

**The traces of the Divine Intelligence  
according to Saint Thomas' *Summa Theologiae***

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*"It is Thy providence, O Father, that steers its course . . . . It is Thy will that the works of Thy wisdom should not be without effect." (Wis. 14: 3, 5)*

**I. INTRODUCTION**

I remember a day when, walking around the house of my grandparents, near a river, I saw an acacia. It was for the first time when, seeing its big thorns, I was very astonished. I asked myself for the first time how is it that such a "weapon" grew up onto this tree. It was clear for me that those thorns were not there for the sake of beauty, or just by mistake. A physicist would say immediately that even a weak force, when applied onto a very small surface, causes a very big pressure. And a physician would continue the explanation saying that this pressure can cause a big pain when applied onto the sensible parts of a living body. So my question was how did that acacia know all these phenomena, how did it know about the pressure exercised by a sharp body or about the pain caused by such a pressure? I was sure that the poor tree had never known the properties of a cow, a goat or a sheep. I had like a flash in that very moment and I "saw" the Intelligence who governs the universe, the Providence who directs everything toward its good. I understood then that only a stupid or a fool could deny the existence of the Eternal Ruler and the action of His Providence, and from that moment all my doubts concerning the existence of God were totally removed.

This essay will begin with a *particular analysis* of the fifth way proposed by Saint Thomas to prove God's existence (ch. II), followed by a study of the relation between this argument and the fact that the perfections of all things are in God (ch. III). The fourth chapter will treat about goodness in general and the divine goodness, both in reference to the fifth way. In the last chapter, I will draw some *conclusions* concerning the subject treated.

## II. THE ANALYSIS OF THE FIFTH WAY

Among the five ways of proving God's existence proposed by Saint Thomas, this fifth way shows a particular light in a very clear manner upon our understanding of God. If the first three arguments pointed toward God as toward a mysterious principle of change, of causing, and of being, the last two arguments help us to understand something more about His nature. Although the fourth way already shows us God as having all perfections in an absolute way, the fifth way seems to reveal in an easier manner God as a Supreme Intelligent Being.

The argument has three parts: *first*, one seeing the universe and the *regularity of the operations* proper to each natural body should admit that all of them operate *for the sake of an end*. That is, all of them act in order to attain to "*that which is best for them.*"<sup>1</sup> Of course, this observation belongs to an intelligent nature. We consider something "best" according to our knowledge of what is "the best." Thus, *every natural operation has its reason.* *Second*, insofar as all things operate for the sake of an end, this *order*<sup>2</sup> shows us that "*they arrive at the end not by chance, but by intention.*"<sup>3</sup> This step of the argument is clear from the very fact that there are *natural sciences*. A science is not concerned with what happens by chance, but it studies *the necessary natural laws*, that is, *the necessary natural order*. On the other hand, *this order makes sense only insofar as it is intended for something*. Thus, it presupposes an intention. Until now we have reached two important conclusions: every operation of a natural body has a reason (1), and presupposes an intention that moves the body according to that reason (2). Therefore, it is clear that the operations of the natural bodies *presuppose an intellectual nature*.<sup>4</sup> All things are moved toward their end by the will of an intelligent being. *Third*, it is evident that not all natural bodies have an intellectual power. Thus, *the reason and the intention mentioned above does not belong to them*, but belongs to another being, *which moves everything according to its intention and reason*. We call this supreme being God.

In fact, the "mechanism" of this argument is that "like understands like." A rational nature is able to see the traces of another reason, even if this likeness is not absolute.

<sup>1</sup> Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 2, a. 3, corpus.

<sup>2</sup> *Order* insofar as these things are *ordered* toward an end.

<sup>3</sup> Saint Thomas Aquinas, *op. cit.*, *ibidem*.

<sup>4</sup> Insofar as reason [ratio] and intention suppose intellect and will.

### III. THE PERFECTIONS OF ALL THINGS ARE IN GOD

This fifth way of proving God's existence shows a particular light upon the fact that the perfections of all things are in God. In the *first step* of the fifth argument<sup>5</sup> we saw that every natural body operate *for the sake of an end*, that is, in order to attain to *that which is best for them*. This is of course a *perfection* proper to that natural thing (it presupposes a potency to that perfection). Further, we saw in the second and in the third steps of the fifth argument that the natural bodies *are ordered* to their perfection by a Supreme Intelligent Being, namely, God. Consequently, *the end* of every natural operation (i.e., the perfection of any natural body) must preexist in the Mind of One ordering something to that end. Thus, *the perfections of all things preexist in God's Mind*. In fact, in q. 4, art. 2 of *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, Saint Thomas shows how the perfections of all things are in God who is *their First Efficient Cause* (1) and their very Being (2). *With respect to the first*, it was proved in the second way that God is the First Efficient cause of everything. But all perfections in an effect *must be found in its efficient cause*, at least with the same account if not in a higher way. Every agent produces something *like* him, this likeness being *univocal* or *equivocal* (it depends on the way of causing, univocally or equivocally). But, insofar as the agent already *is*, the perfections of the effect preexist in it in a more perfect way than they preexist in matter.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, the perfections of all things must preexist in God in a *higher way*, for He is an equivocal agent with respect to all created things. *With respect to the second*, God is being itself subsisting through itself. But "things are perfect insofar as they have being in some way,"<sup>7</sup> for "nothing has actuality except insofar as it is,"<sup>8</sup> that is, insofar as it has being. Thus, because created things receive their being from God, they receive their perfections from God as well. Therefore, it is clear that God possesses in Himself all perfections, as He possesses the fullness of being.

Looking back to all of the arguments, we can conclude that the perfections of all things preexist in God's mind, in God's power and in God's being. It seems that the fifth way adds an

<sup>5</sup> See ch. II of the present essay..

<sup>6</sup> In fact, every perfection is a form (a substantial or accidental one). And the form as such pre-exists in the power of the agent (something actual) in a higher way that it pre-exists in the potency of matter (merely in potency), insofar as what is actual is higher than what is merely in potency. The agent can bring form into matter, that is why one could say that the potency to act is higher (in the order of *being*) than the potency to be acted upon.

<sup>7</sup> Saint Thomas Aquinas, op. cit., I, q. 4, a. 2, corpus.

<sup>8</sup> Ibidem, a. 1, 3<sup>rd</sup> reply.

important statement, saying that these perfections preexist in God's mind. For by excluding the perfection understood as an end in God's mind one would have two possibilities: either to posit the perfection understood as end in something else, which would have to be higher than God,<sup>9</sup> or to deny the finality of any movement originated in the First Mover, and in this case the very notion of "perfection" would be compromised.<sup>10</sup> Of course, both alternatives are absurd. The First Mover, the First Cause, the Necessary Being, the Perfect Being, and the First Ordering Principle must be one and the same Being, if one wants to avoid contradiction.

Another consequence of the fifth way with respect to the perfections of all things is also important: God, whose being possesses all perfections, *is* the ultimate perfection of all things, that is, *their last end*. This is true insofar as *being* is the ultimate perfection of all perfections,<sup>11</sup> and also for the reason that all created things *share* in the Divine perfection. However, we will proceed now to a deeper analysis of this subject, by considering the fifth way in relation to *goodness*, and particularly the *Divine goodness*.

#### IV. GOODNESS AND THE DIVINE GOODNESS

The *good* is defined as "that which all desire."<sup>12</sup> This does not mean that each good should be desired by all, but that "whatever is desired has the account of the good."<sup>13</sup> Therefore, since the good has the account of the desirable, it has the account of the *end*. But the end moves everything as a *final cause*, which is called the "cause of causes,"<sup>14</sup> for without it the other causes do not act. In the agent the final cause comes first, followed by the efficient cause and in the third way by the formal cause. However, in the effect the order is totally changed: first it comes the formal cause, second the efficient cause and third the good.<sup>15</sup> This last order follows the increase of the degree of perfection in the effect, to which we should pay a particular attention.

<sup>9</sup> In this case God would be merely an instrument, for the end must be in the agent, insofar as an agent does not act except for the sake of an end.

<sup>10</sup> Any particular "state of being" of a thing would be just "a state of being," and the things in the universe would have no order (with respect to themselves and to one another).

<sup>11</sup> That is, of any form. *Being* stands to form as form stands to matter.

<sup>12</sup> Saint Thomas Aquinas, op. cit., I, q. 5, a. 1, a. 4; q. 6, a. 2, re. 2.

<sup>13</sup> Ibidem, q. 6, a. 2, re. 2.

<sup>14</sup> Ibidem, q. 5, a. 2, re. 1.

<sup>15</sup> Ibidem, q. 5, a. 4, corpus.

The degree of perfection corresponds in a thing to the degree of actuality. *Inasmuch as we accept the distinction between potency and actuality*, every being, even if it exists only in potency, shares in the desire of some perfection or already possesses it. Consequently, insofar as perfection (or actuality) is a good, *every being, even the potential one, is good* – either by possessing some actuality, or by being in potency to some actuality (tending to it). The consequence is interesting: as soon as one recognizes a thing *under the aspect of good*, he has to posit some final cause, and therefore an intention of an intelligent *being which accounts for the existence of that thing*.<sup>16</sup> And if that being lacks intelligence and consequently the knowledge of the end, it follows that there must be a Supreme Intelligent Being who ordered that thing to that end. This is a particular case of the fifth way of proving God’s existence.

In order to see other particular cases of the fifth argument, we should use the distinction made by Saint Thomas when he speaks about *three general goods: modes, species and order*.<sup>17</sup> In fact, he uses also the distinction made by Scriptures, when it is said: “You have disposed all things in number, weight, and measure” (Wis. 11: 21). Saint Thomas identifies “*number*” with “*species*” – since it offers species to each thing, and “definitions signifying species are like numbers”<sup>18</sup>; “*weight*” with “*order*” – since it draws each thing to rest and stability; and “*measure*” with “*mode*” – since it fixes the mode of each thing.<sup>19</sup> Thus, in order to be perfect, a thing should lack nothing according to the manner of its perfection. That is, it should be *good* in each of these three aspects. But to be perfect according to mode or measure means to have *the prerequisites for form*, to be perfect according to species or number means to have a *form*, and to be perfect according to order or weight means to have *those things which follow on form*. With respect to the latter, it is *the inclination to an end* that follows on form, since “each form, insofar as it is actual, acts and tends to that which belongs to it according to its form.”<sup>20</sup> Here the form is the first actuality of that thing, that is why there is still some potency to the second actuality in it. This *second potency* is in fact the inclination to an end that

<sup>16</sup> One could call it “la raison d’être” – the *ratio essendi* of a thing.

<sup>17</sup> S. Thomas A., op. cit., q. 5, a. 5, corpus.

<sup>18</sup> Ibidem. As a unit added to a number changes completely that number into another one, so an element added to a definition changes the species.

<sup>19</sup> This is a kind of equality between the thing and its principles. See q. 5, a. 5, corpus.

<sup>20</sup> Ibidem.

*follows on form*. Actually, this is the distinction between *being simply* and *being in a certain respect*, insofar as being simply is followed by a potency of being in a certain respect.<sup>21</sup>

After having discussed the distinction made by Saint Thomas, we have to turn again to our argument. Thus, every time when one recognizes *one of these three general goods* in a thing, he has to posit some intention of a Supreme Intelligent Being, who ordered that irrational being to its degree of perfection. Seeing the mode (measure) in things, their species or their order – or, using the words of Scripture, seeing their “number, weight and measure” – one should see immediately behind them the Divine Intelligence, namely, God. Therefore, according to this argument, the scientists studying the natural sciences would have to believe firmly in the existence of an intelligent God.

We should turn our attention now to a previous argument, given at the end of the third chapter of our essay. We said there that God is the last end of all things, their highest good. Saint Thomas speaks very clearly about that in q. 6, a. 1, and his argument is very simple: all things, by desiring their own perfection (which is a certain likeness of the agent<sup>22</sup>), desire the agent itself. But God is the First Cause of all things, thus all things desire God as their end. Saint Thomas exemplifies:

Of the things which desire God, certain things know Him according to Himself, which is proper to the rational creature. Certain things know things sharing in His goodness, which can happen even according to sensible knowledge. And certain things have a natural appetite without knowledge, insofar as they are inclined to their ends by a higher knowing agent.<sup>23</sup>

On the other hand, since God is “being itself subsisting through itself,” that is, the fullness of being, He is not simply *the end* of all things, but also their *last end*. Being is the perfection of all perfections, thus *the last* perfection of all things. But all things have their being from God,<sup>24</sup> hence God is their last end. Even rational creatures are ordered by God to their last end (i.e., happiness – the vision of the Divine Essence), but they have the freedom to fail from their end. However, they do not order themselves to their last end (happiness) – since all desire it naturally. Hence, even rational creatures are ordered by God to their last end.

<sup>21</sup> Ibidem, q. 5, a. 1, corpus.

<sup>22</sup> Insofar as the agent makes something like itself.

<sup>23</sup> S. Thomas A., op. cit., I, q. 6, a. 1, 2<sup>nd</sup> reply.

<sup>24</sup> By sharing to some extent in it.

The conclusion is that everything comes from God (as from the First Efficient Cause) and is moved by God (the First Mover) toward God (their Last End). This is the principle of the unity in the *kosmos*, as S. Dionysius the Areopagite pointed out in his treatise *On the Divine Names*. Therefore, God is the Beginning and the End – Alpha and Omega (Rev. 1: 8, 17).

The last consideration is that, *since God is the last end of all things*, He is good through His essence. He is not ordered to *some other perfection or good*, but to Himself, being in this respect radically different from other things, for we have shown that they are perfected by sharing in the divine perfection to some extent. Hence, they share in the goodness of God. But *God alone* is good through His essence, since only Him does not need another essence to be perfected by.<sup>25</sup> One could conclude that the order in the universe is the work of the Divine love, as S. Dionysius defines it: “the desire of the Good for the Good, by reason of the Good.”<sup>26</sup> God creates everything through this love and afterwards He directs everything through this love to Himself, by reason of Himself.

## V. CONCLUSION

We saw that the fifth way of proving God’s existence brings a particular light upon the nature of God, being in the same time a very strong argument. Considering, for example, the second objection in q. 2, a. 3, this argument shows very clearly that there must be an intention of a Supreme Intelligent Being that accounts for the order in the universe. The human will and reason cannot account for it, since it is evident that it is not the man who decided the end of any natural law. Moreover, even the human being is ordered to happiness by somebody else, who is evidently God himself. On the other hand, since the desire for a definite perfection follows on the form of a thing, it is the First Cause of that thing that must account for this desire in the thing. Hence, the First Cause and the Supreme Intelligent Being must be one and the same being, namely, God.

Here one should understand also how created freedom differs from the freedom of God: all things are created for Him, and they do not have the power to change that, to choose another

<sup>25</sup> He is the First Efficient Cause, being pure actuality and possessing the fullness of being. Hence there is no potency in Him to some other perfection or goodness, therefore he is good through his essence (this is the classical way of proving that).

<sup>26</sup> S. Dionysius the Areopagite, *On the Divine Names* (The Shrine of Wisdom: Surrey, 1957), ch. IV, p. 37.

last end. That is why we can be called *prisoniers de l'infini* [prisoners of the infinite], as Father Molinié uses to say.<sup>27</sup> But it would be absurd to pretend to be absolutely free, for this would mean to be god by nature, which is impossible. Our only chance is the freedom of love.

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See his book with the same title.