


ARTICLE
**ACTIVITY, IDENTITY, AND GOD**
A TENSION IN AQUINAS AND HIS INTERPRETERS

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1. INTRODUCTION**1.1 Introducing the problem.**

God engages in much activity. He knows and loves Himself. He knows what possibly exists and what actually exists. He wills the existence of creatures and creates them. He moves creatures to their acts and directs them towards their ends. Given divine simplicity, whichever of these actions are *in* God are identical to God. None of God's activities are accidents inhering in Him. When activity is ascribed to God and to creatures, it is not ascribed univocally, but analogously, for all God's activities that are in Him just are God, while activities in creatures are accidents added to them. But are *all* of the activities that we ascribe to God really in Him and identical to Him? If not, which activities are identical to God, and which are not?¹

¹The divine acts that we are discussing here are those understood as God's "second acts" rather than His "first act". The notions of "first act" and "second act" are drawn from creatures and applied analogously to God, where "first act" is the primary actuality of a being whereby it is the being that it is, and "second acts" are acts over and above the first act. What this distinction amounts to when applied to God is, of course, part of our question.

In this paper, we take up these issues from a specifically Thomistic point of view. Although it is seldom noticed, the texts of Aquinas suggest what seem (at least on the surface) to be conflicting answers to these questions, giving rise to a diversity of opinion among interpreters of Aquinas. For example, at *SCG* II, ch. 10, Aquinas states that

[...] the multitude of actions which are attributed to God, such as understanding, willing, producing things, and the like are not diverse realities, since each of these actions in God is His very being, which is one and the same [reality].²

Yet, in other places, it is fairly clear that Aquinas thinks at least some of the actions that we ascribe to God are not simply identical to God, as when he says that

[...] creation is really nothing but a certain relation [of the creature] to God together with a beginning of existence.³

Since creating is a species of producing, these latter passages seem to conflict with the former, which simply identify God's production of things with God.⁴

² *SCG* II, ch. 10 (2). See, also, *SCG* II, ch. 9; *SCG* II, ch. 23 (5); *ST* I, q. 13, a. 7, ad 1; and *ST* I, q. 41, a. 4 ad 3. This translation and all subsequent translations are our own.

³ *DP*, q. 3, a. 3.

⁴ It should be noted that at *DP*, q. 3, a. 3 and elsewhere (*ST* I, q. 45, a. 3 ad 1 and 2), matters are complicated by the fact that Aquinas distinguishes between creation "taken actively" and creation "taken passively". It is likely that the quote just above, in which creation is said to be nothing but a relation of the creature to God together with a beginning of existence, refers to what Aquinas calls creation taken passively. Taken actively, Aquinas says that "creation" denotes God himself, together with a rational relation to the creature. The distinction between creation taken actively and passively raises interpretive questions. Does the distinction mean that Aquinas thinks there are really two distinct acts of creation, where one is identical to God plus a relation of reason, and the other is identical to a real relation of the creature to God, or is it merely a way of talking about different elements of a single divine act of creation? Either way, it seems that there will be a divine act of creation that is not identical to God. For, if we say that the distinction points to two really distinct acts of creation, then one of these acts, creation passively considered, will be distinct from God. And if we say the distinction is really just a way of talking about different elements within a single act of creation, that single act will not be identical to God, since not all the elements of that act will be identical to God—in particular,

These latter texts *are* still consistent with passages in which Aquinas identifies God's knowing and willing with God.⁵ This suggests the possibility that God is to be identified with all His immanent acts, such as knowing and willing, but not with His transitive acts, such as creating, sustaining, or moving. In other words, the immanent acts by which God does all that He does are identical to God, but the transitive acts we ascribe to God are really in the creature.⁶ Yet the identification of *all* God's knowing and willing with God is in apparent tension with yet another set of passages. For, some of God's acts of knowing and willing have creatures for their objects and thus appear to make essential reference to creatures. And, yet, in arguing that God has no real relations to creatures, Aquinas denies that the divine substance can be essentially referred to other things, which, Aquinas says, would make God dependent on those things.⁷ This denial that the divine substance can be essentially referred to other things would thus seem to conflict with identifying the divine substance with any acts that take creatures for their objects, including acts of knowing and willing.

The purpose of this paper is twofold: (1) To draw attention to the *apparently* conflicting answers in Aquinas and his interpreters, to the question of which of the acts that we ascribe to God are identical to Him; and (2) To offer what we believe to be the strongest textual and speculative arguments for and against each of the main answers to this question. It is our view that each interpretation has strengths and weaknesses, and should be taken

the real relation of the creature to God. Accordingly, the textual tension already noted is not resolved simply by appeal to the distinction between creation actively considered and creation passively considered. More interpretive work is needed. For further discussion of the distinction and how it might prove helpful, see section 3.3.

⁵ See, for example, *SCG* I, ch. 45 and 73; and *ST* I, q. 14, a. 4 and q. 19, a. 1.

⁶ For Aquinas, immanent acts do not terminate in objects outside their agents, but rather remain in their agents as perfections of them. By contrast, transitive acts terminate in (and result in perfections to) objects outside their agents. Knowing and willing are typically identified by Aquinas as immanent acts, while moving or producing are transitive acts. See *DV*, q. 8, a. 6; *ibid.*, q. 14, a. 3; *DP*, q. 3, a. 15; and *ST* I, q. 85, a. 2.

⁷ See *SCG* II, ch. 12, n. 2. See also *DP*, q. 7, a. 8, obj. 6 and ad 6. As we are using the term, *x* is "essentially referred" to *y* if and only if it is not possible for *x* to exist without *y*'s existing, and without being related to *y*.

seriously, and that those who work on Aquinas should be well acquainted with each; this paper will give that acquaintance. It should be noted that our claim is not that Aquinas contradicts himself on this question. Rather, our contention is that Aquinas' claims on this question are (at least on the surface) in tension, and so require interpretation, and that they can be (and have been) interpreted in five different ways. The need for this interpretation can be seen from the various answers to this question that have been put forward by members of the Thomistic tradition, which we review over the course of this paper.⁸ To our knowledge, ours is the first attempt in the contemporary literature to identify, compare, and evaluate these different Thomistic answers.

Our question is worthy of consideration for a number of reasons: it must be answered not only for the sake of an adequate understanding of Aquinas's and his followers' texts, but also if we are to understand what we mean when we say that God is free, omnipotent, omniscient, and loving. Understanding in general what is meant when we say that God acts is necessary if we are to understand the particular ways in which God is said to act. An answer to the question also helps us better understand divine simplicity and transcendence, as well as what it means to make various kinds of predications of God.⁹ These ways in which the topic of this paper are important for other philosophical questions regarding God will become clearer over the course of the paper.

From the brief survey above, it might be thought that there are only three, not five, main answers to the question posed in (1): a first that

⁸Not only do the various available answers to the question show the need for the interpretive work that we do here, but there is explicit conflict among members of the Thomistic tradition on the proper interpretation of Aquinas on this issue. For example, as we shall show in section 4, those who held what we shall call interpretive Positions 4 and 5 (e.g. Suárez, John of St. Thomas) explicitly opposed the interpretations of Aquinas' texts put forward by advocates of Positions 1 and 2 (e.g. Cajetan).

⁹The question has broader relevance as well, to topics that we will not have space to explore in this paper. For example, understanding how God's acts that intend creatures are related to God is important for understanding God's providence for creatures, as well as the related, much-discussed issues of foreknowledge and predestination.

identifies all of the acts that we ascribe to God with God, regardless of what the objects of those acts are, and regardless of whether the acts are of a type that we would normally classify as immanent or transitive; a second that identifies all of the immanent acts of knowing and willing that we ascribe to God with God, regardless of their objects, but which does not identify the transitive acts of creating, sustaining, or moving that we ascribe to God with God, and instead identifies them with something else, such as God plus a relation of reason to creatures, or with creatures and their real relations to God; and a third that identifies all of the acts that we ascribe to God with God, except those that take actual creatures as their objects, which would include some of the acts of knowing and willing and all of the acts of creating, sustaining, and moving that we ascribe to God.

In fact, the alternatives are more complicated. In section 1.2, we introduce the complication, which will enable us to set out our *five* different answers to the question which sorts of divine acts are identical to God. In parts 2–4, we make the best textual and speculative Thomistic case for and against each of the positions, noting along the way interpreters of Aquinas who have supported each answer.

For each position or interpretation, we are interested in understanding what it takes each act that we *ascribe* to God to be, that is, that to which the ascription of an act to God corresponds, whether this involves God, creatures, or a relation of reason from God to creatures. On no plausible interpretation of Aquinas is it thought that any act inheres in God as a real accident or relation, such that there would actually be many really distinct acts in God. Assuming these caveats, we shall refer for the remainder of this paper to all the acts that we ascribe to God, regardless of their metaphysical basis, as “God’s acts”. As we shall see, on views on which some of God’s acts are identical not to God but to creature’s real relations to God, or to relations of reason from God to creatures, or to something else, these acts are still rightly ascribed to God and called “God’s acts”, though they are not really in God.

One cannot explain the different possible interpretations of Aquinas on this topic by claiming that his view developed over time. Textual support

for the various positions can be found in early works (e.g. *Commentary on the Sentences, Disputed Questions on Truth*), middle works (e.g. *Summa contra gentiles*), and later works (e.g. *Disputed Questions on the Power of God, Summa Theologiae*). It is, thus, more profitable to consider the texts systematically according to different interpretations, rather than in their historical order.

Our paper is somewhat unusual in that we do not argue for the ultimate superiority of one of the positions or interpretations. In fact, we the co-authors disagree about which is, all things considered, the preferred Thomistic position. Yet, we agree that Aquinas can be plausibly read in various ways on this issue; that there are costs and benefits to adopting any of the alternatives; and that it is worthwhile carefully to consider these costs and benefits prior to coming to a conclusion about one's own interpretation. Accordingly, in this paper, we confine ourselves to acquainting the reader with the various interpretations, and their costs and benefits, leaving it to the reader to make a final judgment for him- or herself.

Let us turn, then, to consider a complication, and an articulation of the five positions.

1.2 The objects of acts and the five positions.

Acts take objects, those things on which acts bear.¹⁰ If you will to eat an ice cream cone, eating an ice cream cone is the object of your willing. If you know that Francis is Pope, your knowing has “that Francis is Pope” or “Francis's being Pope” for its object. If you make a pot of coffee, the coffee is the object made. The same is true for God's acts. God's willing that Moses lead His people out of Egypt has Moses's doing just that for its object. God's knowing that Sara is the mother of Isaac has as its object “that Sara is the mother of Isaac”. The object of God's creating Adam and Eve is Adam and Eve. And so on.

¹⁰Here, of course, we mean what Aquinas would call “second”, as opposed to “first”, acts. This applies to everything that follows in this paper, unless otherwise indicated.

If all of God's activity is identical to God, then God is a single act that is at once a knowing, willing, creating, moving, etc., with an unfathomably rich array of objects. Even if God is not identical to all His acts, the activity to which He is identical will be unfathomably rich. Yet the complication mentioned towards the close of the previous section concerns a dispute over how we are to understand the relationship between the identity of an act and its object(s). The dispute concerns whether we should accept a position to which we will give the name *object essentialism*. According to this position, acts have their objects essentially: it is not possible for an act with a specified object to exist without that same object. An implication of this position is that act *a* and act *b* can be the same or identical act only if they have the same object(s).

Object essentialism has a strong intuitive pull. Suppose Kristen chooses to purchase some ice cream at the market. Had she chosen cookies, instead, would she have performed the same act of choosing that she actually did perform? We suspect most will say "no". But the sole reason for thinking the act would have been different is that it has a different object. To agree that the act would have been different, then, is to agree that diversity of object signals diversity of act, which is just what object essentialism amounts to. In addition to its intuitive pull, object essentialism also finds support from principles endorsed by Aquinas. Aquinas holds that acts are specified by their objects¹¹, and seems also to hold that nothing can be identical to that which has a different species.¹² Yet if acts are specified by their objects, then if act *a* has a different object than act *b*, then *a* and *b* are different species of acts. And if *a* and *b* are different species of acts *and* nothing can be identical to that which has a different species, then *a* and *b* cannot be identical. It follows from these Thomistic principles, then, that no acts having different objects can be the same act.

Despite what can be said on behalf of object essentialism, there are reasons that a Thomist might wish to reject it, at least when it comes to God's

¹¹ See *ST* I-II, q. 18, a. 2.

¹² E.g. *ST* I, q. 50, a. 3, ad 1.

acts. We noted in section 1.1 that there are texts in which Aquinas seems to identify all God's acts with God, or at least all God's acts of knowing and willing with God. But we also noted that Aquinas denies that the divine substance can be essentially referred to other things. If we assume object essentialism, these texts may appear irreconcilable. For suppose that God's act of knowing that Francis is Pope during a particular time period is identical to God. Given object essentialism, to be this act of knowing is to have that particular object. It would then not be possible for that act of knowing to exist with a different object, and so not possible for that act to exist unless Francis actually is Pope during that time period. But, then, if this act of knowing is identical to God, it seems that it will not be possible to be God without being (among other things) the act of knowing that Francis is Pope. Indeed, it seems that it will not be possible for God to exist unless Francis is actually Pope during that period—all of which means that the divine substance will make essential reference to Francis's being Pope—that is, God, just by being Himself, is essentially referred to Pope Francis.

Perhaps, there is more than one way of diffusing this conflict; we will explore the possibilities in what follows.¹³ But one way the conflict can be removed is simply by rejecting object essentialism, at least for divine acts that take creatures as objects. If we deny object essentialism, then God's act of knowing that Francis is Pope could exist with a different object. For example, that very same act (which, if it is really in God, just is the divine substance) could be the act of knowing that Benedict, not Francis, is Pope during the period in question. Consequently, if we deny object essentialism, it won't follow from the identification of God's act of knowing that Francis is Pope with God that to be God is (among other things) essentially to be the act of knowing that Francis is Pope. Denying object essentialism, thus, enables the Thomist to identify God and God's acts that make reference to creatures, without making God essentially referable to other things. It enables one to reconcile texts that might otherwise appear irreconcilable.

¹³To anticipate, some of these possibilities involve a revision of the laws that many contemporary philosophers normally take to govern claims about identity, at least when applied to God.

Because claims about which of God's acts are identical to God vary greatly in their significance depending on whether or not one affirms object essentialism, it is necessary to divide the possible answers to the question "Which of God's acts are identical to God?" into two groups, one on which object essentialism is affirmed, and one on which it is denied. Doing so, gives us five main positions, three that affirm object essentialism, and two that deny it:

Position 1: God's acts have their objects essentially, and all of God's acts are identical to God.

Position 2: God's acts have their objects essentially, and all of God's immanent acts of knowing and willing are identical to God, while God's transitive acts of creating, sustaining, and moving, are not identical to God.

Position 3: God's acts have their objects essentially, and all of God's acts are identical to God, except those that take actual creatures as their objects.

Position 4: God's acts do not all have their objects essentially, and all of God's acts are identical to God.

Position 5: God's acts do not all have their objects essentially, and all of God's immanent acts of knowing and willing are identical to God, while God's transitive acts of creating, sustaining, and moving, are not identical to God.

In what follows, we further articulate these positions and discuss the best textual and speculative cases for and against each, noting along the way interpreters of Aquinas who have supported each. Part 2 evaluates Positions 1 and 2. Part 3 evaluates Position 3. And Part 4 evaluates Positions 4 and 5. In each of these parts, we shall first present both the textual and systematic support for the positions under consideration, then raise objections to the

positions, and finally reply to those objections on behalf of the positions in question.

2. POSITIONS ONE AND TWO

2.1 Support for Positions One and Two

The first two positions agree that God's acts have their objects essentially, and that God's immanent acts of knowing and willing are identical to God, including God's acts of knowing and willing creatures. The positions differ concerning whether God's transitive acts of creating, sustaining, moving, and producing are identical to God. Position 2 denies that God and these transitive acts are identical, finding support both from passages in which Aquinas locates an agent's transitive acts, not in the agent, but in the patient,¹⁴ and passages in which an apparently transitive divine act, creation, is identified as a real relation of the creature to God—that is, what we rightly call a divine act is not in God at all, but rather in His creature.¹⁵ Position 1, by contrast, identifies God's transitive acts with God, appealing to passages in which Aquinas does the same.¹⁶ In at least two places, Aquinas denies that God has transitive actions on the grounds that, since God's action is His substance, it must, unlike transitive actions, be the sort of action that

¹⁴See *DV*, q. 14, a. 3; *ST I*, q. 18, a. 3, ad 1; *ST I-II*, q. 110, a. 2; *DP*, q. 7, a. 10, ad 8; *In Phys.* III, lect. 5, n. 322–324; and *In Met.* XI, lect. 9, n. 2309–2313.

¹⁵See *DP*, q. 3, a. 3 and *ST I*, q. 45, a. 3, ad 1 & 2. It is probably what Aquinas calls “creation taken passively” that is identified in these passages with a real relation of the creature to God. Since these passages identify “creation taken actively” with the divine substance, a proponent of Position 1 might actually take these passages as supporting the claim that God's transitive actions, taken actively, are identical to God. We will have more to say about this distinction between creation taken actively and creation taken passively in section 3.3.

¹⁶There are many passages in which Aquinas simply identifies God with God's action, without any qualification. See, for example, *SCG II*, ch. 9, n. 4–5 and *ST I*, q. 41, a. 4, ad 3. There are others in which Aquinas explicitly identifies what is apparently a transitive act with God. For example, at *SCG II*, ch. 10, n. 2 Aquinas identifies God's “producing” with God's very being, and at *ST I*, q. 13, a. 7, ad 1 Aquinas says that “*Creator*” signifies the action of God, which is his essence. At *DP*, q. 8, a. 2, Aquinas says that actions are in their agents, and from the context he seems to mean transitive actions.

remains in the agent and is a perfection (or “quasi-perfection”) of Him.¹⁷ In the Thomistic tradition, Position 1 is supported by Thomas Cajetan, and Position 2 by Francis Sylvester of Ferrara; we discuss their views below.

That which divides Positions 1 and 2 also divides Positions 4 and 5, which will be the focus of Part 4. Like Position 1, Position 4 takes all of God’s acts to be identical to God. Like Position 2, Position 5 takes God’s immanent acts to be identical to God, but not God’s transitive acts. Positions 4 and 5 differ from 1 and 2 in denying object essentialism. Accordingly, the primary grounds for favoring 1 or 2 over 4 or 5 is the intuitive and textual support for object essentialism discussed in section 1.2 above.

In the remainder of this section, we consider further textual and speculative support that could be offered for Position 1 and/or Position 2. Unfortunately, passages in which Aquinas identifies with God all or some of God’s acts that take creatures as their objects typically do not indicate an explicit preference for or against applying object essentialism to God. For this reason, passages considered in support of Position 1 could often be claimed by proponents of Position 4, and passages in support of Position 2 by proponents of Position 5. The debate over whether object essentialism applies to divine acts must, therefore, be settled by appeal to additional passages or systematic considerations of the sort we have already introduced, or will introduce in Part 4.

One place where Aquinas seems clearly to teach that God is identical to some or all of His acts intending creatures (that is, divine acts that take creatures as their objects) is in his discussion of our understanding and naming of God. He distinguishes two kinds of relations to creatures in

¹⁷ See *DP*, q. 3, a. 15; and *SCG* II, ch. 23, n. 5. Calling the actions “*quasi perfectiones*” rather than “*perfectiones*” helps to indicate that these actions are entitatively nothing over and above God’s substance; that is, they do not add an accident to God, but are just rationally distinguishable from God’s substance by us. Still, to ascribe these actions to God is to say something true about God in Himself, not merely about a relation of reason from Him to creatures. These texts seem to support Position 1, since they say that all of God’s acts are identical to God, though some might think that they support Position 2, since they emphasize that all acts that are identical to God are, in fact, immanent (since on these texts, God has no transitive actions). If God has no transitive actions, then there is not much distinction between Positions 1 and 2.

our ascriptions of relations to God.¹⁸ First, there are terms that imply only a relation of reason to creatures,¹⁹ such as ‘lord’ or ‘master’. When we ascribe these terms to God, we do not name the divine substance itself, but rather a relation of reason between God and creatures, and the ascription of the term presupposes but does not name some divine attribute that permits the ascription of the relation of reason; for example, saying that God is ‘lord’ presupposes that God has power.²⁰ Second, there are relative terms applied to God such as ‘savior’ or ‘creator’ that signify divine actions identical to God whereby God is related “*secundum dici*” to creatures, and so these terms primarily signify the divine substance itself.²¹ When we say that God is ‘savior’

¹⁸ *ST I*, q. 13, a. 7, ad 1. See also *In DDN*, ch. 5, lect. 3 where it is argued that God has a universal ordering (*habitudinem*) to all things, and has pre-definitions and volitions of all things in Himself.

¹⁹ Mark Henninger offers a helpful summary of Aquinas’s distinction between real relations and relations of reason: “[Aquinas] held that a relation R of *a* to *b* is real only if *a* and *b* are really distinct extra-mental things, and there is a real extra-mental foundation in *a* for R. Aquinas also held that a relation R of *a* to *b* is of reason only if either (i) *a* and/or *b* is not real, or (ii) *a* and *b* are not really distinct, or (iii) there is no real foundation in *a* for R.” See Mark G. Henninger, SJ, *Relations: Medieval Theories 1250–1325* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 7. At *ST I*, q. 13, a. 7, Aquinas also states that R is a relation of reason if *a* and *b* are not in the same “order”, and by this Aquinas seems to mean that R is rational just when *a* and *b* are of different orders, and *b* is dependent on *a* but *a* is not dependent on *b*; for example, the relation of the real known object to the knowing power is a relation of reason, because the knowing power is related to the known object as known, but the known object as a real thing is outside the order of the known. Examples of two different “orders” may be things that are pure actuality, and things that are both actual and potential.

²⁰ Aquinas seems to mean that when we say that God is ‘lord’ we do not ascribe any action to Him, but only a dependence of creatures on God as His servants, in virtue of His power.

²¹ The later Thomistic tradition called relations *secundum dici* “transcendental relations”; see e.g. John of St. Thomas, *CP, Logica*, pars 2, q. 17, a. 2 (Paris: Vivès, 1883), vol. I: 498–503. Transcendental relations differ from categorical relations (that is, relations in the category of relation). One thing *a* is categorically related to *b* if and only if *a* is referred to *b* (*ad aliud*) such that *a* depends on the real existence of *b*. One thing *a* is transcendently related to *b* if and only if *a* can exist without *b* really existing but has some reference to or dependence on *b* (*ab alio*). For example, prime matter is transcendently related to every possible substantial form. Transcendental relations, but not categorical relations, are always identical to their subjects. If this is the right way to understand relations *secundum dici*, then the suggestion in *ST I*, q. 13, a. 7, ad 1 is that God is transcendently related to actual creatures, such that He is referred to them, without being really dependent on their actually existing (though He may be dependent on them existing in

we ascribe to Him a saving action that is identical to His substance, and by which He is related *secundum dici* to creatures. Accordingly, the way in which we rightly speak about God indicates that there are transitive and immanent acts that intend creatures and that are identical to God. Given that transitive acts are here identified with God, this supports Position 1 (or 4).

Aquinas also argues that just as God in His simplicity can be rightly understood concretely as a supposit or individual substance and abstractly as a nature, so also God can be rightly understood as nature, power, and voluntary actions of willing and knowing.²² While these are each distinct in creatures, they are identical in God.²³ When we understand God analogously through these notions drawn from creatures, we understand Him through these concepts in a proper order; for example, when we understand God as action, we understand this as proceeding from a power. But these relations and distinctions, for example, between God as action and God as power are not really in God, but are relations of reason that we ascribe to God in order to understand Him through concepts drawn from creatures.²⁴ Each of these perfections should be ascribed to God because every perfection found in

some way, for example, intentionally.) However, most non-Thomistic scholastics, such as the Scotists Bartholomaeus Mastrius and Bonaventura Bellutus, *Philosophiae ad mentem Scoti cursus interger*, tom. 1, *Logica*, d. 8, q. 1, n. 5–7 (Venice: Nicolaus Pezzana, 1727), p. 235 argue that a relation *secundum dici* differs from what is here described as a transcendental relation. A relation *secundum dici*, they contend, is just a state of affairs that can be described relationally, without involving any reference of the subject to a term outside itself. It is not clear whether Aquinas means relation *secundum dici* in either of these senses here. The former seems to run the risk of making God essentially referred to, and so really dependent on and related to, creatures; the latter seems to reduce relations *secundum dici* to relations of reason, contrary to the text (*ST* I, q. 13, a. 7, ad 1) under consideration. Current Aquinas scholarship is divided on whether what Aquinas means by relations *secundum dici* is what later thinkers mean by transcendental relations, or if relations *secundum dici* are just a kind of relation of reason, or are just ways of speaking about relations without speaking about relations themselves; for an outline of this controversy see John Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, (Washington: CUA Press, 2000), 320.

²² *ST* I, q. 25, a. 1, ad 3 & 4. Aquinas also draws the distinction between what is natural and voluntary to God at *ST* I, q. 19, a. 3, ad 3, but not in such a way as to make it clear whether He thinks that the voluntary is something in God.

²³ *ST* I, q. 41, a. 4; *SCG* II, ch. 9.

²⁴ *DP*, q. 1, a. 1, ad 1.

creatures is found in God in a more excellent way,²⁵ and nature, power, and action are perfections found in creatures. In light of these concepts, God is rightly understood by us as determining Himself (*determinat seipsum*) and His will to certain actions that are within His power.²⁶ Because God eternally and immutably does each of His actions, we should not say that these actions are contingent in Him.²⁷

Beyond these textual supports, a speculative case can be made for identifying some or all of God's actions intending creatures with God. First, we have already mentioned the argument that, since all perfections found in creatures must be found in God in a more excellent way, and since (on one, albeit controversial, reading of Aquinas) immanent and transitive acts that intend particular creatures are perfections found in creatures, then these must be found in God. Since all things in God are identical to God, then these acts would be identical to God. Second, in this same vein, one could argue that if God did not have acts of knowing, willing, and loving creatures immanent to Him, then He would not consciously be in a state of knowing, willing, or loving creatures, since to be conscious of something is to have an act immanent to one whereby one is in the relevant conscious state. This would indicate a lack of perfection in Him, and a serious challenge to many claims of Christian spirituality regarding God's love for us.

The first of these arguments is made by Cajetan.²⁸ Cajetan argues that freely willing the good of another is a perfection found in creatures, and

²⁵ *ST* I, q. 13, a. 4; *SCG* I, ch. 31.

²⁶ *In Sent.* I, d. 45, q. 1, a. 3; *In Sent.* II, d. 34, q. 1, a. 3, ad 4; *ST* I, q. 19, a. 3, ad 5.

²⁷ *In Sent.* I, d. 45, q. 1, a. 3, ad 3. Aquinas seems to mean that, supposing that God wills something, He cannot change His acts of will. But this does not imply that God could not have willed otherwise than He willed. If by 'contingent' one means that something could have been otherwise, absolutely speaking, as many contemporary philosophers mean the term, then God's acts of will are contingent. But if by 'contingent' one means that something is changeable in its actual way of being, as Aquinas means the term, then God's acts of will are not contingent, though they are free. The contingency ascribed to God to here is not meant to imply that God is contingent in a modern sense of synchronic contingency.

²⁸ Cajetan does not explicitly endorse object essentialism, but he seems to imply it by holding, at *In ST* I, q. 19, a. 2–3 (ed. Leon. IV: 233–237), that God can take on different free perfections by willing different creatures, though this taking on of free perfections does not imply, on Cajetan's

so must be found in God as well. He argues that God has free perfections, His acts intending particular creatures, over and above His necessary perfections—that is, we rightly say that certain intelligible contents are really in God and identical to God, by His free choice. These free perfections do not add to what we might call the “amount” of perfection that God has, but they are real perfections in Him, entitatively identical to Him, though we can distinguish them from His other perfections by a distinction of reason. Since they do not add to the amount of perfection in Him, God can take on some free perfections rather than others, without lessening His own goodness, perfection or fulfillment—that is, God can perform acts of willing and creating some possible creatures and not others. God’s will in itself is necessary—that is, God necessarily performs acts of will, at least the act of intending His own perfection—but He freely refers His will to others as well. God performs these free acts of will through freely willing His own “extensive” perfection—that is, His perfection as reflected imperfectly in things outside Himself. On Cajetan’s view, God’s free acts are identical to God, but, since they add to His nature free perfections, they could have been otherwise than they are, had God immutably and eternally willed otherwise than He has.²⁹ Similarly, and more recently, Eleonore Stump and

view, that God really has accidents or is not simple. (Were he to deny object essentialism, then, like proponents of Positions 4 and 5, to be discussed below, Cajetan would presumably deny that willing different creaturely objects makes any difference to God’s intrinsic perfection. For, given the denial of object essentialism, the divine activity and its perfection is exactly the same regardless of its creaturely objects.) Cajetan does not explicitly state whether he thinks that God’s transitive acts are in God (and so he could be taken to endorse Position 2 rather than Position 1), but he does seem to favor Position 1. In support of this claim, see *In ST I*, q. 45 a. 6, n. 1 (ed. Leon. IV: 475) where he states that God’s acts of creating come together (*convenit*) with God according to His being (*esse*), and so are proper to God’s nature but not to any one of the Persons of the Trinity.

²⁹Cajetan, *In ST I*, q. 19, a. 2–3 (ed. Leon. IV: 233–237). This view is discussed, with more supporting arguments than Cajetan himself provides, though for the sake of disagreement, at: Pedro da Fonseca, *In Met.* VII, ch. 8, q. 5, s. 3 (Frankfurt: Schanuertteri, 1599), 381–382; Salmanticenses, *CT*, tom. 1, tract. 4 “De voluntate Dei”, d. 7, dub. 1, s. 1 (Paris: Palmé, 1876), vol. II: 102–103; Suárez, *DM*, d. 30, s. 9, n. 7–28; John of St. Thomas, *CT I*, tom. 1, q. 19, d. 4, a. 4, n. 16 (Lyon: Borde, 1663), 122. Suárez and the Salmanticenses present (without endorsing) and ascribe to Cajetan the claim that just as the divine persons are identical to the divine nature while being distinct from one another, so the free actions differ from the divine nature, while

Norman Kretzmann have argued that God has acts intending creatures, and those acts exist in Him by His simple mode of being (that is, they are really identical to the divine substance), but that they could have been otherwise had God freely chosen otherwise. We cannot understand God in Himself, though we can rightly understand God through different concepts, such as the concepts of nature and of free action, where ascribing the latter to God ascribes contents to God that He freely chooses.³⁰

In support of the claim that at least God's immanent acts are identical to God, it can furthermore be argued that differences in effects are explained by differences in their causes, and differences in transitive acts are explained by differences in immanent acts in the agents from which the transitive acts proceed. If God did not have at least immanent acts intending creatures in Himself, then there would be no explanation for why creatures are the way that they are. Since other arguments (such as the Five Ways) show that there *is* such an explanation, then God has at least immanent acts intending creatures in Him and identical to Him.

2.2 Objections to Positions One and Two

Besides the objections that proponents of Positions 1 and 2 would level against each other revolving around whether God's transitive acts are identical to God, there are systematic objections that can be raised to both positions.

Objection 1. First, these positions seem contrary to divine freedom. Aquinas holds that God's acts of willing and creating creatures are free,

both are identical to God. The Salmanticenses furthermore enumerate a number of views on how these free perfections add to God, and whether God could lack any of them while still being the same God, all of which admit that these perfections are really identical to God's substance: that they add to Him rationally, rationally with a foundation in reality, formally, or really, and that God could lack them conditionally (i.e. had He eternally and immutably willed otherwise) but not absolutely (i.e. God taken in His "entirety", supposing all that He has willed) or that He could not lack them conditionally or absolutely.

³⁰Eleonore Stump & Norman Kretzmann, "Absolute Simplicity", *Faith and Philosophy* 2 (1985): 352–382; Stump, *Aquinas*, (London: Routledge, 2003), 92–130. Stump and Kretzmann do not explicitly state whether they think God's transitive acts are in God, or just His immanent acts.

not performed under natural necessity, and, accordingly, that God could have done otherwise than He has done.³¹ Yet, if *a* is identical to *b*, it doesn't seem possible for *a* to exist without *b*. Thus, if God's acts of willing and/or creating this universe are identical to God, it doesn't seem as if God could have existed without these acts. And if God could not have existed without these acts, then it appears that God could not have done otherwise than will and create this universe.

Objection 2. For similar reasons, Positions 1 and 2 appear incompatible with God's omnipotence. Aquinas holds that God is omnipotent because He can do or make anything possible absolutely, that is, anything that does not involve a contradiction in terms.³² Now, there are things that do not involve a contradiction in terms which are incompatible with this universe, for example, John McCain's being the 44th president of the United States. Since McCain's being the 44th president is incompatible with this universe in which Barack Obama is the 44th president, it was not possible for God to have created a universe in which McCain is the 44th president, unless it was possible for God to exist without creating this very universe which he actually created. But, as we have seen, if God is identical to His acts of willing and creating this universe, then it would not appear possible for God to exist without willing and creating this universe. Consequently, it would appear impossible for God to do or make certain things that are possible absolutely.³³

Objection 3. There are additional concerns. Positions 1 and 2 seem to make God's substance essentially referred to creatures, contrary to Aquinas'

³¹ *ST I*, q. 19, a. 3–4; q. 25, *ibid.*, a. 5, co. and ad 1 & 3; *ibid.*, a. 6 co. and ad 3; *SCG II*, ch. 23; *DP*, q. 3, a. 15.

³² *ST I*, q. 25 a. 3; *SCG II*, ch. 22–23.

³³ The foregoing argument, of, presupposes that God's creation of a universe extends to details such as who is the 44th president, in keeping with Aquinas's understanding of creation and divine government. See *ST I*, q. 103, a. 5 & 7. Positions 4 and 5, as will be discussed in Part 4, attempt to avoid this and the previous objection to identifying God with God's willing and creating the universe by denying object essentialism. That denial is not available to Positions 1 and 2.

insistence that it is not so referred.³⁴ Since on these positions God's acts that essentially take creatures for their objects are identical to God's substance, they seem to make God really related to creatures and dependent on them, which is contrary to divine transcendence and aseity, and which seems to introduce contingency into God, contrary to divine necessity.³⁵

Objections 4–5. Moreover, since God is identical to only some such acts, He lacks others, and so seems to lack some perfections, which is contrary to divine perfection. One could also argue that, since a defender of Position 1 or 2 would want to hold that these free perfections could have been otherwise, then it would follow that these free perfections are accidental in God, which is contrary to divine simplicity, and are caused in God, which is contrary to God being the uncaused cause. Adopting Position 1 or 2 would thus seem to require a radical revision of the Thomistic conception of God.³⁶

2.3 Replies to Objections

Replies to Objections 1–2. A proponent of Positions 1 or 2 could offer two different responses to the first two objections, which argue that these positions are inconsistent with divine freedom and omnipotence. The first response denies the objections' conditional premise that if *a* is identical to *b*, it is not possible for *a* to exist without *b*, from which it follows that, if God's acts of willing and creating this universe are identical to God, God could not have existed without these acts. We must remember that whenever we say that God is identical to something, we are ascribing to God some conceptual

³⁴ *DV*, q. 23, a. 4, co. and ad 1, ad 6, ad 13; *SCG* II, ch. 11–12.

³⁵ See especially *SCG* II, ch. 11–12. For further discussion of these points, see section 3.1 below. The dependence mentioned here would not be of a sort on which God is causally affected by creatures, since God, on Aquinas' view, is the cause of creatures, and knows them in causing them (*ST* I, q. 14); rather, the dependence would be the dependence that the foundational relatum of a real relation has on its term.

³⁶ Several of this last set of concerns are raised by Suárez, *DM*, d. 30, s. 9, n. 11–18, 20–28. On a modern understanding of modality this argument could be extended: if these positions were right, then God could not exist without the actual world existing, and, if the actual world could fail to exist, then God could fail to exist. This introduces into God an unacceptable dependence on the world.

content originally drawn from creatures. As pointed out in section 2.1, Aquinas holds that we rightly consider God through concepts drawn from creatures, considered in a proper order, such as the order nature, power, action. At each stage of this conceptual consideration, we should ascribe to God attributes that follow upon the primary concept through which we are considering Him (e.g. “nature” or “action”); and since these conceptual contents are not the same as one another, even though they all apply to His one simple being, predicates of one concept cannot be transferred to the other concepts.³⁷ Accordingly, we rightly consider God as being both a necessary nature that would not be otherwise than it is had He done otherwise than He did, and as being free actions that would be otherwise than they are had He done otherwise than He did. Since God is identical to both, we need to consider how the laws of logic or identity apply to God.³⁸

In contemporary philosophy, we normally assume that if *a* is identical to *b*, and *b* is identical to *c*, then *a* is identical to *c*. But with respect to this principle, often called the law of transitivity of identity, Aquinas maintains (with appeal to Aristotle) that “whatever things are identified with the same thing are identified with each other, if the identity be real *and* logical, [...] but not if they differ logically”.³⁹ Inspired by this Aristotelian version of the law of transitivity, a proponent of Positions 1 and 2 might attempt to revise

³⁷ *ST I*, q. 13 a. 4.

³⁸ There is some precedent for these revisions e.g. in Erich Przywara, John R. Betz and David Bentley Hart, *Analogia Entis*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 281.

³⁹ See *ST I*, q. 28, a. 3, ad 1. Our emphasis. Aquinas’s point is made in the course of responding to the objection that the divine persons are not really distinct from each other, since they are each identical to the divine essence. Yet Aquinas (*In Phys.* III, lect. 5, n. 319–322), following Aristotle (*Physics* III, ch. 3, 202b10–22), means the version of the transitivity of identity given here to apply to all beings. This version of the law of transitivity of identity follows, on Aquinas and Aristotle’s view, from certain elements of their natural philosophy and metaphysics. For example, according to Aristotle, a passion and an action are really the same motion in the patient, but they differ logically, and so they do not have the same attributes, nor are they identical in all respects. On Aristotle and Aquinas’s view in the passages already cited in this footnote, not only is the law of transitivity of identity different from how we normally understand it in contemporary philosophy, but likewise the law of indiscernibility of identicals—if *a* is *F*, and *a* is *b*, then *b* is *F*—only applies if *a* and *b* are both really and logically identical.

the principle that enters into our current objection, namely, that if *a* is identical to *b*, then it is not possible for *a* to exist without *b*'s existing. The revised version of this principle would hold, instead, that if *a* is both really and conceptually identical to *b*, then it is not possible for *a* to exist without *b*'s existing. Since God and the divine acts are conceptually distinct, it would not then follow from the divine acts' being really identical with God that God couldn't exist without these acts. Consequently, the real identity of God and these acts would not rule out God's power to have done otherwise, that is, to have done other acts: God, on this view, can freely change some of the intelligible content that belongs to Himself. Moreover, since the divine acts can be both really identical to God and also have different properties than other divine attributes in virtue of their conceptual distinctness, we could say that the divine acts are contingent, even though the divine nature is necessary, without this introducing any real diversity or composition into God.⁴⁰

A second reply to the first two objections, which does not rely on controversial versions of the laws of logic,⁴¹ focuses on what Aquinas means by divine omnipotence and freedom, and on how all claims that we make about

⁴⁰An argument along these lines is made in James Ross, "Comments on "Absolute Simplicity", *Faith and Philosophy* 2 (1985): 383–391, in which Ross replies to Stump and Kretzmann with a version of Position 1 along the lines of this reply. Ross holds that God is identical to His contingent free acting, and that this contingent free acting would have been different than it is had God created a different world or no world at all, though God Himself would not be really different had that happened. God's free acts are related to His freedom as (self-)determinate to determinable, not as act to potency, and His acts are really the same as His freedom. It is possible for Ross to make all these claims because of something like the revisions to the laws of identity made in this reply. There is not space here to discuss Ross's views in detail.

⁴¹After all, revision of the relevant principle concerning the logic of identity is a bold move. One might worry that we lose a grip on what it means to say that *a* and *b* are really identical, or the same being, if we allow that they are the same being, and yet that it is possible for one to exist without the other. It must also be admitted that the Aristotelian versions of the transitivity of identity and the indiscernibility of identicals, while they would no doubt be controversial among many contemporary philosophers, are nevertheless not as counterintuitive as the revision of the principle relevant to our objection. It is one thing to allow that *a* and *b* could be the same being as *c* without being identical to each other, or that *a* and *b* could be the same being without the same things being true of each. It is a step further to say that *a* and *b* could be the same being, and yet that one could exist without the other.

God are made through the “lens”, so to speak, of concepts drawn from creatures and applied analogously to God. This reply distinguishes two senses of what is meant by ‘impossible’ (and related senses of ‘necessary’) when the objection says that if God is identical with His acts of willing and creating this universe, then it is impossible for God to exist without willing and creating this universe. On one sense, on which we consider what is necessary with respect to God’s total entity,⁴² the antecedent and consequent are both true, while on another sense, on which we consider just what is necessary with respect to God’s power, the antecedent is true but the consequent false. On this second response, when Aquinas discusses divine freedom and omnipotence, he is using the second sense; he is discussing the relation of reason not between God as such or in His total entity and the essences of creatable creatures, but rather between God *qua* will, *qua* power, and *qua* nature, and the essences of creatable creatures. Considered in this way, in abstraction from God’s determinate act, and through the notions drawn from creatures of nature, power, and will, there is no necessary connection between God and creatures, such that He necessarily wills or creates any of them, but rather He can do otherwise than He does. For this reason, Aquinas denies that God wills or creates by “absolute” or “natural” necessity, and this is the sort of necessity that he thinks incompatible with God’s ability to do otherwise. On the contrary, considered through the notion of “nature” drawn from creatures (which abstracts from consideration of acts), God can do otherwise than He does. Taken in this way, the consequent of the conditional in the objection is false.⁴³

But when we consider God according to His total entity (which is *not* how we should consider Him to understand what is meant by calling Him free, omnipotent, or naturally non-necessitated), we see that, since God is identical to all the acts He performs, He necessarily does all that He does, and it is impossible for Him to do otherwise. But these acts are said to be necessary not absolutely, but by supposition or by immutability—that is,

⁴²When we speak of God’s “total entity” or God considered “entitatively”, we mean God in His whole being, not considered just as through some particular concept drawn from creatures.

⁴³*DV*, q. 23, a. 4; *DP*, q. 1, a. 1&5; *ST* I, q. 19, a. 3; *ibid.*, q. 25, a. 5.

necessarily, supposing that God wills something, He wills it unchangeably, from all eternity, and so is unable not to will it.⁴⁴ A proponent of Position 1 or 2 could argue that this sense of necessity is not the sort of necessity that is opposed to the power and freedom to do otherwise, but is only the sort of necessity that belongs to an agent who is already performing some definite act. So this sort of necessity and being unable to do otherwise is not a threat to God's freedom or omnipotence. So the objection fails, because the conditional premise can be denied when it is understood in the relevant manner, without any controversial positions on the laws of identity.

It should be noted that this interpretation of "necessity of supposition" goes beyond a straightforward reading of those texts in which Aquinas uses the notion, though it is perhaps consistent with those texts. On a straightforward reading, necessity of supposition (or immutability) describes the kind of necessity that belongs to God's willing from the fact that it is eternal and immutable. Since God's willing is eternal and immutable, necessarily, on the supposition that God wills *x*, then He does so eternally and unchangeably *x*. This straightforward sense of "necessity of supposition" can be accommodated by any of the five positions and is compatible with God's having been able, unchangeably and from all eternity, to will other than *x*. This is not true of the sense of "necessity of supposition" employed by the current reply. That sense goes further in taking "necessity of supposition" to be a kind of necessity that belongs to God's willing, not only from the fact that that willing is immutable and eternal, but from the fact that that each divine act of willing is identical to God. On this extended sense, on the supposition that God is willing *x*, and given that this willing is identical to God, God *could not* have willed other than *x* (so long as we are considering God in His total entity). On this view, surprising as such an implication

⁴⁴For Aquinas's discussion of necessity of supposition and immutability, see *DV*, q. 23, a. 4, ad 1; *ST I*, q. 19, a. 3; and *DP*, q. 1, a. 5. Strictly speaking, "necessity of supposition" seems to be a purely logical matter: necessarily, if *p*, then *p*. Aquinas, however, means more by this kind of necessity than that: he attributes it to God's willing or activity, from the fact that it is immutable. Given divine immutability, it is not possible, on the supposition that God is willing *x*, that God ever not be willing *x*.

might be, it must be affirmed that a God that willed otherwise than God has in fact willed, would not be identical to the actual God.

This second response to the first two objections is given by Ferrara, who defends Position 2, contending that transitive acts are just changes in their patients, while immanent acts are in their agents.⁴⁵ On his view, God is identical to immanent acts intending creatures, and these acts have necessity of supposition. But it is still correct to say that God could have willed otherwise than He did, because there is no necessary connection, absolutely speaking, between God's nature, considered through the concept of "nature" drawn from creatures, and the particular acts of will He has performed.

Reply to Objection 3. This second response to the first two objections also affords a response to objection 3, the worry that Positions 1 and 2 are contrary to Aquinas' claim that God is not essentially referred to creatures. According to this response, the claim that God is not essentially referred to creatures must be understood in the sense that God has no necessary connection to creatures considered under the concept of nature, and that no creature is an adequate end of the divine will (that is, no creature moves the divine will by natural necessity, unlike God's own goodness), but it is compatible with God's will being referred to creatures by necessity of supposition.⁴⁶

Replies to Objections 4–5. Finally, to the objections that Positions 1 and 2 introduce a lack of perfection into God and render him subject to causation, one can reply that to say that God determines Himself is not to say that God causes part of Himself. Rather, it is to say that God is rightly understood, analogously, through the concepts of free action and self-determination drawn from creatures. Likewise, as we have already seen in considering Cajetan's version of these positions, there is no imperfection in God if He chooses to perform certain acts rather than others. On this view, God has

⁴⁵Francis Sylvester of Ferrara, *In SCG I*, ch. 83–84 (ed. Leon. XIII: 232). Ferrara also holds object essentialism: he argues that if *per impossible* God ceased willing these particular creatures, this act of will would cease, not just a relation of reason.

⁴⁶See *DV*, q. 23, a. 4, ad 1.

the fullness of all perfection apart from any consideration of His free acts; free perfections do not add anything to the “amount” of perfection God has. God’s acts are to be considered as analogous to acts of active, rather than passive, potency. Active potencies, including the will, do not imply a potentiality involving lack in themselves or their subject. So no potentiality involving lack is attributed to God by attributing to Him active potencies, or by considering His actions as like those that proceed from such potencies. Rather, everything being attributed to God is actual.⁴⁷ Furthermore, it must be remembered that God’s actions do not really proceed from His power, but are rather really identical to His substance. God’s power is a real principle only of creatures, and is only a logical principle of His acts.⁴⁸ So this defense seems to imply that no potentiality or imperfection is attributed to God by Positions 1 and 2.

3. POSITION THREE

3.1 Support for Position Three

Position 3 holds that God’s acts have their objects essentially, and that God’s acts are all identical to God, except for those acts that take actual creatures as their objects (though these latter sorts of acts are not accidents inhering in God.)⁴⁹ To the best of our knowledge Aquinas’s corpus offers only one instance of clear, direct textual support for Position 3. In book II, chapter 11 of the *Summa contra gentiles*, Aquinas asks whether something is said of God in relation to creatures. He answers in the affirmative, including

⁴⁷ *ST* I, q. 25, a. 1.

⁴⁸ *DP*, q. 1, a. 1, ad 1.

⁴⁹ The adjective “actual” is important here. Position 3 is consistent with God’s act of knowing merely possible creatures being identical with the divine substance; for God could know those simply by knowing His own power, without there being any worry that, if such knowledge of possible creatures is identical to the divine substance, then the divine substance is incompatible with God’s creating anything but the actual universe. As we have seen, and will see momentarily, this worry arises only if God’s knowledge of which creatures are actual is identical to the divine substance, or if His willing and creating creatures is identical to the divine substance (at least if we assume object essentialism).

among his examples a range of divine acts that take creatures as objects. Thus, God is spoken of in relation to creatures because He knows them, because they proceed and have their being from Him, and because they are moved by Him.⁵⁰ Having established that such actions involve predicating relations to creatures of God, Aquinas insists at the start of *SCG* II, ch. 12 that these relations do not really exist in God. The passage is worth quoting at length:

Such relations that refer to God's effects cannot exist in Him really. For they cannot exist in Him as accidents in a subject, since there is no accident in Him, as was shown in Book I. Neither can they be God's very substance. For, since, as Aristotle says in the *Categories*, relations are those which according to their very being have a certain reference to another, God's substance itself would have to be referred to another. But that which is itself referred to another depends upon that other in a certain way, since it can neither be nor be understood without it. Thus, it would follow that God's substance would depend on something extrinsic to it. And so God would not be, of Himself, the necessary being as was shown in Book I. Therefore, such relations do not really exist in God.⁵¹

There are several points to note here. First, when Aquinas denies that these relations really exist in God, the relations in question include divine actions that take creatures as their objects, for he thinks that to predicate such an action of God is to predicate a relation of God to creatures.⁵² Second, assuming for this reading that God's actions intending creatures are relations to them, Aquinas makes clear in this passage that these actions can be neither accidents in God, nor identical to the divine substance.⁵³ This latter point, thus, seems to conflict with the most natural reading of the

⁵⁰ *SCG* II, ch. 11.

⁵¹ *SCG* II, ch. 12, n. 1–2.

⁵² In their attempt to accommodate this passage, proponents of the other positions might contest this first point, and argue, for example, that Aquinas distinguishes God's acts intending creatures from His relations to creatures; those who make this distinction might favor Positions 4 or 5, and will contest the reading of any text that turns on taking God's actions intending creatures to be relations. For further discussion, see sections 3.2 and 3.3 below.

passages considered in section 2.1, in which Aquinas seems to teach that the divine substance and such actions are identical.⁵⁴ Third, the reason Aquinas gives for denying that these actions can be identical to the divine substance suggests that Aquinas here accepts the principle that figured into some of the objections to Positions 1 and 2, namely the principle that if *a* and *b* are entitatively identical, then it is not possible for *a* to exist without *b*'s existing. For Aquinas says here that if these actions were the divine substance, then the divine substance would be essentially referred to creatures, unable to exist without them. Finally, Aquinas's judgment that, if these actions were identical to the divine substance, then the divine substance could not exist without creatures, suggests that Aquinas is here assuming the truth of object essentialism, even as applied to God and His acts intending creatures. For, if object essentialism were false, and it were possible for *a* and *b* to be the same act even though they have different objects, then divine actions that take creatures as objects could be identical to the divine substance without it following that the divine substance couldn't exist without the creaturely objects it actually (though not essentially) has.

If divine actions intending creatures are not accidents in God, nor identical to the divine substance, then one might expect that that they are realities outside God. But, in *SCG* II, ch. 13, Aquinas explicitly denies that relations of God to creatures are realities existing outside Him. For, if they were, then

⁵³See also *DP*, q. 7, a. 8, obj. 6 and ad 6. Although here Aquinas does not explicitly speak of God's actions intending creatures, he does maintain that predications that express relations to creatures are not predicated of God essentially. Rather, they are predicated of God accidentally, not as implying any accidents in God, but on account of something existing outside Him that grounds the predication and which is referred to Him accidentally. If, as seems plausible, "wills the universe", "knows the universe", and "creates the universe" are examples of predications that express relations to creatures, then these passages would seem to support Position 3, over against Positions 1 and 2; though it seems the objection and reply could also be accommodated by Positions 4 and 5. For similar support, see *DP*, q. 7, a. 10 s.c., where Aquinas says that God's relations to creatures do not posit anything real in Him, for they are attributed to Him not by reason of something in Him, but on account of something outside Him.

⁵⁴Perplexingly, some of these former passages can be found in *SCG* II, in chapters very close to the passage now under examination (for example, chapters 9, 10, and 23). We will consider below how this tension might be resolved.

we would have to predicate new relations of God to this first set of relations existing outside Him, which new relations, on this view, would likewise be outside God, requiring yet another set of relations, and so on to infinity. Instead, Aquinas holds that we predicate of God relations to creatures solely in accord with our manner of understanding. In affirming that *a* is related to *b*, we naturally grasp the truth that *b* is related to *a*: the former implies the latter. Thus, in understanding creatures to be related to God as known by him, created by him, etc., we understand God to be related to creatures, and we truly predicate such relations of God, even though these relations cannot really exist in God, either as accidents or as identical to His substance.⁵⁵

In order to avoid confusion, it is important to appreciate what Aquinas is and is not saying here. Despite his claim that we attribute to God relations to creatures solely in accord with our manner of understanding, Aquinas is decidedly not saying that statements such as “God knows that Francis is Pope” or “God created the earth”, which predicate of God relations to creatures, are not really true. After all, he has just affirmed in chapter 11 that statements of this sort are true! Rather, his claim is about the ontological foundation for the truth of such statements. Recall Mark Henninger’s account of the distinction between real and rational relations, cited in section 2.1:

[Aquinas] held that a relation *R* of *a* to *b* is real only if *a* and *b* are really distinct extra-mental things, and there is a real extra-mental foundation in *a* for *R*. Aquinas also held that a relation *R* of *a* to *b* is of reason only if either (i) *a* and/or *b* is not real, or (ii) *a* and *b* are not really distinct, or (iii) there is no real foundation in *a* for *R*.⁵⁶

Clearly, God and creatures are real and really distinct from one another. Accordingly, to say that God’s relations to creatures are not really in God—that they are “rational relations”, not “real relations”—means that there is no foundation in God for statements predicating of God a relationship to creatures. Many such statements are true, but the ontological foundation

⁵⁵ *SCG* II, ch. 13.

⁵⁶ Henninger, *Relations*, 7.

for such statements is in the creature, which is really related to God.⁵⁷ For this reason, God would be no different intrinsically were his relations to creatures, which include His actions intending creatures, different. Indeed, since the ontological grounds for actions intending creatures predicating of God are outside God, one might say that these sorts of divine actions are themselves outside or extrinsic to God, as Aquinas explicitly says of the act of creation when he says it is a relation of dependence of the creature on the Creator.⁵⁸ Below, we consider these statements in light of the distinction, already mentioned in the introduction, between divine acts intending creatures taken actively and taken passively.

We have considered, then, the direct textual support for Position 3. To our knowledge, the position's most famous proponent is Bernard Lonergan, who denied that "God's knowledge of the creature, or His creative will and operation, [... are] some reality in God that would not be there if He had not created", arguing instead that God "is entitatively identical whether He creates or does not create", and that "His knowledge or will or production of the created universe adds only a *relatio rationis* to the *actus purus*".⁵⁹

⁵⁷ See *DP*, q. 7, a. 9, s.c. and co.; *DP*, q. 7, a. 8, ad 6; *DP*, q. 7, a. 10, s.c.; and *DP*, q. 7, a. 11, ad 1.

⁵⁸ See, for example, *DP*, q. 3, a. 3. Admittedly, this suggestion that God's actions intending creatures are outside or extrinsic to God appears in tension with the portion of *SCG* II, ch. 13 discussed above, where Aquinas denies that God's relations to creatures are realities outside God. Yet, we have also just noted that Aquinas is willing to speak of actions intending creatures, such as the act of creation, in ways that suggest they are extrinsic to God. And there is something to be said for the view that God's actions intending creatures are outside God, if the ontological grounds for predicating such actions of God are outside Him. A proponent of Position 3, thus, might well prefer to say that God's acts intending creatures are constituted, in whole or in part, by real items outside God, such as the creatures those acts take as their objects, and those creatures' real relations to God; and not simply by rational relations, which, after all, are not themselves anything real.

⁵⁹ Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Grace and Freedom: Operative Grace in the Thought of St. Thomas Aquinas* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1971), 104 (see also Lonergan, *Grace and Freedom*, in *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), vol. 1: 105, 329–333). A reading of these remarks from Lonergan as supporting Position 4 is less plausible. According to Position 4, God's acts intending actual creatures are identical to the divine substance, even though the same act that the divine substance is could have had different or no creaturely objects (thus, the rejection of object essentialism, at least for God). Lonergan, by contrast, here

Some other authors have also recently defended the position,⁶⁰ as did some medieval scholastics.⁶¹

Although its explicit textual support is limited to one (albeit one well-developed) extended passage, Position 3 enjoys significant speculative support. Unlike Positions 4 and 5, it has the advantage of embracing the intuitively appealing object essentialism (which, as we have noted, Aquinas also seems to embrace). It fits much more easily than Positions 1 and 2 with a number of claims central to Aquinas's doctrine of God, such as that God acts freely and is omnipotent, without needing to resort to the controversial moves made by Positions 1 and 2, because it avoids the objections altogether. Since, on Position 3, actions intending creatures are not identical to the divine substance, there is no worry that the position threatens God's freedom or omnipotence.

3.2 Objections to Position Three

Objection 1. The first objection to Position 3 challenges the interpretation of *SCG* II, ch. 12, the most important passage invoked in its support. This counter-interpretation maintains that the relations that Aquinas there

identifies the *relationes rationis* with, or includes them within, God's acts of knowing, willing, and producing the universe. This implies commitment to object essentialism. For, had the *relationes rationis* been different, God's acts would have been different.

⁶⁰See Barry Miller, *A Most Unlikely God* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996), 106–113; Timothy O'Connor, "Simplicity and Creation", *Faith and Philosophy* 16 (1999): 405–412; Alexander R. Pruss, "On Two Problems of Divine Simplicity", in *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Jonathan Kvanvig (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), vol. 1: 150–167; Jeffrey E. Brower, "Simplicity and Aseity", in *Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology*, ed. Thomas P. Flint and Michael Rea (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 105–128; W. Matthews Grant, "Can a Libertarian hold that our free acts are caused by God?", *Faith and Philosophy* 27 (2010): 22–44; and W. Matthews Grant, "Divine Simplicity, Contingent Truths, and Extrinsic Models of Divine Knowing", *Faith and Philosophy* 29 (2012): 254–274. None of these authors defends Position 3 as the right interpretation of Aquinas, though some credit Aquinas's denial that God is really related to creatures as a historical precedent.

⁶¹The position is presented, but rejected, by the Salmanticenses, *CT*, tom. 1, tract. 4 "De voluntate Dei", d. 7, dub. 5, vol. II: 111, and Suárez, *DM*, d. 30, s. 9, n. 4, as the position of William of Auxerre, Peter Auriol, and Gregory of Rimini.

denies can be identified either with accidents in God or with God's very substance should not be understood to include actions intending creatures. Rather, Aquinas's point is that no real relations to creatures follow from predicating of God actions intending creatures, even though these actions are themselves identical to God's substance. This counter-interpretation distinguishes between actions and relations, allowing the proponents of the other positions to accommodate the passage's claim that these relations cannot be identical to the divine substance, even though they hold that at least some divine actions intending creatures are so identical.

Objection 2. The motive behind the counter-interpretation just proposed—to render the passage consistent with the identification of at least some divine acts intending creatures with the divine substance—brings us to what is likely the most obvious objection to Position 3, namely, that it appears to contradict a great many passages in which Aquinas identifies all or some of God's acts intending creatures with God. Certainly, if we were to settle the debate between Position 3 and the positions that identify these actions with God by counting up which has more passages in its favor, Position 3 would lose by a landslide.

Objection 3. A third objection recalls Cajetan's argument, discussed in section 2.1, that since God must contain all the perfections of creatures in a more excellent way, and since among the perfections of creatures are immanent and transitive acts intending creatures, that God must also have such acts as perfections in God. Yet, on Position 3, God's acts intending creatures are not in God, and hence not perfections of Him. Consequently, Position 3 seems to violate Aquinas's principle that whatever perfections exist in creatures exist first in the Creator.⁶²

Objection 4. A fourth objection charges that Position 3 renders God incapable of conscious knowledge and love of creatures. These states require immanent acts whereby one knows, loves, and is conscious of objects outside

⁶²For this objection see Salmanticenses, *CT*, tom. 1, tract. 4 "De voluntate Dei", d. 7, dub. 5, vol. II: 111; Suárez, *DM*, d. 30, s. 9, n. 6. Suárez holds that it would follow from this view that God would act more imperfectly than any creature.

of oneself. To deny as Position 3 does that God has such immanent acts is, thus, not only to remove such perfections from God, but also radically to alter the conception of God presupposed by Christian spirituality.

Objection 5. Finally, a fifth objection holds that the denial of immanent acts in God renders God incapable of explaining why there is a universe rather than none, or why these creatures rather than other creatures. Differences in effects are explained by differences in their causes. But if, as Position 3 insists, God is entitatively the same regardless of His effects, then there is nothing about God that explains why this universe exists rather than something else or no creatures at all. A proponent of Position 1 or 2 can offer an explanation in terms of God's immanent act of willing that this universe exist, an act intrinsic to and identical with God that explains why this universe exists. No such explanation seems available on Position 3.

3.3 Replies to Objections

Reply to Objection 1. The first objection challenges Position 3's interpretation of *SCG* II, ch. 12. The counter-interpretation argues that the relations Aquinas has in mind here do not include divine acts that take creatures as objects. But, in reply, they certainly seem to include them; for the phrase "such relations" (*huiusmodi relationes*), appearing at the very beginning of ch. 12, makes reference back to examples in ch. 11 in which we truly predicate of God relations to creatures, among which examples Aquinas includes predicating of God acts that take creatures as objects. Furthermore, even on the supposition that Aquinas does not mean to include acts intending creatures among the relations he has in mind, if these acts were identical to the divine substance (or, *per impossibile*, to accidents in Him), then there would be a foundation in God from which a real relation to creatures would follow, contrary to the passage's claim that God has no real relations to creatures. Finally, given the assumption of object essentialism, the argument Aquinas gives at *SCG* II, ch. 12, n. 2 for why God's relations to creatures cannot be something real in God would apply to God's actions intending creatures as much as to His relations to creatures, even on the supposition

that these are distinct. For God's actions intending creatures cannot be in God as accidents, since God has no accidents. And were these actions identical to the divine substance, then, given object essentialism, God would be essentially referred to the creatures intended by His actions, and could not exist without them.⁶³

Reply to Objection 2. Assuming his interpretation of *SCG* II, ch. 12 can be defended, a proponent of Position 3 must admit that there are far more passages in which Aquinas seems to identify with God some or all of God's acts intending creatures than there are passages that directly support Position 3. To this second objection, two sorts of responses are available. A first, less appealing response holds that Aquinas's treatment of the issue is simply inconsistent, and that we should favor Position 3 over the alternatives on account of its speculative advantages, which matter more than which position can claim the most direct proof texts. A second response maintains, on the contrary, that when interpreted properly Aquinas is not inconsistent. Rather, Aquinas means for us to interpret his affirmations of God's identity with the actions in question as true according to our manner of understanding, but not as positing a real identity. Or, alternatively, Aquinas means for us to interpret such affirmations as indicating what is involved in such actions from the side of God, but not what such actions consist in taken as a whole—that is, the whole ontological foundation for our ascriptions of actions intending creatures to God.

This second response gains some plausibility from the fact that, as already noted, the critical passages in *SCG* II, ch. 11–13, in which Aquinas seems pretty clearly to deny that these actions are really identical to God (again, assuming that these actions are rightly understood as relations to creatures), come right after a series of passages at *SCG* II, ch. 9–10 in which Aquinas seems to affirm that identity. It is surely strange for Aquinas so quickly and unwittingly to contradict what he has just said. Is it not more likely that he intends the earlier passages to be understood in light of the latter ones? That is, is it not likely that he wants us to understand the earlier

⁶³ By rejecting object essentialism, Positions 4 and 5 can avoid this last result.

passages, not to be claiming that God and these actions are identical in reality, but only according to our way of understanding? Indeed, a passage in ch. 13 offers some explicit support for this interpretation:

And so it is indeed evident that the aforementioned relations are said of God in a different way than other things that are predicated of Him. *For all other things, such as wisdom and will, are predicated of His essence; the aforementioned relations are predicated of Him in a lesser way, only according to our way of understanding. Nevertheless, our understanding is not false.* Indeed, from the very fact that our intellect understands the relations of the divine effects to be terminated in God Himself, it predicates certain things of Him relatively.⁶⁴

Keep in mind that, given the context of this passage, the relations in question seem to include God's acts intending creatures.⁶⁵ This passage seems to be indicating that these relations do not express the divine essence really, but that they do express it according to our manner of understanding, and that we speak truly according to this manner, provided we do not take God and such actions to be really identical. A proponent of Position 3 could thus argue that in the *SCG* and elsewhere, when Aquinas identifies God with God's actions intending creatures, he takes himself to be speaking truly according to our manner of understanding, but does not mean to affirm a real identity.

In responding to the second objection, a defender of Position 3 might also (or instead) look to those passages in which Aquinas distinguishes "creation taken actively" from "creation taken passively".⁶⁶ Aquinas tells us that creation taken actively is simply the divine substance together with a rational relation to the creature, while creation taken passively is the creature's real relation of dependence on God. In making this distinction, it seems less likely that Aquinas is talking about two distinct acts of creation, and more likely that he is talking about what is involved ontologically from the side

⁶⁴ *SCG* II, ch. 13, n. 5. Our emphasis.

⁶⁵ For this reason, God's wisdom and will, which Aquinas here claims to express God's essence, should not be taken as actions intending creatures.

⁶⁶ See *DP*, q. 3, a. 3, and *ST* I, q. 45, a. 3, ad 1&2.

of the Creator and from the side of the creature, in a single act of creation. From the side of God—that is, creation taken actively—all that is really involved is the divine substance, which is no different if God creates or does not create, since ascribing to God a rational relation to the creature does not posit anything real in God. From the side of the creature—creation taken passively—what is involved is a real relation of dependence on God. The divine act of creation as a whole, then, involves God, the creature, and the creature’s real relation of dependence on God. If this is correct, then it suggests a way in which a proponent of Position 3 might not only support his position, but also respond to the challenge posed by passages in which Aquinas seems to identify God with His acts intending creatures. For, on the suggested reading, a divine act of creation as a whole is not something in or identical to God, but rather includes a creature’s relation of dependence on God, and would not be the same act without that creature’s relation of dependence. Nevertheless, if we consider just what’s involved in creation from the side of the Creator, that is, creation taken actively, then creation is nothing really distinct from the divine substance. So, the proponent of Position 3 can claim that when Aquinas identifies creation with God, he has in mind creation taken actively, but that the divine act of creation as a whole, which is all properly called God’s act, is not identical to the divine substance, but essentially includes a creature’s real relation of dependence on God as well. Admittedly, Aquinas does not explicitly use the taken actively/taken passively distinction for divine acts other than creation. But if we extend the logic of the distinction, it could apply to all divine acts intending creatures, and thus explain how Position 3 is consistent with passages in which Aquinas identifies such acts with the divine substance. On this view, whenever Aquinas identifies such acts with the divine substance, he should be understood as speaking only of what those acts are taken actively, that is, what they involve ontologically from the side of God, not what the act as a whole consists in. As on Positions 1 and 2, the proponent of Position 3 can hold that God, just by being Himself, causes all things, but the ontological analysis of what God’s act of causing consists in differs between those positions.

Reply to Objection 3. To the third objection, which is based on creaturely perfections needing to be in God in a more excellent way, it can be said that it does not follow from the fact that all creaturely perfections are in God, and that immanent and transitive acts intending creatures are perfections in some creatures, that God has immanent and transitive acts intending creatures among His own perfections. For the perfections in creatures need not be had by God in the same way; rather, they can be really in creatures, but only virtually in God, that is, in God inasmuch as He can be causally responsible for them in creatures.⁶⁷ Moreover, it is arguably an advantage of Position 3 that acts intending creatures are not perfections in God. For, if they are, it looks as if part of the divine perfection depends on what God creates, whereas it is more in keeping with Thomistic theology to say that God, since “He cannot lack any excellence that belongs to any thing”,⁶⁸ gains nothing by way of perfection from creating.

Reply to Objection 4. To the fourth objection, which is based on God’s apparent lack of consciousness of creatures on Position 3, it can be said that it is true that Aquinas normally speaks of conscious acts of knowledge and will as immanent acts perfecting the agent. He speaks this way not only when discussing creatures, but also sometimes when discussing God.⁶⁹ For this reason it is arguably a liability of Position 3 that it allows for divine acts

⁶⁷ *ST I*, q. 4, a. 2–3. For instance, acts of discursive reasoning are perfections in some creatures, and healthy skin a perfection in others. These perfections must somehow exist in God, but it doesn’t follow that God (questions of the Incarnation aside) engages in acts of discursive reasoning or has healthy skin. Nor can such examples be dismissed by claiming that these perfections are not pure, having application only to creaturely existence. For proponents of Position 3 will hold that exactly the same is true of immanent or transitive acts intending creatures. If the objector asks what pure perfection in God corresponds to such acts and perfections in creatures, a proponent of Position 3 might respond that the pure acts of knowing and willing, or knowing and willing the best thing (i.e. God), are the corresponding pure perfections, and these are indeed in God, and are that by which He is capable of producing creaturely perfections. So all the cognitive and volitional perfection found in creatures is found in God in a more excellent way just in case God knows and wills Himself, which He does. Or a proponent of Position 3 could even say that being itself, which is identical to God, is the corresponding pure perfection.

⁶⁸ *SCG I*, ch. 28, n. 2. See also *ST I*, q. 4, a. 2.

⁶⁹ E.g. at *SCG II*, ch. 23, n. 5; and *DP*, q. 3, a. 15.

of conscious knowing and willing that depart from this expectation. Still, as we have seen, Aquinas in places denies that God's acts of knowing and willing, which take creatures as objects, are immanent or intrinsic to God. And it surely begs the question against Position 3 to argue that it renders God incapable of consciously knowing and loving creatures on the grounds that all such acts are immanent. For Position 3 disagrees that all such acts are immanent. Even if all such acts turned out to be immanent in creatures, there is no Thomistic basis for insisting that God's mode of consciously knowing and willing must be the same as the creaturely mode.

Furthermore, there may well be Thomistic warrant for thinking that a knower is conscious of an actually existing object without there being an intrinsic state corresponding to that consciousness of the actual object as actual. Aquinas holds that the intrinsic act of the intellect is having the idea (*ratio*) of the known object.⁷⁰ But God has such an idea for all possible objects, so He would gain no new idea or act when some possible object is made actual.⁷¹ On Aquinas' view, God is present to all things, and thereby sees all things.⁷² But presence adds no new intrinsic perfections to God. On this view, God, and perhaps other knowers, can have intentional objects of knowledge when conscious of actual things without intrinsic change so long as they have the ideas of those things already in their intellects and are present to those objects. Conscious, intentional acts can "extend" outside their agents toward their objects, and the consciousness of the actual object as actual is explained not by an intrinsic state, but by the presence of the knower to the object. So, on this view, God can be conscious of creatures even though His acts are just intentional relations or relations of reason, not intrinsic in Him.⁷³

⁷⁰ *ST* I, q. 82, a. 3.

⁷¹ *ST* I, q. 15, a. 3.

⁷² *ST* I, q. 8, a. 3. Among other reasons, God is present to all creatures because He is their formal exemplary, efficient, and final cause.

⁷³ On this notion of intentional intellectual relations by presence see especially Francisco Marin-Sola, *Concordia tomista*, 839–840, cited in Michael Torre, *God's Permission of Sin: Negative or Conditioned Decree?* (Fribourg, 2009), 110–113, 319. A similar notion is found in W. Norris Clarke, *Explorations in Metaphysics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 194–196, who

Reply to Objection 5. Finally, the fifth objection charges that on Position 3's denial of immanent acts in God, God cannot explain why there is a universe at all, or why there are these creatures and not others. In one sense, this charge is correct, but is not a liability for Position 3. In another sense, the charge is incorrect.

The charge is correct in the sense that, according to Position 3, the existence of God, with exactly the same intelligible content and entity in each case, is consistent with our universe's existing, with some other universe's existing, or with no universe existing. The objector would like there to be some variable intelligible content in God that explains why this universe exists rather than one of these other scenarios, insisting that a difference in the effect requires a difference in the cause. The objector proposes an immanent act of willing this universe in God as the needed explanation. But if God has an immanent act of willing the universe, this act is either identical to the divine substance, or is an accident in God. The former, as we have seen, seems to conflict with Aquinas's claim that God could will otherwise than He does, for it does not seem possible for God to exist without willing this universe if He is identical to willing this universe.⁷⁴ The latter not only conflicts with divine simplicity, but also merely pushes the explanatory demand a step back. For, now we need an explanation of why God has this accidental immanent act of willing the universe rather than some other, which will require that there be some prior difference in God explaining why he wills the universe rather than not. This prior difference—perhaps another immanent act—will either be identical to the divine substance or an accident in God. If identical, then God's willing the universe is not free. If an accident, then the demand for explanation will be pushed back again, and so on to infinity. Thus, the cost of requiring that there be something in God that explains why there are these effects is either the elimination of divine

argues that God has intentional relations of personal consciousness toward the world, which are something more robust than rational relations, but not yet real relations. However, we think that Clarke is more a proponent of Position 4 or 5, than of 3.

⁷⁴Of course, those who are persuaded by the responses to this argument in section 2.3 will disagree.

freedom, or the sacrifice of divine simplicity and the generation of an explanatory regress. From a Thomistic perspective, neither cost is acceptable.

Fortunately, there is another sense in which Position 3 is perfectly consistent with the claim that God explains why there is this particular universe. God explains this universe in the sense that He accounts for it as the one who freely causes it to be. Referring to the cause of something is a paradigmatic way of explaining it, even if the cause in question might have existed without the effect that it, in fact, brings about. Moreover, the Thomistic arguments that lead us to recognize that the universe is caused by God also lead us to recognize that God is Pure Act or Subsistent Existence, containing the whole perfection of being.⁷⁵ Subsistent Existence has no accidents,⁷⁶ and it is infinite, not limited to a particular set of effects, but able to produce whatever can be.⁷⁷ But, then, our very arguments for thinking that the universe is caused by God lead to a conception of God that rules out the demand that the universe be explained by some accident in God, or that the divine substance itself be consistent only with God's causing this universe. In other words, our arguments for thinking that God caused the universe are also, by extension, arguments against the principle that a difference of effect requires a difference of cause, at least when it comes to the universe and God.

4. POSITIONS FOUR AND FIVE

4.1 Support for Positions Four and Five.

Like Position 1, Position 4 holds that all of God's acts, including both His immanent and transitive acts intending creatures, are identical to God, that is, to the divine substance. Like Position 2, Position 5 holds that all of God's immanent acts of knowing and willing (including those intending creatures) are identical to God, but that His transitive acts of creating,

⁷⁵ See *De ente et essentia* 4 and *ST I*, q. 3.

⁷⁶ *ST I*, q. 6.

⁷⁷ *ST I*, q. 25, a. 3.

sustaining, and moving creatures are not so identical. The textual support for both sides of this disagreement over whether transitive acts are in God was discussed above, in section 2.1.

What Positions 4 and 5 have in common is that, in contrast to Positions 1–3, they deny that all of God’s acts intending creatures have all of their objects essentially. For those who favor object essentialism, this feature counts against these positions. Yet, the denial of object essentialism is precisely what enables these positions their chief appeal. That appeal consists in their ability to accommodate those passages in which Aquinas identifies the divine substance with God’s acts intending creatures, but without thereby making the divine substance essentially refer to creatures, and without violating God’s aseity, freedom, and omnipotence. We will explain how this works momentarily, but, first, we need to say a bit more about Positions 4 and 5 in order to appreciate more fully how they compare to the other positions.

According to Positions 4 and 5, at least some divine acts that take creaturely objects are identical to the divine substance. These acts have as their primary object God Himself, and God knows and wills Himself essentially. Since these acts are identical to the divine substance, they are necessary, and are identical to God regardless of whether He wills creatures, and regardless of what creatures He wills. If, as indeed He has, God wills to create creatures, these same acts of knowing and willing Himself are acts of knowing and willing creatures. Indeed, they can only be called “acts” in the plural from our point of view, for they are really one and the same act, which is identical to the divine substance, and by this one act God knows and wills Himself primarily, and also knows and wills creatures secondarily. When the divine act has creaturely objects, it does not make an intrinsic difference to God, but only involves having different rational relations to creatures. God might have lacked these particular relations, in which case the divine action would have had different creaturely objects (through different rational relations) or no creaturely objects at all. An implication of this position is that, although God’s act of knowing some creature x is identical to the divine substance, the divine action can only be *characterized* as “knowing x ” if God has a rational relation to x , presupposing the existence of x and x ’s

real relation of causal dependence on God, though x 's existence is explained causally by the divine knowledge and will. Considered in Himself, apart from His rational relations to creatures, the divine action has no determinate creaturely objects—that is, His action is not essentially or necessarily referred to any creatures. But God does not know or will creatures because of the relation of reason, nor are His acts identical to these relations, nor do His acts have these relations as a part or constituent.

Positions 4 and 5 thus have an important similarity to Position 3, and an important difference from Positions 1 and 2. According to Positions 1 and 2, not only is the divine substance identical to knowing x , but, because of object essentialism, the divine substance knows x essentially. To know what the divine substance is essentially would be to know that the divine substance is “knowing x ”. On Positions 3–5, by contrast, the divine substance cannot be characterized as “knowing x ” independently of any relation to x . For Position 3, this implication follows from the fact that God's act of knowing x (taken as a whole) is not identical to the divine substance, but rather is either a rational relation to x , or consists in the ontological items presupposed by that rational relation: namely, x and x 's real relation to God. For Positions 4–5, God's act of knowing x is identical to the divine substance, but the implication follows because the divine act is not essentially knowing x . Rather, it is knowing x and can be characterized as such only when it includes a rational relation to x , grounded in x 's real relation to God.⁷⁸ On Positions 3–5, then, to know what the divine substance is essentially would

⁷⁸To use the contemporary concept of a “truth-maker”, on Positions 1 and 2, God Himself can serve as a truth-maker for the proposition “God knows x ”, whereas on Positions 3–5, the truth-maker for “God knows x ” includes x and the relations between God and x . Thus, the truth-maker for “God knows x ” is the same on Positions 3–5, even though these positions differ with respect to the ontological question of what God's act of knowing x consists in. For this reason, Pruss and Brower, who cast their discussions in terms of the truth-makers for such claims, might be judged to hold a view indeterminate between Positions 3–5. One of the reasons we classified them under Position 3, however, is that they both cite O'Connor as holding substantially the position they favor, and O'Connor clearly takes God's acts intending creatures to consist, not in the divine substance, but in God's relations to His creaturely effects. For these references, see note 60, above. One paradoxical aspect of Positions 4 and 5 is that God's act of knowing x , which is identical to the divine substance, does not constitute a complete truth-maker for “God knows x ”.

not be enough to know that the divine substance is knowing x . One would also need to know something distinct from the divine substance, namely, its contingent rational relation to x .⁷⁹

However, a further qualification is necessary. It is not necessarily a part of these positions that God only knows creatures by knowing that He is rationally related to creatures. On John Capreolus' view, which is a version of Position 4 or 5, it is indeed claimed that God only knows creatures because He knows the relation of reason that obtains between Him and creatures as a result of His willing creatures.⁸⁰ But on many other versions of these Positions that have been held, for example, explicitly on John of St. Thomas' version of Position 4, God just knows and wills creatures in a way entirely transcendent to and independent of creatures, and by an act identical to Himself, which would be no different in its being were He not to know and will these creatures. Because He knows and wills certain creatures, there is a relation of reason from Him to those creatures, but His act of knowing or willing is not identical to a relation of reason. Rather, that relation is posited by us to understand God's acts towards creatures.⁸¹

Because of the similarity of Positions 3–5 on this point, it is often difficult to determine under which of these positions a particular thinker or passage should be classified. The difference among them is that, unlike Position 3, Positions 4–5 are willing to say that actions intending creatures are, in their whole entity, really identical to God, not only according to our way of understanding. Nor are claims that these actions are identical to God merely ways of talking about these actions “taken actively”, in the sense elaborated

⁷⁹If one finds counterintuitive the claim that God's act of knowing x could be identical to the divine substance, and yet one could know what the divine substance is essentially without knowing that the divine substance is “knowing x ”, that is likely because one finds the rejection of object essentialism even for God counterintuitive. In other words, one finds it counterintuitive that one could know the essence of an act of knowing x without knowing what is the object of that act.

⁸⁰Capreolus, *In Sent.* I, d. 45, q. 1, s. c, § 2, ad 1. Aureoli (Turin: Cattier, 1900), vol. II: 587; *ibid.*, s. c, § 3, ad 1. Aureoli, vol. II: 588. Capreolus never says whether he thinks that transitive acts are identical to God, so it is not clear whether he holds Position 4 or 5.

⁸¹John of St. Thomas, *CT* I, tom. 1, q. 19, d. 5, a. 4–5, p. 117–129. For why John of St. Thomas holds Position 5 not 4 see below.

in section 3.3. For Positions 4–5, these actions are wholly and really identical to God. Accordingly, we suggest the following rules for determining how to classify a particular passage in some thinker’s work as to which position is being supported, when it is unclear whether the passage supports Position 3, 4, or 5. If a passage suggests that a divine act intending creatures consists in God’s rational relation to creatures, or in the real relation of the creature to God, or in God plus God’s relations to creatures where God is not identical to the entity of the act, then the passage is best understood as an example of Position 3. If a passage suggests that a divine act intending creatures consists really and entitatively in the divine substance, but that God might have had different rational relations to creatures, due to different creaturely objects of the divine act, and where our characterization of the act as intending some particular creature *x* includes a rational relation to *x*, then the passage is best understood as an instance of Position 4 or 5.

We are now ready to consider the textual and systematic support for Positions 4 and 5, and to note its primary proponents among commentators on Aquinas.⁸² While there is no conclusive textual support for these positions, they are able to accommodate many of the texts in support of Positions 1–3. Positions 4 and 5 affirm with the texts adduced in support of Positions 1 and 2 that the divine actions are identical to the divine substance, but also with the texts adduced in support of Position 3 that God’s acts intending creatures do not essentially refer Him to creatures, but indicate only that the divine substance has certain rational relations to creatures. Perhaps the strongest case for Positions 4 and 5 is their ability to reconcile the passages in Aquinas that appear to be in conflict. As we have seen, there are many passages in which Aquinas identifies divine acts intending creatures with the divine substance. But we have also seen that this identification seems to result in God’s being essentially referred to creatures, and either to conflict with divine freedom and omnipotence, or to require adopting controversial positions in logic. The rejection of object essentialism enables Positions 4 and 5 to avoid these difficulties. If God’s willing or creating

⁸²Some of those we consider here, such as the Jesuit commentators, depart from key Thomistic positions in various respects, but are still within the broader Thomistic commentarial tradition.

x does not essentially have x as an object, then God could be identical to these acts without essentially referring to x . Also, it would be possible for God to exist without being correctly characterized as willing or creating x . For, if God had a rational relation to y , instead, then the same divine act, which is identical to the divine substance, would rightly be characterized as willing or creating y , not x . Consequently, given the denial of object essentialism, the identification of God's willing or creating x with God would not imply that God could not have been willing or creating y , or anything else not involving a contradiction. In this way, identifying God's acts intending creatures with the divine substance can be preserved alongside a Thomistic understanding of God's aseity, freedom, and omnipotence.

The denial of object essentialism, and the adoption of Positions 4 or 5, are indirectly suggested by a plausible reading of a few other passages, contained in *DV* and *SCG*, in which Aquinas distinguishes between the primary and secondary objects of God's acts. Aquinas argues that God's will, like any will, has a primary and secondary object. The primary object of God's will is His own goodness, and this He wills necessarily by the act of will identical to His substance; creatures are the secondary objects of His will,⁸³ and He wills none of these necessarily, except by necessity of supposition or of immutably⁸⁴—that is, having willed something, God cannot not will it. God's will is not essentially referred to any creature; rather, God freely and eternally refers His will to those creatures that He wills to create.⁸⁵ When we say that this act is referred to creatures, we just imply a relation (*respectus*) or ordering (*ordo*) of God to these creatures as object of His will and to their production, and we do not, by speaking of this reference, signify something in God Himself.⁸⁶

⁸³ *DV*, q. 23, a. 4, co.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, ad 1

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, ad 3.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, co.; ad 13; ad 15. Based on what we have seen Aquinas say elsewhere about relations between God and creatures, it is plausible to suppose that these relations or orderings are relations of reason, not real relations.

Furthermore, God's acts are as perfect as they can be just in willing Himself; God gains no perfection or actuality in willing creatures.⁸⁷ Accordingly, God wills both Himself and creatures by one act of the will, and He wills creatures by willing Himself; likewise, He understands creatures by the act by which He understands Himself. This is so because God is entirely primarily directed towards what is best, Himself, and He is the formality under which He does all that He does. The claim being made here is not just that all these acts are identical to the divine substance, but that all acts of the divine will must be understood to be just one act of the divine will, and likewise for the divine intellect.⁸⁸ Proponents of Positions 4 and 5 can plausibly claim that these texts support the view that the divine act does not have its creaturely objects essentially, since that act is essentially specified by its primary object, God Himself, and since the same divine act could have had different creaturely objects. Although these acts do in fact have creatures as their secondary objects, proponents of these views can furthermore claim that these texts support the view that God's acts do not in any sense change what they are entitatively, based on what God does vis-à-vis creatures. What reference to these secondary objects adds to God is just a relation of reason.

This sort of reasoning is found in many Dominican, Carmelite, and Jesuits who comment on Thomas Aquinas from the fifteenth century on,⁸⁹ though the denial of object essentialism also draws on the denial of object essentialism by John Duns Scotus.⁹⁰ We have already seen that John Capreolus endorses a version of one of these positions. He claims that the same act that is now in God willing creature *a* could be in God not willing creature *a*.⁹¹ Most of the other early modern Thomistic commentators

⁸⁷ *DV*, q. 23, a. 4, co.; *SCG I*, ch. 82.

⁸⁸ *In Sent.* I, d. 45, q. 1, a. 2; *SCG I*, ch. 75–76.

⁸⁹ Position 4 (or possibly 5) is also endorsed, in its essentials, by the contemporary analytic philosopher, William E. Mann, "Simplicity and Immutability in God", *International Philosophical Quarterly* 23 (1983), especially 273–276.

⁹⁰ See e.g. Scotus, *Reportatio IA*, d. 39–40, q. 1–3, n. 70, cited in Richard Cross, *John Duns Scotus on God*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 87.

⁹¹ Capreolus, *In Sent.* I, d. 45, q. 1, s. c. § 3, ad 1. Aureoli, vol. II: 588.

make similar claims, though with more specificity as to whether they hold Position 4 or 5.

Position 4 is clearly supported by several sixteenth and seventeenth century Dominicans, including Domingo Bañez and John of St. Thomas. On Bañez's view, in the acts of understanding and loving Himself, God understands and loves both all possible and actual beings. God could not lack the acts He has insofar as they are identical to His essence, but He could have lacked the relations of reason that He has to the creatures that He has in fact willed. Furthermore, considered in its entity, the transitive act of creation is identical to the divine essence, and God could not be without it, even if He had not actually created. Considered in relation to actual creatures, this act includes relations of reason to the particular creatures God has created, and God could be without these relations. God's actions toward creatures add no perfections to Him, though they are fitting to Him, since His perfection is the communication of being, although this is perfectly accomplished in the processions of Trinity, apart from creation.⁹²

John of St. Thomas holds that God's acts of knowing and willing are specified by their primary object, Himself. God's act of knowing essentially includes all cognitive perfections: this one act is, for example, speculative and practical, abstractive and intuitive. God's act of willing essentially includes all volitional perfections: by this one act God wills Himself both freely and necessarily or naturally. God's act of creation is entitatively identical to God as well, and can be considered by us as His power in second act.⁹³ But this one act, which cannot be otherwise than it is, can be applied to and terminated by different creatures, and related to them by a relation of reason. God cannot be without the act, which really is the act of willing and knowing creatures, but He can be without the relations of reason; and so the same

⁹²Domingo Bañez, *In I ST*, q. 19, a. 2, p. 604; *ibid.*, a. 3, p. 607–608.

⁹³The early modern Thomists sometimes speak of God's power or acts intending creatures being in "first act" and "second act", where a first act just intends ideas of possible creatures, and a second act intends actual creatures or ideas of actual creatures. See e.g. Salmanticenses, *CT*, tom. 1, tract. 3 "De scientia Dei", d. 7, dub. 3, s. 4, vol. I: 484 on divine ideas being in first and second act. But these Thomists do not think that there is a real addition to God's actuality when His power or ideas are in second act; rather, this only adds to God a relation of reason.

divine act might have had different creaturely objects. John emphasizes that we cannot understand what this act is like. Because of God's transcendence and independence from all creatures, God's acts are not like ours. Creaturely acts are dependent on and specified by their objects. But God's act is not specified by its creaturely objects; rather, by one transcendent and unchangeable act, which is entirely free and independent of its secondary, creaturely objects, God specifies those objects.⁹⁴

Like Position 3, it is a strength of both Positions 4 and 5 that they emphasize that God is perfect in Himself, apart from any reference to creatures, and that God gains nothing by creating; thus, they emphasize not only His transcendence and aseity, but also His generosity in creating. Bañez's position also clearly shows that at least Position 4 can maintain that every kind of act that is a perfection found in creatures is also found in God, thus including a possible advantage of Positions 1 and 2, and excluding a possible disadvantage of Position 3.

The sixteenth century Jesuit Pedro da Fonseca likewise seems to support a version of Position 4. He holds that by His one simple, necessary, and immutable act of knowing and willing Himself, God knows and wills all creatures. These acts, which are identical to the divine substance, furthermore include God's transitive actions "virtually", that is, according to power. We can make a virtual distinction—that is, a distinction regarding the power and its effects—between God's act of willing Himself and His act of willing creatures, since the former is a perfect exercise of His power, and the latter is not; there is no real distinction or distinction founded in God in Himself (*ex natura rei*) being made here.⁹⁵ But Fonseca differs from other supporters of these positions in that he holds that the link between God and actual creatures should not be understood as a relation of reason, but as a special sort of non-necessary "extension" of the one divine act, which does not add

⁹⁴John of St. Thomas, *CP, Logica*, pars 2, q. 23, a. 1, vol. I: 635–636; *CT*, q. 19, d. 5, a. 4–5, p. 117–129; *CT*, q. 44, d. 18, a. 2, n. 6–7, p. 246–247.

⁹⁵Garrigou-Lagrange, who also seems to be a proponent of Position 4, likewise holds that there is a virtual distinction between God's act of willing Himself and His act of willing creatures. See Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *The One God* (Saint Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1946), 514–16.

to God Himself anything real or any perfection.⁹⁶ Fonseca's reasons for this difference are not entirely clear, but similar claims are made and explained by his successor in the Jesuits, Francisco Suárez.

Suárez supports a version of Position 5. On his view, God really and properly knows and wills all creatures, but by the one act by which He knows and wills Himself, which is identical to Himself, and which would not be different were God to will different or no creatures. As John of St. Thomas also said some decades later, we cannot understand how it can be the case both that God has this act necessarily, and by this act He freely determines creatures exactly as they are. Like Fonseca, Suárez thinks that the way in which God's act extends to or attains its object is different from a relation of reason. He thinks that it is something of a sort higher than we can understand, so we must use the language of rational relations to describe it. But in reality, God's one, necessary act really attains its creaturely objects without any difference in itself from how it would be were it not to attain these objects.⁹⁷ The same things can be said of God's knowledge.⁹⁸ But transitive divine actions are not really in God; rather, God is identical to an immanent act of willing, which explains, for example the transitive acts of creating and conserving, which are really in creatures as modes or relations of dependence on God and on His actions which are identical to Him.⁹⁹ For this reason, Suárez holds Position 5, not 4. Suárez's position emphasizes divine transcendence and aseity, but also that God must be understood to be conscious of and present to all creatures, in a way we cannot comprehend; in this way, Suárez anticipates and seeks to avoid the objection that was leveled against Position 3 and can likewise be leveled against Positions 4 and 5 that God, on these positions, cannot be conscious of creatures. Others who

⁹⁶Fonseca, *In Met.* VII, ch. 8, q. 5, s. 4–5, p. 382–386. A proponent of Positions 3 or 5 might also say that God's substance includes His transitive actions virtually, since it is by His power, which is identical to Him, that all creatures come to be. Fonseca, however, means that the divine transitive actions are really included in the divine immanent actions, and so really in God Himself, so Fonseca is a proponent of Position 4.

⁹⁷Suárez, *DM*, d. 30, s. 9, n. 35–44.

⁹⁸Suárez, *DM*, d. 30, s. 14, n. 21, 26, 29.

⁹⁹Suárez, *DM*, d. 20, s. 5, n. 9.

support Position 5 include the Salamanca commentators on the *Summa theologiae*, who agree with the view of John of St. Thomas with respect to God's immanent acts, but contend that God creates by His immanent act of willing, the transitive act of creation being just in the things created.¹⁰⁰

4.2 Objections

Leaving aside the debate between the two views over whether God's transitive acts are identical to God, which follows the lines of the same debate between Positions 1 and 2, several objections can be raised to Positions 4 and 5 together.

Objection 1. First, object essentialism is quite intuitive, and, so, to abandon it is counter-intuitive. If acts are not specified by their objects, then it is not clear what accounts for the identity of acts.¹⁰¹

Further objections parallel objections to Positions 1, 2, and 3; this is so because Positions 4 and 5 attempt to include key points from those other theories, and so it takes on versions of the objections to them as well.

Objection 2. A second objection, paralleling an objection to Position 1 and 2, is that it seems that on Positions 4 and 5, God cannot really *do* otherwise than He does, contrary to what Aquinas says when speaking of God's freedom and omnipotence. On both positions, God's acts of knowing and

¹⁰⁰ Salmanticenses, *CT*, tom. 1, tract. 4 "De voluntate Dei", d. 7, dub. 7, s. 4-5, vol. II: 119-123; *ibid.*, Notationes ad a. 5, n. 4, vol. II: 135. Support for this view is also found in the eighteenth century Cardinal Billuart, *In ST I*, "De voluntate Dei", diss. 7, a. 4, vol. II: 245-250; *ibid.*, "De opere sex dierum", diss. 1, a. 3, vol. III: 89-90; in the nineteenth century in Cardinal Billot, *De Deo uno et trino*, th. 26, concl. 2, p. 234-238; and in the twentieth century in John F. X. Knasas, "Contra Spinoza: Aquinas on God's Free Will" *ACPQ* 76 (2002): 417-429. Finally, W. Norris Clarke appears to hold a position that is closest to 4 or 5, though he formulates the issue in a somewhat different way than we have. See Clarke, *Explorations*, 183-210.

¹⁰¹ David Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West*, (Cambridge: CUP, 2007), 262 argues that it is "wildly implausible" to hold (as he takes Aquinas to hold) that God wills creatures by the same act by which He wills Himself, without there being any difference to the act were He to will otherwise. Bradshaw thinks this position is a *reductio ad absurdum* of either object essentialism or the view that God wills creatures by the same act by which He wills Himself, though he disagrees with the latter not the former; he defends Gregory Palamas' view, which adds to God a distinction of essence and *energeiai*, in order to address the issues of this paper, and other issues.

willing creatures are identical to God, and on Position 4, so also is God's act of creating them. But, then, it is not possible for God to exist without these acts. Granted, on these positions, the single act that God is might have had different creaturely objects. But that is not the same as the claim that God would have *acted* differently, unless we assume object essentialism, which these positions deny. A counter-intuitive cost of these positions, then, is that Aquinas's claim that God could do otherwise has to be understood, not literally as the claim that God might have acted differently, but rather as the claim that the very same divine act might have had different creaturely objects.

Objection 3. Third, God's free *self*-determination to acts intending creatures, mentioned in some of the texts supporting Positions 1 and 2, seems difficult to reconcile with Positions 4 and 5. On positions 4 and 5, God determines things other than Himself, but, though He has real acts of will determining creatures, He does not seem to determine Himself, because regardless of what He does, He is entitatively no different than He would have been had He done nothing at all.

Objection 4. Fourth, paralleling an objection to Position 3, there does not seem to be any explanation for why God's acts have these creaturely objects rather than some other, or none at all. Differences in effects are normally explained through differences in causes. But, on Positions 4 and 5, there can be no difference in God that would account for differences in His effects, or in the secondary objects of His acts.

Objection 5. Fifth, again paralleling an objection to Position 3, it is not clear how God could be conscious of creatures on this view, for God is intrinsically the same regardless of which creatures He knows, wills, and loves.

4.3 Replies to Objections

Just as similar objections to those raised to Positions 1–3 can be raised to Positions 4 and 5, so similar replies to those objections can be raised here, aside from the first objection, which has to do with the plausibility of object essentialism.

Reply to Objection 1. To the first objection, at least two (not mutually exclusive) responses are possible.¹⁰² A first response is that a proponent of Positions 4 or 5 could hold that acts in general are specified not by any of their objects, but only by their primary objects. Each kind of act is directed towards certain objects primarily, and others only secondarily. For example, an act of intention is directed towards and so specified by the intended end, but an act of choice is directed to and so specified by the means chosen for the sake of some end; in the former, the end is the primary object, while in the latter, the means and end together are. But, on Positions 4 and 5, God has just one act of will directed primarily just to Himself, and so His acts are specified just by this object. The proponent of Positions 4 and 5 could argue that he or she is in fact a kind of object essentialist, namely, a “primary object essentialist”. Acts have their primary objects essentially, but not all of their objects.¹⁰³

A second response is that a proponent of Positions 4 or 5 could hold that object essentialism only obtains for acts that are dependent on their objects for their specification. This would pertain to all creaturely acts. But as many of the Thomistic commentators surveyed above emphasized, God’s acts are not dependent on their objects for their specification; on the contrary, all creatures are dependent on Him and His acts for *their* specification. If an act is not specified by an object, then it need not have that object, even if it does in fact have that object. When we characterize God as willing this universe, we are characterizing His act in terms of a creaturely object to

¹⁰² Each response attempts to show that Aquinas, on Position 4 or 5, in fact can avoid Bradshaw’s objections.

¹⁰³ Admittedly, primary object essentialism does not enable us to supply identity conditions for acts in terms of their objects in the manner afforded by object essentialism. The object essentialist can say that act *a* and act *b* are the same act if and only if they have the same agent and the same objects. But it won’t work to say that act *a* and act *b* are the same act if and only if they have the same agent and the same *primary* object. For two acts could have the same agent and the same primary object, and yet be manifestly distinct. For example, a person’s taking this jog for his health and his eating this broccoli for his health are clearly distinct acts, even though they have the same agent, and even though their primary object, the person’s health, is the same. Thus, a primary object essentialist, if he is to offer identity conditions for actions, will have to give them in terms of something other than the objects of acts.

which He is rationally related and that does not specify His act. Since all creaturely acts are specified by their objects, on this version of Positions 4 and 5, everything intuitive about object essentialism can be maintained for creaturely actions, but not for divine actions. Indeed, this reply fits well with the Thomistic insistence upon analogy between God and creatures, and that God's acts are of a different mode from creaturely acts. The fact that creaturely acts are specified by their objects implies nothing as to whether divine acts are so specified.

Reply to Objections 2–3. To the second and third objections—those dealing with God doing otherwise than He does, and with God's self-determination—it can be replied that talk about God's being able to do otherwise than He does is talk about how God is non-necessarily related to possible creatures. To say that God can do otherwise than He does is not to say that God can be different than He is *ad intra*, but rather that He can make it the case that things are different *ad extra*. Attributing self-determination to God is not meant to imply that God changes Himself, but rather that God has no necessary relation to creatures, but rather can determine which creatures He wills—and so determine how His one immutable act will be characterized. Positions 4 and 5 can maintain all of this without any need to revise the logic of identity for God.¹⁰⁴

Reply to Objection 4. Furthermore, it can be said in response to the fourth objection that God, because of His transcendence over and independence from creatures, explains creatures and their differences without any intrinsic difference in Himself. This is just as in the response to the parallel objection to Position 3. But Positions 4 and 5 have the advantage over Position 3 that they can also maintain that God does have acts intending creatures in Himself, rather than His acts being mere relations of reason or items extrinsic to God; yet without any of the disadvantages of that claim

¹⁰⁴That said, it must be admitted that, on Positions 4 and 5, for God to have made it the case that things are different *ad extra* would not have been for Him to have acted differently. Differences in God's effects, on these positions, do not imply differences in God's acting—that God would have literally acted otherwise.

in Positions 1 and 2, such as needing to revise the laws of identity, or having a counter-intuitive account of God's freedom, omnipotence, or necessity. God explains creatures, without needing to be explained by them; this is, indeed, a chief reason for positing a God in the first place.

Reply to Objection 5. Likewise, the same response to the fifth objection as was made to the parallel objection in Position 3 can be made here, with the addition that God is conscious of creatures through His intrinsic act of knowing them, despite the fact that there is no intrinsic difference between this act as it is and as it would be were God knowing other creatures. Conscious acts, on this view, can extend beyond their intrinsic entity to terminate in objects that do not intrinsically affect them.¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, Fonseca and Suárez's versions of Positions 4 and 5 have the further advantage of including an extension of God's acts towards creatures that emphasizes His presence to and consciousness of those creatures, without intrinsically affecting Him. So long as one is comfortable with a degree of mystery and incomprehensibility in one's view of God—and surely any Thomist is comfortable with this—then one will have no problem accepting this mysterious feature of Positions 4 and 5.

5. CONCLUSION

Thus concludes our evaluation of the five Thomistic positions concerning the question of the identity of God with God's acts intending creatures. While each position is open to certain textual and systematic objections, proponents of these positions are not without their responses. Which position to prefer in the end, will likely depend on assessing whose responses are most satisfactory, all things considered. Since we ourselves remain in disagreement both about which is the correct interpretation of Aquinas and

¹⁰⁵ Compare to Position 3, on which God's conscious acts intending creatures extend beyond God, and do not affect God intrinsically. Whether, on Position 3, God's conscious acts terminate in objects beyond those acts depends on the particular way the position is developed. If the conscious acts include the creaturely objects of consciousness among their constituents, then they do not terminate in objects beyond those acts. Otherwise, they do terminate in objects beyond those acts.

which the correct view of the matter, we leave it to the reader to make this assessment. We hope others will contribute to our understanding of these issues by further developing a defense of one of the positions we have identified, or by presenting an alternative position that we may have overlooked.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Cardinal Billuart

In ST *Summa Sancti Thomae*
 hodiernis academiarum moribus accommodata

Domingo Bañez

In I ST *Scholastica commentaria*
 in primam partem angelici doctoris divi Thomae

Pedro da Fonseca

In Met. *In libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis Stagiritae*

Francisco Suárez

DM *Disputationes metaphysicae*

Francis Sylvester of Ferrara

In SCG *Commentaria in libros quatuor Contra gentiles*

John Capreolus

In Sent. *Defensiones theologiae divi Thomae Aquinatis*

John of St. Thomas

CP *Cursus philosophicus Thomisticus*

CT *Cursus theologicus*

Salmanticenses

In ST *Cursus theologicus*

Thomas de Vio Cajetan

In ST *Expositio super Summam theologiae*

Thomas Aquinas

DP *Quaestiones disputatae De potentia Dei*

DV *Quaestiones disputatae De veritate*

In DDN *In librum beati Dionysii De divinis nominibus expositio*

In Phys. *Commentaria in octo libros Physicorum*

In Met. *In duodecim libros Metaphysicorum expositio*

In Sent. *Scriptum super Sententiis*

SCG *Summa contra gentiles*

ST *Summa theologiae*



SUMMARIUM

Operatio, identitas, Deus

De discrepatione quadam apud Aquinatem eiusque expositores

Numquid omnes Dei operationes cum Deo identificantur? Si non omnes, quae distinguuntur? Thomas Aquinas in suis scriptis, quamquam raro hoc animadvertitur, diversas ad has quaestiones responsiones suadere videtur; unde et D. Thomae expositores diversas ipsius mentis proponunt explicationes. Huius tractationis scopus est, diversitatem supra dictam prae oculis ponere nec non rationes quam potissimas tum textuales, tum speculativas offerre pro et contra unamquamque ad praedictas quaestiones responsionem.

ABSTRACT

Activity, Identity, and God A Tension in Aquinas and his Interpreters

Are all God's activities identical to God? If not, which are identical to God and which not? Although it is seldom noticed, the texts of Aquinas (at least on the surface) suggest conflicting answers to these questions, giving rise to a diversity of opinion among interpreters of Aquinas. In this paper, we draw attention to this conflict and offer what we believe to be the strongest textual and speculative support for and against each of the main answers to these questions.

KEYWORDS: Aquinas; Divine Simplicity; Divine Action; Divine Freedom; Divine Knowledge; Creation; Identity



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