

PART II
ANALOGIES OF THE DIVINE

“THE GREAT VISIBLE GOD”: SOCRATES, ARISTOTLE, AND THOMAS AQUINAS ON THE WAY FROM NATURE TO NATURE’S GOD

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The Five Ways of Thomas Aquinas (*Summa Theologiae* I, 2, 3) are indebted to a metaphysical doctrine about God that was formulated in a prototypical way by Socrates and then later cast in a distinctive form by Aristotle.¹ The prototypical outline is suggested by Socrates in a conversation reported by Xenophon, which I would like to discuss here first. Next I shall relate this Socratic outline to Thomas Aquinas’s metaphysics. Finally, I shall discuss how understanding the approach of Socrates in light of Aristotle is (to my mind) indispensable for appreciating the metaphysics of Thomas, because the Aristotelian clarification pertains to the correlativity of physics with metaphysics: namely, how a visible divine pattern in the universe points to the invisible God.

I. SOCRATIC TEACHING ON GOD

Xenophon testifies in his *Memorabilia* that Socrates, arguing from the manifestly visible order in things, gave a teleological proof for the existence of the divine. In order to rebuke Aristodemus, who was irreligious, Socrates begins with this question:²

[Socrates:] “Suppose that it is impossible to guess the purpose of one creature’s existence, and obvious that another’s serves a

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² The following passages are quoted from Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 1.4, in the Loeb translation *Xenophon in Seven Volumes*, vol. 4 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann, 1979).

useful end, which, in your judgment, is the work of chance, and which of design?"

[Aristodemus:] "Presumably the creature that serves some useful end is the work of design."

Socrates thus begins, *first*, with the implicit question of *whether a causal order exists*. Note that Aristodemus' answer affirms that a causal order exists. His answer to the question is: *Yes, there is purpose, and there is chance*. In a causal order, some things happen according to their intrinsic or extrinsic purposes, whereas other things happen as a result of the intersection of these independent lines of causality. That is, in a causal order, some things are determined by purpose, whereas others result from chance. To this existential affirmation, Aristodemus has no objection.

Socrates seeks, *second*, to find out *what the essence of the causal order might be*. Is it the handiwork (i.e., the creation) of a divinity?

[5] [Socrates:] "Do you not think then that he who created man from the beginning had some useful end in view when he endowed him with his several senses, giving eyes to see visible objects, ears to hear sounds? Would odours again be of any use to us had we not been endowed with nostrils? What perception should we have of sweet and bitter and all things pleasant to the palate had we no tongue in our mouth to discriminate between them? [6] Besides these, are there not other contrivances that look like the results of forethought? Thus the eyeballs, being weak, are set behind eyelids, that open like doors when we want to see, and close when we sleep: on the lids grow lashes through which the very winds filter harmlessly: above the eyes is a coping of brows that lets no drop of sweat from the head hurt them. The ears catch all sounds, but are never choked with them. Again, the incisors of all creatures are adapted for cutting, the molars for receiving food from them and grinding it. And again, the mouth, through which the food they want goes in, is set near the eyes and nostrils; but since what goes out is unpleasant, the ducts through which it passes are turned away and removed as far as possible from the organs of sense. With such signs of forethought in these arrangements, can you doubt whether they are the works of chance or design?"

[Aristodemus:] “No, of course not. [7] When I regard them in this light they do look very like the handiwork of a wise and loving creator.”

Aristodemus thus answers the question about the essence of the causal order by agreeing to liken it to the handiwork or creation of a divinity. But note how tentative and qualified his answer is: “when I regard them in this light.” He seems unsure of how far this analogy to our own souls (“wise and loving”) can be pushed back to establish a firm knowledge of the creator.

Therefore, in reply to this objection of Aristodemus (*Perhaps the essence of the causal order is that it proceeds from something like our soul—wise and loving—but we cannot be sure*) to Socrates’ question, Socrates probes further about the essence of the causal order, i.e., whether it is *essentially* the work of a creator:

[Socrates:] “What of the natural desire to beget children, the mother’s desire to rear her babe, the child’s strong will to live and strong fear of death?”

[Aristodemus:] “Undoubtedly these, too, look like the contrivances of one who deliberately willed the existence of living creatures.”

Note again how the apparent affirmation of Aristodemus is highly qualified. (*Yes, they “look like” acts of intentional intelligence.*) Socrates notices the qualification (“look like”) and so he probes further, testing for Aristodemus’ lack of humility:

[8] [Socrates:] “Do you think you have any wisdom yourself?”

[Aristodemus:] “Oh! Ask me a question and judge from my answer.”

[Socrates:] “And do you suppose that wisdom is nowhere else to be found, although you know that you have a mere speck of all the earth in your body and a mere drop of all the water, and that of all the other mighty elements you received, I suppose, just a scrap towards the fashioning of your body? But as for mind, which alone, it seems, is without mass, do you think that you snapped it up by a lucky accident, and that the orderly ranks of

all these huge masses, infinite in number, are due, forsooth, to a sort of absurdity?"

[9] [Aristodemus:] "Yes; for I don't see the master hand, whereas I see the makers of things in this world."

Now, at last, Aristodemus' true opinion about the essence of the causal order has come out. Socrates has learned that Aristodemus in fact objects to the essence of the causal order being considered by analogy as the handiwork of a "wise and loving creator." Aristodemus, a pretentious sophisticate, considers the analogy to be too anthropomorphic. He now professes materialistic positivism, saying that although he can see human artists at work, he has never seen God.

Socrates therefore further unfolds the analogy of our souls, to a *third* point, about an essential *property* of the causal order, so as to provide an answer to Aristodemus' second objection ("anthropomorphism" regarding the creator, which Aristodemus has added to his first objection of "uncertainty" regarding what creation "looks like"):

[Socrates:] "Neither do you see your own soul, which has the mastery of the body; so that, as far as that goes, you may say that you do nothing by design, but everything by chance."

With this, Socrates has now articulated a property that flows from the essence of the causal order, namely, that not all causes in a causal order have to be material.

Aristodemus realizes that he now has no honest argument or better analogy that can support his previously declared positivism. There is no necessary reason why, in principle, immaterial or unseen causes must be denied as possibly having visible effects. And so Aristodemus now abandons his materialism. But to this *property* of the causal order that Socrates has just articulated (i.e., that there is no reason for it to exclude *immaterial* causes, because not all causes need be material) Aristodemus proceeds to make a *third* objection:

[Xenophon:] Here Aristodemus exclaimed: [10] [Aristodemus:] "Really, Socrates, I don't despise the godhead. But I think it is too great to need my service."

To this new objection—that even if the creator is indeed something like our souls, he must be even more unlike them, and will therefore transcend our attempts to grasp him—Socrates replies by unfolding the analogy to our souls still further:

[Socrates:] “Then the greater the power that deigns to serve you, the more honour it demands of you.”

[11] [Aristodemus:] “I assure you, that if I believed that the gods pay any heed to man, I would not neglect them.”

Aristodemus still considers the analogy to be too anthropomorphic, but since he is unable to refute it, he now pivots to argue, not for God’s non-existence, but rather for God’s unknowable and uncaring super-existence.

Next, Socrates replies to Aristodemus’ objection (i.e., that we must deny that God is personal in a human sense, because he must be more *impersonal* than he is personal) now by arguing that God is rather personal in a pre-eminent sense, and therefore *most truly personal*. Socrates thus establishes a *fourth* point about *the cause* of the property (not all causes are material) that flows from the essence of the causal order (which is essentially ordered by a wise and loving divinity); namely, that the *cause* of the property of any immaterial causes within the causal order must be *most truly personal* because of its care for man (*Memorabilia* 1.11–14):

“Do you... yet think that the gods take no care of you? What are they to do, to make you believe that they are heedful of you?”

Socrates concludes, from the pre-eminence (compared to material causality) of *immaterial* causality, that the immaterial source of the causal order is not only *personal* (a property established on analogy to our souls), but that divinity is, not unknowable and uncaring, but rather possessing the best and most personal qualities of being *wise and loving*, since it is the invisible personal knowledge and care of the divinity that is visibly manifest—in spite of all chance events—in the various purposes of the visible causal order.

But still Aristodemus is skeptical, and he demands direct commerce with the unseen divinity, rather than to accept the indirect inferences of merely mental reasoning:

[15] [Aristodemus:] “I will believe when they send counsellors, as you declare they do, saying, ‘Do this, avoid that.’”

Socrates then concludes with an attempt to show Aristodemus how unreasonable his skepticism is. At the very least, conventional piety towards divinity is more reasonable than Aristodemus’ intellectual qualms, because at least conventional religion does not deny, like Aristodemus, the eminently reasonable analogy from our souls that divinity must be personal, in an eminently wise and loving way (*Memorabilia* 1.15–19).

I would conjecture that Aristotle inherited this fourfold Socratic pattern of argumentation and made it his own. As I have outlined above, the Socratic line of argumentation in Xenophon arguably shows a nascent Aristotelian procedure; namely, the method of proceeding from (1) *existence* to (2) the *essence* of what exists, to (3) a *property* flowing from that essence, to (4) the *causes* of that property.

In Socrates’ prototypical articulation of this pattern, we saw him affirm (1) that a *causal order*, comprised of both purpose and chance, *exists*; (2) that the *essence* of this order is that it is *created* by an immaterial divinity who is analogous to a wise and loving soul; (3) that this essentially created order, insofar as it manifests key *properties* indebted to *immaterial causes*, points definitively to that immaterial divine source of creation; and (4) that the only proportionate cause of such intentional immaterial properties is the invisible *personal agency* of their likewise immaterial, spiritual source.

Like Socrates, Aristotle sought to argue for the reality of the unseen Deity, basing his *physical* proof on the *visible* order of God’s effects. This proof proceeds from the *physics* of the causal order. I would argue that the same procedure characterizes Aquinas’s First Way. Further, like Socrates, Aristotle also made use of the analogy from the *invisible* soul to make a *teleological* proof for the existence of the divine. This proof proceeds from the *metaphysics* of the causal order. I would argue that the same procedure characterizes Aquinas’s Fifth Way.

The correlative relationship between the two proofs, physical and metaphysical, is what I think ultimately structures the later Thomistic analysis. In retrospect, I believe this Thomistic analysis also sheds light on the fourfold pattern of argument characteristic of both Socrates and Aristotle.

II. THOMISTIC TEACHING ON THE WAYS TO GOD

The teleological proof for the existence of God is most crisply summarized in the Fifth Way of Thomas Aquinas to demonstrate God's existence. The Fifth Way is arguably a compressed version of the argument that we just saw Socrates making to Aristodemus. In order to understand the probative force it holds for both Socrates and Aquinas, I think Aristotle's conception of teleology supplies the requisite clarifications.

Aristotle's understanding of teleology is controversial. Despite the controversy, I would maintain that all five of Thomas' famous Ways are characteristically Aristotelian. My position contrasts with *Aristotle on Teleology*,³ in which Monte Ransome Johnson denies that there is a 'teleological' proof for the existence of God in Aristotle. In particular, Johnson argues that the fragmentary evidence from Aristotle's *On Philosophy* (*Peri Philosophias*) cannot be read as evidence that Aristotle conceives of a 'teleological' argument for the existence of God.

In the section of this essay that will follow the current one, I wish to propose a re-reading of three fragments from *On Philosophy* that Johnson discusses, and then add one from the *Protrepticus*. This fragmentary evidence from Aristotle, I argue, can help us understand how Aristotle conceives of a 'teleological' argument for the existence of God that is correlative to the physical approach from nature to nature's God. Once we properly distinguish physical from metaphysical proofs in Aristotle, I think we may see how the metaphysical 'teleological' proof must not be set in false opposition to the physical proof from motion, because the two are in fact correlative.

But before I pursue this point by discussing my chosen four fragments, let me first address the controversy not from the controverted standpoint of Aristotle, but from the later, more articulated, standpoint of Aquinas. That way, I may give a preliminary refutation in principle of the false dichotomy that I believe informs Johnson's reading of the fragments.

³ Monte Ransome Johnson, *Aristotle on Teleology* (Oxford Oxford University Press, 2005). See also the reviews at <<http://ndpr.nd.edu/review.cfm?id=6883>> and <<http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/bmcr/2006/2006-08-37.html>>.

Johnson characterizes the Aristotelian position as proceeding from a physical argument for the necessity of a First Mover rather than from a 'teleological' natural theology proof. In one way, this is definitely true of Aristotle; the former procedure is physics, the latter metaphysics. Aristotle definitely has a focus on physics. (I would even go further and affirm, with Benedict Ashley, O.P., and with that strand of the Thomistic commentatorial tradition that he represents, that metaphysics is not known to exist unless physics proves the existence of its subject matter).

Yet, *pace* Johnson, I believe Aristotle also distinguishes the correlative relationship between the physical and the metaphysical aspects involved in the discussion of the existence of God. As Benedict Ashley has put it to me, in *Physics* VIII Aristotle proves that the First Mover must be the first efficient cause of motion in our universe, but *Metaphysics* XII proves from final causality that the First Mover must be the cause of motion in any universe; in other words, the former is a physical proof *from creatures*, the latter a metaphysical one *from the nature of the Creator*.⁴

Ashley and I thus would argue that the physical proof must come first in the order of knowledge (*prima quoad nos*), otherwise we can have no assurance that such a discipline as metaphysics even exists with its own distinctive subject matter (*viz.*, being as being, whether material or immaterial). Once it is demonstrated (in *Physics* VIII) that only the Pure Act of the First Mover can explain the actual activation of change in our material universe, then metaphysics (in *Metaphysics* XII) can consider the final causality involved in the Prime Mover's relation to any universe.

God is the first efficient cause of the being of all beings. Correlatively, this being of all beings exists for a good purpose, the final cause of the universe. Hence we may in a preliminary way refute Johnson's position in general, for his fundamental philosophical orientation is unclear: not only on the distinction between the physical

⁴ I verified this verbal formulation with Fr. Ashley at the 2007 American Maritain Association conference; the italics indicate his qualifications as he emphasized them to me.

and the metaphysical, but also on their correlativity. Of the physical proof, Ashley maintains:

...the demonstration of the existence of a first immaterial cause given in *Physics VIII*...cannot be metaphysical, but is presupposed to metaphysics, that is, First Philosophy.⁵

No step in this argument requires a metaphysical notion of Being as *ens commune*, but only the analysis of *ens mobile* proper to natural science. If the argument were proper to metaphysics, it would be circular, since metaphysics presupposes the argument's conclusion, namely, that immaterial being exists.⁶

For this very reason, Thomas adopts the proof from motion as the “most evident” of his famous Five Ways.

Yet Ashley propounds a thesis about the scarcely appreciated correlativity in the Five Ways: viz., that *Thomas' first three Ways are physical, whereas the Fourth and Fifth are best seen as metaphysical*. Ashley writes:

The second way from *efficient agency* and the third from *necessity* are variations on this first way. Once we understand the first way based on the observed effect that is motion, the second way argues from the *agents* or moved movers that cause the motion. Furthermore, if we consider the efficient causality of these agents, we see that the action of the first immaterial cause is *necessary* if they are to act, since the fact that they as moved movers are in act is merely *contingent*; and this is the third way. Thus the first three of the five ways are based on three effects, all related to efficient causality: (1) the effect of *motion*, (2) the effect of *agency* of the moved movers, and (3) the *necessity* of the first cause for these contingent agents to act and produce the observed motion.... The other two of the five ways... namely, those through formal and final causality...[pertain] more properly not to natural science but to First Philosophy.⁷

⁵ Benedict Ashley, O.P., *The Way toward Wisdom* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 95-96.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 96.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 100-01.

I myself would wish to refine this reading of Thomas's Five Ways.⁸ I would argue that the Second Way indeed proceeds from efficient causality, but that the Third proceeds from the standpoint of material causality, the Fourth from formal causality, and the Fifth from final causality. I think that this seems to better fit the main point of Ashley's clarifications:

Aristotle, after proving in natural science the existence of a God of motion and its immateriality and hence the need and validity of a Metascience broader in scope than natural science itself, left a deeper consideration of this problem to Metascience. Aquinas completed Aristotle's discussion by his famous *Quinque Viae* or Five Ways of proving God's existence. Of these Five Ways the first is rated by Aquinas as "the first and more evident (*manifestior*) because it is taken from motion," the type of change most evident to our senses and proper to natural science [ST I, 2, 3]. This implies that the other four ways somehow epistemologically presuppose the first, not as if they are its corollaries, but because it precedes them in the order of the intuitive evidence of the middle terms that are their premises.

Thus the *Physics* first intuits the existence of motion from sensible observation and then by analysis of motion arrives at the notion of the four causes. The second and third way, presupposing the proof from motion, derive their middle terms from *efficient* causality: the second from the series of efficient causes that produce motion, the third from the possibility or necessity of the effects of efficient causality. The fourth way, however, no longer argues from efficient causality but from *formal* causality (degrees of perfection) and the fifth way from *final* causality. Final causality, however, is nothing but the predetermination of the efficient cause to produce the perfect actualization of the formal cause.⁹

Although there are many different views on the unity (or lack of unity) of the Five Ways, I would argue that the First Way is physical but all the rest are metaphysical. Perhaps this also helps explain why we

⁸ ST I, 2, 3.

⁹ Ashley, *The Way toward Wisdom*, 421.

find in Thomas no more than *five Ways*. Aquinas makes no claim that there are only five, but compare Ashley’s remarks:

No sixth argument from *material* causality is possible since God is the Unmoved Mover, that is Pure Act, while a material cause must be in potency. Yet in all five proofs the notion of being as not only actual but as changing and thus also potential enters into the demonstration, and this concept of potential being is derived from material causality. Aquinas in a rare tone of contempt berates a certain David of Dinant for thinking that God is “prime matter” [*Contra Gentiles*, I, q. 17, n. 139]. Yet this absurdity is found rather frequently in monistic thinkers, who in their struggle to explain the phenomenal world in relation to the Absolute, speak of it “emerging” or “flowing” or “diffusing” from the Absolute and “returning” to it on the analogy of prime matter receiving various forms which it eventually loses.¹⁰

But yet the Third Way does, in its own fashion, involve material causality. That is, the Third Way proceeds from the *inadequacy* of material causality alone, arguing that contingency alone, i.e., material causality alone, without relative degrees of the more and more necessary, is irrational, because this is unable to account for the correlative relation of material causality to formal causality (based on the correlativity of matter to form) in any changing universe.¹¹ And Ashley’s main point still remains true:

Our knowledge of God also excludes any possibility that he could be an *intrinsic* material cause of his effects since he is utterly free of potentiality. Nor, since he is Pure and Necessary Act, can he be the *intrinsic* formal cause or act of anything that is contingent and thus somehow potential. Thus the language sometimes used in monistic worldviews that speaks of the Absolute as the “ground of all beings,” as if the Absolute were the matter out of which phenomenal things are made, or as the “soul of the universe,” as if the Absolute were a form in matter, can

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Cf. Christopher S. Morrissey, “Aquinas’s Third Way as a Reply to Stephen Hawking’s Cosmological Hypothesis,” *Études maritainiennes-Maritain Studies* XXVII (2011): 99–121.

only be understood as metaphors and not proper analogies. Yet the Stoics and other more spiritual monists have called God the Logos, or Energy, or Force, or Soul that animates the material cosmos.¹² For Plotinus too the World Soul was the Third God. But an intrinsic formal cause is correlative to the matter that it informs, and if God were such he would depend for his existence on matter and would not be its free Creator.¹³

Recall that I have already suggested above that the Fifth Way resembles the Socratic teleological argument. Many thinkers express reservations about both formulations; and I think they are right to do so, because, on my view (which I am now revealing, as the main thesis behind this paper), Aquinas's Ways Two through Five acquire their metaphysically demonstrative force only after a first consideration of the physical proof that they in fact presuppose (viz., the First Way), and I maintain this view because of my interpretation of Aristotle (which differs from that of scholars like Johnson). Thus, my "Aristotelian" understanding of the correlativity between physics and metaphysics would allow one to glimpse the strength of the original "Fifth Way" argument that in Socrates had not yet been established as truly demonstrative. In brief, I would argue that Ways Two through Five, as metaphysical, are correlative to the First Way, which is alone purely physical, although it does conclude with a demonstration of the metaphysical order of being.¹⁴

Concerning how the metaphysical proofs (the Second through Fifth Ways) are correlative to the physical proof (the First Way), Ashley's remarks are most helpful in clarifying how to understand this correlativity; namely, that we must understand it from the standpoint of the interrelatedness of the four causes:

Just as matter and form are correlative so that they complement each other, so efficient causality, if it has regular, productive effects that maintain the natural order, is correlative

¹²Ashley notes: "The use of "Word" (*Logos*) in the Gospel of John, chap. 1 is not intended to speak of God in the Stoic sense of a World Soul, but in a Trinitarian sense of a Divine Person" (*The Way toward Wisdom*, 524, n. 44).

¹³ Ashley, *The Way toward Wisdom*, 422.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 97.

to final causality; and all natural science explanations through law-like efficient causality must also be through final causality, that is, they must be teleological (or “teleonomic”)... since nothing occurs in natural processes except through efficient causes that are predetermined to produce effects that have the regularity of a predictable probability.¹⁵

The natural unit has (1) some organization or order (formal cause) and (2) at the same time has potentiality (material “cause”) for becoming other than it is. (3) This potentiality is actualized from outside by another natural unit (efficient cause), and this actualization is either destructive of the unit, or actualizes it in its own line of stability and actuality, and hence is (4) teleological (final “cause”).¹⁶

Given this general philosophical framework that recognizes the correlative aspects within intrinsic causality (matter and form) and extrinsic causality (agent and end), we can now proceed to classify three of Johnson’s fragments from Aristotle’s *On Philosophy*, according to how they speak of causality, whether physically or metaphysically.

III. ARISTOTELIAN TEACHING ON GOD

First, consider the fragment from Cicero, *De natura deorum* (II xxxvii 95), which shows Aristotle arguing for how different levels of *physical* actuality are intuitively grasped by the mind. The thought experiment is an inversion of Plato’s allegory of the cave. But notice that Aristotle’s cave passage is not an allegory. It is a statement about degrees of actuality; some are actually more intelligible in their degree of reality than others.

Contra Plato, Aristotle maintains that the most intelligible is not the mathematical, as if it were more actual than the sensible; the Forms are not the higher reality. For Plato, the escape from the cave, from convention to nature (from *nomos* to *phusis*), while starting with what is naturally perceived by the senses, allegedly ends by attaining a higher,

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 324.

¹⁶ Benedict Ashley, “Change and Process”, in John N. Deely and Raymond J. Nogar, eds., *The Problem of Evolution* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1973), 267-78, quoted from 294.

non-sensory intelligibility. But, for Aristotle, the sensible is not placed in opposition to the intelligible. In his thought experiment, the escape from the cave is likewise from convention to nature, but, unlike Plato, he stresses the need to escape from the mind-dependent to the mind-independent.

Hence the mathematical or the intelligible, insofar as they keep one stuck in one's head with beings of reason (*entia rationis*), will always be of a lesser degree of actuality than real beings (*entia realia*), since real beings are, after all, the mind-independently real from which the mind-dependent is abstracted. This truth is intuitively and immediately grasped by the mind, and it is well illustrated by Aristotle's thought experiment:

Suppose there were men who had always lived underground, in good and well-lighted dwellings, adorned with statues and pictures, and furnished with everything in which those who are thought happy abound. Suppose, however, that they had never gone above ground, but had learned by report and hearsay that there was a divine spirit and power. Suppose that then, at some time, the jaws of the earth opened, and they were able to escape and make their way from those hidden dwellings into these regions which we inhabit. When they suddenly saw earth and seas and skies, when they learned the grandeur of clouds and the power of winds, when they saw the sun and realized not only its grandeur and beauty but also its power, by which it fills the sky with light and makes the day; when, again, night darkened the lands and they saw the whole sky picked out and adorned with stars, and the varying light of the moon as it waxes and wanes, and the risings and settings of all these bodies, and their courses settled and immutable to all eternity; when they saw those things, most certainly would they have judged both that there are gods and that these great works are the works of gods.¹⁷

Johnson thinks Aristotle in this fragment is describing the false inferences of others. Even if this were so, the deeper point to be

¹⁷ Cicero, *De natura deorum* II xxxvii, 95; trans. Jonathan Barnes, "Fragments from Aristotle's Dialogues", in *The Complete Works of Aristotle* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984), 2392.

grasped is one that Aristotle would in fact share with these alleged others, just as he shares it with Socrates: namely, that it is by considering the different degrees of actuality found in beings, whether mind-dependent or mind-independent, that the mind is intuitively led to grasp the physical truth that, if we observe *manifest differences of degree in actuality*, then this must bear witness to a causal order (whereby the higher manifestly imparts actuality to the lower; e.g., a plant generates seeds). Any metaphysical “argument from design” will always rest upon this first principle of physics, which is arrived at intuitively from observations of material causality in actual operation (e.g., in actuality, the parents always give birth to the children, and never vice versa, etc.). It may be only a story, but its metaphysical lesson seems clear; namely, that “there are more things in heaven and earth ... than are dreamt of in your philosophy,” because actual effects will always demand proportionate causes as their explanation.

Yet, although supremely rational, the intuitive awareness (both here in Aristotle’s story and also in Socrates’ teleological argument) of the physical principle of causality that structures the manifest order of actuality in the world has not yet moved beyond attaining intuitive awareness of a polytheistic plurality of higher causes. We may note that Socrates’ proof to Aristodemus of the care of the Deity also remained on this level, not moving higher than a polytheism in its argument.

But consider a fragment from Sextus Empiricus (*Ad math.* IX.20-23), which reports on Aristotle discussing how to proceed analogically from the causal hierarchy of ordered actualities (in their *multiplicity*) to that hierarchy’s ultimate *unitary* cause. It reasons from many actual effects to one First Cause:

Aristotle used to say that men’s concept of god sprang from two sources—the experiences of the soul and the phenomena of the heavens. From the experiences of the soul, because of its inspiration and prophetic power in dreams. For, he says, when the soul gets by itself in sleep, it then assumes its nature and foresees and foretells the future. The soul is also in such a condition when it is severed from the body at death. At all events, he accepts even Homer as having observed this; for he has represented Patroclus, in the moment of his death, as foretelling the death of Hector, and Hector as foretelling the end of Achilles. It was from such events, he says, that men came to

suspect the existence of something divine, of something in itself akin to the soul and of all things most knowledgeable.

And from the heavenly bodies too: seeing by day the revolution of the sun and by night the well-ordered movement of the other stars, they came to think that there was a god who is the cause of such movement and order.¹⁸

I conjecture that for Aristotle the two sources are connected, because, based on our experience of ourselves, with our soul being experienced as a unity with a higher actuality than everything else observable, a unity possessing a greater actuality that acts as the cause of various experienced effects, we can postulate something akin to this unitary soul as likewise being behind the visible effects of the universe.

Moreover, I think a fragment from Philo shows that Aristotle, upon attaining this essential insight of the soul analogy applied to the physical approach to God, does not then conceive of God onto-theologically, i.e., as a 'physical' cause with a somewhat 'physical' nature (along the lines of a Demiurge). Instead, the transition to metaphysics occurs by recognizing that *God cannot be a part of the material universe*.¹⁹ For the universe is only "the great visible God," according to Aristotle (who thereby engages with the heights of speculation adumbrated in Plato's *Timaeus*). That is, for Aristotle, the universe is the great *material* sign of the unseen, *immaterial* First Cause, because the *actuality* of being is the "uncreated and imperishable" effect housed within any humble material being, which thereby points to that being's "uncreated and imperishable" eternal cause:

Aristotle was surely speaking piously and devoutly when he insisted that the universe is uncreated and imperishable, and when he charged with serious blasphemy those people who maintained ...that the great visible God, Who contains in truth

¹⁸ Rose frag. 10, trans. by A.-H. Chroust in *Aristotle: New Light on His Life and on Some of His Lost Works* (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1973).

¹⁹ On this point, there is an excellent summary in diagram form at Robert Sokolowski, *Eucharistic Presence* (Washington, DC: the Catholic University of America Press, 1994), 42-48.

the sun and the moon and the remaining pantheon of the planets and fixed stars, is no better than the work of man’s hands ...²⁰

To be sure, it is in light of Aquinas’s metaphysical doctrine that I would maintain that Aristotle’s emphasis on the *nature of the universe* here is meant to emphasize something about the *nature of God*: God is in no way something material; he has no admixture of potency. Even if the material universe is “uncreated and imperishable,” this is still trumped by the immaterial “uncreated and imperishable” Source of actuality who invisibly gives, and sustains, the *existence* of “the great visible God.” *The universe itself* thus supplies the First Way to the great invisible God. Therefore this phrase—“the great visible God”—ought to be seen as a kind of poetic shorthand for Aristotle’s proof from motion. I realize this interpretation is controversial (and leaves me open to charges of anachronism), but I would maintain it on the basis that I only wish to read Aristotle in the same spirit that Aquinas did.

Admittedly, none of these fragments, strictly speaking, offer a *metaphysical* teleological proof for God. But I argue that they do offer the necessary insights into the *physical* realm that I think are implicitly part of such a proof, once the transition from the material to the immaterial is made via the proof from motion. It is this very proof from motion that I believe they are suggesting, with their various accounts of the path from nature to nature’s God.

How, then, is such an approach from nature to nature’s God a path of thought from creatures, one ultimately correlative with the properly metaphysical demonstration of God’s nature as what primarily causes the teleological ordering of “the great visible God”? Consider this fourth passage, a passage from Aristotle’s *Protrepticus* that shows how the mind wisely attains metaphysical knowledge of the existence of God (by means of understanding, as far as is rationally possible, the nature of the God who is the unitary, immaterial source of the ordered actuality in all beings).²¹ In this remarkable *Protrepticus* passage, Aristotle says that any human thought thinking about the diverse actions of *secondary causality* in the universe implicitly presupposes the actuality of God (Thought Thinking Itself) and that the explicit

²⁰ Chroust, p. 462, n. 213. [Ross 13, R2 14, R3 12, W 13], Leg Alleg 3.32.97-99.

²¹ Aristotle, *Protrepticus* (from Iamblichus), B27 = 35.5-14 = dP 66.1-9 = A25.

recognition of this is human wisdom's highest achievement. Human wisdom's highest achievement is coming to the explicit realization of the *primary causality* that human thought's activity must actually presuppose in all its acts:

...the conception of an actually existing, wise principle and ruler of all: it is *this* that would have to underlie all cognition as its ground; it is *this* that both would dwell together with contemplative wisdom, and it would be proper for it to do so.²²

Aristotle's suggestion seems to be that the one creating First Cause can only be *personal* because that is what a person thinking about Pure Act will realize: that Pure Act is the Thought Thinking Itself that all wise thought thinks. The purpose of all our activity is to attain what "will best promote the contemplation of God" (*Eudemian Ethics* VIII 1249b14-21). Thus, for Aristotle, physics has an indispensable correlative role to metaphysics' teleological "natural theology" about nature's God, because the physical approach first secures the intellectual insights we need to attain a fully rational contemplation of God as Pure Act. Then, at its peak, such thinking becomes truly metaphysical, i.e., self-reflexively aware of its cognitive kinship with the divine.

IV. THE CORRELATIVITY OF PHYSICS WITH METAPHYSICS

Because the metaphysical contemplation of God has rational value only if it stays in touch with the physical and does not contradict it, I have argued here about how for us the knowledge of Pure Act as the highest *final cause* must be correlative with our *self-reflexive* knowledge of creatures, i.e., as beings existing within the asymmetrical system of potency and act, an asymmetrical system which becomes most manifest when we observe examples of efficient causality (e.g., everything moved is moved by another, etc.).

Yet many thinkers erect obstacles to the delicate balance of both physics and metaphysics required by such an Aristotelian-Thomistic natural theology. For example, Johnson himself criticizes Chroust's

²² My translation from the Greek in Iamblichus. Cf. M. R. Johnson with D. S. Hutchinson, "Authenticating Aristotle's *Protrepticus*," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* XXIX (2005): 193-294.

reading of the fragments, siding with Ross against Brentano on the matter of Aristotle’s theology, artificially setting efficient causality at odds with God’s final causality. But in the spirit of Jacques Maritain, who to my mind has already detailed the reasons why Johnson should be regarded as having picked the losing side in that debate,²³ we should simply note here that there is no need to force an artificial decision and to choose one proof over the other, setting the physical against the metaphysical. In his exegesis, Johnson thinks it necessary to choose the physical over the metaphysical, abandoning the nuances possible in reading Aristotle that commentators like Aquinas and Maritain have seen and that I have tried here to recapitulate by distinguishing the physical and metaphysical thought which I have discerned in my four fragments chosen from Aristotle.

But it is interesting to note that Johnson’s interpretation of Aristotle—to emphasize the physical procedure in Aristotle at the expense of the metaphysical—is atypical. Typically, scholars choose the *metaphysical* over the physical in their exegesis of Aristotle, as when it is denied that Aristotle’s God is an efficient cause of anything, but rather only a final cause. As Maritain has observed:

Aristotle is often credited with certain errors made by his disciples or commentators, especially about ...causality. But a careful study of the text proves that...[he did not] teach that God is not the efficient cause of the world and moves it only as the end, or good, which it desires. (The passage in the *Metaph.*, xii, 7, means simply that God moves as final cause or object of love the [angelic] intelligence which moves the first heaven; he does not affirm that God can act only as final cause and has not made things. On the contrary, in *Metaph.* ii, 1, 993 b 28, he says that the heavenly bodies are dependent on the first cause, not only for their motion, but for their very being. Cf. *Metaph.* vi, 1, 1026 b 17.) Cf. also the passage from Alexander of Aphrodisias...in which

²³ See his “Marginal Notes on Aristotle,” in Jacques Maritain, *Bergsonian Philosophy and Thomism* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 349-77, esp. 360.

God's efficient causality in Aristotle's system is admirably brought out.²⁴

Maritain refers here at the end to the passage in which Alexander says that Aristotle "leads us from the things which are themselves on the lowest plane, but most familiar to us, up to the Father, who has made all things, to God the most sublime, and proves that as the founder [i.e., the one who works on metals] is the cause of the unity of the globe and the brass [meridian in an armillary sphere], so the Divine Power, author of unity and maker of all things, is for all beings the cause of their being what they are."²⁵

I have argued that the *locus classicus* for this demonstration from nature to nature's God—which ultimately contemplates what we can know of God's divine nature simply by reasoning about it—is found in a conversation with Socrates reported by Xenophon. It then acquires probative force with Aristotle's articulation of the correlative physical considerations. In Aquinas's Five Ways, we see it preserved as the way of wisdom, that ancient Greek way from *the great visible God* (from physical nature) to the metaphysical reality of *God in himself*, a way that has remained, and shall always remain, part of Christian patrimony.²⁶

²⁴ Jacques Maritain, *Introduction to Philosophy* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 54, n.2.

²⁵ *Commentary on the Metaphysics* at 1045a36, quoted in Maritain, *Introduction*, 53.

²⁶ Cf. Wayne Hankey, *God in Himself: Aquinas' Doctrine of God as Expounded in the Summa Theologiae*, Oxford Theological Monographs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), reprinted in 2000, in the series Oxford Scholarly Classics.