *immediate* and *direct*. This is so in two ways. First, God's presence to creatures as the cause of their being is not mediated through a creaturely subject, like a created cause is present to its effect. Created causes are present to their effects only insofar as they draw out their effect from some pre-existing subject.[127] This being the case, created causes are only *mediately* present to their effects. God, on the other hand, does not draw out *esse* from some pre-existing subject. He creates it *immediately* (not through mediation) from nothing such that the *esse creatum* is dependent solely and entirely on God from the moment the creature comes into being and at every moment the creature exists.[128] Such causal activity is called creation *ex nihilo*.[129] "In this case," Peter Totleben writes, "it is impossible for the agent to be 'distant' from the effect, because there is no distinct subject on which the agent acts."[130]

God's presence is also immediate to creatures because his presence is not mediated through some power distinct from himself. Recall from above, God's act of volition by which he brings about the effect of a creature's *esse* is *identical* to his very essence.[131] This being the case, God *himself*, as pure being that he is, is present to every creature.

A third reason why God is most intimately present to creatures is because God's very being is not just present *to* creatures but *within* creatures. The created *esse* that is God's immediate effect is "innermost to each thing and is deeper *within* all things."[132] If God is present to the creature insofar as he creates the *esse* of the creature by no other act than the pure act/*esse* that he is, and the creature's *esse* is *within* the creature, then God is present in the creature in virtue of his very essence.[133] In the words of Aquinas, "God is said to be in all things by essence, not indeed of the things themselves, as if he were of their essence; but by his own essence; because his substance is present to all things as the cause of their being."[134] To put it in more

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[123] See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 8, art. 1: "Oportet enim omne agens coniungi ei in quod immediate agit, et sua virtute illud contingere, unde in VII Physic. probatur quod motum et movens oportet esse simul."

[124] See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 45, art. 5.

[125] Knasas, "Aquinas and finite gods," 89.

[126] William Hill, *Knowing the Unknown God* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1971), 176-177.

[127] This line of reasoning is taken from Totleben, "The Palamite Controversy," 77. See also Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 3, Cap. 102: "Omnis creatura in sua actione requirit subiectum aliquod in quod agat."

[128] See Aquinas, *IV Sent.,* Lib. 4, dist. 46, qu. 2, art. 1 ad 2; *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 2, Cap. 16; *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 41, art. 3; qu. 45, art. 2; *De Veritate,* qu. 5, art. 2 ad 6; *De Potentia,* qu. 3, arts. 1 and 2.

[129] See Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 3, Cap. 69 (emphasis added): "[S]i fiunt, oportet quod fiant *ex nihilo*, quod est creari"; *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 45, art. 2 ad 2: "[C]reare est ex nihilo aliquid facere."

[130] Totleben, "The Palamite Controversy," 77.

[131] See note #24 of the Introduction for references in Aquinas's work.

[132] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 8, art. 1 (emphasis added): "Esse autem est illud quod est magis intimum cuilibet, et quod profundius omnibus *inest*."

[133] For this line of reasoning, see Weinandy, *Does God Change?,* 92.

[134] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 8, art. 3 ad 1: "Deus dicitur esse in omnibus per essentiam, non quidem rerum, quasi sit de essentia earum, sed per essentiam suam, quia substantia sua adest omnibus ut causa essendi, sicut dictum est."

colloquial terms, as the cause of a creature's *esse* God necessarily is "in the thick of things," touching the creature "from within."[135]

The irony here is that God's non-real relation with creatures is what allows for him to have the most intimate relation with them.[136] For if God were related to creatures with a real relation, either by an accidental feature within him, his nature, his being, or by way of dependence (either efficient or final causality), then God would *not* be *ipsum esse subsistens,* since, as we have seen above, every mode of real relation with something other than God himself entails some form of passive potentiality. If God were not *ipsum esse subsistens*, then he would not be the source of every creature's *esse* because only that which is pure *esse* can be the primary cause of *esse creatum*.[137] Not being the source of a creature's *esse* would make God distant indeed. Therefore, to deny the non-real relation that God has to creatures (the traditional theistic view) is to undermine the very intimacy that one sets out to uphold with such a denial. It is not Aquinas's view of God, and along with him classical theism, that entails a removed, remote, withdrawn, and isolated God. Rather, such conclusions follow from the views of Hartshorne, Ogden, and Craig.

Now, as to the above authors' concern that the Thomistic doctrine of God's non-real relation to creatures entails that God does not know, will, or love creatures, the key is an insight that was presented above—namely, that God does not create *esse creatum* out of the necessity of his nature. When added to a few more conclusions that Aquinas makes, it becomes clear that not to create out of the necessity of nature is to create by free choice. As Aquinas argues, "Free choice is said in relation to the things that one wills, not of necessity, but of his own accord."[138]

Here is the flow of thought: If creatures come to be in virtue of God's *will* (as opposed to mere happen stance), which necessarily presupposes intellect, and such intellectual willing is not of necessity, then creatures would come to be by God's intellect and free will. If God freely wills creatures, and knows that he is willing creatures, then it would follow that God indeed *does* know and will creatures, thus alleviating the concern of the above authors.

So, are creatures created by *will*? They must be, since it belongs to the nature of all creatures, both rational and non-rational, to act for an end.[139] Order to an end necessarily requires intellect and will: intellect to know the end and will to direct/move a thing to its end. Since God is Creator of all creatures (both non-rational and rational), along with their inherent goal-directed activity, it follows that God must create creatures by both intellect and will.

Is God's willing of creatures a natural necessity? Again, the answer is no.[140] To say that God wills creatures necessarily is nothing more than saying that God is *essentially* related to

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[135] Ibid., 90.

[136] I am grateful to Michael Dodds for articulating this irony. See Dodds, "*The Unchanging God of Love,*" 169.

[137] That pure *esse* alone can be the source of *esse creatum* follows from the line of reasoning embedded of Aquinas's Five Ways. The key principle is that whatever is had *per aliud* reduces to that which is had *per se*. See note #28 of chapter one. See also Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 45, art. 5, where Aquinas argues that only God can create.

[138] Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 1, Cap. 88.

[139] Aquinas employs this line of reasoning to the same end in *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 19, art. 4: "Cum enim propter finem agat et intellectus et natura, ut probatur in II Physic., necesse est ut agenti per naturam praedeterminetur finis, et media necessaria ad finem, ab aliquo superiori intellectu; sicut sagittae praedeterminatur finis et certus modus a sagittante. Unde necesse est quod agens per intellectum et voluntatem, sit prius agente per naturam. Unde, cum primum in ordine agentium sit Deus, necesse est quod per intellectum et voluntatem agat." See also *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 2, Cap. 23 for the line of argumentation.

[140] The natural necessity spoken of here is what Aquinas calls "absolute necessity" (*absolute necessarium*) which is distinguished from what he calls "suppositional necessity" (*suppositione necessarium*). Absolute necessity

creatures. For a creature to be necessarily willed by God is for that creature to constitute God's being because God's being is identical to his willing—they are one and the same reality.[141] But recall from above, God cannot be *essentially* related to creatures. The reasoning that we gave was as follows: 1) If God were essentially related to creatures, then his *esse*, *esse divinum,* would be unintelligible without *esse creatum*; 2) but *esse creatum* in principle cannot constitute the intelligibility of *esse divinum* because *esse creatum* is *esse* that is received within some nature or essence and *esse divinum* is *esse* that is not received into a particular nature or essence; 3) therefore, God, whose nature is *esse divinum*, in principle cannot be related to creatures by way of being essentially ordered to them.

There was another line of reasoning employed above that gives reason why God does not, and in principle cannot, necessarily will *esse creatum*: no creature can be an end for God, or that in which God finds his perfection. To speak of creatures necessarily emanating from God's will would entail that a creature (or creatures) is an end for God—that in which God finds his perfection as *esse divinum*. But, as shown above, there are three reasons why something other than God himself—a creature—cannot serve as an end for God. First, God is pure act, which means there is no passive potency within him. If creatures were an end for God, then the full actualization (perfection) of God's being would be related to that creature as potency to act. Second, God's *esse* belongs to a diverse ontological realm than a creature's *esse. Esse creatum* can never involve *esse divinum*. This being the case, *esse creatum* cannot add to *esse divinum*, which would have to be true if a creature (creatures) were an end for God. Third, God contains in himself the perfection of all things such that no possible creaturely perfection of being could add to God because creatures have nothing that is not already in God according to his infinite and simple mode of being. Since a creature (or creatures) cannot serve as an end for God—that in which God finds his perfection, it follows that the production of a creature's *esse* does not, and in principle cannot, necessarily proceed from God's will.[142]

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refers to a necessity that something be and cannot be otherwise absolutely speaking. As applied to God and his creative act, it would mean that the creative act belongs to His very nature and/or being such that to posit His existence would be to posit His creative act. With such necessity, we could not have one without the other. Suppositional necessity, on the other hand, refers to a necessity that follows from a supposed actuality that could have been otherwise. For example, Socrates's choice to run could have been otherwise. But on supposition that Socrates does run, it is necessary that he runs because he cannot not be running while he is running. Similarly, supposing that God creates, it is necessary that he creates because given God's immutability he cannot *not* will what he wills. God cannot change his will from creating to not creating. It is an eternal present analogous to the now of Socrates's running. For this distinction between the two kinds of necessity in Aquinas, see *De Veritate,* qu. 23, art. 4 ad 1; *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 1, Cap. 83; *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 19, art. 7 ad 4. For authors who comment on this distinction relative to God's willing of himself and God's willing of creatures, see Duby, "Divine Simplicity, Divine Freedom, and the Contingency of Creation." 130-131; Stump and Kretzmann, "Absolute Simplicity"; Stump, *Aquinas*, 122-124; Dolezal, *God Without Parts,* 185; Totleben, "The Palamite Controversy," 97-98; Dodds, *The Unchanging God of Love,* 172-174.

[141] This follows from Aquinas's doctrine that God's being is identical to his action in general. See note #24 of the Introduction for citations from Aquinas. See the same note for Aquinas's doctrine that God's being is identical to his willing specifically.

[142] The main argument for Aquinas as to why God creates by free will and not of natural necessity is that creatures are not, and in principle cannot be, a necessary means to the divine end, which is the divine goodness, or the divine essence itself. In reference to why God does not will creatures with absolute necessity, he writes, "[S]emper est volens actu quicquid vult, non solum circa se sed etiam circa causata: sed *quia volitum non habet necessarium ordinem ad divinam bonitatem, quae est proprium obiectum divinae voluntatis*." *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 1, Cap. 82 (emphasis added). This argument is essentially the same as the above argument for why a creature cannot be an end for God. Aquinas presents his argument in several places throughout the corpus of his writings. See, for example, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 19, art. 3; *De Potentia,* qu. 1, art. 5; *De Vertiate,* qu. 23, art. 4; *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 1, Caps. 81, 88; Lib. 3, Cap. 35. For authors who defend this line of reasoning in Aquinas, see John F. Wippel,

With all the pieces of the puzzle now in place, we only need run the argument in full:

Premise One: If creatures come to be in virtue of God's *will* (as opposed to mere happen stance), which necessarily presupposes intellect, and such intellectual willing is not of necessity, then creatures would come to be by God's intellect and free will.

Premise Two: Creatures come to be in virtue of God's *will* (as opposed to mere happen stance), which necessarily presupposes intellect, and such intellectual willing is not of necessity.

Conclusion 1: Therefore, creatures come to be by God's intellect and free will.

The last few movements below do not need any argumentation. Premise three is self-evident and Premise Four is Conclusion 1 restated.

Premise Three: If creatures come to be by God's intellect and free will, then God knows and wills creatures.

Premise Four: Creatures come to be by God's intellect and free will.

"Norman Kretzmann on Aquinas's Attribution of Will and of Freedom to Create to God," *Religious Studies* 39, no. 3 (2003): 287-298, 297-298; *Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas,* Vol. 2 (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of American, 2007), 231-233, 237; "Thomas Aquinas on the Ultimate Why Question," 745-747; Levering, *Engaging the Doctrine of Creation,* 104; Wittman, *God and Creation,* 65-70; Julie Ann Swanstrom, "The Metaphysics of Causation in the Creation Accounts of Avicenna and Aquinas," PhD. Dissertation (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University, 2013), 152-154; Stump and Kretzmann, "Absolute Simplicity"; Totleben, "The Palamite Controversy," 93; Gloria Frost, "Aquinas and Scotus on the Source of Contingency," *Oxford Studies in Medieval Philosophy* 2, no.1 (2014): 46-66, 52-53; Dennis Bonnette, "God: Eternity, Free Will, and the World," Strange Notions, https://strangenotions.com/god-eternity-free-will-and-the-world/, accessed April 22, 2022; Aiden Kimel, "Aquinas and Divine Freedom: God Might Have Willed Otherwise," Electic Orthodoxy, September 18, 2018, https://afkimel.wordpress.com/2018/09/18/aquinas-and-divine-freedom-god-might-have-willed-otherwise/, accessed April 22, 2022; Mahfood, "Divine Simplicity into the Negative Zone"; Dolezal, *God Without Parts,* 203-204; Rudi Te Velde, *Aquinas on God: The 'Divine Science' of the Summa Theologiae* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 85. For other arguments that Aquinas gives for why God creates by free will, see *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 1, Cap. 81; Lib. 2, Cap. 23; *De Potentia,* qu. 3, art. 15. For commentary on Aquinas's other lines of argumentation for God's freedom to create, see Wippel, "Thomas Aquinas on the Ultimate Why Question." For an argument in favor of God's creative act being naturally necessary, see Norman Kretzmann, *The Metaphysics of Theism: Aquinas's Natural Theology in Summa Contra Gentiles I* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 217-225; *The Metaphysics of Creation: Aquinas's Natural Theology in Summa Contra Gentiles II* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 120-126 and 132-136; "Goodness, Knowledge, and Indeterminacy in the Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas," *The Journal of Philosophy, Supplement* 80, no. 10 (1983): 631-649; "A Particular Problem of Creation: Why Would God Create This World?" in *Being and Goodness: The Concept of the Good in Metaphysics and Philosophical Theology,* ed. Scott MacDonald (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018), 229-249. For counter responses to Kretzmann's line of reasoning, see Wippel, "Norman Kretzmann on Aquinas's Attribution of Will and of Freedom to Create to God"; *Metaphysical Themes*, 218-37; "Thomas Aquinas on the Ultimate Why Question," 742, 751; Dolezal, *God Without Parts,* 191-194; Lagrange, *The One God,* 499-500; *God: His Existence and His Nature,* Vol. II, 100-101; Kerr, *Aquinas and the Metaphysics of Creation,* 64-65; Wittman, *God and Creation,* 59-65; Donnelly, "Saint Thomas and the Ultimate Purpose of Creation"; Swanstrom, "The Metaphysics of Causation," 155-158; Dewan, "St. Thomas, Norman Kretzmann, and Divine Freedom in Creating"; James Ross, "Did God Create the Only Possible World?" *Review of Metaphysics* 16, no. 1 (1962):14-25, 18; Michael Liccione, "Mystery and Explanation in Aquinas's Account of Creation," *The Thomist* 59, no. 2 (1995): 223-245, 230-231, 243-244.

Conclusion 2: Therefore, God knows and wills creatures.

What about the above concern with regard to God loving us human beings? First, love involves willing the good of the other.[143] The good for us as human beings is that we exist, that we have everything that constitutes what we are as rational animals—the union of body and rational soul, and that we are directed to our final end, which is God himself. Since God wills all these things for us, it follows that He loves us. Second, there is no greater manifestation of love than the *free* and *gratuitous* gift of existence that God gives us in creating us, a giving in which there is no self-interest on God's part. It is not hyperbolic to say that we are created from the purest of pure acts of love.

Given everything said above, a theist should have no qualms with affirming that God is not really related to creatures and at the same time knows, wills, and loves creatures. Such a knowing and willing, as argued above, is a knowing and a willing of the *most* intimate kind—a knowing and willing that belongs only to the Creator who has a non-real relation to creatures. As regards to God's love, it is of the most generous kind as there is nothing for God to get out of such loving activity. For the Creator to have such an intimate and loving involvement in our existence is a far cry from being a distant and impersonal unloving God.

Conclusion

In this Chapter, I have argued that if God's relation to creatures is not a real relation but one of reason, then the variability of creation would not make God subject to being entitatively different than he is now. The truth of this premise came to light when I elucidated the nature of the logical term in a "mixed" relation, which in the relation between God and creation is God Himself. This allows for there to be variation on the creature side of the God-creature relation without there being variation, whether in fact or potentially, in God.

I then laid out all the ways in which God could possibly be related to creatures: by way of an accidental feature within God, such as quantity or a quality, by way of nature, by way of being, and by way of dependence—whether efficient or final causality. Given the metaphysics of divinity established in Chapter One, it was then argued that God cannot be related to creatures in any of the ways that makes for a real relation, nor can he be related to creatures in principle, thus establishing the truth of Premise Two of the main argument: God's relation to creatures is not a real relation but one of reason. Since both premises in the main argument have been shown to be true, and the form is valid, the conclusion necessarily follows: the variability of creation does not make God subject to being (or in fact be) entitatively different than He is now.

I have also addressed three objections to God's non-real relation to creatures and found them wanting. It is not true that God's non-real relation to creatures falsifies predications of God such as "Creator" and "Lord." Nor does such a non-real relation make the universe unintelligible. Finally, the idea that God's non-real relation to creatures makes Him distant, impersonal, and unloving has been shown to be off base because it fails to appreciate the metaphysics of God's non-real relation to creatures, which allows for the most intimate presence to a creature possible and a love that is of the highest kind—the free giving of existence that is void of all self-interest.

The general defense provided in this chapter addresses primarily the intuitive sense that the variability of creation poses a threat to divine immutability. The tension between the two doctrines that many intuit is sufficiently eased with the argument presented in this Chapter. However, within

[143] See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* IaIIae, qu. 26, art. 4; IIaIIae, qu. 23, art. 1.

the philosophical literature the tension between the two doctrines is shown to be based on more than intuition. There are specific reasons that philosophers give as to *why* they think the variability of creation poses a threat to divine immutability. As mentioned in the Introduction, they are divided into two main difficulties: "the difficulty of potentiality" and "the difficulty of counterfactual difference." The rest of this essay will be devoted to solving each of these difficulties, starting in the next chapter with the difficulty of potentiality.

Chapter Three
The Difficulty of Potentiality

As mentioned at the end of the previous chapter, the tension that arises when one attempts to affirm, at the same time, the doctrines of divine immutability and the variability of creation goes beyond mere intuition. There are *specific* reasons that philosophers give as to why a theist cannot affirm both doctrines. The tension can be articulated in one of two ways, depending on which doctrine is highlighted as posing a threat. For example, the tension could be articulated in a way that attempts to show why divine immutability poses a threat to the variability of creation. The tension also could be articulated in reverse order, attempting to show why the variability of creation poses a threat to divine immutability. It is the latter order that I will focus on in this dissertation.

What I have called "the difficulty of potentiality" is one of the two major difficulties that arise within this discussion. This difficulty will be the focus of this chapter. The other major difficulty, "the difficulty of counterfactual difference," and the different forms that it takes, will be taken up in chapters four, five, and six.

The "difficulty of potentiality" can be divided into two versions: a *weak* and *strong* version.[1] The weak version asserts that if God were free to have created otherwise, then that would entail *a prior openness to alternative orders* for Him to choose from, and given that He chose one over the other, He must have moved from "a state of potentially willing something to a state of actually willing it," from deliberation to actualization.[2] But to move from potentiality to actuality entails change, which divine immutability excludes.

The *strong* version does not locate the problem in the prior openness to alternatives and the *movement* from potentiality to actuality. Rather, it focuses on the modal status of "could have" in the claim that God, from all eternity, "could have" created differently. If God "could have" created differently, then it seems there would be contingency in the divine will, and if contingency, then some unactualized potentiality. But, of course, the classical view of divine immutability does not allow for unactualized potentiality, since an unactualized potentiality would entail God's being *subject* to change. This does not fit with the classical view because God is not only immutable in fact but also in *principle*—that is to say, God is not even *subject* to change (as defended in Chapter 1).[3]

The sections in this chapter will correspond to the two versions of the difficulty. The weak version will be the focus of section one. I will articulate the objection in more detail and then show why the objection is unsuccessful and how it can be overcome. Section two will focus on the strong version of the difficulty. The movement will be the same as the first section. I will articulate the objection and then proceed to answer the objection, showing in different ways how the strong version of the difficulty can be overcome and does not pose a threat to divine immutability. I will conclude the chapter with a summary of my arguments and conclusions.

I.

[1] See Grant for this division in "Aquinas, Divine Simplicity, and Divine Freedom."

[2] Ibid., 130. For a list of authors who have considered this version of the difficulty from potentiality, see note 16 of the Introduction.

[3] For authors who have advocated for this version of the difficulty, or at least see it as a serious challenge, see note 17 of the Introduction.

The Weak Version—Movement from Potency to Act

The weak version of the difficulty of potentiality asserts that if God were free to have done otherwise, then he would have had to move from a state of potentiality to actuality, from a state of potentially willing this order of providence to actually willing it, which, of course, entails change. This rings true when we consider ourselves as being free to have done otherwise. Prior to our free choice to have done action X, we merely considered it among other alternative actions. Such a moment was one in which we were only *capable* of choosing one or the other, in a state of potency to the alternatives. Only after we were attracted by the merits of one alternative over the other did we *actually* choose to perform the act that we did in fact choose, thereby moving from a state of potentiality to one of actuality—potentially choosing to actually choosing. This is why Aquinas teaches, "Everything that has a potency to opposites is mutable."[4]

The doctrine of the variability of creation states that God could have done other than He did. In other words, he could have chosen differently. For example, rather than choose to permit one of his apostles to betray him, which is what He chose for this order of providence, He could have chosen to not permit any of his apostles to betray Him, which would have constituted a different order of providence. But this freedom to have chosen a different order would seem to entail that God must have had a moment prior to the choice that he in fact made for this order of providence at which his will was merely open to the possible orders. This would have been a state of potentiality for God's will, and only *after* such a moment when he was attracted to the goods of this order over those of another did God's will move to a state of *actually* choosing this order. Of course, such movement from potency to act entails change and thus conflicts with the doctrine of divine immutability.[5]

At the heart of this objection is the idea that free will entails mutability. Now, there are two possible ways to read this. Either A) free will entails mutability because that is the way we *human beings* experience free will, or B) the nature of free will *itself* entails mutability *regardless* of whether it is human or divine. Depending on how one reads the objection the response will differ. I will address each reading in due order.

To say that free will entails mutability because that is the way we *human beings* experience free will is to attribute univocally the modality of *human* freedom, which involves various volitional acts that precede any choice of an alternative (e.g., counsel, intention, consent, etc.), to the modality of *divine* freedom.[6] This is a problem because, as Dolezal writes, "The modality of volitional freedom cannot be abstracted from the nature of the volitional agent."[7] This is so because

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[4] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 19, art. 7 obj. 4: "[O]mne quod habet potentiam ad opposita, est mutabile." Cf. qu. 19, art. 3 obj. 4. See also Dodds, *The Unchanging God of Love,*170-171.

[5] Aquinas seems to present a version of this objection in *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 1, Cap. 82. He presents the objection as stating that if God's will were not determined to certain things, then God's will would be in potentiality. The reason he gives for this is that every power that is open to (not determined by) one thing or the other is in a way in potency (*Omnis autem virtus quae est ad utrumlibet est quodammodo in potentia*). Aquinas does not emphasize the *movement* from potency to act that would have taken place when God chose to will this order of providence. However, given that Aquinas believes that God chose to will this order of providence, the objection that Aquinas presents here maps on with the weak version of the difficulty of potentiality. This view is confirmed by what Aquinas states later in the same chapter: "Si enim in divina voluntate nulla est potentialitas, non sic absque necessitate alterum oppositorum praeaccipit circa sua causata quasi consideretur in potentia ad utrumque, ut primo sit volens potentia utrumque et postmodum volens actu."

[6] This line of argumentation is taken from Dolezal, *God without Parts,* 202-203; Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action,* 137.

[7] Dolezal, *God Without Parts,* 202

the nature of the agent, and thus the being that the nature specifies in kind, is that which determines the mode of the activity—*agere sequitur esse* (action follows being).[8] Two agents with two different natures are going to have to different modes of action.

So, if an agent has a nature such that it is mutable and time bound, its activity is going to involve mutability and time bound characteristics. Human beings have a nature such that they are mutable and time bound. Therefore, the activity of human beings, free choice included, will involve mutability and time bound characteristics. In the case of human free choice, then, there will be a before and an after, a deliberation and consideration of alternatives prior to the actual choice of one over the other.

If, on the other hand, a free agent has a nature such that it is immutable and eternal, then its activities will not involve mutability and time bound characteristics. God is immutable and eternal. Therefore, God's activity, including his free choices, do not involve mutability and time bound characteristics. There can be no prior time to His choice at which God contemplates a range of possibilities and then moves to elect one over the other. This objection, therefore, makes the gross error of "thrusting God into time,"[9] wrongly attributing to an eternal and immutable God a modality of freedom that belongs to a mutable and time bound creature.

This response so far is sufficient to overcome the objection. However, it is negative in its approach, merely showing where the objection goes wrong. There is a positive aspect to it that is worthy of note—namely, that God's act of contemplation of the possible orders of providence and the actualization of this order and not another is one eternal act.[10] As Helm writes, "[B]oth his contemplation of them and his decision to actualize one of them is one timelessly eternal act."[11] There is no *temporal* distinction between contemplation and actualization because both are the same eternal act that God is. The "openness," or indifference, that God has to different orders of providence is not one of temporally standing before alternatives prior to choosing—a sort of passive indifference.[12] Rather, it is one of having a non-necessary relationship to them, which is the ground for His non-real relation to creation (as shown in the previous chapter).[13] As Ross puts

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[8] For this principle found in Aquinas, see *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 3, Cap. 69: "Si *agere sequitur ad esse in actu*, inconveniens est quod actus perfectior actione destituatur." See also Lib. 2, Cap. 6: "Omne igitur ens actu natum est agere aliquid actu existens"; Lib. 2, Cap. 8: "Potentia enim activa competit alicui secundum quod est actu"; *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 75, art. 2: "Vel dicendum quod per se agere convenit per se existenti"; *III Sent.* Lib. 3, dist. 3, qu. 2, art. 1: "Praeterea agere sequitur ad esse perfectum." For authors who have expounded on this principle, see W. Norris Clarke, *Explorations in Metaphysics*, Chap. 3; *Person and Being* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1993), 6-25; Joseph de Finance, *Être et agir dans la philosophie de saint Thomas* (Rome: Librarie Éditrice de l'Université Grégorienne, 1960).

[9] Bonnette, "God: Eternity, Free Will, and the World."

[10] For authors who employ this line of reasoning, see Helm, *Eternal God,* 179; James Ross, "Creation," 621; "Creation II" in *The Existence and Nature of God,* ed. by Alfred J. Fredesso (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 118; Garcia, "Divine Freedom and Creation," 195.

[11] Helm, *Eternal God,* 179.

[12] For the idea of passive indifference, see Duby, "Divine Simplicity, Divine Freedom, and the Contingency of Creation"; Ross, "Creation."

[13] For a list of resources on Aquinas's treatment of the non-necessary relationship that God has with creatures, see note 142 of chapter two. For authors who articulate God's freedom in this way, see Dolezal, *God Without Parts,* 203-204; Stephen Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God,* Vol. 1, 1853 Reprint (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 328; Brian Davies, "Simplicity," in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Philosophical Theology*, eds. Charles Taliaferro and Chad Meister (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 42-44; Edward Feser, "Davies on Divine Simplicity and Freedom," May 17, 2010, https://edwardfeser.blogspot.com/2010/05/davies-on-divine-simplicity-and-freedom.html, accessed May 21, 2022; Duby, "Divine Simplicity, Divine Freedom, and the

it, "The actual world is made actual not after a state of mere possibility but instead of being merely possible."[14]

This does not mean that we cannot *logically* distinguish between divine contemplation and actualization.[15] Consideration of the possible does have a *logical* priority to the actualization of this order. This is based on the logical distinction that one can make between God's knowledge and willing.[16] Given such a distinction, we can distinguish between aspects of God's intellect and will, which bear logical relations to each other, without turning the logically prior contemplation of possible providential orders and the actualization of *this* one into a temporal sequence. The illuminated paper for eternity can be illuminated by the lamp without there being a temporal sequence of non-illumination and then illumination. It is true that this analogy limps because the illuminated paper is not merely *logically* dependent on the lamp for its illumination but is dependent on it *in reality*. However, it does show that there can be a relation of priority without temporality. In the case of God's act of contemplation of possible orders of providence and the actualization of one over the other, the priority is merely logical.

As mentioned above, there is a second way to read the claim that free choice entails mutability. Consider that the above response focused on the error of attributing what is involved in *human* freedom to *divine* freedom. Edward Feser calls this erroneous move the "fallacy of accident."[17] For example, it would be false to conclude that any possible college professor must be under nine feet in height based on the premise that every college professor who has ever lived has been under nine feet in height.[18] The reason is because being under nine feet tall is *not essential* to being a college professor—it is *accidental*.

Similarly, it is false to conclude that *all* freedom entails mutability based on the premise that every *human* instance of freedom entails mutability because mutability is not essential to freedom per se—it is accidental. Now, someone may challenge this claim and say that mutability belongs to the nature of free will itself *regardless* of whether it is human or divine. This would be a second way to read the above claim that free choice entails mutability.

But when we consider the criteria that seem necessary and sufficient for free choice, mutability does not enter the picture. In his paper "Aquinas, Divine Simplicity, and Divine Freedom," W. Matthews Grant identifies three criteria that "appear necessary" for choice *per se*: 1) the choice must be ultimately up to the agent, 2) the agent must be able to have chosen otherwise, and 3) the agent's choice is motivated by a reason.[19] If it can be shown that God's choice to actualize this order of providence meets these three criteria, then we would have reason to conclude that God's choice is free without the logical entailment of mutability.

Contingency of Creation," 130-131; Stump, *Aquinas*, 122-124; Levering, *Engaging the Doctrine of Creation,* 101-103;

[14] Ross, "Creation," 621. See also Ross, "Creation II," 118.

[15] This line of reasoning is taken from Helm, *Eternal God,* 179; Garcia, "Divine Freedom and Creation," 195.

[16] For the affirmation that we can make a logical distinction between God's intellect and will, see Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 4, Cap. 24; Garrigou Lagrange, *Reality: A Synthesis of Thomistic Thought*, Chap. 8, in *Reverend Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange: Collection 16 Books* (Aeterna Press, 2016), Kindle Edition; *The One God,* Chap. 19.

[17] Feser, *Five Proofs of the Existence of God,* 197.

[18] See Ibid.

[19] Grant notes that such criteria are what "appears necessary," since not every libertarian would require that all three criteria be satisfied. Like for Grant, the scope of this thesis limits my ability to probe deeper the discussion surrounding the necessary and sufficient conditions for free choice. See Grant, "Aquinas, Divine Simplicity, and Divine Freedom," 141, note 6. See also Grant, *Free Will and God's Universal Causality,* 65-70.

Regarding the first criterion, my arguments from the previous chapter as to why God's willing of creatures is not a natural necessity suffice.[20] Recall, to say that God wills creatures necessarily is nothing more than to say that God is *essentially* related to creatures. But, as was shown, God cannot be essentially related to creatures lest we make *esse creatum* necessary for the intelligibility of *esse divinum,* which is an impossibility. Also, it was shown that God cannot will creatures necessarily because no creature can be an end for God (and thus not necessary for God's perfection) given that he is pure act, that His *esse* belongs to a diverse ontological realm than a creature's *esse,* and that He contains within himself the perfection of all things such that no possible creaturely perfection of being could add to Him. To say that God does not necessarily will creatures is tantamount to saying that God's willing of creatures is ultimately up to Him as agent, thus meeting the first criterion for free choice.

The above line of reasoning suffices as well for showing why God's willing of creatures meets the second criterion (that an agent be able to will otherwise). If God is not naturally necessitated (absolutely necessitated) to will creatures, then He is free to have willed otherwise, whether such willing involved no creatures at all or a different order of providence. There is nothing about the divine will itself that necessitates the creation of creatures. Nor is there anything extrinsic to God that could necessitate him to create, given that He is the primary cause which is caused by nothing. The lack of being absolutely necessitated to will something other than himself means his willing of something other than himself could have been otherwise. Therefore, God's willing of creatures meets criterion number two for free choice.

God's willing of creatures meets criteria three as well. In the words of Grant, "God cannot begin to choose at the motivation of a reason, but God's eternal choice to create can certainly be so motivated."[21] Such motivation, or the reason for God's willing of creatures, is the divine goodness itself, which is identical with God's essence. This must be so because, as shown in the previous chapter, nothing other than God himself can serve as an end of the divine will. So, God's willing of creatures is intelligible only on the basis that He wills them as ordered to himself as their end. Given that the end is the entire reason for willing, as Aquinas teaches,[22] the divine will "wills no other except by reason of its goodness."[23] The divine goodness, therefore, is the very reason for God willing creatures—that "on account of which He wills."[24] Criterion number three for free choice, therefore, is met.

Now that we have shown that God's willing of creatures meets all three criteria for free choice, we can conclude that God's willing of creatures is *free* volitional activity. We can also conclude that God's free volitional activity does not necessarily entail mutability because none of the three criteria for free choice entail mutability. There is nothing about free choice *per se* that necessitates mutability. Mutability is accidental to free will. This allows theists to affirm free choice within God's volitional activity of actualizing this order of providence without

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[20] Recall from note 140 in the previous chapter, the natural necessity that is spoken of here is what Aquinas identifies as "absolute necessity" (*absolute neccessarium*) as opposed to "suppositional necessity" (*suppositione necessarium*).

[21] Grant, "Aquinas, Divine Simplicity, and Divine Freedom," 131.

[22] See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 19, art. 2 ad 2 (emphasis added): "*[I]n his quae volumus propter finem, tota ratio movendi est finis*, et hoc est quod movet voluntatem."

[23] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 19, art. 2 ad 3: "ex hoc quod voluntati divinae sufficit sua bonitas, non sequitur quod nihil aliud velit, sed quod *nihil aliud vult nisi ratione suae bonitatis*."

[24] Aquinas, *De Veritate,* qu. 23, art. 4: "Voluntas igitur divina habet pro principali volito id quod naturaliter vult, et quod est quasi finis voluntatis suae; scilicet ipsa bonitas sua, *propter quam vult quidquid aliud a se vult*."

contradicting his divine immutability. Even more so, given the metaphysics of divinity presented thus far and its relation to creation, theists have a principled reason for saying that God's willing of creatures *must* be free and without mutability.

So, regardless of how one reads the weak version of the difficulty of potentiality, whether the claim is taken as arguing free choice entails mutability because that is how we human beings experience it, or it is taken as saying free choice in and of itself necessarily entails mutability, this version of the difficulty fails in posing a threat to the doctrine of divine immutability.

II.
The Strong Version—Possibility Entails Unactualized Potency

With the *weak* version of the difficulty of potentiality now overcome, we turn to the *strong* version. The strong version of the difficulty focuses on the modal status of "could have" in the statement, "God *could have* created otherwise." Even if God's freedom to have done otherwise would not have entailed movement from potency to act when he in fact chose this order of providence, affirming that God "could have" done otherwise seems to admit that there exists presently within God some unactualized potency.[25] As philosopher David Bradshaw puts it, "Is not the ability to do otherwise a kind of potency?"[26]

One response is that this objection assumes God has a real relation to the effects that he produces as Creator. For God to have unactualized potency due to his not creating a different order of providence implies that there is some actuality that is not present within God that *would* be present had God created that different order. Now, this can be true *only if* what we call "God's creative act" is a feature within God, either accidental or substantial, in virtue of which God is really related to His creatures. God cannot be dependent on the creature for having the anticipated actuality without having a real relation to the creature in some way. As shown in the previous chapter, dependence necessarily entails a real relation.

But we have already shown in the previous chapter that God's relation to his creatures in principle cannot be real, whether it be by way of an accidental feature, by nature, by his essential being, or by causal dependency (either efficient or final).[27] Given that God's relation to His creatures is not a real relation, God's openness to other created orders of providence (or no created order at all) is one of non-dependence and not an openness that entails unrealized perfection. In other words, the stress on God's being able to have done otherwise is not meant to locate God's power being in potency to acquiring its perfection by being determined to a created order when brought into operation but rather to highlight that the order of providence that God could have willed (and the order that he in fact willed) is not *absolutely* necessary according to his nature.

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[25] For authors who adopt this line of reasoning as a successful argument for showing the incompatibility of the doctrines of God's immutability and the variability of creations, see Mullins, *End of the Timeless God*, 140; Ward, *The Concept of God,* 157; Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West,* 247; Jay Wesley Richards, *The Untamed God: A Philosophical Exploration of Divine Perfection, Simplicity, and Immutability* (Downers Grove: interVarsity Press, 2003), 234. For authors who take up this issue and defend the two aforementioned doctrines, see Grant, "Aquinas, Divine Simplicity, and Divine Freedom"; Nemes, "Divine Simplicity Does Not Entail Modal Collapse"; Duby, "Divine Simplicity, Divine Freedom, and the Contingency of Creation"; *Divine Simplicity: A Dogmatic Account,* 201-202.

[26] Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West,* 247.

[27] W. Matthews Grant takes this approach in response to the strong version of the difficulty of potentiality. See Grant, "Aquinas, Divine Simplicity, and Divine Freedom."

As *ipsum esse subsistens*, being is found within God according to its total power, which means there is no perfection of being that can be added to his being. This being the case, no finite being can have a necessary order to God's perfection. Given that finite being is of a diverse ontological order with respect to infinite being, finite being is "really indifferently related to [God's] perfection."[28] It is this real indifference that creatures have to God's perfection that is the *fundamentum in re* for the assertion that God is free to have done otherwise, not some unactualized potency within God.[29] To state it differently, it is the nature of finite being itself in relation to infinite being that grounds the indifference that God has to creatures, not the state of divine power that awaits its perfection when determined to one thing.[30]

David Bradshaw offers a counter to the above line of reasoning, arguing that an appeal to God's perfection to get around the objection misses the whole point. He writes, "The question was not whether God's ability to do otherwise is an imperfection, but whether it constitutes a

[28] Knasas, "Aquinas and Finite gods," 92. It is important to note here, as does Knasas, that a creature's indifference to God does not mean that God does not love his creatures. As mentioned in the previous chapter (Chapter 2, Section III.C), there is no greater manifestation of love than to bring into and sustain a creature's existence. See Ibid., 96, endnote 17.

[29] See Ibid.

[30] I take this line of reasoning to be essentially Aquinas's argument in *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 1, Cap. 82. There he directly takes on this strong version of the difficulty of potentiality. He responds by articulating the two ways in which a power can be open to alternatives. The first is from the side of the power itself, when it anticipates the achievement of its perfection upon being determined to one of the alternatives. Aquinas uses the example of an intellect that remains in doubt and has not yet attained the principles needed to be determined to one of the alternatives, the achievement of which would constitute its perfection in knowledge. The second way a power can be open to alternatives, as Aquinas explains, stems from the side of the object. If neither object is necessary for the perfect operation of the power, then the power is open (indifferent) to both—that is to say, both objects are possible alternatives for the power to be directed to. As Aquinas points out, only the first way implies potentiality. More specifically, it implies *passive* potentiality, the kind of potentiality that implies imperfection. This will be made manifest below. Now, Aquinas is correct to point out that God's openness to alternative orders of providence is not according to the first way but according to the second. Therefore, Aquinas concludes, God's openness to alternatives does not entail a potentiality within Him that would constitute His being imperfect. See also *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 19, art. 3 ad 4. For authors who follow Aquinas and employ this line of reasoning in response to this strong version of the difficulty of potentiality, see Knasas, "*Contra* Spinoza," 428; "Aquinas and Finite gods," 92; Lagrange, *God, His Existence, and His Nature,* Vol. II, 238, 351-354; Dolezal, *God Without Parts,* 209; Stump, *Aquinas,* 124-125; Grenier, *Thomistic Philosophy: Volume II*, 327; Duby, *Divine Simplicity: A Dogmatic Account,* 202; "Divine Simplicity, Divine Freedom, and the Contingency of Creation," 130-131; Levering, *Engaging the Doctrine of Creation,* 103; Garcia, "Divine Freedom and Creation," 196; Feser, "Davies on Divine Simplicity and Freedom"; Davies, "Simplicity," 43.

potency."[31] For Bradshaw, all the above response shows is that if God's capability to have done otherwise is a potency, "it need not be an imperfection."[32]

Bradshaw seems to assume that affirming *any* kind of potency within God would be a problem for the view of God as *actus purus*. But this is not true. *Actus purus* only excludes *passive potentiality*—"the principle of suffering [being affected by] from another"[33] which "follows being in potency."[34] It does not exclude *active potentiality*, which "follows being in act."[35] As Aquinas writes, "[W]ith respect to a creature possibility [with regard to God] is able to be considered not according to passive potential (*potentiam passivam*), but according to active potential (*potentiam activam*), which is not limited to one thing."[36]

Active potency *is* compatible with God as *actus purus* because active potency within God simply refers to God's pure active power (which is identical to His essence[37]) that is and can be a

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[31] Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West,* 247. Bradshaw's counter is specifically directed at Aquinas's argument from *Summa Contra Gentiles* Lib. 1, Cap. 82, which was articulated above in note 30. W. Matthews Grant expresses similar discontent with Aquinas's argument. He writes, "Aquinas's response appears to turn on an equivocation regarding what it means to be 'in potentiality.' Granted that one kind of potentiality might be the imperfection of a particular power in the absence of some act of that power. And granted that the divine will need not create in order to achieve its perfection. Yet, the strong potentiality objection concerns a different kind of potentiality. It concerns the potentiality that appears to be in God due to the fact that he could be creating otherwise than he is creating. And this potentiality seems to be there irrespective of the question of whether the perfection of God's will depends on his creating one universe rather than another. It also seems to be there even if we grant that God's will cannot change. Hence, Aquinas's response to the strong version of the potentiality objection falls short of its target." Grant, "Aquinas, Divine Simplicity, and Divine Freedom," 132. As mentioned in note 27 of this chapter, Grant thinks a better response to the strong version of the difficulty of potentiality is to appeal to God's non-real relation to creatures. But, as I pointed out above, it is God's non-real relation to creatures that makes it such that God's openness to different orders of providence is one of non-dependence. This being the case, Aquinas's argument in *Summa Contra Gentiles* Lib. 2, Cap.82 is just another way of stating Grant's argument concerning God's non-real relation to creation.

[32] Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West,* 247.

[33] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 25, art. 1: "[P]otentia vero passiva est principium patiendi ab alio." See also Dever, "Divine Simplicity," 141.

[34] Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 2, Cap.7: "[P]otentia passiva sequitur ens in potentia."

[35] Ibid.: "potentia activa sequitur ens in actu."

[36] Aquinas, *De Potentia,* qu. 3, art. 15: "[R]espectu vero creaturae potest ibi considerari possibilitas, non secundum potentiam passivam, sed secundum potentiam activam, quae non limitatur ad unum."

[37] Aquinas gives five arguments for the identity between God's active power and His substance/essence in *Summa Contra Gentiles* Lib. 2, Cap. 8. First, active power belongs to something insofar as it is in act: "Potentia enim activa competit alicui secundum quod est actu." Since God is act itself (*actus ipse*), it follows that God is identical to his power. Second, if God were not identical to His power, then He would be powerful by participation since that which *has* power and is not its own power (*non est sua potentia*) is powerful through participation of another's power (*potens participation potentiae alicuius*). But God cannot have anything by way of participation because He is His own being: "De Deo autem nihil potest dici participative: cum sit ipsum suum esse." Therefore, God must be identical to His power. Third, active power is a perfection of being: "Potentia activa ad perfectionem rei pertinent." Given that every perfection is contained within the very being of God (*Omnis divina perfectio in ipso suo esse continetur*), which He is identical to, it follows that active power is identical to His being. Fourth, if God were not identical to His active power, then His active power would be an accident, since whatever power is not identical to a thing's substance is an accident within that thing (*In rebus quarum potentiae non sunt earum substantiae, ipsae potentiae sunt accidentia*). Since God cannot have accidents, it follows that He is identical to His active power. Finally, active power is that in virtue of which a thing acts: "Id autem quo quis agit, est eius activa potential." God, as the primary agent (*primum agens*), exists in virtue of his own essence and therefore acts in virtue of his own essence. Since God is identical to his essence, it follows that God is identical to His active power. For further articulation of these arguments, and how they factor into understanding active power in God, see Dever, "Divine Simplicity," 143-144.

principle of an effect.[38] Active potency, or active power, can be considered in two ways: as a "principle of action" (*principium actionis*), or as a "principle of effect" (*principium effectus*)—i.e., a principle of acting upon another.[39] For creatures, active potency, or active power, refers to an "idle capacity" to be a principle of an effect that *anticipates* fulfillment by operation.[40] This is why active potency in creatures signifies a *principle of action*, which involves a lack of some actuality that would be there if the creature were actually operating as a principle, or cause, of an effect.

God's active potency (active power), on the other hand, is not a *principle of action* (except according to our understanding[41])—that is to say, it is not "an idle capacity" that needs to be actualized by operation.[42] Rather, it is the pure actuality or actual operation that God is as considered "with a [logical] relation to a creature (*cum relatione ad creaturam*)," [43] which is to say God's power is God's being, as well as God's essence, considered under the aspect of "a

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[38] For Aquinas's use of this line of reasoning see Aquinas *De Potentia,* qu. 1, art. 1, resp., ad 1; qu. 3, arts. 2, 15; *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 25, art. 1, 2 ad 2, 3; qu. 41, art. 4; *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 2, Cap. 7; Lib. 2, Cap. 10. For other authors who use this line of reasoning with respect to the current issue under discussion, see Gloria Frost, "Aquinas's Ontology of Transeunt Casual Activity," *Vivarium* 56 (2018): 47-82 [58-60]; Duby, "Divine Simplicity, Divine Freedom, and the Contingency of Creation," 140; "Divine Immutability, Divine Action, and the God-World Relation," 151-152; D.Q. McInerny, *Natural Theology,* 267; Levering, *Engaging the Doctrine of Creation,* 98, note 73; Spencer and Grant, "Activity, Identity, and God," 27-28; Dolezal, *God Without Parts,* 93; Loughran, "Efficient Causality and Extrinsic Denomination in the Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas," 133-140; Dever, "Divine Simplicity," 141-146; Helm, *Eternal God,* 193-194. For authors who deal with active potency in general irrespective of the issue being considered, see James E. Royce, "St. Thomas and the Definition of Active Potency," *New Scholasticism* 34, no. 4 (1960): 431-437; Brock, *Action and Conduct,* 95; Feser, *Scholastic Metaphysics*, 39-40; Coffey, *Ontology*, 367-396, 481; Francis Nugent, "Immanent action in Saint Thomas and Aristotle," *The New Scholasticism* 37, no. 2 (1963): 164-187 [179-182]; Loughran, "Efficient Causality and Extrinsic Denomination," 133-140; Miller, "The Problem of Action," 148-149; Dever, "Divine Simplicity," 141-144.

[39] For affirmation that active potency can be considered as a principle of action and an effect, see Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 25, art. 1 ad 3: "[P]otentia in rebus creatis non solum est principium actionis, sed etiam effectus"; *De Potentia,* qu. 1, art. 1 ad 1: "[Q]uod potentia non solum est operationis principium, sed etiam effectus." For Aquinas's articulation that active power can be considered as a principle of acting upon something else, see *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 25, art. 1: "potentia activa est principium agendi in aliud"; *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 2, Cap. 7: "Potentia enim activa est principium agendi in aliud secundum quod est aliud"; Lib. 2, Cap. 10: "[P]otentia activa principium agendi in aliud." See also Dever, "Divine Simplicity," 145.

[40] Duby, "Divine Immutability, Divine Action, and the God-World Relation," 152. See also Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 25, art. 1 ad 3; Feser, *Scholastic Metaphysics,* 39; Henry Koren, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Animate Nature* (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1955), 59.

[41] See Aquinas *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 25, art. 1 ad 3; *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 2, Cap. 10.

[42] Duby, "Divine Immutability, Divine Action, and the God-World Relation," 152. For Aquinas's denial of God's active power being a principle of action, see *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 25, art. 1 ad 3; *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 2, Cap. 10. In *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 2, Cap., 9, Aquinas gives his argument as to why God's active power is not a principle of action: namely, God's active power is identical to His action. Aquinas uses the principle of the transitivity of identity to argue for this. The principle of the transitivity of identity states that if two things are identical to one and the same thing both in reality *and* logically, then those two things are identical. As Aquinas argues, since both God's power and God's action are both, really and logically, identical to His substance, which is pure act, it follows that God's power is identical to His action/operation: "Quae enim uni et eidem sunt eadem, sibi invicem sunt eadem. Divina autem potentia est eius substantia, ut ostensum est. Eius etiam actio est eius substantia, ut in primo libro ostensum est de intellectuali operatione: eadem enim ratio in aliis competit. Igitur in Deo non est aliud potentia et aliud actio." See also *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 25, art. 1 ad 2; Gaven Kerr, *Aquinas and the Metaphysics of Creation,* 68-69; Dever, "Divine Simplicity," 144; Feser, *Scholastic Metaphysics,* 39. For Aquinas's argumentation that God's operation is identical to his essence, see *De Potentia,* qu. 1, art. 1, ad 6 and 8; *I Sent.* dist. 8, qu. 3, art. 1 ad 1; *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 25, art. 1 ad 3; qu. 45, art. 1 ad 3.

[43] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 45, art. 3 ad 1.

principle of what is made."[44] Given that active potency, or active power, can be considered as a principle of what is made, and God is the active principle of all else that exists insofar as He is the source of being, it is not unfitting that active potency be attributed to God.[45] In fact, it is *most* fitting because active potency is in God "maximally."[46]

When we add to this that God's active power in principle cannot find its perfection in finite being as its end—that is to say, there is no necessary relation between God and creatures, we conclude that active potency can be predicated of God without introducing within God imperfection, some potency that needs to be actualized.[47] So, if Bradshaw means by "potency" simply *active* potency, when he argues that God's freedom to have done otherwise entails "potency" within him, then his argument does not pose a threat to the view of divine immutability presented in this essay. In fact, it ceases to be an objection entirely.

The non-necessary relation that God has to creation grounds a second response. In the first response articulated above, teasing out the notion of "non-dependence" embedded in the statement "God *could have* created otherwise" was key to showing how the possibility of God having created otherwise does not entail the kind of potentiality that is a lack of actuality (imperfection). The second response zeroes in on the notion of "logical possibility" embedded in the statement "God *could have* created otherwise." Rather than the statement implying something within God that is not actualized because He did not create differently (e.g., a power in potency to operation), it expresses a logically possible state of affair.[48]

Following Aquinas, we can distinguish between two meanings of the term "possible."[49] First, it can reference that which is possible for some power.[50] For example, teaching is possible

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[44] Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 2, Cap. 10 (emphasis added): "potentia non dicitur in Deo sicut principium actionis, sed *sicut principium facti*." For argumentation as to why God's power is identical to His action, see note 42 of this chapter. The active power as applied to God is called by some "uncreated active power," in contrast to "created active power," which is active power as found in creatures. See Feser, *Scholastic Metaphysics,* 39.

[45] See Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 2, Cap. 7: "Potentia enim activa est principium agendi in aliud secundum quod est aliud. Deo autem convenit esse aliis principium essendi. Ergo convenit sibi esse potentem." See also *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 2, Cap. 10; *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 25, art. 1; *De Potentia,* qu. 1, art. 1.

[46] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 25, art. 1: "Relinquitur ergo quod in Deo maxime sit potentia activa."

[47] See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 25, art. 2 ad 2: "[P]otentia autem Dei non ordinatur ad effectum sicut ad finem, sed magis ipsa est finis sui effectus."

[48] For authors who take this approach in responding to the strong version of the potentiality objection, see Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 75, art. 6 ad 2; *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 1, Cap. 82; *De Veritate*, qu. 2, art. 13; qu. 24, art. 3 ad 3; Stump, *Aquinas*, 123; Bernard Lonergan, *Philosophy of God and Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1973), 64-65; Jeffrey E. Brower, "Aquinas's Metaphysics of Modality: A Reply to Leftow," *The Modern Schoolman* 82, no. 3 (2005), 201-212 [205-206]; Stump and Kretzmann, "Absolute Simplicity," 368; Garcia, "Divine Freedom and Creation," 196; Boedder, *Natural Theology,* Bk. 2, Chap. 5, #183, Kindle; Bonnette, "God: Eternity, Free Will, and the World"; Steven J. Duby, "Divine Simplicity, Divine Freedom, and the Contingency of Creation," 131-132; Miller, *A Most Unlikely God,* 102-105; Edward Feser, "Divine Simplicity and Freedom," May 17, 2010, https://edwardfeser.blogspot.com/2010/05/davies-on-divine-simplicity-and-freedom.html, accessed on October 31. 2021; Davies, "Simplicity," 43-44; Spencer and Grant, "Activity, Identity, and God," 55; Leftow, "Aquinas on God and Modal Truth," 175-176; Ross "Creation II," 118; Dolezal, *God Without Parts,* 205-208.

[49] See Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 1, Cap. 82; Cf. *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 25, art. 3. See also Brower, "Aquinas's Metaphysics of Modality".

[50] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 25, art. 3 (emphasis added): "Possibile autem dicitur dupliciter, secundum philosophum, in V Metaphys. Uno modo, *per respectum ad aliquam potentiam*." See also Brower, "Aquinas's Metaphysics of Modality," 206.

for us due to our rational powers. Teaching, therefore, is said to be *possible* for human beings, for "what is subject to human power is said to be possible to man."[51]

Second, possibility can arise on account of a relation in which two terms stand in relation to each other without contradiction or absolute necessity, or the in the words of Aquinas, "when there is not a necessary order of the predicate to the subject."[52] Jeffrey Brower calls this kind of possibility "possibility proper."[53] For example, in the enunciable, "the triangle does not have three equal sides," three equal sides, the predicate, can be denied of triangle, the subject, without contradiction because the notion of a triangle does not logically entail having three equal sides. It logically entails three *straight* sides. To state it differently, three equal sides is not, absolutely speaking, necessarily ordered or related to a triangle as three *straight* sides is. This being the case, it is *possible* that a triangle not have three equal sides, which is just another way of saying it is neither absolutely necessary nor impossible to have a state of affair where a triangle does not have three equal sides.

Now, it is only in relation to the first meaning of "possible" where passive potentiality enters the picture. We humans have the active power to teach, for example, but because we are not the act of teaching itself, such an active power is only a principle of operation and must be moved into a state of operation for us to be actually teaching. So, the possibility for me to teach entails an unactualized potency.

Logical possibility ("possibility proper"), on the other hand, in no way involves potentiality. To say, "It is possible for there to be a triangle that does not have three equal sides," does not entail potentiality like possibility on account of power does because in mathematics there is neither power nor motion.[54]

With these distinctions in place, we can now see how the *possibility* for God to have created differently does not entail an unactualized potency. The sense of possibility that is operative in the statement "God could have created otherwise" is understood in terms of *logical* possibility and not in terms of the possibility that arises on account of an active power within God that is not actualized, like in the case of creatures. Following philosopher Barry Miller, the logically *proper* formula is expressed as follows:

> It can be that (God create world *alpha*), or it can be that (God create world *beta*).[55]

What this means is that there is nothing logically contradictory in the idea that God create world *alpha* or *beta*. Given that neither state of affair entails a logical contradiction, both are *possible*.[56]

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[51] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 25, art. 3: "[S]icut quod subditur humanae potentiae, dicitur esse possibile homini."

[52] Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 1, Cap. 82: "[Q]uando non est necessarius ordo praedicati ad subiectum." See also *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 25, art. 3.

[53] Brower, "Aquinas's Metaphysics of Modality," 206.

[54] See Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 1, Cap. 82: "[I]n mathematicis non sit potentia neque motus."

[55] Miller formulates the expression not in reference to variable orders of providence but rather in reference to the more fundamental idea of God creating or not creating. He states the formula as follows: "It can be that (God create the Universe), or it can be that (God not create the Universe)." See Miller, *A Most Unlikely God,* 102. As indicated above, the formula applies just as easily to the relation between God and different orders of creation. For a good summary of Miller's approach here, see Dolezal, *God Without Parts,* 205-206.

[56] An important caveat here is that the possibility spoken of is an *absolute* possibility and not a possibility that follows upon a supposition. To use an example from Aquinas (*Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 19, art. 3), it is possible in an absolute sense that Socrates not sit. There is no logical contradiction in the state of affair of Socrates not sitting. But on supposition that Socrates is sitting, it is not possible that Socrates not sit, lest we affirm a contradiction (Socrates

Understanding the statement "God could have created otherwise" in this *logical* sense avoids reading "could have" as an internal modal operator, as if God had some internal unactualized potency that would be actualized if he were to have created differently. Rather, it conveys what is neither necessary nor impossible.[57]

At this point, a reasonable question arises: "Why is it the case that there is no logical contradiction involved in God *not* creating world *alpha*, or God *not* creating world *beta*, such that it is possible for God to create either *alpha* or *beta*?" The answer lies in the metaphysics of divinity explained in the previous chapter. Recall, no finite being can be necessarily ordered to God's perfection as *ipsum esse subsistens*. This means that no finite being is *logically* wrapped up in the notion of divinity as *esse divinum*. Consequently, there is no logical contradiction in the notion of God existing and there being no finite being, nor is there a logical contradiction in the notion of God existing and there not being *this* collection of finite beings, say, world *alpha*, or *that* collection of finite beings, say, world *beta*. It is in this *logical* sense that God *could have* created other than he did. Given the possibility of God having created otherwise is a *logical* possibility, no unactualized potency is necessarily introduced within God.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have laid out two versions of the difficulty of potentiality: the weak version and the strong version. I have argued that the weak version, which is based on the idea that free will entails movement from potency to act, does not succeed in showing that divine immutability and the variability of creation are incompatible. As was shown, my responses were determined by the different readings of the weak version.

On the reading that the objection is rooted in our *human experience* of free will, it fails on account of applying a finite modality of volitional freedom to an agent that is infinite in being. On the view that the objection is rooted in the notion that free will itself entails mutability, regardless if the freedom is in a finite or infinite mode, then such a claim is simply false because God's choice to actualize this order of providence meets three necessary criteria for choice *per*

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would be sitting and not sitting at the same time and in the same respect). Similarly, the state of affair of God creating world *beta* (and not creating world *alpha*) is possible in an *absolute* sense. There is no logical contradiction involved in the idea of God creating world *beta* and not world *alpha*, for reasons stated above. But it is not possible, on supposition that God created world *alpha* (our world), for God to create world *beta*. The reason for this is God's immutability—He cannot will to actualize world *alpha* and then change his will to not actualize world *alpha*. Aquinas argues this point in *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 19, art. 3: "[S]equitur quod alia a se eum velle, non sit necessarium absolute. Et tamen necessarium est ex suppositione, supposito enim quod velit, non potest non velle, quia non potest voluntas eius mutari." Therefore, the possibility spoken of above is intended in the absolute sense, not in the suppositional sense.

[57] Aquinas argues along these same lines in *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 1, Cap. 82. First, he denies that God's will is indifferent to alternatives in the sense of first potentially willing either and then actually willing one over the other: "Si enim in divina voluntate nulla est potentialitas, non sic absque necessitate alterum oppositorum praeaccipit circa sua causata quasi consideretur in potentia ad utrumque, ut primo sit volens potentia utrumque et postmodum volens actu." Aquinas then explains the true meaning of God's indifference to creatures—namely, they do not have a necessary order to the divine goodness: "[S]ed quia volitum non habet necessarium ordinem ad divinam bonitatem, quae est proprium obiectum divinae voluntatis." Based on this lack of necessity that creatures have to the divine goodness, Aquinas views the possibility of God willing this or that effect as not a reference to a potentiality but rather a reference to that which is neither necessary nor impossible: "Deus vult hoc causatum, manifestum est esse enuntiabile non necessarium, sed possibile, illo modo quo non dicitur aliquid possibile secundum aliquam potentiam, sed quod non necesse est esse nec impossibile est esse." See also Aquinas, *De Veritate,* qu. 24, art. 3 ad 3; art. 4 ad 4.

se: 1) the choice is ultimately up to God; 2) He could have done otherwise; and 3) God's choice was motived by the reason of His divine goodness.

I also argued that the strong version of the difficulty of potentiality fails as an objection to divine immutability, leading to the conclusion that God's freedom to have done otherwise *does not* entail an intrinsic unactualized potency. One reason I gave was that God has no real relation to creatures, which is a necessary condition for God to have an unactualized potency in not creating what he could have created. As I pointed out, the main reason for this is that finite being, which is of a diverse ontological order than infinite being, cannot add to the infinite being that God is. I also considered a counter response from David Bradshaw that such a view still entails a potency within God, just without any imperfection. But, as I argued, affirming potency within God poses no threat to the view defended in this essay on condition that the potency is *active* potency. Within God, such potency is not a principle of action but a principle of what is made.

I also responded to the strong version by articulating a way to understand the statement "God could have created otherwise" without "could have" serving as an internal modal operator, as if God was lacking some actuality that would have been there if He were to have created differently than He did. Rather, "could have" signifies a *logical* possibility: it can be that (God have created world *beta*), even though He actually has created world *alpha*. The lack of contradiction in the idea of God creating world *beta* grounds its *possibility*. In this sense we can say that God could have created differently than he did.

The "difficulty of potentiality" is not the only difficulty that we have to overcome in affirming the compatibility of the doctrines of divine immutability and the variability of creation. There exists the "difficulty of counterfactual difference" and the various forms that it takes. To this we turn in our next chapter.

Chapter Four
The Difficulty of Counterfactual Difference

Several times thus far I have said that that there are two major difficulties that we must overcome in affirming the compatibility of the doctrines of divine immutability and the variability of creation: the "difficulty of potentiality" and the "difficulty of counterfactual difference." With the "difficulty of potentiality" now out of the way, we can begin to consider the "difficulty of counterfactual difference."

Recall, the "difficulty of counterfactual difference" asserts that if God were to have chosen to create differently, there would be some corresponding difference within him. There are two forms that this difficulty takes, each of which arises from a particular reason *why* one might think that God's choice to create a different order of providence entails a difference within his being. The first is what I call the "identity problem." The second is what I call the "specification problem." This chapter will introduce and explain each of these versions of the "counterfactual difference" problem.

I have divided the chapter into two major sections. In section one, I will articulate the "identity problem," showing where it comes from in Aquinas's thought and highlighting a few authors, both friend and foe, who recognize that the problem is a real challenge. Section two will be devoted to the "specification problem," which in turn is divided into three subsections that explain the Thomistic principles from whence the problem arises.

I.
Understanding the "Identity Problem"

As I explained in the Introduction, it is part and parcel of classical theism that God's acts are identical to his very being. Aquinas writes,

> It is also clear from the foregoing that the manifold actions ascribed to God, as intelligence, volition, the production of things, and the like, are not so many different things, since each of these actions in God is His own very being, which is one and the same thing.[1]

This follows from the doctrine of divine simplicity, which says there can be no real distinction whatsoever that bears upon the divine being—whether it be a distinction of form and matter,[2] suppositum and nature,[3] species and genus,[4] substance and accident,[5] or essence and existence.[6] This being the case, there can be no real distinction between his operations, like intellection, volition, and production of things (*producere res*), and his being.

Given this identity of God's acts with his being, it seems that if God were to will a different created order (or no created order at all) he would *be* different. Several authors have

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[1] Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Lib. 2, Cap. 10. The above translation is taken from the Fathers of the English Dominican Province, vol. 2 (London: Burns Oates & Washbourne, 1924), pp. 13-14. For other citations where Aquinas affirms this doctrine, see note #24 of the Introduction.

[2] See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, qu. 3, art. 2.

[3] See Ibid., Ia, qu. 3, art. 3.

[4] See Ibid., Ia, qu. 3, art. 5.

[5] See Ibid., Ia, qu. 3, art. 6.

[6] See Ibid., Ia, qu. 3, art. 4.

recognized this problem.[7] For example, Katherine Rogers writes, "[I]f God is His Act, as the tradition holds, the current difficulty [of counterfactual freedom] remains. God cannot do other than He does *without being other than He is*."[8] Bradshaw concurs:

> [D]ivine simplicity entails that God is identical to His own will. Does not this mean that if God were to will something different, then *He would be something different*? Since among the things that God wills is the existence of creatures, such a result would be at odds with the insistence of both Augustine and Aquinas that God's essence does not depend on His act of creation.[9]

The "identity problem" can be summarized in the following form:

Premise 1: All of God's acts are identical to God's being.

Premise 2: The act of creation is an act of God.

Conclusion 1: Therefore, God's act of creation is identical to His being.

Premise 3: If God's act of creation is identical to His being, then a different act of creation (a differently willed order of providence), or no act of creation, would entail a difference in God's being.

Premise 4: God's act of creation is identical to His being (from Conclusion 1).

Conclusion 2: Therefore, a different act of creation would entail a difference in God's being.

Although the above argument is valid, there are problems with the premises that make it unsuccessful in disproving the compatibility of God's immutability and His freedom to have created otherwise. Chapter five will be devoted solely to identifying these problems and why they justify a rejection of the argument.

II.
Understanding the "Specification Problem"

As mentioned above, the "identity problem" is not the only form that the "difficulty of counterfactual difference" takes. The other form is the "specification problem." This problem, so it is argued, arises from the Thomistic doctrine that every object specifies its act, particularly the act of the will; hence the label "the specification problem." Upon analysis, it would seem to require that God's act of creation *in the causal sense* just is, ontologically speaking, of the kind that is creative of the specific effects of which it is a principle. In other words, on this view the effects are constitutive of *esse divinum*. If this view is correct, God *would* be counterfactually different if He were to have created differently, since His divine will would have different objects.

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[7] See note 23 of the Introduction.
[8] Rogers, "Traditional Doctrine of Divine Simplicity," 178-179; emphasis added.
[9] Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West,* 247; emphasis added.

The remainder of this chapter is dedicated solely to a detailed articulation of the problem itself. Chapter six will deal with the solutions. I have divided the articulation of the problem into three subsections. In subsection II.A., I will explain the different ways in which Aquinas uses the term "object" in relation to acts. Subsection II.B. is devoted to showing that for Aquinas the exterior act serves as a formal principle of the interior act of the will, thereby determining the very character or being of the volitional act. Finally, in subsection II.C, I will conclude my explanation of the "specification problem" by showing how the "specification problem" arises when the metaphysics of specification is applied to the Divine Will.

II.A.
Aquinas's Different Uses of "Object" in Relation to Volitional Acts

Central to Aquinas's action theory is that "a difference of objects makes a difference of species in actions."[10] This follows from the principle that "every act has its species from its object."[11] In other words, the object of an act specifies the kind of act it is. Aquinas uses the term "object" (*obiectum*) to refer to a variety of things. Sometimes he uses it to refer to that which an external act bears upon, i.e., the patient around which the action is formed.[12] Take, for example, the act of eating ice cream. We call it "an act of eating ice cream" because it involves an act of eating that *bears upon* ice cream. With this use, the object is that "about which" or "concerning which" (*circa quam*) an action concerns itself.[13]

Other times, however, Aquinas uses *obiectum* to refer to the end sought by the will.[14] For example, a person may engage in an act of adultery only to achieve the end (*obiectum*) of theft.[15] Aquinas also uses *obiectum* to refer to that which specifies a particular power.[16] Color, for

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[10] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia IIae, qu. 18, art. 5: "[D]ifferentia obiecti facit differentiam speciei in actibus." See also Ia IIae, qu. 18, art. 2; qu. 31, art. 8 ad 3.

[11] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia IIae, qu. 18, art. 5: "omnis actus speciem habet ex suo obiecto." See also *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, IIae, qu. 18, art. 2; qu. 19, art. 1; ad 3; IIa IIae, qu. 59, art. 2; *Summa Contra Gentiles* Lib. 1, Cap. 77; *De Malo* qu. 2, art. 4 ad 10. For an exhaustive list of references throughout Aquinas's corpus where he asserts that an action takes its form or species from its object, see Joseph Pilsner, *The Specification of Human Actions in St. Thomas Aquinas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006)*,* 71, n. 180.

[12] See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia IIae, qu. 18, art. 2 ad 2: "obiectum non est materia ex qua, sed *materia circa quam*"; art. 6: "Sicut igitur actus exterior accipit speciem ab *obiecto circa quod est*"; qu. 73, art. 3 ad 1: "obiectum, etsi sit materia circa quam terminatur actus." For an explanation of this use of "object," see Brock, *Action and Conduct,* 86-88; John A. Osterle, *Ethics* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1958), 103; Michael Cronin, *The Science of Ethics,* Vol. I (Dublin: M.H. Gill and Son, 1930), 95; Steve Long, "On the 'Isomorphism' of Evil Action and Co-action," Lecture given during "On Cooperatoin with Evil" conference at the Dominican House of Studies in Washington, DC. March 16-17, 2018. Text of the lecture can found at https://www.academia.edu/36316238/ON_THE_ISOMORPHISM_OF_EVIL_ACTION_AND_CO_ACTION.

[13] See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia IIae, qu. 18, art. 2 ad 2: "obiectum non est materia ex qua, sed materia circa quam"; qu. 73, art. 3 ad 1.

[14] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia IIae, qu. 1, art. 3: "ita actus interior voluntatis accipit speciem *a fine, sicut a proprio obiecto*"; ad 1: "etiam finis habet rationem obiecti."

[15] Aquinas uses this example in *Summa Theologiae,* Ia IIae, qu. 18, art. 6.

[16] See *Summa Theologiae,* Ia IIae, qu. 3, art. 7 (emphasis added): "Manifestum est autem quod unumquodque intantum est perfectio alicuius potentiae, inquantum ad ipsum pertinet ratio *proprii obiecti illius potentiae*." See also ad 3 (emphasis added): "ultima *perfectio cuiuslibet potentiae* est ut attingat ad id in quo plene invenitur *ratio sui obiecti*." Cf. Ia, qu. 19, art. 3.

example, is the object of man's power to see and thereby defines an act of seeing—seeing *is* sensing color, not taste or smell.[17]

Truth, not sensible things, defines an act of intellection.[18] As I seek to know whether divine immutability and the variability of creation can be affirmed together at the same time, I am engaging in an intellectual act because I am seeking the truth of the matter. Man's volitional power (the power to will) has an object as well: the good.[19] When I will to have some perceived good and intentionally act to acquire it, I engage in an act of the will.

Now, Aquinas also uses *obiectum* to refer to *the exterior act itself*, which stands in relation to the interior act of the will as its object and specifies it.[20] Aquinas is unambiguous on this. Early in his career, for example, he writes, "The exterior act is compared to the will as an object."[21] This is within the context of affirming that "the exterior act completes the interior act in goodness or badness, as a terminus completes the motion."[22] Aquinas articulates this same view in his *De Malo*, where he teaches that sin is denominated by the exterior act insofar as it relates to the interior act of the will. He writes, "An act has its species from its object, and on account of this sin is designated by means of the exterior act according to which it is compared to [the act of the will] as its object."[23] Aquinas would affirm this view all the way until the end of his career, writing in his *Summa Theologiae,* "The exterior act is the object of the interior act of the will."[24]

II.B.
The Exterior Act as a Formal Principle of the Interior Act of the Will

[17] Aquinas uses this example in several places throughout his writings. See *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 1, art. 3; qu. 19, art. 3; *De Veritate,* qu. 5, art. 10; qu. 14, art. 8; ad 4; ad 5; *Quodlibet III,* qu. 12, art. 2; *Quodlibet* III, qu. 12, art. 2; *Compendium theologiae,* Lib. 1, Cap. 85; *Sentencia libri De anima* (Turin: Marietti, 1959), Lib. 1, lect. 2; Lib. 2, lect. 21. For Aquinas's statements about senses of touch and taste and their respective objects, see *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 78, art. 3 ad 3 and 4; see also *I Meta.,* Lect. 1. Aquinas speaks of the objects of concupiscible and irascible faculties in *Summa Theologiae,* Ia IIae, qu. 25, art. 1 ad 1. He also has a great deal to say about the object of the theological virtue of faith. See IIa IIae, qu. 1, art. 6 obj. 2; art. 2; qu. 2, art. 2; qu. 4, art. 6; qu. 5, arts 3 and 4; qu. 7, art. 1 ad 3; qu. 10, art. 5 obj. 1.

[18] See *Summa Theologiae,* Ia IIae, qu. 3, art. 7: "Proprium autem *obiectum intellectus est verum*."

[19] See Aquinas *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 19, art. 4: "bonum est obiectum voluntatis." See also art. 1 obj. 1; ad 2; ad 3; qu. 82, art. 4; Ia IIae, qu. 19, art. 3; IIa IIae, qu. 82, art. 3; *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 1, Caps. 72, 74, 78, 81, 95, Lib. 2, Caps. 23, 24, Lib. 3, Caps. 1, 3, 26, 85, 148, Lib. 4, Cap. 19; *De Malo,* qu. 3, art. 6 ad 2.

[20] See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia IIae, qu. 19, art. 8; qu. 20, art. 1 obj. 1 and ad 1; *II Sent.* dist. 40, qu. 1, art. 3; *III Sent.* dist. 9, qu. 1, art. 1; *De Malo,* qu. 2, art. 3. For resources that elaborate on this use of *obiectum* in Aquinas and its importance for Aquinas's understanding of what specifies human action, see Chad Ripperger, "The Species and Unity of the Moral Act," *The Thomist*, 59, no.1 (1995): 69–90; Henry Davis, *Moral and Pastoral Theology* (New York, 1943), p. 55; Charles Coppens, *A Brief Text-book of Moral Philosophy* (New York: Schwartz, Kirwin & Fauss, 1924), p. 33.

[21] Aquinas, *II Sent.* Dist. 40, qu. 1, art. 3: "[A]ctus exterior comparatur ad voluntatem sicut objectum."

[22] Ibid.: "[A]ctus exterior complet interiorem in bonitate vel malitia, sicut terminus motus complet motum.

[23] Aquinas, *De Malo,* qu. 2, art. 3 (emphasis added): "actus habet speciem ab obiecto; et propter hoc peccatum denominatur ab actu exteriori secundum quod comparatur *ad ipsum ut obiectum*." The objection to which Aquinas is responding here makes it clear that *ipsum* refers to the interior act of the will. He writes in arg. 1 (emphasis added), "Denominatio enim fit a principali, ut dicitur II de anima. Sed peccatum denominatur ab exteriori actu, ut cum dicitur furtum vel homicidium. Non ergo peccatum principaliter consistit *in actu voluntatis.*" For commentary on this passage, see Pilsner, *The Specification of Human Action in St. Thomas Aquinas,* 80; Ripperger, "The Species and Unity of the Moral Act," 77.

[24] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia IIae, qu. 20, art. 1 obj 1: "actus exterior est obiectum interioris actus voluntatis." Aquinas responds in the reply, ad 1 (emphasis added): "*actus exterior est obiectum voluntatis*, inquantum proponitur voluntati a ratione ut quoddam bonum apprehensum et ordinatum per rationem."

The question now is, "How does this create a problem for the compatibility between divine immutability and the variability of creation?" Before answering this question, it is necessary to explain the metaphysical role that an exterior act plays for the interior act of the will when it relates to the will as its object. Such a role is that the exterior act, as object, *serves as a formal principle of the interior act of will*, which means it determines the very *character* or *being* of the volitional act. This is one way of understanding Aquinas's above statement that "every act [the interior act of the will] has its *species* from its object."[25]

II.B.1.
The Metaphysics of Specification for Intellectual Activity

To begin unpacking this teaching of Aquinas, we start with Aquinas's understanding of "form." For Aquinas, "form" determines the very being of a thing, both its substantial and accidental being.[26] For example, the tree outside is 'tree being in actuality,' or 'actually a tree," because it has the substantial *form* of a tree. The green leaves on it are green because they have the accidental form of "greenness." As philosopher John P. O'Callaghan writes, "form brings certain identity to things, causing them to be units of a certain kind."[27]

Another function Aquinas thinks form has, along with specifying the kind of being a subject is, is to specify the kind of operation a subject has and can engage in. For example, Socrates's human form not only makes him human but also determines the kind of operations that he can engage in *qua* human—namely, knowing and willing. This grounds Aquinas's teaching that "every agent acts through the form by which it is in act."[28] Form, therefore, is a principle of action for Aquinas.

Now, for Aquinas this schema of form determining the being and operation can be transferred to an *individual instance of an act itself*. Take my act of knowing the tree outside, for example. For Aquinas, when I know the tree, my intellect conforms itself to the form present in the tree in a way such that the form of the tree now has a mode of being in my intellect that is no longer organic, physically extended, and located within space, but rather immaterial and universal.[29] The tree's mode of being that is organic, physically extended, and located within

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[25] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia IIae, qu. 18, art. 5 (emphasis added): "omnis actus *speciem* habet ex suo obiecto."

[26] See Aquinas, *De Principiis Naturae* (Rome: Leonine, 1972), Cap. 1: "Forma facit esse in actu"; *Summa Theologiae,* IIIa, qu. 17, art. 2. This is also present in Aquinas's teaching that formal principles, or form, determine the species of a thing. See *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 2, Caps. 81 and 95; *Summa Theologiae,* IIa IIae, qu. 10, art. 5 obj. 1. For a detailed treatment of Aquinas's teaching on form, see Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas,* 296-311.

[27] John P. O'Callaghan, *Thomist Realism and the Linguistic Turn: Toward a More Perfect Form of Existence* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), 238.

[28] Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 2. Cap. 20: "cum omne agens agat per formam qua actu est." See also Lib. 1, Cap. 46: "forma cuiuslibet agentis principium est propriae operationis"; Lib. 2 Cap.41: "omne agens agit inquantum habet formam"; Lib. 3, Cap. 85: "omne agens agit per suam formam"; *De Veritate* qu. 22, art. 12: "Ratio autem agendi est forma agentis per quam agit."

[29] There is debate among Thomists as to whether the intellect conforms itself to the single form that exists in a thing known or whether the thing known produces, by way of efficient causality, a numerically distinct form like unto itself in the intellect. For the former view, see O'Callaghan, *Thomist Realism and the Linguistic Turn,* 247-248; Joseph Owens, *Cognition: An Epistemological Inquiry* (Houston, TX: The Center for Thomistic Studies, 1992), Chap. 2. For the latter view, see Therese Scarpelli Cory, "Aquinas's Intelligible Species as Formal Constituents" (Unpublished manuscript at the time of writing this dissertation), 289,

space, for Aquinas, is the tree's "material being" (*esse materiale*).[30] Aquinas calls the mode of being that is immaterial and universal, the being that the form has in my intellect, "intelligible being" (*esse intelligibile*).[31] And it is this "intelligible being" that constitutes a new actuality within me, since *my intellect itself*, when conformed to the form of the tree, moves from being potentially in "intelligible being" to actually in "intelligible being".[32] As Aquinas writes, "Indeed the possible intellect is existing as in potency to intelligible being but is *made in act* by means of the intelligible species, just as prime matter is made in act in sensible being by means of a natural form."[33]

But the intelligible being, or the new actuality, that my intellect takes on is not general. Rather, it is specific in kind: it is *treeish*, or 'tree being in actuality.'[34] This is so because, as mentioned above, form determines the being of its subject. The tree form in the tree now united to my intellect gives my intellect a determinately *treeish* character, a new quality of being that is

https://www.academia.edu/45135618/Aquinass_Intelligible_Species_as_Formal_Constituents_DSTFM_31_2020_261_309_. I side with the former view given Aquinas's denial that the agent intellect (*intellectus agentis*) makes the form of a thing present in the passive intellect in a way that a body moves from one location to another. Aquinas writes, "Et per hunc modum dicitur abstrahi species intelligibilis a phantasmatibus, non quod aliqua eadem numero forma, quae prius fuit in phantasmatibus, postmodum fiat in intellectu possibili, ad modum quo corpus accipitur ab uno loco et transfertur ad alterum." *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 85: art. 1 ad 3. This view of conformity, as opposed to transfer, is also embedded in Aquinas's teaching on truth. For example, he teaches that truth is in the intellect in so far as the intellect is *conformed* to the object understood. He writes in *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 16, art. 1, "[C]um verum sit in intellectu secundum quod conformatur rei intellectae." See also art. 2 (emphasis added): "Et propter hoc per *conformitatem intellectus et rei* veritas definitur . . . Intellectus autem *conformitatem sui ad rem* intelligibilem cognoscere potest."

[30] Aquinas *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 18, art. 4 ad 2 (emphasis added): "[F]orma domus in mente artificis habet esse immateriale et intelligibile, in domo autem quae est extra animam, habet *esse materiale* et sensibile." See also *II Sent*., dist. 19, qu. 1, art. 3 ad 1; *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 1, Cap. 55; Lib. 2, Caps. 16, 50, 92; *De Potentia,* qu. 7, art. 7; Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestio disputata de spiritualibus creaturis* (Turin: Marietti, 1953), art. 9, ad 15; *Compendium theologiae*, Lib. 1, Cap. 82. Joseph Owens calls the "material being" of a thing "real existence." See Owens, *Cognition,* 39.

[31] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 14, art. 6 ad 1 (emphasis added): "[I]ntellectus cognoscit lapidem secundum *esse intelligibile* quod habet in intellectu." See also Ia, qu. 15, art. 1; qu. 18, art. 4 ad 2; qu. 23, art. 3; *Suppl.* qu. 83, art. 6 ad 2; *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 2, Caps. 77, 79, 92, 98; Lib. 3, Caps. 46, 51, 59; Lib. 4, Cap. 26; *De Veritate*, qu. 4, art. 8 ad 2; *De Potentia*, qu. 2, art. 1. Owens calls this mode of being "cognitional existence." See Owens, *Cognition,* 39.

[32] For an explanation of this movement of the intellect from potency to act as a response to the thing known, see O'Callaghan, *Thomist Realism*, 248.

[33] Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 2. Cap. 98 (emphasis added): "Intellectus enim possibilis est ut *potentia existens in esse intelligibili; fit autem actu per speciem intelligibilem*, sicut materia prima fit actu in esse sensibili per formam naturalem." See also Lib. 2, Cap. 96: "intellectus enim accipiens cognitionem a sensibilibus, non est actu in esse intelligibili, sed in potentia"; Cap. 98: "Intellectus igitur possibilis noster non cognoscit seipsum nisi per speciem intelligibilem, qua fit actu in esse intelligibili"; *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 34, art. 1, ad 2: "intellectus autem ipse, secundum quod est per speciem intelligibilem in actu."

[34] I do not become a tree precisely because the form of the tree is not received in my intellect in the way that it is received in matter. Rather, it is received immaterially. See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia., qu. 76, art. 2.

accidental in nature.[35] If my intellect were conformed to the form of a stone on the ground, it would have "stoney intellectual being" and thus be *stoney* in character.[36]

Now, this *treeish* or *stoney* intellectual being that I have in virtue of the tree form or stone form *just is* my act of knowing the tree or the stone.[37] Aquinas teaches this in the first book of his *Commentary on the Sentence*s. "But to this that is understanding in act," he writes, "it is necessary that the intelligible in potency be made intelligible in act."[38] In other words, for the form that exists naturally in the tree to be *understood* it must have "intelligible being." But such "intelligible being," as shown above, is had when the intellect conforms itself to the form of the tree and thereby understands it. Therefore, the intelligible being that the tree's form has in my intellect *just is* my act of understanding the tree.

So, how is the intelligible brought into act? How does the tree's form come to have "intelligible being" in my intellect? Aquinas answers, "That species is stripped of all appendages of matter through the power of the agent intellect," and thereby "perfects the intellect in potency," making "the intellect in act."[39] Notice that it is the "intelligible in act," or "intelligible being," that makes "the intellect in act." For Aquinas, the two are the same. He concludes, "Whence just as the

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[35] Cory uses the example of knowing a fern and concludes that the form of a fern "gives the actualized intellect a determinately fernish character." Cory, "Aquinas's Intelligible Species," 289. O'Callaghan explains this formal character of the intellect this way: "Absolutely considered *what it is* for an act of understanding to be of an X, the act's *essence* or *quod quid est esse*, does not differ from *what it is* for the X to be, the X's *quod quid est esse.*" O'Callaghan, *Thomist Realism and the Linguistic Turn*, 240 (emphasis added). For Aquinas's affirmation that the intellect *unites* to the thing known, see *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 2, Cap. 59 (emphasis added): "Intelligitur autem id cuius *species intelligibilis intellectui unitur* . . . . . Omne *cognoscens per virtutem cognoscitivam coniungitur obiecto*, et non e converso: sicut et operans omne per virtutem operativam coniungitur operato. Homo autem est intelligens per intellectum sicut per virtutem cognoscitivam. *Non igitur coniungitur per formam intelligibilem intellectui, sed magis per intellectum intelligibili*"; *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 56, art. 1 (emphasis added): "Sed in actione quae manet in agente, oportet ad hoc quod procedat actio, *quod obiectum uniatur agenti*, sicut oportet quod sensibile uniatur sensui, ad hoc quod sentiat actu. Et ita se habet *obiectum unitum potentiae ad huiusmodi actionem*, sicut forma quae est principium actionis in aliis agentibus." For the accidental nature of this new being that the intellect acquires, see *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 1, Cap. 46 (emphasis added): "Species intelligibilis in intellectu praeter essentiam eius existens *esse accidentale* habet."

[36] Cory, "Aquinas's Intelligible Species," 289. Similarly, O'Callaghan explains how a different object known determines a different act of understanding. He writes, "[The intellect] responds within itself, and brings itself from potency to act, in such a way that the character of the response is determined by the formal character of the *res extra animam.* The formal character of the act of understanding is 'received' from the *res* understood, because if it had encountered some other *res,* differing formally, it would have responded in a formally different way . . . Because the intellect potentially knows all things, it actively responds to its encounter with X. It responds in an X-like fashion, rather than a Y-like fashion, which it would have done had it encountered Y. Something comes to be as a response to an encountered object, in a way determined by the object that 'moves it to its act,' that moves the knower to respond. So the formal characteristics of the act of understanding depend upon the formal characteristics of the object understood." O'Callaghan, *Thomist Realism,* 248.

[37] For an in-depth defense of this claim, see Therese Scarpelli Cory, "Knowing as Being? A Metaphysical Reading of the Identity of Intellect and Intelligible in Aquinas," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 91, no. 3 (2017): 333–351.

[38] Aquinas, *I Sent.* dist. 35, qu. 1, art. 1 ad 3: "[S]ed ad hoc quod sit intelligens in actu, oportet quod intelligibile in potentia fiat intelligibile in actu."

[39] Ibid., "[Q]uod species ejus denudatur ab omnibus appenditiis materiae per virtutem intellectus agentis; et oportet quod haec species, quae est intellecta in actu, perficiat intellectum in potential." See also *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 1, Cap. 71 (emphasis added): "Nam cum intellectus noster singulas res per singulas species proprias cognoscat et diversas, id quod est in actu cognoscit *per speciem intelligibilem, per quam fit intellectus in actu*"; Lib. 2, Cap. 30 (emphasis added): " . . . et similiter cum *intellectus est in actu* per speciem intelligibilem." For an in-depth treatment of abstraction, see Owens, *Cognition*, Chap.5.

soul is not different from man so what is understood in act [the intelligible in act] is not different from the intellect understanding in act but the same."[40] Aquinas spells out the reason for this identity in book four of the *Sentences*. He writes, "[W]hat is understood in act becomes one with the intellect in act, inasmuch as the form of the thing understood becomes the form of the intellect, inasmuch as understanding is in act."[41]

Aquinas would continue to affirm this principle throughout his career. Consider, for example, this clear statement from his *Summa Contra Gentiles:* "The intelligible in act [what is understood in act] is the intellect in act, just as the sensible in act is the sense in act."[42] Similarly, he writes in his *Summa Theologiae,* "Whence it is said in the book on the soul that the sensible in act is the sense in act, and the intelligible in act [what is understood in act] is the intellect in act."[43]

Given that the intelligible in act, or the intelligible being that a thing's form has in the intellect, just is the intellect in act, it follows that the form of a thing specifies not just the intelligible being of my intellect but also *the intellectual act itself*. Per the examples above, it is an act of the kind *knowing a tree,* or an act of *knowing the stone*.[44] This illustrates what Aquinas means when he says, "But no act is perfectly brought forth by any active power except it is connatural to it through *some form that is the principle of action*."[45] In other words, intellectual acts are systematically coordinated with the contents of those acts, such that it is not the case that two intellectual acts could be the same but their content different.

II.B.2.
The Metaphysics of Specification for Volitional Activity

The above metaphysics of specification applies equally to the will and its volitional acts. The difference is that rather than the will having as its formal object the form of a thing, like in the case of an intellect taking on the form of a tree in knowing it, it has *the exterior act* as its formal principle. Above we said that for Aquinas the exterior act stands in relation to the interior act of the will as its object.[46] But Aquinas also teaches that "the *form* of the will is from the object just

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[40] *I Sent.* dist. 35, qu. 1, art. 1 ad 3: "Unde sicut anima non est aliud ab homine, ita intellectum in actu non est aliud ab intellectu intelligente actu, sed idem."

[41] Aquinas, *IV Sent.*, dist. 49, qu. 2, art. 1 ad 10: "intellectum in actu fit unum cum intellectu in actu, inquantum forma intellecti fit forma intellectus, inquantum est intellectus in actu." Aquinas goes on immediately thereafter to qualify that we should not understand this to mean that the form of the thing understood is the intellect's very essence. He writes, "non quod sit ipsamet essentia intellectus." For an explanation of this formal identity between the thing understood and the one understanding, see O'Callaghan, *Thomist Realism*, 239-246.

[42] Aquinas *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 1, Cap. 51: "Intelligibile in actu est intellectus in actu: sicut et sensibile in actu est sensus in actu." See also Lib. 2, Cap. 55: "[U]nde intellectus in actu et intelligibile in actu sunt unum"; Cap. 59: "Intellectus in actu et intelligibile in actu sunt unum." For the slightly different formulation found the above references from his *Sentences* (where *intellectum in actu* and *intellectus actu* are identified as one and the same), see Lib. 1, Cap. 47; Lib. 2, Caps. 74, 98, 99, 101.

[43] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 14, art. 2: "Unde dicitur in libro de anima, quod sensibile in actu est sensus in actu, et intelligibile in actu est intellectus in actu." For the slightly different formulation found in the above references from his *Sentences* (where *intellectum in actu* and *intellectus actu* are identified as one and the same), see Ia, qu. 55, art. 1 ad 2; qu. 84, art. 4. See also *De Veritate*, q. 8 a. 14 ad 16; *De spiritualibus*, art. 4 ad 14; art. 9; *De Malo,* qu. 8, art. 3; *Quodlibet,* III, qu. 8; *Compendium Theologiae,* Lib. 1, Cap. 83.

[44] As Cory puts it, using a different example, "A fernish intellect performs an act of fernish knowing." Cory, "Aquinas's Intelligible Species," 289.

[45] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* IIa IIae, qu. 23, art. 2 (emphasis added): "Nullus autem actus perfecte producitur ab aliqua potentia activa nisi sit ei connaturalis per *aliquam formam quae sit principium actionis*."

[46] See note 20 of this chapter.

as in the case of any act."[47] Since the exterior act is an object of the interior act of the will, and as an object it serves as the formal principle for the volitional act, it follows that the exterior act that the will directs itself to serves as a formal principle of the interior act of the will.

Now, recall from above that in Aquinas's metaphysics form determines a specific kind of being or actuality, not only for a thing's substantial being but also its accidental being, including the being of its acts. We saw above that the form of a thing, like the tree form, served as the form for the intellect and thereby determined the intelligible being of the intellect, which was the intellect in act. Since the exterior act as object serves as a formal principle for the will, like the form of a tree does for the intellect, it follows that the exterior act chosen by the will determines the very being or actuality of the act of the will. In other words, the exterior act specifies the interior act of the will, making it be of a certain kind.

The effect that the exterior act has on the actuality of the interior act of will is made intelligible by Aquinas's comparison of the operation of the will relative to its object and the operation of the agent intellect in relation to its object. In his *De Veritate,* question twenty-two, article five, Aquinas explains how the "the soul forms within itself the form of things."[48] He writes, "A thing which is outside the soul does not impress its species on the possible intellect except through the operation of the agent intellect."[49] Aquinas then goes on to compare this operation to the operation of the will in relation to its object: "Likewise it is not without the operation of the will that the will tends to what is desirable."[50]

Inasmuch as the will tends to the exterior act, the exterior act takes on the character of a final cause, given that the exterior act is willed as a means to achieve that which is properly the final cause, a perceived good. But as *object* of the volitional act, the exterior act, which the will brings about as an efficient cause, plays a role similar to that of the object of our active intellect: it impresses itself on the soul as a formal cause, thereby determining a real actuality of the soul. Like the intelligible being that is the intellect in act, the new actuality or being that the will obtains as specified by the exterior act just is the will in action that is of a specific kind—willing a specific exterior act, whatever it may be (e.g., raising my hand), to be brought about. So, the exterior act chosen by the will determines the very being of the interior act of the will.[51] W. Matthews Grant labels this metaphysical structure as "object essentialism."[52]

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[47] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia IIae, qu. 19, art. 10 (emphasis added): "*[F]orma* voluntatis est ex obiecto sicut et cuiuslibet actus." See also qu. 9, art. 1 (emphasis added): "[O]biectum movet, determinando actum, ad modum *principii formalis*"; Ia, qu. 56, art. 1 (emphasis added): "Et ita se habet *obiectum unitum potentiae ad huiusmodi actionem*, sicut forma quae est principium actionis in aliis agentibus"; *I Sent.* dist. 48, qu. 1, art. 2: "[S]pecies autem cujuslibet actus voluntarii trahitur ex objecto, quod est *forma voluntatis* producentis actum." Aquinas also speaks of objects of the will as the "form of the will" in *De Veritate,* qu. 22, art. 8. There, Aquinas talks about how God changes our wills in one of two ways: either by simply moving it or "impressing some form into the will itself" (*imprimendo aliquam formam in ipsam voluntatem*).

[48] Aquinas, *De Veritate,* qu. 22, art.5 ad 10: "anima in seipsa formas rerum formare."

[49] Ibid: "[R]es quae est extra animam, non imprimit speciem suam in intellectum possibilem nisi per operationem intellectus agentis."

[50] Ibid: "Et similiter etiam non est sine operatione voluntatis quod voluntas in appetibile tendat."

[51] Joyce writes, "The [objects desired by the will] are truly called the will's 'motives': they move it to action. *They give, moreover, to the acts of the will their specific character*. The nature of the particular act is determined by the motive. Hence a plurality of distinct objects involves a plurality of acts." Joyce, *The Principles of Natural Theology,* Chap.12 (emphasis added).

[52] Grant, *Free Will and Universal Causality,* 76–80, 82, 206 n.7. See also Grant and Spencer, "Activity, Identity, and God: A Tension in Aquinas and his Interpreters," 11.

Now, someone might object that the exterior act cannot serve as a formal principle for the interior act of the will (and thereby be that which determines or specifies a new actuality for it) because the formal principle of the will is the *end* that the will intends, which for many actions is separate from the exterior act willed.[53] Aquinas describes the formal role that the end plays for the will as that which the will "transforms" (*transformatur*) into.[54] Although it is true that Aquinas teaches that "the end" (*finis*) is the "form of the will" (*forma voluntatis*), the exterior act (*actio*) as object sometimes serves as an end for the interior act of will.[55] And, similar to how the intellect "conforms" to its object (the form of the tree that I know), it is *this* end (the exterior act as object) that the will "transforms" (*transformatur*) into, thereby being determined in its actuality by the exterior act that it transforms into.[56]

Aquinas affirms this in book three, chapter two, of his *Summa Contra Gentiles*.[57] There he argues *that* "in acting every agent aims at some end."[58] The end, as Aquinas states, is "that to which the inclination of the agent tends."[59] So, if "the inclination of the agent tends through the

[53] For example, a person may steal for the sake of achieving the end of adultery. For Aquinas, these are two distinct acts, the first of which is ordered to the other as a means to an end. See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia IIae, qu. 18, art. 6.

[54] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, IIae, qu. 63, art. 3 (emphasis added): "[V]oluntas ordinatur in illum finem et quantum ad motum intentionis, in ipsum tendentem sicut in id quod est possibile consequi, quod pertinet ad spem, et quantum ad unionem quandam spiritualem, per quam quodammodo *transformatur* in illum finem, quod fit per caritatem."

[55] Aquinas, *De Potentia,* qu. 3, art. 6 ad 12 (emphasis added): "Ideo autem in habitibus animae specialiter bonum et malum poni dicuntur, quia morales actus, et per consequens habitus, specificantur ex fine, qui est quasi *forma voluntatis*, quae est principium proprium malorum actuum. Bonum vero et malum dicuntur per comparationem ad finem." See also *II Sent.* dist. 38, qu. 1, art. 5 (emphasis added): "*[F]orma voluntatis* est finis, quod est appetibile, sicut intelligibile est forma intellectus"; dist. 40, qu. 1, art. 1 ad 5 (emphasis added): "[Q]uod finis est *forma voluntatis* secundum quam operatio humana dicitur." For Aquinas's more general teaching that the end is the form of an act, see *Summa Theologiae,* Ia IIae, qu. 1, art. 3; qu. 73, art. 3 ad 1; IIa IIae, qu. 4, art. 3; qu. 23, art. 8. For Aquinas's teaching that the end *specifies* an act as its form, see *Summa Theologiae,* Ia IIae, qu. 1, art. 3; ad 2; qu. 18, art. 6; IIa IIae, qu. 186, art. 1. For instances where Aquinas explicitly affirms that actions or operations serve as ends, see *III Sent.* dist. 33, qu. 2, art. 3 ad 4; *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 3, Cap. 2; Cap. 3; *Summa Theologiae,* Ia IIae, qu. 14, art. 2 ad 2; qu. 20, art. 4 ad 2; qu. 56, art. 1; qu. 72, art. 3 ad 2. This teaching is also found implicitly in Aquinas's teaching that the object of an act has the character of an end—see *Summa Theologiae,* Ia IIae, qu. 72, art. 3; 73, art. 3 ad 1. The reasoning is as follows: If exterior acts are objects of the interior act of the will, as I argued above, and the objects of an act take on the role of an end, then it follows that exterior acts serve as ends of the interior act of the will. For an in-depth study of Aquinas's teaching that the exterior act serves as an end of the interior act of will, see Pilsner, *The Specification of Human Actions in St. Thomas Aquinas,* 87-89; Brock, *Action and Conduct,* 87-89; Ripperger, "The Species and Unity of the Moral Act."

[56] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, IIae, qu. 63, art. 3.

[57] See Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 3, Cap. 2 (emphasis added): "[S]i quidem actio terminatur ad aliquod factum, impetus agentis tendit per actionem in illud factum: si autem non terminatur ad aliquod factum, impetus agentis tendit in ipsam actionem. Oportet igitur quod omne agens in agendo *intendat finem: quandoque quidem actionem ipsam*; quandoque aliquid per actionem factum." Aquinas later in the same chapter speaks of play and contemplation as actions that serve as ends: "Sunt autem aliquae actiones quae non videntur esse propter finem, sicut actiones ludicrae et contemplatoriae, et actiones quae absque attentione fiunt, sicut confricatio barbae et huiusmodi: ex quibus aliquis opinari potest quod sit aliquod agens non propter finem. Sed sciendum quod actiones contemplativae non sunt propter alium finem, sed ipsae sunt finis." See also Cap. 3: "Si enim ipsa actio sit finis, manifestum est quod est perfectio secunda agentis."

[58] Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 3, Cap. 2: "[O]mne agens in agendo intendit aliquem finem."

[59] Ibid: "[Q]uod tendit impetus agentis."

action to that achievement," then "the achievement" serves as the agent's "end."[60] But "if the inclination of the agent tends toward the action itself," then "the action" serves as the "end."[61]

Aquinas, perhaps in a clearer fashion, affirms this teaching in *prima secundae*, question seventy-two, article three of his *Summa Theologiae*. He writes,

> Objects, according to which are placed in relation to the exterior act, have the aspect of matter circa quam, but according to which are placed in relation to the interior act of the will, they have the aspect of an end; and they have from this that which they give, the species of the act.[62]

But what do we make of the relation between the exterior act and end when the exterior act is distinct (non-identical) from some further end that is principally intended by the agent, like in the case when someone steals for the sake of committing adultery? In the case of stealing for the sake of adultery, there are two distinct acts—"two species that are separate" (*duabus speciebus quasi disparatis*)—that the agent wills because stealing is not "of itself ordained to the end" (*per se ordinatum ad finem*) of adultery.[63] This being the case, *both* specify the interior act of the will. In the words of Aquinas, such a person "commits a twofold malice in one action."[64]

However, whenever an exterior act is willed and it has a *per se* order (naturally ordered of itself) to some further end principally intended by the agent, "the most formal, containing, defining species is derived from the end."[65] Again, Aquinas writes, "If the object [the exterior act willed] of itself is ordained to the end, one of the said differences [the end] is of itself determinative of the other [the exterior act willed]."[66]

Take, for example, the deliberate killing of an unjust aggressor in legitimate self-defense. The deliberate killing takes on the formal species of self-defense as opposed to hatred or vengeance because the act of killing (the object of the interior act of the will) of itself has a natural ordering to the intended end of defense (what is ultimately intended as an end). For this type of act, the exterior act is so tightly bound up with the end of the agent that, in the words of Totleben, "the specifying components of the exterior act always fall within the agent's intention when performing

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[60] Ibid (emphasis added): "[S]i quidem actio terminatur ad aliquod factum, impetus agentis tendit per actionem in illud factum."

[61] Ibid: "[S]i autem non terminatur ad aliquod factum, impetus agentis tendit in ipsam actionem. Oportet igitur quod omne agens in agendo intendat finem: quandoque quidem actionem ipsam; quandoque aliquid per actionem factum."

[62] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia IIae, qu. 72, art. 3 ad 2: "[O]biecta, secundum quod comparantur ad actus exteriores, habent rationem materiae circa quam, sed secundum quod comparantur ad actum interiorem voluntatis, habent rationem finium; et ex hoc habent quod dent speciem actui." For other instances where Aquinas affirms that human actions or operations can serve as ends for the interior act of the will, see *III Sent*., dist. 33, qu. 2, art. 3, ad 4; *Summa Theologiae,* Ia IIae, qu. 14, art. 2 ad 2; qu. 20, art. 4; ad 2; qu. 56, art. 1.

[63] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia IIae, qu. 18, art. 7: "[Q]uando obiectum non est per se ordinatum ad finem, differentia specifica quae est ex obiecto, non est per se determinativa eius quae est ex fine, nec e converso. Unde una istarum specierum non est sub alia, sed tunc actus moralis est sub duabus speciebus quasi disparatis."

[64] Ibid (emphasis added): "Unde dicimus quod ille qui furatur ut moechetur, *committit duas malitias in uno actu*."

[65] Steven A. Long, "*Veritatis Splendor* §78 and the Teleological Grammar of the Moral Act," *Nova et Vetera*, 6, no. 1 (2008): 139–156. For a book-length treatment of this, see Steven A. Long, *The Teleological Grammar of the Moral Act* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2008). See also Ripperger, "The Species and Unity of the Moral Act."

[66] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia IIae, qu. 18, art. 7: "Si vero obiectum per se ordinetur ad finem, una dictarum differentiarum est per se determinativa alterius. Unde una istarum specierum continebitur sub altera."

the action."[67] The deliberate killing and the end of self-defense are "two different ways of describing the same total action."[68] Given the *per se* order that the killing act has to the end of self-defense, the interior act of will has a single object: the exterior act of lethal self-defense. Lethal self-defense, therefore, is that which specifies the interior act of will, determining its new actuality that is qualitative in nature.[69]

II.C.
Conclusion

It is precisely the above metaphysics of the specification of human action, and in particular the interior act of will, that some argue generates the "difficulty of counterfactual difference."[70] Consider that Aquinas affirms creatures are in some sense objects of the divine will. In his *Summa Contra Gentiles,* he writes, "[S]ome things fall under the divine will according to the place that

[67] Peter Totelben, "A Primer on Human Action and the Moral Object" (*Academia.edu*, October 7, 2019), 12, n.11.

[68] Ibid.

[69] Another illustrative example of an act that has a *per se* order to an end would be opening the chest for the sake of repairing the heart. The exterior act of opening the chest takes on the form of the end that is intended: heart surgery. As such, the opening of the chest together with the repairing of the heart constitutes a single object of the interior act of the will and thus specifies the will.

[70] Hill is representative of this line of thinking: "God with creation and God without it [or with a different creation] are not entirely the same thing, and it appears overly facile to dismiss this as exclusively on the side of the creature . . . God does freely determine himself to know and love this actual world rather than any of the other infinite number of possible worlds . . . God is choosing, in unqualified freedom, to so specify himself . . . the point is that there occurs a determination within God as knowing and loving, on which basis he is other, relatively speaking, than he would be had he determined himself in some other way." Hill, "Does the World Make a Difference to God?", 157. As mentioned in note #27 of the Introduction, Spinoza articulates the problem but to a different end. See Spinoza, *Ethics,* prop. XXXIII, bk. 1, in *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, 437-438. Bradshaw, in *Aristotle East and West,* does not explicitly state the argument; however, it is clearly implied in his critique of Knasas's argumentation in Knasas's article "*Contra* Spinoza" (427-429), which is directed specifically at Spinoza's objection that God would be different if he were to have created differently (or not at all). See Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West,* 262. See also Grant and Spencer, "Activity, Identity, and God," 10-12, 52; Grant, *Free Will and God's Universal Causality,* Chap. 4. It is unclear as to whether Grant takes the effects of God's action as specifying the divine volition itself—what I call below in Chapter 5, Section I, the "causal sense" or "active creation," or simply the divine act taken as a whole—what I call below the "constitutive sense," or "passive creation" (God + effect + effect's dependence on God). At some places Grant seems to suggest that the effect specifies God himself. For example, he writes, "[S]urely, what God is doing isn't always formally the same. For God to cause American Pharoah is for God to do something different than for God to cause Justify; or, if one thinks that God performs a single act in which he causes everything he causes, then for God to perform *that* act is for God to do something different than he would have done had he brought about different things than he did. A divine causal act is specified by the effect(s) in which it terminates. We should, therefore, recognize the effect and terminus as an essential part of the act" (p.59). This denial of God's acts being the same with different effects is part and parcel of Grant's denial of the Scholastic model that "takes God's acts to be intrinsic to God" (p. 77). Grant gives his reasons for rejecting the Scholastic model on page 7. Given this rejection, Grant seems to be saying that all the difference in creating differently would *not* be merely on the side of the effects. However, there are other places where Grant suggests that the effect only specifies the "divine act" taken as a whole, or in the "constitutive sense." For example, when he writes about the creative act, he's willing to take the divine act of creation "as a whole" (p. 217, n. 16). Regardless of how we interpret Grant's position, he acknowledges the counterfactual difference problem, and in particular the "specification problem," as a serious challenge to divine immutability.

they have in the order of the good."[71] He even says that God *intends* the order of the universe: "the order of the universe is properly *intended* by God."[72]

Now, if created effects serve as objects of the divine will, and as we showed above objects are determinative of the very being of an agent's interior act of will insofar as they serve as a form of the will act, then it would seem the very being of God's volitional activity, which is identical to God's being, would be different if he were to have willed a different order of created effects (i.e., a different order of providence). Thus, it seems that God would indeed be entitatively different if he were to have created differently.

III.
Conclusion

In this chapter, I have introduced and explained in detail the two forms that the "difficulty of counterfactual difference" takes, each arising from different reasons why one might think that God would be different if He were to have created other than he did. The first form is the "identity problem" and the second is the "specification problem." With the different forms of the problem now mapped out, we turn to their solutions in the remaining chapters.

[71] Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 1, Cap. 86: "Sic autem cadunt aliqua sub divina voluntate secundum quod se habent in ordine boni." See also Lib. 2, Cap. 35: "Nam sub voluntate divina cadit non solum quod eius effectus sit, sed quod tunc sit."

[72] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 15, art. 2 (emphasis added): "Ordo igitur universi est proprie a Deo *intentus*."

Chapter Five
A Thomistic Solution to the "Identity Problem"

It is one thing to explain a problem, it is another to solve it. The previous chapter mapped out the two forms that the "difficulty of counterfactual difference" takes: the "identity problem" and the "specification problem." There remains, therefore, a need to solve these two forms of the problem. This chapter is devoted solely to solving the "identity problem."

The chapter is divided into three sections. In section one, I will summarize the "identity problem" to reestablish our specific target. Section two will be devoted to the solution that I offer to the problem. Finally, in section three, I will summarize the insights garnered from the above two sections as it pertains to the compatibility of divine immutability and the variability of creation.

I.
The Identity Problem Revisited

As explained in the previous chapter, the "identity problem" states that given the identity of God's acts with his being, if God were to will a different created order (or no created order at all), he would *be* different. Again, the argument can be summarized in the following form:

Premise 1: All of God's acts are identical to God's being.

Premise 2: The act of creation is an act of God.

Conclusion 1: Therefore, God's act of creation is identical to His being.

Premise 3: If God's act of creation is identical to His being, then a different act of creation (a differently willed order of providence), or no act of creation, would entail a difference in God's being.

Premise 4: God's act of creation is identical to His being (from Conclusion 1).

Conclusion 2: Therefore, a different act of creation would entail a difference in God's being.

The above argument is valid. However, there is a problem of ambiguity with the phrases "God's acts" and "act of creation," which in turn creates a problem with the role that these phrases play in rigidly designating God's being.[1] Exposing this problem of ambiguity, and why it justifies a rejection of this argument, will be the focus of the next section.

II.
"The Disambiguating of Divine Acts" Solution to the Identity Problem

[1] For a treatment on rigid and non-rigid designation, see Tomaszewski, "Collapsing the Modal Collapse Argument," 5-6.

As David Burrell points out in his book *Aquinas: God and Action,* we must always exercise caution with the use of our terms when we talk about creation.[2] The above argument's use of the phrases "God's acts" and "act of creation" ignores such caution. The ambiguity of these phrases comes to light when we distinguish the senses of designation for action: the "causal sense" and the "constitutive sense."[3]

For any action that brings about an effect, there is the principle of the effect—the activity in virtue of which an effect comes about—and the effect itself. For example, if Socrates slices bread, *that in virtue of which* the bread is being sliced is Socrates' act of cutting—that is to say, the principle of the effect. The contingent state of affair that is brought about, namely, the bread being cut, is the effect insofar as it is caused by Socrates' act of cutting.

Now, ordinarily, a person would describe the above action with the phrase "Socrates's act of slicing bread."[4] But this description of the action is ambiguous.[5] Does it describe what is being done to the bread—namely, the bread is being sliced? Does it designate Socrates' act of cutting, which serves as the principle in virtue of which the bread is sliced? Perhaps it describes *both*—the bread that is being sliced *plus* Socrates's act of cutting—that in virtue of which the bread is being sliced.

To speak of the action phrase "Socrates's act of slicing bread" as *the act within Socrates in virtue of which the bread is being sliced*—that is to say, Socrates' act of cutting the bread—is to speak of it in a "causal sense." The action phrase here takes its name from what is within Socrates as the *principle* of the effect, characterizing Socrates as he is in himself; hence this is called "intrinsic predication."[6]

There is another sense in which the action phrase "Socrates's act of slicing bread" can be interpreted. It could refer to the *whole* or *total* situation—namely, *the bread being sliced in virtue of Socrates's act of cutting it*.[7] On this view, the effect *together with* its dependence on Socrates's act of cutting would constitute what we call "Socrates's act of slicing bread." This is why it is called the "*constitutive* sense." Rather than focusing on one part of the state of affair—Socrates's act of cutting, like is done in the "causal sense," the focus is on the *whole* state of affair (the total situation)—the bread being cut (the effect) *plus* its relation of dependence on Socrates's act of cutting (the principle). To predicate action of Socrates in this way—by way of

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[2] See Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action,* 153.

[3] The label "causal sense" is taken from Nemes, "Divine Simplicity Does Not Entail Modal Collapse," 112. The label "constitutive sense" is taken from Tomaszewski, who at the time of writing this dissertation has only used this phrasing in a podcast and not in a published source. See Tomaszewski, "COMMENTARY Bonus|Tomaszewski responds to Mullins." Thomas Loughran describes the same reality using the label "causal act": "[T]he 'causal act,' on the other hand, refers to the *total situation* wherein the perfection of the agent becomes fruitful in another. The causal act, consequently, is not some new act but the same act in a new relationship." Loughran, "Efficient Causality and Extrinsic Denomination in the Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas," 226.

[4] This example of slicing bread is taken from Matthew Kelly, "Action in Aquinas," *The New Scholasticism* 52, no. 2 (1978): 261-267, 264.

[5] For a detailed treatment of the ambiguity of the term action as it is applied to events and how to disambiguate such descriptions, see Kelly, "Action in Aquinas."

[6] See Grant, "Divine Simplicity, Contingent Truths, and Extrinsic Models of Divine Knowing," 254. See also Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas,* 223; Brower, "Simplicity and Aseity," 124 n.1; David Lewis, *On the Plurality of Worlds* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), 61-62. For these authors, "intrinsic" is not taken to signify what is *essential* within the agent. Rather, it is meant to signify what is *within* the agent as opposed to what is external to the agent.

[7] For this idea of an action designating the whole or total situation of an agent and the effects that an agent brings about, see Brock, *Action and Conduct,* 52-55; Loughran, "Efficient Causality and Extrinsic Denomination in the Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas," 226-227

the effect and its dependence on Socrates as a principle—is called "extrinsic predication" or "extrinsic denomination."[8] On this view, whether or not the action phrase accurately describes reality is dependent in part on whether the effect of the bread being sliced is actually brought about by Socrates, just like the truth value of my hitting a home run is dependent in part on the baseball actually going over the fence after I hit it.[9]

This approach of describing Socrates's act of slicing the bread by way of "extrinsic denomination" illustrates the Aristotelian-Thomistic maxim "the act of the agent is in the patient."[10] In his analysis of motion in both the *Physics* and *Metaphysics*, Aristotle argues that the act of the mover (the agent) is in the motion of the thing that is moved (the patient).[11] In other words, the motion brought about in the patient is identified as the very action of the mover. For Aristotle, to predicate 'action' to a cause (mover) there is no need for there to be an act in the cause in addition to the effect that it brings about. Rather, the effect brought about, and its dependence on the cause, *just is* the cause's 'action.'[12]

Aquinas explicitly adopts this Aristotelian principle in his *Summa Theologiae*, writing, "The act of the one moving [the mover] in that which is moved is motion."[13] He further writes, "[A]s motion is the act of the thing moved, so an act of this kind is the act of the agent."[14] In his *De Veritate,* Aquinas identifies an act that "terminates in something outside the one acting" (called transitive action—e.g., the building that completes in a built edifice) as an act that is not "in the maker, but in the thing made."[15]

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[8] The label "extrinsic predication" is taken from Grant, "Divine Simplicity, Contingent Truths, and Extrinsic Models of Divine Knowing," 254. See also Brower, "Simplicity and Aseity," 124 n.1; Lewis, *On the Plurality of Worlds*, 61-62. For an in-depth treatment of causal action and "extrinsic denomination," see Loughran, "Efficient Causality and Extrinsic Denomination in the Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas." For a treatment as to how "extrinsic denomination" relates to predicating action and passion to subjects in Aquinas's interpretation of Aristotle, see Francis Feingold, "Do Causal Actions Inhere in Their Agent? Aquinas's Reception of Aristotle's 'actio est in passo' Doctrine," Lecture delivered at the 52nd International Congress on Medieval Studies, at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo, Mich., May 11–14, 2017; Brock, *Action and Conduct,* 78.

[9] This example is taken from Tomaszewski, "COMMENTARY Bonus|Tomaszewski responds to Mullins." The notion of the truth value of an action statement being partially constituted by the effect coming about is known as the "truth-maker theory." This theory will be employed below in the articulation of different senses of divine action. For further study on this theory, see Pruss, "On Two Problems of Divine Simplicity," 152-154; Brower, "Simplicity and aseity"; "Making Sense of Divine Simplicity," *Faith and Philosophy* 25 (2008): 3-30.

[10] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 48, art. 5, ad 3: "actio agentis est in patiente." For an in-depth treatment of this maxim, see Loughran, "Efficient Causality and Extrinsic Denomination in the Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas"; Frost, "Aquinas' Ontology of Transeunt Causal Activity"; Kane, "The Subject of Predicamental Action According to John of St. Thomas"; Feingold, "Do Causal Actions Inhere in Their Agents?"; Brock, *Action and Conduct,* Chap. 2. For a briefer articulation of the Aristotelian-Thomistic principle, see Brian Davies, "The Action of God," *New Blackfriars* 75, no. 879 (1994):76-84.

[11] See Aristotle, *Physics* III, 202a 13—20. Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* XI, 1066a 28—34.

[12] David Burrell articulates this Aristotelian-Thomistic maxim this way: "When A causes something to happen to B, then, the act of the thing moved (B) is identical with that of the mover (A). In short, what happens is what we see happening to B (or in B). We say that A is causing this to happen, not because we ascertain that something is going on between them (whether by seeing or positing it), but simply because we understand that B depends on A to this extent." See Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 132—133.

[13] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia IIae, qu. 110, art. 2: "[A]ctus enim moventis in moto est motus."

[14] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 18, art. 3 ad 1: "[S]icut motus est actus mobilis, ita huiusmodi actio est actus agentis."

[15] Aquinas, *De Veritate,* qu. 14, art. 3 (emphasis added): "Activa autem potentia duplex est: quaedam quidem cuius *actio terminatur ad aliquid actum extra*, sicut aedificativae actio terminatur ad aedificatum; quaedam vero est cuius actio non terminatur ad extra, sed consistit in ipso agente ut visio in videnti, ut habetur ex philosopho in IX Metaph. In his autem duabus potentiis diversimode sumitur complementum. Quia enim actus primarum potentiarum,

Now, it is this grammar of action—the act of the agent is in the patient—that Aquinas identifies as one of 'extrinsic denomination.' This becomes evident in his commentary on Aristotle's *Physics.* He writes,

> It is clear that although there is one motion, the predicaments which are taken according to motion are two, according to which the predicamental denominations [action and passion] are taken from different extrinsic things. For one thing is an agent, from which, as from something extrinsic, the predicate of passion is taken by way of denomination; and another thing is the *patient, from which the agent is denominated*.[16]

For Aquinas, therefore, the action of an agent—"Socrates' act of slicing bread"—can be denominated by way of the effect (patient) that the agent brings about—"the bread being cut by Socrates."

This grammar of action is to be contrasted with Aquinas's grammar that signifies the interior act of an agent that is actualized within an agent when it moves from idleness to act, an actuality, which for a finite agent is an accident, in virtue of which the agent acts on the patient.[17] Take, for example, Aquinas's *Commentary on the Sentences:* "[T]he novelty of action produces a kind of change in the agent as it is passing from idleness into action."[18] Similarly, he writes, "In everything in which operation differs from substance, there must be some kind of movement from which this proceeds anew into operation; because an operation is acquired in it which was not there previously."[19] This interior act of the agent, which is *involved* in the act that brings about change in a patient, maps on to what we have called above the "causal sense" of an action. Although, it is important to note that the movement from idleness to act, and thus the idea that the act is an accident, is not essential to the "causal sense" of action. It merely signifies something on the agent side of the equation between an agent and its effect.

Thus, the "act of an agent" for Aquinas is quite extensive. It includes both the "causal sense" and "constitutive sense" of "action." Insofar as "action" signifies the interior act, which for a finite agent is an accident, action is to be conceived of in the "causal sense." When "action' signifies the act of the agent in the patient, which is a denomination of action to the agent by way of the effect brought about in the patient, action is to be conceived of in the "constitutive sense."

The same sort of complexity exists for the grammar of *divine* action. Take, for example, the action phrase "God's act of causing you to read these words." Should "God's act" here be taken in a "causal sense," where action is predicated of God intrinsically and refers to God's intellectual and volitional operation, which just is his infinite *esse*, whereby he causes you to read these words? Or should it be taken as a reference to the *whole* or *total* situation—the

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ut, ibidem, philosophus dicit, *non sunt in faciente, sed in facto*: ideo complementum potentiae ibi accipitur penes id quod fit." For Aquinas's direct commentary on Aristotle's principle, see Aquinas, *III Phys.,* Lect. V; *XI Metaphys.,* Lect. 9.

[16] Aquinas, *III Phys.,* Lect. V. (emphasis added): "Sic igitur patet quod licet motus sit unus, tamen praedicamenta quae sumuntur secundum motum, sunt duo, secundum quod a diversis rebus exterioribus fiunt praedicamentales denominationes. Nam alia res est agens, a qua sicut ab exteriori, sumitur per modum denominationis praedicamentum passionis: et alia res *est patiens a qua denominatur agens*."

[17] This line of reasoning is adapted from Feingold, "Do Causal Actions Inhere in Their Agents?". As Feingold argues, this interior act is an accident in agents that are finite.

[18] Aquinas, *II Sent.* dist. 1, qu. 1, art. 5 ad 11: "[N]ovitas actionis facit aliquam mutationem in agente prout est exiens de otio in actum."

[19] Aquinas, *I Sent.,* dist. 8, qu. 3, art. 1 ad 4: "[I]n omnibus in quibus operatio differt a substantia, oportet esse aliquem modum motus ex hoc quod exit de novo in operationem; quia acquiritur in ipso operatio, quae prius non erat."

"constitutive sense"? If taken in this sense, the divine causal act ("God's act of causing you to read these words") would be specified in terms of the effect that the divine intellectual and volitional operation (God's infinite *esse*) brings about—namely, you reading these words—*and* the effect's relation of dependence on the divine intellectual and volitional operation—your act of reading these words insofar as it is caused by the divine intellectual and volitional operation.[20]

The same ambiguity exists for the phrase "God's act of creation." Joyce states the query succinctly: "When, therefore, we ask, what is the act of creation, our question may signify: What are we to conceive in God as being the immediate principle of his creative activity? or: What is the effect immediately issuing from God as actually creative?"[21] The first signification matches what we called above the "causal sense" of divine acts—the divine intellection and volition that just is God's *esse*. "God's act of creation" in the "causal sense" would be just the divine *esse* itself, the pure acting power that God is considered as a *principle* of created effects. Edward Feser stipulates this sense as "God's creative act considered *qua act*."[22]

The second signification matches the "constitutive sense" of divine action—the effect *plus* its dependence on God as its principle. This sense of "God's act of creation" would refer to "creation *taken as a whole*," where not only the divine substance is designated but the creature's relation of dependence on the divine substance for its *esse*.[23] If we follow Feser here, we could label this sense as "God's creative act considered qua act *of creation*."[24]

Aquinas had his own descriptions for "God's act of creation" that matches the above senses of divine action: *creatio active* (active creation) and *creatio passive* (passive creation).[25] For Aquinas, *creatio active* just is the divine action itself, which is God's essence/esse considered insofar as it has a non-real relation (a relation of reason) to creation.[26] This fits the "causal sense" of divine action. *Creatio passive*, Aquinas says, "conveys a relation of the creature to the creator,"[27] a relation that is in the creature and is *real*.[28] This matches the "constitutive sense" of divine action.

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[20] Although I have chosen to go with Tomaszewski's "constitutive sense" to describe this understanding of divine action, Steven Nemes describes the same reality with the label "effectual sense." See Nemes, "Divine Simplicity Does Not Entail Modal Collapse," 112-113. W. Matthews Grant labels this view of divine acts as the "extrinsic model." See Grant, *Free Will and Universal Causality,* 58-59. Aquinas articulates the "constitutive" and "causal" distinction of divine action in terms of God's "will of expression" (*voluntas signi*) and "will of good pleasure" (*voluntas beneplaciti*). "Will of expression" signifies that which comes from God, namely, the effect, along with the effect's relation of dependence on God. God's "will of good pleasure" signifies God himself. See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 19, art. 11; *De Veritate,* qu. 23, art. 3. For commentary on this distinction that Aquinas makes, see Grenier, *Thomistic Philosophy, Volume II*, 329.

[21] Joyce, *Natural Theology,* 352.

[22] Edward Feser, "Mullins Strikes Out," July 23, 2022, https://edwardfeser.blogspot.com/2022/07/mullins-strikes-out.html, accessed October 23, 2023.

[23] Grant, *Free Will and Universal Causality,* 207, n. 16; emphasis added.

[24] Feser, "Mullins Strikes Out."

[25] See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 45, art. 3 ad 1 and 2; *De Potentia*, qu. 3, art. 3. For commentary on this doctrine of Aquinas, see McWhorter, "Aquinas on God's Relation to the World," 2; Spencer and Grant, "Activity, Identity, and God," 37-38; Grant, *Free Will and Universal Causality,* 207, n. 16; Dever, "Divine Simplicity and the Current Debate," 116-117, Anderson, *The Cause of Being,* 45.

[26] See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 45, art. 3 ad 1: "[C]reatio active significata significat actionem divinam, quae est eius essentia cum relatione ad creaturam." In this very same reply, Aquinas affirms that God's relation to creation is not real: "in Deo ad creaturam *non est realis*" (emphasis added).

[27] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 45, art. 3, ad 3: "[Passive] creatio importat habitudinem creaturae ad creatorem cum quadam novitate seu incoeptione."

[28] See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 45, art. 3 ad 2: "creatio passive accepta est in creatura"; ad 1: "Relatio vero creaturae ad Deum est relatio realis."

Predicating *act of creation* of God in this passive or constitutive sense is similar to the way that *Creator* is predicated of God.[29] Recall from chapter 2, *Creator* does not designate anything intrinsic to God himself. Rather, it designates the relation that God has to creatures in virtue of the creature being ordered to God by way of its *esse*, which it receives from God as its source. This being the case, many have called the label *Creator* a "Cambridge property,"[30] or an "extrinsic denomination."[31]

Similarly, the passive or constitutive sense of the "act of creation," when predicted of God, is predicated of Him as a Cambridge or extrinsic property.[32] It does not correspond to some real property within God that grounds the truth of the statement that God creates. Rather, it is predicated of God in virtue of the fact that a creature is sustained in being here and now by God.[33] Predicating "act of creation" of God as a Cambridge or extrinsic property is grounded in the conclusion that we argued for in Chapter 2, namely, that God's relation with creation is not real but one of reason.

The "causal" and "constitutive" senses of "God's acts" and "God's act of creation" is of the utmost importance for the above argument because each are referred to in the premises of the argument and are said to be identical to God's being. But how are these phrases meant to be taken?

If the phrase "God's acts" is taken in the causal sense (that in virtue of which an effect is brought about), then the identity statement in premise one between "God's acts" and his being is true. On this view, "God's acts" would designate God's intellectual and volitional activity (that in virtue of which the effect of you reading these words is brought about), which just is his infinite *esse*. Technically speaking there would be no divine act*s* (plural). Rather, there would be the one divine act that God is.[34]

Similarly, if "God's act of creation" is taken in the "causal sense," or signifies creation taken actively, to use the language of Aquinas, then Conclusion 1 of the argument would follow from premises one and two, and thus premise four would be true. On this reading, "God's act of creation" would signify God's infinite *esse* considered insofar as it is the principle in virtue of which things exists.

Problems, however, arise for premise *three* if we interpret "God's acts" and "God's act of creation" in this "causal sense." Recall, premise three states: If God's act of creation is identical to His being, then a different act of creation (a differently willed order of providence), or no act

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[29] See Tomaszewski, "Collapsing the Modal Collapse Argument," 6.

[30] See Feser, *Five Proofs of the Existence of God,* 197; Miller, *A Most Unlikely God,* 6. David Burrell does not use the label "Cambridge property," but he does affirm that our ascription of Creator to God as if it were a property within Him is "only a manner of speaking." See Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action,* 98.

[31] See Boedder, *Natural Theology,* bk. II, chap. 1; Matava, *Divine Causality and Human Free Choice*, 272. For Aquinas's treatment of extrinsic denominations made of God, like Creator, see *Summa Theologiae*, qu. 5, art. 2 ad 1; qu. 6, art. 4; qu. 13, arts. 2, 5, and 7; qu. 14, art. 15 ad 1; *I Sent.* dist. qu. 1, art. 2. For a detailed explanation about "extrinsic denomination" relative to God's acts in general, see Wennemann, "St. Thomas's Doctrine of Extrinsic Denomination"; Dever, "Divine Simplicity," 164-165, 178.

[32] Although Barry Miller does not use the exact label of "God's act of creation," he does refer to "God's willing to create the universe" as a Cambridge property, which is basically the same thing. See Miller, *A Most Unlikely God,* 108. See also Lonergan, *Grace and Freedom,* 105; Grant, "Aquinas, Divine Simplicity, and Divine freedom," 136-137; Feser, "Mullins Strikes Out."

[33] See Chapter 2, Section III.A. of this essay. See also Grant, "Aquinas, Divine Simplicity, and Divine freedom," 136-137.

[34] For Aquinas's arguments as to why there can be only one divine act in God, see *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 1, Cap. 76. See also below Chapter 6, Section II.C.

of creation, would entail a difference in God's being. Although premise three only speaks of "God's act of creation," a particular view of "God's acts" is necessarily implied. The reason is that premise three only arrives at the idea that "God's act of creation" is identical to God's being based on premise one, which states that "God's acts," of which God's act of creation is one instance, are identical to his being. So, whatever sense of divine action is taken, whether the "causal" or the "constitutive," applies to *both* "God's acts" and "God's act of creation."

The first problem that the "causal sense" creates for premise three is this: If we interpret "act of creation" as referring just to God's infinite *esse* considered insofar as it is a principle of the effect of creaturely existence—that whereby God brings into and sustains the creature's *esse*, then premise three begs the question insofar as it states that there can be a different act of creation. If "act of creation" in the "causal sense" (active creation) just is the divine *esse* itself (considered insofar as a principle of creaturely effects), then the phrase "a different act of creation" simply means "different divine being" (considered insofar as it is a principle of creaturely effects). In other words, to speak of a possible "different act of creation" is to speak of *esse divinum* possibly being different than what it is now. But this is the very conclusion that the identity of God's creative act with his being is supposed to lead to, according to premise three. Premise three, therefore, begs the question on this causal view.[35]

A second problem that the "causal sense" raises for premise three is that on this view premise three would be assuming that God's being has a real relation to the effects that he brings about, which we have already shown to be false. Consider that the "causal sense" of "God's act of creation" would signify God's *esse* considered as a principle of creaturely effects. A "different act of creation" in premise three signifies different created effects (a different order of providence). Therefore, for premise three to say that a different act of creation would entail a difference in God's *esse* is to say that different created effects (a different order of providence) would entail a difference in God's *esse*.

Now, different created effects would entail a difference in God's *esse if and only if* God's *esse* had a real relation to the creatures that are His effects, in which case God's "act of creation" would correspond to some 'creation feature' within God that served as the ground for his real relation. Recall from Chapter 2, we showed that if God's relation to creatures is *not* a real relation but one of reason, then the variability of creation ("a different act of creation" in premise three) would not make God subject to being entitatively different than he is now. The reason that we gave was that on this supposition the relation that God would have to creatures would be had not in virtue some extramental foundation within God himself (a creation feature, characteristic, or property), but would be imputed to him entirely in virtue of the real relation that creatures have to him ("extrinsic denomination").[36] This being the case, if something were to be different on the creature side of the God-creature relation, nothing would be different on the God side of the God-creature relation.

We showed that God's relation to creatures is not real but one of reason. There is no intrinsic 'creation feature,' property, or characteristics that grounds God's relation to creatures. Therefore, it follows that different created effects would not entail a difference in God's *esse*, contra premise three. Premise three, therefore, is false, at least on the view that "God's act of creation" is taken in the "causal sense."

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[35] This line of argumentation is inspired by William E. Mann's line of argumentation for why God's being would not be different if God were to will something else. See Mann, *God, Modality, and Morality*, 54-55.

[36] W. Matthews Grant and Timothy Pawl take a similar line of argumentation as it is applied to God's knowledge in "The Aloneness Argument Fails," *Religious Studies* (2021):1-17.

What if we interpret "God's acts" and "God's act of creation" in the "constitutive sense"?[37] The argument does not fare any better.[38]

One problem is that on this view the argument would be equivocating with the phrases "God's acts" and "God's act of creation." The constitutive sense of "God's acts" includes the effects that God brings about. Returning to our above example, the divine action of God causing you to read these words, when taken in the constitutive sense, is partially constituted by you actually reading these words.[39] This is made clearer when we consider the "*of creation*" part of "God's act *of creation*." The "*of creation*" part signifies the being of creatures as a created effect and its relation of dependence on God. So, "God's act *of creation*" is partly constituted by creatures actually existing in virtue of God's causal activity. The constitutive sense of divine action, therefore, includes the effects that God brings about, whether it be your act of reading these words and its dependence on God ("God's act of causing you to read these words"), or the *esse* of creatures of its dependence on God ("God's act of creation").

But a divine act that is specified in this way, whether it be "God's act of causing you to read these words" or "God's act of creation," is *not* what Aquinas, and classical theists who follow him, believe to be identical to God's *esse*.[40] What is said to be identical to God's *esse* is the power or activity *in virtue of which* the created effect comes to be—namely, the divine act of intellection and volition.[41] So, with the phrases "God's acts" and "God's act of creation," the

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[37] This is not merely a hypothetical question. Some authors interpret the phrase "God's act of creation" in the constitutive sense and affirm its identity with God's being. Take, for example, Ryan Mullins. Within the context of arguing for modal collapse, he writes, "Divine actions like creating the universe or giving grace are not Cambridge properties because they are intrinsic to God, and identical to God . . . God's causal activity of producing the universe and of producing grace in sinners are actions which are identical to God given divine simplicity." Ryan Mullins, "The Ongoing Debate Over Divine Simplicity: A Response to the Conversation," Theopolis*,* August 14, 2019, https://theopolisinstitute.com/conversations/the-ongoing-debate-over-divine-simplicity-a-response-to-the-conversation/, accessed October 3, 2023. For Mullins, "creating the universe" or "giving grace" cannot be an extrinsic predication or denomination of God. Rather, "creating the universe" or "giving grace" is *intrinsic* to God, i.e., essential to God's very being. See Mullins, "The Ongoing Debate Over Divine Simplicity." To claim that the divine creative act, *along with its effects*, is identical to God's being is to take "God's act of creation" in the constitutive sense. This being the case, the following arguments against identifying the constitutive view of divine action with God's being apply to the modal collapse arguments that Mullins puts forward in a variety of his works. See Mullins, *The End of the Timeless God,* 138; "Classical Theism," 94-95. For other authors who interpret "God's act of creation" in this constitutive sense within the context of modal collapse arguments, see note 23 of the Introduction.

[38] For authors who take on this constitutive sense of "God's acts" and "God's act of creation," see note 30 of the Introduction.

[39] Here is where the truth-maker theory comes into play when articulating the truth value of *divine* action statements. For resources on truth-maker theory, see note 9 of chapter five.

[40] See Miller, *A Most Unlikely God,* 107-108; Edward Feser, "Scotus on Divine Simplicity and Creation," August 24, 2019, https://edwardfeser.blogspot.com/2019/08/scotus-on-divine-simplicity-and-creation.html; "The Neo-Classical Challenge to Classical Theism"; *Five Proofs of the Existence of God,* 197.

[41] Someone might object here that Aquinas does identify this view of divine action with God's being. Consider, for example, the quote from Aquinas at the beginning of this chapter: "It is also clear from the foregoing that the manifold actions ascribed to God, as intelligence, volition, *the production of things*, and the like, are not so many different things, since each of these actions in God is His own very being, which is one and the same thing." *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 2, Cap. 10 (emphasis added). Here Aquinas identifies "the production of things" with God's "very own being." Is not Aquinas viewing divine acts in a constitutive sense? Ryan Mullins makes this very objection in his "The Ongoing Debate Over Divine Simplicity." Spencer and Grant also raise this difficulty in their "Activity, Identity, and God," 6. I do not think that Aquinas is viewing "the production of things" in a constitutive sense in the above passage. The reason becomes clear when we consider his distinction between *creatio active* and *creatio passive*. In *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 45, art. 3 ad 1, Aquinas clearly identifies *creatio active*—the "causal sense" of divine action—as identical to God's being: "creatio active significata significat actionem divinam, quae est

argument, at least on the constitutive view, refers to something different than what proponents of the identity doctrine, like Aquinas, would refer to with the same phrases. Therefore, the premises of the argument equivocate with the phrases "God's acts" and "God's act of creation." Given such equivocation, conclusion 1 cannot be inferred from premises one and two, and thus conclusion 2 cannot be inferred from premises three and four.

Another problem is that premise one and premise four are false on the view that "God's acts" and "God's act of creation" are specified in the constitutive sense. The basis for denying that God's acts, and more specifically, God's act of creation, is identical to God's *esse* on the constitutive view is the metaphysics of divinity that we have articulated in previous chapters. The only way that "God's act of causing you to read these words" or "God's act of creation"—when taken in the constitutive sense—can be identical to God's being is if God's infinite *esse*, or his pure acting power, *is*, ontologically speaking, a type of actuality that just is by nature that which brings about your act of reading these words and/or creaturely being.[42] In other words, God's divine actuality, his intellection and volition, would have to be essentially (by nature) creative.

But we have already shown, in Chapters 2 and 3, that God's willing of creatures is *not* a natural necessity. The reason is that to say otherwise makes God essentially related to creatures, which, for already stated reasons, is a metaphysical impossibility. Therefore, "God's acts" and "God's act of creation," when taken in a constitutive sense, cannot be identical to God's being, thus falsifying premises one and four. Given that premises one and four are false on the constitutive view, we can reject conclusions one and two.

Given what we have argued above, the "identity problem" fails as an objection against the compatibility between divine immutability and the variability of creation, regardless of the sense that one takes for "God's acts" and "God's act of creation." Ambiguous terms, equivocation, and false premises do not make for a good objection.

III.
Conclusion

As mentioned above, some see the "identity problem" as one insurmountable obstacle that stands in the way of reasonably affirming the compatibility between the doctrines of divine immutability and the variability of creation. *That* God's actions are identical to the divine *esse*

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eius essentia cum relatione ad creaturam." Aquinas then emphasizes that the relation in God to creatures is not real but only one of reason: "relatio in Deo ad creaturam non est realis, sed secundum rationem tantum." On the other hand, the relation that the creature has to God, which in ad 2 Aquinas calls *creatio passive*, is real. Aquinas writes, "Relatio vero creaturae ad Deum est relatio realis." Now, given that Aquinas views *creatio active* and *creatio passive* as distinct, his identification of *creatio active* with God's being seems to imply that *creatio passive* is *not* identical to God's being. Why would there need to be a distinction between the two if one was just as identical to God's being as the other? Moreover, if Aquinas thought that *creatio passive* were identical to God's being, then he would be asserting that *esse creatum* (creaturely being) is essential to *esse divinum* (God's being), which is just another way of saying that God's relation to creatures is real. But Aquinas explicitly states that the relation in God to creatures is not real but only one of reason. So, either Aquinas is contradicting himself (in the very same text), or Aquinas does not think that *creatio passive*—the constitutive sense of God's act of creation—is identical to God's being. I think the latter option is the more reasonable option. And if this is true, then we can reasonably conclude that when Aquinas speaks of "the production things" being identical to God's being, he means it in the "causal sense" of divine action—namely, the power or activity whereby God makes things, which just is the divine *esse*.

[42] This line of argumentation was inspired by Christopher Tomaszewski's comments in the podcast episode, "COMMENTARY Bonus|Tomaszewski responds to Mullins' on Modal Collapse."

makes it appear that God would have to be entitatively different if he were to have created differently; hence "the difficulty of counterfactual difference."

But, as I have shown, the "identity problem" only arises when certain problematic assumptions are made about God and his relation to the effects that he brings about. For example, if "God's act of creation" is taken in the "causal sense," then premise three of the argument (If God's act of creation is identical to His being, then a different act of creation would entail a difference in God's being) *assumes* that there can be different divine *esse* inasmuch as it states that there can be a different act of creation. But *that* there could be different divine *esse* is the very conclusion that the argument seeks to prove true. Therefore, premise three begs the question.

I also showed that premise three, at least on the view that the "act of creation" is seen in the causal sense, *assumes* that God has a real relation with the effects that He brings about as their causal principle. Given that a different "act of creation" signifies different effects, such difference cannot bear on God's *esse* unless God's *esse* is really related to such effects. But, according to the central argument of this dissertation, God's *esse* cannot be really related to the effects that it is a causal principle of.

The "identity problem" also fails as an objection on the view that "God's act of creation" is taken in a "constitutive sense." First, when claiming that God's act of creation is identical to God's *esse,* it would be equivocating on the phrase "God's act of creation," referring to the *whole* or *total* situation of creatures and their relation of dependence on God *plus* God's divine *esse* considered as that in virtue of which creatures exist when Aquinas, and classical theists who follow him, take the phrase "God's act of creation" as referring *merely* to God's *esse* considered with a relation of reason with creation.

Second, taking "God's act of creation" in the constitutive sense makes the identity claim of God's act of creation and God's *esse* equivalent to the claim that God's acting power *just is of the kind* that brings about particular effects. But, as was shown, such a natural necessity in God's creative action is false.

So, no matter which sense we ascribe to the phrases "God's acts" or "God's act of creation," whether the causal sense or the constitutive sense, the "identity problem" fails as an insurmountable obstacle to the affirmation that the doctrines of divine immutability and variability of creation are compatible.[43]

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[43] There have been other paths that scholars have taken to solve the "identity problem." One example is W. Norris Clarke's distinction between the two orders of God's *esse*: his "intrinsic real being" and his "intentional being." See W. Norris Clarke, "A New Look at the Immutability of God," in *Explorations in Metaphysics*, 43-72. Clark locates the variability of divine acts in God's "intentional being" and argues that contingent differentiation in the order of God's intentional or cognitive being "does not entail that God's own intrinsic real being, the level of his own intrinsic perfection, in any way undergoes real change." Ibid., 187. Another suggested path is Mark Spencer's use of the fourteenth-century Greek Orthodox theologian Gregory Palamas's distinction between God's *energeiai* ("energies") and the divine essence and the early fourteenth-century Catholic theologian John Duns Scotus's "formal distinction" between the divine attributes of God. See Mark K. Spencer, "The Flexibility of Divine Simplicity: Aquinas, Scotus, Palamas," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 57, no. 2 (2017): 123-139. Like Clarke, Spencer attempts to identify a domain within God that would account for the variability of divine acts. Such a domain is God's *energeiai* ("energies"), which, for Spencer, are "all the ways in which God reveals himself and can be participated and named." Ibid., 125. The variability of such *energeiai*, so Spencer argues, does not threaten God's immutability because the *energeiai* are "formally" distinct from the divine essence, which just is God's absolute infinite *esse*. Now, *both* paths for solving the "identity problem" can be read in different ways, one that conflicts with the thesis of this dissertation and another that does not. Given that both Clarke and Spencer take their proposals to be consistent with traditional Thomism (when read in a charitable light), and thus not to be in conflict

But one may counter that the preferred solution in this chapter might not be preferable in the end because it overlooks a crucial Thomistic doctrine that would ground the claim that God's acts, in particular His "act of creation," are identical to His being *in the "constitutive sense."*

The doctrine in question here is *every object specifies its act*. When analyzed, such a doctrine seems to demand that God's act of creation *in the causal sense* just is, ontologically speaking, of the kind that is creative of the specific effects that it is a principle of. On this view, different effects—different objects of the divine will—would indeed constitute a difference in *esse divinum*. God *would* be counterfactually different if he were to have created differently, since His divine will would have different objects. Given that this objection arises from the doctrine concerning the specification of acts, I have called it "the specification problem." Given that we have already explained the problem in chapter four, the next chapter will be devoted solely to its solution.

with the thesis of this dissertation, I opted to engage with positions that are more directly hostile to the Thomistic approach.

Chapter Six
A Thomistic Solution to the "Specification Problem"

As detailed in chapter four, the Thomistic principles concerning human action give rise to what I have called the "specification problem." Since every object specifies its act, it seems that God's being would be different if He were to have created differently given that His will would have had different objects. A different created order entails a different object of will.

I argue that this view is mistaken, and therefore fails as a reason to reject the compatibility of the doctrines of divine immutability and the variability of creation. In this chapter, I offer a two-fold solution to the apparent problem. The first, which constitutes the content for section one, is negative in its approach. I will argue that "the specification problem" becomes a problem for the compatibility of divine immutability and the variability of creation only if we transfer a creaturely order of volitional activity to the divine, a transfer that we have a principled reason to reject. The second solution that I propose, which makes up section two, is more positive in its approach. I argue that the divine essence is the sole primary formal object of the one act of divine volition with creatures playing a secondary and material role, giving meaning to Aquinas's teaching that God wills creatures in willing Himself.[1] As I will show, this is the key to showing positively why creatures do not specify God's divine will.

Finally, in section three I will conclude the chapter with an overview of the problem and the proposed solutions with an eye on how it relates to the overall project of this thesis: the compatibility of divine immutability and the variability of creation.

I.
The *Negative* Approach to Solving the "Specification Problem"

There are two lines of argumentation that we can give within this negative approach. The first is this: the "specification problem" *too hastily* transfers a creaturely order of volitional activity, which involves the object specifying the volitional act, to the divine order of volitional activity (Section I.A). The second line of argumentation goes a step further and gives principled reasons to reject the application of a creaturely order of volitional specification to God (Section I.B). I will present each line of argument in the two subsections below.

I.A
Too Hastily of a Transfer and the Fallacy of Accident

As I explained above, the "specification problem" arises from a reflection on how exterior acts specify *our* interior acts of will. But anytime we extrapolate a finite mode of something and apply it to God we should be cautious as to which inferences we draw about God. For example, in Chapter 3 we looked at the "difficulty of potentiality." There it was argued that if God were free to have done otherwise, then either he would have moved from potency to act in willing this order of providence rather than another, or he would have an unactualized potency in

[1] See Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 1, Cap. 75: "[V]olendo se, vult etiam alia." See also Lib. 1, Cap. 76, 78, 80, 81, 83, 88. Aquinas expresses this teaching a bit differently elsewhere, but it is essentially the same. See "*Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 19, art. 2 ad 2: "Et sic, sicut alia a se intelligit intelligendo essentiam suam, *ita alia a se vult, volendo bonitatem suam*"; qu. 19, art. 2 ad 4; *De Potentia,* qu. 9, art. 9. See also Wippel, "Norman Kretzmann on Aquinas's Attribution of Will and of Freedom to Create to God."

not willing another order of providence. But it was shown that such conclusions were false because it incorrectly extrapolated a finite mode of freedom and applied it to God, whose freedom is of an infinitely different ontological category. This was identified as the "fallacy of accident."[2] Unlike our freedom of choice, which *does* entail potency, God's freedom of choice *does not* entail potency, precisely because he is pure actuality.

The same line of reasoning applies here with the "specification problem." It moves from a creaturely order of volitional specification to a divine volitional specification, "implicitly drawing upon the finite context of our thought to think [of] subsistent existence."[3] When initially faced with such a move, one is within the boundaries of reason to be hesitant to affirm the inferences made, since it might turn out that God's volitional activity is *not* specified *in the same way* that a creature's volitional activity is specified. At first glance it would seem this might be the case. If we think of willing only within a finite context, we will ineluctably think of God's willing of creatures as "a finite item"—"something determinate and set up," which cannot be true.[4] Like with the difficulty of potentiality, the conclusions made based on the "specification problem" fall prey to the "fallacy of accident."[5]

I.B
A Principled Reason to Reject the Transfer of a Creaturely Order of Volitional Specification to Divine Volition

Another line of argumentation within this negative approach is to provide a principled reason to reject a transfer of the creaturely order of volitional specification to divine volition. The reason is this: the creaturely order of volitional specification presupposes potency, which in principle is incompatible with God as pure actuality. There are six ways to expose the potency embedded in the creaturely order of volitional specification.

First, the creaturely order of specification necessarily entails *an act being in a genus*. Consider that there can be no talk of an action being specified without it also being in a genus of act. The very notion of a species involves the collapsing or contraction of a genus by some difference. Aquinas makes this very argument in his *De Potentia,* writing, "Wherever is found a species and individual, there is found a genus: because a species is built out of genus and difference."[6] Specification and genus, therefore, go hand and hand.

Now, the difference that specifies a thing "entails a *further* actuality that exists in addition to the nature of the genus."[7] The genus, therefore, stands in a relation to the specifying difference as potency to act, since "Everything that which requires something added to what it is able to be

[2] Feser, *Five Proofs of the Existence of God,* 197.

[3] Knasas, "Aquinas and Finite gods," 92.

[4] Knasas, "Aquinas and Finite gods," 92.

[5] Feser, *Five Proofs of the Existence of God,* 197.

[6] Aquinas, *De Potentia,* qu. 7, art. 3: "ubicumque est invenire speciem et individuum, ibi est invenire genus: quia species constituitur ex genere et differentia." See also Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 1, Cap. 25: "Si ens esset genus, oporteret differentiam aliquam inveniri per quam traheretur ad speciem"; Ibid: "Nam omne quod est in aliquo genere, habet aliquid in se per quod natura generis designatur ad speciem: nihil enim est in genere quod non sit in aliqua eius specie." *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 3, art. 5: "[Q]uia species constituitur ex genere et differentia." See also Dever, "Divine Simplicity," 66.

[7] Dever, "Divine Simplicity," 65-66.

is in potency with respect to that."[8] This is why Aquinas identifies the difference that specifies a thing to be related to the genus of that thing "as actuality to potentiality."[9]

Second, the creaturely order of specification entails a *new actuality or being that is added* to the agent's will. Recall from above, the exterior act as object of the interior act of will impresses itself on the will thereby giving the will a new actuality or being that determines the act *to be* of a specific kind. This maps on to what Aquinas says concerning "essential specification" (*designatione essentiali*). [10] In reference to that which is "added to a thing to specify something by an essential specification," he explains that "what is added, the thing acquires being in act."[11] Given the principle stated above—namely, that "everything that requires something added to what it could be is in potency with respect to that,"[12] it follows that the will specified by the object willed stands in a relation to its object as one of potency to act. The creaturely order of volitional specification, therefore, presupposes potency.

Third, the creaturely order of volitional specification introduces *dependency*. The act that is specified *depends* upon the object that specifies. Consider this maxim from Aquinas: "It is impossible for a thing to be in act unless it is with every existing thing with which substantial being is specified." [13] For example, an animal cannot be a real existent unless it is either a rational or an irrational animal.[14] The same holds true for our volitional acts. Such acts cannot be in act without the objects whereby the act is specified. Our volitional acts, therefore, *depend* on their objects for their actuality.[15] But whatever depends on another stands in relation to that other as potency to act. Therefore, the creaturely order of volitional specification necessarily entails potency.

Fourth, the creaturely order of volitional specification entails the will *being assimilated* to that which specifies it. Just like in intellection the intellect *conforms*, or assimilates itself, to the form of the tree outside, the will conforms, or assimilates, itself to the object willed, taking on the very *formal character* of the object willed.[16] This is the basis for what was explained above that the object serves as a formal principle of the interior act of will, determining its qualitative character.

Now, as Aquinas teaches, where there is assimilation there is movement toward that to which a thing is being assimilated: "assimilation signifies a motion toward likeness."[17] Furthermore, what is assimilated takes on, or receives, the similarity from that to which a thing is assimilated.[18] It is these two facts about assimilation that manifest the embedded potency. Take movement, for example. As was explained in Chapter 1, movement necessarily involves potency because movement is fundamentally the actualization of a potential. Receiving similarity entails potency as well, because to take on a likeness of that to which a thing is assimilated is to derive

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[8] Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 1, Cap. 24: "Omne illud quod indiget aliquo superaddito ad hoc quod possit esse, est in potentia respectu illius."

[9] Aquinas, *Summa Theologae,* Ia, qu. 3, art. 5: "sicut actus ad potentiam."

[10] Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 1, Cap. 24.

[11] Ibid (emphasis added): "Quod additur alicui ad designationem alicuius designatione essentiali, non constituit eius rationem, sed solum esse in actu."

[12] Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 1, Cap. 24: "Omne illud quod indiget aliquo superaddito ad hoc quod possit esse, est in potentia respectu illius."

[13] Ibid.: "Impossibile est enim aliquid esse in actu nisi omnibus existentibus quibus esse substantiale designatur."

[14] See Ibid: "non enim potest esse animal in actu quin sit animal rationale vel irrationale."

[15] See Totleben, "The Palamite Controversy," 95.

[16] See note 48 of Chapter 4.

[17] Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 1, cap. 29: "assimilatio motum ad similitudinem."

[18] Ibid: "sic competit et quod ab alio accipit unde simile sit."

being or actuality that it did not have before. And as was mentioned above, the relation between a thing and whatever it receives is one of potency to act.[19] Potency, therefore, is so embedded within the creaturely order of volitional specification that there can be no such order without potency.

Fifth, the creaturely order of volitional specification involves an order of the will to an end other than itself. Consider what was explained above, namely, that the exterior act serves as an end of the interior act of will, and consequently is able to formally characterize the volitional act. Now, whenever a thing is ordered to an end other than itself there is potential. Aquinas teaches as much: "In every creature there is a potentiality to change . . . according to an order to the end."[20] It does not take much effort to see the truth of this teaching. Consider that a thing cannot be in potency to that which it has essentially. A triangle, for example, cannot be in potency to having three straight sides because that is just what a triangle is. But it can be in potency to being drawn with chalk on a chalkboard or with green ink on a piece of paper because such characteristics do not belong to what a triangle is but rather are accidental to a triangle's essence. So, if a thing's end is not essential to it, it stands in potency to that end.

Within the creaturely order of volitional specification, the interior will act has something other than itself as its end—namely, the exterior act. Therefore, the interior act of will stands in a relation to the exterior act willed that is one of potency to act. Thus, potency is intrinsic to the creaturely order of volitional specification.

Sixth, potency is embedded in the creaturely order of volitional specification because such an order of specification entails composition. Recall from above that the new actuality or being that the interior act of will receives when specified by its object that new actuality is accidental in nature. But wherever there is a union of a subject and its accidents there is composition.

Now, as shown in Chapter 2, potency is intrinsic to the *ratio* of composition.[21] Consider that whatever is composite is *posterior to* the component parts. [22] This means the whole stands to the parts as potentiality to actuality. Recall from above, actuality is prior to potentiality. Also, whatever is composite is caused, which relates the composed entity to its cause as potentiality to actuality because every effect is dependent on its cause.[23] Finally, whatever is composed has some part which is not wholly itself, which, again, makes the whole stand in a relation to that part as potency to act because the whole is dependent on that part.[24] Since the creaturely order of volitional specification entails composition, and composition necessarily entails potency, it follows that the creaturely order of volitional specification entails potency.

I.C.

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[19] Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 1, Cap. 24: "Omne illud quod indiget aliquo superaddito ad hoc quod possit esse, est in potentia respectu illius."

[20] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 9, art. 2: "[I]n omni creatura est potentia ad mutationem . . . secundum ordinem ad finem." James Anderson picks up on this principle as well. Concerning transitive action, he writes, "[T]ransitive action is an accident of the agent [a creature] since it presupposes the agent's determination to an end (an effect) external to itself, which respect to which the agent is therefore potential." Anderson, *The Cause of Being,* 143. This idea is also implicit in Brock, *Action and Conduct,* 95.

[21] See Clarke, *The One and the Many*, 157-158.

[22] See *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, qu. 3, art. 7; *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. I, Cap. 18; Feser, *Five Proofs,* 69-71; Lagrange, *The One God*, 191-192; *God, His Existence, and His Nature,* Vol. I, 198; Joyce, *Principles of Natural Theology,* Chap. 10; Clarke, *The One and the Many,* 183.

[23] See *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, qu. 9, art. 1; Lagrange, *The One God*, 192. Joyce, *Principles of Natural Theology,* Chap. 3; Clarke, *The One and the Many,* 183.

[24] See *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, qu. 3, art. 5, 7; Anselm, *Proslogion,* Cap. XVIII; *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* "St. Anselm."

Conclusion

Given the metaphysics of divinity spelled out in Chapter 1 of this dissertation, it is clear as to why the creaturely order of volitional specification cannot be transferred over to God's volitional activity. God is pure act, having no passive potentiality. The creaturely order of volitional specification entails passive potentiality within the willing agent. Consequently, it is metaphysically impossible for God to be specified by the creaturely effects that he wills like a creaturely interior act of will is specified by its exterior act. We might summarize the above argumentation in the following way:

> Premise One: If God's will could be specified by his creaturely effects like creaturely volitional acts are specified by their objects, then God's will would stand in a relation to his creaturely effects that is one of potency to act.
>
> Premise Two: But God's will cannot stand in a relation to his creaturely effects that is one of potency to act.
>
> Conclusion 1: Therefore, God's will cannot be specified by his creaturely effects like creaturely volitional acts are specified by their objects.

The conclusion arrived at within this negative approach at solving the "specification problem" fits within the general argument in the following way:

> Premise Three: If no creaturely effect that God wills can specify the Divine will, then the Divine will would remain entitatively the same if God were to have created a different order of providence.
>
> Premise Four: No creaturely effect that God wills can specify the Divine will (from Conclusion 1).
>
> Conclusion 2: Therefore, the Divine will would remain entitatively the same if God were to have created a different order of providence.

The negative approach to solving the "specification problem" simply shows *that* creatures cannot specify the divine will. But there remains the question as to *how* it is that God wills creatures, which, as mentioned above, are objects of the divine will in some sense, and yet such creatures do not specify the divine will. How is one to make sense of this? To this question we turn in Section II below.

II.
The *Positive* Approach to Solving the "Specification Problem"

The answer to the question as to *how* it is that creatures do not specify the divine will even though God truly wills them to exist is that the divine essence is the sole formal or principal object of the single act of divine volition with creatures playing a material role, giving meaning to

Aquinas's teaching that God wills creatures in willing Himself.[25] This constitutes the *positive* approach to solving the "specification problem," offering a positive rationale as to why creaturely effects willed by God do not specify the Divine will.

There are several things that this answer presupposes each of which will be explained and argued for below:

1. The distinction between formal and material objects of willing (Section II.A).
2. *That* the divine essence is always the formal object of divine willing with creatures playing a material or accidental role (Section II.B).
3. An explanation as to *why* the divine act of volition must be numerically the same regardless of the created order of providence willed (Section II.C).
4. *That* there is one and only one divine act of will regardless of which created order of providence is willed (Section II.D).

Let us begin with the first presupposition: the distinction between formal and material objects of willing.

II.A.
The Distinction Between Formal and Material Objects of Willing

Following Aquinas, when we consider objects in general there is a critical distinction that must be made: a distinction between the formal and material aspect of an object. The formal aspect is that which "constitutes or defines an object."[26] To use Aquinas's words, the formal aspect denotes "an object inasmuch as it is an object,"[27] and is the primary factor that accounts for the object specifying an act: "acts are not diversified according to their species except by the formal diversity of their object."[28] In other words, whatever aspect of the object that the act has a *proper* or *per se* order to, and thus establishes the precise aspect under which it is an object of the act, is the formal aspect of the object. Take Aquinas's example of color in relation to the power of vision.[29] The color of something is that which makes an act that bears on it of the kind *seeing*. Contrast this with sound, which makes an act that bears on it of the kind *hearing*. The *proper* or *per se* order that an act of seeing has to color is that which constitutes color as the formal object of an act of seeing. Color is the precise aspect in virtue of which a thing is an object of an act of seeing.[30]

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[25] See note 1 of this chapter.

[26] Pilsner, *The Specification of Human Action,* 91.

[27] Aquinas, *Sentencia De Anima,* Lib. 2, Lect. 6: "Sed sciendum est, quod ex obiectis diversis non diversificantur actus et potentiae animae, nisi quando fuerit differentia obiectorum inquantum sunt obiecta, id est secundum rationem formalem obiecti."

[28] Aquinas, *III Sent*., dist. 27, qu. 2, art. 4, ad 3: "[M]aterialis diversitas objectorum sufficit ad diversificandum actum secundum numerum; sed secundum speciem actus non diversificantur nisi ex diversitate formali objecti." For references where Aquinas similarly speaks of "powers/faculties" being diversified by formal objects, see *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 59, art. 4; Ia IIae, qu. 54, art. 2 ad 1; *De Potentia,* qu. 9, art. 9 ad 3; *Quaestio disputata de anima* (Turin: Marietti, 1953)*,* qu. 15 ad 18; *Quaestiones disputatae de virtutibus* (Turin: Marietti, 1953), qu. 2, art. 4. For a litany of references where Aquinas affirms that the formal *ratio* of objects specifies acts, see Pilsner, *The Specification of Human Action,* 91, n. 233.

[29] See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 59, art. 4; *De Veritate,* qu. 2, art. 4; *De Virtutibus,* qu. 2, art. 4.

[30] Aquinas employs a few reductio ad adsurdum arguments to justify his claim that color is related to vision properly and *per se*. Consider, for example, his argument that if different kinds of objects, like a plant and other

The material aspect of an object, on the other hand, is *accidental* in relation to the act, having no *per se* order to the act.[31] This being the case, it in principle does not specify the act—or make it to be the kind of thing it is, even though it may fall within the scope of the act.[32] Such a material aspect is "incidental" to the act.[33] Concerning Aquinas's example of color and vision, the material aspect of an object seen would be the substance in which color is found.[34]

To see how this distinction pans out in concrete terms, consider Aquinas's example of looking at three different things: a stone, a man, and a heavenly body.[35] Each are different ontologically speaking—no one thing has the same form as the other. Yet, when we look at them, we are not engaging in three different kinds of acts. Regardless of whether we look at the stone, the man, or a heavenly body, the act is *still* of the kind *seeing*. The essential differences of each thing thus have no bearing on the act. In other words, their ontological differences do not specify the act of seeing. The reason is that they all have the same *formal* relationship to the act of seeing: they are colored and thus visible. Consequently, relative to the act of seeing they are essentially the same, with their diversity being *accidental* and *non*-essential.

Even if we stick just with a single object, like the stone, and suppose that one stone is black and another is yellow, we can see that the individual colors themselves are material, or accidental, relative to the act of seeing. My act of seeing the black stone is not an essentially different kind of act than seeing the yellow stone. *Both* are acts of the kind seeing. They may be numerically different acts, assuming I look at the black stone at a different time from when I look at the yellow one. But each act is of the same kind: seeing. So, even the individual colors themselves, although falling within the scope of the act of seeing, do not specify the *type* of act that it is.[36] Thus, the individual colors themselves are material or accidental and not formal with respect to the object of an act of seeing.

In the above two examples, the focus was on the exterior act of seeing and the non-specifying aspects of its object: *substances* in which color is found and *individual colors*

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animals, specified our act of seeing, then we would not see plants and animals with the same visual power. Our act of seeing a plant would be of an *essentially* different kind than our act of seeing animals, which, Aquinas concludes, is absurd. Therefore, our visual power, and thereby its acts of seeing, cannot be specified by different kinds of objects. Rather, it is specified by color. See Aquinas, *Sententia libri Ethicorum* (Rome: Leonine, 1969), Lib. 6, Lect. 1: "Non enim quaelibet diversitas generis in obiectis requirit diversas potentias, alioquin non eadem potentia visiva videremus plantas et alia animalia, sed sola illa diversitas quae respicit formalem rationem obiecti." Aquinas offers another argument that sticks with differences among colors themselves. If, for example, white *of itself* were an object that specified our faculty of sight, as opposed to the color black, then we would have a faculty to see white, and an essentially *different* faculty to see black. Aquinas concludes that this is absurd, and rightfully so. For this reason, Aquinas asserts that color is the *proper* and *per se* object of the faculty of sight. See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 59, art. 4: "icut si proprium obiectum potentiae visivae est color secundum rationem coloris, non distinguuntur plures potentiae visivae secundum differentiam albi et nigri, sed si proprium obiectum alicuius potentiae esset album inquantum album, distingueretur potentia visiva albi a potentia visiva nigri."

[31] See Aquinas, *De Veritate,* qu. 2, art. 4.

[32] See Ibid.

[33] Pilsner, *The Specification of Human Action,* 96.

[34] See Ibid.

[35] See Aquinas, *De Veritate,* qu. 2, art. 4. For places where Aquinas uses an example similar to the one above, see *II Sent*., dist. 24, qu. 2, art. 2, ad 5; *IV Sent*., dist. 49, qu. 1, art. 3 ad 1; *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 1, arts. 3, 7; qu. 77, art. 3; qu. 79, art. 11; *De Veritate*, qu. 15, art. 1, sc 9; *De Potentia*, qu. 9, art. 9, ad 3; *De Anima*, art. 13, ad 2; *Quodlibet* III, qu. 12, art. 2; *Sentencia libri De anima*, Lib. 2, lect. 6.

[36] For Aquinas's use of this line of reasoning concerning individual colors and their non-specifying power, see *III Sent*., dist. 27, qu. 2, art. 4; ad 3; dist. 33, qu. 1, art. 1; *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 79, art. 7; *De Anima*, art. 13, obj 1.

themselves. But their non-specifying power transfers over to the interior act of will as well, simply because, as mentioned above, the exterior act stands in relation to the interior act of will as its object. If material or accidental aspects of objects cannot formally specify the being of an exterior act, then it cannot formally specify the being of the interior act of will that has the exterior act as its object.

Another example where this formal versus material distinction comes to light is the sin of pride, which is unique relative to the above examples in that it bypasses the specification of exterior acts and bears directly on the interior act of will. For Aquinas, there can be many different things, materially speaking, that can serve as objects of the same sin of pride.[37] Consider, for example, that I can be inordinately proud either with my money or knowledge. Such objects are as diverse as material and spiritual. Yet, these different things still stand in relation to a single interior act or habit of the kind *pride*. It is not as if my sin of pride with respect to money is an essentially different sin than the pride that I have with respect to knowledge. The reason for this sameness, Aquinas teaches, is that each thing (money and knowledge) falls under the same formal *ratio* (notion) by which the inordinate act of pride is specified. He writes, "Nothing prohibits us to find in diverse things . . . one formal *ratio* of an object, by means of which a sin receives its species. And in this way pride seeks excellence concerning diverse things."[38] The formal *ratio* for the sin of pride is the seeking of "excellence," a seeking which, of course, is *inordinate*. Such an inordinate seeking of excellence is the formal object by which an act is specified as of the kind *pride*. If the object sought is solely a sensible object, Aquinas explains that pride pertains to the irascible appetite taken in a strict sense, which is the sensitive appetite.[39] However, if the object pertains to both sensible and spiritual things, then pride pertains to the irascible appetite taken in a "wider sense" (*largius*) or a "more common acceptation" (*communius accepta*), in which case the intellective appetite is involved.[40] Whatever thing the excellence is inordinately sought in, however, whether it be money, knowledge, or any other thing, such a thing is material or accidental with respect to the sinful act of pride.[41] Given that such things are material or accidental, they do not specify the act.

There are many examples from our everyday lives that illustrate how things so dissimilar can fall under the same formal object that specifies an act.[42] But for the sake of the limited scope of this chapter, consider just this one: the *act* of typing the sentence, "The cat is on the mat." Given

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[37] See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, IIae, qu. 72, art. 1 ad 3; IIa IIae, qu. 162, art. 2; ad 4; *De Malo,* qu. 8, art. 2; ad 3.

[38] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, IIae, qu. 72, art. 1 ad 3: "nihil prohibet in diversis rebus specie vel genere differentibus, invenire unam formalem rationem obiecti, a qua peccatum speciem recipit. Et hoc modo superbia circa diversas res excellentiam quaerit." See also IIa IIae, qu. 162, art. 2; ad 4; *De Malo,* qu. 8, art. 2; ad 3.

[39] See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, IIae, qu. 162, art. 3: "Si ergo arduum quod est obiectum superbiae, esset solum aliquid sensibile, in quod posset tendere appetitus sensitivus, oporteret quod superbia esset in irascibili quae est pars appetitus sensitivi."

[40] See Ibid: "Sed quia arduum quod respicit superbia, communiter invenitur et in sensibilibus et in spiritualibus rebus necesse est dicere quod subiectum superbiae sit irascibilis non solum proprie sumpta, prout est pars appetitus sensitivi, sed etiam communius accepta, prout invenitur in appetitu intellectivo."

[41] For a detailed list of the many actions or habits in addition to pride that Aquinas shows have a single formal *ratio* of an object and yet are found in many different things that are material or accidental in relation to the action or habit, see Pilsner, *The Specification of Human Action,* 108, n. 272.

[42] Two more examples from everyday life are illustrative. For the first, take the above statement, "the cat is on the mat." It can be said in English or in French. Regardless of which language I speak it in, I would still be engaging in an act of speaking. Another example is the act of lifting weights. Whether I use 100, 110, or 120 lbs. dumbbells, I still execute the act of lifting weights. The weight of dumbbells is non-specifying with respect to the essence of the act itself. Consequently, their weight is also non-specifying for the interior act of will.

the wonders of Microsoft Word technology, and supposing there were no rules in academic writing, I could type this sentence with whatever color font I wanted (blue, red, yellow, etc.), with whatever size font that I wanted (thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, etc.), and even with italicized or bolded words, and I would still be engaging in an act of the kind *typing a sentence*. Each of these items mentioned above have no bearing on the specification of the exterior act itself—the act of typing a sentence. They are all material or accidental objects in relation to the exterior act of typing a sentence, *falling under* the formal *ratio* of the act of typing a sentence. Given that these things do not constitute the nature of the exterior act of typing, they in turn do not and cannot specify the interior act of will that wills the exterior act of typing as its object. Like was seen above, where the formal *ratio* of an act's object is found in different things, those different things do not specify the act—whether the exterior act or the interior act of will.

II.B.
The Formal-Material/Accidental Distinction Applied to Objects of the Divine Will

The above distinction between formal and material aspects in objects of volitional acts is key to showing *how* God wills creaturely effects without such creatures specifying the divine will. Recall, whatever aspect of an object that is non-specifying in relation to an act of volition is non-formal—that is to say, it is material or accidental. Only that in virtue of which an object is an object—the formal *ratio* of the object—specifies. When it comes to God's willing creatures, creatures are material or accidental objects relative to the divine will. God himself, the divine essence, is the sole formal object. As Aquinas writes, "God wills His own *esse* and His own goodness as principal object.[43] What this means when applied to God's willing of creatures is that when God wills such creaturely effects, He ultimately wills Himself. Again, Aquinas states, "[I]n everything willed He wills His own *esse* and His own goodness."[44] The divine essence/goodness is that *on account of which* God wills anything other than Himself, "the *reason* for willing other things."[45] It is *because* of the divine goodness that God wills creatures—that in virtue of which He communicates being to creatures. This being the case, no matter what creaturely effect that God wills, or if He did not will any creatures at all, the formal object of His will is always the same: the divine essence. Creatures are simply material or accidental relative to the "divine self-correspondence."[46] Consequently, the specification of the divine volition is always the same—an act of willing the divine essence/goodness.[47]

But why should one think that the divine essence is the sole formal object of the divine will? Also, how is it that creatures fall under this single formal object, such that when God wills creatures, as Aquinas teaches, He wills Himself?[48] I will answer each of these questions in turn below.

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[43] Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 1, Cap. 80: "Deus vult suum esse et suam bonitatem ut principale obiectum."

[44] Ibid.: "In omni igitur volito vult suum esse et suam bonitatem."

[45] Ibid (emphasis added): "[Q]uod est sibi *ratio* volendi alia."

[46] Wittman, *God and Creation,* 278.

[47] For a detailed analysis of this line of reasoning, see Knasas, "*Contra* Spinoza." See also Spencer and Grant, "Activity, Identity, and God," 43-50; Totleben, "The Palamite Controversy," 74-75, 96; Dolezal, *God Without Parts,* 182-184; McCann, *Creation and the Sovereignty of God,* 229; Liccione, "Mystery and Explanation in Aquinas's Account of Creation," 228-231.

[48] See note 1 of this chapter.

The justification for the claim that the divine essence is the sole formal object of the divine will already in part has been provided. Above, it was argued that creatures in principle cannot specify the divine will. We only need draw out the implications of this. Recall from above, to be a non-specifying object is to be a material or accidental object. Since creatures are non-specifying objects of the divine will, it follows that they are material or accidental objects of the divine will. Given the complete disjunction between material and formal objects, creatures in principle cannot possibly be a formal object of the divine will. Now, creatures, insofar as they are not God, constitute a complete disjunction with God: either God or not God. Since no being that is *not God* can be a formal object of the divine will, it follows that only God can be the formal object of the divine will.

There are two other arguments that are worth noting because they are more positive in their approach. Both come from Aquinas's treatment of this issue in book one, chapter seventy-four of his *Summa Contra Gentiles*.[49] For the first argument, consider that in as much as God is subsistent *esse* itself He is subsistent goodness itself, for being and goodness are the same in reality and different only in idea (goodness adds the notion of desirability to being).[50] This means that the divine essence is also identical with subsistent goodness itself, since God's essence just is subsistent *esse* itself.[51] Now, as Aquinas teaches, the good is the principal or formal object of will, whether creaturely or divine.[52] It follows, therefore, that the divine essence, which just is the divine goodness, is the formal object of the divine will.[53]

The second argument is based on the principle that "*every power is proportionate to its principal (formal) object according to equality.*"[54] Recall from the metaphysics of divinity articulated in prior chapters that *esse divinum* is of an essentially diverse order of being in comparison to *esse creatum*: it is infinite. This means that the divine will, which is identical to *esse divinum,* is infinite as well.[55] Consequently, the only object that can possibly be proportionate for the divine will is something that is infinite. Now, as has been mentioned several times previously in this dissertation, the divine essence itself is identical to *esse divinum*. It follows, therefore, that the divine essence is infinite. So, the divine essence alone can serve as a proportionate object of the divine will according to equality. There is no more disproportion according to equality as there is between God and creature. As Aquinas writes, "[N]othing is proportionate according to equality to God's will, except His essence."[56] Therefore, the divine essence alone is the formal object of the divine will.

The question now is, "*How* is it that creatures fall under this single formal object of the divine will, such that when God wills creatures He ultimately wills Himself?" There are four paths or routes that we can take to see how creatures relate to this divine self-correspondence, each of which can be identified in Aquinas's writings.

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[49] For all of Aquinas's arguments on this issue, see Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 1, Cap. 74. For a good summary of Aquinas's arguments, see Dolezal, *God Without Parts*, 182.

[50] See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 5, art. 1.

[51] See Ibid., Ia, qu. 3, art. 4; *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 1, Cap. 22.

[52] See Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 1, Cap. 72; *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 19, art. 1 ad 3.

[53] For this argument in Aquinas, see *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 1, Cap. 74.

[54] See Ibid: "Unaquaeque virtus ad suum obiectum principale secundum aequalitatem proportionatur."

[55] The identity between God's will and God's being follows from the identity between God's will and His essence. For arguments that show why God's will is identical to His essence, see Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 1, Cap. 74.

[56] See Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 1, Cap. 74.

The first path is that God wills *to manifest* His divine goodness in creatures.[57] Aquinas makes this explicit in question twenty-three, article four of his *De Veritate.* He writes:

> The divine will, therefore, has for its principal will [object] that which it naturally wills [the divine essence], and which is like an end of its will, namely, his own goodness, *on account of which* He wills whatever else He wills other than Himself; for He wills creatures *on account of* his goodness, as Augustine says; that is to say, His own goodness, which is not able to be multiplied through its essence, may at least *be diffused to many through a certain participation of likeness*. Hence, the things which He wills concerning creatures are like His secondary will [object], which He wills *on account of His goodness*; thus, the divine goodness is *the reason* of his will willing all things, just as his essence is the reason of his knowing all things.[58]

Notice that Aquinas articulates the general principle that God wills creatures "on account of His goodness" (*propter suam bonitatem*). The Divine goodness is the very "reason" (*ratio*) why God wills creatures. But the divine goodness is *not* a reason "as though [God] is desiring something He does not have."[59] Rather, the divine goodness is a reason for creating because He desires that His divine goodness "be diffused to many through a certain participation of likeness."[60] Or, as Aquinas puts it in his *De Potentia,* "[God] desires to communicate what He does have: for He acts not from a desire of the end, but from love of the end."[61] God creates not to possess his own goodness but to communicate it. The Divine goodness, therefore, is that *in virtue of which* God wills creatures, the first principle of the whole communication of being to creatures. Creaturely effects fall under the scope of the divine volition insofar as they fall under the formal object that the divine essence/goodness is for the divine will. Consequently, the creaturely effects play only a material or accidental role relative to the divine volition, and thus do not specify it. Thus, God [non-necessarily] wills creatures in willing Himself.

The diffusion of goodness manifest in the first path above illumines a second path for understanding how creatures fall under the single formal object that the divine essence/goodness is, such that when God wills creatures He wills Himself. Consider the Thomist maxim "every agent produces something similar to itself."[62] For Aquinas, it belongs to the nature of things not only to

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[57] For authors who follow Aquinas in this line of reasoning, see note 34 of the Introduction.

[58] Aquinas, *De Veritate,* qu. 23, art. 4 (emphasis added): "Voluntas igitur divina habet pro principali volito id quod naturaliter vult, et quod est quasi finis voluntatis suae; scilicet ipsa bonitas sua, *propter quam* vult quidquid aliud a se vult: vult enim creaturas *propter* suam bonitatem, ut Augustinus dicit; ut videlicet sua bonitas, quae per essentiam multiplicari non potest, saltem *per quamdam similitudinis participationem diffundatur ad multa*. Unde ea quae circa creaturas vult, sunt quasi eius volita secundaria, quae *propter* suam bonitatem vult; ut divina bonitas sit eius voluntati *ratio* volendi omnia, sicut sua essentia est ei ratio cognoscendi omnia." For passages where Aquinas argues along the same lines, see *II Sent.* dist. 1, qu. 2, art. 1; *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 1, Cap. 75; *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 19, art. 2; ad 2; ad 3; qu. 20, art. 2.

[59] Aquinas, *De Potentia,* qu. 3, art. 15 ad 14: "non enim agit propter suam bonitatem quasi appetens quod non habet."

[60] Aquians, *De Veritate,* qu. 23, art. 4: "saltem per quamdam similitudinis participationem diffundatur ad multa."

[61] Aquinas, *De Potentia,* qu. 3, art. 15 ad 14: "[S]ed quasi volens communicare quod habet: quia agit non ex appetitu finis, sed ex amore finis."

[62] Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 1, Cap. 49: "omne agens agat sibi simile." Other places of the axiom in Aquinas's corpus: *I Sent*., dist. 7, qu. 1, art. 1; *III Sent.* dist. 23, qu. 3, art. 1 ad 1; dist. 33, qu. 1, art. 3; *De Veritate,* qu. 21, art. 4; *De Malo,* qu. 1, art. 3; *De Potentia,* qu. 2, art. 2; qu. 3, art. 6; qu. 3, art. 17 ad 6; qu. 7, art. 5; *Compedium Theologiae,* qu. 1, art. 101; *De Divinis Nominibus*, Cap. 2, Lect. 4; Cap. 3, Lec. 1; *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 4, art.

seek their own perfection and rest in it, but also to spread, through acting, their own good among others as far as it is possible.[63] Now, when an agent acts, and thus spreads its goodness, it acts by its form.[64] Given the principle that every agent makes something similar to itself, the form of the agent is going to be present in the effect in some way, such that every effect will bear some "resemblance" (*similitudo*) to its cause.[65]

The same line of reasoning applies to God. God is an agent that acts through His essence and produces some effect, i.e., creatures. Given the above Thomist maxim that every agent produces something similar to itself, it follows that God produces, or more technically "creates," something like Himself.[66] Such similitude is the manifestation of both the divine *esse* and the divine goodness, which in the creature is not the divine *esse* or the divine goodness itself, but rather a limited/bounded/restricted manifestation thereof.[67] Nevertheless, there is "*some* kind of likeness"

3; qu. 5, art. 3; qu. 6, art. 1; qu. 19, art. 2; qu. 45, art. 6; *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 2, Caps. 11, 16, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 30, 33, 40, 41, 43, 45, 46, 53, 76, 89, 98. For further analysis on the principle, see Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas,* 517-518; Wippel, "Thomas Aquinas On Our Knowledge of God and the Axiom that Every Agent Produces Something Like Itself"; Owens, An *Elementary Christian Metaphysics,* 356-357, 358; Brock, *Action and Conduct,* 104-105; Dever, "Divine Simplicity," 84; Davies, *The Reality of God,* 207-208.

[63] See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 19, art. 2: "Res enim naturalis non solum habet naturalem inclinationem respectu proprii boni, ut acquirat ipsum cum non habet, vel ut quiescat in illo cum habet; sed etiam ut proprium bonum in alia diffundat, secundum quod possibile est."

[64] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 4, art. 3: "[A]git autem unumquodque secundum suam formam."

[65] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 4, art. 3 (emphasis added): "Cum enim omne agens agat sibi simile inquantum est agens, agit autem unumquodque secundum suam formam, necesse est quod in effectu sit *similitudo formae agentis*." See also qu. 6, art. 1; *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 1, Cap. 29.

[66] For authors who affirm this line of reasoning, see Lagrange, *The One God,* 507-508; Wippel, "Thomas Aquinas on Our Knowledge of God and the Axiom that Every Agent Produces Something Like Itself"; Swanstrom, "The Metaphysics of Causation," 116-137; Liccione, "Mystery and Explanation in Aquinas's Account of Creation," 225; Davies, *The Reality of God,* 207-208; Dever, "Divine Simplicity," 84-89; Rocca, *Speaking the Incomprehensible God*, 272-273.

[67] For Aquinas's teaching that creatures manifest the divine *esse*, see *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 4, art. 3: "Et hoc modo illa quae sunt a Deo, assimilantur ei inquantum sunt entia, ut primo et universali principio totius esse." For Aquinas's teaching that creatures manifest the divine goodness, see Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 19, art. 2: "[S]i res naturales, inquantum perfectae sunt, suum bonum aliis communicant, multo magis pertinet ad voluntatem divinam, ut bonum suum aliis per similitudinem communicet, secundum quod possibile est." The ending phrase here, "secundum quod possibile est," is key for blocking any charge of a necessary creation based on the principle that every agent acts to diffuse its goodness. When applied to God, God diffuses His goodness "according to what is possible" in the sense that He creates according to what His nature as pure actuality/pure *esse* allows, which means His will to create *must* be gratuitous and *not* necessary. God being pure actuality metaphysically precludes Him from creating necessarily. A philosopher representative of the aforementioned charge is Norman Kretzmann. See Norman Kretzmann, *The Metaphysics of Theism,* 217-225; *The Metaphysics of Creation,* 120-126 and 132-136; "Goodness, Knowledge, and Indeterminacy"; "A Particular Problem of Creation," 229-249. For a counter response using specifically the phrase "secundum quod possibile est," see Wippel, "Norman Kretzmann on Aquinas's Attribution of Will and of Freedom to Create to God"; *Metaphysical Themes*, 218-37.

(*aliqualem similitudinem*),[68] or in the words of Wippel, an "analogical similarity."[69] It is a similarity that is "a one-way relation": from creature to God—the creature is like God, but God is not like the creature.[70]

Now, it is this similitude that the creature has to God that Aquinas sees as a basis for the affirmation that God wills creatures in willing Himself.[71] In chapter seventy-five of book two in his *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Thomas starts off with the principle that "Whoever loves a thing in itself and for its own sake consequently loves all things in which it [what is loved] is found."[72] Consider the example that Aquinas uses.[73] Suppose someone loves sweetness in itself and for its own sake. He would thereby love all sweet things, since in all sweet things that which he loves for its own sake, sweetness, is found. The love directed to each sweet thing would thereby be *on account of* the love of sweetness. Thus, the formal object would be the sweetness and thereby the only thing that specifies the kind of act that bears on the sweet things, namely, an act of love for sweetness. The love for this sweet thing or that sweet thing would not determine a *different kind* of act, since all would be acts of love of sweetness. Recall, wherever the same formal *ratio* of an object is found, the act specified by that formal object remains the same.

Aquinas applies the same line of reasoning to God and creatures.[74] He writes,

> God wills and loves His own *esse* in itself and for its own sake . . . Now all other being is a kind of His own being according to a similitude of participation, as was to some extent made clear by what was noted above [*SCG* 1.29]. Therefore, it remains that God, from this very fact that He wills and loves Himself, He wills and loves other things.[75]

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[68] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 13, art. 2 (emphasis added): "Unde quaelibet creatura intantum eum repraesentat, et est ei similis, inquantum perfectionem aliquam habet, non tamen ita quod repraesentet eum sicut aliquid eiusdem speciei vel generis, sed sicut excellens principium, a cuius forma effectus deficiunt, cuius tamen *aliqualem similitudinem* effectus consequuntur." Aquinas specifies the kind of likeness as one of "analogy" (*analogiam*) in qu. 4, art. 3: "Si igitur sit aliquod agens, quod non in genere contineatur, effectus eius adhuc magis accedent remote ad similitudinem formae agentis, non tamen ita quod participent similitudinem formae agentis secundum eandem rationem speciei aut generis, sed secundum aliqualem analogiam, sicut ipsum esse est commune omnibus. Et hoc modo illa quae sunt a Deo, assimilantur ei inquantum sunt entia, ut primo et universali principio totius esse."

[69] Wippel, "Thomas Aquinas on Our Knowledge of God and the Axiom that Every Agent Produces Something Like Itself," 88. For other authors who speak to the analogous likeness (similarity but greater dissimilarity) that creatures have to God, see Swanstrom, "The Metaphysics of Causation," 116-137; Dever, "Divine Simplicity," 89; Carnelio Fabro and B.M. Bonansea, "The Intensive Hermeneutics of Thomistic Philosophy: The Notion of Participation," *Review of Metaphysics* 27 (1974): 449-491, 469; Gregory P. Rocca, *Speaking the Incomprehensible God* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America, 2004), 274-278; Kossel, "St. Thomas's Theory of the Causes of Relation," 170-171; Leftow, "Aquinas on God and Modal Truth," 195.

[70] Dever, "Divine Simplicity," 84. Aquinas affirms this asymmetrical nature of the similitude in *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 1, Cap. 29, writing, "Secundum tamen hanc similitudinem convenientius dicitur Deo creatura similis quam e converso . . . Non igitur Deus creaturae assimilatur, sed magis e converso."

[71] That the similitude that creatures have to God is the basis for this argument will become evident as the passage from *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 1, Cap. 75 is explained below.

[72] Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 1, Cap. 75: "Quicumque amat aliquid secundum se et propter ipsum, amat per consequens omnia in quibus illud invenitur."

[73] See Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 1, Cap. 75: "[U]t qui amat dulcedinem propter ipsam, oportet quod omnia dulcia amet."

[74] For authors who have followed Aquinas in this line of reasoning, see note 35 of the Introduction.

[75] Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 1, Cap. 75: "Sed Deus suum esse secundum se et propter ipsum vult et amat, ut supra ostensum est. Omne autem aliud esse est quaedam sui esse secundum similitudinem participatio, ut ex praedictis aliquatenus patet. Relinquitur igitur quod Deus, ex hoc ipso quod vult et amat se, vult et amat alia."

For Aquinas, because the *esse* of the creatures, along with their goodness, is a likeness of God, even though only by way of participation, the formal *ratio* of the object of God's volition—the divine *esse*/goodness itself—is found therein. In other words, God only wills and loves creatures *because* He wills and loves Himself. Like what was stated above in the articulation of the first path, the divine *esse*/goodness, which just is the divine essence, is the *reason for* God willing creatures. Thus, formally speaking, God is doing nothing but willing and loving Himself—i.e., His own *esse*/goodness—when He wills creatures. By falling under the formal umbrella of the divine self-correspondence, creatures serve as objects of the divine will only in a material or accidental way and thus have no specifying power over the divine volition.

A third path for seeing how creatures relate to the divine self-correspondence (God willing creatures in willing Himself) is that God wills Himself as the *end* of all creatures.[76] As Aquinas states, "God is the ultimate end *of things* . . . from this therefore that He wills Himself to be, also He wills other things, which are ordered to Himself as to *their* end."[77] This follows upon the order of divine being itself in which God is his own end.[78]

Now, consider what was said above concerning how when an exterior act has a *per se* order to an end, the exterior act takes on the form of the end willed such that both the exterior act and the end *together* constitute a *single* object that specifies the interior act of will, the end being that which is formal and the exterior act being that which is material.[79] Such a principle applies to God willing himself as the end of creatures. In as much as creatures find their perfection in God as their ultimate end, they have a *per se* order to the divine goodness.[80]

The *per se* order, however, is not one of God to creatures such that the divine goodness *necessitates* creatures to be achieved as an end.[81] As mentioned in Chapter 2, the divine goodness is perfectly specified in itself as *subsistent goodness itself* and thus does not, and in principle cannot, depend on *esse creatum*. The *per se* order, rather, is one of creatures to God such that God

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[76] For sources that deal with this path, see note 36 of the Introduction.

[77] Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 1, Cap. 75 (emphasis added): "Deus ultimus *rerum* finis, ut ex praedictis aliquatenus patet. Ex hoc igitur quod vult se esse, etiam alia vult, quae in ipsum sicut in finem ordinantur." See also Lib. 1, Cap. 86; *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 19, art. 3; Ia, IIae, qu. 19, art. 2; obj 2; ad 3. Aquinas also discusses the order that one thing has to another within the whole of the created order, but how that whole is itself directed to God as its ultimate end. See *II Sent.* dist. 1, qu. 2, art. 3; *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 1, Cap. 78.

[78] See Aquinas, *II Sent*. dist. 1, qu. 2. art. 1; *De Potentia,* qu. 3, art. 15, ad 14; Ia, qu. 25, art. 5; Ia, qu. 19, art. 2 ad 2; cf. Ia, qu. 19, art.5; Ia, qu. 19, art. 1 ad 3; Ia, qu. 65, art. 2; *II Sent.* dist. 1, qu. 1, art. 5 ad 12; *II Sent*. dist. 1, qu. 2, art. 2; *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 2, Cap. 35; Lib. 3, Cap. 17.

[79] For an explanation as to how the exterior act plays a material role when it has a per se order to the intended end, which is most formal and determining, see Steve Long, "Engaging Thomist Interlocutors," *Nova et Vetera*, 9, no. 2 (2011): 267–295, 294; "Veritatis Splendor §78 and the Teleological Grammar of the Moral Act," 143;

[80] For Aquinas's argument as to why God is the end of all creatures, see *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 3, Cap. 17.

[81] For evidence that Aquinas explicitly denies that creatures are a means to achieve Himself as end, see *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 44, art. 4 (emphasis added): "Sed primo agenti, qui est agens tantum, *non convenit agere propter acquisitionem alicuius finis*; sed intendit solum communicare suam perfectionem, quae est eius bonitas. Et unaquaeque creatura intendit consequi suam perfectionem, quae est similitudo perfectionis et bonitatis divinae. Sic ergo divina bonitas est finis rerum omnium." For more places where Aquinas rejects the idea that creatures are a necessary means to achieve the end of divine goodness, see *De Potentia* qu. 3, art. 15, ad 5, 14; art. 16; *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Lib. 1, Caps. 75, 81, 82; Lib. 2, Cap. 35. This point is important because when interpreting Aquinas's teaching in *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 19, art. 3 where he says that God wills Himself as the end of creatures, Bradshaw wrongly claims, "God necessarily wills His own goodness, [but] He wills the existence of creatures only as a dispensable means to this end." See Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West*, 249. See also Totelben, "The Palamite Controversy," 94, n. 229.

ordains or directs creatures to find *their* perfection in Him. Since they have a *per se* order to Him as to *their* end, the divine willing of them takes on the species of the end to which they are ordered as most formal and specifying, which is the divine essence/goodness. As Davies put it, "[S]ince his will is directed to the ultimate good (i.e. himself), it is himself that he is ultimately engaged in willing even as he wills his creatures."[82] Thus, when God wills creatures, He *primarily* and *formally* wills himself. The formal *ratio* of the divine willing is still the divine self-correspondence. The divine will does not terminate in creatures. Rather, it terminates in God Himself.

There is yet one more path to make intelligible how creatures fall under the formal object of the divine will, such that God only formally wills Himself when He wills creatures. In the words of John Knasas, the path is this: "The willing of creatures is *mediated through* the divine essence. God wills creatures *in and through* willing himself."[83]

Such mediation comes to light when one considers Aquinas's teaching that creatures "pre-exist in God"[84] as primary cause, which is based on the principle that "the likeness of every effect pre-exists in some way in its cause."[85] Concerning this pre-existence, Aquinas is quick to point out that such effects do not pre-exist in God "as something distinct from His [God's] essence" but rather "is entirely one with it,"[86] such that they exist "in Him [God] according to His mode, namely the material immaterially and the many unitedly."[87] This is the basis for Aquinas's teaching on God's knowledge of things other than himself. For Aquinas, "God knows the effects *through* His essence"[88] because "God knows creatures according to which they are *in* Himself."[89]

It is this same model of mediation that Aquinas applies to the divine willing of creatures. He writes:

> God, in willing Himself, wills all things that are *in* Him. Now all things in a certain manner pre-exist *in* Him by means of their proper ratio . . . God, therefore, *in willing Himself*, He also wills other things.[90]

Aquinas views this divine volitional mediation as following directly upon the divine cognitive mediation. Again, Aquinas explains,

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[82] Davies, *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas,* 147.

[83] Knasas, "*Contra* Spinoza," 427 (emphasis added). For other authors who articulate this line of argumentation, see note 37 of the Introduction.

[84] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 4, art. 2 ad 1: "Et sic, quae sunt diversa et opposita in seipsis, in Deo praeexistunt." See also Ia, qu. 13, art. 2; qu. 14, art. 6; Ia, IIae, qu. 2, art. 5 ad 2;

[85] Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 1, Cap. 49: "Omnis effectus in sua causa aliqualiter praeexistit similitudo." See also Cap. 29.

[86] Aquinas, *De Vertitate,* qu. 2, art. 3 ad 3: "[E]ffectus eius in eo est distinctus ab essentia sua, sed omnino unum." See also *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 4, art. 2 ad 1.

[87] Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 1, Cap. 77: "sunt enim alia in ipso secundum modum eius, scilicet materialia immaterialiter et multa unite." Elsewhere Aquinas describes the pre-existence of such effects in God as "a higher way" (*modum altiorem*). See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 13, art. 2.

[88] Aquinas, *De Veritate,* qu. 2, art. 3 ad 3 (emphasis added): "Deus *per* essentiam suam effectus suos cognoscit."

[89] Ibid., qu. 2, art. 3 ad 3 (emphasis added): "Deus hoc modo cognoscit creaturas secundum quod sunt *in* ipso."

[90] Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 1, Cap. 75 (emphasis added): "Deus, volendo se, vult omnia quae *in* ipso sunt. Omnia autem quodammodo praeexistunt *in* ipso per proprias rationes, ut supra ostensum est. Deus igitur, *volendo se*, etiam alia vult."

> Just as the divine understanding is one, due to the fact that it does not see the many except in the one, so the divine will is one and simple, due to the fact that it does not will the many except *through* the one, which is His own goodness.[91]

Here, in the above statement, is where Aquinas links the ideas of God's willing creatures *through* willing Himself and the divine essence being the sole formal object of the divine volition. The statement is Aquinas's reply to an objection against God's willing things other than Himself. The objection argues that if God were to will things other than himself, then the acts of His will, and thus His existence, would be multiplied.[92] The basis for this objection, as Aquinas explains, is the principle that "acts of will are multiplied according to what is willed."[93] In other words, volitional acts are multiplied in proportion to the number of objects that the interior act of will stands in relation to. But, as seen above, this is not a problem for Aquinas because creatures are willed *in and through* the divine essence, making the divine essence the *single* formal object for the divine volition. For Aquinas, therefore, to speak of God's willing creatures *through* willing Himself is to say that the divine essence is the principal/formal object of the divine volition.[94] Thus, we have a fourth path in Aquinas for making intelligible how creatures fall under the single formal object that the divine essence/goodness is, such that when God wills creatures He wills Himself.

At this point, it is important to take stock as to where we have come so far. We said there are four paths to make intelligible the idea that creatures fall under the formal object of the divine will, which just is the divines essence/goodness itself, as material or accidental: 1) God wills creatures on account of His divine goodness by way of manifesting His goodness in them; 2) God wills creatures on account of His divine goodness by way of willing and loving His goodness that is present in creatures, though in a limited mode; 3) God wills creatures on account of His divine goodness by way of ordering them to Himself as to their end; and 4) God wills creatures on account of His divine goodness by way of willing creatures *through* the divine essence. Since the formal object of the divine will remains in its willing of creatures, regardless of whether it is this created order of providence or another, it follows that the divine will remains specified in the same way. Thus, the divine will remains the same, or so it seems.

II.C.
The Need for a Numerically Identical Divine Act of Volition Explained

The conclusion that creatures fall under the formal object of the divine will as material or accidental would seem to be sufficient to complete this positive approach to solving the "specification problem." The divine essence is the sole formal object of the divine will, regardless of the creatures that it wills. The formal object alone specifies the being or actuality of a volitional act. Therefore, the being or the actuality of the divine will never changes, which means the divine

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[91] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 19, art. 2 ad 4 (emphasis added): "[S]icut intelligere divinum est unum, quia multa non videt nisi in uno; ita velle divinum est unum et simplex, quia multa non vult nisi *per* unum, quod est bonitas sua."

[92] Ibid., obj 4: "[A]ctus voluntatis multiplicatur secundum volita. Si igitur Deus velit se et alia a se, sequitur quod actus voluntatis eius sit multiplex, et per consequens eius esse, quod est eius velle. Hoc autem est impossibile. Non ergo vult alia a se."

[93] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 19, art. 2 ad 4: "[A]ctus voluntatis multiplicatur secundum volita."

[94] Aquinas argues similarly in *Summa Theologiae,* Ia, qu. 28, art. 4 ad 1: "[Q]uia intelligendo se intelligit omnia alia, et eadem ratione voluntas et volitum."

will never changes. However, there is one more piece to the puzzle that needs to be set in place—namely, the act of divine volition is *numerically the same* regardless of which created order is willed.

The reason for this next piece of the puzzle is pointed out by Mark Spencer and W. Matthews Grant in their paper "Activity, Identity, and God: A Tension in Aquinas and his Interpreters". Recall from above, the argument as to why the act of divine volition is not specified differently with a different created order of providence is because the divine will has the same *formal* or *primary* object. Spencer and Grant call this "primary object essentialism" as opposed to simple "object essentialism."[95]

But, as Spencer and Grant rightly point out, "it won't work to say that act *a* and act *b* are the same act if and only if they have the same agent and the same *primary* [formal] object."[96] Consider Spencer's and Grant's example.[97] Suppose that we have two acts with the same formal object: I take *a jog* for the sake of my health and *eat broccoli* for the sake of my health. Both acts have the same formal object: health. Therefore, both actions are of the kind *a healthy act*. Yet, they are clearly distinct volitional acts. It is true that in each scenario there is a single act concerning the relation between the means (jogging and eating broccoli) and the end (health), a relation where the means—jogging and eating broccoli—have a *per se* order to the end of health (where a means has a per se order to the end there is a single object willed). But my will act to jog is not numerically the same as my will act to eat broccoli. This being the case, the actuality that I have when I eat broccoli would not be numerically the same as my actuality when I jog because a new act entails new actuality. Sure, the new actuality is still a 'healthish' kind of actuality, but nevertheless it is a *new* 'healthish' actuality.

Similarly, even though God would will creatures within this created order (*alpha*) and Himself in a single act of volition, and thus the divine will be formally specified by the divine essence, the possibility of a numerically distinct act of volition willing a different created order (*beta*) with the same formal object (the divine essence) is not thereby precluded. But a distinct act of volition that entails the acquisition of new actuality is not compatible with the metaphysics of divinity articulated in this dissertation. Pure actuality cannot be subject to acquiring new actuality, even if *per impossible* it could be of the same kind 'pure actualityish.' So, having the same agent and the same *formal/primary* object for a differently willed created order is not sufficient to complete the project of solving the "specification problem." Formal/primary object essentialism preserves *specific* identity (same species), but it does not preserve *numerical* identity. What is needed is not only the same agent, God, and the same formal object, God, but *the same act of volition,* a single act that would be present with created order *alpha* or created order *beta*. Given that such a single act of volition would have the same formal object, regardless of the created order, it would follow that the divine act of volition would not change in actuality but rather be entitatively the same. So, is it possible to show that God's volitional act in virtue of which a different created order (beta) would come about is numerically identical to the volitional act in virtue of which the current created order (alpha) came about? The answer to this question is provided below.

II.D.
The *Absolute* Unicity of the Divine Act of Volition

[95] Spencer and Grant, "Activity, Identity, and God," 11, 54.
[96] Ibid., 54, n. 103.
[97] See Ibid.

Showing that there is only a single divine act of will in God does not require much elaboration given the metaphysics of divinity articulated in previous chapters. Recall from Chapter 4, it was argued that God's acts are identical to His *esse*. Aquinas writes,

> It is also clear from the foregoing that the manifold actions ascribed to God, as intelligence, volition, the production of things, and the like, are not so many different things, since each of these actions in God is His own very being, which is one and the same thing.[98]

As mentioned in the same chapter, this follows directly from the doctrine of divine simplicity, which says there can be no real distinction of *any* kind whatsoever that bears upon the divine being.[99] This being the case, there can be no real distinction between his operations, like intellection, volition, and production of things (*producere res*), and his being.[100]

Now, there can be one and only one being such that it is pure *esse*. The reason why is because all the modes of multiplication in principle cannot be applied to God. Consider, for example, the multiplicity that arises from specifying a genus. Plato the philosopher and Fido the dog is each an animal. *Animality* here is the genus. But their multiplicity *qua* animal is due to the specifying difference of rationality: Plato is a *rational* animal and Fido is not. As mentioned in Chapter 1 (Section III.B), such a specifying difference restricts what is possible for the genus animal. The whole of animality is not found in a rational animal. For every rational animal animality is found restricted to the rational kind. Nor is the whole of animality found in a non-rational animal since for every non-rational animal animality is found restricted to the non-rational kind.

If pure *esse* could be multiplied into various instances by added differences like the differences that constitute a species within a genus, then whatever instance of pure *esse* one would think of, that instance would not be *esse* according to the full realization of *esse,* or its total power (*tota virtus*).[101] Rather, that instance would be restricted or limited to an *esse* of a *specific* kind. But God as *pure* esse is the full realization of *esse* because He lacks nothing that belongs to the total power of *esse*. Since God must *be* the "the total power of being itself" (*totam virtutem ipsius esse*),[102] and multiplicity according to the mode of specific difference entails a lack of the total power of *esse*, it follows that pure *esse* cannot be multiply instantiated in the way a genus is specified by specific differences.

The other mode of multiplication is by way of matter. This mode is unique to having multiplicity within an individual species. Suppose there is a small brown leaf near my foot and a big golden leaf near the tree in front of me. They are both of the species *leaf.* Yet, they are

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[98] Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Lib. 2, Cap. 10. See also note #24 of the Introduction for further citations from Aquinas.

[99] In Chapter 4, the different kinds of distinction that are excluded from God in Aquinas's writings were noted: the distinction between form and matter, suppositum and nature, species and genus, substance and accident, and essence and existence. See notes 2-6 of Chapter Four for references to Aquinas.

[100] See note #24 of the Introduction for citations in Aquinas's work where he argues why God, who is being itself, must be identical to his action in general.

[101] See Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 1, Cap. 28: "[N]am res secundum quod suum esse contrahitur ad aliquem specialem modum nobilitatis maiorem vel minorem, dicitur esse secundum hoc nobilior vel minus nobilis. Igitur si aliquid est cui competit tota virtus essendi, ei nulla nobilitatum deesse potest quae alicui rei conveniat." For an articulation of the same idea but from a different perspective, see Wippel, "Thomas Aquinas on the Distinction and Derivation of the many from the one"; *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas,* Chap. 7.

[102] Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Lib. 1, Cap. 28; Cf. Lib. 1, Cap. 43

numerically distinct, precisely because of their matter: the leaf at my foot is not the same parcel of matter as the parcel of matter that makes up the leaf near the tree.

Given what has been shown concerning the metaphysics of *esse divinum* in previous chapters, multiplication by way of matter cannot be applied to God. As Aquinas argues in chapter 4 of his *De Ente Et Essentia*, multiplying pure *esse* by matter would make pure *esse* subsist in matter instead of in itself, in which case it would no longer be subsistent *esse*.[103] Moreover, the problem of *esse* not being found according to its total power would still exist, since one instance of pure *esse* would be bounded in some way such that it is lacking in the full realization of the total power that belongs to *esse*. Therefore, it is impossible to have multiple instantiations of pure *esse* by way of matter.

Now, even if the above two modes of multiplication were not exhaustive, it would not matter because the metaphysics of *esse divinum* would preclude *any* mode of multiplication. Notice that both modes of multiplication articulated above signify some reality indeterminately, which is then further determined by some principle distinct from itself. For example, the generic notion *animal* signifies all animals, but in an indeterminate way. It stands to be further determined by the addition of a specifying feature or features—e.g., rationality—that is formally distinct from the generic notion.

The same is true for the multiplication of a species into its individual members. The species *human* signifies all individuals of its kind, but in an indeterminate way. For the species to be further determined to the individuals, recourse to another principle besides the species is necessary. And as we saw above this principle is some accidental feature, like a particular parcel of matter, or any accident that is intrinsically related to matter.

Pure *esse* cannot possibly have a potency to be further determined by something formally distinct from itself. This is because there is nothing other than *esse* by which it can be determined—except non-*esse*, which is nothing. And to be determined by nothing is not to be determined at all. Gaven Kerr explains,

> [A]nything not envisaged by pure *esse* is precisely an impossibility of being and beyond the scope of being. Given the latter, there can be nothing distinct from pure *esse* which stands to determine it in some fashion.[104]

Therefore, there can be nothing distinct from pure *esse* that could possibly determine it in a way that would make multiple instances of it. Pure *esse,* then, is *intrinsically indeterminable*, and therefore in principle there cannot be multiple instantiations of it.

II.E
Conclusion

All the pieces are in place to complete the positive approach to solving the "specification problem." The divine essence/goodness always is the *formal* object of the divine will, with creatures merely having a material or accidental role as an object relative to the divine will. Consequently, even if God were to have willed created order *beta* instead of created order *alpha,* God's volitional act would have been formally specified in the same way: it would have been of

[103] Aquinas, *De Ente et Essentia,* Cap. 4: "[E]t multo minus reciperet additionem materiae, quia iam esset esse non subsistens sed materiale."

[104] Kerr, *Aquinas's Way to God,* 27.

the kind, or had the formal *ratio* of*,* 'willing the divine goodness,' with creatures (and their order) falling under that same formal *ratio*. This being the case, the very *being/actuality* of God's willing would have been of the kind 'willing the divine goodness,' which just is *esse divinum* because God's willing of Himself is identical to His being.[105] But the *specification* of God's volitional act is not the only thing that would have been the same. The act *itself* would have been numerically identical, which, per Spencer's and Grant's insightful objection above, is required to meet *all* the conditions necessary for God to not be different if He were to have created differently. In other words, there would have been no numerically distinct act in virtue of which God would have brought about created order *beta* than the single act in virtue of which He currently brings about created order *alpha.* With all these things in place, it follows that God's act of willing the counterfactual created order *beta* would not entail an entitative/intrinsic difference within God. Thus, the "specification problem" in the end is not a problem at all but only an *apparent* problem.

III.
Conclusion

In this chapter, I have articulated two approaches to solving what I have called "the specification problem," one of the forms that the "difficulty of counterfactual difference" takes. The first approach was negative in its approach. I argued that the "specification problem" is immediately seen to be problematic due to its hasty transfer of a creaturely order of volitional specification to the divine order of volitional specification. Not only is it hastily drawn, but insofar as the objection *concludes* that the divine volition *must be* specified in the same way as creaturely volition it commits the fallacy of accident, extracting what *is* accidental to the mode of finite volitional specification and transferring it over to the divine. For this reason alone, it would be reasonable for one to reject the transfer. However, I have gone a step further and offered a principled reason why one *should* reject such a transfer: the creaturely order of volitional specification entails potency. I then exposed, in six ways, the potency embedded in the creaturely order of volitional specification, giving grounds to reject the application of such a model to the divine will, given that God is pure actuality.

For the positive, and second approach to solving the specification problem, I argued that regardless of which order of providence God wills, the divine essence/goodness *always* serves as the formal object of the divine will, with creatures falling *under* the formal *ratio* of God willing His goodness as material or accidental objects. And given that there is one and only one divine act of volition, which just is God's subsistent goodness itself, it follows that God's single act of volition, which always has the same form of Himself determining the being of His volition, would remain entitatively the same regardless of which created order that He wills (or no created order at all). Thus, when faced with the above argumentation, the "specification problem" dissolves and fails to provide reasons to affirm the incompatibility between the doctrines of divine immutability and the variability of creation.

[105] See note 7 of chapter four.

Conclusion

The question that this dissertation has dealt with is whether the doctrines of divine immutability and the variability of creation are incompatible. In other words, the issue of concern was whether God would be entitatively different than He is now if He were to have created differently, assuming the truth of the Thomistic doctrine that God is free to have done otherwise. The answer that I argued for in this dissertation is that God *would not* and *could not* be entitatively different if He were to have created differently.

I began, in Chapter 1, with a general defense of the doctrine of divine immutability, rooting this claim in three essential truths about divinity: God's pure actuality, absolute simplicity, and absolute perfection. Based on these three truths, I concluded that God in principle cannot be subject to change; otherwise, we would have to affirm a series of contradictions—God would be purely actual and not purely actual, absolutely simple and not absolutely simple, infinitely perfect and not infinitely perfect, at the same time and in the same respect. Given the contradictions than ensue from a denial of God's unchangeableness, I concluded that we should affirm the doctrine.

Now, in response to some philosophers who might be inclined to say that Aquinas's metaphysics of divinity only requires God to be immutable relative to *this* order of providence, and *not* relative to counterfactual created orders of providence, I argued that such a view is metaphysically impossible. I based this claim on the idea that the difference in God with a counterfactual order of providence would metaphysically require a lack of something according to the total power of being, which cannot be for God because, as was shown, His nature *is* the total power of being itself, or "subsistent being itself" (*ipsum esse subsistens*). Therefore, I concluded that we must affirm a *strong* view of divine immutability.

But saying *that* God must remain the same even if He were to create differently is one thing, defending that claim is another. To this end, I set out in Chapter 2 to offer a general defense of the compatibility of the doctrines of divine immutability and the variability of creation. This defense utilized the Thomistic doctrine of relations, focusing in on the sort of relation where two terms are related but in one the relation is real whereas in the other it is one of reason. As I showed, this doctrine of "mixed relations" is key to unlocking the mystery as to how God can be related to creatures as their Creator without having to be different than He is now when we consider a counterfactually different order of providence. Of course, such a claim presupposes that God's relation with creation is not real but one of reason. This being the case, I defended the idea that God's relation to creation is not real but only one of reason. I rooted this claim in the metaphysics of divinity articulated in my defense of the *strong* view of divine immutability. Also, I showed why the objections to this view of God's relation to creatures fail to give justification for rejecting such a doctrine. It does not rob God of the title Creator, it does not make the universe unintelligible, and it does not make God impersonal and remote. In fact, as I showed, it is precisely God's non-real relation with creation that allows for the title "Creator" to be predicated of God, for the universe to be intelligible, and for God to be personal and intimate with His creation.

As good as having a general defense of the compatibility of the doctrines of divine immutability and the variability of creation is, it is not sufficient without addressing the reasons why philosophers think the two doctrines are incompatible. For this reason, I turned to addressing these issues, which I divided into two major difficulties: the difficulty of potentiality and the difficulty of counterfactual difference.

As I explained in Chapter 3, for some, the difficult of potentiality arises when we consider that God's freedom to have done otherwise seems to entail that God had a prior openness to created

world *alpha* (the current world) and created world *beta*, and then moved from potentially willing *alpha* to actually willing it. Others perceive the difficulty in the idea that God "*could have*" created differently, which seems to introduce unactualized potency within God. The former version of the difficulty was referred to as the *weak* version and the latter as the *strong* version.

In response to the *weak* version, I showed that the difficulty arises only if one extrapolates a human mode of free willing and applies it to the divine, or if one assumes that free willing necessarily entails mutability. I argued that *both* ways of running the objection fail. The former commits the fallacy of accident and the latter is simply false—the criteria for free choice, as I argued, can be met without mutability.

The strong version was shown to be false in light of the Thomistic doctrine that God's relation with creation is not real but one of reason. An appeal to such a doctrine proves the strong version of the difficulty of potentiality to be unsuccessful because it serves as a difficulty *if and only if* God has a real relation with creation. Given that such an assumption is false, as was shown, I concluded that the strong version of the difficulty of potentiality was no difficulty at all, only apparent. I also showed how the difficulty dissolves when we consider that God's "ability" to have done otherwise is not a passive potency but an active potency, which when applied to God does not convey a 'principle of action' but a principle in virtue of which creatures can be brought about.

Such an idea led to a response that shows how the phrase "could have" in the statement, "God could have done otherwise," does not pick out some power within God that needs to be actualized, but rather conveys the idea of "logical possibility"—it is logically possible *that* there could have been a different created order of providence with its relation of dependence on God. Given that this statement does not entail potentiality but only what is neither necessary nor logically impossible, it can be applied to God. Thus, I concluded that the strong version of the difficulty of potentiality fails.

The other major difficulty that I addressed was the "difficulty of counterfactual difference"—the difficulty that God would seem to be entitatively different if He were to have in fact created differently. One reason for thinking this, as I detailed in Chapter 4, is the Thomistic doctrine that God's acts are identical to His being, which I called the "identity problem." If God were to have acted differently by creating a different order of providence, and His action is identical to His being, then it would seem to follow that God would *be* different.

The other reason for "difficulty of counterfactual difference," also explained in Chapter 4, is that every act is specified by its object, and in particular, the interior act of will is determined in its very being/actuality by the exterior act that it wills as its object; hence my label of the "specification problem." Given this teaching, it seems that if the divine will were to have a different created order than the current one as its object, then it would be specified differently, and thereby different in its very being/actuality. This indeed causes an apparent problem for the doctrine of divine immutability.

The solutions to the above two forms of the "difficulty of counterfactual difference" were offered in the two subsequent chapters. In Chapter 5, I focused on the "identity problem." My argument in response was that such an objection fails to disambiguate between the "causal sense" and the "constitutive sense" of "God's acts/God's act of creation." As I showed, on the "causal sense" reading the objection either begs the question against the defender of divine immutability or wrongly assumes a real relation between God and the creature, since the intelligibility of God's act/*esse* cannot involve the effect given that it is *pure* actuality/*esse*. The "constitutive sense," as I showed, does not fare any better. First, Aquinas and his followers deny that "God's acts/act of creation" taken in the "constitutive sense" is identical to God's being, the reason being that the

created effect that God wills to bring about does not specify the *esse* of the divine will, an assumption that the objection wrongly makes. Second, the "constitutive sense" reading necessarily claims that God's being, ontologically speaking, is a type of actuality that just is by nature that which brings about a created effect, which is just another way of saying that God creates necessarily. But, as I pointed out, the defense of God's relation of reason with creation articulated in Chapter 2 and the answers given to the versions of the difficulty of potentiality in Chapter 3 reveal that God does *not* create necessarily.

My response to the "specification problem," which constituted the content of Chapter 6, was two-fold. Negatively, I argued that such an objection falls subject to the fallacy of accident, transferring a creaturely mode of volitional specification to the divine. Also, I gave a principled reason as to why we should reject such a transfer: the creaturely order of volitional specification entails potency, which in principle cannot be applied to God who is pure actuality. My positive response was that God's single act of will, which would be numerically the same if He were to have created differently, necessarily always has the divine essence/goodness as its formal object, with creatures falling *under* the formal *ratio* of God willing His goodness as material or accidental objects. Given the metaphysics of specification that an object has on an act of will, for God to always have the divine essence/goodness as the formal object of His divine will is to always have the being of His divine act of will conformed to His very own divine essence/goodness, which just is His divine *esse*, regardless of which created order He wills or does not will. Since God's will always has the same specified being, which just is His own divine goodness, which just is His own divine *esse*, the "specification problem" dissolves and fails to provide reasons to affirm the incompatibility between the doctrines of divine immutability and the variability of creation.

The difficulty of reconciling the doctrines of divine immutability and the variability of creation is a difficulty that ranks among the top difficulties for classical theism. Eleonore Stump provides support for this claim, writing, "The most recalcitrant difficulties generated by the doctrine of simplicity are those that result from combining the doctrine with the traditional ascription to God of free will."[1] Although she specifically refers to the doctrine of simplicity, we could just as easily insert divine immutability, since divine immutability and divine simplicity go hand and hand—you cannot have one without the other. But as great of a difficulty it is, it is not unsurpassable, as I have shown with this dissertation. Classical theist, therefore, can continue to affirm the existence of the free and unique Creator who cannot change.

[1] Stump and Kretzmann, "Divine Simplicity," 252.

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