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Thomas Aquinas on Grace as a Mysterious Kind of Creature

Although the question of whether, in the thought of St. Thomas Aquinas,¹ the grace of justification or divinization is “created” or “un-created” has received considerable attention in late 20th- and early 21st-century scholarship, many of the questions and arguments proposed by those in favor of grace being uncreated have gone unanswered. Among these ancillary questions and arguments are those concerning the subject of grace for Aquinas, Aquinas’s classification of grace within the Aristotelian categories, and the reason for the mystery and unconsciousness of grace. These questions appear unrelated, but, as will be seen in this paper, they are each logically connected to each other and to the overall thesis that sanctifying grace is created, not uncreated. This paper aims to make Aquinas’s thesis that grace is created more palatable to objectors by addressing each of these ancillary questions.

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¹ All citations from Thomas Aquinas are from the following editions and will be abbreviated as noted: *Opera Omnia* [=Leon.] (Rome: Leonine Commission, 1882-), the parts of which that are used being *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate* [=De Veritate] and *Quaestiones disputatae de malo* [=De Malo]; *idem, Scriptum super libros Sententiarum* [=In Script.], ed. R. P. Mandonnet and R. P. Maria Fabianus Moos, vol. 1–4 (Paris: Sumptibus P. Lethielleux, 1929–1947); *idem, In duodecim libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis Expositio* [=In Metaph.], ed. M. R. Cathala, Raymundi Spiazzi (Italy: Marietti Editori, 1964); *idem, Summa Theologiae* [=S.Th.], ed. John Mortensen and Enrique Alarcón (Lander: The Aquinas Institute, 2012). All translations from the Latin are my own.



The greatly influential mid-twentieth century theologian, Karl Rahner, S.J., his intellectual disciple, Jerome Ebacher, O.C.S.O., and the contemporary theologian, Anna N. Williams, have each defended, in his or her own way, the thesis that the grace of justification or divinization in Aquinas is uncreated grace, not created grace—God himself, and not a creature.² Recently, both Luke Martin and Richard Cross have responded in distinct ways to this thesis as instantiated in the work of Williams.³ Although the present paper endorses the general arguments and conclusions of both Martin and Cross, both authors leave unanswered the ancillary questions on the subject, categorial status, and mystery or unconsciousness of grace. The result is that debate as to whether grace is created or uncreated in Aquinas's thought remains unsettled with arguments for each side of the debate remaining unanswered. In this paper, I try to advance the debate toward a satisfactory settlement by addressing some of the questions previously only addressed by those in favor of grace being uncreated.

The next two sections in this paper summarize the existing arguments and interpretations of Aquinas given by Rahner, Ebacher, Williams, Martin, and Cross. The result of this analysis is a clear sense of what arguments have yet to be answered. The last section takes up the

² Karl Rahner, "Nature and Grace," in *Nature and Grace: Dilemmas in the Modern Church*, trans. Dinah Wharton (New York, N.Y.: Sheed and Ward, 1964), 125; *idem*, "Some Implications of the Scholastic Concept of Uncreated Grace," in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 1: *God, Christ, Mary and Grace*, trans. Cornelius Ernst (Baltimore, Md.: Helicon Press, 1961), 320–321. In the former text, Rahner speaks of "divinization," but in the latter, "justification." Although these are not the same thing, the point Rahner makes is clearly intended to refer to the same sense of "grace." Jerome Ebacher, "Grace and Supernaturalization," *Angelicum* 58, no. 1 (1981): 21–32. Anna Williams, *The Ground of Union: Deification in Aquinas and Palamas* (New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1999). See especially *ibid.*, 87–89 and 191, note 29. Concerning other topics, Williams is not in agreement with the likes of Rahner. See, e.g.: *ibid.*, 151.

³ Luke Martin, "Williams, Aquinas, and Uncreated Grace," *New Blackfriars* 98, no. 1073 (2017): 34–43; Richard Cross, "Deification in Aquinas: Created or Uncreated?," *The Journal of Theological Studies* 69, no. 1 (2018): 106–132.

unanswered arguments of those defending a theory of uncreated sanctifying grace by showing the logical relation of Aquinas's views on the subject of grace, its categorial classification, and its mystery and inaccessibility to consciousness.

Karl Rahner and Jerome Ebacher

In "Nature and Grace," Karl Rahner, argues that "uncreated grace" is "the very essence of grace."⁴ Rahner reaches this conclusion through the following inference:

If . . . grace and glory are two stages of the one process of divinization, and . . . in glory God communicates himself to the supernaturally elevated created spirit in a communication which is not the *efficient* causal creation of a creaturely quality or entity distinct from God, but the quasi-formal causal communication of God himself, then this can also be applied to *grace* much more explicitly than it commonly has been in theology up till now.⁵

Put differently, if [a] grace is the same as glory, but [b] glory is not a quality efficiently caused by and distinct from God, then [c] neither is grace distinct from God or efficiently caused by God. In the major premise, *i.e.* [b], Rahner sets up an opposition between, on the one hand, quasi-formal participation in God himself and, on the other hand, an accidental quality efficiently caused by and entitatively distinct from God. Rahner, concludes this line of reasoning with an ancillary argument directed at the same conclusion, but presumably of less weight. After having stated that uncreated grace is the very essence of grace, Rahner adds: "[W]hich also explains much better how grace can strictly be called a mystery, for a purely created entity as such can never be an absolute mystery . . . God communicates himself to man in his own re-

⁴ Rahner, "Nature and Grace," 125.

⁵ *Ibid.*

ality. That is the mystery and the fullness of grace.”⁶ Rahner seems to have in mind that only God is mysterious, so if grace is something created, distinct from God, then grace is no mystery.

Another point that Rahner makes in the same article, which this paper will address, is that “The supernatural grace through which man is justified and can do just works was [in neo-scholasticism] regarded as something in itself beyond consciousness. This,” says Rahner, “is a theological opinion which has always been in dispute.”⁷ Rahner admits that, “The simplest experience and the teaching of the Council of Trent (DB, 802, 805, 825, 826) seem to endorse this view almost as a matter of course.”⁸ Drawing his own somewhat non-committal judgment about this standard non-conscious view of grace, Rahner says: “Would one be completely mistaken in seeing a connection with modern naturalism of this theory too? If it is true that the modern lack of interest in the supernatural could only have developed on the basis of this conception of grace (which is of course in some measure nominalistic)?”⁹ Although Rahner confines his judgment to rhetorical questions rather than overt assertions, it is clear he rejects the view that grace is not consciously experienced and associates it with the heresy of naturalism and the heterodoxy of nominalism.

“[I]nspired by the suggestive anthropological and transcendental developments of grace by Karl Rahner,” Jerome Ebacher, in an article called “Grace and Supernaturalization,” sets out “to trace in barest outline a doctrine of grace which finds its normal integration in the assumptions and principles chiefly of St. Thomas Aquinas.”¹⁰ In his article, Ebacher reaffirms the two theses that we have just seen Rahner pro-

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, 115.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 116.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 119.

¹⁰ Ebacher, “Grace and Supernaturalization,” 21.

pose. Moreover, Ebacher draws a logical connection between these two theses, which is only implicit in Rahner. Ebacher also significantly develops the views espoused by Rahner. All the while, Ebacher continues to cite St. Thomas and gives no indication that the theory of grace he describes is opposed to Aquinas's own theory of grace.

Like Rahner, Ebacher draws the distinction between uncreated and created grace, but he is clearer about what the difference between these two is. "Considered objectively," he says, "grace is the reality of God communicated in his true, *physical essence and life* to the justified soul; it is the actual (quasi-formal) divinization of the very substance of the soul, but more immediately of the *faculties of the soul* . . . This is obviously *uncreated grace*."¹¹ So, for Ebacher, grace is God himself considered as formally participated by a creature. The subject of this participation is immediately the faculties of the soul and secondarily the substance of the soul. Ebacher goes on to describe created grace, which receives only minimal attention in the remainder of the article: "Created grace . . . is the soul's individual and measured reception of divine life."¹² Both kinds of grace, says Ebacher, are "accidental to the soul, for the soul is not substantially altered in its own proper essence and creatureliness, but only raised, by virtue of its union, to a bio-functional dignity to which it had no intrinsic natural claim."¹³ It is important to notice here that Ebacher does not call both kinds of grace "accidents," but only "accidental to the soul." Presumably, Ebacher thinks that God himself (who is uncreated grace) cannot be an accident inhering in the soul but can somehow be accidental to the soul inasmuch as he is out-

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 22. Cf. *ibid.*: "It does nonetheless remain that the *objective* reality of uncreated grace, as being God communicated to the spiritual substance and faculties of the soul is the infinite, immutable and eternal God."

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

side the essence of the soul.¹⁴ Another important thing to notice is that Ebacher sees the union brought about by grace as “bio-functional” rather than natural. As Ebacher says, the nature or substance of the creature cannot itself be altered. Thus, the change brought about by grace must be in the operations or functions of the creature, not its nature. We will return to this point later.

Following Rahner, after having distinguished the two kinds of grace, Ebacher turns to the topic of mystery. “Supernaturalization,” he says, “is a mystery. But it is a mystery only because it involves the nature of God himself. In the mind of Scheeben, all mysteries can be reduced to but one single mystery, simply because their *involvement with the divinity* makes of them a mystery. Anything created is *per se* knowable.”¹⁵ Like Rahner, Ebacher thinks that God alone is mysterious. Creatures, on the other hand, are knowable *per se*. From this, Ebacher concludes that, since the “psychological factors involved in the ‘mystery’ of grace” are created, they “are therefore subject to human understanding and do not constitute properly so-called the mystery about grace.”¹⁶

In the remainder of his article, Ebacher goes on to assert several new propositions concerning divinization. The first two are closely linked: one concerning the “proper and immediate recipient of the divine life,” the other concerning “the manner of union which is effected through grace.”¹⁷ Ebacher begins by discussing the manner of union, and then concludes to the proper recipient of divine life. “[U]pon being communicated,” says Ebacher, “the divine *life* will be both given and received according to its own proper modality, that is to say, it will not be given or received as a *static* reality or mere *presence*, but as a spirit-

¹⁴ Cf. Aquinas, *In VII Metaph.*, l. 13, 1581–82.

¹⁵ Ebacher, “Grace and Supernaturalization,” 22.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 22–23.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 23.

ual function or *life*.”¹⁸ From this assertion, which Ebacher does not support with any argument, Ebacher reaches the following conclusion about the sort of union effected by grace. “If this is so, then we may assume likewise that the immediate and proper recipient of grace must be a spiritual power or faculty which can harmonize, in its own specific operation, with the proper modality of the divine life.”¹⁹ Ebacher concedes that “the substance itself of the soul is also divinized, but only *statically* (*per modum essentiae*) or entitatively, forasmuch as the divine principle of life is made *present* to it. But it is the faculties of the soul that are the immediate recipients of the divine life.”²⁰ Evidently, Ebacher has in mind that the divine life is *life* in the sense of second act, not first act. Thus, since it is the powers or “faculties” of the soul rather than the substance of the soul, which proximately performs the operations of life, it follows that the immediate recipient of divine life must be the soul’s powers, not its substance.

Ebacher then asserts a third proposition similar to one we saw in Rahner—namely, that grace “is said to differ from glory, not in *kind*, but in *degree*. Glory is the vision of God.”²¹ This leads to a fourth proposition: “We may accordingly establish a further proposition,” says Ebacher.

If the divine life is communicated in accordance with the nature of the immediate recipient of grace (the faculties), it follows that the active intellect (in the measure of its limited and created capacity) will be made aware, through the reality of sanctifying grace (and in the obscurity of informed supernatural faith) not of an image of the divine essence . . . but of the divine essence itself in its physical entity and immediacy.²²

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*, 24.

²² *Ibid.*, 24–25.

To support this conclusion, Ebacher reminds readers that the divine essence cannot be known by any created image or medium since none is adequate to God. Later on, he says, “whatever the light of glory is, it is certainly not *something* which allows us to see God—it is rather in the nature of a removal of any obstacle.”²³ Of course, Ebacher is aware that he faces an obvious objection. If grace is itself the activity of the divine life in the mind and if, even with grace, prior to glory, the active intellect is made aware of the divine essence immediately, then why is it that we patently do not experience the the divine essence? To counter this objection, Ebacher makes two points. First, he notes that Aquinas does not absolutely speaking rule out seeing God’s essence while still in the body since even St. Paul did this. He only rules out seeing God’s essence given “our present and gross state of union of body and soul.”²⁴ Second, Ebacher distinguishes between conscious vision of God’s essence, on the one hand, and, presumably, a non-conscious vision of God’s essence, on the other. He says: “Ecstasy, which frees the soul more or less from its normal functioning as the form of the body and as its principle of organization, does permit of transitorial experiential knowledge of God, his essence and even the Trinity, as mystics have many times attested.”²⁵ The assumption here seems to be that ecstasy removes the aforementioned present and gross state of union with the body, and as a result we become conscious of the immediate vision of God’s essence, which we already unconsciously had by grace. From this analysis, Ebacher reaches his grand conclusion:

Hence, informed supernatural faith can be nothing else than infused, intuitive, experiential, and consequently participated *pro-cessional* knowledge of the divine nature, notwithstanding the incidental obscureness of this immediate vision in our present

²³ *Ibid.*, 26.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 25.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

state of union of body and soul . . . I believe, in harmony with the traditional teaching, that the activity of the soul, in this present state of union with the body, is normally so wholly absorbed in the teleological organization of matter as hardly to admit of intuitive acts, even on the purely natural plane. It is well known, for example, that flashes of intuitive knowledge natural or supernatural, are inevitably accompanied by the phenomenon of ecstasy, and that any prolonged experience of this nature involves a partial suspension of normal organic functioning.²⁶

In short, we know God's essence immediately by faith even now, but are not conscious of this immediate knowledge except when in a state of ecstasy in which the obstacle of organic functioning is removed. Ebacher goes on to conclude that the three theological virtues—faith, hope, and love—are found in the Trinity itself by analogy and are even constitutive of the divine persons.²⁷ But discussing this further conclusion is beyond the scope of what this paper can do. In the next section, we must look at what has already been said implicitly against the position of Rahner and Ebacher by Cross and Martin, who have taken objection to Williams' view that the grace that sanctifies is uncreated, not created. The section after that will address the arguments of Rahner, Ebacher, and Williams not answered by Cross and Martin.

Williams, Martin, and Cross on Uncreated Grace

In her study of deification in Aquinas and Palamas, Anna N. Williams states that one of the greatest obstacles to union between theologians, East and West, on the topic of sanctifying grace is the notion of created grace.²⁸ Williams thinks, however, that Aquinas does not contribute to this obstacle. "The first indication of the oddity of applying such a category [*i.e.*, created grace] to the theology of the *Summa* is the

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 26.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 27.

²⁸ Williams, *The Ground of Union*, 87.

sheer difficulty of finding uses of *gratia creata* at all. None appears in the treatise on grace itself, despite its elaborate taxonomy . . . Even the comprehensive *Lexicon of St. Thomas Aquinas* mentions created grace only in passing and furnishes no reference to the *Summa*.²⁹ Acknowledging that this argument “from absence” might be weak, Williams adds that the burden of proof in favor of the view that Aquinas had a theory of created grace rests with those who disagree with her.³⁰ While Rahner and Ebacher seem to identify grace with the divine nature under the aspect of being participated, it is unclear whether Williams holds this view. For Williams there is a spectrum of possible views about grace, ranging from that of simply identifying grace with the divine nature, on the one hand, and calling grace a “pure effect” or creature on the other:

Where Thomas most consistently, and apparently most comfortably, locates grace is in the center of a spectrum, at one of whose poles stands the identification of grace with divine nature, but at whose opposite pole stands the equation of grace and *pure effects*, such as virtue. He generally locates grace between these options, preferring to call it the creature’s *participation of the Uncreated*. Notably, however, he rules out the equation of grace and virtue, while leaving open the possibility of equating grace and divine love, as we have seen.³¹

Williams backs up her claim that Aquinas holds such a *via media* view by pointing out how Aquinas denies that grace is a virtue.³² Her reasoning, here, seems to be that if grace were created (*i.e.*, a pure effect), then it would be a virtue. But it isn’t a virtue, according to Aquinas. Therefore, neither does Aquinas view grace as a pure effect. This claimed *via media* thesis, however, is ambiguous. Is saying that grace is neither

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*: “One might counter this line of reasoning with the objection that it suffers from the usual weakness of an argument from absence. This charge may be met with the equally formal objection that the burden of proof lies on those who make assertions.”

³¹ *Ibid.*, 85. Emphasis added.

³² *Ibid.* See *S.Th.*, I-II, q. 110, a. 3, co.

simply identified with the divine nature nor created consistent with the Rahnerian view that grace is the divine nature *as* participated? It would seem so. How else could we interpret Williams when, at the same time she denies that grace should be simply identified with the divine nature, she simultaneously says: “What grace is, most truly and fundamentally, is *gratia increata*, the Holy Spirit, God *ipse*”?³³

Both Martin and Cross object to the claim that Williams would be making were she, in fact, to mean what we have here interpreted her to mean—namely, that grace is God himself considered under the aspect of being participated by creatures. Martin, however, unlike Cross, argues that what in fact Williams asserts about uncreated grace is never made clear in her book.³⁴ Both Martin and Cross make unique arguments against Williams. Neither, however, addresses Williams inference from the fact that grace is not a virtue to the conclusion that grace is uncreated. As I will show in the next section, the mistake underlying this inference is logically connected to how we must answer Rahner and Ebacher’s concern about the mystery of grace. For now, we will briefly summarize the existing progress in the debate about created grace made by Martin and Cross, respectively.

Martin points out two theses in Aquinas’s thought that seem incompatible with Williams’ view—absent further clarification on her

³³ Williams, *The Ground of Union*, 89.

³⁴ Martin, “Williams, Aquinas, and Uncreated Grace,” 43: “However, I suggest that given the absence of an account of uncreated grace from Williams . . . the burden of proof is back on her, as a clearer account is required.” *Ibid.*, 34: “I conclude that Williams’ account is unclear and in need of clarification.” *Ibid.*, 36: “I argue that it is unclear what Williams means by suggesting Aquinas view grace as uncreated, given the constraints of Thomas’ thought.” Along similar lines, Luke Davis Townsend, “Deification in Aquinas: A Supplementum to *The Ground of Union*,” *The Journal of Theological Studies* 66, no. 1 (2015): 204–234, concludes: “[Williams] fails to provide a clear definition of deification; she fails to provide a full account of what Thomas means when he speaks of deification” (*ibid.*, 234).

part.³⁵ First, grace is an accidental quality.³⁶ Second, according to the doctrine of divine simplicity, God does not enter into composition with any creature, either as a material or as a formal principle.³⁷ Thus, grace cannot be the divine nature as formally participated. After giving this argument against Williams, Martin gives a possible reply to himself.³⁸ In Christ, the divine nature *does* seem to enter into composition with something—namely, into a hypostatic composition with human nature. As Martin notes, this is an analogous composition, not a composition strictly so-called. Might not we “suggest that God’s presence in persons [other than Christ] also involves analogous composition, but of a *different kind* from the incarnation”?³⁹ At this point, Martin attempts to

³⁵ Martin, “Williams, Aquinas, and Uncreated Grace,” 36–37.

³⁶ Martin doesn’t cite Aquinas, here, but we could cite for him: *S.Th.*, I–II, q. 110, a. 2; *De Veritate*, q. 27, a. 2, ad 7. Since Martin’s argument is one concerning the right interpretation of Aquinas, it suffices that we note Aquinas’s own claim that grace is an accidental form. Nevertheless, it is also worth noting that the magisterium has committed itself to the identification of sanctifying grace with an inhering form also. Evaluating authoritative pronouncements on the matter, Ludwig Ott puts the two propositions, “Sanctifying Grace is a supernatural state of being which is infused by God, and which permanently inheres in the soul” and “Sanctifying grace is not a substance, but a real accident, which inheres in the soul-substance,” both under the category of *sententia certa*: *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, trans. Patrick Lynch (Fort Collins, Colo.: Roman Catholic Books, 1954), 255. Melissa Eitenmiller, likewise, notes that to deny “a true, inward inherence of the grace of justification in the soul” would put one under the condemnations of the Council of Trent, which affirmed such an inherence in opposition to the merely external imputation of justification envisioned by Luther (*idem*, “Grace as Participation According to St. Thomas Aquinas,” *New Blackfriars* 98, no. 1078 [2017]: 705). So, if one accepts the magisterial teaching of the Church concerning grace, it would seem one must also accept the truth of Aquinas’s claim that grace is an accident—that is, something inhering in the one graced. Then again, if the magisterial teaching of the Church is accepted, it would also seem that one would be forced to accept Martin’s anti-Williams conclusion also since Ott puts the proposition, “Sanctifying Grace is a created supernatural gift really distinct from God,” at a higher level of certainty than the proposition concerning its inherence, namely, *sententia fidei proxima*. Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, 254.

³⁷ Martin cites: *S.Th.*, I, q. 3, a. 8.

³⁸ Martin, “Williams, Aquinas, and Uncreated Grace,” 37–38.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 38.

develop a view he attributes to Karl Rahner and Karen Kilby.⁴⁰ Like the view we already saw in Rahner and Ebacher, this solution maintains that God, in grace, communicates himself as “a *quasi*-formal cause,” but this solution adds the specification that God himself actually becomes an accidental form in the creature without becoming thereby “entangled” with the creature.⁴¹ Kilby’s notion of God being “unentangled” is glossed by Martin as meaning that, when God is an accidental form of the creature, he is not like created accidental forms, which are ontologically dependent and mere instrumental causes.⁴² Instead, as accidental form, God continues to be principal actor and ontologically independent. Martin ultimately dismisses this Rahner-Kilby-inspired solution for saving Williams’ theory of grace on the grounds that an unentangled accident seems to be a contradiction in terms.⁴³ Whereas there can be analogical composition with the divine nature in Christ since this composition takes place at the level of substance, which is ontologically independent, it seems impossible for God to enter an analogous composition with individual Christians through the accident of grace since turning God into an accidental form would undermine God’s freedom and ontological independence. Martin, thus, concludes that unless Williams further clarifies her position, her position seems inconsistent with Aquinas’s own principles that God cannot enter composition with a creature and that grace is an accidental quality.

Richard Cross offers a different and more definitive response to Williams’ view that sanctifying grace is uncreated in Aquinas’s thought. Cross first responds to Williams’ argument from absence—namely, the

⁴⁰ As found in: Karen Kilby, *Karl Rahner: Theology and Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2004); Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1978), esp. 119 and 121.

⁴¹ Martin, “Williams, Aquinas, and Uncreated Grace,” 39, who cites: Kilby, *Karl Rahner*, 56 and 121.

⁴² Martin, “Williams, Aquinas, and Uncreated Grace,” 39–40.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 40–41.

argument that Aquinas almost never mentions created grace, but mentions uncreated grace frequently. “In reality, however,” says Cross, “the situation is quite the opposite [of what Williams claims]. Aquinas frequently uses the term *gratia creata* throughout his *oeuvre* . . . but he uses the term *gratia increata* merely *once* in the context of discussion of salvific grace, to talk about ‘the Holy Spirit, God *ipse*’, in the early *Sentences* commentary.”⁴⁴ Here, Cross is accusing Williams of a rather straight-forward and embarrassing factual error. A search of *gratia increata* and “=*gratia =increata*” in Robert Busa’s Index Thomisticus search engine does more or less support Cross’s claim about uncreated grace. The phrase shows up three times, all within book 3 of the *Sentences* commentary.⁴⁵ In contrast, a search of “=*gratia =creata*” reveals the phrase being used tens of times and in multiple works—the *Sentences*, *De Veritate*, and the *Summa theologiae*. This disparity of usage reverses the onus of proof back onto Williams, Rahner, and Ebacher. They have the burden to show that, when Aquinas speaks of sanctifying grace or the grace that deifies, he has in mind uncreated grace, which seems to be a rather rare use of the word “grace” in Aquinas’s thought.

Even if those who sympathize with Williams interpretation of Aquinas are still suspicious of Cross’s interpretation on the grounds that Aquinas’s use of the phrase “created grace” is infrequent, Cross has an answer to such a suspicion.

Why, then, the near silence on created grace in the *Summa*’s treatise on grace? The short answer, I think, is that the matter simply was not controversial—it was *obvious* that habitual grace was something created. That grace is some kind of disposition or habit of the soul—and thus an accident—was a commonplace of twelfth century theology. Given the scarcely controversial assumption that God cannot be a form or accident of a creature . . .

⁴⁴ Cross, “Deification in Aquinas,” 108–109.

⁴⁵ *In III Script.*, d. 2, q. 2, a. 1, qc. 1, ad 2; *ibid.*, d. 13, q. 3, a. 1, co.; and in one of the redactions.

it follows immediately and obviously that habitual grace is something created. The teaching is found explicitly in the Franciscans—the *Summa fratris Alexandri* and Bonaventure, for example—and was not at this time a topic of hot dispute.⁴⁶

In other words, Cross endorses the same position that Luke Martin came to in his response to Williams—namely, that God cannot be an accidental form of a creature. Thus, given that it was taken for granted by medieval theologians (and explicitly stated by Aquinas)⁴⁷ that grace is an accident, it follows that grace is not God himself, but a creature. This, according to Cross, is such an obvious inference that medieval theologians found little need to explicitly bring it up.

After giving this response to Williams' argument based on the supposed infrequency of the word "created grace" in Aquinas, Cross goes to the heart of the mistake made by theologians, such as Williams, Rahner, Ebacher, and Kilby, when they set up, as we have seen, a dichotomy between grace being a *quasi*-formal participation in the divine nature, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, grace being a created accident. For Cross, these two things are not opposed, but, on the contrary, the former entails the latter. Cross makes this point in the context of responding to Luke D. Townsend, who, while modifying Williams' interpretation in some details, keeps her essential position that "Since through his indeclinable power, God gives *himself*, deification manifestly occurs through uncreated grace."⁴⁸ In a footnote, Townsend says the indwelling of the Spirit is uncreated grace, but the gifts of the spirit and theological virtues are created graces.⁴⁹ This is obviously remi-

⁴⁶ Cross, "Deification in Aquinas," 113–114.

⁴⁷ *E.g.*, *S.Th.*, I–II, q. 110, a. 2, ad 2.

⁴⁸ Townsend, "Deification in Aquinas," 220.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*: "Here, one should note that deification's occurring by uncreated grace does not preclude the fact that created grace is also involved in the process. With the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, who is God's gift of God's self, also come the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit, and the virtues, which are created graces."

niscent of Williams' argument that, since Aquinas refuses to identify grace with virtue, he evidently takes grace not to be a creature, but God himself. For Townsend, the grace of union had now on earth and later in the beatific vision is an unmediated participation of the divine essence and, therefore, not something created, but God himself.⁵⁰ This line of reasoning from grace being a formal participation in divine nature to grace being uncreated is common, as we have seen, to Rahner, Ebacher, Kilby, and Williams. In response to such an argument, as found in Townsend, Cross argues:

Townsend identifies a catena of passages in which Aquinas affirms that the believer participates in God, or in the divine nature or essence. But identifying such passages is not sufficient to show that participation in the divine is immediate in the sense that Townsend specifies. Clearly, Aquinas accepts that the believer participates in God. He says so on multiple occasions, many of which Townsend quotes or references. The question is whether or not Aquinas believes that this claim is susceptible of further analysis—and if so, of what analysis . . . It turns out that Aquinas does indeed offer such an analysis, and that in this analysis he [Aquinas] simply *identifies* created grace and participation: habitual grace is that in virtue of which someone is graced, and that in virtue of which someone participates in God.⁵¹

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 231: "One sees here that the grace of union with God, regardless of whether it refers to initial or ultimate union, is necessarily a gift of uncreated grace. God's gift of union with God's self is not mediated. Rather, God's gift to the creature is God's own self and God's own essence. This gift of uncreated grace is given presently to those who accept it, and will be received in its fullness in the beatific vision. The uncreated nature of the grace of union also follows from Thomas's understanding of the beatific vision. In this vision, the rational creature will gaze upon God's own essence, and thereby participate in that essence . . . Therefore, in summary, deification for Aquinas means becoming god by participation, which is to partake of and share in the essence of divinity. This participation begins with the creature's justification and adoption as a child of God. It deepens with the creature's sanctification and growth in deformity; and ultimately, it becomes complete with the creature's glorification and total deification."

⁵¹ Cross, "Deification in Aquinas," 120–121.

Cross goes on to invoke *De Veritate*, q. 27, a. 1, ad 10, where Aquinas distinguishes between something being immediate in terms of efficient causality and formal causality.⁵² God justifies us immediately in terms of efficient causality—that is, no agent besides God justifies us—but God does not justify us immediately in terms of formal causality. There is a form in us (*i.e.*, habitual grace), which is that by which we are justified by God. As Cross explains, “claiming that participation is *reducible* to a created quality does not in any way undermine the reality of participation—it does not eliminate participation from the theological landscape. The created quality is the formal cause in virtue of which it is true that the creature participates in God.”⁵³ Cross ultimately attributes the mistaken inference from grace being formal participation in God to grace being uncreated to a failure to correctly understand Aquinas’s adaptation of Platonic theology.⁵⁴

In summary, Rahner, Ebacher, Williams, Kilby, and Townsend all say that sanctifying grace or deification is uncreated, not created. Luke Martin says that sanctifying grace is created—unless someone can better clarify what is meant by “uncreated grace.” Richard Cross says that sanctifying grace is created, period. These are the opposing conclusions so far given. The arguments for these opposing conclusions have been partially, but not fully settled. On the side of Martin and

⁵² *Ibid.*, 121.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 126.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 132: “According to Aquinas, saying that God is the charity by which we love each other is to say not that charity is something uncreated, but rather that we participate in God’s charity. And this corrective presupposes that participation should be construed as consisting in something created—a created habit of charity—rather than something uncreated—uncreated charity. After all, Aquinas wants to block the inference to uncreated charity, and he attempts to do so precisely by explaining Augustine’s language in terms of participation. Ignorance of Platonic theology and its terms, then, have led Lombard into error. Aquinas’s comment is surely germane to the issues I have been discussing here: construing participation in terms of uncreated grace misunderstands Aquinas, and, according to Aquinas himself, misrepresents the earlier theological tradition of which he takes himself to be a representative.”

Cross, there are two unanswered arguments. First, as Martin points out, if God is grace, but if Aquinas identifies grace with a quality, then God would enter into composition with a creature as an accidental form, which Aquinas says is impossible. Second, as Cross argues, if God were to be grace, then God would be in an accidental category since grace is in the category quality. But it was obvious to all medieval authors that God is not in an accidental category. Neither Martin nor Cross's arguments have been answered. On the opposing side—that of Rahner, Ebacher, Williams, Kilby, and Townsend—however, there are arguments for the opposite conclusion. First, all of those saying grace is uncreated, as we have seen, reason from the fact that grace is a (*quasi*-formal) participation in the divine nature to the conclusion that grace is uncreated. This argument was sufficiently countered by Cross who showed it rested on a failure to grasp the nature of Aquinas's Platonic metaphysics of participation. A second argument for uncreated grace was Williams' argument from the rarity of the phrase "created grace" in Aquinas's thought. This argument too was countered by Cross when he showed it was factually erroneous. Besides these two arguments, which *have* been addressed, there are other arguments in favor of grace being uncreated, which have *not* yet been addressed. These will be addressed in the next section. First, from Williams, there is the argument that, if Aquinas thought grace were a pure effect, he would have classified it as a virtue, but he says it is not a virtue. Therefore, he did not think it was a pure effect. A second unanswered argument has been suggested by Rahner and developed by Ebacher. That argument is this: Grace differs from glory not in kind, but only in degree. Yet, glory is God himself received in the powers of the soul in the beatific vision. Thus, grace too is God himself as participated in the powers of the soul. Finally, there is a third argument, again common to Rahner and Ebacher, which states that grace is a mystery, but that no creature is a mystery; thus grace is no creature, but instead God himself. In the next section, it remains to

address these three arguments and to show their logical connection both to each other and to the question of whether grace is created or uncreated.

The Subject, Classification, and Mystery of Grace

As we have seen, in order to defend the view that grace is uncreated, Ebacher stated that the subject of grace is, like the subject of glory, immediately the faculties of the soul and only secondarily the essence of the soul. This led to the conclusion that grace is a dynamic participation in divine life and that, by having grace, one has immediate knowledge of the divine essence—whether or not one is currently conscious of this knowledge. Ebacher implied that, in laying out this reasoning, he was representing Aquinas’s own view. This, however, is not true, as can be seen by a careful consideration of what Aquinas says about the subject and classification of grace. From this consideration, we can also draw conclusions concerning other arguments we have seen raised by Rahner, Ebacher, and Williams in favor of grace being uncreated. In particular, we will find a reply to Williams’ argument that, since Aquinas denies grace is a virtue, grace must not be a pure effect (*i.e.*, a creature). And we will find a reply to Rahner and Ebacher’s argument that, unless grace is the uncreated God himself, then it cannot be a mystery.

Aquinas addresses the subject of grace consistently in both early to late works.⁵⁵ To see this, we may begin with his early article, *De Veritate*, q. 27, a. 6 (1256–1259), whose express object is to determine whether grace is in the essence of the soul. In the corpus of this article, Aquinas presents two opinions, the former of which he rejects and the

⁵⁵ For the parenthetical dates assigned to Aquinas’s works, I follow the estimates found in: Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas: The Person and His Work* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996).

latter of which he endorses. The first opinion is that grace and virtue are the same *per essentiam*.⁵⁶ Thus, presumably thanks to the fact that virtue is in the powers of the soul, it follows that grace must be in the powers of the soul “as in a subject according to the truth of the thing . . . but by some appropriation, it can be said . . . that grace pertains to the essence” of the soul. This appropriation is due not to an essential, but to a merely notional difference between grace and virtue. According to the second opinion, which Aquinas claims to support (*sustinemus*), grace and virtue are not the same *per essentiam*.⁵⁷ But it is the very notion (*ratio*) of virtue to perfect powers with respect to right operation. Thus, if grace were in the powers as its subject, grace would have to be the same as virtue. Since it is not the same, neither is grace in the powers of the soul. Rather, it is in the essence of the soul, giving the soul, as

⁵⁶ Leon., 22.814: 87–101: “[D]e gratia duplex est opinio: una quae dicit gratiam et virtutem esse idem per essentiam; et secundum hanc necesse est dicere quod gratia sit in potentia animae sicut in subiecto secundum rei veritatem, eo quod virtus quae perficit ad operandum, non nisi in potentia esse potest, quae est operationis principium; sed per quandam appropriationem potest dici secundum hanc opinionem quod gratia respicit essentiam, virtus vero potentiam, secundum quod gratia et virtus, etsi non per essentiam saltem differunt ratione, quia gratificatio per prius ad ipsam animam pertinet quam ad actum eius, cum non propter actus anima acceptetur a Deo sed e converso.”

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 22.814: 102–113: “Alia vero opinio, quam sustinemus, est quod gratia et virtus non sint idem per essentiam; et secundum hoc necesse est dicere quod gratia sit in essentia animae sicut in subiecto et non in potentiis, quia, cum potentia in quantum huiusmodi ordinetur ad operationem, oportet perfectionem potentiae secundum propriam rationem ad operationem ordinari. Istud autem est quod facit rationem virtutis, ut sit proxime perfectiva ad recte agendum: unde oportet, si gratia in potentia animae esset, quod esset, idem cum aliqua virtutum. Si ergo hoc non sustinetur, oportet dicere quod gratia sit in essentia animae perficiens ipsam in quantum dat ei quoddam esse spirituale et facit eam per quandam assimilationem ‘consortem divinae naturae’ . . . sicut virtutes perficiunt potentias ad recte operandum.” For a recent studies of what the obscure phrase *esse spirituale* and the related phrase *esse intentionale* means in Aquinas, see: Stephen Brock, “Intentional Being, Natural Being, and the First-Person Perspective in Thomas Aquinas,” *The Thomist* 77, no. 1 (2013): 103–133; Gyula Klima, “Three Myths of Intentionality Versus Some Medieval Philosophers,” *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 21, no. 3 (2013): 359–376; Robert Moser, “Thomas Aquinas, *Esse Intentionale*, and the Cognitive as Such,” *The Review of Metaphysics* 64, no. 4 (2011): 763–788.

Aquinas states, a spiritual being (*esse spirituale*) and assimilating it to the divine nature. In contrast, the virtues perfect the soul with respect to operation, not being (*esse*).

Aquinas reaches the same conclusion by essentially the same argument in his late *Prima secundae*, q. 110, a. 4 (1271).⁵⁸ This article again asks about the subject of grace. Aquinas answers that, if grace is the same as virtue, it must be in the powers since every virtue has the powers of the soul for its subject. But since grace is not the same as virtue, but rather is prior to virtue, it must have something prior to the powers as its subject—namely, the essence of the soul. As one participates in divine love by the virtue of charity in one’s psychological powers, so too, one participates in the divine nature by a “recreation” in grace, having for its subject the essence of the soul.

In sum, the immediate or proper subject of grace for Aquinas is the essence of the soul, not its powers.⁵⁹ It is beyond the scope of this paper to consider the proper subject of glory for Aquinas, but it is clear

⁵⁸ *S.Th.*, I–II, q. 110, a. 4, co.: “Si enim gratia sit idem quod virtus, necesse est quod sit in potentia animae sicut in subiecto, nam potentia animae est proprium subiectum virtutis, ut supra dictum est. Si autem gratia differt a virtute, non potest dici quod potentia animae sit gratiae subiectum, quia omnis perfectio potentiae animae habet rationem virtutis, ut supra dictum est. Unde relinquitur quod gratia, sicut est prius virtute, ita habeat subiectum prius potentiis animae, ita scilicet quod sit in essentia animae. Sicut enim . . . secundum potentiam voluntatis amorem divinum, per virtutem caritatis; ita etiam per naturam animae participat, secundum quamdam similitudinem, naturam divinam, per quamdam regenerationem sive recreationem.”

⁵⁹ *De Malo*, q. 4, a. 4, which asks about the subject of original sin, makes for fruitful comparison with the above texts from *De Veritate* and the *Summa*. Since original sin is the contrary of grace, and contraries have the same subject, this article provides an indirect or implicit argument in favor of grace being in the soul before the powers of the soul. *De Malo*, q. 4, a. 4, ad 5, in particular, implies the problem that, if grace and original sin were in the powers before the essence of the soul, then Adam’s descendants would not contract original sin by carnal descent, as the Catholic faith teaches, but by actual sin, as Adam did, for whom original sin began in the powers and overflowed to the essence of the soul. Ott notes that it is the error of Pelagius to think that original sin is transmitted through actual sins made by imitation of one’s parents rather than by physical descent without actual sin. Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, 223.

from the preceding analysis that, either it is false to say that glory has the powers of the soul for its proper subject or we must take Aquinas's identification of grace and glory in a highly qualified way. In any case, for Aquinas, in both the *Summa* and *De Veritate*, the conclusion that *grace* is not properly in the powers of the soul follows from the premise that grace is not the same as virtue. Now, as we saw, Williams uses this same premise—namely, that grace is not virtue—in order to prove that grace is uncreated or God himself. By looking at Aquinas's categorial classification of grace, let us see why it is that this premise supports Aquinas's own conclusion about grace being in the essence of the soul, but does *not* support Williams' conclusion about grace being uncreated. Again, we will consider *De Veritate* and the *Summa theologiae* in turn.

De Veritate, q. 27, a. 2, asks whether grace is the same as charity. The body of the article makes clear that Aquinas intends to distinguish grace not only from charity, but from virtue in general.⁶⁰ To answer the question, Aquinas draws an analogy between nature and grace. There are, Aquinas says, three prerequisites for attaining the end of a natural thing: the nature itself fitted to the end, the inclination to the end, and the motion to the end.⁶¹ For instance, earth has a certain nature suited to being at the middle of the world, an inclination to that end, and, assuming there are no obstacles, a motion to that end as well. But since there is an end for humans above the natural end of contemplation attributed to humans by the philosophers, it follows that man must be elevated in his nature so as to be suited to such an end, must receive an inclination

⁶⁰ Cf. Leon., 22.793: 99–101: “Dicendum quod quidam dicunt quod gratia est idem per essentiam quod virtus secundum rem.”

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 22.794: 110–121: “Cum enim diversarum naturarum diversi sint fines, ad consecutionem alicuius finis in rebus naturalibus tria praeexiguntur, scilicet natura proportionata ad finem illum, et inclinatio in illum finem, quae est naturalis appetitus finis, et motus in finem; sicut patet quod in terra est natura quaedam per quam sibi competit esse in medio, et hanc naturam sequitur inclinatio in locum medium secundum quam appetit naturaliter talem locum, etiam cum extra ipsum per violentiam detinetur; et ideo remoto prohibente per deorsum movetur.”

thereto, and must be moved thereto.⁶² Grace, Aquinas says, elevates human nature, charity constitutes a new inclination in humans to their new higher end, and the other virtues provide for the motion to that higher end. In short, if grace were reduced to virtue in general or charity in particular, then, by grace, humans would receive an inclination and motion to a supernatural divine end without their natures being first made proportional to that end. This is as impossible as for a stone to be given the inclination and act of hearing without any change to its nature.

In *Prima secundae*, q. 110, a. 3, which asks whether grace is the same as virtue, Aquinas reaches this same conclusion, but does so by a new argument. Now, Aquinas points out that virtue must be defined in reference to “some preexistent nature.”⁶³ This was how Aquinas defined virtue in *Prima secundae*, q. 49, a. 2, when he derived the four species of the Aristotelian category, quality, in order to determine the genus of virtue, which is habit (*habitus*). The fourth species of quality determines a subject in accidental being (*esse accidentale*) with respect to quantity; the second and third species do so with respect to action and passion, respectively; and the first species does so with respect to the nature of the thing.⁶⁴ In q. 49, a. 2, ad 3, Aquinas had further subdivided the first species of quality into two subspecies: habits and dispositions. Habits, he said, are rooted in some unchangeable cause, but

⁶² *Ibid.*, 22.794: 121–148.

⁶³ *S.Th.*, I–II, q. 110, a. 3, co.: “Ex quo patet quod virtus uniuscuiusque rei dicitur in ordine ad aliquam naturam praeexistentem, quando scilicet unumquodque sic est dispositum, secundum quod congruit suae naturae.”

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, I–II, q. 49, a. 2, co.: “Modus autem sive determinatio subiecti secundum esse accidentale, potest accipi vel in ordine ad ipsam naturam subiecti; vel secundum actionem et passionem quae consequuntur principia naturae, quae sunt materia et forma; vel secundum quantitatem. Si autem accipiatur modus vel determinatio subiecti secundum quantitatem, sic est quarta species qualitatis . . . Modus autem sive determinatio subiecti secundum actionem et passionem, attenditur in secunda et tertia specie qualitatis . . . Sed modus et determinatio subiecti in ordine ad naturam rei, pertinet ad primam speciem qualitatis, quae est habitus et dispositio.”

dispositions in some changeable one. Aquinas's examples of these two species indicate that what he has in mind by this distinction is that habits are in the soul (an unchangeable cause) whereas dispositions are in the body (a changeable cause). This interpretation is supported by *Prima secundae*, q. 50, a. 1, where Aquinas says that "no habit is principally in a body as its subject," and that long-lasting bodily dispositions, like beauty and health, have the character of habits only imperfectly since "the causes of them are by nature easily changeable."⁶⁵ Whereas dispositions determine their subject, a body, in reference to the coming to be or passing away of some nature, habits determine their subject, the soul, not with respect to the generation or corruption of a nature, but with respect to the operations consequent upon a preexistent nature.⁶⁶ So, it is not the case that virtues, which are habits, simply happen to be in reference to a preexistent nature. It is part of the essence of virtue to be in the soul, ordering its powers to operations befitting a pre-existent nature. Having made this point, Aquinas, in q. 110, a. 3, goes on to draw a distinction between infused and acquired virtues.⁶⁷ Acquired virtues are in reference to human nature itself, but the infused virtues are in reference to a higher nature—the participated divine na-

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, I-II, q. 50, a. 1, co.: "[N]ullus habitus est principaliter in corpore sicut in subiecto." *Ibid.*: "Si vero loquamur de dispositione subiecti ad formam, sic habitualis dispositio potest esse in corpore, quod comparatur ad animam sicut subiectum ad formam. Et hoc modo sanitas et pulchritudo, et huiusmodi, habituales dispositiones dicuntur. Non tamen perfecte habent rationem habituum, quia causae eorum ex sua natura de facili transmutabiles sunt."

⁶⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, I-II, q. 49, a. 3.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, I-II, q. 110, a. 3, co.: "[V]irtutes acquisitae per actus humanos, de quibus supra dictum est, sunt dispositiones quibus homo convenienter disponitur in ordine ad naturam qua homo est. Virtutes autem infusae disponunt hominem altiori modo, et ad altiorem finem, unde etiam oportet quod in ordine ad aliquam altiorem naturam. Hoc autem est in ordine ad naturam divinam participatam . . . Sicut igitur lumen naturale rationis est aliquid praeter virtutes acquisitas, quae dicuntur in ordine ad ipsum lumen naturale; ita etiam ipsum lumen gratiae, quod est participatio divinae naturae, est aliquid praeter virtutes infusas, quae a lumine illo derivantur, et ad illud lumen ordinantur."

ture. Thus, in order for man to have infused virtues, there must be something in man prior to virtue—namely, grace—which constitutes man’s participation in that higher or divine nature. So, grace is not the same thing as virtue.

Now, while Aquinas’s argument in q. 110, a. 3, that grace is not virtue relies implicitly on his previous derivation of the Aristotelian species of quality in q. 49, a. 2, the third objection in q. 110, a. 3 appeals to that same earlier text to draw the opposite conclusion. It states that grace is a quality. But it is not in the fourth, third, or second species. Thus, it must be in the first species. But if grace is in the first species, it is either a habit or a disposition. Now, habits in the mind, like grace, are virtues; so grace is a virtue. Aquinas replies by saying that grace is in the first species, but that it is so by reduction and without thereby being a virtue.⁶⁸

This reply is significant for answering both Williams’ argument about virtue as well as the Rahner-Ebacher argument about mystery. Let us begin with Williams’ argument. Aquinas clearly does not deny that grace is virtue in order to indicate that grace is uncreated, as Williams would have it. Indeed, an article earlier,⁶⁹ Aquinas asked whether grace was a quality and answered affirmatively. Then in the reply to the second objection in that article he stated that grace has an inferior mode of being (*modus essendi*) to the soul since the soul subsists in itself, but grace, being an accident, is a form inhering in the soul.⁷⁰ It is impos-

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, I–II, q. 110, a. 3, ad 3: “[G]ratia reducitur ad primam speciem qualitatis. Nec tamen est idem quod virtus, sed habitudo quaedam quae praesupponitur virtutibus infusis, sicut earum principium et radix.”

⁶⁹ *I.e.*, *S.Th.*, I–II, q. 110, a. 2.

⁷⁰ This incidentally also undermines Ebacher’s assertion that grace is received according to God’s “own proper modality.” Ebacher, “Grace and Supernaturalization,” 23. Grace is received in the imperfect modality of an accident, not in the supremely perfect modality of the Creator. For a recent and now standard interpretation of what Aquinas means by the phrase *modus essendi*, see: John Tomarchio, “Aquinas’s Division of Be-

sible to read this in a way compatible with grace being the uncreated God himself, as Williams interprets Aquinas's thinking. Grace, unlike God, is not only in a created category (*i.e.*, quality), but it also has an imperfect creaturely mode of existence. So, the reason Aquinas denies that grace is virtue is not in order to show that grace is uncreated or to deny that grace is a "pure effect," but rather merely to put grace in a different species of effect than virtue.

But what species of effect is grace in? Aquinas says it is reduced to the first species of quality, but that is hardly a satisfying answer. Why is it "reduced" to that species and not properly contained in it? Pursuant of answers to these questions, we must turn to the problem raised by Ebacher and Rahner. According to them, God alone is a mystery. So, grace cannot be mysterious unless it is God himself and not some creature. All creatures, thinks Ebacher, are "*per se* knowable," as we have seen. Since grace is a mystery, it must be uncreated. Contrary to these assertions, we will see below that, despite being a creature, grace is not known by humans with certainty. Moreover, it is mysterious as well and its mysteriousness is what accounts for its inability to be placed without qualification in either of the two Aristotelian subspecies of the first species of quality—namely, habits and dispositions.

The term "consciousness" is ambiguous in a Thomistic context since Aquinas himself almost never uses this term. Colloquially, we tend to use the word "conscious" for two distinct things. On the one hand, sometimes we use the term quite broadly in a way practically synonymous with "knowledge." For instance, an employer may say, "I am conscious of the fact that you signed up for vacation next week, but recent events will require you to come into work anyway."⁷¹ On the

ing According to Modes of Existing," *The Review of Metaphysics* 54, no. 3 (2001): 585–613.

⁷¹ This is the way Aquinas uses *consciuis* in *S.Th.*, I–II, q. 112, a. 5, co.: "[E]t in quantum homo non est consciuis sibi alicuius peccati mortalis."

other hand, sometimes we use the word “conscious” in a narrower sense in which it designates only our relation to those objects falling immediately and actually into a perceptual faculty. It is in this narrower sense that someone could say, “I am conscious of redness and sweetness, but not of the apple itself, which I eat.”⁷² Just as we ought to keep distinct these two senses of “conscious,” we should also keep in mind the distinction between a thing’s knowability by us and a thing’s being a mystery. For Aquinas, the divine nature and Trinity are both surely mysteries, but both are knowable by us in this life, and the former is even imperfectly knowable by unaided natural reason.⁷³

So, we have three distinct questions before us: Are we conscious of grace in the narrow sense? Do we know grace? And is grace a mystery? The last of these questions relates to Aquinas’s strange classification of grace by reduction to the first species of quality. In *Prima secundae*, q. 112, a. 5, which asks whether anyone can know that they have grace, Aquinas states that, apart from special divine revelation, no one can know with certainty that he or she has grace. That’s because, contrary to Ebacher’s assertion, Aquinas does not think that all creatures are *per se* knowable. As Aquinas suggests in other texts, some things are known with certainty from being *per se* knowable to us, others from being demonstrated through necessary relations to what is *per se* knowable to us, and still others from a contingent relation to something *per se* knowable.⁷⁴ The first two kinds are known with certainty. Since no one has knowledge of the proper principle of grace, God himself, Aquinas reasons that no one can demonstrate with certainty the presence of grace in the soul.⁷⁵ Instead, Aquinas says that our knowl-

⁷² Cf. *S.Th.*, I, q. 13, a. 8, co.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, I, q. 2, a. 2.

⁷⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, I–II, q. 94, a. 2; *ibid.*, I, q. 82, a. 2; *ibid.*, I–II, q. 57, a. 2.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, I–II, q. 112, a. 5, co.: “Alio modo homo cognoscit aliquid per seipsum, et hoc certitudinaliter. Et sic nullus potest scire se habere gratiam. Certitudo enim non potest

edge of grace is limited to conjectural knowledge through signs.⁷⁶ These signs seem to be things of which we are consciously aware (in the narrow sense) and which are the effect of grace. Examples of these are delight in God and contempt for the world, both of which are operations or acts in the powers of the soul. Since, as we have shown contrary to Ebacher, grace is not itself in the powers of the soul, we are not immediately aware or conscious of it in the way we are conscious of its effects. Nevertheless, we have uncertain knowledge or a suspicion of it from these effects, and thus, we can say in a broad sense of the word that we are “conscious” of having grace. If this broad sense of “consciousness” is all that is intended by Rahner and Ebacher, then both authors are correct that we may be conscious of grace.

Now, despite the fact that grace is a creature in the category quality and even known conjecturally from its effects, nevertheless, grace is a mystery. The reason for this can be seen by an analogy between recreation in grace and the mystery of creation *ex nihilo*. In *De Veritate*, q. 27, a. 6, Aquinas asks whether any creature can cause grace. Aquinas answers negatively.⁷⁷ Grace in itself, Aquinas says, is a perfection ele-

haberi de aliquo, nisi possit diiudicari per proprium principium, sic enim certitudo habetur de conclusionibus demonstrativis per indemonstrabilia universalia principia; nullus autem posset scire se habere scientiam alicuius conclusionis, si principium ignoraret. Principium autem gratiae, et obiectum eius, est ipse Deus, qui propter sui excellentiam est nobis ignotus.”

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, I–II, q. 112, a. 5, co.: “Tertio modo cognoscitur aliquid coniecturaliter per aliqua signa. Et hoc modo aliquis cognoscere potest se habere gratiam, inquantum scilicet percipit se delectari in Deo, et contemnere res mundanas; et inquantum homo non est conscius sibi alicuius peccati mortalis.”

⁷⁷ Leon., 22.797–798: 209–226: “[G]ratiam effective nulla creatura causare potest . . . Prima sumitur ex condicione ipsius gratiae. Gratia enim, ut dictum est, est quaedam perfectio elevans animam ad quoddam esse supernaturale; nullus autem effectus supernaturalis potest esse ab aliqua creatura, duplici ratione: primo quidem quia eius solius est rem ultra statum naturae promovere, cuius est gradus naturae statuere et limitare, quod solius Dei esse constat; secundo quia nulla virtus creata agit nisi praesupposita potentia materiae vel alicuius loco materiae; potentia autem naturalis creaturae non se ex-

vating the soul to a certain supernatural existence (*esse supernaturale*). From this fact, two considerations prevent any creature from causing grace. First, it pertains to God alone to delimit the various grades of nature. Second, no creature can make things but by means of some pre-existing potency or subject. But no creature is naturally in potency to be elevated to higher than natural perfections. Thus, no creature can cause grace. Here, we see that, although grace accrues to a preexistent subject, like ordinary accidents, it is unlike ordinary accidents in two significant ways. As Aquinas says in his derivation of the species of quality in *Prima secundae*, q. 49, a. 2, accidental qualities determine a subject with respect to accidental being (*esse accidentale*). In contrast, grace, as a new quasi-specific difference superadded to an already complete nature, determines its subject neither with respect to accidental or substantial being, but instead with respect to *esse supernaturale*.⁷⁸ Sec-

tendit ultra perfectiones naturales; unde nullam supernaturalem operationem aliqua creatura efficere potest.”

⁷⁸ A few clarifications should be noted about *esse supernaturale* and *esse spirituale*. It is doubtful that *esse supernaturale* should be conflated with *esse spirituale*, which is also spoken of as an effect of grace (e.g., *De Veritate*, q. 27, a. 1, ad 3). The latter term is also apparently associated with the sensible forms found in the sense powers (e.g., *S.Th.*, I, q. 78, a. 3). A thing is said to have *esse spirituale* not necessarily because of its having the exalted mode of being of an immaterial substance, like God or an angel, but instead because of its separation from its proper matter, subject, or condition. For instance, the form of a house in the mind of the builder has *esse spirituale* because, in the mind, this form does not have for its subject brick and mortar, but instead the potential intellect. *De Veritate*, q. 27, a. 7, co. Likewise, the species of color are said to be in the air spiritually, not naturally. *De Veritate*, q. 27, a. 4, ad 4. By extension, we can talk of the divine nature being present through *esse spirituale* or *esse intentionale* in a creature since it is not God’s proper condition to be in a created subject. It is in a similar way that Aquinas can speak of grace being in the sacraments not with *esse naturale*, but as the species of colors are in the air—namely, spiritually. See: *De Veritate*, q. 27, a. 4, ad 4 and *De Veritate*, q. 27, a. 7, co. On the other hand, sometimes—for instance, when paraphrasing Pseudo-Dionysius—Aquinas does use the phrase *esse spirituale* not to refer to a non-natural mode of being, as in the cases just mentioned, but instead in a way more or less synonymous with *esse supernaturale*. See, e.g.: *De Veritate*, q. 27, a. 2, co. (Leon., 22.794: 150–154): “[N]on potest aliquis habere spiritualem operationem nisi prius esse spirituale accipiat, sicut nec operationem alicuius naturae nisi prius habeat

ondly, grace is unlike other qualities in that it is like a quasi-first act, not a second act. Although grace is an accident and, therefore, presupposes a preexistent subject in act, nevertheless, it is *like* an entirely new substance or creation. That's because the subject to which grace is added is not in natural potency to the perfection that grace gives. So, although "creation" only properly befits substances, not accidents or parts of substances, as Aquinas says elsewhere,⁷⁹ nevertheless, it is more proper to say the grace is "created" and that receiving grace is a new "birth" than to say this of other accidents, such as virtues or vital operations. That's because, as we have said, grace is like a new specific difference without any *proper* subject. It is like a new essence from a new creation

esse in natura illa." For recent authors debating the significance of the phrase *esse spirituale* in Aquinas's psychology, see: footnote 57. Another thing to note concerning the phrase *esse supernaturale*, is that, although this is often translated as "supernatural existence," it is, in my opinion, an open question whether the phrase *esse supernaturale* refers to an act of existence or to a certain essence or form. Aquinas says that *esse* sometimes signifies the essence or nature of a thing. See: *In I Sent.*, d. 33, q. 1, a. 1, ad 1 (Mandonnet 766). To my mind, it is highly implausible that *esse supernaturale* signifies an act of existence. For one thing, this would mean that grace confers a new act of existence. Apart from the problems posed by the very notion of an act of existence in the first place (at least as this is understood by existential Thomists), a thing receiving a new act of existence is also improbable inasmuch as it is hard to see how something that already exists can receive a new act of existence or what it would mean for an already existing thing to gain a new act of existence. If such a position is intelligible at all, it seems to be nothing but a poetic way of speaking about the acquisition of a new condition or quality. In that case, the *esse supernaturale* formally caused by grace is nothing except the condition of being divinized itself—that is, the quality itself as possessed—just as the being white caused by the form of whiteness is nothing but the quality of whiteness itself as possessed by a surface. For a wider consideration of the problem of Aquinas using *esse* to refer to essence or form, not existence, see: Elliot Polsky, "In as Many Ways as Something is Predicated . . . in that Many Ways is Something Signified to Be': The Logic behind Thomas Aquinas's Predication Thesis, *Esse Substantiale*, and *Esse in Rerum Natura*," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 93 (2019): 263–292; as well as Gregory Doolan's working essay, "Aquinas on the Distinction between *Esse* and *Esse*: How the Name 'Esse' Signifies Essence in *Metaphysics* Δ.7," which is available online—see the section *References* for details.

⁷⁹ *S.Th.*, I–II, q. 110, a. 2, ad 3.

quasi-*ex nihilo*. If creation *ex nihilo* is a mystery, then surely so too is grace which is like a new creation.

The result of this analysis is that grace does not properly fit into either of Aristotle's two subspecies within the first species of quality—namely, dispositions and habits. Like habits, grace is in the soul, not the body. But unlike habits, and like dispositions, grace is ordered directly not to an operation or second act, but to a certain nature—namely, the divine nature. It is this essential reference to the mystery of the divine nature and the spiritual existence of that nature brought about by grace in the soul that makes grace itself a mystery. Yet, the mystery of grace is also inseparable from the fact that grace is a creature—an accident even in the category quality.

Rahner, Ebacher, and Williams each in their own way argue that sanctifying grace—the grace by which we become justified and conformed to the divine nature—is itself the uncreated God as participated by creatures. Previous authors have responded to this conclusion, but they have left unanswered several key arguments brought forward by their interlocutors. In this paper, we have tried to answer these unanswered arguments by addressing the three questions: What is the subject of grace? What is the proper classification of grace within the Aristotelian categorial scheme? And is grace something of which we are conscious and is it a mystery?

The answers to each of these questions are related. It was because Ebacher thought that grace had the powers of the soul for its immediate subject that he thought that we had immediate knowledge of God's essence in grace. Things in the powers of the soul, such as our operations of delight and contempt, are things of which we have immediate awareness and of which we can be conscious. Since, however, contrary to Ebacher's saying, grace has for its subject not the powers of

the soul, but the very essence of the soul, it follows that we do not have immediate awareness of grace. Rather, grace is known conjecturally by the operations of the soul's powers, which are the signs and effects of grace. Moreover, the place of grace in the essence of the soul rather than its powers is also related to the mystery of grace and its *sui generis* classification. Since, for Aquinas, what grace confers to its subject is not some accidental determination in accidental being, but an additional quasi-specific difference, determining the soul to *esse supernaturale*, it follows that the generation of grace is not like other accidental changes, but is like a new birth and a new creation capable of being brought about by none other than the omnipotent God. Just as creation *ex nihilo* is a mystery, so too, grace, which fails to be neatly contained within Aristotle's species of being, is a mystery. Yet, this mystery of grace is not from the fact that grace is uncreated, but precisely from its character as a quasi-new creation.



Thomas Aquinas on Grace as a Mysterious Kind of Creature

SUMMARY

Although the question of whether, in the thought of Thomas Aquinas, sanctifying grace is “created” or “uncreated” has received considerable attention in the last several decades, many of the questions and arguments proposed by those, such as Karl Rahner, Jerome Ebacher, and Anna N. Williams, in favor of grace being uncreated have gone unanswered. Among these ancillary questions and arguments are those concerning the proper subject of grace, the categorial classification of grace, and the reason for the mystery and unconsciousness of grace. These questions appear unrelated, but, as this paper argues, they are each logically connected to each other and to the overall thesis that sanctifying grace is created, not uncreated. This paper aims to make Aquinas's thesis that grace is created more palatable to objectors by addressing each of these previously unaddressed ancillary questions.

KEYWORDS

Thomas Aquinas, Karl Rahner, Anna N. Williams, Thomistic metaphysics, Aristotle's categories, grace, justification, divinization.

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