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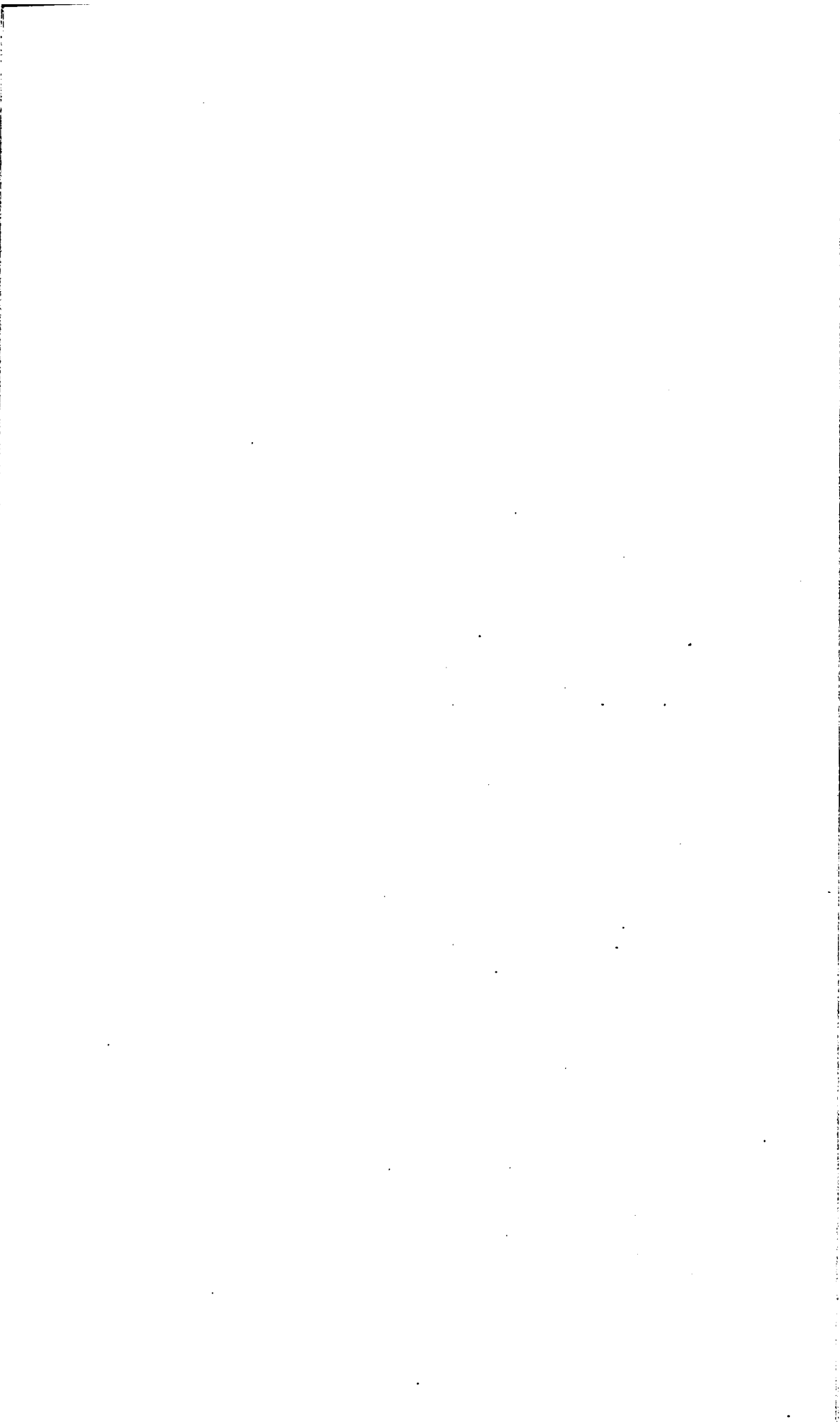
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An Introductory Essay
to The History of
The Development of Metaphysics
in The Commentary on
Peter Lombard's Sentences
by Thomas Aquinas

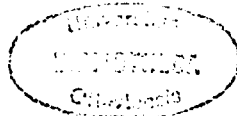
BY

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EXCERPT OF

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CHAPTER I

PARTICIPATION

Participation and Procession
General Approach
Meaning of Participation
Divine Perfections and Modes of
Participation
Hierarchy and Participation
Causality and Participation

Participation and Procession

The theme of participation in Thomas' doctrine, theological as well as philosophical, is of primary importance. The two aspects, theological and philosophical, are closely linked, one being the analogy of the other. Thus speaking of the person of the Son, the Logos, and the order which derives from him, Thomas says,

Ordo, quia sicut trames a fluvio derivatur,
ita processus temporalis creaturarum ab aeterno
processu personarum...¹

and a few sentences later he invokes the authority of Aristotle on the same point,

Semper enim id quod est primum est causa eorum
quae sunt post, secundum Phil. II Met., text. 4;
unde primus processus [personarum divinarum] est

¹ I Sent., prologus, p. 2-3.

causa et ratio omnis sequentis processionis.²

Let us try to see Thomas' general approach towards participation before entering into the details of its structure.

General Approach

Thomas is a theologian. As a Christian whose vocation was that of a doctor, his unremitting occupation was an elucidation of God's revealed Word by the use of natural reason. Philosophy, therefore, was used by him for a theological end. Its appearance in the Sentences depends entirely on theological questions, and is presented, not in the order of philosophy itself, but in the order of the questions of the Sentences, which is based on the Augustinian categories of res-signa, uti-frui. In order, therefore, to present Thomas' view of the hierarchy of being, we should conform to that order which most closely resembles the

² Ibid. We find the same in I Sent., d. 14, q. 2, a. 2, sol., p. 325. "Respondeo dicendum quod in exitu creaturarum a primo principio attenditur quaedam circulatio vel regressio, eo quod omnia revertuntur sicut in finem in id a quo sicut principio prodierunt. Et ideo oportet ut per eadem quibus est exitus a principio, et reditus in finem attendatur. Sicut igitur dictum est quod processio personarum est ratio productionis creaturarum a primo principio,..." According to Thomas, this procession can be considered in two ways, one of which is the following: "et sic talis processio attenditur secundum dona naturalia, in quibus subsistimus,..."

theological context in which the philosophical doctrine was developed. In doing so, we would more closely approximate Thomas' thought. And that philosophical order which most closely resembles theology is not the "via inventionis", but the "via iudicii". This is the sapiential view of the order of being.

The theologian is chiefly concerned with the Deity, and all other things in relation to the Deity, as known through the inspiration of divine light.³ For the philosopher, it is the constitution, and order, of sensible things, and all things known by analogy through sensible things.⁴

A comparison of these orders will reveal many illuminating points.

<u>Theology</u>	<u>Philosophy</u>
Father God Son, Word, Christ Holy Spirit	God, Creator
Angels (constituted in grace)	Separate substances
Man (constituted in grace)	Man
Animals	Animals
Plants	Plants
Inanimate world	Inanimate world

³ I Sent., prol., q. 1, a. 1, ad 1, p. 8.

⁴ Ibid.

We see that the two orders greatly resemble each other in the number and grades of perfection of the diverse realities. The aspects under which they are investigated differ radically, however, as well as the relative value of each grade of being in the evolution of the respective sciences. But the definite parallel between the two orders — theological and sapiential view of philosophy — need not surprise one: it is indeed the one God who creates and reveals.

This fact is of prime importance to penetrate the philosophical world of the theologian Thomas. As a Christian thinker, Thomas holds that all creatures are made to the image and similitude of God. God has, in a free and loving act, given the entire substance⁵ of each thing a being in the world.

These created substances imitate God's perfection as vestiges, if they are not endowed with reason; images,

⁵ "Hoc autem creare dicimus, scilicet producere rem in esse secundum totam suam substantiam." II Sent., d. 1, q. 1, a. 2, p. 17-18. Cf. also II Sent., d. 12, q. 1, a. 5, p. 317-319; ibid., d. 13, q. 1, p. 327.

if they imitate Him in what is most noble⁶: reason.⁷

These created substances, endowed with reason in imitation of God's goodness, come to know the attributes of the Divinity through the participations which are participated by the creatures. Thomas calls on the Pseudo-Denis' authority, as well as that of Aristotle, both of whom, strangely enough, share the same doctrine.

Divina attributa non innotescunt nobis nisi ex eorum participationibus quibus a creaturis participantur. Sed inter omnes alias participationes esse prius est, ut dicitur V cap. De Divinis Nom., his verbis "ante alias ipsius" scilicet Dei "participantes, esse positum est." Cui etiam dictum Philosophi consonat, Liber De Causis, prop. 4: "Prima rerum creaturarum est esse." Ergo videtur quod secundum rationem intelligendi in Deo esse sit ante alia attributa, et "qui est", inter alia nomina.⁸

⁶ "Solutio. Respondeo dicendum quod imago in hoc differt a vestigio: quod vestigium est confusa similitudo alicujus rei et imperfecta; imago autem repraesentat rem magis determinate secundum omnes suas partes et dispositiones partium ex quibus etiam aliquid de natura illius rei percipi potest. Et ideo in illis tantum creaturis dicitur esse imago Dei quae propter sui nobilitatem ipsum perfectius imitantur et repraesentant; et ideo in angelo et homine secundum id quod est in ipso nobilius. Alia autem secundum id quod est in ipso nobilius. Alia autem quae plus et minus participant de Dei bonitate, magis accedunt ad rationem imaginis." I Sent., d. 3, q. 3, a. 1, p. 109-110.

⁷ Cf. I Sent., d. 3, q. 4, a. 1, p. 113-114.

⁸ I Sent., d. 8, q. 1, a. 3, p. 199. It should be noted that both of Thomas' sources are Neo-Platonist: Denis, a metaphysician of the good; the author of the Liber de Causis, based on Proclus, is a metaphysician of the One.

Philosophical knowledge is attained through causality, remotion, and eminence.

... cum creatura exemplariter procedat ab ipso Deo sicut a causa quodammodo simili per analogiam, ex creaturis potest in Deum deveniri tribus modis quibus dictum est, scilicet per causalitatem, remotionem, eminentiam.

Through this process we arrive at a Being who, in the order of substance, is the measure of participation of all creatures.

Ita etiam in genere substantiae, illud quod habet esse perfectissimum et simplicissimum, dicitur mensura omnium substantiarum, sicut Deus.¹⁰

His existence and His essence are one, because all multitude in the order of existence, as in any other order, must be reduced to unity, according to the Platonist Denis in De Divinis Nominibus.

... cum omnis multitudo procedat ex aliqua unitate ... oportet universitatis multitudinem ad unum principium omnium entium primum reduci, quod est Deus.¹¹

The prime philosophical name of God — who is the source of unity, and to whom all things must be reduced — is "Qui Est".¹² Indeed, it is one of the names God Himself

⁹ I Sent., d. 3, q. 1, a. 3, p. 96.

¹⁰ Ibid., d. 8, q. 4, a. 2, p. 223.

¹¹ Ibid., d. 2, q. 1, a. 1, p. 60.

¹² "Hoc idem videtur per Damascenum, ubi supra, cap. ix, dicentem quod "qui est" maxime est proprium nomen Dei et per Rabbi Moysen, qui dicit hoc nomen esse nomen ineffabile, quod dignissimum habetur." I Sent., d.8, q.1, a.1, p. 194.

revealed to Moses:

Dixit Dominus ad Moysem: si quaesieris nomen meum, sic dices filiis Israel: Qui est misit me ad vos.¹³

But God has also revealed another name, and it is this: "Ego sum Deus Patris tui, Deus Abraham, Deus Isaac et Deus Jacob."¹⁴

Contrary to what Pascal might say,¹⁵ it is an evident fact that the God of philosophers and the God of religion do meet; that the God who creates and the God who reveals are indeed one. For Thomas, natural contemplation of God through his effects is ordained to the supernatural contemplation of God known in his essence. These two orders, that of nature, and of grace, are seen as participations, radically differing yet by the Wisdom and Mercy of God, ordered to each other. In spite of Pascal,¹⁶ this sense of order, and of their mutual support, is a prime characteristic of Thomas' doctrine.

¹³ Exodus, 3, 14.

¹⁴ Exodus, 3, 6 and 16.

¹⁵ "Dieu d'Abraham, Dieu d'Isaac, Dieu de Jacob, non des philosophes et des savants." Pensées; Adversaria, N^o. 2, p. 363. Pantheon edition (1950).

¹⁶ "Je sais un peu ce que c'est [l'ordre], et combien peu de gens l'entendent. Nulle science humaine ne l'a gardé: St. Thomas ne l'a pas gardé. La Mathématique le garde, mais elle est inutile en sa profondeur." Pensées; Apologia, N^o. 28, p. 14, Pantheon edition.

We have seen Thomas' general approach to the question of participation, with emphasis on the sapiential view of philosophy. Let us now see the same theme in greater detail.

The Meaning of Participation

Participation, imitation and similitude are three concepts which are closely linked. We can see this in what is a unique description in the Sentences.

... creaturae non dicuntur divinam bonitatem participare quasi partem essentiae suae, sed quia similitudine divinae bonitatis in esse constituentur, secundum quam non perfecte divinam bonitatem imitantur sed ex parte.¹⁷

Creatures are said to participate the divine goodness because there is a partial similitude or imitation.

Participation always implies an inferior mode of being. "Quia quod est per essentiam, prius est quam id quod est per participationem."¹⁸ The superiority of that which is participated is variously described.

Sed illud cuius participatione aliquid denominatur, est magis et perfectius quantum ad illud genus secundum quod denominat [sic: should be denominatur], quam ipsum participans, ut supra

¹⁷ II Sent., d. 17, q. 1, a. 1, p. 415. The entire character of the text is Neo-Platonic, and can be summarized in the fact that esse is derived from goodness.

¹⁸ IV Sent., d. 8, expositio textus, p. 352.

habitu est: xxii dist.; et Dionysius etiam dicit cap. xii, De Div. Nom., quod participationes excedunt ipsa participantia.¹⁹

Without doubt, what is participated is superior to that which participates; and we find this, again on the authority of Dionysius,

Fraeterea, secundum Dionysium, v cap. De Divinis Nom., tantum distat inter ipsas Dei participationes et participantes, quod participatio quanto simplicior est tanto nobilior, participans vero quanto majorem habet compositionem donorum participatorum, tanto nobilior est; sicut esse est nobilior quam vivere, et vivere quam intelligere, si unum sine altero intelligatur: omnibus enim esse praeeligitur. Sed quod habet plura his, melius est.²⁰

There is the clear distinction: the participants and the participations. What accounts for this distinction? It lies in the perfections participated, and the mode of participation. This new term, mode, is an important one.

... in creaturis spiritualibus possumus duo considerare: scilicet ipsas perfectiones divinae bonitatis secundum se acceptas; et hic nominatur Deus, non quidem symbolice, sed proprie, sicut dicitur sapiens et intelligens et hujusmodi; ... Vel possumus considerare ipsum modum determinatum participandi hujusmodi perfectiones, qui modus pertinet ad determinatum naturam vel ordinem angelorum.²¹

¹⁹ I Sent., d. 34, q. 1, a. 1, p. 777-778. The Neoplatonic source, Dionysius, should be noted, as well as the fact that denomination is according to a genus.

²⁰ I Sent., d. 17, q. 2, a. 2, p. 414.

²¹ I Sent., d. 34, q. 3, a. 2, p. 800-801.

There are the divine perfections, and the determined mode of participation, a mode which belongs to the nature. The principle, however, is a universal one, applying to all created natures.

Nihil habet esse, nisi in quantum participat divinum esse, quia ipsum est primum ens, quare causa est omnis entis. Sed omne quod est participatum in aliquo est in eo per modum participantis.²²

We have then these elements in participation: a) the divine perfection, b) the participants, or^{c)} the mode of the participants. Let us see how the divine perfections are described before discussing the created mode of participation.

The Divine Perfections and Modes of Participation

God is the cause of all beings. He possesses esse in the most noble of modes, because something is always in the cause in a more noble mode than in the caused thing.

... illud quod est primum principium essendi, nobilissimo modo habet esse, cum semper sit aliquid nobilius in causa quam in causato. Sed nobilissimus modus habendi esse est quo totum aliquid est suum esse.²³

²² I Sent., d. 8, q. 1, a. 1, p. 197-198. The concept of causality seems entirely dependent on participation. This is most significant.

²³ I Sent., d. 8, q. 4, a. 1, p. 219. This use of mode is closely linked to the Platonic term of "measure" and is used by Thomas in this sense.

It is interesting to see that the most noble mode of having esse is that in which the entirety of the thing is its esse. And even though this divine goodness is communicable, it is not so in the highest mode.

... quamvis divina bonitas sit communicabilis, non tamen secundum modum altissimum, prout est in Deo: unde summa bonitas non communicatur.²⁴

Though the highest mode is not communicable, God does communicate his goodness,

... ad hoc Deus creaturam facit ut unaquaeque de sua bonitate participet quantum possibile est; meliusque est ut secundum aliquem modum participet quam nullo modo.²⁵

The communication of the goodness depends on possibility, possibility which is according to some mode. It is better to participate according to a mode than in no mode whatsoever.

Whatever is communicated to creatures must, in fine, be found in God, again according to the most noble of modes.

Quod autem est causa alicujus habet illud [entitatem et bonitatem] excellentius et nobilius. Unde oportet quod omnes nobilitates omnium creaturarum inveniatur in Deo nobilissimo modo et sine aliqua imperfectione...²⁶

²⁴ I Sent., d. 8, q. 2, a. 2, p. 205.

²⁵ II Sent., d. 32, q. 2, a. 3, p. 837.

²⁶ I Sent., d. 2, q. 1, a. 2, p. 63. One should read the discussions of mode and measure in I Sent., d. 3, q. 2, a. 2, p. 101-103, and a. 3, p. 105. A text similar to the one quoted above can be found in I Sent., d. 8, q. 4, a. 2, p. 221-222. "Quarta causa est ex perfectione divini esse, quae colligit omnes nobilitates omnium generum. Unde ad nullum genus determinatur..." And in the same article we find the following: "... quidquid est in genere habet esse (continued next page)

Thus we can see the divine perfection proceeding from, and returning to itself in the similitude of creatures. The divine perfection is spoken of as a mode, the highest and most noble. This mode is communicated to others, according to the goodness of the cause.

Things are participated in diverse things according to diverse modes. There are two elements which we have seen before: the perfection itself (which is newly described here as the common reason) and the proper mode into which the analogical perfection is received. The perfection, in its analogical reason, is common to God and to creatures. The perfection can be goodness, entity (entitas), or other such things. These are received into proper modes of participation. These are described as determined modes of having or possessing something. Is it this distinction of a modal participation which allows us to answer how the divine perfection is found in creatures? We have been told that the divine goodness cannot be communicated in its highest mode. Thomas also tells us that it can be participated according to a determined mode.

26 (continued) determinatum ad illud genus. Sed esse divinum nullo modo determinatum est ad aliquod genus, quinimo comprehendit in se nobilitates omnium generum, ut dicit Philosophus et Commentator in V Met., text. 21."

... divina bonitas participatur in diversis secundum diversos modos. Perfectioni autem participatae duplex nomen imponitur. Vel secundum rationem communem perfectionis illius; et tunc nomen est commune et ipsi principio communicanti et omnibus participantibus, secundum analogiam sicut bonitas, entitas, et hujusmodi. Vel secundum proprium modum quo recipitur vel est in aliqua creatura, ut patet quod cognitio participatur a Deo in omnibus cognoscentibus, et hoc nomen "sensus" imponitur ad significandum cognitionem secundum aliquem modum determinatum habendi ipsam, et propter hoc non est commune omnibus.²⁷

The participated perfection has two names; one common according to the analogical reason; the other not common because it is imposed from the determined mode. What is the nature of this determined mode?

We have seen above that it is connected to nature. It is a determined mode because this mode is that of a determined nature, for instance, of the angels. Before trying to ascertain what is the structure of this determined mode, we should show the foundation of the distinction between the participated perfection and the mode of the participant. This is the question of the quiddity and its esse.

²⁷ I Sent., d. 19, q. 2, a. 1, p. 469. From this text we can see that the analogical division of the ten genera according to modes is not only based on predication in logic, but has a metaphysical foundation in participation. The ten genera are modes of being conceived according to formal perfection alone. Cf. I Sent., d. 22, q. 1, a. 3, p. 538: "... aliter dividitur aequivocum, analogum et univocum. Aequivocum enim dividitur secundum res significatas, univocum vero dividitur secundum diversas differentias sed analogum dividitur secundum diversos modos. Unde cum ens praedicatur analogice de decem generibus, dividitur in ea secundum diversos modos."

Thomas holds that it is impossible for any participation to be had unless there is a difference²⁸ between the esse and quiddity of a thing.

... ejus in quo non differt suum esse et sua quidditas non potest participari quidditas sua sive essentia, nisi et esse participetur. Sed quandocumque dividitur essentia alicujus per participationem, participatur essentia eadem secundum rationem et non secundum idem esse. Ergo impossibile est ejus in quo non differt essentia et esse, essentialem participationem dividi vel multiplicari. Tale autem est Deus.²⁹

The difference of quiddity and esse permits participation, and, in the context, this participation is described as an essential one. The term is used in relation to God who cannot be divided or multiplied by an essential participation. This refers us back to the statement concerning created things which can participate the same essence but not the same esse. We find a similar use in a text in which Thomas speaks of the "more or less" of a mode of participation.

... magis et minus potest dici aliquid dupliciter: vel quantum ad ipsam naturam participatam, quae secundum se intenditur et remittitur secundum accessum ad terminum vel recessum, et hoc non est nisi in accidentibus; vel quantum ad modum participandi; et sic etiam in essentialibus dicitur

²⁸ It should be noticed here that Thomas does not speak of a distinction, or of a composition, but uses the term of differt. This difference of esse and quiddity is held, in an implicit manner to be real, based on things, but expressed from a logical approach, and in logical terms.

²⁹ I Sent., d. 3, q. 1, a. 2, sol., p. 94.

magis et minus secundum diversum modum participandi, sicut angelus dicitur magis intellectualis quam homo.³⁰

Here we see that there is an identification of the mode with the nature of the angel, and of man; and these are called "essentials". The use of the concrete nouns suggests that the natures are closely associated with the entire substance, and not just with the quiddity. This association of the mode with the substance suggests a slight incoherency, but, as we shall shortly see, it is legitimate in this metaphysics we are describing. For the moment we are concerned with the fact that participation is in the order of essence, whether of one nature, or of the diverse grades of natures.³¹

We can gather from all the foregoing that it is the difference of quiddity and esse which permits us to speak of a mode. Mode of participation refers to the limiting structure of an essence which is more or less than another essence. It is this modal structure which permits us to speak of creatures participating God's goodness and being. It is a

³⁰ I Sent., d. 8, expositio textus, p. 209.

³¹ Cf. I Sent., d. 35, q. 1, a. 4, ad 3, p. 820: "... magis et minus nunquam univocationem vel speciei unitatem auferunt; sed ex ea quibus magis et minus causantur possunt differentiam speciei facere, et univocationem auferre: et hoc contingit quando magis et minus causantur non ex diversa participatione unius naturae, sed ex gradu diversarum naturarum; sicut angelus homine intellectualior dicitur." The diverse grades of natures are bound to the nature of the possibles.

firm principle that God is not the inherent form of any creature, though these imitate his essence. If creatures cannot share (in a physical sense) God's essence, they cannot share his esse. However, creatures do participate the perfections of his essence according to certain modes. The quiddity is a mode limiting that act of being whereby they imitate their exemplar cause.

It is also a difference of quiddity and esse which permits participation of one nature. It seems a well established point that it is the quiddity, which differs from the esse, which is the mode.

Participation is less "to share being in common with", rather it has the emphasis of the Greek notion of metousia, "to have being after", that is, to have being after the exemplar of divine goodness, of which the created substance is then a similitude. Participation is similitude.³²

³² Cf. The definition of participation, II Sent., d. 17, q. 1, a. 1, p. 415; or note the use of terms in the following text: "Loquendo autem de Deo per comparationem ad nos, sic iterum dupliciter potest considerari. Aut secundum suam similitudinem et participationem; et hoc modo ipsum esse est per se notum; nihil enim cognoscitur nisi per veritatem suam, quae est a Deo exemplata; veritatem autem esse est per se notum." I Sent., d. 3, q. 1, a. 2, sol., p. 94. Another synonym is representation. "Alio modo quando ipsum nomen dicit aliquid repraesentatum in creaturis, sicut vivens: omnis enim vita exemplata est a vita divina. Et similiter hoc nomen "qui est" nominat Deum per esse inventum in creaturis quod exemplariter deductum est ab ipso." I Sent., d. 8, q. 1, a. 1, p. 196. Cf. also I Sent., d. 4, q. 1, a. 2, p. 132; ibid., d. 8, q. 5, a. 2, p. 231; III Sent., d. 2, q. 1, a. 1, p. 56.

As Fr. Th. Delvigne, o.p., has remarked: "Cette notion de similitude joue un grand rôle dans le Commentaire."³³

He continues describing the influence of this notion.

On voit que c'est là toute une organisation théologique découlant entièrement de ce principe que l'imparfait dérive des perfections divines comme leurs manifestations. A la lumière de cette doctrine, bien des pages du Commentaire des Sentences s'éclairent et prennent tout leur sens, et cette oeuvre acquiert une cohérence très forte et vraiment impressionnante.

Elle présente des voies pour arriver à Dieu par démonstration, qui sont loin de ressembler à celles de la Somme. Inspirées de Denys, elles vont des créatures à Dieu, comme on s'élève de l'imparfait au parfait, et n'ont guère recours à la contingence, au mouvement et à la causalité qui fondent l'argumentation des "quinque viae" de la Somme. Aussi aboutissent-elles à un Etre qui est moins la Cause première des choses que la Perfection infinie dont participe le monde et que l'esprit atteint dans les perfections créées dans la mesure où celles-ci s'en approchent. De là un rapport entre Dieu et le monde qui est plutôt un rapport de similitude que de dépendance. Aussi, au terme de ces voies, la transcendance divine est-elle moins marquée que sa ressemblance avec les perfections qui émanent de lui et ont amené l'esprit jusqu'à lui.

Le monde devient la manifestation des perfections divines qui en sont la cause efficiente exemplaire; de chacune d'elles dérivent des séries de perfections créées: la sagesse créée vient de la Sagesse divine, la science de la Science, la vie de la Vie, etc...³⁴

³³ The quotation is from page 119 of the only article the present writer has been able to find on the metaphysical context of the Commentary: "L'inspiration propre du traité de Dieu dans le Commentaire des Sentences de Saint Thomas", in Bulletin Thomiste, Notes et communications, I (1932), p. 119-124*, with the single exception cf. Fr. Connolly's article: "The Attributes of God..." noted above.

³⁴ Fr. Delvigne, "L'inspiration propre...", p. 120.

Strong as the Dionysian influence is, Thomas has added an element to participation and it lies in the quiddity differing from the esse. There cannot be participation unless there is this difference.

Hierarchy and Participation

The Dionysian hierarchy is a cardinal point in the philosophical structure of the Sentences: it is the vivifying spirit of the Thomas' notion of participation. It is the source of all order in the universe, an order, we must remark, which resembles the theological order. For instance,

... divina sapientia, quae est exemplar rerum, facit similitudinem suam in creatura secundum ordinem: quia prius efficiuntur in participatione divinae similitudinis creaturae superiores, et posterius inferiores.³⁵

The participation, or similitudes, are closely bounded one to another by a series of descensions, in which one order touches another.

... sicut dixit Dionysius, cap. vii De Divin. Nomin., natura inferior secundum supremum sui attingit infimum naturae superioris; et ideo natura animae in sui supremo attingit infimum naturae angelicae; et ideo aliquo modo participat intellectualitatem in sui summo.³⁶

These beings share, more or less, in the perfection of God. This more or less establishes the grade of being.

³⁵ I Sent., d. 8, q. 3, a. 1, ad 1, p. 211.

³⁶ I Sent., d. 3, q. 4, a. 1, p. 113.

Inter formas autem corporum magis appropinquat ad similitudinem Dei, anima rationalis; et ideo participat de nobilitatibus Dei, scilicet quod intelligit, et quod potest movere, et quod habet esse per se; et anima sensibilis minus, et vegetabilis adhuc minus, et sic deinceps.³⁷

The various grades of beings of the hierarchy are determined by what we might call pure perfections.

... quidquid perfectionis in rebus est, hoc Deo secundum unum et idem indivisibile convenit, scilicet esse et vivere et intelligere, et omnia hujusmodi. Cum autem omnes creaturae imitentur ipsam essentiam quantum ad esse, non tamen omnes quantum ad vivere: nec iterum illa quae imitantur ipsum quantum ad esse, eodem modo esse participant, cum quaedam aliis nobiliter esse possideant.³⁸

Thomas can speak of creatures imitating God's essence as to esse, because he conceives of esse as a form, which like whatsoever other form, is common.

Esse autem aliquid potest dici terminatum tripliciter; vel secundum durationem totam...; vel ratione partium durationis...; vel ratione suppositi in quo esse recipitur: esse enim recipitur in aliquo secundum modum ipsius, et ideo terminatur, sicut et quaelibet alia forma, quae de se communis est, et secundum quod recipitur in aliquo, terminatur ad illud;...³⁹

We find the same in another text, in which these perfections are derived from the efficient exemplar, and again we see that all beings imitate his essence.

³⁷ I Sent., d. 8, q. 5, a. 2, p. 231.

³⁸ I Sent., d. 26, q. 2, a. 2, p. 841.

³⁹ I Sent., d. 8, q. 2, a. 1, p. 202. The text, bearing on esse as a form, is not an isolated statement.

... omnia attributa divina sunt principium productionis per modum efficientis exemplaris; sicut bonitatem omnia bona imitantur, et essentiam omnia entia, et sic de aliis.⁴⁰

Thus participation is based on the similitude or imitation of God's perfection; and according to the perfections participated an order of being is founded, an order which finds its place above or below another form of participation, in an other word, a hierarchy.

This hierarchy is of Dionysian inspiration, and this can be seen in a text which can be taken as a summary of participation as similitude: "Omnes bonitates in creaturis participatae sunt quidem radii divinae bonitatis."⁴¹

Causality and Participation

Fr. Delvigne has already spoken of the type of causality to be found in the Commentary. Two elements can be noticed. First, there is the formula of exemplar efficient cause.⁴² The second element is the exclusive derivation of one perfection from its divine exemplar, and it

⁴⁰ I Sent., d. 10, q. 1, a. 5, ad 4, p. 272.

⁴¹ II Sent., d. 28, q. 1, a. 5, ad 4, p. 733. The text deals with the analogy of light, and uses Denis' authority.

⁴² Cf. I Sent., d. 8, q. 1, a. 3, ad 2, p. 200; and I Sent., q. 5, a. 2, p. 493-494; and such uses as effective et exemplariter in I Sent., di 8, q. 1, a. 2, p. 198.

alone, for instance, wisdom from Wisdom, science from Science, life from Life.⁴³ These elements can be seen clearly in this text.

Respondeo dicendum quod opera divina possunt comparari ad divina attributa sicut ad causam efficientem exemplarem; et hoc modo sapientia creaturae est a sapientia Dei, et esse creaturae ab esse divino, et bonitas a bonitate.⁴⁴

The question immediately arises as to the reason for such an expression which implies a certain formalism, as well as a reduction of one order of causality to the other. We will see the reason in Thomas' conception of causality.

A most informative element of Thomas' doctrine of causality is found in his major division of the causes.

... duplex est agens, scilicet agens divinum, quod est dans esse, et agens naturale, quod est transmutans.⁴⁵

⁴³ Cf. I Sent., d. 3, q. 1, a. 2, sol., p. 94; ibid., d. 8, q. 1, a. 1, p. 196; d. 7, q. 3, p. 199-200. Also such statements as "omne esse, in quantum perfectum est, exemplariter deductum est ab esse divino." I Sent., d. 36, q. 2, a. 3, p. 844-845. III Sent., d. 2, q. 1, a. 1, ad 3, p. 56-58.

⁴⁴ I Sent., d. 1, expositio textus, p. 49 in fine. Also: "Omnia attributa divina sunt principium productionis per modum efficientis exemplaris; sicut bonitatem omnia bona imitantur, et essentiam omnia entia, et sic de aliis." I Sent., d. 10, q. 1, a. 5, ad 4, p. 271-272. Fr. Connolly says, in "The Attributes of God..." in Philosophical Studies, p. 22-23: "In the development of this exemplar causality in the Sentences there is a dangerous skidding between the purely logical and the real."

⁴⁵ II Sent., d. 15, q. 1, a. 2, sol., p. 372.

The division, which appears as between a cause of motion and the divine cause is of Avicennian inspiration.

... unde Avicenna, Tract. X Meta., cap. X, dicit quod agens divinum differt a naturali: agens enim naturale est causa motus; sed agens divinum est dans esse totum; sicut Creator mundi...⁴⁶

A natural agent is cause of motion, it is a factive cause.

Thomas has a division of this efficient cause.

... causa efficiens dupliciter potest dividi. Uno modo ex parte effectus: scilicet in disponentem quae causat dispositionem ad formam ultimam, et perficientem quae inducit ultimam perfectionem. Alio modo ex parte ipsius causae in agens principale, et instrumentale. Agens enim principale est primum movens, agens autem instrumentale est movens motum.⁴⁷

It can easily be seen that efficient causality in these texts is based on a conception of substantial actuality, and nothing further. It is the cause of motion whose term is an induced form. There can be no doubt that such is the case for the efficient cause as disponent and perficient in the text above. It is equally clear for the efficient cause as principal and instrumental; thus,

Agens enim principale, cum agat sibi simile, oportet quod habeat formam quam inducit per suam actionem in agentibus univocis vel aliquam

⁴⁶ I Sent., d. 7, q. 1, a. 1, ad 4, p. 178. "Sicut enim dicit Avicenna, lib. I Sufficientiae, cap. XI, haec est differentia inter agens divinum et agens naturale, quod agens naturale est tantum causa motus, et agens divinum est causa esse." I Sent., d. 37, q. 1, a. 1, sol., p. 857-858.

⁴⁷ IV Sent., d. 1, a. 1, a. 4, p. 32.

nobiliorem, in agentibus non univocis. Sed agens instrumentale non oportet quod habeat formam quam inducit ut disponentem ipsum sed solum per modum intentionis, sicut de forma scammi in serra patet.⁴⁸

Again these two elements of motion, and the induction of a form. The induction of form is the reason for this proposition, that, "nihil agit ultra suam speciem, quia effectus non potest esse nobilior causa".⁴⁹ The effect, or the induced form, cannot be more noble than the form possessed by the agent.

The process of change through motion is centered on the actuality of form.

Et ideo, cum motus corruptionis tendat in non esse, generationis vero ad esse; quando forma introducitur, forma est; quando autem expellitur, non est.⁵⁰

The simple statement, without any qualification, that when the form is introduced it expresses the fundamental characteristic of efficient causality. Form is actuality, and causality is the eduction of a form.

⁴⁸ IV Sent., d. 5, q. 2, a. 2, p. 218.

⁴⁹ III Sent., d. 33, q. 1, a. 5, p. 1024.

⁵⁰ IV Sent., d. 17, q. 1, a. 5, p. 852. The context does not suggest any other reality present in the effect of the cause. Esse enters causality as the term of God's action and as a form: "Esse enim recipitur in aliquo secundum modum ipsius, et ideo terminatur, sicut et quaelibet alia forma quae de se communis est..." I Sent., d. 8, q. 2, a. 1, p. 202. This is the meaning which should be given to such clauses as "agens divinum est dans esse totum", quoted above.

Another characteristic of efficient causality is the reduction of efficiency to formal causality.

Causa enim efficiens non reducitur in idem numero cum forma generati, sed in idem specie, ut patet in II Phys.⁵¹

One reason for this reduction is to be found in the very nature of the causality of motion. The term of the motion is always a form,⁵² and it is from this form which terminates the motion that the motion receives its specificity.⁵³ Efficient cause, being simply a source of motion, whereby the form is generated, has no further reality or efficiency than that of a possessed form in act. Because the efficient cause is opposed to passivity, and therefore to matter, it must be located on the side of form. A further reason for reduction is to be found in the nature of metaphysics as a science. Efficiency is the action (or motion) of a form in act (of an agent) on matter. Because matter, considered in itself, is unknowable except in its relation to a form, efficient causality, to enter the subject of metaphysics, must

⁵¹ IV Sent., d. 1, q. 1, a. 4, ad 3, p. 38.

⁵² Cf. II Sent., d. 34, q. 1, a. 2, ad 5, p. 377-378. "... terminus enim generationis est forma, quia est mutatio ad esse; terminus vero corruptionis est privatio quia est mutatio ad non esse." Another instance of the actuality of form.

⁵³ Cf. I Sent., d. 46, q. 1, a. 2, p. 1053. "Motus, secundum Philosophum in V Physic. recipit speciem a termino. Sed quodlibet fieri terminatur ad esse hoc ejus quod fit."

be reduced to ratio entis. Efficiency — in its intelligibility to the metaphysician — explains the presence of the same specific form in diverse matter.

The unity of doctrine between this conception of efficient causality and that of participation as a sharing in God's perfection through a similitude is evident.

Summary

Participation is to partly possess, or have a similitude of, God's perfection. This is based on esse, which, as a form, is an imitation of God's perfections. Participation is possible because esse and quiddity differ in all creatures. This difference allows a more or less of being in creatures. This more or less establishes various orders of being, a hierarchy. Efficient causality does not lift this doctrine of participation beyond the level of essence, since efficient causality is a moving cause in generating a form, and is conceived only in terms of form.

God and participation are described in Neo-Platonic terms. As Fr. Connolly says,

Nevertheless, in establishing the existence of a Most Perfect Being, who is exemplary cause of all, St. Thomas' presentation seems to evoke an intellectual climate, where the mounting scale of formal perfections embraces not only how the inferior formalities are understood, but is also the very explanation of their causes in existence.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Cf. "The Attributes of God...", loc. cit., p. 20.

In the next chapter, we will investigate the structure of the "more or the less" of an essence which constitutes a reality, and which places it in a hierarchy. It is the question of the possible.

CHAPTER II

POSSIBILITY

Possibility and the Constitution of
a Being
Possibility and the Hierarchy of
Being
Possibility, Esse and Dependence

Possibility and necessity are two important terms whose meanings have been greatly discussed, particularly because of the central influence of the possible in Avicenna's philosophy itself, and of this philosophy on Thomas' own doctrine. It is commonplace to students of these matters that the respective metaphysics diverge because of the conception of the nature of the possible.¹ And the fact of diverging conceptions of being is as commonplace.

Possibility, for Avicenna, lies in the indifference to being found in a (logical) essence; it can be or not be. Necessity is the exclusive attribute of the divinity, all

¹ Cf. C. Smith, s.j., "Avicenna and the Possibles", in New Scholasticism, Vol. 17, 1943, p. 343-357. This is probably the best article, English or French, on this question, with relation to Thomas' final position. Cf. also Th.-B. Wright, "Necessary and Contingent Being in St. Thomas", in New Scholasticism, Vol. 25, 1951, p. 437-466, and the works of M.A. Goichon, La distinction de l'essence et de l'existence, p. 164 in particular. Also Etienne Gilson, Being and Some Philosophers, Pontifical Inst. Med. Studies, Toronto, 1949 (1st ed.), p. 75 *passim*.

others are possible in se, and remain possible in se, even though through the power of an exterior agent (God, Necesse esse) they may become necessary, but always necessary through another (per aliud), and never in themselves. The Avicennian logical conception of being (possibile per se, necessarium per aliud), based on the doctrine of the common nature, leads to the view that creatures are only relative beings, there being nothing in a being which would account for its subsistence as a being. Created being becomes essentially relative not substantial.

With Thomas, necessity is not the exclusive attribute of uncreated being, but belongs as well to the angelic substances. It is shown that angelic substances, because they do not possess a substantial principle of mutability (matter), are in essence incorruptible, and therefore are necessary beings even though this necessity is caused by another. This position is commonly held to be the only one to which Thomas gave credence during his career.²

² This is based on the text from De Potentia, q. 5, a. 3, and in Contra Gentiles, l. II, cap. xxx. The De Potentia text is always quoted first, and a secondary reference to the Contra Gentiles follows. This procedure of reference, however, obscures the growth of the problem in Thomas' mind. On close reading in relation with the Sentences, it would seem that the Contra Gentiles followed the Sentences, and then was, so to speak, codified later in the De Potentia. This then would be the chronological order: Sentences, Contra Gentiles, De Potentia, Summa theologiae. This is an opinion; the writer has not had occasion to make a detailed study of these works, and has been unable to find any information in the secondary Thomistic literature.

Without exposing Avicenna's position and Thomas' as found in his later works, this chapter will bring forth the matter found in the Sentences. It will be seen that it is not the position given in the De Potentia; and though not the position of Avicenna, approaches it.

Possibility and the Constitution of a Being

Thomas speaks of possibility in spiritual as well as material beings; and even of God Himself, in one place.³

There is a twofold possibility: that according to which the creatures are born to have. This refers to the perfection of the nature in its potency by the acquiring of ulterior perfections, virtues, both moral and speculative, etc. The other is described as the possibility based on reception of esse from another.

Est autem considerare duplicem possibilitatem: unam secundum id quod creatura habet [res]; alteram secundum id quod nata est habere. Prima consequitur creaturam secundum quod habet esse ab alio; omne enim quod esse suum ab alio habet, non est per se necesse esse, ut probat Avicenna, tract. viii Meta., cap. liv, unde, quantum est in se, est possibile, et ista possibilitas dicit dependentiam ad id a quo est. ... et hanc dependentiam sive possibilitatem

³ Cf. I Sent., d. 3, divisio textus, p. 88. He speaks of the authority of the Apostle Paul, proving the possibility of the unity of the divine essence — probat unitatis divinae essentiae possibilitatem. There is nothing further in the text. The statement refers to a question concerning God's unity, the compossibility of the Divine Attributes in Unity, Simplicity. It is a logical possibility.

consequitur mutabilitas quaedam, quae est verti-
bilitas in nihil...⁴

What is the nature of this mutability which founds possibility? Strictly speaking, it is not mutability, and for two reasons. The first reason is that in all mutable things there is a substrate to that form which is removed. If we take the entire esse of creatures which depends from God, we cannot find any substrate which would be a principle of mutation.

The other reason is that nothing is said possible if its contrary is necessary. The esse of creatures cannot, in any way, fail unless the influence of the divine goodness be withdrawn, which is impossible, and the contrary of necessary because the divine will is immutable. Accordingly creatures

⁴ I Sent., d. 8, q. 3, a. 2, sol., p. 213-214. The word res is found in the Parma edition (1856-57). Its addition adds clarity to the text. There is no change of meaning. The reference to Avicenna is found in his *Metaphysics*, tract. VIII, cap. LIV. The creatures considered in the text are angelic substances; material beings are considered later. Fr. Connolly, in "The Attributes of God...", p. 49, has this pertinent observation: "However, if St. Thomas' break with the metaphysics of essence is clear on the point mentioned by M. Gilson, it is by no means clear on several other points. An example of this, which has far-reaching results throughout the deduction of the attributes, is the exposition of the mutability of creatures and the mutability of God. M. Gilson points out that the traditional metaphysics of essence presented change not as an existential fact but as a purely essential index of an ontological deficiency. That which changes appears immediately as non-necessary and consequently non-being. He says that the *Summa* of Alexander of Hales shows the two notions of creature and changeable as being equivalent. There seems to be no difference between these two notions in St. Thomas' treatment of the immutability of God."

cannot be said corruptible simply, but under condition that they are abandoned.

Mutability is the possibility of the entire esse defecting into nothingness if the divine influence be withdrawn. Possibility and mutability, vertibility are not synonyms. Mutability, vertibility is the possible considered in its capacity to non-esse. Possibility is found in any being other than God in the capacity to esse or non-esse. This possibility is found in all creatures, even spiritual substances devoid of matter; it is not limited to creatures composed of matter and form.⁵

We come to a more detailed discussion of possibility in the constitution of creatures.

Principium mutationis et causa est rei possibilitas; nec defectus esse potest nisi per potentiam incompletam. Illud ergo cui nihil admiscetur de potentia secundum naturam suam nec mutari nec deficere potest: illud autem cui admiscetur potentia quae tamen tota per actum completur, potest quidem, quantum in se est, deficere et mutari secundum quod esse et completionem suam non nisi ab alio habet; sed ratione perfectae receptionis, quae nihil potentiae imperfectum relinquit, habet immobilitatem et indeficientiam. Hujusmodi autem exemplum sumi potest in naturalibus et intellectualibus. Invenitur autem in naturalibus quorundam potentia naturalis omnino completa, et per suum esse et per suam formam; et ideo esse deficiens habent, sicut patet in corporalibus caelestibus, quorum potentia non est

⁵ This is the position, under the influence of Averroes, which Thomas adopts later in the Summa contra Gentiles, B. 2, Chap. 30, and more firmly in De Potentia, q. 5, a. 3.

susceptiva alicujus alterius esse vel formae, unde elongata sunt a privatione et per consequens a corruptione. Sed materia aquae non tota completur per formam aquae hoc modo ut reducatur in omnem perfectionem possibilem per eam; unde simul cum forma aquae manet privatio formae aeris, et ideo haec corruptibilia sunt.⁶

Possibility is a principle of movement. What does this imply? It implies a change of status, from one manner of having being to another manner. It is a change in what the being is, or what it has. We have seen above the extension of meaning is given to movement. There can be no defect in being unless there is an incomplete potency. Possibility is identified with passive potency.

Thomas says that which has no potency mixed in its nature cannot change or suffer any deficiency. This, at first, would seem to limit possibility to natural being, that is, those composed of matter and form; and identify the potency of possibility with potency of matter. However, this is not the case; there is possibility in angelic substances.⁷

The first example Thomas gives is of celestial bodies. A celestial body is that which has potency in its

⁶ II Sent., d. 7, q. 1, a. 1, p. 181.

⁷ This may be seen in many texts; cf. II Sent., d. 3, q. 1, a. 6, sol., p. 104 in particular, and in any text affirming a distinction of essence and esse in angelic substances in general.

nature yet is totally completed by its act, by its esse and form. Considered in itself, it can change, and suffer deficiency in as much as its esse and its completion are from another; but by reason of the perfect reception in the potency, which leaves no potency unperfected, it is immobile and indeficient.

There are two levels of consideration here: one is in the level of nature, the other, the level of esse. These celestial bodies have potency in their nature, hence prime matter which is totally actuated by the substantial form. Considered on this level there is no possibility to change.

Considered in itself, inasmuch as the esse and completion are received from another, there is a possibility, mobility, and deficiency. Possibility here is not founded on matter but on the reception of esse and completion from another. This last phrase can be understood in this way. No ^{created} being is the sufficient cause for its existence. It must be from another. Completion must be understood in relation to causality, a "making" in which that which exists is a complete being, a substance which stands by itself. Possibility then is the capacity for determination.

A second example following on the general statement is also found in natural things.

The matter of water is not entirely completed by the form of water in such a way that all the perfection possible

would be actualized. There still remains the privation of the form of air. This is the foundation for corruption of water by fire, for instance. The possibility in the matter is in the matter, as well as in the reception of esse from another.

This possibility to a contrary can also be found in intellectual creatures. That which is immediately and naturally known determines the power of the entire reason. But the rational type of intellectual creatures comes to this first known only through inquisition and resolution.

During the process of reasoning, there is adherence to one part of the affirmation, with a certain inclination, through doubt, to the other part of the affirmation. When, however, there has been a resolution to the principles which are known per se, there is a firm adhesion to one part with the impossibility of holding the other part.

Possibility here lies, not in matter, nor in reception of an esse from another, but in the capacity to be determined by the necessity of the first principles.

The relation is not explained. It is expressed in negative terms: the impossibility of holding an affirmation because of the firm adhesion to first principles.

Possibility does not lie precisely in the comparability of one affirmation with the first principles, but rather in the potency of the reason to adhere to one affirmation,

or another. It can be said that true possibility is that which is compatible with the first principles, but then this definition would exclude that possible act of reason whereby a false affirmation would be held. Possibility is not had when there is actual compossibility of one affirmation with the first principles. This becomes a necessity. In the context of the Sentences, it can be seen this necessity is that of actual being, which cannot be other than what it is; and not that existential necessity based on a non-essential act, which founds the principle, being is, and cannot be non-being.

Possibility lies here then in the potency of the reason to two acts, which would complete its being.

As it is with the rational power, so it is with the will of angels. The angels have choice; hence possibility.⁶ It is a potency to have acts, or complete forms. This is their possibility. When, however, the angelic will is perfected by the light of glory, there can be no possibility of turning to something other.

The presence of possibility in angelic substances is described in terms of potency and act, the possibility of quiddity and its esse:

⁶ Cf. also II Sent., d. 5, q. 1, a. 2, ad 1, p. 144-145 on the possibility of angels sinning.

Et quia omne quod non habet aliquid a se est possibile respectu illius, huiusmodi quidditas (scilicet, angeli) cum habeat esse ab alio erit possibilis respectu illius et respectu ejus a quo esse habet, in quo nulla cadit potentia; et in tali quidditate invenietur potentia et actus, secundum quod ipsa quidditas est possibilis, et esse suum est actus ejus.⁹

This potency of the quiddity to be determined by the act of the esse received from the first cause, of which it is the imperfect similitude,¹⁰ is the possibility inherent in the constitution of angelic substance, indeed, of all creatures. The nature of esse is not elucidated. It is stated to be an act, an act received in a potency.

Possibility, in this sense, is found in all beings, except God. It lies in the capacity to be determined by an act. The discussion is always on terms of form. Possibility is also found in the intellect in its capacity to be determined by an affirmation, and the first principles. It is

⁹ I Sent., d. 8, q. 5, a. 2, sol., p. 229-230.

¹⁰ The relation of similitude and possibility is expressed in the following text, the second part of which is found in the Parma edition: "Cum creatura exemplariter procedat ab ipso Deo sicut a causa quodammodo simili; per analogiam, eo scilicet quo et quaelibet creatura eum imitatur secundum possibilitatem naturae suae..." I Sent., d. 3, q. 1, a. 3, sol., p. 96.

Imitation is based on the possibility of the nature. The reference seems to be to the form of the whole being. However, the Parma edition dates 1856-57, and the source of the added phrase is not given. It is impossible to say whether or not this was Thomas' phrase. The doctrine is not contrary to that given elsewhere in the Sentences.

also found in the will of angels to be determined by the Light of glory. All of which examples are found above. There is another example most instructive concerning the notion of possibility, particularly in relation to esse.

It is fundamental in the doctrine that only individuals exist. Certain accidents such as whiteness and blackness do not exist except in man as one example of individuation by matter, one of the principles of the species. They then possess an esse naturae.

Item accidentium habentium esse naturae quaedam consequuntur naturam individui, scilicet materiam, per quam natura individuatur, sicut album et nigrum in homine; unde etiam non consequuntur totam speciem:...¹¹

These are accidents which, to exist, must have matter as their limiting principle. There are other accidents which do not have matter in their quiddity, but are subject to a simple form, the soul, because of the possibility in its quiddity.

Quaedam autem habent esse naturae, sed consequuntur ex principiis speciei, sicut sunt proprietates consequentes speciem; et talibus accidentibus potest forma simplex subjici; quae [anima] tamen non est suum esse ratione possibilitatis quae est in quidditate ejus, ... et talia accidentia sunt potentiae animae.¹²

¹¹ I Sent., d. 8, q. 5, a. 2, ad 4, p. 230-231.

¹² Ibidem.

Possibility again appears as the capacity to receive determinations. The texts suggest that there is first a quiddity, a possible which does not include its esse, and when this possible, e.g. whiteness, goodness, is limited by matter, or whatever takes the place of matter, it then possesses the esse naturae, that is the being of a nature composed of matter and form, or of potency and act in the case of the spiritual soul and its faculties. Esse naturae would be a being of a nature, in the sense of participating the perfection of the essence. The analysis does not appear to penetrate to a more fundamental act.

A similar use of possibility is found in the context of a question concerned with the necessity of a habit perfecting the operation of the possible intellect in Christ's human nature.¹³ An objection denies this because natural potencies such as fire — and God also! — act without any intermediary habit. This, Thomas concedes, is true of natural potency which operates in one determined way — circa aliqua determinata. But it is not true of the human soul. It is not determined to one thing, but has an operation bearing on absolute being — circa ens simpliciter. That is

¹³ "Sed contra. Christus assumpsit integre naturam nostram. Sed de integritate naturae est intellectus possibilis. Ergo assumpsit intellectum possibilem. Sed possibilis intellectus non intelligit perfecte nisi per habitum perfectiatur." III Sent., d. 14, q. 1, quæstio 2, p. 431.

the operation of the soul is not determined to one type of being such as the eye is to colour, or to one category in the nine predicaments. This is the "possibility" of the intellect which must be determined by a habit.

Sed anima humana habet operationem circa ens simpliciter. Et ideo cum habeat possibilitatem in suo esse, oportet quod ejus possibilitas perficiatur per aliquod additum, ad hoc quod operetur.¹⁴

To what does the phrase "cum habeat possibilitatem in esse suo" refer? To the human soul, or its operation. It does not seem probable, in this doctrine, that it refer to the esse of the soul, which as a substance (incomplete), it has received from another by act of creation. Such an esse is not ordered to acting, but to being, whereas Thomas' concern is with the determination to action of a certain possibility by a habit — ut operetur. It must then refer to that operation of the soul which is concerned with being simpliciter, that is, the possible intellect. In either case, (human soul, or its operation through the possible intellect), possibility remains a capacity to receive determination.

¹⁴ III Sent., d. 14, a. 1, ad 3, p. 438. Cf. also I Sent., d. 3, q. 4, a. 1, p. 112-113, and II Sent., d. 3, q. 3, a. 3, ad 1, p. 121.

Possibility and the Hierarchy of Being

Possibility is found in the constitution of minerals, air, men, angels, substances, accidents, the human soul, in its operations. Such is one aspect of possibility; there is another, and perhaps more important aspect, that of possibility and the hierarchy, the degrees, of beings.

Thomas says that it is grades of possibility involved — permixtae — in the angelic natures which constitute their distinction. Beginning with the fact that the nature or quiddity of an angel is possible in respect to the esse received from God, he continues,

Invenitur enim natura cui possibilitas admiscetur plus et plus distans ab actu, secundum quod recedit a similitudine divinae naturae, quae est actus tantum.¹⁵

Possibility lies in the distance of the nature from the Pure Act, which is God. This distance, a recession from the divine similitude — a term suggesting form — depends on potency and act present in the nature, as shown in the following example,

Ista quidditas simplex quae est propinquior per similitudinem ad divinum esse, minus habet de potentia et plus de actu, et est Deo vicinior et perfectior.¹⁶

¹⁵ II Sent., d. 3, q. 1, a. 3, sol., p. 93-94.

¹⁶ Ibidem.

Now we know that quiddity is to esse as potency to act. Can this apply here? Let us substitute esse for act, quiddity for potency, and see what meaning the text contains.

That simple quiddity, which is closer in similitude to the divine esse, has less of quiddity, and more esse, and so is closer to God, and more perfect.

Such an interpretation is most awkward. The quiddity is what a thing is; according to the text then, the less it is what it is, the greater its esse. It becomes obvious that potency and act here, must refer to something else.

What is the nature of this act and potency? It will be found in the following texts which continue in the same perspective — that is formal perfection.

We can say that each form — understanding form, as specific form, — constitutes a grade of perfection, a grade of possibility. This is confirmed by the following statements concerning the various orders of created being.

Cum ergo substantiarum simplicium, ut dictum est de angelis, sit differentia in specie secundum gradum possibilitatis, in eis, ex hoc anima rationalis ab angelis differt, quia ultimum gradum in substantiis spiritualibus tenet, sicut materia prima in rebus sensibilibus.¹⁷

Possibility constitutes the diverse grades of angelic substances, and this statement extends even to material substances, such as man. Beings are determined segments of reality.

¹⁷ II Sent., d. 3, q. 1, a. 6, sol., p. 104.

This determination distinguishes them one from the other. They are hierarchized by the total perfection contained in their possibility. The greater the perfection, the higher the position in the order of beings. Perfection will be seen as the lack of composition: the less composition (or "notes"), the greater its perfection.

An example is given in the succeeding text, along with a certain relation between possibility and esse.

Unde qui plurimum de possibilitate habet, esse suum est adeo propinquum rebus materialibus, ut corpus materiale illud esse possit participare, dum anima corpori unitur ad unum esse: et ideo consequuntur istae differentiae inter animum et angelum, unibile et non unibile, ex diverso gradu possibilitatis.¹⁸

This possibility is identified with the essence. The examples show that possibility is to be sought in the compossibility or impossibility of the "notes" of the quiddities. Thus the phrase unibile et non unibile refers to the notes of the quiddity of the soul which permits union with matter, and to the notes of the quiddity of the angel which do not permit union with matter. Possibility is reduced to notes of the essence. The greater the possibility, that is, the number of "notes" in the quiddity of a creature, the closer is its esse to material things. The quantity, e.g. the number of notes, the "more or less" of the possibility constitutes the esse. However, it is impossible to identify possibility and

18 II Sent., d.3, q.1, a.6, sol., p. 104.

esse in view of the many formal statements on this theme. What relation then can we discern, in this text, between possibility and esse?

That possibility allows for the participation, in one esse, of diverse elements which enter the "make-up" of man, is one relation. These diverse elements or "notes", matter and spirit in man, being non repugnant one to the other, can form a unity capable of standing by itself in the order of beings. Since unity and being are convertible, possibility, as a unity of diverse elements has some relation to being. This relation is a somewhat distant one, consisting in the indifference of the quiddity to those states of being which are universal, or particular. It does not have that immediacy which characterizes the relation of essence to esse in the modern Thomistic school. We will see later, however, that the "indifference" of the possibility is not as marked as it is, for instance, in Avicenna.

This manner of speaking in connection with possibility — referring to a more or less of act and potency in approaching the divine similitude — can only be fully understood in the context of the concept of participation. It suffices, for the moment, that the act and potency has more or less of act and potency, or in other words of

Thomas, has act and potency mixed in the possibility; it suffices that we cannot explain this coupling of act and potency by substituting quiddity and esse; and it also suffices that this notion of possibility in angels must, on analysis, be understood as meaning formal or essential perfection, and be approached from the logical side of the "notes" of a concept. This last statement is confirmed in a lengthy discussion at the end of Book I, of which we present the most pertinent elements.

Sciendum igitur quod omnis potentia vel est ad esse vel ad non esse, sicut potentia quae est ad corrumpendum. Unde quidquid non potest habere rationem entis vel non entis non potest esse possibile; [...] Et ex hoc sequitur ulterius quod nullum eorum possit in quibus contrarium praedicati est in definitione subjecti, ut quod faciat hoc, scilicet hominem non esse rationalem, vel triangulum non habere tres lineas.²⁰

We find this logical approach to possibility — with its connotation of unity — even in the highest and most actual of beings, God Himself. The statement is found in the preliminaries to the question proving His existence: "... probantis unitatis divinae essentiae possibilitatem".²¹

This logical, and psychological,²² basis (absolute nature, neither singular nor universal, indifferent to being

²⁰ I Sent., d. 42, q. 2, a. 2, sol., p. 991.

²¹ I Sent., d. 3, divisio textus, p. 88.

²² For reasons for the ultimate psychological origin of This point, see Gilson, Being and Some Philosophers (quoted above), p. 75 in particular.

or non-being) of possibility allows us to affirm an absence of a clear distinction, in Thomas' mind, between logical and real possibility. In practice, logical possibility founds real possibility, and they are never completely separated, though in certain cases (human soul, the mind, possibility of God's power, etc.) possibility is seen as the potency (active or passive) of an existing reality. This element is not developed in the doctrine to any great extent; it does not possess greater philosophical value than logical possibility. Indeed logical possibility always seems to have precedence over it. In modern Thomistic thought, it is impossible to ascribe any reality whatsoever to logical possibility, but such was not the case in mediaeval times, for St. Thomas who followed the tradition of St. Albert and Avicenna.²³

POSSIBILITY, ESSE AND DEPENDANCE.

The equation between Possibility and dependence is clear:

²³ "Avicenna, who died in 1073, had already developed a complete system of metaphysics which, to a large extent, was an application of the logical principle that essences are "indifferent" to all their possible determinations." Et. Gilson's The History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages, Random House, New York, (1955), p. 628, note 97. Cf. also Fr. Smith's article quoted above.

... unde quantum est in se, est possibile, et ista possibilitas dicit dependentiam ad id a quo est. ... et hanc dependentiam sive possibilitatem consequitur mutabilitas quaedam, quae est vertibilitas in nihil...

The most succinct expression of the relations of these three elements can be found in this text.

... et quia omne quod non habet aliquid ex se, sed recipit illud ab alio, est possibilis vel in potentia respectu ejus, ideo ipsa quidditas est sicut²⁵ potentia et suum esse acquisitum est sicut actus; ...

That which in itself does not possess something, but receives it from another is possible or in potency. A quiddity does not have esse in itself therefore it is possible or in potency to esse, and when esse is acquired it is as its act. Because something is had from another, it is in potency or possibility to it. We can see this in the text as well.

Cum igitur natura animae sit receptibilis in quantum habet aliquid de possibilitate, eo quod omne habens esse ab alio est possibile in se, ut²⁶ probat Avicenna, lib. De Intelligentiis, cap. iv,...

Whatever thing which has esse from another has possibility in its composition. From this fact of reception of esse from another, it is not a difficult step to state that such a possible depends on that from which it receives esse.

²⁴ I Sent., d. 8, a. 3, c. 2, sol., p. 213-214

²⁵ II Sent., d. 3, q. 1, a. 1, p. 87-88

²⁶ I Sent., d. 3, q. 4, a. 1, p. 112-113.

We find the same point in another context which, on close analysis of its application to angels, seems to arrive back at the logical conception of possibility. The text says that from the possibility of the quiddity the ratio of the genus is drawn; from the complement of the quiddity, the ratio of the difference is drawn. The complement is the ultimate specific determination of the specific essence.²⁷ But these two elements of possibility and complement are found to exist differently in composed and in simple substances.

... ex ipsa possibilitate quidditatis trahitur ratio generis; ex complemento autem quidditatis trahitur ratio differentiae secundum quod appropinquat ad esse in actu; sed hoc differenter contingit in substantiis compositis et simplicibus: quia in compositis possibilitas est ex parte materiae, sed complementum est ex parte formae; [...] In simplicibus autem naturis non sumitur genus et differentia ab aliquibus partibus, eo quod complementum in eis et possibilitas non fundatur super diversas partes quidditatis, sed super illud simplex: quod quidem habet possibilitatem secundum quod de se non habet esse, et complementum prout est quaedam similitudo divini esse, secundum hoc quod appropinquabilis est magis et minus ad participandum divinum esse; et ideo quot sunt gradus complementi, tot sunt differentiae specificae.²⁸

In simple substances, which are not composed of parts, it is impossible that the complement and possibility be drawn from the matter and form; furthermore, both the complement and

²⁷ Cf. text: "et ideo quot sunt gradus complementi, tot sunt differentiae specificae".

²⁸ II Sent., d. 3, q. 1, a. 5, p. 100.

possibility are founded on simple thing itself (illud simplex): that is, on the essence alone. How can this be? It is possible inasmuch as it does not have esse in itself, but from another. It has its complement inasmuch as it is a certain similitude of the divine esse.

Now such a distinction is a curious one for we are told in other texts (quoted above), that the role the complement plays here is exactly that which possibility plays. For instance,

Cum ergo substantiarum simplicium, ut dictum est de angelis, sit differentia in specie secundum gradum possibilitatis in eis...²⁹

Yet, in the text above we are told, "quot sunt gradus complementi, tot sunt differentiae specificae".³⁰ And again, it is according to the complement that the angelic substance approaches, more or less, to the participation of the divine esse:

... et complementum prout est quaedam similitudo divini esse, secundum hoc quod appropinquabilis est magis et minus ad participandum divinum esse;...³¹

Yet, in another text, we are told that possibility fills this function,

²⁹ II Sent., d. 3, q. 1, a. 6, sol., p. 104.

³⁰ Ibid., a. 5, p. 100.

³¹ Ibidem.

Invenitur enim natura cui possibilitas admiscetur plus et plus distans ab actu, secundum quod recedit a similitudine divinae naturae, quae est actus tantum.³²

Here we are presented with an equation of possibility and complement. It should be noted that their functions are expressed in almost identical words, and are all found in the 11 Book, d. 3, q. 1 (different articles). They are both in the line of essence. We are then left with the position outlined above: a thing is possible because it has its esse from another. And we can conclude that this possibility is conceived along the line of logical essence, that it has its esse from another and because of this can be said to depend upon that from which it has esse.

Possibility is not seen primarily as a concrete property of existing sensible things open to further perfections, but is conceived rather as the complexus of notes contained in the intention of the intellect, the definition of which is the answer to: what is a being? It corresponds to a "this".³⁴

³² 11 Sent., d.3, a. 3, sol., p. 93-94. We hold as equivalent expressions "magis et minus" and "plus et plus"; and "appropinquabilis" secundum quod recedit".

³⁴ On the Aristotelian background of "this", cf. Owens, The Doctrine of Being..., p. 241-245. Also Jacques Chevalier, La notion du necessaire chez Aristote et chez ses predecesseurs, particulierement chez Platon, Paris, Alcan, 1915.

To be a "this", for Thomas, is not the consequent of individuation by matter alone: to be a "this" is to have a determined content positing some thing in the order of beings. By "order of beings", one is to understand position in that state of being in which one stands, not entirely as an intention of the intellect, or of the will, or as an accident dependent on something other, but alone, as a substance in act; and also — and this is the more important meaning because it is the foundation of the first meaning — "order" as meaning hierarchy of diverse grades of perfections in relation to the All-Perfect: "order of beings" not excluding the meaning of reality, but emphasizing relative position, based on internal perfection whereby one being is superior or inferior (per prius et posterius) to another. Again we see that possibility is related to an All-Perfect in the purely formal order.

We have been led to think that the concepts of possibility and participation rest ultimately on an act of being which is formal act. If the doctrine does rest on an act of being which is not a formal act, it is difficult to see how a logically conceived possible could possess reality of itself. But we see that possibility does possess a degree of being...

A few words of conclusion. Participation of creatures in God's being was seen as inspired by a Neo-Platonic conception. Participation was defined, somewhat materially, as a sharing in part, that is, more formally, through a similitude of the Divine Essence. The similitude was based on the intelligibility of the essence, on the structure of notes comprising the whatness of each being, a whatness which ordered the various levels of reality into a hierarchy.

Possibility in the structure of a created reality was approached primarily from a logical point of view, in particular that of Avicenna. This logical orientation was to an extent overcome by the adaptation of another Avicennian theme, the difference of quiddity and esse. The position, as exposed in the Sentences, is one of comparative simplicity, based on the Avicennian approach through the nature of the possible. But it is more penetrating than Avicenna's metaphysics. The statement that the possible is dependant on God's creative action changes the entire ground of all other affirmations in the doctrine. There can be no doubt that it was the profoundest treatment of these metaphysical problems in those times, only to be surpassed by Thomas' own efforts in later years.

