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(1a. 2-11)

Timothy McDermott O.P.

Excerpt

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## SUMMA THEOLOGICÆ, 1a.

QUIA IGITUR principalis intentio hujus sacræ doctrinæ est Dei cognitionem tradere, et non solum secundum quod in se est sed secundum quod est principium rerum et finis earum et specialiter rationalis creaturæ, ut ex dictis est manifestum,<sup>1</sup> ad hujus doctrinæ expositionem intendentes,

primo tractabimus de Deo,  
secundo de motu rationalis creaturæ in Deum,  
tertio de Christo, qui secundum quod homo via est nobis  
tendendi in Deum.

Consideratio autem de Deo tripartita erit:

primo namque considerabimus ea quæ pertinent ad essentiam divinam,  
secundo ea quæ pertinent ad distinctionem personarum,  
tertio ea quæ pertinent ad processum creaturarum ab ipso.

Circa essentiam vero divinam

primo considerandum est an Deus sit,  
secundo quomodo sit vel potius quomodo non sit,  
tertio considerandum erit de his quæ ad operationem  
ipsius pertinent, scilicet de scientia et voluntate et  
potentia.

<sup>1</sup>cf 1a. 1, 7

\*These are the three main parts of the *Summa*, namely the *Prima Pars* or first part (vols 1–15 of this series), the *Secunda Pars* or second part (vols 16–47), and the unfinished *Tertia Pars* or third part (vols 48–60). The second part is further divided into the *Prima Secundæ* or first section of the second part (vols 16–30) and the *Secunda Secundæ* or second section of the second part (vols 31–47). For a plan of

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#### WHETHER THERE IS A GOD

SO BECAUSE, as we have shown,<sup>1</sup> the fundamental aim of holy teaching is to make God known, not only as he is in himself, but as the beginning and end of all things and of reasoning creatures especially, we now intend to set forth this divine teaching by treating,

first, of God,  
secondly, of the journey to God of reasoning creatures,  
thirdly, of Christ, who, as man, is our road to God.<sup>a</sup>

The treatment of God will fall into three parts:

first, his nature,  
secondly, the distinction of persons in God,  
thirdly, the coming forth from him of creatures.<sup>b</sup>

Concerning the nature of God we must discuss

first, whether there is a God,  
secondly, what manner of being he is, or better, what manner of being he is not.  
thirdly, the knowledge, will and power involved in God's activity.<sup>c</sup>

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the whole see vol. 1 of this series, and for comments on the *Summa's* structure see the introduction to the present volume.

<sup>b</sup>This is the main division of the *Prima Pars*, namely on the one God (vols 2–5), the Blessed Trinity (vols 6–7), and Creation (vols 8–15).

<sup>c</sup>The present volume covers the first and part of the second of these subdivisions: the second subdivision is completed by vol 3, on how we can know and name God, and the third is covered by vols 4 and 5.

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## SUMMA THEOLOGIAE, 1a. 2, 1

## Quæstio 2. de Deo, an Deus sit

Circa primum quæruntur tria:

1. utrum Deum esse sit per se notum,
2. utrum sit demonstrabile,
3. an Deus sit.

*articulus 1. utrum Deum esse sit per se notum*

AD PRIMUM sic proceditur:<sup>1</sup> 1. Videtur quod Deum esse sit per se notum. Illa enim nobis dicuntur per se nota quorum cognitio nobis naturaliter inest, sicut patet de primis principiis. Sed, sicut dicit Damascenus in principio libri sui, *omnibus cognitio existendi Deum naturaliter est inserta.*<sup>2</sup> Ergo Deum esse est per se notum.

2. Præterea, illa dicuntur esse per se nota quæ statim cognitis terminis cognoscuntur: quod Philosophus attribuit primis demonstrationum principiis.<sup>3</sup> Scito enim quid est totum et quid est pars, statim scitur quod omne totum majus est sua parte. Sed intellecto quid significet hoc nomen Deus statim habetur quod Deus est. Significatur enim hoc nomine id quo majus significari non potest. Majus autem est quod est in re et intellectu quam quod est in intellectu tantum, unde cum intellecto hoc nomine Deus statim sit in intellectu, sequitur etiam quod sit in re. Ergo Deum esse est per se notum.

3. Præterea, veritatem esse est per se notum, quia qui negat veritatem esse concedit veritatem esse. Si enim veritas non est, verum est veritatem non esse; si autem est aliquid verum oportet quod veritas sit. Deus autem est ipsa veritas; *Ego sum via, veritas et vita.*<sup>4</sup> Ergo Deum esse est per se notum.

SED CONTRA, nullus potest cogitare oppositum ejus quod est per se notum, ut patet per Philosophum circa prima demonstrationis principia.<sup>5</sup> Cogitari autem potest oppositum ejus quod est Deum esse, secundum illud *Psalmi*:

<sup>1</sup>cf 1a. 17, 3 ad 2; 85, 6; 87, 1 ad 1; 88, 3; 1a2æ. 94, 2; 1a. 12 as a whole. Also 1 *Sent.* 3, 1, 2. *CG* 1, 10, 11; III, 38. *De veritate* X, 12. *De potentia* VII, 2 ad 11. *In psalmos* 7. *In De Trinitate* 1, 8 ad 6.

<sup>2</sup>*De Fide Orthodoxa* 1, 1. PG 94, 789. St John of Damascus, died A.D. 749, the last of the Greek Fathers and the first theological encyclopædist.

<sup>3</sup>*Posterior Analytics* 1, 2. 72a7-8

<sup>4</sup>*John* 14, 6

<sup>5</sup>*Metaphysics* IV, 3. 1005b11. *Posterior Analytics* 1, 10. 76b23-27

<sup>a</sup>The theory of demonstration adopted by St Thomas from Aristotle can be put briefly as follows. A true statement about some subject is 1. clearly true to begin

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## Question 2. whether there is a God

Under the first of these questions there are three points of inquiry:

1. is it self-evident that there is a God?
2. can it be made evident?
3. is there a God?

*article 1. is it self-evident that there is a God?*

THE FIRST POINT:<sup>1</sup> 1. It seems self-evident that there is a God. For things are said to be self-evident to us when we are innately aware of them, as, for example, first principles. Now as Damascene says when beginning his book, *the awareness that God exists is implanted by nature in everybody.*<sup>2</sup> That God exists is therefore self-evident.

2. Moreover, a proposition is self-evident if we perceive its truth immediately upon perceiving the meaning of its terms: a characteristic, according to Aristotle,<sup>3</sup> of first principles of demonstration.<sup>a</sup> For example, when we know what wholes and parts are, we know at once that wholes are always bigger than their parts. Now once we understand the meaning of the word 'God' it follows that God exists. For the word means 'that than which nothing greater can be meant'. Consequently, since existence in thought and fact is greater than existence in thought alone, and since, once we understand the word 'God', he exists in thought, he must also exist in fact.<sup>b</sup> It is therefore self-evident that there is a God.

3. Moreover, it is self-evident that truth exists, for even denying it would admit it. Were there no such thing as truth, then it would be true that there is no truth; something then is true, and therefore there is truth. Now God is truth itself; *I am the way, the truth and the life.*<sup>4</sup> That there is a God, then, is self-evident.

ON THE OTHER HAND, nobody can think the opposite of a self-evident proposition, as Aristotle's discussion of first principles makes clear.<sup>5</sup> But the opposite of the proposition 'God exists' can be thought, for *the fool* in the

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with, or 2. its truth can be made clear in the light of some more fundamental statement about the subject, or 3. its truth cannot be made clear in this way at all. The statements clearly true to begin with are said to state self-evident propositions, namely the *first principles* mentioned several times in this article. The most fundamental self-evident principle is the *definition* of the subject. Any other statement the truth of which can be made evident in the light of the definition is said to be *demonstrable*. A truth which cannot be made evident in this way is *indemonstrable*. For further comment see Appendix 1.

<sup>b</sup>This is a formulation of the celebrated argument of St Anselm's *Proslogion*, the so-called 'ontological' argument. For the meaning of the word 'God' see Appendix 4.

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## SUMMA THEOLOGIAE, 1a. 2, 1

*Dixit insipiens in corde suo, non est Deus.*<sup>6</sup> Ergo Deum esse non est per se notum.

RESPONSIO: Dicendum quod contingit aliquid esse per se notum dupliciter, uno modo secundum se et non quoad nos, alio modo secundum se et quoad nos. Ex hoc enim aliqua propositio est per se nota quod prædicatum includitur in ratione subjecti; ut homo est animal, nam animal est de ratione hominis. Si igitur notum sit omnibus et de prædicato et de subjecto quid sit, propositio illa erit omnibus per se nota; sicut patet in primis demonstrationum principiis, quorum termini sunt quædam communia quæ nullus ignorat, ut ens et non ens, totum et pars, et similia. Si autem apud aliquos notum non sit de prædicato et subiecto quid sit, propositio quidem quantum in se est erit per se nota, non tamen apud illos qui prædicatum et subjectum propositionis ignorant. Et ideo contingit, ut dicit Boëtius, quod quædam sunt *communes animi conceptiones* et per se notæ *apud sapientes tantum, ut incorporalia in loco non esse.*<sup>7</sup>

Dico ergo quod hæc propositio Deus est, quantum in se est per se nota est, quia prædicatum est idem subjecto; Deus enim est suum esse, ut infra patebit.<sup>8</sup> Sed, quia nos non scimus de Deo quid est non est nobis per se nota, sed indiget demonstrari per ea quæ sunt magis nota quoad nos et minus nota secundum naturam, scilicet per effectus.

1. Ad primum ergo dicendum quod cognoscere Deum esse in aliquo communi sub quadam confusione est nobis naturaliter insertum, in quantum scilicet Deus est hominis beatitudo. Homo enim naturaliter desiderat beatitudinem, et quod naturaliter desideratur ab homine naturaliter cognoscitur ab eodem. Sed hoc non est simpliciter cognoscere Deum esse, sicut cognoscere venientem non est cognoscere Petrum quamvis sit Petrus veniens: multi enim perfectum hominis bonum quod est beatitudo æstimant divitias, quidam voluptates, quidam aliquid aliud.

2. Ad secundum dicendum quod forte ille qui audit hoc nomen Deus non intelligit significari aliquid quo majus cogitari non possit, cum quidam crediderint Deum esse corpus. Dato autem quod quilibet intelligat hoc

<sup>6</sup>*Psalms* 13 (14), 1; 52 (53), 1

<sup>7</sup>*Quomodo substantiæ bonæ sint* or *De Hebdomadibus*. PL 64, 1311. Anicius Manlius Severinus Boëtius, executed A.D. 524–5. His works were one of the main channels through which Greek speculation passed to the early Latin middle ages.

<sup>8</sup>cf 1a. 3, 4

<sup>c</sup>At first sight the last two sentences seem to contradict one another: if ‘God is his own existence’ then it would seem that ‘what it is to be God’ is evident to us. And so, since we are ‘learned’ enough to know that God is his own existence, it must surely be ‘self-evident and commonplace’ to us that he exists. To this St

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psalms *said in his heart: There is no God.*<sup>6</sup> That God exists is therefore not self-evident.

REPLY: A self-evident proposition, though always self-evident in itself, is sometimes self-evident to us and sometimes not. For a proposition is self-evident when the predicate forms part of what the subject means; thus it is self-evident that man is an animal, since being an animal is part of the meaning of man. If therefore it is evident to everybody what it is to be this subject and what it is to have such a predicate, the proposition itself will be self-evident to everybody. This is clearly the case with first principles of demonstration, which employ common terms evident to all, such as 'be' and 'not be', 'whole' and 'part'. But if what it is to be this subject or have such a predicate is not evident to some people, then the proposition, though self-evident in itself, will not be so to those to whom its subject and predicate are not evident. And this is why Boëthius can say that *certain notions are self-evident and commonplaces only to the learned, as, for example, that only bodies can occupy space.*<sup>7</sup>

I maintain then that the proposition 'God exists' is self-evident in itself, for, as we shall see later, its subject and predicate are identical, since God is his own existence.<sup>8</sup> But, because what it is to be God is not evident to us, the proposition is not self-evident to us, and needs to be made evident.<sup>c</sup> This is done by means of things which, though less evident in themselves, are nevertheless more evident to us, by means, namely, of God's effects.

Hence: 1. The awareness that God exists is not implanted in us by nature in any clear or specific way. Admittedly, man is by nature aware of what by nature he desires, and he desires by nature a happiness which is to be found only in God. But this is not, simply speaking, awareness that there is a God, any more than to be aware of someone approaching is to be aware of Peter, even should it be Peter approaching: many, in fact, believe the ultimate good which will make us happy to be riches, or pleasure, or some such thing.<sup>d</sup>

2. Someone hearing the word 'God' may very well not understand it to mean 'that than which nothing greater can be thought', indeed, some people have believed God to be a body. And even if the meaning of the

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Thomas would answer that, though we know it to be true that God is his own existence (arguing from his effects in this world), we cannot fully comprehend what that statement means (cf 1a. 3, 4 ad 2). We can therefore *know it to be true* that the proposition 'God exists' is self-evident in itself, and yet not experience that self-evidence for ourselves. We know that the proposition is self-evident by argument, from our experience of God's effects. This is the distinction the article is making.  
<sup>c</sup>cf 1a2æ. 2, on where happiness lies.

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## SUMMA THEOLOGIAE, Ia. 2, 2

nomine Deus significari hoc quod dicitur, scilicet illud quo majus cogitari non potest, non tamen propter hoc sequitur quod intelligat id quod significatur per nomen esse in rerum natura, sed in apprehensione intellectus tantum. Nec potest argui quod sit in re nisi daretur quod sit in re aliquid quo majus cogitari non potest—quod non est datum a ponentibus Deum non esse.

3. Ad tertium dicendum quod veritatem esse in communi est per se notum, sed primam veritatem esse hoc non est per se notum quoad nos.

*articulus 2. utrum Deum esse sit demonstrabile*

AD SECUNDUM sic proceditur:<sup>1</sup> 1. Videtur quod Deum esse non sit demonstrabile. Deum enim esse est articulus fidei. Sed ea quæ sunt fidei non sunt demonstrabilia, quia demonstratio facit scire, fides autem de *non apparentibus* est, ut patet per Apostolum.<sup>2</sup> Ergo Deum esse non est demonstrabile.

2. Præterea, medium demonstrationis est quod quid est. Sed de Deo non possumus scire quid est sed solum quid non est, ut dicit Damascenus.<sup>3</sup> Ergo non possumus demonstrare Deum esse.

3. Præterea, si demonstraretur Deum esse, hoc non esset nisi ex effectibus ejus. Sed effectus ejus non sunt proportionati ei, cum ipse sit infinitus et effectus finiti, finiti autem ad infinitum non est proportio. Cum ergo causa non possit demonstrari per effectum sibi non proportionatum, videtur quod Deum esse non possit demonstrari.

SED CONTRA est quod Apostolus dicit, *invisibilia Dei per ea quæ facta sunt intellecta conspiciuntur*.<sup>4</sup> Sed hoc non esset nisi per ea quæ facta sunt posset demonstrari Deum esse, primum enim quod oportet intelligi de aliquo est an sit.

RESPONSIO: Dicendum quod duplex est demonstratio. Una quæ est per causam et dicitur propter quid, et hæc est per priora simpliciter; alia est per effectum et dicitur demonstratio quia, et hæc est per ea quæ sunt priora quoad nos (cum enim effectus aliquis nobis est manifestior quam sua causa,

<sup>1</sup>cf Ia. 3, 5; 12, 12; 32, I. III Sent. 24, I, 2 (ii). CG I, 12. De potentia VII, 3. In De Trinitate I, 8

<sup>2</sup>Hebrews II, I

<sup>3</sup>De Fide Orthodoxa I, 4. PG 94, 800

<sup>4</sup>Romans I, 20

<sup>\*</sup>For the general notion of demonstration see note *a* to previous article. In the statement of a definition, the predicate of the statement is clearly seen to be the very meaning of the subject of the statement. In any statement which is yet to be

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word 'God' were generally recognized to be 'that than which nothing greater can be thought', nothing thus defined would thereby be granted existence in the world of fact, but merely as thought about. Unless one is given that something in fact exists than which nothing greater can be thought—and this nobody denying the existence of God would grant—the conclusion that God in fact exists does not follow.

3. It is self-evident that there exists truth in general, but it is not self-evident to us that there exists a First Truth.

*article 2. can it be made evident?*

THE SECOND POINT:<sup>1</sup> 1. That God exists cannot, it seems, be made evident. For that God exists is an article of faith, and since, as St Paul says, faith is concerned with *the unseen*,<sup>2</sup> its propositions cannot be demonstrated, that is made evident. It is therefore impossible to demonstrate that God exists.

2. Moreover, the central link of demonstration is a definition.<sup>3</sup> But Damascene<sup>3</sup> tells us that we cannot define what God is, but only what he is not. Hence we cannot demonstrate that God exists.

3. Moreover, if demonstration of God's existence were possible, this could only be by arguing from his effects. Now God and his effects are incommensurable; for God is infinite and his effects finite, and the finite cannot measure the infinite. Consequently, since effects incommensurate with their cause cannot make it evident, it does not seem possible to demonstrate that God exists.

ON THE OTHER HAND, St Paul tells us that *the hidden things of God can be clearly understood from the things that he has made*.<sup>4</sup> If so, one must be able to demonstrate that God exists from the things that he has made, for knowing whether a thing exists is the first step towards understanding it.

REPLY: There are two types of demonstration. One, showing 'why', follows the natural order of things among themselves, arguing from cause to effect; the other, showing 'that', follows the order in which we know things, arguing from effect to cause (for when an effect is more apparent

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demonstrated, this is not so. But suppose the predicate of such a statement can be seen to be necessarily connected with the predicate of the definition of the statement's subject. Then, through or by means of the definition, the predicate and subject of the statement can now be seen to be necessarily connected. This is what is meant by saying that a definition acts as a 'link' in demonstration; for the predicate of the definitional statement acts as a bridge or 'central term' between the subject and predicate of the statement to be demonstrated.



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## SUMMA THEOLOGIAE, Ia. 2, 2

per effectum procedimus ad cognitionem causæ). Ex quolibet autem effectu potest demonstrari propriam causam ejus esse, si tamen ejus effectus sint magis noti quoad nos, quia, cum effectus dependeant a causa, posito effectu necesse est causam præexistere. Unde Deum esse, secundum quod non est per se notum quoad nos, demonstrabile est per effectus nobis notos.

1. Ad primum ergo dicendum quod Deum esse et alia hujusmodi quæ per rationem naturalem nota possunt esse de Deo, ut dicitur Rom.<sup>5</sup> non sunt articuli fidei sed præambula ad articulos. Sic enim fides præsupponit cognitionem naturalem sicut gratia naturam et ut perfectio perfectibile. Nihil tamen prohibet illud quod per se demonstrabile est et scibile, ab aliquo accipi ut credibile qui demonstrationem non capit.

2. Ad secundum dicendum quod cum demonstratur causa per effectum necesse est uti effectu loco definitionis causæ ad probandum causam esse, et hoc maxime contingit in Deo. Quia ad probandum aliquid esse necesse est accipere pro medio quid significet nomen, non autem quod quid est (quia quæstio quid est sequitur ad quæstionem an est). Nomina autem Dei imponuntur ab effectibus, ut postea ostendetur;<sup>6</sup> unde demonstrando Deum esse per effectum accipere possumus pro medio quid significet hoc nomen Deus.

3. Ad tertium dicendum quod per effectus non proportionatos causæ non potest perfecta cognitio de causa haberi: sed tamen ex quocumque effectu manifeste nobis potest demonstrari causam esse, ut dictum est. Et sic ex effectibus Dei potest demonstrari Deum esse, licet per eos non perfecte possimus ipsum cognoscere secundum suam essentiam.

<sup>5</sup>Romans 1, 19–20<sup>6</sup>cf Ia. 13, 1 ff

<sup>b</sup>Demonstration so far described in the notes is only one type of demonstration: arguing from a thing's essential nature to its properties (or from a cause to effects). Such demonstration not only shows a certain fact to be true (the existence of a property or of an effect), but also shows why it is true (because of the thing's nature, or because of the cause). But it is possible to argue the other way round, and demonstrate the existence of a cause from the existence of an effect. Then, however, one can only show a certain fact to be true (the existence of the cause); one cannot show why it is true, although one can show *why one knows it to be true* (namely because of the existence of the effect). It is because the reasons for knowing a fact and the reasons for the existence of that fact do not always coincide, that one can have demonstrations *that* which are not demonstrations *why*.

<sup>c</sup>The objector thinks God's existence indemonstrable because God's essence is indefinable. But St Thomas points out that demonstration of existence cannot

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to us than its cause, we come to know the cause through the effect).<sup>b</sup> Now any effect of a cause demonstrates that that cause exists, in cases where the effect is better known to us, since effects are dependent upon causes, and can only occur if the causes already exist. From effects evident to us, therefore, we can demonstrate what in itself is not evident to us, namely, that God exists.

Hence: 1. The truths about God which St Paul says we can know by our natural powers of reasoning<sup>c</sup>—that God exists, for example—are not numbered among the articles of faith, but are presupposed to them. For faith presupposes natural knowledge, just as grace does nature and all perfections that which they perfect. However, there is nothing to stop a man accepting on faith some truth which he personally cannot demonstrate, even if that truth in itself is such that demonstration could make it evident.

2. When we argue from effect to cause, the effect will take the place of a definition of the cause in the proof that the cause exists; and this especially if the cause is God. For when proving anything to exist, the central link is not what that thing is (we cannot even ask what it is until we know that it exists), but rather what we are using the name of the thing to mean.<sup>e</sup> Now when demonstrating from effects that God exists, we are able to start from what the word 'God' means, for, as we shall see,<sup>6</sup> the names of God are derived from these effects.

3. Effects can give comprehensive knowledge of their cause only when commensurate with it: but, as we have said, any effect whatever can make it clear that a cause exists. God's effects, therefore, can serve to demonstrate that God exists, even though they cannot help us to know him comprehensively for what he is.

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depend on definition anyway, since definition presupposes existence of the thing defined. (Definition states how the word 'x' must be used if it is to name *x*. cf note *a* to 1a. 3, 6.) St Thomas sketches the following order of events: first, we know *y* to exist; secondly, we use the word 'x' to mean *cause of y*; thirdly, we demonstrate that *x* exists (cf note *b*); fourthly, we define *x* (i.e. present how the word 'x' is used as a declaration of what *x* is); fifthly, we then demonstrate why certain other truths hold of *x* (cf note *a*). So 'demonstrations that', unlike 'demonstrations why', do not presuppose a definition; instead they presuppose the existence of an effect, and of a word to describe the cause of that effect. The objector's point about the indefinability of God is thus irrelevant; what we need rather to know is that things exist which require the kind of cause we use the word 'God' to describe. cf 1a. 1, 7 ad 1; 13, 8. For further discussion see Appendix 1.