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AQUINAS
Summa Theologiae, *Questions on God*

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Frontmatter

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THOMAS AQUINAS

Summa Theologiae
Questions on God

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Frontmatter

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Cambridge University Press
0521821401 - Summa Theologiae: Questions on God
Edited by Brian Davies and Brian Leftow
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Contents

<i>Introduction</i>	<i>page</i> vii
<i>Chronology</i>	xxxii
<i>Further reading</i>	xxxiv
<i>Editors’ and translator’s note</i>	xxxix

Summa Theologiae, Questions on God

Question 1	The nature and scope of sacred doctrine	3
Question 2	Does God exist?	20
Question 3	God’s simplicity	28
Question 4	God’s perfection	44
Question 5	The general notion of good	51
Question 6	God’s goodness	63
Question 7	God’s limitlessness	69
Question 8	God’s existence in things	78
Question 9	God’s unchangeableness	87
Question 10	God’s eternity	92
Question 11	God’s oneness	105
Question 12	How God’s creatures know him	113

Cambridge University Press
0521821401 - Summa Theologiae: Questions on God
Edited by Brian Davies and Brian Leftow
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Contents

Question 13	Talking about God	138
Question 14	God’s knowledge	167
Question 15	On God’s ideas	200
Question 18	On God’s life	207
Question 19	God’s will and providence	217
Question 20	Love in God	241
Question 21	God’s justice and mercy	251
Question 22	God’s providence	259
Question 25	God’s power	269
Question 26	God’s beatitude	283
<i>Index of scriptural citations</i>		288
<i>Index of names and subjects</i>		291

Cambridge University Press

0521821401 - Summa Theologiae: Questions on God

Edited by Brian Davies and Brian Leftow

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Introduction

The thirteenth century brought Western Europe much that was new in Christianity and in the life of the mind. New religious orders for both men and women were founded, including two whose rules stipulated that their members should not be attached permanently to any monastery: the Franciscans and the Dominicans. Thus there came to be friars willing to travel widely in pursuit of their missions. The thirteenth century also fostered a new institution called a ‘university’. And it was then that Aristotle was reintroduced to the West, in Latin translation and with commentaries by Islamic and Jewish scholars of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, such as Ibn Sina, Ibn Rushd and Moses Maimonides. The work of Thomas Aquinas (1224?–74) was one fruit of these developments. As a young man he joined the Dominicans, who supported systematic theological studies for their members as a preparation for preaching, especially to non-Christians. He later became a professor in the Theology Faculty of the University of Paris, and Aristotle became the chief philosophical influence on his defence and explanation of Christian theology. If Aquinas is the medieval author who most influenced the development of Christian thought about God, his times helped to make him so.

Though Aquinas lectured in the Theology Faculty, he also wrote a number of purely philosophical books, including (as was usual then) commentaries on Aristotle and other earlier authors. He thus debated philosophy with his contemporaries in the Faculty of Arts, particularly Siger of Brabant, who defended as Aristotle’s opinion the view of Averroes (Ibn Rushd) that all humans share a single soul. Still, Aquinas’s primary responsibility was to teach theology, and his major work in this context was the *Summa Theologiae* (*ST* for short). He began

Cambridge University Press

0521821401 - *Summa Theologiae: Questions on God*

Edited by Brian Davies and Brian Leftow

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Introduction*

writing *ST* while teaching in Rome (1265–8), worked on Part II while teaching in Paris (1268–72) and wrote the rest of what he produced (he never completed the project) in Naples during the following year. *ST* covers all the issues that were prominent in medieval theology and were addressed in the standard eight-year course of theology studies. He wrote *ST* for ‘beginners’.¹ But it will be obvious that someone embarking on the study of theology in Aquinas’s day had to have mastered much else first.

Reading the *Summa*

ST is the size of a multi-volume book. It is divided into three Parts, which are in effect the book’s volumes, and its arrangement is inspired by the Neoplatonic theme of all reality flowing from and eventually returning to a divine source. Thus, Part I is about God and about creation as proceeding from him as its source. Part II discusses the return of intelligent creatures to God, and is divided into two major sections: one (usually called the *12ae*) concerns human actions, morality and grace, while the second (*22ae*) provides a more detailed review of the virtues. Part III is devoted to Christ as the mediator between God and human beings and to the theological implications of the Incarnation, including the Church. The Parts are subdivided into ‘questions’, which are equivalent to *ST*’s chapters, and are grouped by topic into ‘treatises’.

Finally, the questions divide into articles, each a discrete, self-contained discussion of one specific problem under its question’s general topic. Each article is a debate in miniature, which reflects the style of formal academic disputation common in medieval universities. The title identifies the issue to be debated and is put in the form of a question that invites a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer. The debate begins with arguments for both answers. Usually the first set of arguments – the ‘objections’ – is against the position Aquinas wants to defend, and the following argument(s), introduced by the phrase ‘on the contrary’, support(s) Aquinas’s own view. (Sometimes, though, he rejects the arguments on both sides (e.g. 13.10).²) These

¹ S. Thomae Aquinatis *Summa Theologiae* (Ottawa: Studii Generalis, 1941), prologue, 1a.

² References to material translated in this volume appear in the text, by question and article number. Where I quote Aquinas without giving translation credits, I quote from this volume’s translation. To avoid confusion, please note: references to Aquinas always involve at least two numbers, or else a number and an abbreviation like ‘q’. Where a single number is given in brackets, this is a reference to a proposition of mine stated in this introduction.

Cambridge University Press

0521821401 - Summa Theologiae: Questions on God

Edited by Brian Davies and Brian Leftow

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Introduction*

preliminary arguments often rely on brief citations from the Bible, or equally brief references to Christian theologians or philosophers. As a Christian, Aquinas takes biblical texts to express truths revealed by God: thus biblical citations are in effect arguments from the testimony of an unimpeachable witness. Citations of theologians may have the force of authoritative interpretations of that testimony, especially if they are drawn from those early theologians (such as Augustine or Gregory) who came to be known as ‘Fathers of the Church’. However, these and the references to philosophers may also be quick ways to refer students (or their teachers) to arguments they could be expected to know. Even where they are simply references to someone’s views, they do not represent a blind obeisance to the dead. The mere fact that someone smart finds a certain view plausible has some force as evidence for the view’s truth. For at least some of the smart are so in part because they are perceptive, and to be perceptive is to see more, and more clearly, than most.

Following the objections and counter-argument(s) in each article is the body (*corpus*) of the question. Here Aquinas sets out his own view. Finally, there are responses to the initial objections, in which Aquinas tries to show why they misfire. It is unwise to skip these; some of Aquinas’s best points appear in them.

Philosophy and theology

Aquinas wrote *ST* as a Christian theologian. This affects how he frames some issues. When he takes up the existence of God, for instance, he does not raise it as a matter he seeks to settle by argument. He takes it for granted that God exists. Aquinas sees the real issue here as about the kind of justification that belief in God can have. Is the proposition that God exists self-evident (2.1)? Is it one that philosophy can demonstrate (2.2)? Can one show that philosophy can demonstrate it by showing that philosophy has done so (2.3)? Still, Aquinas was a *philosophical* theologian. While the Christian faith provides the claims he seeks to support, the arguments he gives to support them are intended to pass muster with philosophers. So it does not distort Aquinas’s intent to see him as providing a philosophical account of God. This account is found in Questions 1–26 of Part I of *ST*, and this account is what I now introduce.

Cambridge University Press

0521821401 - Summa Theologiae: Questions on God

Edited by Brian Davies and Brian Leftow

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Introduction*

God's nature and existence

Aquinas takes up arguments for God's existence in the second Question of Part I, before he has said anything about what he means by 'God'. This may seem to some readers an odd way to proceed. Philosophers discuss two interrelated questions: (a) how should we conceive of God: what should we mean by the word 'God'? (b) are there good reasons to think that there is a God? One might think that (a) should come first. When we know what something is, we can move immediately to the question about its existence or otherwise. When Jones dies and Jones's lawyer executes the will, the lawyer may ask, did Jones have a sister? The lawyer knows what a sister is, and the real question is whether such a sister exists or not. But it is not clear that we know what sort of thing a God would be, or what the word 'God' means. So it might seem better first to clarify what 'God' means and only then to ask whether there is a God.

Aquinas's own theory of knowledge bolsters this thought. He held that (mystical experience aside)³ nothing is in the intellect which was not first in the senses: we can by natural means have positive, contentful concepts of the natures only of what we can see, hear, touch, and so forth. We cannot perceive immaterial things: as they cannot reflect light they cannot be seen, as they do not emit sound waves they cannot be heard, and so forth.⁴ So on Aquinas's terms we cannot by natural means have positive, contentful concepts of what such things are. We cannot acquire a concept of God – even an inadequate one – by acquaintance, in the way in which we might get a vague concept of what an aeroplane is by seeing one flying by at a great height in the sky. If we cannot perceive God and cannot by natural means have a positive concept of him without perceiving him, and we have not been 'infused' with such a concept by gracious divine action, how then can we say what he is well enough to know what it would take to show that he exists?

Aquinas's answer is that while we do not know what God is, we do know what we mean by the word 'God', a meaning we have built up from our acquaintance with his effects (2.2 *ad* 2). But this just pushes the question back a step: if we do not know what sort of thing God is, how do

³ As Aquinas sees it, in mystical 'rapture', one can 'see' the essence of God (*ST* 2a2ae 175.3).

⁴ Of course, God can cause the air to vibrate and so cause us to hear a sound. But he does not *emit* the sound wave, and so there is a distinction between hearing a sound God causes to occur and hearing God.

Cambridge University Press

0521821401 - Summa Theologiae: Questions on God

Edited by Brian Davies and Brian Leftow

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Introduction*

we know what sorts of effect he would have? One answer here, surely, is that as Aquinas is a Christian theologian, he gets his ideas of God's effects from biblical sources. The Bible tells him that God creates, sustains, provides for and rules over whatever is not God. We may not know much about *how* any of these things work, but if one is a Christian, one accepts that they are so. This tells Aquinas that there are certain roles earlier philosophers had spoken of that God must in fact play. Aristotle, for instance, had argued the existence of an unmoved mover, a first being in his cosmological scheme who was ultimately responsible for all change in the material world. Any being who plays this role has a great deal to do with sustaining and providing for the world. Perhaps the Christian God might delegate this to some eminent creature, but it is at least a reasonable thought too (to a Christian) that if anyone plays this role, God does. So Aquinas takes it that the unmoved mover's effect, the world's motion, is actually a divine effect and so reworks Aristotle's argument for an unmoved mover as an argument to the existence of the Christian God.

This reworking would seem all the more reasonable because earlier Christians shaped the concept of God that his tradition developed under the influence (ultimately) of Aristotle and Plato. Plato had argued for the existence of Forms, entities that he held to be timeless, immutable, simple and divine.⁵ Aristotle had modified this picture by depicting God as being like a Platonic Form but everlastingly engaged in thinking about the best possible thing, namely himself.⁶ Christian theism took these ideas aboard as it developed during the first Christian centuries. St Augustine (354–430) put the resulting concept of God (often called 'classical theism') so persuasively that it became the unchallenged framework for Christian theology for the subsequent nine hundred years.

Thus when Aquinas begins *ST* with arguments for God's existence, he knows what he aims to prove. So did the students he wrote for, who shared his biblical and philosophical sources.

The Five Ways

Even the decision to begin with proofs of God's existence left other options open. St Anselm (1033–1109) had argued in the *Proslogion* (1078) that by unfolding the content of a particular description of God, one

⁵ *Phaedo* 78b–e; *Timaeus* 37e–38a. ⁶ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 12.8.

Cambridge University Press

0521821401 - Summa Theologiae: Questions on God

Edited by Brian Davies and Brian Leftow

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Introduction*

could show that he exists, a style of argument usually called ‘ontological’. Aquinas prefers arguments from observable natural effects to their first cause. The Five Ways he offers did not originate with him. The first is based closely on Aristotle. So is the second, for which Maimonides is a more immediate source.⁷ Some are not stated fully; the first, for instance, either compresses or excerpts a far longer account of Aristotle’s argument given by Aquinas in the earlier *Summa against Gentiles*.⁸ Even one of the Ways raises more issues than an introduction can hope to discuss adequately, but it may be helpful to clarify one feature common to the first three by examining how it occurs in the first. Part of the First Way runs as follows:

Some things . . . undergo change . . . anything in process of change is changed by something else . . . this something else, if in process of change, is itself changed by yet another thing . . . But there has to be an end to this regress of causes, otherwise there will be no first cause of change, and, as a result, no subsequent causes of change. For it is only when acted upon by a first cause that intermediate causes produce change (if a hand does not move the stick, the stick will not move anything else). So, we are bound to arrive at some first cause of change that is not itself changed by anything . . . God. (2.3)

Aquinas does not think that every regress of causes must end in a first cause. For example, while he thinks there was a first human being, he does not think this had to be so. On the contrary, he thinks it possible that every human being could have had human parents, that is, that there was no first human.⁹ But he does think that at least one sort of causal series must end in a first cause. He uses the term ‘causal series ordered *per se*’ (which I shall abbreviate as a ‘*per se* series’) for this kind. The First Way deals with one such causal series.¹⁰

Let me note three distinctive properties of *per se* series. In a famous series of events, Booth pulls the trigger, this causes the bullet to strike,

⁷ For a full historical treatment see William Craig, *The Cosmological Argument from Plato to Leibniz* (New York: Macmillan, 1979).

⁸ This may be because Aquinas intended *ST* as an introduction to theology. It may also indicate that sometimes Aquinas briefly refers to an argument whose full version he could expect students already to have met.

⁹ *ST* 1a 46.2 *ad* 7. ‘It is possible’ here does not mean ‘for all we know, this might be so’. Aquinas’s point is that, although this is not how things are, God could have chosen to have it so.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

Cambridge University Press

0521821401 - Summa Theologiae: Questions on God

Edited by Brian Davies and Brian Leftow

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Introduction*

and the strike causes Lincoln to die. In this series, some causes act before others.¹¹ In a *per se* series, however, all causes act at once: when the hand moves the stick which moves (say) a stone, hand and stick act at once in moving the stone.¹²

That Abraham begets Isaac and Isaac begets Jacob is another causal series. But though Abraham caused Isaac to exist and so contributed to Isaac's begetting, he did not cause Isaac to beget Jacob. In a *per se* series, however, every cause other than a first is caused to act by another member of the series: the hand causes the stick to cause, that is, to move the stone.

Again, Abraham does not act with Isaac to beget Jacob. In a *per se* series, all causes act together to produce the final effect: the stick moves the stone and the hand also moves the stone. So in a *per se* series, all at once, the stick is acting on the stone because the hand is causing the stick to act on it, because the human is causing the hand to act on the stick, and the human and the hand are acting on the stone because the human is causing the hand to cause the stick to act on the stone.¹³

The argument in the First Way, then, is really the following:

1. Some things are in change at time *t*.
2. Everything in change at *t* is at *t* part of a *per se* causal series and is at *t* being changed by some cause in this series.¹⁴
3. If there are any causes in such a series, there is a first cause of change in it.
4. There are causes in these series (from 2). So
5. There is a first cause of change in each such series.

¹¹ In one sense, causes act only when their effects occur: they have not acted until they have had some effect. This is how Aquinas (following Aristotle, *Physics* 3.3) thinks of causes; but speaking as I do in the text smoothes exposition.

¹² Aquinas thinks that in the First Way's case, the first mover in the series will be atemporal. For defence of the claim that one can use 'at once' to speak even of an atemporal being's relation to temporal events, see my *Time and Eternity* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991).

¹³ If only one cause acts to produce its effect, it is trivially the case that all causes act at once, that every cause other than the first is caused to cause by the first (i.e. that there are no causes in the series which are not first and are not caused to cause by the first) and that all causes act together to produce the final effect. If these were the only properties which distinguish a *per se* causal series from the Abraham–Isaac–Jacob sort, we would have to conclude that all causal series consisting of just one cause and one effect are trivially *per se*. I cannot here consider whether these are the only distinguishing marks of *per se* series.

¹⁴ 'Is at *t* being changed' allows for the claim that the changer does not act at *t* – a point on which Aquinas insists, as he thinks that the first changer in this series is atemporal. If all one-cause causal series are trivially *per se*, the second conjunct in (2) above entails the first.

Cambridge University Press

0521821401 - Summa Theologiae: Questions on God

Edited by Brian Davies and Brian Leftow

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Introduction*

6. If a cause of change is in change, it is not first (from 2). So
7. There is an unchanging cause of change.
8. This is God.

This rendering may strike some readers who are familiar with the Five Ways as odd, since it makes no reference to an infinite series of causes: many commentators read the First Way as arguing that because an infinitely extended causal series of a certain sort is impossible, there must be a first cause. But this gets things backwards. The argument, surprisingly, is that ‘there has to be an end to this regress of causes [because] otherwise there will be no first cause of change and, as a result, no subsequent causes of change’. It is not that there must be a first cause because there cannot be an infinite series, but that there cannot be an infinite series because there must be a first cause. That the series of causes cannot be infinite is (Aquinas thinks) a corollary of (3).¹⁵ There is something else, not argued here, that stands behind (3). The hand-and-stick illustration alludes to this. Aquinas made the thought behind (3) a bit clearer in his earlier *Compendium of Theology*:

All changed things are changed by other things, inferiors by superiors, as the elements are by the celestial bodies . . . Since whatever is changed by another is as if an instrument of the first changer, were there no first changer, all changers would be instruments . . . it is ridiculous . . . to suppose instruments to be changed, but not by some first agent. This would be as if someone were to say that a saw or hatchet operates without a carpenter. So there is a first changer.¹⁶

Like the First Way, this text does not use the term ‘*per se* series’. But the parallels in the illustrations show that this is what Aquinas has in mind: just as a hand moves the stick that moves the stone, so a hand moves the saw that cuts the wood, and when a hand moves a stick and the stick moves a stone, the hand moves the stone by means of the stick; the stick is the hand’s instrument in moving the stone. What supports (3) in

¹⁵ Actually, it does not follow from (3). A series can both be infinite and have a first or last member. For example, there is a first natural number and there is an infinite series of them; there is a last negative integer and there is an infinite series of them.

¹⁶ *Compendium of Theology* 1.3, in S. Thomae Aquinatis *Opuscula Omnia*, ed. R. Mandonnet (Paris: LeThielleux, 1927), v. 2, 2–3. Until recently the *Compendium* was taken to postdate *ST* 1a. The consensus now is that the *Compendium* is earlier than *ST*, and perhaps contemporary with the *Summa against Gentiles*.

Cambridge University Press

0521821401 - Summa Theologiae: Questions on God

Edited by Brian Davies and Brian Leftow

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Introduction*

Aquinas's mind, then, is the idea featured in the *Compendium* argument, that changers in *per se* series that are not first are instruments.

Consider again the distinctive properties of a *per se* series. If the stick is acting on the stone because the hand is causing it to do so, and the hand is acting on the stone because the hand is causing the stick to act on the stone, it is by means of the stick that the hand's power is applied to the stone. The stick is the instrument by which the hand's power moves the stone; in a *per se* series, whatever is being moved or changed by another member of the series is that further thing's instrument. Thus the *Compendium* in effect argues for (3) as follows:

9. Necessarily, in any *per se* series of changers, either it is or it is not the case that all changers in the series are instruments of other changers in the series.
10. Necessarily, if a changer is not an instrument of any other changer in the series, it is a first changer in that series. So
11. Necessarily, in any *per se* series of changers, either there is a first changer or all changers in the series are instruments of other changers in the series.
12. Necessarily, it is not the case that all changers in a *per se* series are instruments of other changers in the series. So
13. Necessarily, in every *per se* series there is a first changer,

(13) is just (3). (9) is obvious. (10) is equally so on reflection. If a changer is not the instrument of another member of the series, but whatever is being moved or changed by another member of the series is that further thing's instrument, the changer is not being moved or changed by another member of the series. But if there *were* further members of the series, they would be moving or changing it. So there are none: the changer that is not an instrument is the series' first member. (9) and (10) together entail (11). We must ask, then, whether (12) is true.

Here is one consideration that favours (12). If our stick is the hand's instrument to move the stone, the hand moves the stone by means of the stick. That is, when we insert 'the hand' into the blank space in the phrase '___ causes the stone to move by means of the stick', we get a true statement that expresses what is going on. This statement describes the entire causal series as causing the final effect. And it should, for the effect is *inter alia* the effect of the entire series: it is true that the stone moves because the stick moves it, and because the hand moves it, and because

Cambridge University Press

0521821401 - Summa Theologiae: Questions on God

Edited by Brian Davies and Brian Leftow

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Introduction*

the entire series (hand and stick) moves it. In fact, it is the statement describing the entire series that seems best to capture what is really going on. It seems that for any *per se* series, there should be a true statement of this sort. For in any such series there is instrumental causality and the entire series is the cause of the final effect.

Now, if nothing is inserted in the blank space in ‘___ causes the stone to move by means of the stick’, these words express no truth or falsehood. They are not the kind of thing that can do so, for they are not a complete sentence. Consider, then, what would be so if there were no first changer in a *per se* series. Now, if this is a *per se* series, there is ‘instrumental causality’ in it. So there should be a true sentence describing the entire series by inserting into the blank space of a sentence-frame of the form: ‘___ causes effect F by means of C by means of D by means of E . . .’ a term referring to a cause. But with no first changer, we could not insert a subject-term in the blank space and have the result be a truth describing the entire series as causing the effect. Suppose we insert ‘B’ into the sentence-frame just given. The resulting statement will be true, if B is in fact a cause in the series. But if B is not the first cause in the series, this truth will not describe the entire series causing the final effect. For if B is not the first cause, some further part(s) of the series cause(s) B to cause, and the resulting statement will leave out namely whatever part(s) of the series play(s) this role. On the other hand, with nothing plugged into the blank – no term for a first cause – the purported description of what is going on is something that cannot be true. This suggests that there cannot be a true sentence asserting the existence of an entire *per se* causal series with no first changer.¹⁷ Further, if in such a case there is nothing to plug into the blank before the verb ‘causes’, then there is nothing that does the whole series’ causing and therefore the whole series is not a cause of the final effect. But there cannot be a *per se* causal series of which this is true. If every cause in the series save a first is caused to act by prior causes of the series – if every such cause is applying other members’ power to the final effect – then the entire series causes the effect, that is, all the members together do.

Thus, at least, one argument for (3). But even if it is sound, there is much more to say about the First Way. Its argument for (2) is

¹⁷ This paragraph is heavily indebted to Barry Miller, ‘Necessarily Terminating Causal Series’, *Mind* 91 (1982), 201–15.

Cambridge University Press

0521821401 - Summa Theologiae: Questions on God

Edited by Brian Davies and Brian Leftow

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Introduction*

controversial. Again, why see a human as an instrument of a further mover, for example an angel? Perhaps humans can be first causes; in other words, perhaps (2) is not true. It is therefore possible that, even if it is sound, the *Compendium* argument provides less than Aquinas had hoped, for perhaps first movers need not be anything like a divine cause. Still, though many deride them, perhaps there is yet something to be said for Aquinas's First and Second Ways.¹⁸

Each of the Five Ways concludes that a description is satisfied – that there is an unchanging changer, a first efficient cause, and so on. However, it is not obvious that all five descriptions apply to the same being. Nor is it obvious that 'all call these God' (2.3) (although the Ways assert this), or that if all do call these God they are correct to do so. These assertions are in effect promissory notes. Questions 3–26 try to redeem them by drawing out implications of these five descriptions. In doing so Aquinas tells us what it is to be an unchanging changer, a first cause, and the rest. By the time we reach Question 26, if Aquinas's arguments work, we do have something Godlike on our hands. So these five descriptions provide the foundation of Aquinas's subsequent account of God's nature.

Simplicity

Aquinas begins this account with his doctrine of divine simplicity (of which someone once said: 'if that's His simplicity, I cannot face His complexity'). Something is more complicated or complex the more parts it has. It is simpler the fewer its parts, and wholly simple if it has no parts at all. Aquinas's doctrine of divine simplicity (which I abbreviate 'DDS') asserts that God is wholly simple: he is not put together from parts of any sort. Aquinas places DDS first in his treatment of God's nature because it is basic to the rest of it: DDS leads directly to claims that God is perfect, unchangeable, atemporal, spiritual, and suchlike. These claims (together with DDS) constitute the core of classical theism.

Most theists accept one part of DDS, that God is not made of matter, where 'matter' is used in the familiar sense of the stuff of which physical bodies are composed. (Aquinas also uses the term in a rather different sense, which is discussed below.) If God is not made of matter, he is not composed of extended parts (3.1). But Aquinas also speaks of God as not

¹⁸ The Third Way also involves (3). But it has problems which seem to me insuperable.

Cambridge University Press

0521821401 - Summa Theologiae: Questions on God

Edited by Brian Davies and Brian Leftow

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Introduction*

‘composed’ of other kinds of part, such as a form, an essence, accidents, a ‘subject’ of accidents, and existence. Most theists who are not philosophers have no views on this at all. And well they may not, for the terms are strange, as is what Aquinas’s use of them in this context presupposes. Parts compose. Wholes are composed. Wholes can consist completely of different sorts of part at once; our bodies consist completely of both molecules and quarks. When Aquinas speaks of things other than God as ‘composed’ of, for example, essences and accidents, he takes it that concrete things consist completely not only of concrete parts but also of abstract ones – essences and accidents. His discussion of DDS, then, takes the form of denying that God is composed of either concrete or abstract parts.

The sorts of part Aquinas includes are the already-mentioned ordinary material parts and forms,¹⁹ ‘prime matter’, essences, accidents, and a thing’s existence. Forms are either souls or certain sorts of properties, for example shapes, sizes, weights, colours, structures or powers. For Aquinas, forms are particular: as he sees it, it is not the case that all square things share a single form, squareness, but rather that each has its own squareness. Having forms empowers causes to act as they do but, with the possible exception of souls, forms are abstract, that is, they are not the kinds of thing that can act themselves.

As Aquinas understands the term, a ‘form’ may be either substantial or accidental. The substantial form of any given thing is whatever in it made its matter become – and/or makes it be actually – the kind of thing it is. Aquinas follows Aristotle in thinking of the whole natural world as objectively divided into kinds. When we classify (say) birds as one genus of animal and fish as another, it is not the case that one scheme we might adopt is no better than another: if we saw birds and fish as the same kind of animal, we would be getting it wrong, objectively. So too, for Aquinas, each natural kind is in turn subdivided into more specific kinds (such as sparrows, trout, etc.), and each most specific natural kind has a characteristic form that makes it the kind of thing it is. In this way of thinking, what makes a horse a horse rather than a cow is that it has the substantial form of a horse. Human souls thus are also substantial forms: having a human soul is what makes us belong to the kind ‘human’. Kinds

¹⁹ Aquinas also uses ‘form’ to refer to immaterial substances. In this sense of the term, God is a form. In neither sense is it true that he *has* a form.

Cambridge University Press

0521821401 - Summa Theologiae: Questions on God

Edited by Brian Davies and Brian Leftow

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Introduction*

are intrinsic properties. That means that the kind to which something belongs is determined entirely by itself, not by how other things are in the world outside it.²⁰ So substantial forms are all intrinsic attributes.

In Aquinas's usage, a form is accidental (an accident) if and only if it is not substantial. He thought of accidental forms as of three sorts.²¹ Some are quantities, which make true answers to questions broadly of the 'how much?' sort – such as sizes and weights. While Aquinas thought of all these as intrinsic to their bearers, we no longer think today of all Thomist quantities as intrinsic. For example, an object's weight is a function of the gravity field it is in and so is affected by the world beyond it. Some accidental forms are qualities, which make true answers to questions broadly of the 'how is it?' or 'what is it like?' sort – such as colours and tones. Aquinas thinks of these too as all intrinsic to their bearers. Relational properties – for example being shorter than Socrates – are Aquinas's third sort of accidental form.

I shall now introduce a new term: a truthmaker is an item whose existence makes some truths true. All Thomist forms are truthmakers. So for that matter are ordinary material parts: my left hand's existence makes it true that I have a left hand. The term 'truthmakers' naturally raises such questions as: what is it to make something true? What 'things' are made true? For present purposes one need not answer these questions. The 'things' that are made true might be sentences, sentence-types, propositions – whatever the correct theory of the matter says they are. Likewise, one can say for the moment that 'making true' is whatever the correct theory of truth says it is. If truth is understood as correspondence with reality, for instance, to make something true is to be that with which the truth in question corresponds.²²

²⁰ At least this is intuitively a plausible claim. There are philosophers who suggest that something is human only if it had the right sort of parents, which is not an intrinsic property. My gloss on being intrinsic represents only the main sort of intuition that developed accounts of the intrinsic try to respect. For one of the most influential contributions to defining 'intrinsic', see David Lewis and Rae Langton, 'Defining "intrinsic"', in David Lewis, *Papers in Metaphysics and Epistemology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 116–32.

²¹ Aquinas accepts Aristotle's claim that there are nine categories of accidental predicates. But he thinks that the other six apply to things in virtue not of forms in them but of how things are outside them (*Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics Book V* 1. 9, #892; *Commentary on Aristotle's Physics Book III* 1. 5, #322; my thanks to Jeff Brower for these references). They do not apply to a thing *A* in virtue of a form in *A* which is of the same category as the predicate.

²² But for a problem with this claim see David Lewis, 'Forget about the Correspondence Theory of Truth', *Analysis* 61 (2001), 275–80.

Cambridge University Press

0521821401 - Summa Theologiae: Questions on God

Edited by Brian Davies and Brian Leftow

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Introduction*

For Aquinas, ‘matter’ is the general term for that which ‘bears’ or ‘receives’ forms. If one sculpts a statue from a block of marble, the resulting statue is still made of marble but it acquires its characteristic features as a statue – for example, that it is a statue of Cicero rather than of someone else – from its shape. The change the artist brings about is the imposition of a specific shape or form on the original material. Aristotle and Aquinas took this as a model for all kinds of change; thus Aquinas took a thing’s matter to be *inter alia* what gives it the capacity to undergo change, and he used the term ‘form’ to label whatever attribute matter might acquire. For any material thing, its matter is the stuff of which it is made, the parts of which it is composed or, most generally, whatever was potentially that thing and became actually that thing by coming to have the appropriate form. The matter of any thing is also a truthmaker: it makes true answers to questions such as ‘of what does this thing consist?’

Aquinas distinguishes one sort of matter as ‘prime’ (‘first’). To see why and what he means by this, let us consider the ‘sculpture’ model of change again. If a sculpture gradually changes from pink to grey, it is still the same kind of stuff – marble – that it was. It has just changed in respect of an accident. But there is also change with respect to substantial form: at death, Aquinas held, the human soul (a substantial form) is parted from the human body, and as a result what is left behind, a corpse, no longer belongs to the kind *human being*. If we model this change on a sculpture’s changing colour, we shall want to say that there is some stuff (like the marble) that is the same throughout the change, that first was and now is not a human being, as the marble first was and now is not pink. This stuff also belongs to some kind(s): it is (say) organic matter of a particular chemical composition. But we can imagine this stuff too losing its substantial form, as when its constituent molecules break down into atoms.²³ Does every parcel of matter host an infinite number of substantial forms? Since each substantial form places a thing in its kind(s), an infinity of such forms would mean that each thing belongs to an infinity of natural kinds; there seems no good reason to believe this. But if there are a finite number of substantial forms in any bit of matter, there is a ‘first’ form,

²³ Aquinas did not believe in molecules or atoms; this is a not an illustration he would have used.

Cambridge University Press

0521821401 - Summa Theologiae: Questions on God

Edited by Brian Davies and Brian Leftow

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Introduction*

one all the others presuppose.²⁴ Suppose one believes this, and believes too that any bit of matter has the capacity to change with respect to every substantial form it bears. If this is a *change*, then there must be something that continues throughout, existing both at the start and at the end of the change. Were there no such thing, this would be merely a case of substituting a new bit of matter for an old, not the old bit of matter changing its form. If this is change in a material thing, what continues must be some sort of matter. But we are talking now about the matter that bears (and changes with respect to) the very first, most basic substantial form in a thing. So this must be matter that has of itself no substantial form at all, that is, matter that is not of itself any *kind* of matter at all, but a mere receiver of forms. This is Aquinas's 'prime matter'. It is supposed to be the ultimate receiver of all attributes and a necessary condition for change in respect to the most basic substantial form.

To continue this quick survey of Aquinas's terms, the essence of any being is what makes it the kind of thing it is, so it is that which makes true the answer to the question 'what is this?' Things with essences come to exist when matter receives a particular substantial form. Aquinas thinks of essences, like forms, as abstract particulars. Finally, a subject is that which receives or bears a form.²⁵

Aquinas's arguments for DDS try to show that none of the ways in which things divide into multiple truthmakers apply to God. For present purposes, then, Aquinas's DDS may be summarized as follows: in the case of God, every intrinsic non-Trinitarian truth is true in virtue of exactly the same truthmaker, which is identical with God. Leaving the Trinity aside, God has no internal structure of truthmakers at all: God is just one undivided truthmaker for all these truths. One may wonder just how a Christian of Aquinas's orthodox stripe could leave the Trinity aside here. On standard Trinitarian doctrine, God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is not obvious that this is compatible with the Thomist account of divine simplicity. To make an incredibly long story short, for

²⁴ Actually, Aquinas believed that there was *just* one substantial form in any bit of matter (*ST* 1a 76.4). But one need not accept this particular view of his to feel the more general conceptual pressure to which talk of prime matter responds, and it is to show this that I am abstracting from his particular view.

²⁵ What of existence? The existence of something *x* is also supposed to be a truthmaker for the proposition '*x* exists'. But one can be pardoned the thought that *x* itself makes '*x* exists' true, and so a further truthmaker (existence) is otiose.

Cambridge University Press

0521821401 - Summa Theologiae: Questions on God

Edited by Brian Davies and Brian Leftow

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Introduction*

Aquinas, following a particular reading of an important Christian creed, the divine Persons are not supposed to be parts into which God divides. Each Person is all of God. All of God is Father, all of God is Son, and yet Father and Son are not identical. On Aquinas's approach, it is more nearly correct to say that God makes up the Persons of the Trinity rather than that the Persons make up God: very roughly, God eternally, necessarily and intrinsically plays the roles of Father, Son and Spirit. But I cannot say more than this; one cannot summarize Aquinas's account of the Trinity in a few paragraphs, and the Trinity does not come up in the Questions I am introducing.

Immutability

Aquinas's DDS shapes the rest of his account of God. It entails, for instance, God's being intrinsically immutable (9.1). Aquinas relies in this context on a distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic changes. To change intrinsically is to gain or lose some but not all intrinsic properties. To see why 'some but not all' is required, suppose that some item, George, loses all its intrinsic properties. George has the property of being identical with George. This property is intrinsic: whether George has it does not depend on how things are in the world outside George's boundaries. If George loses all its intrinsic properties, it loses the property of being identical with George. But if George loses this property, there no longer is anything identical with George. George has ceased to exist and been replaced by something else, rather than merely changing, that is, continuing to exist in a changed form. Thus to change intrinsically, a thing must lose some intrinsic property and also retain at least one other intrinsic property. Since no one property can both remain and not remain, intrinsic change requires a real distinction between the intrinsic properties of the thing that changes. In a simple being such as God, however, there can be no such distinction.

DDS does not rule out 'extrinsic' change, a change in the way that other things are related to God. Since this would not involve God's having had or developing any internal complexity, such changes can be attributed to God (13.7). However, it is worth asking whether Aquinas should admit even extrinsic change in God. Suppose that at a certain point in time we are the same height, and you later grow taller so that I am then shorter than you. This is a mere extrinsic change in me. But it still follows

Cambridge University Press

0521821401 - Summa Theologiae: Questions on God

Edited by Brian Davies and Brian Leftow

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Introduction*

that at one time something is true of me that is not true of me at another time, and this may entail my being in time. Yet Aquinas wants God's immutability to entail God's being atemporal (10.2). Aquinas also thinks that DDS rules out ceasing to exist. In Question 9.2 he suggests that this follows because ceasing to exist is a change in the thing that ceases. This is in tension with his claim (at *ST* 1a 45.2 *ad* 2) that coming into existence is not a change in the thing that comes into existence, because his argument for this claim would apply equally to ceasing to exist.

Timelessness

As Aquinas sees it, 'time is the numbering of before and after in change (*motus*)' (10.1). For Aquinas, a '*motus*' is an intrinsic change or a spatial movement. Thus time is a sequence of locations for this sort of event, which are ordered like the real numbers. Just as (in his eyes) spaces are locations for material objects, times are locations for events. Other items such as properties are in space due to their relations to material things. For example, the colours red, white and blue are in a certain place only because there is an American flag there. If there were no flag or anything else red there, there could not be any redness there. In a similar way, according to Aquinas, if things other than *motus* exist at times, this is only because they do or can have *motus* at those times (10.4 *ad* 3). Accordingly, if a thing does not at least possibly change intrinsically or move, it is not located in time.

Aquinas's account of time is one premise in his argument that God is atemporal. The other premises come from his treatment of God. As we have seen, the Thomist God is intrinsically immutable. In arguing for God's immutability, Aquinas does not discuss spatial motion because he thinks that other things he has already argued eliminate this. Because God is immaterial (3.1), he does not occupy any place as material things do and so does not move from place so filled to place so filled. This is necessarily so, as he is immaterial by nature. Because he is omniscient and the Creator and sustainer of all things, he is also omnipresent in the sense of being 'in' all things and places in virtue of his power over and knowledge of them (8.2–3). In this peculiar way of being in place, he is already in every place to which we might think he could move. There is no place for him to go and, for that reason too, he does not move from place to place. This too is necessarily so if any place exists: he is omniscient by

Cambridge University Press

0521821401 - Summa Theologiae: Questions on God

Edited by Brian Davies and Brian Leftow

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Introduction*

nature, and he is by nature such that he creates and sustains whatever coexists with him. So necessarily, Aquinas's God does not move from place to place.

Aquinas's account of time, together with his claims about God, imply that God is atemporal (10.2). However, one might query the account of time on which he relies here. Perhaps (we may think) if time passes, everything gets older, not just things that do or might undergo *motus*. Again, Aquinas explicitly allows that God can undergo extrinsic change, as when God becomes Lord of a new creature simply because a new creature comes to exist (13.7). At one point in time, for instance, he is not the Lord of Moses and subsequently he comes to be such after Moses is born. It is a good question why being able to change extrinsically is not enough to place God in time.

God's knowledge

The First Way leads Aquinas to say that nothing in God either is or realizes a passive potentiality (3.1), where 'passive potentiality' is understood as that by virtue of which something may be acted on by something else.²⁶ The denial of passive potentiality in God has implications for Aquinas's account of divine knowledge. If nothing can act on God then God does not know things outside himself by perceiving them, because perceptual knowledge is knowledge that one is caused to have. When we see a tree, for instance, light reflected from the tree enters our eyes and stimulates various nerves. On Aquinas's account, therefore, God cannot literally observe the world. If God cannot 'look' outside himself to know things, the only way he could have knowledge is by looking within. Accordingly, Aquinas holds that in some sense God knows all he knows by knowing himself (14.5–6). We know some of our mental states by introspection: we are just immediately aware that we are thinking certain things or are in pain, for instance. For Aquinas, via DDS, everything in God is identical with his mental states: otherwise there would be a real distinction within him, between his mental states and something else. So if God can know his mental states immediately, just by having them, God can have the same immediate grasp of everything about him. Aquinas holds in consequence that God can 'look within' for knowledge

²⁶ *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics Book IX* 1. 1, #1782.

Cambridge University Press

0521821401 - Summa Theologiae: Questions on God

Edited by Brian Davies and Brian Leftow

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Introduction*

of both possible and necessary truths. Aquinas holds that God is omnipotent, meaning by this that he can bring about all states of affairs whose obtaining does not entail a contradiction (25.3).²⁷ So, on his account, God can know all that is possible simply by understanding fully the range of his own power.²⁸ He might also know all that is necessarily true by introspection, since necessary truths are simply those that would be true given any possible state of affairs whatever. So when he looks within himself and sees what he can bring about, he sees the content of every possible world. He knows by looking within himself that what he can make actual is a world containing contingent truths that he helps make true and necessary truths that he does not make true, but which would be true if he made the contingent truths true.

Thus Aquinas may be able to provide an account of God's knowledge of what is possible and necessary, and perhaps DDS allows us to call all this knowledge introspective. But it is not clear how God can look within himself and come to know contingent states of affairs in creation. Aquinas argues that God must be able to do this, but does not say much about how he can do so. Question 14.5 and 14.8 might suggest an answer along these lines: God knows what he wills to be the case by looking within himself. God knows by knowing his own nature that whatever he wills to be the case is the case. So God knows by looking within himself premises from which he could infer what is the case outside himself. God does not perform any inferences (14.7). But God 'sees' without inference, 'in' these premises, what anyone else would have to infer from them (19.5).

This account implies that God wills the occurrence even of our free choices, with a power that cannot be obstructed. It also seems to entail God's not (so to speak) waiting to see what we choose and then cooperating in causing it to happen, but rather determining from all eternity what we choose. This seems to put the freedom of our choices in jeopardy. But if Aquinas's account of how God knows what is contingently the case outside himself is not broadly of this sort, it is not clear what else it might be. True, when Aquinas comes to discuss the relation between divine

²⁷ For some apparent qualifications see *Summa against Gentiles* 11 25.

²⁸ Aquinas holds that it is not in God's power to do evil (25.3 *ad 2*). It would seem to follow that he could not know of possible evil states of affairs by understanding the range of his power. To pursue this by way of a look at Aquinas on God's knowledge of evils, see 14.10; *Summa against Gentiles* 1 71; *On Truth* 2.15.

Cambridge University Press

0521821401 - Summa Theologiae: Questions on God

Edited by Brian Davies and Brian Leftow

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Introduction*

foreknowledge and human freedom (14.13), he does not speak of God's will. He speaks instead as if God knew about our free actions by observing them. But on Aquinas's terms, as we have seen, God cannot literally observe anything.

Divine ideas

There are eternal, necessary truths, for example that $2 + 2 = 4$ or that courage is a virtue. Plato gave an influential theory of what makes these things true: they are true, he held, because there are timeless entities, the Forms or Ideas, whose relations make them true: courage is a virtue because the Idea of Courage has a particular relation to the Idea of Virtue. Augustine, whose theology was in many ways the framework within which Aquinas worked, had been a Platonist before he became a Christian. So he was concerned to fit the Ideas he had believed in within a Christian metaphysic: Augustine asked how the Ideas relate to God. His answer was that Plato's Ideas were ideas in the mind of God. But Augustine, like Aquinas, held DDS. This posed a question: how can an internally simple being have many ideas in his mind? Augustine never answered the question. Aquinas does. To understand his answer, let us distinguish two sorts of 'meaning' a term can have. A term's *sense* is the sort of meaning a definition of the term might express: the sense of 'the Morning Star' is 'the last star to disappear in the morning'. 'The Morning Star' refers to Venus: a term's *reference* is what those who use that term as the subject of an assertive sentence are talking about, and if I say 'the Morning Star is a planet', I am talking about Venus. Aquinas's answer to our question is that "'idea' is not the name for God's essence as such, but only in so far as it is the likeness or intelligible nature of this or that thing' (15.2 *ad* 1). That "'idea' is not the name for God's essence as such' asserts that when we speak of (say) a divine idea of Jones, we are referring to God's nature (as 'the Morning Star' names Venus). As DDS implies that God *is* his nature, Aquinas's point here is really that in these cases we are talking about God. That 'idea' names God 'as . . . the likeness or intelligible nature of this or that thing' asserts that the sense of 'divine idea of Jones' is 'God *qua* likeness . . . of Jones'. For Aquinas, then, there really are not many distinct divine ideas. There is only God. Aquinas purges divine ideas from his ontology. When DDS collides with the claim that God has many ideas, the latter yields.

Cambridge University Press

0521821401 - Summa Theologiae: Questions on God

Edited by Brian Davies and Brian Leftow

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Introduction*

The will of God

Due to DDS, Aquinas holds that God's occurrent knowing (14.4) and willing (19.2 *ad* 1) are identical with God's essence and so with each other. This seems implausible, as one would think there are things that God knows but does not will. God knew that Hitler was killing the Jews, but (we might think) this surely was not something that he willed. So too, he knows that $2 + 2 = 4$, but what God wills, we might think, he brings about – and if it is necessarily true that $2 + 2 = 4$, that $2 + 2 = 4$ would seem not to need bringing about by anyone. As to the first problem, the claim that God did not will that Hitler kill the Jews is misleading short-hand. God certainly did permit it, and permitting is an act of will. Further, God also kept Hitler in existence, kept the gas in the chambers lethal (by upholding the laws of nature), and so on. When we say that God did not will the Jews' deaths, then, we can mean only that he did not think that this was good or that he commanded that we not do such things. But all this raises another question. If all God's acts of will are identical with his essence, God has only one act of will, since he has only one essence. So one may wonder how the one act can cause the gas to be lethal, permit the SS men to operate the chamber and prevent the doing of even worse evil, which seem three different kinds of activity.

Here is one approach. For Aquinas, what makes necessary truths true is identical with the divine essence (14.5–6; 25.3): the same simple reality makes it true that God is divine and that $2 + 2 = 4$. It follows that God's willing does not bring it about that necessary truths are true, because they are identical with God's willing (19.2 *ad* 1) and because God's willing does not bring it about that his essence exists. He knows that such things are true introspectively, and his willing them can be called a rejoicing that they are so, in so far as he rejoices in being God.²⁹ In the case of contingent things that God knows/wills, he either causes or merely permits them. He causes them if they do not involve either free creaturely action or natural or moral evil. If they involve any of the latter, he merely permits them. All distinctions here depend on the content of what God knows/wills. There is the one simple divine act, which is directed to all actual and possible states of affairs. Whether it is a rejoicing, a causing or a permitting of some particular state of affairs depends entirely on what

²⁹ *Summa against Gentiles* 1 90.

Cambridge University Press

0521821401 - Summa Theologiae: Questions on God

Edited by Brian Davies and Brian Leftow

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Introduction*

the state of affairs is. But this strategy is troubling. Sometimes, when we cause good things and merely permit evils, this is because our attitude towards the two differs in tone or quality: we approve of the goods and disapprove of the others, and these attitudes' really differing explains why we only permit the evils. On the strategy just outlined, God's inner attitudes (knowing/willing) towards a good he positively wills and an evil he merely permits are just identical. So to speak, one could not tell that he was for one and against the other by a qualitative tone. There is nothing in the attitude he takes to explain his only permitting the evils, for there is no difference in the attitudes involved at all, intrinsically. So it seems that something important has been lost.

Aquinas's picture of God as perfect (q. 4) and simple sets him other problems about God's will. Someone who is perfect in all respects lacks nothing. But to will something seems to imply that one wants it, and (one might think) one wants only what one does not have. So being perfect seems to exclude having a will (19.1 obj. 1). Aquinas replies that God wills to possess only himself (19.1 *ad* 1, and 2) and so always has what he so wants as to will it. But then can he will things outside himself (19.2)? Yes, Aquinas argues, because it is natural to things to seek to 'spread their own good to others so far as they can' and so 'much more is it the characteristic of God's will to share his goodness with others (so far as this is possible)' (19.2). The idea, it seems, is that God wills only what he does not lack – his goodness – but wills there to be more of it by making other things which reflect it (19.3). But before he made them, did not God lack those other things and that reflection? What Aquinas really needs here is the thought that God's own possession of his goodness cannot be added to, and so his decision to share with others is sheer generosity.³⁰ In any case, this answer imperils the claim that God has free choice. It seems to make God's willing other things something that he does by nature and to require an explanation and defence of the claim that God is free (19.10).

Aquinas asks whether God necessarily wills whatever he wills (19.3) and whether he acts by will at all (19.4). These are for Aquinas really two aspects of a single question, since on his account, anything that does not act by will acts by nature (19.4) and a thing necessarily does whatever it

³⁰ *Summa against Gentiles* 1 93.

Cambridge University Press

0521821401 - Summa Theologiae: Questions on God

Edited by Brian Davies and Brian Leftow

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Introduction*

does by nature. This question arises in part from DDS (19.3 obj. 3 *et* 6). According to DDS, God's willing is identical with God's essence (19.1 *ad* 3), and things have their essences necessarily. So it might seem to follow that God has his act of will necessarily. But if he necessarily has the very act of will he has, it seems to follow that he necessarily wills exactly what he does. If he does, he acts by nature, not will.

Aquinas replies that God wills with absolute necessity only his own goodness. Since in order to possess his own goodness he does not need other things to exist, he need not will the latter (19.3). Yet Aquinas also recognizes a way in which it is necessary that God will anything he wills, and this muddies the waters. In addition to absolute necessity, Aquinas speaks of hypothetical necessity:

We judge something to be absolutely necessary on the basis of some relation holding between terms . . . 'Socrates is sitting' is not necessary in this way, and is, therefore, not absolutely necessary. But we can say that 'Socrates is sitting' is hypothetically necessary in the sense that it is true that if Socrates is sitting, he is sitting. (19.3)

Absolute necessity is the sort had by truths of logic and mathematics: if it were absolutely necessary that Socrates sit, that Socrates not be sitting would be as impossible as that $2 + 2 = 5$. Hypothetical necessity is necessity 'given the truth of a particular hypothesis'. It is not absolutely necessary that Socrates sit, but suppose we take as true the hypothesis that he is sitting. While Socrates sits, it is not possible that he is also not sitting. Thus, on the supposition that Socrates sits, for Socrates not to sit would entail a contradiction, namely that Socrates sits and does not sit at the same time. Hypothetical necessity is the same sort as is involved when Aquinas asks whether God can change the past. He cannot do so, Aquinas thinks, because given that Socrates sat, for God to bring it about that he did not sit would imply God's bringing it about that he sat and did not sit at the same time (25.4). Aquinas thinks that hypothetical and absolute necessities are necessary for the same reason: something is necessary whose contradictory implies a contradiction (25.3). There is a difference, however, in that hypothetical necessity is time-relative. From the fact that with hypothetical necessity Socrates sits, nothing follows about whether Socrates will sit or was sitting at some other time. By contrast, if humans are animals with absolute necessity, they are always animals.

Cambridge University Press

0521821401 - Summa Theologiae: Questions on God

Edited by Brian Davies and Brian Leftow

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Introduction*

Aquinas thinks that it is absolutely necessary that God will his own goodness, but that he need not will anything to exist outside himself. Nonetheless, if God has willed that Socrates sit, this has hypothetical necessity – in his eternal present (10.1), it is necessarily so while it is so – and in this case this does entail his willing it at all future times, since his will is immutable (19.3). (This raises a further question, of how God can will changes without changing his will, which Aquinas takes up in 19.7.) Now, the reason this muddies the waters emerges precisely from the fact that Aquinas sees hypothetical necessities as necessary due to their connection to contradictions, just as absolute necessities are. For then it seems that the proper way to distinguish the two cases is this: absolute necessities are necessarily necessary. Their contradictories are contradictions and could not have failed to be so. Hypothetical necessities are necessary, but only contingently necessary. Their contradictories are contradictions, but could have failed to be such. If this is so, then God necessarily wills everything that he wills. But this is not because he needed to, and he need not have necessarily willed it. If I have interpreted the modality correctly here – a big if, because Aquinas's thinking about modality is hard to puzzle out – Aquinas does not actually save the claim that God wills contingently anything he wills. But oddly enough, this does not matter much. There is no problem in the claim that God did not need to act as he did and that it is up to him what is necessarily true of him 'hypothetically'. These things leave God's action healthily free.

Still, Aquinas does want to say that God wills some things with absolute necessity and some with only hypothetical necessity. Does this entail God's having two acts of will, then? We can see what Aquinas would say here from what he says in a parallel case. God wills some things to be so at all times, for example, that there be the outermost heaven (10.6). He wills others to be so now and not later, for example, that a certain human being is alive. So it seems that his will changes. Aquinas replies that, on the contrary, he has one changeless act of will, which changelessly wills changes to occur, so that some things are so only now (and then otherwise later), while others are always so (19.7). A difference in the temporal status of the object of will does not entail a different act of will. In the same way, Aquinas would say that a difference in the modal status of the object of will does not entail a modally different act of will. God has one act of will, which wills states of affairs of both kinds.