

# AS IN GOD'S EYE IT IS HOW THOMAS AQUINAS AND DIONYSIUS RESOLVE THE GREATEST DIFFICULTY

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In this paper, I compare Dionysius's and Aquinas's strategies of solving the problem of the One and the Many. That is, I examine how they reconcile the simplicity of the Divine Essence with the multiplicity of the Divine Ideas. I claim that they posit a perfect conceptual overlap between the 'contents' of certain Exemplar Ideas and the creatures fashioned in their likeness. My argument proceeds in two steps. First, I analyze the analogous significations of the Divine Names and how these senses facilitate Dionysius's and Thomas's metaphysical reductions of created esse to Ipsum Esse. Second, I develop the implications of these accounts of exemplar causality by contrasting them with a form of Platonism. Such Platonism reifies the Divine Names, turning them into separate hypostases and exemplar causes, which creatures only imperfectly participate. For Thomas and Dionysius, by contrast, creatures perfectly resemble God's Ideas. Given this perfect resemblance, I conclude that, in some sense, one can know the 'contents' of God's creative intentions simply by coming to know creatures. However, I conclude by adding several, important caveats to our knowledge of the Divine Exemplars.

“‘The greatest difficulty,’ Parmenides said, ‘is the following.’”<sup>1</sup> So begins Plato's most challenging critique of exemplarism in *Parmenides*. The elderly philosopher asks Socrates how knowledge of the Ideas is possible if individuals only partly resemble them. For Socrates is a man rather than the fullness of ‘what it is to be man’. The latter signifies or ‘holds back’ more perfections than those captured by this or that man. Given these reserve perfections, how could acquaintance with particulars ever

<sup>1</sup> Plato, *Opera: Volume II: Parmenides, Philebus, Symposium, Phaedrus, Alcibiades I and II, Hipparchus, Amatores*, ed. J. Burnet, 2nd edition (Oxonii: Clarendon Press, 1922) 133b–c.

yield knowledge of their Ideas? At best, one might have true beliefs (*ἀληθεῖς δόξαι*) about Ideas, not demonstrative knowledge.

According to Cornelio Fabro, this aporia was resolved by Aquinas. Unlike Plotinus and Proclus, who justified knowledge of Ideas by positing elaborate hierarchies of emanation and participation, Aquinas overcame Parmenides's aporia by subsuming created *esse* into its virtual mode of being in the One.<sup>2</sup> Thomas's strategy, inspired by Dionysius, is one of 'metaphysical reduction', a leading back of finite *esse* to its source in *Ipsium esse subsistens*.<sup>3</sup>

In what follows, I examine this reduction and its consequences for our understanding of the Divine Ideas. My main contention is that it entails a perfect conceptual overlap between the 'contents' of certain Exemplar Ideas and the creatures fashioned in their likenesses.

My argument proceeds in two steps. First, I analyze the analogous significations of the Divine Names and how these senses facilitate Dionysius's and Thomas's metaphysical reductions of created *esse* to God. I then show how this reduction contextualizes their account of the Divine Exemplars. Both consider Exemplars to be God's creative anticipations of finite substances as limited participants in *per se esse*, his first pure participation or 'gift' to creatures. Second, I develop the implications of this account of exemplar causality by contrasting it with a form of Platonism, one that adheres to what R. J. Henle called the *via abstractionis*.<sup>4</sup> Such Platonism reifies the Divine Names into separate hypostases and exemplar causes, which creatures only imperfectly participate. For Thomas and Dionysius, creatures perfectly resemble God's exemplars, his intensions to give them a limited share in *per se esse*. Given this perfect resemblance, I conclude that, in some sense, one can know the 'contents' or *rationes* of God's creative intentions simply by knowing creatures. In my conclusion, I place several important qualifications on our knowledge of the Divine Exemplars.

<sup>2</sup> Cornelio Fabro, 'Platonism, Neo-Platonism and Thomism: Convergencies and Divergencies', *The New Scholasticism* 44, no. 1 (1970), 80. 'It is only the Thomistic correction, that is the promotion of the *Esse* from the *primum metaphysicum* and from the Principle of all reality that the aporias of the Platonic One are surpassed.'

<sup>3</sup> Cornelio Fabro, *Participation et Causalité Selon S. Thomas D'Aquin* (Louvain: Publications Universitaires de Louvain, 1961), 242. 'Denys, en théologie chrétienne, a tout unifié en Dieu, qui est ainsi créateur immédiat de toutes choses: saint Thomas attribue cette *réduction métaphysique* même à Aristote et au *de Causis*.'

<sup>4</sup> R. J. Henle, *Saint Thomas and Platonism: A Study of the Plato and Platonic Texts in the Writings of Saint Thomas*, (New York: Springer Publishing, 2012), 411.

*I: Per ipsum esse fecit subsistere omnia quaecumque sunt:5*

The Divine Names are a crucial part of Thomas's and Dionysius's reduction of created *esse* to its virtual mode of being in God. These names signify certain created perfections as well as their pre-eminent mode of being in their Cause. Their dual significance thus shows how created perfections can be meaningfully predicated of and led back to God. Hence, it is necessary to investigate Dionysian terms like *per se esse* and *per se vitam*.

However, as Thomas notes, Dionysius's language is often obscure; he frequently 'employs the style and mode of speaking' of the Platonists,<sup>6</sup> who posited separate substances like *homo per se* or 'man in himself'. They did so, according to Aquinas, because they observed that terms like 'humanity' contained perfections over and above the limitations found in individuals. From this juxtaposition, they concluded that individuals only partly shared in the Forms, and that the latter were 'more real' (*ἄνωγος ὄν*) than the former.<sup>7</sup> Or better, one could say that particulars are less than fully real, their separated essences existing in the world of Ideas.

Indeed, the Platonists concluded that not only were there Forms of natural kinds, but *a fortiori* Forms of forms. Such Forms were meant to account for the principles of unity, being, intelligence, and eternity shared by all intelligibles. Some of these principles, as in Plotinian and Procline theology, were thought to exist independently of the One, being repugnant to its absolute simplicity.<sup>8</sup> For instance, Plotinus posited a separate hypostasis, Intellect, which eternally contemplated its own Ideas.<sup>9</sup> As all intellection is necessarily *of* something, even Intellect had a definite nature. For it too had an intentional object, namely the

<sup>5</sup> Aquinas, *In librum Beati Dionysii De divinis nominibus expositio* (hereafter *In div. nom.*), ed. C. Pera, P. Caramello, C. Mazzantini (Rome: Marietti, 1950), V, lect. 1, p. 236.

<sup>6</sup> *In div. nom.*, *prooemium*, p. 1. 'Plerumque utitur stilo et modo loquendi quo utebantur platonici, qui apud modernos est inconsuetus'. (All translations from Greek and Latin are my own).

<sup>7</sup> *In div. nom.*, *prooemium*, p. 2. 'Dicebant, ergo, quod hic homo singularis sensibilis non est hoc ipsum quod est homo, sed dicitur homo participatione illius hominis separati. Unde in hoc homine sensibili invenitur aliquid quod non pertinet ad speciem humanitatis, sicut materia individualis et alia huiusmodi. Sed in homine separato nihil est nisi quod ad speciem humanitatis pertinet'.

<sup>8</sup> Proclus, *The Elements of Theology: A Revised Text with Translation, Introduction, and Commentary*, ed. E. R. Dodds, 2nd edition (Oxford: New York: Clarendon Press, 1992), props. 21–23.

<sup>9</sup> Plotinus, *The Enneads*, trans. Llyod P. Gerson et alii (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 539–40.

manifold of intelligible Being within Itself. Being and Intellect, in short, are difficult to reconcile with absolute simplicity.

Dionysius, too, uses terms like *ipsum per se esse* (αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτὸ εἶναι) to refer to the Divine.<sup>10</sup> Is he thus positing immaterial, self-subsisting entities apart from God? One of Dionysius's contemporaries raised this question and requested clarification. Pre-empting such a misinterpretation, Dionysius responded:

What in general, though, you ask, do we mean by 'being itself' or 'life itself' or all those which exist absolutely and primordially and which we regard as having been the first to subsist from out of God? We say that this is not oblique but that it has a simple and direct explanation. **For we do not say that Being itself, the Cause of the being for all beings, is some divine or angelic being—for only Being itself beyond being [i.e. God] is source, being, and cause of being for all beings.** To speak summarily, we do not say that beings and substances are sources and creators of beings. Now some who are negligent teach that these are gods and creators of beings, but, to speak truly and properly, neither these persons nor their fathers have known such [gods], for they do not exist.<sup>11</sup> (Emphasis added).

It was perhaps this and similar passages in the *Divine Names* that led Aquinas to the startling claim that 'Dionysius almost everywhere follows Aristotle'.<sup>12</sup> For Dionysius, like Aristotle, denied the existence of separate substances corresponding to objects of thought. Moreover, he

<sup>10</sup> Dionysius the Areopagite, *Corpus Dionysiacum* I. ed. B. R. Suchla (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1990), V. 5, p. 183. (Hereafter *De Divinis Nominibus*.)

<sup>11</sup> *De Divinis Nominibus*, XI. 6, p. 222. Τί δὲ ὅλως, φῆς, τὸ αὐτοεῖναι λέγομεν ἢ τὴν αὐτοζωὴν ἢ ὅσα ἀπολύτως καὶ ἀρχηγικῶς εἶναι καὶ ἐκ θεοῦ πρῶτως ὑφεστηκέναι τιθέμεθα; Τοῦτο δέ, φαμέν, οὐκ ἔστιν ἀγκύλον, ἀλλ' εὐθὺ καὶ ἀπλὴν τὴν διασάφησιν ἔχον. Οὐ γὰρ οὐσίαν τινὰ θεῖαν ἢ ἀγγελικὴν εἶναι φαμέν τὸ αὐτοεῖναι τοῦ εἶναι τὰ ὄντα πάντα αἰτίαν, μόνον γὰρ τοῦ εἶναι πάντα τὰ ὄντα καὶ αὐτὸ τὸ εἶναι τὸ ὑπερούσιον ἀρχὴ καὶ οὐσία καὶ αἴτιον, οὐδὲ ζωογόνον ἄλλην θεότητα παρὰ τὴν ὑπέρθεον πάντων, ὅσα ζῆ, καὶ τῆς αὐτοζωῆς αἰτίαν ζῶν οὔτε, συνελόντα εἰπεῖν, ἀρχικὰς τῶν ὄντων καὶ δημιουργικὰς οὐσίας καὶ ὑποστάσεις, ἅς τινες καὶ θεοὺς τῶν ὄντων καὶ δημιουργοὺς αὐτοσχε διάσαντες ἀπεστομάτισαν, οὕς, ἀληθῶς καὶ κυρίως εἰπεῖν, οὔτε αὐτοὶ «ἤδεισαν», ἅτε δὴ οὐκ ὄντας, οὔτε «οἱ πατέρες αὐτῶν».

<sup>12</sup> Aquinas, *Super Sent.*, lib. 2 d. 14 q. 1 a. 2 co, cited in Hankey, 'The Concord of Aristotle, Proclus, the Liber de Causis & Blessed Dionysius in Thomas Aquinas, Student of Albertus Magnus', *Dionysius* 34 (2016), n. 70.

denied that separate substances apart from God were responsible for giving *esse* to things.

Given that these names do not refer to separate gods, what do they signify? Dionysius admits that they are said in two ways. First, one can predicate the divine names 'principally' (ἀρχικῶς), 'divinely' (θεικῶς), and 'causally' (αἰτιατικῶς). Dionysius offers little clarification as to what this sense entails other than that these names signify God as 'Cause beyond cause and Source beyond source'.<sup>13</sup>

However, his use of the prefix ὑπερ (e.g. ὑπεράρχιον καὶ ὑπερούσιον; lit. beyond-principle and beyond-substance) suggests that these names signify perfections in the Divine *esse* by way of preeminence. If God is 'Cause beyond cause and Source beyond source', then he is not one source or cause of being among others. Usually, sources and causes are of definite beings and definite themselves, i.e. humanity is a definite principle or cause in *this* man. God, however, does not have a definite nature but an infinite one. Hence, one cannot say univocally that he is a cause or source. Indeed, one might say he is *not* a source or cause. But such denials may lead one to think that God, not being a cause, is somehow impotent. Therefore, one must say that God is a cause in a pre-eminent sense. One predicates causality of God by removing any limitations co-signified by the word 'cause'. In this sense, then, the Divine Names signify certain perfections that belong to God in a pre-eminent way.

Dionysius attributes ontological primacy to this sense of terms like *per se esse* and *per se sapientiam*. For their referent is God, whom they signify pre-eminently. Dionysius thus seems committed to the analogicity of the Divine Names. For they are said in many ways, but always in reference to a single nature, in this case the Divine *esse*.<sup>14</sup> Hence, any further inquiry into their signification requires a brief account of analogy.

In general, analogous names constitute and refer to what Doolan calls 'analogous communities',<sup>15</sup> groups of beings hierarchically ordered

<sup>13</sup> *De Divinis Nominibus*, XI. 6, p. 222. Ἄλλ' αὐτοεῖναι καὶ αὐτοζωὴν καὶ αὐτοθεότητά φαμεν ἀρχικῶς μὲν καὶ θεϊκῶς καὶ αἰτιατικῶς τὴν μίαν πάντων ὑπεράρχιον καὶ ὑπερούσιον ἀρχὴν καὶ αἰτίαν.

<sup>14</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysica*, 1003a33–1003b4.

<sup>15</sup> For more on technical terms like 'analogous community', 'prime analogate', etc. see Gregory T. Doolan, 'Aquinas on Substance as a Metaphysical Genus', in *The Science of Being as Being*, ed. Gregory T. Doolan, Metaphysical Investigations (Catholic University of America Press, 2012), 99–128.

by relations of priority and posteriority. Whatever is signified by the primary sense of an analogous name represents that community's 'prime analogate'. It is primary or prime insofar as it enters into the accounts of its analogs. These have their name and intelligibility on account of the prime analogate. Adapting Aristotle's example from *Metaphysics* Γ, one might say of a man, a diet, a sport, and a certain complexion that they are healthy.<sup>16</sup> Aside from the man, the others are healthy in secondary senses. They are 'healthy' because they cause, sustain, or signify health in the body. Health in the man, then, is the prime analogate from which the other senses derive their predicates and meaning *qua* healthy.

Health in the man, moreover, is prior both ontologically and in account. For absent health in the man, diets, sports, and complexions could not cause, preserve, or signify in the relevant respects. It is prior in account since it enters into the definition of its analogs. Sports are activities that promote health, medicine the art that produces health, etc.

This last observation creates an aporia insofar as it implies that God is ontologically or notionally posterior to his creation. For neither the 'causal' sense of health nor its referent, medicine, were prior to health in the man. Health is said of and exists 'in' medicine on account of health in the man, not *vice-versa*. But if this relation between cause and effect holds for medicine and health, would it not also apply to God and his creatures? Is God somehow secondary in account or, per *impossibile*, in being?

Such an understanding would be backwards, at least for Thomas, since it conflates the priority of our understanding with priority in the order of being. As he puts it in the *Summa Theologiae*, sometimes that which is signified by a name (*res significata*) differs from the being from which the name's sense was originally taken (*impositio nominis*).<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysica*, 1003a33–1003b3. Τὸ δὲ ὃν λέγεται μὲν πολλαχῶς, ἀλλὰ πρὸς ἓν καὶ μίαν τινὰ φύσιν καὶ οὐχ ὁμωνύμως ἀλλ' ὥσπερ καὶ τὸ ὑγιεινὸν ἅπαν πρὸς ὑγίειαν, τὸ μὲν τῷ φυλάττειν τὸ δὲ τῷ ποιεῖν τὸ δὲ τῷ σημεῖον εἶναι τῆς ὑγείας τὸ δ' ὅτι δεκτικὸν αὐτῆς, καὶ τὸ ἱατρικὸν πρὸς ἱατρικὴν γὰρ τῷ ἔχειν ἱατρικὴν λέγεται ἱατρικὸν τὸ δὲ τῷ εὐφυὲς εἶναι πρὸς αὐτὴν τὸ δὲ τῷ ἔργον εἶναι τῆς ἱατρικῆς.

<sup>17</sup> Aquinas, *Opera Omnia* Vol. 4: *Summa Theologiae*, I<sup>a</sup> q. 1–49 cum commentariis Caietani (Rome: Leonine Edition, 1888), q. 13, a. 6, co, p. 150. 'Cum enim dicitur Deus es bonus, vel sapiens, non solum significatur quod ipse sit causa sapientiae vel bonitatis, sed quod haec in eo eminentius praeexistunt. Unde, secundum hoc, dicendum est quod, quantum ad rem significatam per nomen, per prius dicuntur de Deo quam de creaturis: quia a Deo huiusmodi perfectiones in creaturas manant. Sed quantum ad impositionem nominis, per prius a nobis imponuntur

When the *res significata* exceeds the power of that being from which one derived the *impositio*, one must make a distinction between priority in being and the understanding. As Doolan observes:

Sometimes what is first in reality is not what is first to us. If we consider again the example of the analogous term “healthy,” Thomas explains that because of medicine’s healing **power**, its “healthiness” is in fact naturally prior to the health of the animal, for a cause is always prior to its effect. Nevertheless, because we know **this power** through its effect, we name it from the effect. In this way, something is taken as prior according to the order of our understanding that is not prior according to the order of reality. (Emphasis mine).<sup>18</sup>

That is, when considered with respect to power (actuality or *δύναμις*), medicine is prior to its effects. For it has an ability to generate a state in the man that he could not bring about on his own. However, considered with respect to the natures from which we impose meanings on terms, health in the man is prior, since, strictly speaking, health is a quality not of an art but of living things.

Similarly, considered with respect to power, God is prior to any of his effects. For he gives *esse* to things that could never have it apart from his act of creating them. Moreover, his power is such that it depends on nothing other than itself in order to be. Therefore, with respect to power, God’s *esse* is primary. Yet, with respect to the natures from which we impose significations on names, *per se esse*, *vitam*, and *sapientiam* are drawn from and thus apply primarily to God’s created participations. Although said of God super-eminently, for us these names signify the participations or effects from which they were originally abstracted.

Dionysius thus affirms that we can use God’s names ‘in a participable way’ (*μεθεκτῶς*). He writes:

creaturis, quas prius cognoscimus. Unde et modum significandi habent qui competit creaturis ut supra dictum est.

<sup>18</sup> Gregory T. Doolan, ‘Aquinas on Substance as a Metaphysical Genus’, in *The Science of Being as Being*, ed. Gregory T. Doolan, Metaphysical Investigations (Catholic University of America Press, 2012), 126.

When said in a participable way (μεθεκτῶς), **we mean the providential powers** (δυνάμεις) that have been given out of the (a) unparticipated [or ‘unparticipatable’] (ἀμέθεκτος) God, [that is] (b) **substantification itself, vivification itself, and deification itself** (τὴν αὐτοουσίωσιν, αὐτοζώωσιν, αὐτοθέωσιν). All things participate these in a manner fitting to themselves by which they are called (c) beings (τὰ ὄντα), living things (ζῶντα), and divine (ἐνθεα) and [said to] exist (καὶ ἔστι).<sup>19</sup>

This ‘participable’ sense thus signifies God’s effects or ‘powers’ (δυνάμεις). Elsewhere, Dionysius refers to these as God’s ‘gifts’ (δωρεαί),<sup>20</sup> or ‘processions’ (προόδοι) into creatures.<sup>21</sup>

Apparently relying on the Procline triad of the (a) the unparticipated or ‘unparticipatable’ (God or the One), (b) the participation (substantification itself), and (c) the created participant (the concrete thing), Dionysius specifies that names taken in this second, participable sense refer to (b) God’s participations, gifts, or processions into creatures.

What, then, are these participations? Dionysius says little more than what was already cited above. Elaborating further, Aquinas suggests that they are the absolute natures of pure perfections, i.e. those perfections whose *rationes* do not include a necessary relation to matter. Deploying Avicenna’s ‘threefold consideration of a nature’,<sup>22</sup> Thomas notes that we can conceive of a nature insofar as it is (a) in a particular thing (*in particulari*), (b) in the mind as a universal (*in universali*), or (c) absolutely (*secundum se*) in such a way that we prescind from considerations of

<sup>19</sup> *De Divinis Nominibus*, XI. 6, p. 222. μεθεκτῶς δὲ τὰς ἐκδιδόμενας ἐκ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀμεθέκτου προνοητικὰς δυνάμεις τὴν αὐτοουσίωσιν, αὐτοζώωσιν, αὐτοθέωσιν, ὧν τὰ ὄντα οἰκείως ἑαυτοῖς μετέχοντα καὶ ὄντα καὶ ζῶντα καὶ ἐνθεα καὶ ἔστι.

<sup>20</sup> *De Divinis Nominibus*, II. 3, p. 125.

<sup>21</sup> *De Divinis Nominibus*, II. 3, p. 126.

<sup>22</sup> Gregory T. Doolan, ‘Aquinas on Esse Subsistens and the Third Mode of Participation,’ *The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review* 82, no. 4 (2018): 624–27; nn. 44–49. Cf. *Quodlibet* VIII, q. 1, a. 1. *Sancti Thomae de Aquino opera omnia*, vol. 25/1 (Rome: Leonine Edition, 1996), 51–53. Cited in Doolan, ‘Third Mode,’ 624; n. 44. ‘Dicendum, quod, secundum Avicennam in sua metaphysica, triplex est alicuius naturae consideratio. Una, prout consideratur secundum esse quod habet in singularibus; sicut natura lapidis in hoc lapide et in illo lapide. Alia vero est consideratio alicuius naturae secundum esse suum intelligibile; sicut natura lapidis consideratur prout est in intellectu. Tertia vero est consideratio naturae absoluta, prout abstrahit ab utroque esse; secundum quam considerationem consideratur natura lapidis, vel cuiuscumque alterius, quantum ad ea tantum quae per se competunt tali naturae.’

particularity or universality (*prout abstrahunt et ab universalitate et a particularitate*). This last mode is what Dionysius, according to Thomas, means by the *per se* names of God said in a participable way (*sicut signatur cum dicitur: per se vita*).<sup>23</sup>

Admittedly, one might think Thomas's clarification of Dionysius by means of Avicenna represents a case of the *obscurum per obscurius*. Yet, these Procline and Avicennian divisions are mutually reinforcing, and, indeed, illumine one another. Consider the following analogy.<sup>24</sup> According to Aristotle, the sun emits white light, which actualizes a transparent body (i.e. air or water).<sup>25</sup> Such actualization, in turn, enables determinate colors like green to actualize water or air in determinate ways (i.e. greenly). These determinations of the transparent are received in the eye, thereby constituting discrete acts of vision.

Corresponding to Proclus's triad, this image presents us with three terms: the (1) unparticipated (i.e. the sun : God), (2) the created participation (i.e. white light : *per se esse*), and (3) the individual participants (i.e. the green grass: *id quod habet esse*). At the second and third levels, one can distinguish three 'locations' of light or green. For instance, green may either be (a) in the grass (*in particulari*), (b) in the eye as the 'form of green' (one might say '*in oculis*').<sup>26</sup> Stretching the analogy a bit, if the eye could reflect on its own contents, it could prescind from green's particular mode of being in the grass as well as its more detached mode in the eye and thus consider it (c) absolutely.

<sup>23</sup> *In Div. Nom.*, XI, lect. 4. 'Participationes autem ipsae tripliciter considerari possunt: uno modo secundum se, prout abstrahunt et ab universalitate et a particularitate, sicut signatur cum dicitur: per se vita; alio modo considerantur in universali, sicut dicitur vita totalis vel universalis; tertio modo in particulari, secundum quod vita dicitur huius vel illius rei.'

<sup>24</sup> See Doolan, 'Aquinas on Esse Subsistens and the Third Mode of Participation', 633–636. For Thomas's use of this Platonic paradigm when explaining the relation between God and creatures, see STh I, q. 104, a. 1 (Leon. ed., 5:464): 'Sic autem se habet omnis creatura ad Deum, sicut aer ad solem illuminantem. Sicut enim sol est lucens per suam naturam, aer autem fit luminosus participando lumen a sole, non tamen participando naturam solis; ita solus Deus est ens per essentiam suam, quia eius essentia est suum esse; omnis autem creatura est ens participative, non quod sua essentia sit eius esse'. Cited in Doolan, 'Aquinas on Esse Subsistens and the Third Mode of Participation', n. 68. See also Aristotle, *De Anima*, ed. W. D. Ross, Bilingual edition (Oxonii: New York: Oxford University Press, 1979).

<sup>25</sup> For more on Aristotle's and Aquinas's accounts of light see Aristotle, *De Anima*, 418a26–419b2. For Aquinas's color theory of white light as the form of visibility and exemplar form of colors, see Therese Scarpelli Cory, 'Rethinking Abstractionism: Aquinas's Intellectual Light and Some Arabic Sources', *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 53, (2015): 607–46.

<sup>26</sup> Aristotle, *De Anima* II.7, 431b29–432a1. οὐ γὰρ [ἡ πόα] ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ, ἀλλὰ τὸ εἶδος. 'It is not the [grass] that is in the soul, but rather its form.'

Yet, despite its pedigree and flexibility, even this analogy fails to capture all the relevant relations. First, being material and not an abstract quiddity, green must either be in the thing or in the eye. Only the mind can consider abstract natures universally in the sense required by (b) or in the absolute sense implied by (c). Second, while the sun is the cause of a single graduated perfection—light—God is the source of *all* perfections in *all* their gradations.<sup>27</sup> Third, while the sun's actualization of colors presupposes the existence of bodies, which for Aristotle and Aquinas were colored *per se*, God's 'light' gives things their *esse* and thus the ability to receive any further perfection.

Still, the analogy manages to capture the general relation of Proclus's triad to Avicenna's threefold *consideratio*. One could apply Proclus's triad (the unparticipated being, the participated form or participation, and the participant) to three hierarchically related entities, i.e. the (1) unparticipated sun, (2) its participation or procession in white light, and (3) the participating grass that shares in light in a way befitting its nature.<sup>28</sup> On the other hand, it seems Avicenna's distinction is applicable to a definite nature at either the second or third level. One could say that while Proclus's triad divides a nature vertically by degrees of causal power, Avicenna's *consideratio* spreads it horizontally by identifying 'where' it may be at its given level.

Adding modern notions of white light as containing the wavelengths of all particular colors, one could use this analogy to account for the different significations that certain predicates obtain at each level

<sup>27</sup> Aquinas makes this very point in the *De Veritate*. It marks a dissimilarity between God's knowledge of his effects and what white light would know if it could know individual colors. Whereas God is the cause of all formal perfections and matter, white light is only the equivocal cause, exemplar, and measure of colors in material things, but not the matter in which these colors inhere. Hence, white light would not know its effects *in their material principles*. Aquinas, *Opera Omnia* Vol. 22 1/2: *De Veritate*, qq. 1–7 (Rome: Leonine Edition, 1970), q. 2, a. 4, ad. 4, p. 58. 'Ad quartum dicendum, quod albedo superabundat a viridi colore quantum ad alterum eorum quod est de natura coloris, scilicet quantum ad lucem, quae est quasi formale in compositione coloris, et secundum hoc est mensura aliorum colorum; sed in coloribus invenitur aliquid aliud quod est quasi materiale in ipsis, scilicet terminatio diaphani, et secundum hoc albedo non est mensura colorum: et sic patet quod in specie albedinis non est totum id quod in aliis coloribus invenitur; et ideo per speciem albedinis non potest haberi propria cognitio de quolibet aliorum colorum; secus autem est de essentia divina. Et praeterea in essentia divina sunt res aliae sicut in causa; alii autem colores non sunt in albedine sicut in causa; et ideo non est simile.'

<sup>28</sup> This hierarchy is explicitly mentioned by Proclus. See Proclus, *The Elements of Theology: A Revised Text with Translation, Introduction, and Commentary*, ed. E. R. Dodds, 2nd edition (Oxford: New York: Clarendon Press, 1992), prop. 24, pp. 28–29.. πᾶν τὸ μετέχον τοῦ μετεχομένου καταδέεσθαι, καὶ τὸ μετεχόμενον τοῦ ἀμεθέκτου.

of being.<sup>29</sup> For instance, one might predicate 'light' of beings at the participating, participated, and unparticipated levels of being. At the participating level, 'light' refers to the color green, which is, for the most part, said of material composites like grass. 'Green-light' is, as Aristotle would say, like "snub, a this in a that" (τόδε ἐν τῷδε). The account or λόγος of green includes a reference to particular matter.<sup>30</sup>

'Light', when said at the second level (i.e. of white light), is more peculiar. For white light is *not* directly visible but rather the form and cause of visibility for other things (*ratio visibilitatis visibilium*).<sup>31</sup> Moreover, it is not connected to air or water as green is to grass. These media, when illumined, do not have a particular color but rather all colors.

At the third level, when said of the sun, 'light' is inadequate as a predicate. It does not capture the fact that the sun does not need a medium nor an external source for its light. Rather the sun is light on account of itself. It is, one might say, *ipsum lumen per se subsistens*.

By extension, the analogy explains why certain perfections, when said of God, are either metaphorical or analogous. Furthermore, the third level of the comparison suggests that even analogous perfections

<sup>29</sup> Cory, "Rethinking Abstractionism," 622. Embodied understanding is possible only because the agent intellect and the phantasm are complementary active principles, each contributing what the other lacks for generating the intelligible species. The agent intellect is the sheer form of intelligibility, not determined to this or that intelligible such as horseness or catness (just as physical light is the sheer indeterminate *form of visibility*) (Emphasis added). Cory's discussion of light as the form of visibility in Aquinas is interesting for two reasons. First, it suggests that, while the notion of light as somehow containing all wavelengths is modern, it is not too anachronistic to apply it to the ancients and medievals. For if light is the form of visibility *qua* actualizer of the transparent, in which determinate colors participate, then, colors are defective instances of light's pre-eminent power. They are thus lesser kinds of light. See Aquinas, *Opera Omnia* Vol. 22 3/1: *De Veritate*, qq. 21–29 (Rome: Leonine Edition, 1973), q. 22 a. 14 s.c. 2, p. 647. Praeterea, sicut lux est *ratio visibilitatis colori*, ita finis est ratio appetibilitatis his quae sunt ad finem. Sed eodem actu visus videt colorem et lucem (Emphasis added). Second, Cory's discussion suggests that Aquinas's account of colors and light may be modern in another respect. She says that the potentially intelligible phantasm and the agent intellect are 'complementary active principles, each contributing what the other lacks for generating the intelligible species'. *Mutatis mutandis*, I would suggest that, if white light is the form of visibility for colors *qua* actualizers of the transparent, then the potentially visible body (i.e. the green surface) and white light are likewise complementary active principles constitutive of vision. For both white light and the green grass each have necessary components of vision that the other lacks, white light is able to actualize the transparent *simpliciter* and the green grass is a determinate body and thus the *per se* object of sight. One does not see white light simply, but only the green thing in the presence of white light.

<sup>30</sup> Aristotle, *De Anima* III.4, 429b14.

<sup>31</sup> Aquinas, *Opera Omnia* Vol. 22 2/1: *De Veritate*, qq. 8–12 (Rome: Leonine Edition, 1970), a. 8 ad.10, p. 325.

like life, wisdom, and being, which are truly predicated of God, are inadequate insofar as they co-signify some limitation like 'inherence in' or 'dependence on' another.

Beginning with the level of predicamental participants,<sup>32</sup> the level of composite substances and the nine accidents mentioned in the *Categories*, it is clear that names drawn from things with matter in their accounts are metaphorical when said of God. As the sun is not green, neither is God a lion, except insofar as he is powerful. In this case, though, one is using 'lion' to signify 'power'. When one calls God a lion, one does not mean that he is 'a roaring animal' but that he has power or, even better, that he is his Power. The proposition 'God is a lion', therefore, is metaphorical. Names of participants like 'green' and 'lion' break along the same lines. Neither is able to literally signify unparticipated being on account of determinate matter in their *rationes*.

One might expect that predicates drawn from God's participations like *esse*, power, or wisdom more adequately signify his nature. After all, Dionysius said that names like *per se esse* can signify *both* God *and* creatures, albeit in different respects. What is more, names drawn from God's participations are pure or 'neutrally immaterial'.<sup>33</sup> As white light is devoid of a solid body such as grass or stone in its account, so too are *esse* and wisdom separable from the material conditions of animality in man.

Yet, even these predications co-signify a degree of inherence and dependency. When we say that something 'exists', 'is alive', or 'is wise', we mean that these perfections exist *in* some substance. Moreover, such inherence implies that the substance or quiddity is *other* than the perfections themselves. It is thus dependent insofar as its substance needs to receive these perfections from another. As white light exists in some transparent body on account of the sun, so too do *esse*, life, and wisdom inhere in a medium other than themselves on account of God.

For these reasons, were one to attribute *esse* to God, one would need to qualify even this predicate. As 'light', when said of the sun, does not signify the fact that the sun's light 'inheres' in itself, so too '*esse*'

<sup>32</sup> For more on the distinctions between predicamental and transcendental participation, see Cornelio Fabro, *Participation et Causalité Selon S. Thomas D'Aquin*, 381–409.

<sup>33</sup> John F. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas: From Finite Being to Uncreated Being*, First Paperback Edition (Washington, D.C: Catholic Univ of Amer Press, 2000), 47.

does not signify God's mode of subsistence. His *esse* does not inhere or depend on another. To be sure, *ipsum esse* differs from 'lion' insofar as it does not have matter in its account and thus truly signifies God. Yet even *ipsum esse* does not capture the fact the God is *ipsum esse per se subsistens*.

The relation between Proclus's triad and Avicenna's *consideratio* in place, we may attempt to give an answer to the original question. What are the two senses of *per se* language according to Dionysius and the perfections they signify? Starting with the first, these names signify God's divine *esse* as the cause and source of his pure perfections in creatures. With respect to the second, *per se* names signify the nature of a participation considered absolutely. Following the analogy, they do not signify 'green' but rather 'white light'. Furthermore, they signify 'white light' absolutely, as neither in a medium nor in an eye.

In this latter sense, *per se esse* is the absolute concept of *actus essendi*. It signifies that perfection in a composite whereby its essence is actual rather than potential. *Esse* taken absolutely signifies that actuality by which all actual essences are in act, that perfection by which all the perfections of substances have the additional perfection of being *in rerum natura*. It signifies this perfection of perfections absolutely, prescinding from its mode of being either in a composite substance or in the mind. In a word *per se esse* signifies 'the actuality of all [finite] acts and the perfection of all [finite] perfections'.<sup>34</sup>

Taken together, these two senses enable Thomas and Dionysius to reduce all created perfections to the First Cause. For *per se esse* is God's first name, and all other names are ultimately reducible to it as participants. Insofar as any Divine Name *is* or signifies anything, it must first participate *per se esse*. For this reduction to work, one must assume (1) the doctrine of divine simplicity, and (2) the principle that, in equivocal causes, the effect pre-exists virtually in its cause, as green 'pre-exists' in white light or the sun. These points having been granted, it is possible to show that all perfections pre-exist in God's simple, infinite *esse*.

For Thomas and Dionysius, the most important element in this reduction is the divine name of *esse*. As we saw, this name signifies

<sup>34</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Questiones disputatae de potentia*, ed. P. M. Pression (Rome: Marietti Edition, 1965), p. 192. Cited in Wippel, *Metaphysical Thought*, n. 34.

the pure perfection of *esse* considered absolutely. Every particular substance, in order to be and receive any further perfection, must have some share in *per se esse*. As Dionysius says:

Being (τὸ εἶναι) has been projected before all of God's other participations, and '*per se esse*' is older than 'the being of life itself,' 'the being of wisdom itself,' or 'the being of divine similitude itself.' And in relation to all the other [*per se* perfections] of which participants have some share, beings (τὰ ὄντα) will first participate *ipsum esse*.<sup>35</sup>

Commenting on this passage, Thomas clarifies that *esse* is prior to life and wisdom in two respects. First, *esse* is prior to *vita* or *sapientia* in the order of understanding (*prius...intelligitur*). For if a thing has any perfection whatsoever, it must first participate *esse*.<sup>36</sup> Second, this conceptual priority entails an ontological one, namely Proclus's elevation of a participation over its participants.<sup>37</sup> All other absolute participations like *per se vitam* or *per se sapientiam* stand to *per se esse* as participants. They *must* participate *esse* in order to be. *Esse* thus stands to them as act to potency (*comparatur ad ea ut actus eorum*).

From this priority, Dionysius concludes that all things whatsoever have their *esse* from God. He writes:

The super-substantial Goodness itself, throwing out its first gift of being itself, is hymned through this eldest and primary participation. From and in God's super-substantial Goodness exist (1) being itself, (2) the principles of beings, (3) all finite beings, and (4) all things whatsoever sustained by being. Moreover,

<sup>35</sup> *De Divinis Nominibus*, V, 5, p. 183. καὶ πρὸ τῶν ἄλλων αὐτοῦ μετοχῶν τὸ εἶναι προβέβληται, καὶ ἔστιν αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτὸ τὸ εἶναι πρεσβύτερον τοῦ αὐτοζωῆν εἶναι καὶ αὐτοσοφίαν εἶναι καὶ αὐτομοιότητα θεῖαν εἶναι, καὶ τὰ ἄλλα, ὅσων τὰ ὄντα μετ' ἔχοντα, πρὸ πάντων αὐτῶν τοῦ εἶναι μετέχει.

<sup>36</sup> *In div. nom.*, cap. V, lect. 1, p. 236. 'Primo quidem, per hoc quod *quaecumque* participant aliis participationibus, primo participant ipso *esse*: prius enim intelligitur aliquod ens quam unum, vivens, vel sapiens.'

<sup>37</sup> *In div. nom.*, cap. V, lect. 1, p. 236. 'Secundo, quod ipsum *esse* comparatur ad vitam et alia huiusmodi sicut participatum ad participans: nam etiam ipsa vita est ens quoddam et sic *esse*, prius et simplicius est quam vita et alia huiusmodi et comparatur ad ea ut actus eorum.'

[all of these are in God] absolutely (ἀσχέτως), comprehensively (συνειλημμένως), and unitarily (ἐνιαίως).<sup>38</sup>

Clarifying Dionysius's fourfold distinction, Thomas says that God causes the *esse* (1) of 'to be itself' (*per se esse*), the first absolute participation, (2) of all the principles of existing things, and (3) of all existent things, both (3a) of substances as well as (3b) of accidents, and (4) of imperfect beings such as motion and being in potency.<sup>39</sup>

Given the principle that beings pre-exist virtually in their cause, which, in this case, is the infinite, simple *esse* of God, it follows that the entire manifold of created *esse* pre-exists within God. From the noblest absolute participation like *per se sapientiam* to the most tenuous accident or inconsequential of motions, all of finite being exists simply in the Divine *esse*. All the perfections enjoyed by substances in addition to these substances themselves pre-exist in God insofar as any of them have even the smallest share in *esse*. Absolutely everything insofar as it is is reducible to God as the giver of *esse* or 'substantifier' (ὑποστατής).<sup>40</sup>

In this section, we have elaborated the steps of Thomas's and Dionysius's metaphysical reduction, their leading back of all created *esse* to God. This reduction centered on the analysis of the Divine Name of *per se esse*. This name is analogous insofar as it has two senses. First, it signifies God as the pre-eminent and super-essential Cause of *esse* in creatures. Second, it signifies God's gift of *per se esse* considered absolutely, that act by which the actualities of created essences come to be.

Taking these senses in reverse order, one can 'lead back' all created *esse* to God. Insofar as a creature enjoys any perfection or actuality whatsoever, it will first participate *per se esse*. Whether it enjoys the perfections of life or wisdom, of its own essence, of any accident, or of motion, all of these will have some definite share in *per se esse*. Thus,

<sup>38</sup> *De Divinis Nominibus*, V, 6, p. 184. Πρώτην οὖν τὴν τοῦ αὐτοῦ εἶναι δωρεὰν ἢ αὐτοῦπεραγαθότης προβαλλομένη τῇ πρεσβυτέρᾳ πρώτῃ τῶν μετοχῶν ὑμνεῖται. Καὶ ἔστιν ἐξ αὐτῆς καὶ ἐν αὐτῇ καὶ αὐτὸ τὸ εἶναι καὶ αἱ τῶν ὄντων ἀρχαὶ καὶ τὰ ὄντα πάντα καὶ τὰ ὁπωσοῦν τῷ εἶναι διακρατούμενα καὶ τοῦτο ἀσχέτως καὶ συνειλημμένως καὶ ἐνιαίως.

<sup>39</sup> *In div. nom.*, cap. V, lect. 1, p. 236–237. Dicit ergo primo quod non solum *ex ipsa* Dei bonitate, sed etiam *in ipsa* est (1) ipsum *per se esse*, quod est Dei participatio et (2) omnia *principia existentium* et (3) *omnia existentia*, (3<sub>a</sub>) tam substantiae quam (3<sub>b</sub>) accidentia et (4) omnia *quocumque modo* continentur sub *esse*, sicut entia imperfecta, ut ens in potentia et motus et alia huiusmodi.

<sup>40</sup> *De Divinis Nominibus*, XI, 6, p. 221.

one can reduce any perfection in the predicamental order, the order of finite substances and accidents, to its limited share in the actuality of all acts. Substances and accidents are unique ‘contractions’ or delimitations of unlimited *actus essendi* on account of their particular quiddities.

Having referred predicamental perfections back to their participation in *per se esse*, one can then reduce *per se esse* back to God. As we saw, the second, participable sense of the Divine Names depends on the first, causal sense. *Per se esse* not only signifies the actuality of all acts; it signifies their pre-eminent mode of being and self-subsistence within the Divine *Esse*. For God is the super-substantial Cause and Source of *esse* for creatures. He is the one who gives them their share in the absolute participation of *per se esse*. Hence Thomas says, ‘*per ipsum esse fecit subsistere omnia quaecumque sunt*’ (through *per se esse*, God has made to subsist all things whatsoever that exist).<sup>41</sup>

This reduction of all predicamental perfections to their participation in *per se esse* and then to their infinite mode of being in God grounds both kinds of Divine Exemplarism, that of the Divine *esse* and of God’s Exemplar Ideas. For all things, insofar as they are, have been given a share in *ipsum esse*, God’s first gift to creatures. *Ipsum esse* is a created likeness of God’s infinite *esse* by which he makes substances come to be in act. Therefore, insofar as creatures contract *ipsum esse* through their essence principle, they enjoy a share in a likeness of God’s self-subsisting *esse*. In other words, creatures’ own *actūs essendi* constitute their share in a likeness of God’s *esse*. His Divine *esse* is thus an exemplar for all created *actus essendi*.

However, God also knows from all eternity the ways in which creatures’ essences will contract a share in *ipsum esse*. He knows the ways created essences will come to be insofar as they participate their own *actus essendi*. Such knowledge, to which we now turn, constitutes the exemplarity of God’s Exemplar Ideas. These Ideas are his eternal anticipations of the ways in which created essences will receive a share in his first participation and likeness.

<sup>41</sup> See note 5 above.

## II: Acts in God's eye what in God's eye he is

Having made this reduction of created *esse* to *per se esse* and God's infinite *esse*, Dionysius introduces the Divine Ideas or παραδείγματα. As all visible beings rely on the sun in unique ways befitting their natures (i.e. as either visible, growing, perceiving, or thinking), *a fortiori* all beings depend on God for their *esse* in whatever way they have it. As the sun 'uniformly anticipates' the diversity and multitude of its effects, so too does God contain all of creation in a unified, simple way.<sup>42</sup> He knows the ways in which all things will receive a likeness of himself, come to be, and receive any further perfections. The paradigms, then, are the ways God eternally anticipates his creatures and their essences as unique participants in *per se esse*.

Dionysius thus reduces the multiplicity of the Platonic Ideas to the incomprehensible and unconfused unity of God's causal power. He defines the παραδείγματα as the 'being-producing λόγοι that uniformly pre-subsist in God'. He also calls them God's 'pre-definitions', and 'divine, good willings that are determinative and productive of beings'.<sup>43</sup>

Reminiscent of the Stranger's definition in the *Sophist* of being as nothing but power (δύναμις),<sup>44</sup> Dionysius conceives of the Ideas as God's powers to bestow *esse* in determinate ways. Far from idle talk or lifeless abstractions, the Ideas are the ultimate causes of things. They are the discrete ways that God can 'substantiate,' 'will,' or 'predetermine' beings to have a share in *per se esse*, his first absolute participation. Recalling the analogy of the sun, one might imagine these Exemplars as akin to how the sun might know all of the ways things would have a share in white light and thus come to be colored.

Having explained the nature of an exemplar, Dionysius introduces and critiques a certain philosopher named Clement. Clement's position serves as a useful foil for Dionysius's own account. For Clement thinks that the paradigms refer to beings other than God. Dionysius writes:

<sup>42</sup> *De Divinis Nominibus*, V, 8, pp. 187–188.

<sup>43</sup> *De Divinis Nominibus*, V, 8, p. 188. Παραδείγματα δέ φαμεν εἶναι τοὺς ἐν θεῷ τῶν ὄντων οὐσιοποιούς καὶ ἐνιαίως προϋφεστῶτας λόγους, οὓς ἡ θεολογία προορισμούς καλεῖ καὶ θεῖα καὶ ἀγαθὰ θελήματα, τῶν ὄντων ἀφοριστικά καὶ ποιητικά, καθ' οὓς ὁ ὑπερούσιος τὰ ὄντα πάντα καὶ προώρισε καὶ παρήγαγεν.

<sup>44</sup> Plato, *Opera: Volume I: Euthyphro, Apologia Socratis, Crito, Phaedo, Cratylus, Sophista, Politicus, Theaetetus*, ed. E. A. Duke et al., 3rd edition (Oxonii : New York: Clarendon Press, 1995), 247–d–e.

If the philosopher Clement deems it fit to have it said that paradigms refer to the most principal of beings, his account does not proceed by means of proper, perfect, and simple names. For it is necessary to remember, conceding that it has been put rightly, that theology says, ‘I have not laid out [the firmament and the hosts of heaven] before you that you might trudge behind them,’ but that, through the analogical cognition of these things, we may be led upwards to the Cause of all things, insofar as we are able to do so.<sup>45</sup>

Clement, in other words, has not grasped the significance of God’s proper, perfect, and simple names. In one sense, they refer to and signify God causally or principally as the source of his pure processions. In a second sense, they signify these processions taken absolutely. Clement has, in effect, conflated the two. Doubtless impressed by their absolute and pure significance, Clement has reified the Divine Names and posited their referents as separate hypostases, ‘the most principal among beings’. Consequently, he refers to things ‘principally’, ‘divinely’, and ‘causally’ that only ought to be spoken of in ‘a participable way’.

Dionysius does not specify whether, for Clement, these are separate substances, such as Procline henads, or heavenly bodies. In either case, he implies that Clement’s names are improper, imperfect, and multifarious. From the biblical perspective of Hosea, whom Dionysius cites, they are conceptual idols, Egyptian *simulacra* threatening God’s people with renewed bondage.<sup>46</sup> While these names rightly signify God and his processions, Clement redirects their praises elsewhere. From a philosophical perspective, Clement’s account impedes true analogical knowledge of the First Cause. For God created the hosts of heaven as well as his processions, not as ends of inquiry in themselves, but rather as manifestations and signs of Divine Wisdom.

Echoing Paul and the Prophets, Dionysius runs these critiques together. Clement’s baroque ontology is the result of an impious

<sup>45</sup> *De Divinis Nominibus*, V, 9, p. 188. Εἰ δὲ ὁ φιλόσοφος ἀξιοῖ Κλήμης καὶ πρὸς τι παραδείγματα λέγεσθαι τὰ ἐν τοῖς οὖσιν ἀρχηγικώτερα, πρόεισι μὲν οὐ διὰ κυρίων καὶ παντελῶν καὶ ἀπλῶν ὀνομάτων ὁ λόγος αὐτῶ. Συγχωροῦντας δὲ καὶ τοῦτο ὀρθῶς λέγεσθαι τῆς θεολογίας μνημονευτέον φασκούσης ὅτι «Οὐ παρέδειξά σοι αὐτὰ τοῦ πορεύεσθαι ὀπίσω αὐτῶν», ἀλλ’ ἵνα διὰ τῆς τούτων ἀναλογικῆς γνώσεως ἐπὶ τὴν πάντων αἰτίαν, ὡς οἰοί τέ ἐσμεν, ἀναχθῶμεν.

<sup>46</sup> *Septuaginta: A Readers Edition Hardcover*, eds. Gregory R. Lanier and William A. Ross (Peabody, Massachusetts: Tyndale House Publishers, 2018), Hosea 13:4.

doxology. Because he has not clarified the twofold sense of the Divine Names, he is unable to offer right praise. Because he is unable to give an account of God's δόξα, his Glory, apparent in the things that have been made, he cannot give an account of being *qua* being.

Commenting on Dionysius's critique, Aquinas draws two remarkable conclusions. First, he says that, 'properly speaking' (*proprie*), Exemplars are not principles of *exemplata*.<sup>47</sup> Second, creatures fulfill (*impleri*) the Divine Wisdom.<sup>48</sup> Pace Clement, creatures manifest rather than defect from their Divine Ideas. How does Thomas arrive at these conclusions? He begins by reminding us that 'an exemplar is that according to which something else comes to be—such that the exemplar is imitated' (*exemplar enim est secundum quod fit aliud ut sic exemplar imitetur*).<sup>49</sup>

From this definition, it follows that Clement's 'principal beings' are not simple, perfect, or proper exemplars. First, if they are exemplars like Platonic Forms, they will not be *simple*, since they will participate other Forms as the Form of Man participates Unity, Eternity, Life, etc., while serving as exemplars for others. It is difficult to see how such principles could account for unity in their *exemplata* unless they are one in species or form. Second, they are *imperfect* because they need (*indigeant*) other exemplars, a neediness unbefitting of first principles. Thomas puts these points thus: Clement's superior beings 'are not *perfect* exemplars, since even these stand in need of other exemplars. Nor are these *simple* exemplars, since they are at once exemplars and *exemplata*.'<sup>50</sup> Third and most important, Clement's superior beings are *improper* exemplars since they are somehow principles of particulars. Thomas writes:

Things, however, are not made (*non sunt factae*) for this end, that they imitate certain superior beings (*aliqua superiora entia*), but for this one, that in them might be fulfilled that which the divine wisdom ordained. **Hence, whatever may be the principles**

<sup>47</sup> See note 53 below.

<sup>48</sup> See note 53 below.

<sup>49</sup> *In div. nom.*, cap. V, lect. 3, p. 250.

<sup>50</sup> *In div. nom.*, cap. V, lect. 3, p. 250. Non sunt *perfecta* exemplaria, cum et ipsa aliis exemplaribus indigeant. Non sunt etiam simplicia, quia sunt simul exemplaria et exemplata.

**of things (e.g. paradigms like Clement's), these will not be, properly speaking, [the things'] exemplars.<sup>51</sup> (Emphasis added)**

That is, Clement's superior entities fail because somehow they enter into composition with things as their principles.

What does such composition entail and why does Thomas find it repugnant? These questions are difficult to answer, as neither Thomas nor Dionysius clarifies Clement's account of exemplar causality. Going beyond their *ipsissima verba*, it seems to me that Clement's exemplars could function in one of two ways. Either they are like Platonic Forms, external measures against which individual things necessarily fall short. They would thus be external beings that, in some sense, entered into composition with particulars as formal principles, the really real versions of their participants. Or they could affect internal formal principles in particulars by means of efficient causality. For instance, a stone takes on accidental forms of 'heat' and 'redness' when warmed by a fire.

For Dionysius and Thomas, neither option is compatible with the Divine *esse*. As the green grass does not directly receive the sun's effects as internal principles, creatures do not directly receive God's *esse* by means of efficient causality. For in this case, individuals would directly participate the Divine *esse*. Such a result would entail pantheism since everything shares in the Divine nature. Instead, as grass participates the sun indirectly through white light, the sun's first effect or participation, creatures participate God indirectly through the perfection signified absolutely by *per se esse*.

Neither do Exemplars measure particulars as Platonic Forms. For God's intention was not that creatures slavishly and imperfectly mimic 'certain superior entities' (*aliqua superior entia*). On the contrary, the Divine Will made things so that they might fulfill (*impleatur*) and manifest the Divine Wisdom.<sup>52</sup> Creatures fulfill rather than fall short of God's Ideas. Everything that *is*, insofar *as it is*, is exactly as God intended it to be.

<sup>51</sup> *In div. nom.*, cap. V, lect. 3, p. 250. 'Res autem non sunt factae ad hoc ut imitentur aliqua superiora entia, sed ad hoc quod in eis impleatur quod divina sapientia ordinavit; unde non sunt proprie rerum exemplaria, quaecumque rerum principalia.'

<sup>52</sup> See note 53 above

If creatures fulfill the Divine Wisdom, there must be precise agreement between the content of God's 'willings' and the things he has in fact willed into being. For the exemplars are *not* standards against which creatures fall short but rather anticipations of what they will realize. Every man, as Hopkins put it, 'acts in God's eye what in God's eye he *is*'.<sup>53</sup> One could go so far as to say that, for Thomas and Dionysius, one contemplates the very contents of the Divine Mind, not by imagining perfect exemplars of which things in this world are but shadows, but by attending to the things themselves. For ultimately it is not the formal abstractions of the mind, nor the works of human hands, but the works of the Divine Wisdom that are truly theophanous.

### *III: Conclusions and Qualifications*

In a paper on Dionysius and Aquinas, anything positive said of God must always be taken away. Hence, Aquinas, appealing to Dionysius's authority, says in the *Summa Theologiae* that the soul 'does not know the Divine Ideas (*rationes*) because it does not know God's essence (*ipsum Deum*)'.<sup>54</sup> What is going on here? Thomas distinguishes two ways in which one thing is known in another.<sup>55</sup> One may know one thing in another by means of an equal power, as sight is adequate to see those

<sup>53</sup> Gerard Manly Hopkins, 'As Kingfishers Catch Fire by Gerard Manley Hopkins', (Poetry Foundation, November 25, 2021), <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44389/as-kingfishers-catch-fire>.

<sup>54</sup> Aquinas, *Opera Omnia* Vol. 5: *Summa Theologiae*, I<sup>a</sup> q. 50–119 cum commentariis Caietani (Rome: Leonine Edition, 1889). Ia, q. 84, a. 5. Ergo anima non cognoscit omnia in rationibus aeternis.

<sup>55</sup> Aquinas, *Opera Omnia* Vol. 5: *Summa Theologiae*, I<sup>a</sup> q. 50–119 cum commentariis Caietani (Rome: Leonine Edition, 1889). Ia, q. 84, a. 5. co. 'Utrum anima intellectiva cognoscat res materiales in rationibus aeternis? Cum ergo quaeritur utrum anima humana in rationibus aeternis omnia cognoscat, dicendum est quod aliquid in aliquo dicitur cognosci dupliciter. Uno modo, sicut in objecto cognito; sicut aliquis videt in speculo ea quorum imagines in speculo resultant. Et hoc modo anima, in statu praesentis vitae, non potest videre omnia in rationibus aeternis; sed sic in rationibus aeternis cognoscunt omnia beati, qui Deum vident et omnia in ipso. Alio modo dicitur aliquid cognosci in aliquo sicut in cognitionis principio; sicut si dicamus quod in sole videntur ea quae videntur per solem. Et sic necesse est dicere quod anima humana omnia cognoscat in rationibus aeternis, per quarum participationem omnia cognoscimus. Ipsum enim lumen intellectuale quod est in nobis, nihil est aliud quam quaedam participata similitudo luminis increati, in quo continentur rationes aeternae. Unde in Psalmo IV, dicitur, multi dicunt, quis ostendit nobis bona? Cui quaestioni Psalmista respondet, dicens, signatum est super nos lumen vultus tui, domine. Quasi dicat, per ipsam sigillationem divini luminis in nobis, omnia nobis demonstrantur. Quia tamen praeter lumen intellectuale in nobis, exiguntur species intelligibiles a rebus acceptae, ad scientiam de rebus materialibus habendam; ideo non per solam participationem rationum aeternarum de rebus materialibus notitiam habemus, sicut Platonici posuerunt quod sola idearum participatio sufficit ad scientiam habendam.

things that come to be in a mirror. Here a visible power is proportioned to a visible object. Or, one may know a thing in another insofar as the latter is a principle of knowledge. This entails an asymmetry between the knowing power and the intelligibility of the principle.

Thomas illustrates this difference by appealing, once again, to the analogy of the sun. Recalling the earlier use of this image, one might say that one does not know green as it pre-exists in the sun. Rather, one sees green in the grass by means of the sun's light. We know all things 'in the sun' (*in sole*) insofar as we see them 'through the sun' (*per sole*).

It is only in this sense that we know the *rationes* of the Divine Ideas. It is because they are the unparticipable principles of particulars that we can know their effects. However, the human mind, having but a mere participation of uncreated light, cannot look upon the Ideas directly. Since these are identical with the Divine *Esse*, to which no knowing power is adequate, no one apart from God and the blessed see them at the level of their own intelligibility.

The situation is not unlike the following. Suppose a dog and a man were to stare at one and the same thing, say, a triangle. In one way, they would be seeing the same thing. In another way, they would not, since, while the dog grasps the sensible properties of the image (its color, size, and smell), the man sees its intelligible features (i.e. scalene, one, and equal to 180 degrees). Likewise, the things God understands by means of his Ideas (the *quods* of his understanding) are identical in content to the things he has made and, thus, the things his creatures can understand. But the *quos* of their understanding differ dramatically. For God understands his Ideas by means of being one with them in his infinite *esse*.<sup>56</sup> Creatures, on the other hand, know them by means of abstraction, which is an incremental process dependent on sensibles.

Still, the relevant negations having been made, this account of the Ideas offers an answer to Parmenides's aporia from the start of this paper. Recall that Parmenides challenged Socrates to explain how one can know the Ideas if particulars are only their images and partial likenesses. Aquinas can respond by saying that the contents of the Exemplars are identical with the things God has made. There is no

<sup>56</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, q. 14, a. 2, co, p. 168. Respondeo dicendum quod Deus se per seipsum intelligit.

daylight between Socrates and the Divine Idea of Socrates. He is not an imperfect image of the Divine Exemplar by which God created him.

However, as human beings do not have necessary knowledge of particulars but rather the universal natures signified by terms like 'man' or 'horse,' a critic might respond that finite knowers can never know the full perfections of these Exemplars. Yet, human beings can know even the content of these speculative *rationes* in the Divine Mind. For God does not create 'man' but Socrates. Socrates perfectly conforms to his Exemplar in the Divine Mind. This Exemplar, though, includes in it the way that God's *esse* is imitable 'humanly.' Even if Parmenides's objection stands to a certain extent, insofar as we will never know in this life all the ways that God could make men (i.e. the fullness of perfection in his Idea of Man), what we know in this life is not thereby rendered false. The εἶδος of 'man' abstracted from Socrates by the agent intellect does not differ in content from the Divine Idea of Man, which is just the way his *esse* is imitable in a human way. That is, human nature, the quiddity of man, *in this man* is neither contrary to nor defects from what the Divine Wisdom intended.

As St Paul says, 'from the foundation of the world, the invisible things of God, His eternal nature and power, are *clearly seen* (καθορᾶται), *in the things that have been made*'.<sup>57</sup> Not only do Paul's words provide confidence that there is no final gap between the truths of reason and faith, when interpreted with the help of Dionysius and Aquinas, they enable one to see the world itself as the fulfillment or manifestation of the Divine Wisdom. To reject the beauty of such a vision of being and human life, would be, as he says later on, to be truly without excuse.

<sup>57</sup> Kurt Aland and Erwin Nestle, eds., *Novum Testamentum Graece Et Latine - Greek/Latin New Testament*, 3 (Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 1983), Romans 1:20.