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Thomas Aquinas on God's Existence and Simplicity

Summa Theologiae

Part I, Question 2. Does God Exist?

With respect to this question there are three points of inquiry:

1. Is it self-evident that God exists?
2. Can we demonstrate that God exists?
3. Does God exist?

Article 1. Is it self-evident that God exists?

1. It seems that 'God exists' is self-evidently true. For we say that things are self-evident to us when we know them by nature, as by nature we know first principles. But as Damascene observes when beginning his book, 'the knowledge that God exists is implanted by nature in everybody'.¹ So, 'God exists' is self-evidently true.

2. Moreover, a proposition is self-evident if we perceive its truth immediately upon perceiving the meaning of its terms – a characteristic of first principles of demonstration (according to Aristotle).² For example, when we know what wholes and parts are, we know at once that wholes are always bigger than their parts. But once we understand the meaning of the word 'God', we immediately see that God exists. For the word means 'that than which nothing greater can be signified'. So, since what exists in thought and fact is greater than what exists in thought alone, and since, once we understand the word 'God', he exists in thought, he must also exist in fact. It is, therefore, self-evident that God exists.

3. Again, it is self-evident that truth exists, for even denying so would amount to admitting it. If there were no such thing as truth, it would be true that there is no truth. So, something

1 *On the Orthodox Faith* 1.1. PG 94.789.

2 *Posterior Analytics* 1.2, 72a7–8.

is true and, therefore, there is truth. But God is truth itself: 'I am the way, the truth, and the life.'³ So, it is self-evident that God exists.

On the contrary, as Aristotle's discussion of first principles makes clear, nobody can think the opposite of what is self-evident.⁴ But we can think the opposite of the proposition 'God exists.' For 'the fool' in the Psalms 'said in his heart: "There is no God."⁵ So, it is not self-evident that God exists.

Reply: A proposition can be self-evident in two ways: (a) in itself, though not to us, and (b) both in itself and to us. For a proposition is self-evident when its predicate forms part of its subject's definition (thus, for example, it is self-evident that human beings are animals since being an animal is part of the meaning of 'human being'). And if everyone knows the essence of the subject and predicate, the proposition will be self-evident to everybody. This is clearly the case with first principles of demonstration, which employ common terms known to all of us (such as 'being' and 'non-being', 'whole' and 'part', and the like). But if some people do not know the essence of its subject and predicate, then a proposition, though self-evident in itself, will not be so to them. This is why Boethius can say that 'certain notions are self-evident and commonplaces only to the learned, as, for example, that only bodies can occupy space'.⁶

So, I maintain that the proposition 'God exists' is self-evident in itself, for, as I shall later show,⁷ its subject and predicate are identical since God is his own existence. But, because we do not know what God is, the proposition is not self-evident to us and needs to be demonstrated by things more known to us, though less known as far as their nature goes – that is, by God's effects.

Hence:

1. Knowledge that God exists is not implanted in us by nature in any clear or specific way. Admittedly, we naturally know what we naturally desire, and we naturally desire happiness, which is to be found only in God. But this is not to know unequivocally that there is a God any more than to be aware of someone approaching is to be aware of Peter (even if it is really Peter who is approaching). Many, in fact, believe that the ultimate good that will make us happy is riches, or pleasure, or some such thing.
2. Someone hearing the word 'God' may very well not understand it to mean 'that than which nothing greater can be thought'. Indeed, some people have believed God to be something material. And even if someone thinks that what is signified by 'God' is 'that than which nothing greater can be thought', it does not follow that the person in question thinks that what is signified by 'God' exists in reality rather than merely as thought about. If we do not grant that something in fact exists than which nothing greater can be thought (and nobody denying the existence of God would grant this), the conclusion that God in fact exists does not follow.

³ John 14: 6.

⁴ *Metaphysics* 4.3, 1005b11; *Posterior Analytics* 1.10, 76b23–7.

⁵ Psalms 13: 1. The numbering of the Psalms follows that of the Latin Vulgate.

⁶ *How Substances Are Good in Virtue of their Existence without Being Substantial Goods (De Hebdomadibus)*. PL 64.1311.

⁷ 1a 3.4.

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

Article 2. Can we demonstrate that God exists?

1. It seems that we cannot demonstrate⁸ that God exists. For it is an article of faith that God exists, and we cannot demonstrate matters of faith since demonstration causes knowledge while faith, as St Paul says, is concerned with 'the unseen'.⁹ So, it is impossible to demonstrate that God exists.

2. Moreover, the middle term¹⁰ in a demonstration is what something is. But, as Damascene tells us, we do not know what God is, only what he is not.¹¹ So, we cannot demonstrate that God exists.

3. Again, if we could demonstrate God's existence, the demonstration would have to proceed by reference to his effects. But God and his effects are incommensurable, for God is infinite and his effects finite, and the finite cannot measure the infinite. So, since a cause cannot be demonstrated by effects that are incommensurate with it, it does not seem possible to demonstrate that God exists.

On the contrary, St Paul tells us that 'the invisible things of God can be clearly seen, being understood from what he has made'.¹² And if that is right, then we must be able to demonstrate that God exists from what he has made, for that something exists is the first thing we need to know about it.

Reply: There are two kinds of demonstration. One kind, 'demonstration why' something is so, argues from cause to effect and proceeds by means of what is unqualifiedly first. The other, 'demonstration that' something is so, argues from effect to cause and proceeds by means of what is first so far as we are concerned (for when an effect is more apparent to us than its cause, we come to know the cause through its effect). But, in cases where the effect is better known to us, any effect of a cause demonstrates that the cause exists, for effects depend on causes and can occur only if their causes exist. So, from effects that we know we can demonstrate what in itself is not self-evident to us, namely, that god exists.

Hence:

1. The truths about God that St Paul says we can know by our natural powers of reasoning (that God exists, for example) are not articles of faith.¹³ They are presupposed by them. For faith presupposes natural knowledge, just as grace does nature, and just as all perfections presuppose that which they perfect. But there is nothing to stop people from accepting on faith some demonstrable truth that they cannot personally demonstrate.

8 i.e. prove by deducing from known premises.

9 Hebrews 11: 1.

10 The term in an Aristotelian syllogism that lets one link the subject of one premise with the predicate of another. Thus in the argument 'S is P, all Ps are Qs, so S is Q', the middle term is 'P'.

11 *On the Orthodox Faith* 1.4. PG 94.800.

12 Romans 1: 20.

13 Romans 1: 19–20.

2. When we demonstrate a cause from its effect, the effect takes the place of what the cause is in the proof that the cause exists, especially if the cause is God. For, when proving that something exists, the middle term is not what the thing is (we cannot even ask what it is until we know that it exists) but what we are using the name of the thing to mean. But when demonstrating from effects that God exists, we are able to start from what the word 'God' means, for, as I shall later explain,¹⁴ what we predicate of God is derived from these effects.
3. Effects can give comprehensive knowledge of their cause only when they are commensurate with it. But, as I have said, any effect can make it clear that a cause exists. So, God's effects can serve to demonstrate that God exists, even though they cannot help us to know him comprehensively for what he is.

Article 3. Does God exist?

1. It seems that there is no God. For if one of two contraries were infinite, the other would be completely destroyed. But by the word 'God' we understand a certain infinite good. So, if God existed, nobody would ever encounter evil. But we do encounter evil in the world. So, God does not exist.

2. Moreover, anything that can be caused by few principles is not caused by many. But it seems that we can fully account for everything we observe in the world while assuming that God does not exist. Thus we explain natural effects by natural causes, and intentional effects by human reasoning and will. So, there is no need to accept that God exists.

On the contrary, Exodus represents God as saying, 'I am who am.'¹⁵

Reply: There are five ways in which we can prove that there is a God.

The first and most obvious way is based on change. It is certain, and clear to our senses, that some things in the world undergo change. But anything in process of change is changed by something else. For nothing can be undergoing change unless it is potentially whatever it ends up being after its process of change – while something causes change in so far as it is actual¹⁶ in some way. After all, to change something is simply to bring it from potentiality to actuality, and this can only be done by something that is somehow actual: thus fire (actually hot) causes wood (able to be hot) to become actually hot, and thus it changes and modifies it. But something cannot be simultaneously actually *x* and potentially *x*, though it can be actually *x* and potentially *y* (something actually hot, for instance, cannot also be potentially hot, though it can be potentially cold). So, something in process of change cannot itself cause that same change. It cannot change itself. Necessarily, therefore, anything in process of change is changed by something else. And this something else, if in process of change, is itself changed by yet another thing; and this last by another. 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

14 1a 13.1ff.

15 Exodus 3: 14.

16 Aquinas's claim is that causes cause due to a property they have, not one they lack. When we say that the pilot's absence caused the shipwreck, then, Aquinas would parse this more precisely by saying that what caused the shipwreck was the storm and the hidden reef, but the pilot's absence permitted these causes to operate.

anything else). So, we are bound to arrive at some first cause of change that is not itself changed by anything, which is what everybody takes God to be.

The second way is based on the notion of efficient causation.¹⁷ We find that there is an order of efficient causes in the observable world. Yet we never observe, nor ever could, something efficiently causing itself. For this would mean that it preceded itself, which it cannot do. But an order of efficient causes cannot go back infinitely. For an earlier member in it causes an intermediate, and the intermediate causes a last (whether the intermediate be one or many). If you eliminate a cause, however, you also eliminate its effect. So, there cannot be a last cause, nor an intermediate one, unless there is a first. If there is no end to the series of efficient causes, therefore, and if, as a consequence, there is no first cause, there would be no intermediate efficient causes either, and no last effect, which is clearly not the case. So, we have to posit a first cause, which everyone calls 'God'.

The third way is based on the possible and the necessary, and it runs as follows. Some of the things we encounter are able to be or not to be, for we find them generated and perished (and, therefore, able to be or not to be). But not everything can be like this. For something that is capable of not being at some time is not. So, if everything is able not to be, at some time there was nothing in the world. But if that were true, there would be nothing even now, for something that does not exist is only brought into being by something that does exist. Therefore, if nothing existed, nothing could have begun to exist, and nothing would exist now, which is patently not the case. So, not everything is the sort of thing that is able to be or not to be. There has got to be something that must be. Yet a thing that must be either does or does not have a cause of its necessity outside itself. And, just as we must stop somewhere in a series of efficient causes, so we must also stop in the series of things which must be and owe this to something else. This means that we are forced to posit something which is intrinsically necessary, owing its necessity to nothing else, something which is the cause that other things must be.

The fourth way is based on the gradations that we find in things. We find some things to be more and less good, more and less true, more and less noble, and so on. But we speak of various things as being more or less F in so far as they approximate in various ways to what is most F. For example, things are hotter and hotter the closer they approach to what is hottest. So, something is the truest and best and most noble of things, and hence the most fully in being.¹⁸ For, as Aristotle says, the truest things are the things most fully in being.¹⁹ But when many things possess some property in common, the one most fully possessing it causes it in the others. To use Aristotle's example, fire, the hottest of all things, causes all other things to be hot. So, there is something that causes in all other things their being, their goodness, and whatever other perfection they have, and we call this 'God'.

The fifth way is based on the governance of things. For we see that some things that lack intelligence (i.e. material objects in nature) act for the sake of an end. This is clear from the fact that they always, or usually, act in the same way so as to achieve what is best (and therefore reach their goal by purpose, not by chance). But things lacking intelligence tend to a goal only as directed by one with knowledge and understanding. Arrows, for instance, need archers. So, there is a being with intelligence who directs all natural things to ends, and we call this being 'God'.

¹⁷ Causation in the usual sense.

¹⁸ *Metaphysics* 2.1, 993b30.

¹⁹ *Metaphysics* 2.1, 993b25.

Hence:

1. As Augustine says, 'Since God is supremely good, he would not permit any evil at all in his works, unless he were sufficiently powerful and good to bring good even from evil.'²⁰ So, it belongs to the limitless goodness of God that he permits evils to exist and draws good from them.
2. Since nature acts for definite ends under the direction of a higher cause, its effects must be traced to God as the first of all causes. Similarly, even things done intentionally must be traced back to a higher cause than human reasoning and will, for these are changeable and lacking. And, as I have said, we must trace all such things back to a first cause that cannot change and is intrinsically necessary.

Part I, Question 3. God's Simplicity

Having recognized that something exists, we still have to investigate the way in which it exists, so that we may come to understand what it is that exists. But we cannot know what God is,²¹ only what he is not. We must therefore consider the ways in which God does not exist rather than the ways in which he does. So, now I consider:

First, the ways in which God is not;
second, the ways in which we know him;
third, the ways in which we describe him.

The ways in which God is not will become apparent if we rule out everything unfitting to him, such as being composite, changing, and the like. So, I shall ask:

First, about God's simplicity, thus ruling out composition.²² And because simplicity implies imperfection and incompleteness in the material world, I shall then ask:

second, about God's perfection;
third, about his limitlessness;
fourth, about his unchangeableness;
fifth, about his oneness.

About the first of these questions there are eight points of inquiry:

1. Is God a body? Is he, that is to say, composed of extended parts?
2. Is he composed of form and matter?

²⁰ *A Handbook on Faith, Hope and Love (Enchiridion)* 11. PL 40.236.

²¹ According to Aquinas, we know that God necessarily satisfies many descriptions – that he is omnipotent, omniscient, etc. But God satisfies these because he is divine. For Aquinas these descriptions do not tell us what it is to be divine; it is not the case that to be divine is to be omniscient, omnipotent, etc. Deity is some property other than any of these. Aquinas's claim here is that we cannot intellectually grasp this property. We can know what it is to be omniscient or to be human, but we cannot know what it is to be divine.

²² Literally consisting of or having been put together from parts. We usually think of parts as concrete things from which other concrete things are assembled. But the same thing can consist completely of different sorts of part: books, say, of both quarks and molecules. Aquinas thinks that concrete things consist completely of concrete parts, but also abstract ones – essences, accidents, and the like.

3. Is he composed of 'whatness' (essence or nature) and subject?
4. Is he composed of essence and existence?
5. Is he composed of genus and difference?
6. Is he composed of substance and accidents?
7. Is there any way in which he is composite, or is he altogether simple?
8. Does he enter into composition with other things?

Article 1. Is God a body composed of extended parts?

1. It would seem that God is a body. For a body is something with three dimensions, and sacred Scripture ascribes three dimensions to God: 'He is higher than heaven and what will you do? He is deeper than hell and how will you know? His measure is longer than the earth and broader than the sea.'²³ So, God is a body.

2. Moreover, everything with shape is a body, for shape is characteristic of extended things as such. But God seems to have a shape, for in Genesis we read, 'Let us make human beings in our image and likeness',²⁴ where 'image' means 'figure' or 'shape' as in Hebrews: 'who is the brightness of his glory, and the figure [that is to say, image] of his substance'.²⁵ So, God is a body.

3. Moreover, anything with bodily parts is a body. But Scripture ascribes bodily parts to God, saying in Job, 'Have you an arm like God?',²⁶ and in the Psalms, 'The eyes of the Lord are towards the righteous'²⁷ and 'the right hand of the Lord does valiantly'.²⁸ So, God is a body.

4. Moreover, only bodies can assume postures. But Scripture ascribes certain postures to God: thus Isaiah 'saw the Lord sitting',²⁹ and says that 'the Lord stands to judge'.³⁰ So, God is a body.

5. Again, nothing can be the starting-point or finishing-point of a spatial movement unless it is a body or bodily. But Scripture refers to God as the finishing-point of a spatial movement ('Come to him and be enlightened')³¹ and as a starting-point ('Those that depart from you shall be written in the earth').³² So, God is a body.

On the contrary, John writes: 'God is spirit.'³³

Reply: God is in no way a body, and we can show this in three ways.

First, no body causes change without itself being changed, as can be shown inductively. But I have shown above that God is the unchanging first cause of change.³⁴ So, God is clearly not a body.

23 Job 11: 8–9.

24 Genesis 1: 26.

25 Hebrews 1: 3.

26 Job 40: 4.

27 Psalms 33: 16.

28 Psalms 117: 16.

29 Isaiah 6: 1.

30 Isaiah 3: 13.

31 Psalms 33: 6.

32 Jeremiah 17: 13.

33 John 4: 24.

34 1a 2.3.

Second, the first being must of necessity be actual and in no way potential. For, although in any one thing that passes from potentiality to actuality, the potentiality temporally precedes the actuality, actuality, absolutely speaking, precedes potentiality, for nothing can be changed from a state of potentiality to one of actuality except by something actual. Now we have seen that the first being is God.³⁵ So, there can be no potentiality in God. In bodies, however, there is always potentiality, because the extended is as such divisible. So, God cannot be a body.

Third, God is the most noble of beings, as is clear from what I have already said.³⁶ But a body cannot be the most noble of beings. For bodies are either living or non-living, and living bodies are clearly the more excellent. Yet a living body is not alive simply in virtue of being a body (otherwise all bodies would be living); it is alive because of some other principle (in our case, the soul). Such a principle will be more excellent than body as such. So, God cannot be a body.

Hence:

1. As I remarked earlier, sacred Scripture uses bodily metaphors to convey truth about God and spiritual things.³⁷ So, in ascribing three dimensions to God they are using bodily extension to signify the extent of God's power: depth, for example, signifies his power to know what is hidden; height, the loftiness of his power above all other things; length, the lasting quality of his existence; breadth, the universality of his love. Or there is Dionysius's explanation of depth as the incomprehensibility of God's essence, length as the penetration of all things by God's power, and breadth as the boundless reach of God's guardianship enveloping all things.³⁸
2. We say that human beings are in God's image, not because they have bodies, but because of their superiority to other animals. And this is why Genesis, after saying, 'Let us make human beings in our image and likeness', adds, 'that they may have dominion over the fishes of the sea',³⁹ and so on. Human beings owe this superiority to reason and intellect. So, they are in God's image because of their intellect and reason, which are incorporeal.
3. The Scriptures ascribe bodily parts to God by a metaphor drawn from their functions. Eyes, for example, see; so, when we attribute an 'eye' to God it refers to his power of seeing things in an intelligible rather than a sensory manner. And similarly with other parts of the body.
4. The ascribing of posture to God is again simply metaphor. He is said to be sitting, for instance, because of his unchangeableness and authority. He is said to be standing because his might triumphs in the face of all opposition.
5. One approaches God, and one draws away from him, not by bodily movement, since he is everywhere, but by movement of the heart. In this context, 'approaching' and 'drawing away' are metaphors that picture being moved in spirit as if it were like being moved in space.

35 1a 2.3.

36 1a 2.3.

37 1a 1.9.

38 *The Divine Names* 9.5. PG 3.913.

39 Genesis 1: 28.

Article 2. Is God composed of form⁴⁰ and matter⁴¹?

1. God seems to be composed of form and matter. For since soul is the form of the body,⁴² anything with a soul is composed of matter and form. But the Scriptures ascribe soul to God; thus in Hebrews we find quoted, as if from the mouth of God, 'my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back my soul will have no pleasure in him'.⁴³ So, God is composed of matter and form.

2. Moreover, according to Aristotle, anger, joy, and the like, are passions of something made up of parts.⁴⁴ But the Scriptures ascribe such passions to God: 'the anger of the Lord,' says the psalm, 'was kindled against his people'.⁴⁵ So, God is composed of matter and form.

3. Again, matter is what makes a thing an individual. But God seems to be an individual, not something predicable of many individuals. So, God is composed of matter and form.

On the contrary, since having dimensions is one of the primary properties of matter, anything composed of matter and form must be a body. As I have shown, however, God is not a body.⁴⁶ So, he is not composed of matter and form.

Reply: God cannot contain matter.

First, because matter is potential, while God, as I have shown, is sheer actuality with no potentiality.⁴⁷ So, God cannot be composed of matter and form.

Second, in things composed of form and matter, their form gives them perfection and goodness. Such composite things therefore only participate in goodness, for matter participates in form. But the first and best good (i.e. God) does not participate in goodness, for being good by essence is prior to being good by a kind of participation.⁴⁸ So, God cannot be composed of matter and form.

Third, all agents act in virtue of their form, so the way in which they are agents will depend on the type of form they have. What is primarily and essentially an agent must therefore be primarily and intrinsically form. Yet God is the primary agent, since, as I have explained, he is the first efficient cause.⁴⁹ So, God is essentially form and is not composed of matter and form.

40 A real attribute 'in' the thing. Aquinas thinks of forms as abstract constituents, as particular as their bearers: Socrates' humanity is something abstract that is 'in' and particular to Socrates. Forms are either substantial or accidental. For any x , x' substantial form is that in x which made x' matter (q.v.) become and/or makes it be actually x' kind of thing. The substantial form of water, for instance, is a structure which makes of a group of atoms an instance of the kind *water molecule*. A form is accidental just if it is not substantial. A form may be, for example, a shape, a structure, a power, a quality or a soul.

41 That which 'bears' or 'receives' forms. For any x , x' matter is the stuff of which x is made, the parts of which x is composed, or most generally that which was potentially x and became actually x .

42 For Aquinas, for any x , x' form is that in x which made (or makes) x' matter (q.v.) become (or be) actually x' kind of thing. Every soul is a form: a dog's soul is that in the dog which made and makes its matter a living canine body, and so a dog. But not every form is a soul. Water has a form but no soul.

43 Hebrews 10: 38.

44 *On the Soul* 1.1, 403a3ff.

45 Psalms 105: 40.

46 1a 3.1.

47 1a 3.1.

48 Something 'participates in' a form just if it bears the form and is not identical with it.

49 1a 2.3.

Hence:

1. Scripture ascribes soul to God by a metaphor drawn from its activity. For since soul is the seat of volition in us, we call what is pleasing to God's will 'pleasing to his soul'.
2. Scripture ascribes anger and the like to God by a metaphor drawn from their effects. For it is characteristic of anger that it stimulates us to requite wrong. Divine retribution is therefore metaphorically called 'anger'.
3. The forms of material things are individualized by matter, which cannot be predicable of a subject since it is itself the first underlying subject – though a form as such (unless something interferes) can be received by many things. But a form which cannot be received in matter, and is self-subsisting, is individualized just because it cannot be received in a subject, and God is such a form. So, it does not follow that there is matter in God.

Article 3. Is God composed of 'whatness' (that is, essence⁵⁰ or nature) and subject?⁵¹

1. It seems that God is not the same as his essence or nature. For nothing is in itself. But we say that God's essence or nature (his divinity) is in God. So, it seems that God must differ from his essence or nature.

2. Moreover, effects resemble their causes, for what a thing does reflects what it is. But individual created things are other than their natures (a particular human being, for instance, is not humanity). So, it seems that God is not divinity.

On the contrary, we speak of God not only as living but as life: 'I am the way, the truth and the life.'⁵² But divinity bears the same relationship to God as life does to the living. So, God is divinity itself.

Reply: God is the same as his essence or nature.

We shall understand this when we note that things composed of matter and form cannot be the same as their natures or essences. For essence or nature in these things includes only what falls within the definition of a species – as humanity includes what falls within the definition of human being, for this makes us to be human and is what humanity signifies (i.e. what makes human beings to be human beings). But we do not define the species of anything by the matter and properties peculiar to it as an individual. We do not, for example, define human beings as things that have *this* flesh and *these* bones, or are white, or black, or the like. *This* flesh and *these* bones, and the properties peculiar to them, belong indeed to *this* human being, but not to its nature. Individual human beings therefore possess something that human nature

50 For any x , x' having its essence makes x the kind of thing it is, and so is that which makes true the answer to the question 'what is x ?' Things acquire their essences by acquiring their substantial forms: a water molecule acquires its essence, *being water*, by coming to host the distinctive structure of a water molecule. Aquinas thinks of essences as abstract constituents, as particular as their bearers: Socrates' humanity is something abstract that is 'in' and particular to Socrates.

51 Subject: that which receives or bears an essence. When hydrogen and oxygen atoms come to make up a water molecule, the atoms are the subject that receives the essence (that is, come to be structured as water molecules are) and the resulting water is the subject that bears the essence.

52 John 14: 6.

does not, and particular human beings and their nature are not, therefore, altogether the same thing. 'Human nature' names the formative element in human beings; for what gives a thing definition is formative with respect to the matter that gives it individuality.

However, the individuality of things not composed of matter and form cannot derive from this or that individual matter. So, the forms of such things must be intrinsically individual and themselves subsist as things. Such things are therefore identical with their natures.

In the same way, then, God, who, as I have said, is not composed of matter and form,⁵³ is identical with his own divinity, his own life, and with whatever else is similarly predicated of him.

Hence:

1. When we talk about simple things we have to use the composite things from which our knowledge derives as models. So, when talking about God we use concrete nouns to signify his subsistence (since the subsistent things with which we are familiar are composite), and we use abstract nouns to express his simplicity. Therefore, when we talk of divinity, or life, or something of that sort, residing in God, we should not attribute the diversity that this implies to God himself, but to the way in which we conceive of him.
2. God's effects resemble God as far as they can, but not perfectly. This failure in resemblance is due to the fact that they can represent only by many what, in itself, is simple and one. As a result they are composite and cannot, therefore, be identified with their natures.

Article 4. Is God composed of essence and existence?

1. It seems that essence and existence are not the same when it comes to God. If they were, there would be nothing added to God's existence. But existence to which nothing is added is existence in general (the existence that is predicated of everything), and, if essence and existence are the same in God, the word 'God' would mean 'existence in general' (the existence we can predicate of everything). But this is not so. As the book of Wisdom says, 'they gave the incommunicable name to wood and stones'.⁵⁴ So, God's existence is not his essence.

2. Moreover, as I said earlier, we can know that God exists, but we cannot know what he is.⁵⁵ So, God's existence is not the same as what God is – his essence or nature.

On the contrary, Hilary writes, 'Existence is not an accident in God; it is subsisting truth.'⁵⁶ So, what subsists in God is his existence.

Reply: I have shown that God is his own essence.⁵⁷ That he is also his own existence can be shown in a number of ways.

First, what belongs to a thing over and above its essence must be caused: either from the principles of the essence itself, as accidents peculiar to a particular species (as the sense of humour characteristic of human beings derives from human nature), or from an external cause (as heat in water derives from some fire). So, if the existence of something is other

53 1a 3.2.

54 Wisdom 14: 21.

55 1a 2.2.

56 St Hilary of Poitiers (c. 315–c. 368), *On the Trinity* 8. PL 10.208.

57 1a 3.3.

than its essence, it must derive from the thing's essence, or it must have an external cause. But it cannot be caused by the principles of the thing's essence, for nothing of which the existence is derived can bring itself into being. If a thing's existence differs from its essence, therefore, its existence must be caused by something other than the thing in question. But this cannot be so in God's case, for, as we have seen, he is the first efficient cause.⁵⁸ So, we cannot say that God's existence is something other than his essence.

Second, existence is what makes every form or nature actual (which is why we only express the actuality of goodness or human nature by speaking of them as existing). So, when a nature is not what amounts to existence as such, then, it must exist potentially. Now, as I have shown, God does not contain potentialities.⁵⁹ In him, therefore, essence cannot differ from existence, and existence is his essence.

Third, anything on fire, without being fire itself, participates in fire. Similarly, anything existing, without being 'existence as such', participates in existence. Now, God and his essence are the same, as I have shown.⁶⁰ And if God is not 'existence as such' (if existence is not what his essence amounts to), then he only participates in existence and will not therefore be the primary existent, which he clearly is. So, God is not only his own essence, but also his own existence.

Hence:

1. We can understand 'something to which nothing is added' in two ways. We can take it as implying that further addition is excluded by definition (as reason is excluded by definition from irrational animals). We can also take it as implying that further addition is just not included in the definition (as reason is not included in the definition of animals in general, though neither is it excluded). Understood in the first way, divine existence is existence without addition. Understood in the second way, existence without addition is existence in general.
2. We use the verb 'to be' in two ways: to signify the act of existence, and to signify the mental uniting of predicate to subject which constitutes a proposition. Now, we cannot know what God's act of existence amounts to any more than we can know his essence. But we can know God's being in the second sense in so far as we know ourselves to be speaking truly when we say that God exists. As I have said, we know that we are speaking truly here because of God's effects.⁶¹

Article 5. Is God composed of genus and difference?

1. It seems that God does belong to a genus. For the definition of a substance ('something self-subsistent') is most fully applicable to God. So, God belongs to the genus of substance.

2. Moreover, any measure must belong to the same genus as the things it measures (lengths are measured by length, and numbers by number). But it seems from what Averroes says that God is the measure of all substances.⁶² So, God must belong to the genus of substance.

On the contrary, a genus is logically prior to the things that exemplify it. But nothing is prior to God in either reality or understanding. So, God does not belong to a genus.

58 1a 2.3.

59 1a 3.1.

60 1a 2.3.

61 1a 2.2, especially *ad* 2.

62 Ibn Rushd, also known as Averroes (1126–98), *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics* 10.7.

Reply: There are two ways of belonging to a genus: strictly and without qualification, as do the species that fall under a genus; and by way of reduction, as principles and privations do. For example, unity and the point are reduced to the genus of quantity as principles of quantity; and blindness, like all other defects, is reduced to the genus of its corresponding. But God belongs to a genus in neither of these ways.

We can show that he cannot be a species within a genus in three ways.

First, because we define species by differentiating some generic notion. Such differentiation is always based on some actualization of the potentiality that gave rise to the generic notion. Thus sense-life, envisaged in the concrete, gives rise to the notion of animal (an animal being something that lives by sense-perception), while mental life gives rise to the notion of a reasoning creature (a creature which lives by its mind). But the mind-life of human beings realizes potentialities of their sense-life. And we see the like in other cases. So, since realization of potentialities does not occur in God, he cannot be a species within a genus.

Second, since the genus of something states what the thing is, a genus must express a thing's essence. But God's essence is to exist, as I have shown.⁶³ So, the only genus to which God could belong would be the genus of being. Aristotle, however, has shown that there is no such genus: for genera are differentiated by factors not already contained within those genera, and no differentiating factor could be found that did not already exist (it could not differentiate if it did not exist).⁶⁴ So, we are left with no genus to which God could belong.

Third, all members of a genus share one essence or nature: that of the genus stating what they are. As existing things, however, they differ, for some particular horse is not some particular man, and this man is not that man. So, when something belongs to a genus, its nature, or what it is, must differ from its existence. As I have shown, though, this difference does not exist in God,⁶⁵ God, therefore, clearly cannot be a species within a genus.

And this shows why we cannot assign either genus or difference to God, nor define him, nor demonstrate anything of him except by means of his effects; for definitions are composed of genus and difference, and demonstration depends upon definition.

It is also clear that God does not belong mediately to a genus by initiating or generating it. For anything that initiates a genus in such a way that it mediately belongs to it is ineffective outside that genus: only the point generates extension, and only unity generates number. But God initiates everything that is, as I shall later show.⁶⁶ So, he does not initiate any particular genus so as to belong to it.

Hence:

1. The word 'substance' does not mean baldly that which exists of itself, for existence is not a genus, as I have shown. Rather, 'substance' means 'that which is possessed of an essence such that it will exist of itself, even though to exist is not its essence'. So, it is clear that God does not belong to the genus of substance.
2. This argument supposes that like is measured by like. Strictly speaking, however, God is not like anything, though he is called the measure of all things in as much as the closer things come to God the more fully they exist.

⁶³ 1a 3.4.

⁶⁴ *Metaphysics* 3.3, 998b22.

⁶⁵ 1a 3.4.

⁶⁶ 1a 44.1.

Article 6. Is God composed of substance⁶⁷ and accidents?⁶⁸

1. It seems that there are accidents in God. For Aristotle says that 'substance is never accidental to anything'.⁶⁹ So, something that is accidental in one thing cannot be the substance of another. The fact that heat, for example, is an accidental form of some things proves that it cannot be the substantial form of fire. But wisdom, power, and the like, which we ascribe to God, are accidents in us. So, there are accidents in God.

2. Moreover, in every genus there is a principal member. But there are many genera of accidents. So, if the principal members of these genera are not in God, there will be many other principal members besides God; and this does not seem right.

On the contrary, every accident is an accident of some subject. But God cannot be a subject, since, as Boethius says, 'no simple form can be a subject'.⁷⁰ So, there cannot be accidents in God.

Reply: What I have already said makes it clear that accidents cannot exist in God.

First, because accidents realize some potentialities of their subject, since an accident is a mode in which the subject achieves actuality. But, as I have said, we must entirely rule out potentiality from God.⁷¹

Second, because God is his own act of existence, and as Boethius says, 'you may add to an existent, but you cannot add to existence itself'⁷² (just as a hot thing may have other properties besides being hot – such as whiteness – but heat itself cannot be otherwise than hot).

Third, because what exists by nature is prior to what is accidental, so that if God is the absolutely prime existent, nothing can exist in him by accident. Nor can there be accidents existing in him by nature (as, for example, people have a sense of humour by nature). For such accidents derive from a subject's essential nature. But there is nothing derived in God. All derivation starts from him. It therefore follows that God contains no accidents.

Hence:

1. As I shall explain later, we do not ascribe power and wisdom to God and to us in the same sense.⁷³ So, it does not follow that accidents exist in God as they do in us.
2. Since substance is prior to accidents, the principles of accidents are reducible to the principles of substance as to something prior. And although God is not first in the genus of substance, he is still first with respect to all being, transcending all genera.

67 A concrete particular thing that bears attributes.

68 Accidents: attributes (forms) that are not essences or substantial forms. Aquinas thinks of accidents as abstract constituents, as particular as their bearers: Socrates' weight is something abstract that is 'in' and particular to Socrates. As Aquinas sees it, all real accidents are either quantities (which make true answers to questions in the 'how much?' family), qualities (which make true answers to questions in the 'how is it?' or 'what is it like?' families) or relations (which make true answers to questions about how things are related).

69 *Physics* 1.3, 186b1–4.

70 *On the Trinity* 2. *PL* 64.1250.

71 1a 3.1.

72 *How Substances Are Good in Virtue of Their Existence without Being Substantial Goods* (*De Hebdomadibus*). *PL* 64.1311.

73 1a 13.5.

Article 7. Is there any way in which God is composite, or is he entirely simple?

1. It seems that God is not entirely simple. For the things that derive from God resemble him: thus everything deriving from the first being exists, and everything deriving from the first good is good. But nothing deriving from God is entirely simple. So, God is not entirely simple either.

2. Moreover, we should ascribe whatever is better to God. But, in the world with which we are familiar, composite things are better than simple ones: compounds are better than elements, for example, and elements are better than their constituent parts. So, we should not assert that God is altogether simple.

On the contrary, Augustine says that God is truly and absolutely simple.⁷⁴

Reply: There are many ways of showing that God is entirely simple.

First, relying on what I have already said, God is not composed of extended parts (since he is not a body), nor of form and matter, nor does he differ from his own nature, nor his nature from his existence. Nor can we distinguish in him genus and difference, nor substance and accidents. It is therefore clear that God is in no way composite. Rather, he is entirely simple.

Second, everything composite is subsequent to its components and dependent on them. But God, as I have shown, is the first of all beings.⁷⁵

Third, everything composite is caused; for elements diverse of themselves do not combine unless made to do so by a cause. As I have said, though, God is not caused since he is the first efficient cause.⁷⁶

Fourth, in any composite there is a realizing of potentialities such as cannot occur in God: for either the potentialities of one component are realized by another, or, at any rate, all the components together are potentially the whole.

Fifth, we cannot predicate anything composite of its own component parts. This is obvious in composites made up of different parts, for no part of a man is a man, and no part of a foot is a foot. And although in composites made up of similar parts certain ways of describing the whole apply also to the parts (every bit of air, for example, is air, and every drop of water is water), other ways do not (thus if a unit of water occupies two cubic feet, no part of it will do so). So, in all composites there is some element that is not the composite itself. Now, even if we grant that a thing possessed of a form may contain something that is not itself (e.g. that a white thing contains elements not included in the concept of whiteness), in the form itself there is nothing other than itself. But God is form itself, indeed existence itself. So, he can in no way be composite. And this was what Hilary was pointing out when he said, 'God, being power, is not made up of things that are weak; and, being light, is not pieced together from things that are darkness.'⁷⁷

Hence:

1. Things deriving from God resemble him as effects resemble a primary cause. But it is in the nature of an effect to be composite in some way, because even at its simplest its existence differs from its essence, as I shall later explain.⁷⁸

74 *On the Trinity* 4.4–8. PL 42.927–9.

75 1a 2.3.

76 1a 2.3.

77 *On the Trinity* 7. PL 10.223.

78 1a 50.2, *ad* 3.

2. In the world with which we are familiar composite things are better than simple ones, because created perfection is found in many things, not just one. But divine perfection is found in one simple thing, as I shall shortly show.⁷⁹

Article 8. Does God enter into composition with other things?

1. It seems that God does enter into composition with other things. For Dionysius declares that 'the existence of everything is the divine nature, which is beyond being'.⁸⁰ But the existence of everything enters into the composition of each. So, God enters into composition with other things.

2. Moreover, God is a form, for Augustine says that 'the Word of God' (which is God) 'is unformed form'.⁸¹ But form is a component of things. So, God must be a component of something.

3. Again, things which exist without differing are identical. But God and prime matter⁸² exist without differing and are, therefore, completely identical. Yet prime matter enters into the composition of things. So, God must do so too. – To prove the middle step in this argument: things that differ do so by certain differentiating factors, and must therefore be composite. But God and prime matter are altogether simple and, therefore, they are identical.

On the contrary, Dionysius says that 'nothing can touch God, nor is there any union with him by mingling part with part'.⁸³

Reply: On this point three mistakes have been made. As we learn from Augustine, some people have held that God is the soul of the world.⁸⁴ We can include with these people those who said that God is the soul of the outermost heaven.⁸⁵ Others have said that God is the form of all things – the reputed view of Amaury of Bène and his followers. The third mistake was the really stupid thesis of David of Dinant – that God is prime matter. All these opinions are clearly wrong. God cannot enter into composition with anything in any way, whether as a formal principle or as a material one.

First, because God is the first efficient cause of things, as I have already said.⁸⁶ But the form of an effect, though specifically similar to its efficient cause (e.g. people beget people),

79 1a 4.2, ad 1.

80 *The Celestial Hierarchy* 4.1. PG 3.177.

81 *Sermons* 38. PL 38.662.

82 The ultimate receiver of all attributes. Suppose with Aquinas that there are four elements – earth, air, fire and water – and that some earth can change into some water. If this is one body of stuff changing, rather than being replaced by another body of stuff, something must be there throughout that first bears the attribute of being earth and then bears the attribute of being water. But if earth and water are *elements*, they are ultimate kinds of chemical matter: they are not made up of some more fundamental chemical stuff. Aquinas infers that there is a more basic kind of matter than chemical elements, and he calls it prime matter. Since for Aquinas every physical thing is composed of elements, for Aquinas, every physical thing contains prime matter.

83 *The Divine Names* 2.5. PG 3.643.

84 *The City of God* 7.6. PL 41.199.

85 Aquinas accepted Aristotle's cosmology, in which the earth was surrounded by a series of crystalline spheres, the heavens.

86 1a 2.3.

is not numerically identical with the efficient cause. Matter and efficient causes are neither numerically nor specifically identical, for matter is in potentiality while efficient causes are actual.

Second, since God is the first efficient cause, efficient activity belongs to him primarily and essentially. But a component is not an efficient cause primarily and essentially. Thus a hand does not act. Rather, human beings act by means of their hands, and it is fire which warms by virtue of its heat. So, God cannot be a component of anything.

Third, no part of something composite can be the first being. Nor can the matter or form of composite things (their first parts) be the first among beings. For matter is in potentiality, and potentiality is unqualifiedly secondary to actuality, as I have shown.⁸⁷ Again, form, when a part of something composite, is a form which participates in something. Now something that participates in x is posterior to that which is essentially x .

For example, the fire that is in things that are on fire is posterior to that which is by nature fire. But I have already shown that God is the primary being, without qualification.⁸⁸

Hence:

1. Dionysius means that God's nature is the existence of all things by efficient causality and as an exemplar, not by its essence.
2. The Word is not a component form but an exemplary one.⁸⁹
3. Simple things do not differ from one another because of differences. That is the case only with composites. Hence, although the factors 'rational' and 'irrational' differentiate people and horses, these factors themselves do not require further factors to differentiate them one from another. Strictly speaking, therefore, simple things are not *different*, but *diverse*. According to Aristotle, things that are diverse are absolutely distinct, but things that are different are different in some respect.⁹⁰ Strictly speaking, then, God and prime matter are not *different* but *diverse*. So, it does not follow that they are identical.

Part I, Question 13. Talking about God

Having considered how we know God, I now turn to consider how we speak of him, for we speak of things as we know them. Here there are twelve points of inquiry:

1. Can we use any words to refer to God?
2. Do we predicate of God substantially?⁹¹
3. Do we predicate of God literally, or must we always do so metaphorically?
4. Are the many terms we predicate of God synonyms?
5. Are words we use both of God and of creatures used univocally or equivocally?
6. Given that we actually use them analogically, do we predicate them primarily of God or of creatures?
7. In speaking of God, can we use words that imply temporal succession?

⁸⁷ 1a. 3.1.

⁸⁸ 1a 2.3.

⁸⁹ The prototype or model in accordance with which things are made.

⁹⁰ *Metaphysics* 10.3, 1054b24.

⁹¹ i.e. do words in the category of substance express God's nature when used to describe him?

8. Is 'God' the name of a nature or of a certain activity?
9. Is the name 'God' peculiar to God or not?
10. When it is used of God, of what shares in divinity, and of what is merely supposed to do so, is it used univocally or equivocally?
11. Is 'The One who Is' the most appropriate name for God?
12. Can we formulate affirmative propositions about God?

Article 1. Are any words suitable for talking about God?

1. It seems that no words are suitable for talking about God. For Dionysius says, 'of him there is no naming nor any opinion',⁹² and we read in Proverbs, 'What is his name or the name of his son if you know?'⁹³

2. Moreover, nouns are either abstract or concrete. But concrete nouns are inappropriate to God because he is altogether simple; and we can rule out abstract nouns because they do not signify a complete subsistent thing. So, we can predicate no term of God.

3. Again, a noun signifies something as coming under some description; verbs and participles signify it as enduring in time; pronouns signify it as being pointed out or as being in some relationship. None of these is appropriate to God: he has no qualities or accidental attributes; he is non-temporal; and he cannot be pointed to because he is not available to the senses; moreover he cannot be referred to by relative pronouns since the use of these depends on the previous use of some other referring term such as a noun, participle or demonstrative pronoun. So, there is no way of referring to God.

On the contrary, in Exodus we read, 'The Lord is a great warrior; His name is Almighty.'⁹⁴

Reply: Aristotle says that spoken words are signs for thoughts, and thoughts are likenesses of things.⁹⁵ So, words refer to things indirectly through thoughts. We can therefore designate something in so far as we can know it intellectually. Now, I have already shown that we cannot see God's essence in this life.⁹⁶ We only know him from creatures. We think of him as their source, and then as surpassing them all and as lacking anything that is merely creaturely. So, we can designate God from creatures, though the words we use do not express that divine essence as it is in itself. In this they differ from a term like 'human being', which is intended to express by its meaning the essence of human being as it is – for the meaning of 'human being' is given by a definition of human being which expresses its essence, for the nature that a name signifies is the definition.

Hence:

1. We say that God has no name, or is beyond naming, because his essence is beyond what we understand of him and the meaning of the names we use.
2. Since we come to know God from creatures, and since this is how we come to refer to him, the expressions we use to name him signify in a way that is appropriate to the material creatures we ordinarily know. Among such creatures the complete

92 *The Divine Names* 1. PG 3.593.

93 Proverbs 30: 4.

94 Exodus 15: 3.

95 *On Interpretation* 1.1, 16a3.

96 1a 12.4.

subsistent thing is always a concrete union of form and matter; for the form itself is not a subsistent thing, but that by which something subsists. Because of this the words we use to signify complete subsistent things are concrete nouns which are appropriate to composite subjects. When, on the other hand, we want to speak of the form itself we use abstract nouns which do not signify something as subsistent, but as that by which something is: 'whiteness', for example, signifies that by which something is white.

Now God is both simple, like a form, and subsistent, like something concrete. So, we sometimes refer to him by abstract nouns (to indicate his simplicity) while at other times we refer to him by concrete nouns (to indicate his subsistence and completeness) – though neither way of speaking measures up to his way of being, for in this life we do not know him as he is in himself.

3. To signify something as coming under some description is to signify it as subsisting in a certain nature or definite form. I have already said that the reason we use concrete nouns for God is to indicate his subsistence and completeness,⁹⁷ it is for the same reason that we use nouns signifying a thing under some description. Although they imply temporal succession, we can use verbs and participles of him because his eternity includes all time. Just as we can understand what is both simple and subsistent only as though it were composite, so we can understand and speak of the simplicity of eternity only after the manner of temporal things. It is composite and temporal things that we ordinarily and naturally understand. We can use demonstrative pronouns of God in so far as they point, not to something seen, but to something understood, for so long as we know something, in whatever way, we can point it out. So, just as nouns and participles and demonstrative pronouns can signify God, so can relative pronouns.

Article 2. Do we predicate any term of God substantially?

1. It seems that we predicate no term of God substantially. For John Damascene says, "The words used of God must signify not what he is substantially but what he is not, or his relationship to something else, or something that follows from his nature or activity."⁹⁸

2. Moreover, Dionysius says, "You will find a chorus of holy teachers seeking to distinguish clearly and laudably the divine processions in the naming of God."⁹⁹ This means that the words which the holy teachers use in praising God differ according to his different causal acts. But to speak of something's causal activity is not to speak of its essence. So, such words are not predicated of God substantially.

3. Again, we designate things to the extent that we understand them. But in this life we do not understand God's substance (what God is). So, we cannot predicate anything of him substantially (we cannot say what he is).

On the contrary, Augustine says, "To be God is to be strong, to be wise, or whatever else we say of his simplicity in order to signify his substance."¹⁰⁰ So, all such terms signify God's substance.

⁹⁷ See the reply to objection 2 in the present article.

⁹⁸ *On the Orthodox Faith* 1.9. PG 94.835.

⁹⁹ *The Divine Names* 1. PG 3.589.

¹⁰⁰ *On the Trinity* 6.4. PL 42.927.

Reply: It is clear that the problem does not arise for negative terms or for words which express the relationship of God to creatures. These obviously do not express what he is but rather what he is not or how he is related to something else – or, better, how something else is related to him. The question is concerned with words like ‘good’ and ‘wise’ which are neither negative nor relational terms, and about these there are several opinions.

Some have said that sentences like ‘God is good’, though they sound like affirmations, are in fact used to deny something of God rather than to assert anything. Thus, for example, when we say that God is living we mean that he is not like something inanimate, and likewise for all such propositions. This was the view of the Rabbi Moses.¹⁰¹

Others said that such sentences are used to signify the relation of God to creatures, so that when we say ‘God is good’ we mean that God is the cause of goodness in things, and likewise in other such propositions.

Neither of these views seems plausible, however, for three reasons.

First, on neither view can there be any reason why we should use some words about God rather than others. God is just as much the cause of bodies as he is of goodness in things. So, if ‘God is good’ means no more than that God is the cause of goodness in things, why not say ‘God is a body’ since he is the cause of bodies? Likewise, we could also say ‘God is a body’ because we want to deny that he is merely potential being like prime matter.

Second it would follow that everything we say of God is true only in a secondary sense, as when we say that medicine is ‘healthy’, meaning merely that it causes health in the one who takes it. But it is the living body that we call healthy in a primary sense.

Third, this is not what people want to say when they talk about God. When people speak of the ‘living God’ they do not simply want to say that God is the cause of our life, or that he differs from a lifeless body.

So, we must find some other solution to the problem: that such words do say what God is (they are predicated of him in the category of substance),¹⁰² but they fail adequately to represent what he is. The reason for this is that we speak of God as we know him, and since we know him from creatures we can only speak of him as they represent him. Any creature, in so far as it possesses any perfection, represents God and is like him, for he, being simply and universally perfect, has pre-existing in himself the perfections of all his creatures, as I have already noted.¹⁰³ But a creature is not like God as it is like another member of its species or genus. It resembles him as an effect may in some way resemble a transcendent cause although failing to reproduce perfectly the form of the cause – as in a certain way the forms of inferior bodies imitate the power of the sun. I explained this earlier when I was dealing with God’s perfection.¹⁰⁴ So, words like ‘good’ and ‘wise’ when used of God do signify something that God really is, but they signify it imperfectly because creatures represent God imperfectly.

So, ‘God is good’ does not mean the same as ‘God is the cause of goodness’ or ‘God is not evil’. It means that what we call ‘goodness’ in creatures pre-exists in God in a higher way. Thus God is not good because he causes goodness. Rather, goodness flows from him because he is good. As Augustine says, ‘Because he is good, we exist.’¹⁰⁵

101 Moses Maimonides (1138–1204), *Guide for the Perplexed* 1.58.

102 They express his nature.

103 1a 4.2.

104 1a 4.3.

105 *On Christian Doctrine* 1.32. PL 34.32.

Hence:

1. Damascene is saying that these words do not signify what God is since none of them express completely what he is; but each signifies imperfectly something that he is, just as creatures, represent him imperfectly.
2. Sometimes the reason why a word comes to be used is quite different from the meaning of the word. Take, for example, the Latin word *lapis* (stone). Speakers of Latin derive the word from *laedens pedem* (what hurts a foot). However, it is not used to mean 'what hurts a foot', but to refer to a particular kind of physical object. Otherwise everything that hurts a foot would be a stone. In the case of words used of God we may say that the reason they came to be used derives from his causal activity, for our understanding of him, and our language about him, depends on the different perfections in creatures which represent him, however imperfectly, in his various causal acts. Nevertheless, we do not use these words to signify his causal acts. 'Living' in 'God is living' does not mean the same as 'causes life'. We use the sentence to say that life pre-exists in the source of all things, though in a higher way than we can understand or signify.
3. In this life we cannot understand God's essence as it is in itself. But we can do so in so far as the perfections of his creatures represent it. And this is how the words we use can signify it.

Article 3. Can we say anything literally about God?

1. It seems that we cannot use any word literally of God. For, as I have said, we take every word we use when talking about God from our speech about creatures.¹⁰⁶ But we use such words metaphorically of God, as when we call him a 'rock' or a 'lion'. So, we only speak metaphorically when talking about God.

2. Moreover, we do not use a word literally of something if it would be more accurate not to use it than to use it. But according to Dionysius it would be truer to say that God is not good or wise or any such thing than to say that he is.¹⁰⁷ So, we say none of these things literally of God.

3. Again, we apply the names of bodily things to God only metaphorically, for he is incorporeal. But all such names imply corporeal conditions, for they signify temporal succession and composition of matter and form, which belong to the material world. So, we use such words only metaphorically of God.

On the contrary, Ambrose says, 'Some names clearly show forth what is proper to divinity, and some express the luminous truth of the divine majesty, but there are others which we predicate of God metaphorically and through a certain likeness.'¹⁰⁸ So, we do not use all words of God metaphorically. We use some of them literally.

Reply: As I have said, we know God from the perfections that flow from him to creatures,¹⁰⁹ and these perfections certainly exist in him in a more excellent way than they do in them.

106 1a 13.1.

107 *The Celestial Hierarchy* 2. PG 3.41.

108 *On Faith* 2, prol. PL 16.583.

109 1a 13.2.

Yet we understand such perfections as we find them in creatures, and as we understand them so we use words to speak of them. Thus we have to consider two things in the words we use to attribute perfections to God: first, the perfections themselves that are signified (goodness, life, and the like); second, the way in which they are signified. As far as the perfections signified are concerned, we use the words literally of God, and in fact more appropriately than we use them of creatures, for these perfections belong primarily to God and only secondarily to other things. But so far as the way of signifying these perfections is concerned, we use the words inappropriately, for they have a way of signifying that is appropriate to creatures.

Hence:

1. Some words that signify what has come forth from God to creatures do so in such a way that part of the meaning of the word is the imperfect way in which creatures share in God's perfection. Thus it is part of the meaning of 'stone' that it is a material thing. We can use such words of God only metaphorically. There are other words, however, that simply mean certain perfections without any indication of how these perfections are possessed – words, for example, like 'being', 'good', 'living', and so on, and we can use words like these literally of God.
2. The reason why Dionysius says that such words are better denied of God is that what they signify does not belong to God in the way that they signify it, but in a higher way. In the same passage he therefore says that God is beyond every substance and life.¹¹⁰
3. These words imply bodily conditions not in what they mean but in the way in which they signify it. But the ones that are used metaphorically have bodily conditions as part of what they mean.

Article 4. Are all the words we predicate of God synonymous?

1. It seems that all the words we apply to God are synonymous. For synonyms are words that mean exactly the same thing. But whatever words we apply to God refer to exactly the same reality in God, for his goodness, and his wisdom, and such-like are identical with his essence. So, all these expressions are synonyms.

2. Moreover, if someone should argue that, although they signify the same thing, they do so from different points of view, there is an answer we can give: that it is useless to have different points of view which do not correspond to any difference in the thing viewed.

3. Again, something that can only be described in one way is more perfectly one than something that can be described in many ways. But God is supremely one. So, he is not describable in many ways, and the many things we say about him all have the same meaning: they are synonymous.

On the contrary, piling up synonyms adds nothing to the meaning: 'clothing garments' are just the same as 'garments'. So, if everything we say about God is synonymous it would be inappropriate to speak of 'the good God' or anything of the kind. Yet Jeremiah says, 'Most strong, mighty and powerful, your name is Lord of armies.'¹¹¹

110 *The Celestial Hierarchy* 2. PG 3.41.

111 Jeremiah 32: 18.

Reply: The words we use to speak of God are not synonymous. This is clear enough in the case of words we use to deny something of him, or to speak of his causal relation to creatures. Such words differ in meaning according to the different things we wish to deny of him, or the different effects to which we are referring. But it should be clear from what I have previously said¹¹² that even the words that signify what God is (though they do it imperfectly) also have distinct meanings.¹¹³

What we mean by a word is the concept we form of what the word signifies. Since we know God from creatures, we understand him through concepts appropriate to the perfections that creatures receive from him. What pre-exists in God in a simple and unified way is divided among creatures as many and varied perfections. The many perfections of creatures correspond to one single source which they represent in varied and complex ways. Thus the different and complex concepts that we have in mind correspond to something altogether simple which they enable us imperfectly to understand. Thus the words we use for the perfections we attribute to God, though they signify what is one, are not synonymous, for they signify it from many different points of view.

Hence:

1. So, the solution to the first objection is clear. Synonyms signify the same thing from the same point of view. Words that signify the same thing that is thought of in different ways do not, properly speaking, signify the same, for words only signify things by way of thoughts, as I noted above.¹¹⁴
2. The many different points of view are not baseless and pointless, for they all correspond to a single reality which each represents imperfectly in a different way.
3. It belongs to the perfection of God's unity that what is many and diverse in others should in him be unified and simple. That is why he is one thing described in many ways, for our minds learn of him in the many ways in which he is represented by creatures.

Article 5. Do we use words univocally or equivocally of God and creatures?

1. It seems that words used both of God and of creatures are used univocally. The equivocal is based on the univocal as the many is based on the one. A word such as 'dog' may be used equivocally of the animals that bark and of something in the sea [i.e. dogfish], but only because it is first used univocally (of the things that bark); otherwise there would be nowhere to start from and we should go back for ever. Now some causes are univocal because their effects have the same name and description as themselves – what is generated by human beings, for example, is also a human being. But some causes are equivocal, as is the sun when it causes heat, for the sun itself is only equivocally hot. Since, therefore, the equivocal is based on the univocal it seems that the first agent upon which all others are based must be a univocal one. So, we univocally predicate the terms that we use of God and of creatures.

2. Moreover, there is no resemblance between things that are only equivocally the same. But according to Genesis there is a resemblance between creatures and God: 'Let us make

112 1a 13.2.

113 1a 13.1 and 2.

114 1a 13.1.

human beings in our own image and likeness.¹¹⁵ So, it seems we can say something univocally of God and creatures.

3. Again, as Aristotle says, the measure must be of the same order as the thing measured.¹¹⁶ But God is the first measure of all beings, as Aristotle also says. So, God is of the same order as creatures and something can therefore be said univocally of both.

On the contrary, the same word when used with different meanings is used equivocally. But no word when used of God means the same as when it is used of a creature. 'Wisdom', for example, means a quality when it is used of creatures, but not when it is applied to God. So, it must have a different meaning, for we have here a difference in the genus which is part of the definition. The same applies to other words. So, we must use all of them equivocally when we apply them to both God and creatures.

Furthermore, God is more distant from any creature than any two creatures are from each other. Now there are some creatures so different that we can say nothing univocally of them (when they differ in genus, for example). Much less, therefore, can we say anything univocally of creatures and God. Everything we say of them we must say equivocally.

Reply: It is impossible to predicate anything univocally of God and creatures. Every effect that falls short of the power of its agent cause represents it inadequately, for it is not the same kind of thing as its agent cause. Thus what exists simply and in a unified way in the cause will be divided up and take various different forms in such effects – as the simple power of the sun produces many different effects in things on earth. In the same way, as I said earlier, all the perfections which in creatures are many and various pre-exist in God as one.¹¹⁷

The words denoting perfections that we use in speaking of creatures all differ in meaning and each one signifies a perfection as something distinct from all others. Thus when we say that a man is wise, we signify his wisdom as something distinct from the other things about him – his essence, for example, his powers, or his existence. But when we use 'wise' when talking about God we do not intend to signify something distinct from his essence, power or existence. When we predicate 'wise' of a human being we, so to speak, circumscribe and define the limits of the aspect of human beings that it signifies. But this is not so when we predicate 'wise' of God. What it signifies in him is not confined by the meaning of our word but goes beyond it. So, it is clear that we do not use 'wise' in the same sense of God and people, and the same goes for all other words. So, we cannot use them univocally of God and creatures.

Yet although we never use words in exactly the same sense of creatures and of God, we are not merely equivocating when we use the same word, as some have said, for if this were so we could never argue from statements about creatures to statements about God – any such argument would be invalidated by the Fallacy of Equivocation.¹¹⁸ That this does not happen we know not merely from the teachings of the philosophers who prove many things about God but also from the teaching of St Paul, for he says, 'The invisible things of God are made known by those things that are made.'¹¹⁹

115 Genesis 1: 26.

116 *Metaphysics* 10.1, 1053a24.

117 1a 13.4.

118 The following argument commits this fallacy – all pigs are kept in pens, pens are something to write with, therefore all pigs are kept in something to write with. The premises do not imply the conclusion – that is, the argument is invalid – because 'pen' has a different sense in its two occurrences.

119 Romans 1: 20.

So, we must say that words are used of God and of creatures in an analogical way, in accordance with a certain order between them. We can distinguish two kinds of analogical or proportional uses of language. First, there is the case of one word being used of two things because each of them has some order or relation to a third thing. Thus we use the word 'healthy' of both medicine and urine because each of these has some relation to health in animals, the former as a cause, the latter as a symptom of it. Second, there is the case of the same word used of two things because of some relation that one has to the other – as 'healthy' is used of medicine and animals because the former is the cause of health in the latter.

In this way some words are used neither univocally nor purely equivocally of God and creatures, but analogically, for we cannot speak of God at all except in the language we use of creatures, as I have said. So, whatever we say of both God and creatures we say in virtue of the order that creatures have to God as to their source and cause, in which all the perfections of things pre-exist most excellently.

This way of using words lies somewhere between pure equivocation and simple univocity, for the word is neither used in the same sense, as with univocal usage, nor in totally different senses, as with equivocation. The several senses of a word used analogically signify different relations to some one thing, as 'healthy', said of urine, indicates health in an animal, and as when it signifies a cause of that health when predicated of medicine.

Hence:

1. Even if it were the case that equivocal predications are based on the univocal, the same cannot be true when it comes to agent causation. A non-univocal efficient cause is causal with respect to an entire species – as the sun accounts for there being any people. A univocal cause, on the other hand, cannot be the universal cause of the whole species (otherwise it would be the cause of itself, since it is a member of that same species) but is the particular cause that this or that individual should be a member of the species. So, a universal cause, which must be prior to a particular cause, is non-univocal. Such a cause, however, is not wholly equivocal even though it is not univocal, for then there would be absolutely no resemblance between it and its effects. We could call it an analogical cause, and this would be parallel to the case of speech, for all univocal predications are based on one non-univocal, analogical predicate, that of being.
2. The resemblance of creatures to God is an imperfect one, for as I have said, they do not even share a common genus.¹²⁰
3. God is not a measure proportionate to what is measured. So, it does not follow that he and his creatures belong to the same order.

The two arguments in the contrary sense do show that words are not used univocally of God and creatures. But they do not show that they are used equivocally.

Article 6. Do we predicate words primarily of God or of creatures?

1. It seems that the words we use of God apply primarily to creatures. For we speak of things as we know them since, as Aristotle says, words are signs for things as understood.¹²¹ But

¹²⁰ 1a 4.3.

¹²¹ *On Interpretation* 1.1, 16a3.

we know creatures before we know God. So, our words apply to creatures before they apply to God.

2. Dionysius says that 'the language we use about God is derived from what we say about creatures'.¹²² But when a word such as 'lion' or 'rock' is transferred from a creature to God it is used first of the creature. So, such words apply primarily to a creature.

3. Words used of both God and creatures are used of him in that he is the cause of all things, as Dionysius says.¹²³ But what we say of something in a causal sense applies to it only secondarily – as 'healthy' applies primarily to a living animal and only secondarily to the medicine that causes its health. So, we apply such words primarily to creatures.

On the contrary, we read in Ephesians, 'I bend my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus, from whom all fatherhood in heaven and on earth is named';¹²⁴ and the same seems to apply to other words used of God and creatures. So, we use these words primarily of God.

Reply: Whenever a word is used analogically of many things, it is used of them because of some order or relation they have to some central thing.¹²⁵ In order to explain an extended or analogical use of a word it is necessary to mention this central thing. Thus you cannot explain what you mean by 'healthy' medicine without mentioning the health of the animal of which it is the cause. Similarly you must understand 'healthy' as applied to an animal before you can understand what is meant by 'healthy urine', which is a symptom of that health. The primary application of the word is to the central thing that has to be understood first. Other applications will be more or less secondary in so far as they approximate to this use.

Thus all words used metaphorically of God apply primarily to creatures and secondarily to God. When we use them of God they signify merely a certain likeness between God and a creature. When we speak metaphorically of a meadow as 'smiling' we only mean that it shows at its best when it flowers, just as people show at their best when they smile: there is a likeness between them. In the same way, if we speak of God as a 'lion', we only mean that, like a lion, he is mighty in his deeds. It is obvious that the meaning of such a word as applied to God depends on and is secondary to the meaning it has when used of creatures.

This would be the case for non-metaphorical words too if they were only used to express God's causality, as some have supposed. If, for example, 'God is good' meant the same as 'God is the cause of goodness in creatures' the word 'good' as applied to God must be defined in terms of what it means when applied to creatures; and hence 'good' would apply primarily to creatures and secondarily to God.

But I have already shown that words of this sort do not only say how God is a cause.¹²⁶ They also say what he is essentially. When we say that he is good or wise we do not simply mean that he causes wisdom or goodness, but that he possesses these perfections eminently. So, we should conclude that from the point of view of what the words mean they are used primarily of God and derivatively of creatures, for what the words mean (the perfections they signify) flows from God to creatures. But from the point of view of our use of the words we apply them first to creatures because we know them first. That

122 *The Divine Names* 1. PG 3.596.

123 *Mystical Theology* 1. PG 3.1000.

124 Ephesians 3: 14–15.

125 *Metaphysics* 4.7, 1012a23.

126 1a 13.2.

is why, as I have mentioned already, they have a way of signifying that is appropriate to creatures.¹²⁷

Hence.

1. This is valid so far as our first application of the words is concerned.
2. Words used of God metaphorically are not in the same case as the others, as I have said.¹²⁸
3. This objection would be valid if all words were used to express God's causality and not to say what he is, as 'healthy' expresses the causality of a medicine and not what it consists in.

Article 7. In speaking of God, do we use words that imply temporal succession?

1. It seems that we do not apply to God words that imply temporal succession, even when we are speaking of his relation to creatures. It is generally agreed that such words signify what God is in himself. Thus Ambrose says that 'Lord' indicates his power,¹²⁹ but this is the divine substance, and 'creation' indicates his action, but this is his essence. God, however, is not temporal but eternal. So, we do not apply these words to him in a temporal sense but as applicable from eternity.

2. Moreover, whatever is true of something in a temporal sense can be said to be made (as, for example what is white has been made white). But nothing in God is made. So, we say nothing of him in a temporal sense.

3. Moreover, if the reason why we use words of God in a temporal sense were that such words imply a relation to creatures, then the same would be true of every word that implied such a relation. But we apply some of these as from eternity. We say, for example, that God knew and loved creatures from eternity – 'I have loved you with an everlasting love.'¹³⁰ So, all other words, such as 'Lord' or 'Creator', are applicable from eternity.

4. Moreover, these words signify a relation, and this must therefore be a reality in God or in the creature alone. It cannot, however, be only in the creature, for if this were so, we would call God 'Lord' in virtue of the opposite relation existing in the creature. But we name nothing from its opposite. The relation, therefore, must be something real in God. Yet, since he is beyond time, it cannot be temporal. So, it seems that we do not use such words of God in a temporal sense.

5. Moreover, we call something relative in virtue of some relationship it has. For instance, we refer to someone as 'lord' because of the lordship he has, just as we call something white because of its whiteness. If, therefore, the relation of lordship were something that God did not really have but were merely a way of thinking of him, it would follow that God is not truly Lord, which is clearly false.

6. Again, when the two terms of a relationship are not of the same order, one may exist without the other – for example, the knowable can exist without knowledge, as we read in the *Categories*.¹³¹ But in the case of relations between God and creatures, the two terms

127 1a 13.3.

128 See the body of the present article.

129 *On Faith* 1.1. *PL* 16.553.

130 Jeremiah 31: 3.

131 *Categories* 7, 7b30.

are not of the same order, and so something could be said relatively of God even though creatures did not exist. In this way words like 'Lord' and 'Creator' can apply to God from eternity and are not used in a temporal sense.

On the contrary, Augustine says that the relative term 'Lord' is applicable to God in a temporal sense.¹³²

Reply: Some words that imply a relation to creatures are said of God in a temporal sense and not as applicable from eternity.

In order to explain this we must first say something about relations.

Some have said that being related to something is never a reality in nature – that it is something created by our way of thinking about things. But this is false because some things do have a natural order or relation to others. Since, whenever we can say of x that it is related to y , we can also say of y that it is related to x , there are three possibilities here.

Sometimes both what we say of x and what we say of y is true of them not because of any reality in them, but because they are being thought of in a particular way. When, for instance, we say that something is identical with itself, the two terms of the relation only exist because the mind takes one thing and thinks of it twice, thus treating it as though it has a relation to itself. Similarly, any relation between a thing and nothing is set up by the mind treating 'nothing' as though it were a term. The same is generally true of all relations that are set up as part of our thinking – the relation of *being a species of a certain genus*, for instance.

In the second case both what we say of x and what we say of y is true of them because of some reality in x and y . They are related because of something that belongs to both – quantity, for example, as with the relations of *being bigger than* and *being smaller than*, *being double* and *being half*, and so forth. It is the same with the relations that result from causal activity as *being what is changed by* and *being what changes*, *being father of* and *being son of*, and so forth.

In the third case the truth about x that it is related to y is due to something real in x , but the truth about y that it is related to x is not due to anything real in y . This happens when x and y are not of the same order. Take, for example, the relation of *being knowable by* and *knowing* (whether we mean knowledge by the senses or by the mind). When x is knowable by y , x is not in and by itself something knowable. In so far as it exists in its own right it lies outside the order of knowledge. So, while the relation of *knowing x* is a reality in the senses or mind of y – for knowing is what makes a real difference to these – *being knowable by y* is not a reality in x . Thus Aristotle says that we call some things relative not because they are related to others but because others are related to them.¹³³ We say that one side of a column is the right side because it is on the right side of some animal; the relation of *being on the right of* is real in the animal but not in the column.

Now, since God is altogether outside the order of creatures (because they are ordered to him but not he to them), it is clear that being related to God is a reality in creatures, but being related to creatures is not a reality in God. We say it about him because of the real relation in creatures. So it is that when we speak of his relation to creatures we can apply words implying temporal sequence and change, not because of any change in him but because of a change in the creatures; just as we can say that a column has changed from being on

132 *On the Trinity* 5.16. PL 42.922.

133 *Metaphysics* 5.15, 1021a29.

my left to being on my right, not through any alteration in the column, but simply because I have turned around.

Hence:

1. Some relative words signify a relationship, others signify that on account of which there is a relationship. Thus 'lord' says nothing more about a lord except that he stands in some relationship. To be a lord precisely is to be related to a servant – the same is true of words like 'father', 'son', and so forth. Other relative words, however, such as 'mover' and 'moved', 'head' and 'being headed', signify something on account of which there is a relationship. Some of the words we use of God are of the first kind and some of the second. 'Lord', for instance, signifies nothing but a relation to creatures, though it presupposes something about what God is, for he could not be lord without his power, which is his essence. Others such as 'Saviour' or 'Creator' which refer directly to God's activity, which is his essence, are of the second kind and signify something on account of which God has a relationship. But we use both sorts of word of him in a temporal sense in so far as they convey expressly or by implication a relation to creatures. We do not predicate them temporally in so far as they signify directly or indirectly the divine essence.
2. Relations that we attribute to God in a temporal sense are not real in him but belong to him as a way of speaking of him and with no real change in him. The same is true of any becoming that we attribute to him – as when we say, 'Lord, you have become a refuge for us.'¹³⁴
3. Thinking is not something we do to other things, but remains within us; and the same is true of willing. So, we apply from eternity expressions signifying relations that ensue from God's thinking and willing. When, however, they signify relations that ensue from acts which, according to our way of thinking about God, proceed from him to external effects, they can be used of him in a temporal sense. This is the case with words like 'Creator' and 'Saviour'.
4. God's temporal relations to creatures are in him only because of our way of thinking of him, but the opposite relations of creatures to him are realities in the creatures. It is quite admissible to attribute a relation to God because of something that takes place in a creature, for we cannot express a reality in creatures without talking as though there were also matching relations in God. So, we say that God is related to a creature because the creature is related to him – just as, according to Aristotle, we say that the knowable is related to knowledge because knowledge is related to it.¹³⁵
5. God is related to creatures in so far as creatures are related to him. Since the relation of subjection to God is really in the creature, God is really Lord. It is the relationship of lordship in him that is supplied by our minds, not the fact of his being the Lord.
6. When we ask whether the terms of a relation are of the same order or not, we are not asking about the things that are said to be related but about the meaning of the relative words used. If one entails the other, and vice versa, then they are of the same order – as with *being double* and *being half of* or with *being father of* and

¹³⁴ Psalms 89: 1.

¹³⁵ *Metaphysics* 5.15, 1021a30.

being son of. If, however, one entails the other, but not vice versa, then they are not of the same order. This is the case with *knowing* and *being knowable by*. For *x* to be knowable by *y* it is not necessary that *y* should be knowing *x*; it is sufficient that it should have the power to know *x*. Thus 'being knowable' signifies intelligibility as something prior to actual knowledge. If, however, we take 'being knowable' to mean being actually here and now intelligible, then it coincides with the actual exercise of knowledge, for a thing cannot be so known unless someone is knowing it. In a parallel way, although God is prior to creatures (as being knowable is prior to knowing) since '*x* is lord of *y*' and '*y* is subject to *x*' entail each other, *being lord of* and *being subject to* are of the same order. So, God was not lord until he had a creature subject to him.

Article 8. Is 'God' the name of a nature?

1. It seems that 'God' is not the name of a nature. For Damascene says that 'God' (θεός) is derived from θείειν, which means 'to take care of' or 'to foster all things'; or else from αἴθειν, which means 'to burn' – for our God is a fire burning up all wickedness; or from θεᾶσθαι, which means 'to consider all things'.¹³⁶ All the verbs mentioned here signify activity. So, 'God' signifies an activity, not a nature.

2. Moreover, we name things in so far as we know them. But we do not know God's nature. So, the term 'God' cannot signify what that is.

On the contrary, Ambrose says that 'God' is the name of a nature.¹³⁷

Reply: The reason why we use a word to mean something is not always what the word is used to mean. We come to understand what a thing is from its properties or activities, and we often derive our name for the sort of thing something is from some property or activity of it. For example, speakers of Latin derive the word 'rock' (*lapis*) from something it does – hurting the foot (*laedens pedem*). Yet the word 'rock' signifies what a rock is in itself, not what it does. On the other hand, though, we do not name things we know in themselves (e.g. cold, heat, whiteness, and so on) from anything else. In their cases the reason why we use the word to mean something is the same as what it is used to mean.

Now, God is not known to us in his own nature, but through his activity or effects; so, as I have said, we can derive the language we use in speaking of him from these.¹³⁸ 'God' is therefore the name of an activity, for it is an activity of God that leads us to use it – the word is derived from his universal providence: everyone who uses the word 'God' has in mind one who cares for all things. Thus Dionysius says, 'the Deity is what watches over all things in perfect providence and goodness'.¹³⁹ But, although derived from this activity, the word 'God' is used to signify the divine nature.

Hence:

1. Everything John Damascene says here refers to divine Providence, which is what makes us use the word 'God' in the first place.

¹³⁶ *On the Orthodox Faith* 1.9. PG 94.835, 838.

¹³⁷ *On Faith* 1.1. PL 16.553.

¹³⁸ 1a 13.1.

¹³⁹ *The Divine Names* 12. PG 3.969.

2. The meaning of the name we give to something depends on how much of its nature we understand from its properties and effects. Since from its properties we can understand what a stone is in itself, the word 'stone' signifies the nature of the stone as it is in itself. Its meaning is the definition of a stone, in knowing which we know what a stone is; for 'what a word means is the definition'.¹⁴⁰ But from God's effects we do not come to understand what God's nature is in itself, so we do not know what God is. We know him, as I have noted, only as being excellent, as being causal, and as lacking in anything merely creaturely.¹⁴¹ Its is in this way that the word 'God' signifies the divine nature: it is used to mean something that is above all that is, and that is the source of all things and is distinct from them all. This is how those that use it mean it to be used.

Article 9. Is the name 'God' peculiar to God alone?

1. It seems that 'God' is not peculiar to God, but can be used of other things. For whatever shares in what a name signifies can share in the name. But I have just said that 'God' signifies the divine nature,¹⁴² which, according to 2 Peter, is something that can be communicated to others: 'He has bestowed upon us precious and very great promises . . . that by this we may become partakers of God's nature.'¹⁴³ So, 'God' may be applied to others besides God.

2. Furthermore, only proper names are altogether incommunicable. But 'God' is a common noun, not a proper name, as is clear from the fact that it can be used in the plural, as in the psalm: 'I have said that you are gods.'¹⁴⁴ So, 'God' is applicable to many things.

3. Again, as I have said, the name 'God' is applied to God because of an activity.¹⁴⁵ But other words that we use of God because of his activities (e.g. 'good', 'wise', and the like) are all applicable to many things. So, 'God' is as well.

On the contrary, we read in Wisdom, 'They gave the incommunicable name to sticks and stones',¹⁴⁶ and the reference is to God's name. So, the name 'God' is incommunicable.

Reply: A name may be used of many things in two ways, either properly or by metaphor. It is properly used of many when the whole of what it means belongs to each of them; it is used metaphorically when some part of what it means belongs to each. The word 'lion', for example, properly speaking, applies only to the things that have the nature it signifies, but it is also applied metaphorically to other things that have something of the lion about them. The courageous or the strong can be spoken of in this way as 'lions'.

To understand which names, properly speaking, apply to many things we must first recognize that every form that is instantiated by an individual either is or at least can be thought of as being common to many. Human nature can be thought of, and in fact is, common to many in this way. The nature of the sun, on the other hand, can be thought of as being, but in fact is not, common to many. The reason for this is that the mind

140 *Metaphysics* 4.7, 1012a23.

141 1a 12.12.

142 1a 13.8.

143 2 Peter 1: 4.

144 Psalms 81: 6.

145 1a 13.8.

146 Wisdom 14: 21.

understands such natures in abstraction from individual instances; hence whether it be in one individual or in many is irrelevant to our understanding of the nature itself. Given that we understand a nature we can always think of it as being in many instances.

An individual, however, from the very fact of being individual, is divided from all others. Hence a word that is used precisely to signify an individual cannot be applicable to many in fact, nor can it be thought of as applicable to many. It is impossible to think that there could be many of some particular individual. Hence no proper name is properly speaking communicable to many, though it may be communicable through some resemblance – as a man may metaphorically be called ‘an Achilles’ because he has the bravery of Achilles.

But Consider the case of forms which are instantiated not by being the form of an individual, but by themselves (inasmuch as they are subsistent forms). If we understood these as they are in themselves, it would be clear that they are not common to many in fact and also cannot be thought of as being common to many – except perhaps by some sort of resemblance as with individuals. In fact, however, we do not understand such simple self-subsistent forms as they are in themselves. We have to think of them on the model of the composite things that have their forms in matter. For this reason, as I said earlier, we apply to them concrete nouns that signify a nature as instantiated in an individual.¹⁴⁷ Thus the nouns we use to signify simple subsistent natures are grammatically the same as those we use to signify the natures of composite things.

Now, as I have said, we use ‘God’ to signify the divine nature,¹⁴⁸ and, since this nature cannot have more than one instance,¹⁴⁹ it follows that, from the point of view of what is in fact signified, the word cannot be used of many, though it can mistakenly be thought of as applying to many – rather as someone who mistakenly thought there were many suns would think of ‘sun’ as applying to many things. Thus we read in Galatians, ‘You were slaves to gods who by nature were not gods’,¹⁵⁰ and a gloss says, ‘not gods by nature but according to the opinion of human beings.’¹⁵¹

Nevertheless the word ‘God’ does have several applications, though not in its full meaning. It is applied metaphorically to things that share something of what it means. Thus ‘gods’ can mean those who by resembling God share in some way in the divine, as in the psalm: ‘I say you shall be gods.’¹⁵²

If, however, a name were given to God, not as signifying his nature but referring to him as something distinct, regarding him as an individual, such a proper name would be altogether incommunicable and in no way applicable to others – perhaps the Tetragrammaton¹⁵³ was used in this way among the Hebrews: it would be as though someone were to use the word ‘Sun’ as a proper name designating this individual.

Hence:

1. God’s nature can be communicated to others only in the sense that they can share in God’s likeness.

147 1a 13.1, *ad 2*.

148 1a 13.8.

149 1a 11.3.

150 Galatians 4: 8.

151 Interlinear gloss. *PL* 192.139.

152 Psalms 81: 6.

153 The four Hebrew letters that spell out God’s personal name.

2. 'God' is a common noun and not a proper name because it signifies the divine nature in the concrete, though God himself is neither universal nor particular. We do not, however, name things as they are in themselves but as they are to our minds. In fact, the name 'God' is incommunicable, rather as I said of 'Sun'.¹⁵⁴
3. We apply words like 'good' and 'wise' to God because of the perfections that flow from God to creatures. They do not signify God's nature; rather, they signify these perfections absolutely speaking. So, not only can we think of them as applicable to many things; they actually are so. But we apply the word 'God' to him because of the activity peculiar to him which we constantly experience, and we use it to signify his nature.

Article 10. Is the name 'God' used in the same sense of God, of what shares in divinity and of what is merely supposed to do so?

1. It seems for three reasons that 'God' is used univocally of what has the divine nature, what shares in this nature, and what is supposed to have it. For when we do not have the same meaning for the same word we cannot contradict each other. Equivocation eliminates contradiction. But when Catholics say 'The idol is not God', they contradict pagans who say 'The idol is God.' So, 'God' is being used univocally by both.

2. Furthermore, an idol is supposed to be God, but is not so in fact, just as the enjoyment of the delights of the flesh is supposed to be felicity, but is not so in fact. But the word 'happiness' is used univocally of this supposed happiness and of true happiness. So, 'God' must also be used univocally of the supposed and the real God.

3. Again, words are used univocally if they have the same meaning. But when Catholics say there is one God they understand by 'God' something almighty, to be revered above all things. But pagans mean the same when they say that their idol is God. So, the word is used univocally in the two cases.

On the contrary, what is in the mind is a sort of picture of what is in reality, as *On Interpretation* says.¹⁵⁵ But when we say 'That is an animal', both of a real animal and of one in a picture, we are using the word equivocally. So, 'God' used of the real God and of what is thought to be God is used equivocally. Furthermore, we cannot mean what we do not understand. But pagans do not understand the divine nature. So, when they say, 'The idol is God', they do not mean true divinity. Yet when Catholics say that there is only one God they mean this. So, Catholics and pagans do not use the term 'God' univocally. They predicate it equivocally of the true God and of what is supposed to be God.

Reply: In the three meanings listed above, 'God' is used neither univocally nor equivocally but analogically. When a word is used univocally it has exactly the same meaning in each application. When it is used equivocally it has an entirely different meaning in each case. But when it is used analogically its meaning in one sense is to be explained by reference to its meaning in another sense. Thus to understand why we call accidents 'beings' we have to understand why we call substances beings. Likewise, we need to know what it means for animals to be healthy before we can understand what expressions like 'healthy urine' or 'healthy

154 See the body of the present article.

155 *On Interpretation* 1, 16a5.

medicine' mean. For healthy urine indicates a state of health, and healthy medicine makes animals healthy.

It is the same with the case I am now considering. For we have to refer to the use of 'God' as meaning the true God in order to explain its use as applied to things that share in divinity or which are supposed to be gods. When we say that something is a 'god' by sharing in divinity we mean that it shares in the nature of the true God. Similarly, when we say that an idol is a god, we take 'god' to mean something that people suppose to be the true God. So, it is clear that while 'God' is used with different meanings, one of these meanings is involved in all the others and the word is therefore used analogically.

Hence:

1. We say that a word has different uses not because we can use it in different statements but because it has different meanings. Thus 'man' has one meaning and one use whatever it is predicated of, whether truly or falsely. It would be said to have several uses if we meant it to signify different things – if, for instance, one speaker used it to signify a man and another to signify a stone or something else. Thus it is clear that Catholics,¹⁵⁶ when they say that an idol is not God, are contradicting pagans who affirm that it is God, for both are using 'God' to signify the true God. When pagans say 'The idol is God' they are not using 'God' to mean that which is merely supposed to be God. If they were, they would be speaking truly, as Catholics do when they sometimes use the word in that way (cf. 'All the gods of the pagans are demons').¹⁵⁷

2, 3. We can make the same reply to the second and third objections. For these have to do with the different statements we can make with a word, not with a difference in meaning.

4. As to the fourth argument which takes the opposite point of view: the word 'animal' is not used wholly equivocally of a real animal and an animal in a picture. Aristotle uses the word 'equivocal' in a broad sense to include the analogical,¹⁵⁸ thus he sometimes says that 'being', which is used analogically, is used equivocally of the different categories.

5. Neither Catholics nor pagans understand the nature of God as he is in himself, but both know him as in some way causing creatures, as surpassing them and as set apart from them, as I have said.¹⁵⁹ In this way when pagans say 'The idol is God' they can mean by 'God' just what Catholics mean when they declare, 'The idol is not God.' People who knew nothing whatever about God would not be able to use 'God' at all, except as a word whose meaning they did not know.

Article 11. Is 'The One who Is' the most appropriate name for God?

1. It seems that 'The One who Is' is not the most appropriate name for God. For the name 'God' cannot be shared, as I have said.¹⁶⁰ But 'The One who Is' is a name that can be shared. So, it is not the most appropriate name for God.

156 Aquinas used this to refer to all Western Christians, and in this particular use it might simply refer to Christians.

157 Psalms 95:5.

158 *Categories* 1, 1a1.

159 1a 12.12.

160 1a 13.9.

2. Dionysius says, "To call God good is to show forth all that flows from him."¹⁶¹ But what is supremely characteristic of God is to be the source of all things. So, the most appropriate name for God is "The Good" rather than "The One who Is".

3. Every name of God seems to imply a relation to creatures – for we only know God from creatures. But "The One who Is" implies no such relation. So, it is not the most appropriate name for God.

On the contrary, we read in Exodus that when Moses asked, "If they ask me, "What is his name?" what shall I say to them?," the Lord replied, "Say this to them, "The One who Is has sent me to you."¹⁶² So, "The One who Is" is the most appropriate name for God.

Reply: There are three reasons for regarding "The One who Is" as the most appropriate name for God.

First, because of its meaning; for it does not signify any particular form, but existence itself. Since the existence of God is his essence, and since this is true of nothing else (as I have shown),¹⁶³ it is clear that this name is especially fitting for God, for we name everything by its form.

Second, because of its universality. All other names are either less general or, if not, they at least add some nuance of meaning which restricts and determines the original sense. In this life our minds cannot grasp what God is in himself; whatever way we have of thinking of him is a way of failing to understand him as he really is. So, the less determinate our names are, and the more general and simple they are, the more appropriately do we apply them to God. That is why Damascene says, "The first of all names used of God is "The One who Is", for he comprehends all in himself, he has his existence as an ocean of being, infinite and unlimited."¹⁶⁴ Any other name selects some particular aspect of the being of the thing, but "The One who Is" fixes on no aspect of being but stands open to all and refers to God as to an infinite ocean of being.

Third, "The One who Is" is the best name for God because of its tense. For it signifies being in the present, and it is especially appropriate to predicate this of God – for his being knows neither past nor future, as Augustine says.¹⁶⁵

Hence:

1. "The One who Is" is more appropriate than "God" because of what makes us use the name in the first place, that is, his existence, because of the unrestricted way in which it signifies him, and because of its tense, as I have just said.¹⁶⁶ But when we consider what we use the word to mean, we must admit that "God" is more appropriate, for we use this to signify the divine nature. Even more appropriate is the Tetragrammaton which is used to signify the incommunicable and, if we could say such a thing, the individual substance of God.
2. "The Good" is a more fundamental name for God is so far as he is a cause. But it is not more fundamental simply speaking, for to be comes before being a cause.

161 *The Divine Names* 3. PG 3.680.

162 Exodus 3:13 and 14.

163 1a 3.4.

164 *On the Orthodox Faith* 1.9. PG 94.836.

165 *On the Trinity* 5.2. PL 42.912.

166 See the body of the present article.

3. God's names need not necessarily imply a relation to creatures. It is enough that they should come to be used because of the perfections that flow from God to creatures, and of these the primary one is existence itself, from which we get the name 'The One who Is'.

Article 12. Can we formulate affirmative propositions about God?

1. It seems that we cannot formulate affirmative propositions about God. For Dionysius says, 'Negative propositions about God are true, but affirmative ones are vague.'¹⁶⁷

2. Moreover, Boethius says, 'A simple form cannot be a subject.'¹⁶⁸ But God is a simple form to the highest degree, as I have already shown.¹⁶⁹ So, he cannot be a subject. But affirmative propositions are about their subjects. So, we cannot formulate such propositions about God.

3. Again, we fall into error when we understand something as different from the way it is. Now God is altogether without composition in his being, as I have proved.¹⁷⁰ So, since every affirmative act of the intellect understands an object as composite, it would seem that we cannot truly formulate affirmative propositions about God.

On the contrary, what is of faith cannot be false. But some affirmative propositions are matters of faith, as, for example, that God is three and one, and that he is almighty. So, we can formulate true affirmative propositions about God.

Reply: In every true affirmative proposition, although the subject and predicate signify what is in fact in some way the same thing, they do so from different points of view. This is so both in propositions that express an accidental predication and in those that express an essential predication. After all, in 'The man is a white thing' it is clear that 'man' and 'white thing' refer to the same object but differ in meaning, since what it is to be a man is not the same as what it is to be a white thing. But it is also true for a statement such as 'human beings are animals'. That which is human is truly an animal: in one and the same thing we find the sensitive nature because of which we call it an animal and the rational nature because of which we call it a human being.

There is even a difference in point of view between subject and predicate when they have the same meaning, for when we put a term in the subject place we think of it as referring to something, whereas in the predicate place we think of it as saying something about the thing, in accordance with the saying 'we understand predicates formally (as meaning a form), and we understand subjects materially (as referring to what has the form)'.

The difference between subject and predicate represents two ways of looking at a thing, while the fact that they are put together affirmatively indicates that it is one thing that is being looked at. Now, God, considered in himself, is altogether one and simple, yet we think of him through a number of different concepts because we cannot see him as he is in himself.

But although we think of him in these different ways we also know that to each corresponds a single simplicity that is one and the same for all. We represent the different ways of thinking of God in the difference of subject and predicate. We represent his unity by bringing them together in an affirmative statement.

167 *The Celestial Hierarchy* 2. PG 3.140.

168 *On the Trinity* 2. PL 64.1250.

169 1a 3.7.

170 1a 3.7.

Hence:

1. Dionysius says that what we assert of God is vague (or, according to another translation, 'incongruous') because no word used of God is appropriate to him in its way of signifying, as I have observed.¹⁷¹
2. Our minds cannot understand subsisting simple forms as they are in themselves. We understand them in the way that we understand composite things, in which there is the subject of a form and something that exists in that subject. And so we apprehend a simple form as if it were a subject, and we attribute something to it.
3. In the sentence, 'We fall into error when we understand something as different from the way it is', 'different from' can refer either to the thing understood or the way of understanding. Taken in the former sense the proposition means that we are mistaken when we understand something to be different from what it is. That is true, but it is irrelevant when it comes to our present concern, for when we formulate propositions about God we do not say that he has any composition. We understand him to be simple. But if we take 'different from' to apply to the way of understanding, then the proposition is false, for the way of understanding is always different from the way the thing understood is. It is clear, for example, that our minds non-materially understand material things inferior to them; not that they understand them to be non-material, but that we have a non-material way of understanding. Similarly when our minds understand simple things superior to them we understand them in our own way, that is on the model of composite things; not that we understand the simple things to be composite, but that composition is involved in our way of understanding them. So, the fact that our statements about God are composite does not make them false.