Analytical Table of Contents

The following Article titles are paraphrased; in the text itself, they are given both in paraphrase and in literal translation.

Commentator's Introduction *page* xvii
What Is God? xvii
Regulating the Firehose xviii
Perplexity xviii
Removing Obstacles xx
The Partnership of Faith and Reason xxii
Pushback xxiii
Esotericism xxv
Aristotle, the "Destroyer," and Reason, the "Whore" xxvi
Things to Learn and Unlearn xxviii
St. Thomas and Modern Science xxx
Why Now? xxxiv
Overview xxxv
Architecture xxxvii
Housekeeping xli
Acknowledgments xliii

Question 1, Article 1: Is it reasonable to think that the reach of our reasoning needs to be extended by divine Revelation? 1
It would hardly be persuasive for St. Thomas to say that we need divine Revelation just because divine Revelation tells us so. He does quote from Holy Scripture to show that it confirms his conclusions, but the argument in this Article is based squarely on reason: We need Revelation because some of the things we need to know cannot be found out by reason alone, and because even many of those things which can be are very difficult for reason to ascertain.
Text, Paraphrase, and Commentary 1

Discussion: Preambles to Faith – and Preambles to Reason? 13

Question 2, Article 3: Does God exist – is He real? 15
When St. Thomas asks whether God exists, this is not like asking whether Zeus, Apollo, or Athena exists. Rather we are asking whether there is a Something or Someone on which all else depends. None of the five arguments St. Thomas presents for the existence of God depend on Scripture. Each is purely philosophical. We are not in the realm of faith, but still in the realm of the reasonable preambles to faith – although faith goes on to purify and fortify reason, and confirms the conclusions that reason has attained.
Text, Paraphrase, and Commentary 15
Discussion: Why is There Something and not Rather Nothing? Hey, Whatever 37
Discussion: Maimonides on the First Cause 39
Discussion: Does Purposeful Order Really Require a Designer? 39

Question 3, Article 7: Is God completely simple, rather than in some way composite? 42
In everyday language, something is called simple if it is easy to understand. Here, though, simplicity is contrasted with being composite – with having distinct aspects or parts. Composite things might be compounds of bodily parts or portions, of matter and form, of nature and "suppositum," of existence and essence, of genus and difference, or of substance and accident. The Tradition claims that God is not composite in any of these ways. Is it correct?
Text, Paraphrase, and Commentary 42
Discussion: The Same All Through 54
Discussion: Maimonides and the Divine Simplicity 56

Question 4, Article 1: Is God "perfect" or complete? 58
In the received view, God is perfect, meaning that He is complete, lacking in nothing, without undeveloped potentialities; He is always full. Contemporary English tends to use the term "perfect" differently, in the sense of what is entirely good. Though one might anticipate that if God is perfect, then He is entirely good, the question of His goodness per se is not explored until Question 6. Here we are asking only about His fullness or complete actuality.
Text, Paraphrase, and Commentary 58
Discussion: Creation Revisited 66
Discussion: Out of the Frying Pan, Into the Fire 66

Question 6, Article 2: Is God the summit or apex of good? 68
To say that God is the supreme good – literally, the summit of good – means more than that He is good. It even means more than that He is the best good. The claim is that He is good in a better way than all other goods. He is the uncreated Good from which all finite possibilities of

good flow downward. His goodness and theirs cannot even be measured on the same scale. He is the Uncreated Source of all that is. He is the Original, of which created goods are but copies. Could even that be true?
Text, Paraphrase, and Commentary 68
Discussion: Highest Good, okay – but why say God is Good in the First Place? 80

Question 49, Article 2: Granted that God is the supreme good, is He also the cause of evil? 81
This is the only Article we take up out of order. Could it be that since the universe contains things like cancer and tapeworms, God is just evil? Or that in some sense God is good, but His idea of good is entirely unintelligible and irrelevant to us? Or that, in His goodness, God doesn't mean to do us evil, but the evils we suffer are beneath His notice? St. Thomas addresses such concerns elsewhere in the Treatise on the One God. The equally dreadful possibility considered and rejected in the present Article is that God is indeed the Creator of good – but also the Creator of evil. Even if we understand the reasoning behind the proposition that God is altogether good, we may yet suffer the nagging doubt that He couldn't be. For where would evil come from, if not from Him? The Universal Doctor presents rational solutions to such doubts.
Text, Paraphrase, and Commentary 81
Discussion: Why Doesn't God's Providence Just Eliminate all Evils From Things? 93
Discussion: Why Do Bad Things Happen to Good People? 95
Discussion: Does God Cause Spiritual Blindness and Hardness of Heart? 97

Question 7, Article 1: Is God infinite? 100
Although at several points we have spoken as though God is infinite, up to now the fact has not actually been proven. His infinity follows closely from other things we have considered. However, to show that this is the case, St. Thomas has to delve into what "infinity" means.
Text, Paraphrase, and Commentary 100
Discussion: Is God Infinite the Same Way Numbers are Infinite? 110

Question 8, Article 1: Is God in all things? 111
The idea that God is in all things has often been taken as implying pantheism – that God is all things. But doesn't the Tradition say that God is in all things? It does. Then isn't pantheism true? And if it isn't true, then is the Tradition mistaken to say that He is in all things? In order to investigate whether He is in all things, St. Thomas must also consider what has traditionally been meant by the assertion.
Text, Paraphrase, and Commentary 111
Discussion: But Doesn't God Use Secondary Causes? 123

Question 9, Article 1: Is God exempt from every sort of change? 126

As St. Thomas is aware, God's changelessness is rather plainly implied by His perfection, since any change would be a decline from that perfection. Nonetheless, the Objectors present various reasons for thinking that God could not be immutable – that He would have to be subject to change – and so these need solutions. In our own day too, many people are inclined to object, thinking that an unchanging God would be "static." Since in all of our finite experience, to be a living person is to be immersed in flux and change, we suppose that an unchanging God would be frozen in time, never doing anything, no more living or personal than a statue. But this is a false picture. We should not say that the eternal God is doing nothing, but that everything He does, He is doing all the time.

Text, Paraphrase, and Commentary 126
Discussion: Immutability and Trustworthiness 136

Question 10, Article 2: Is God eternal? 138
If God is eternal, then he has no beginning and no end, and His action extends to every moment, rather than being limited in time as our action is. St. Thomas unpacks the implications of these ideas. We already know from the previous Article that eternity has to do with changelessness, and we already know from Question 9 that God is changeless – so He must be eternal too, and there is nothing left to do in this Article – right? Not quite. Besides, most of the heavy lifting in this Article is in the Replies to the Objections.

Text, Paraphrase, and Commentary 138
Discussion: Eternity in Their Hearts 150

Question 11, Article 3: Is God a single Being? Is there just one of Him? 155
Many polytheists would be perfectly happy to borrow yet another god from Christianity, but only so long as they could demote Him from the One God to a god among gods: "What have you got against the others?" The naïve assumption is that God belongs to the genus "gods" – that He is just one more of those things (but in Christian belief, the real one). St. Thomas has argued that He is not that sort of thing at all – in fact, He is not a "sort of thing." Moreover He is of such a nature that there could not be more than of Him. But how do we know He is one? Even someone who considers the many gods of polytheism false, foolish, base, demonic, or all too human may ask "But is monotheism true?"

Text, Paraphrase, and Commentary 155
Discussion: Formal Gods, Informal Gods, and God 169
Discussion: The Trinity, Take Two 170
Discussion: Weak and Beggarly? 174

Question 12, Article 13: Can we gain a loftier knowledge of God by divine grace than by our natural powers of reason? 176
The term "grace" refers to unmerited gifts of God, among which might be gifts of knowledge. Does God offer knowledge over and above what

we could have learned just through the still earlier gift of our inbuilt reasoning powers? At stake is the authenticity of the deeds, and the truth of the teachings, recorded in Holy Scripture. Thomas Aquinas always takes natural reason as far as he can before turning to what God has revealed by grace; he wants us to trust Revelation, but only authentic Revelation. Now, though, he turns the inquiry around. In order to know all that we need to know about God, do we need His grace at all? This inquiry amplifies the one in Question 1, Article 1.

Text, Paraphrase, and Commentary 176
Discussion: If We Can't see God, then how do the Blessed see him? 192

Question 13, Article 12: Granted that we do not perceive the essence of God, still, can we affirm anything positive about Him? 195
Can we form true propositions about God? Some say no – but one would have to know a great deal about God in order to be certain that one could not know anything else about Him. At every stage of his writing, St. Thomas has taught that what we can say about God is limited. In this life we do not see His very essence, and the mere backwash of His glory would overwhelm us. However, whether our little speeches are inadequate is not the question: Rather we should ask whether their inadequacy makes them false. Can we say anything positive about God? Throughout this book St. Thomas has been making affirmative statements about Him. But even if we can, then what kinds can we make, and in what sense should we take them? We might even ask what it is about the reality of God that makes talking about His reality so difficult – and yet so important.

Text, Paraphrase, and Commentary 195
Discussion: Illogical Logics and Scrambled Affirmations 213

Question 14, Article 1: Does God know anything? 218
According to certain views, God has no knowledge. Perhaps He is just a great world process that grinds on without knowing what it is doing. Or perhaps God is the All, which is not intelligent, but contains intelligent parts – that is, us. Or perhaps, although God does not have knowledge from the first, He may acquire knowledge. It is not difficult to refute such opinions. But where does all this leave us? Can He know anything? Does He know anything? What does He know? And how well does He know it?

Text, Paraphrase, and Commentary 218
Discussion: Don't Tell me "Everything" – What Does God Know? 232

Question 16, Article 5: Is God, in His own being, truth? 237
Doubtless many readers take the saying that God is truth in a merely figurative sense, as a dramatic way to emphasize that He loves truth, reveals truth, and loves those who live according to His truth and are truthful themselves. All of those claims are made in Scripture too. But

could the statement that God simply is truth be meant literally? We should not carelessly dismiss the possibility, for by this point in the Treatise on the One God many other startling things about God have already proven to be the case. St. Thomas investigates whether this is another.

Text, Paraphrase, and Commentary 237
Discussion: Is Truth About Things or About Sentences? 246
Discussion: Does Truth Really Lie in Correspondence? 247
Discussion: The Thought That Stops Thought 249

Question 18, Article 3: Is it fitting to call God alive? 251
Life science students are taught that living things are distinguished from nonliving things by the functions they perform, such as nutrition, excretion, and adaptation to the environment. Such lists of functions are not drawn up with a view to life in general, but only with a view to biological life. It would be foolish to say that God is not alive because He does not excrete. In order to find out whether the Tradition is correct in attributing life to God, we need a better criterion of what it is to be alive, and it must be generally applicable, not crafted just to produce the conclusion that He is. St. Thomas has such a criterion, and puts it to work.

Text, Paraphrase, and Commentary 251
Discussion: In the Hands of the Living God 269

Question 19, Article 3: Does God have to will what He wills – is He compelled by necessity? 273
The hypothesis that God's will is completely free, that He does not have to will what He wills, seems to present difficulties. Would it mean that His will does not have to be good or wise? That would make him an arbitrary tyrant. But the hypothesis that His will is not free, that it is compelled by necessity, that He cannot otherwise than as He does, turns Him into a kind of Fate. Presumably even our prayers to such a God would be pointless, because for Him to respond to a prayer would be to will something different than what He would have willed had the prayer not been offered. St. Thomas distinguishes the question of whether there is anything that God wills by necessity from the question of whether He wills all that He wills by necessity. These questions turn out to have different answers.

Text, Paraphrase, and Commentary 273
Discussion: Does the Necessity of God's Knowledge Make Our Acts Necessary? 289
Discussion: The Range of God's Freedom 291

Question 20, Article 2: Does God love all things? 296
Love is an attitude that exults in the sheer existence of the other and wills the other's good. In the words of the Thomist Josef Pieper, it wants to say

"It is good that you exist; it is good that you are in this world!" Thus it is not primarily a condition of the feelings but an attitude of the will. But does God love the things that He creates? Does He cherish even the least of His creatures, as the Tradition claims? Much earlier we established that He is good. But does He will to impart good? Objections can be offered from many different directions. Of course Scripture asserts God's love for all things, but St. Thomas inquires whether this can be demonstrated by logical considerations alone.

Text, Paraphrase, and Commentary 296
Discussion: Lover, Beloved, and Most Perfectly Liberal Giver 311
Discussion: Does God Even Love US With the Love of Friendship? 313

Question 21, Article 4: Is everything God does characterized by both mercy and justice? 318

Mercy is the will to relieve another's suffering. Justice is the will to give another person what he deserves. Sometimes, giving him what he deserves makes him miserable. Moreover, even apart from punishment, people do suffer. These facts make it difficult to see how mercy and justice can coexist. Yet according to the Tradition, they do. The claim is not merely that God is sometimes just and sometimes merciful – but that He is always both in every act at every time. How could this even be possible?

Text, Paraphrase, and Commentary 318
Discussion: Can Justice and Mercy be Reconciled in Human Affairs Too? 331

Question 22, Article 2: Does God's providence rule everything, not just things in general but also particular things? 333

The term "providence" refers to God's detailed rule of the universe, to His provision for all things. Why should He pay attention to details? In particular, why should He take notice of all our doings and govern what happens to us? According to a certain common view of God, He doesn't. At most He exercises "general" providence, for example setting up space and time and the sorts of regularities that occupy physicists, but not paying attention to us. Our ability to govern even our own small affairs is limited. How then can a Being in charge of the whole universe take notice when each sparrow falls, and number each hair on our heads? Besides, the great among us do not trouble themselves much with the affairs of their underlings. So wouldn't God be above all that sort of thing?

Text, Paraphrase, and Commentary 333
Discussion: Like an Archer who Aims at a Target 366
Discussion: Does God Care for Oxen? Revisited 367

Question 25, Article 3: Is God all-powerful, or omnipotent? 371

It may seem that this Article is unnecessary – isn't God's omnipotence already plain from the earlier demonstration of His complete actuality

and His primacy in the order of causes? Yes, and in that sense, the Article proves nothing new. However, our imaginary Objectors think they have compelling reasons to think that God couldn't be omnipotent. If they are right, then despite appearances, the previous arguments must have been flawed somehow, and we need to backtrack and find out how. St. Thomas finds that each Objection misunderstands what it means for God to be omnipotent. So despite the wording of the "whether" in the title of this Article, the real question is not so much whether God is omnipotent, but what it means for Him to be omnipotent.

Text, Paraphrase, and Commentary 371
Discussion: Omnipotence Does not Imply Voluntarism 391

Question 26, Article 3: Is God the beatitude of the beatified, the very blessedness of the blessed ones in heaven? 393
Beatitude is supreme happiness. The query before us is not whether God will give the blessed supreme happiness, but whether He is their supreme happiness. To put it another way, it is not whether He will give them beatitude as something different from Himself, but whether He will give it to them by giving them Himself. The answer, interestingly, depends on the sense in which the question is asked – for there are two ways of taking it, and they must be treated differently. With this Article we tremble at the threshold of the Gospel.

Text, Paraphrase, and Commentary 393
Discussion: Loitering at the Gate 402
Discussion: The Broader Argument 403

Commentator's Conclusion: Preamble to What? 409
We saw at the outset of the book that Thomas Aquinas considers reason a preamble to faith. But to faith in what? Human life is triply haunted, by the specter of absurdity, by the burden of brokenness and guilt, and by the dread of mortality and incompleteness. Can there be meaning, can there be healing and forgiveness, can we be everlastingly fulfilled? According to St. Thomas, the answers to these three questions are provided in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, who bore our sins and opened the path to the Father. This scandalizes us because if the Gospel is true, then the facile and comforting proposal of "many roads to heaven" is false. It scandalizes us even more because it asks something of us. And so the Treatise on the One God is not the end of our investigation, but the beginning.

Index of Scriptural References 413
General Index 415