

Metaphysics Course Summary

[(Added 2008) I have selectively corrected this document but have not tried to correct everything that needs it.]

An outline of the way in which the things which we have taken in the course so far are applied to the task of discovering whatever we are capable of knowing about God and the relations of creatures, i.e., ourselves, to God through the use of our natural powers of knowledge alone, i.e., without the aid of revelation. We will assume that the existence of God has been proven in the standard ways. We make this assumption because of limitations of time, because the majority of you have probably met these proofs in some course already, and because the best way to appreciate the proofs that God exists is by seeing what follows from these proofs concerning the question what this being, "God", Whose existence has been proven, is. (The knowledge of what something is as opposed to the knowledge that it is. If you wish to see some standard proofs, see Aquinas, pp.159-160; and Wild, pp. 353-369.)

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The proofs conclude to the existence of something described as the first cause of things, i.e., a cause Who is Himself uncaused. From the fact that God is an uncaused cause several things follow:

First, God must be pure act, must not be composed of potency and act. This is because whatever is composed of potency and act must be caused; God is not caused. Therefore ....

The reason why anything composed of potency and act must be caused is that any reality which is a union of a passive receptacle and a principle actualizing that passivity is capable of not being. A passive potency, as such, can be deprived of its corresponding act since it does not give itself its act, does not possess its corresponding act of itself. Any union of potency and act, therefore, is in itself indifferently related to existence or non-existence; for it depends upon the existence of a principle, the potency, which is

capable of not possessing its corresponding act. To point out that any union of potency and act is indifferently related to existence or non-existence is like pointing out that there is nothing in the nature of a statue that requires that every statue be clay rather than bronze; some cause outside of the nature of a statue, as such, is required to explain why this statue is clay and this other one bronze. Like wise, the nature of a rat is indifferently related to being used or not being used in an experiment; some cause outside the nature of the rat, as such, has to explain why a given rat is actually being used in an experiment. (On the other hand, no cause outside that nature of the rat is required to explain why the rat actually has the quality "being something which needs food to sustain its existence".) So any being whose reality consists of the reception of act by some potency, must have the explanation of its existence in something other than itself, some exterior cause. God has no cause. [End of original p. 1 (added 2008)] Therefore God is not composed of potency and act.

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What we have done here is to extend the notions of potency and act beyond the analysis of change to the analysis of being in general. We have already seen the need for an efficient cause in things that come to be as a result of a change in something existing before. Now is it true that an actualization of a potency needs an efficient cause only when this actualization exists as a result of a change; or is it true that what exists as a result of a change needs a cause because it is an actualization of a potency? In other words, is the reason why something needs an efficient cause the fact that it is composed of potency and act or the fact that it is a peculiar kind of potency-act union, namely, the kind that exists as a result of a change? (We will see very shortly a potency-act union which does not result from a change.) As the above paragraph shows, the reason why something needs an efficient cause is the fact that it is a potency-act union. Therefore, wherever we find such a union and regardless of whether such a union exists as a result of a change, an efficient cause is needed.

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It follows further that the existence of God is absolutely necessary; for there is no potentiality to non-being in it; for there is no potency in it.

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It also follows that there is no composition of any sort in God; He is absolutely simple. For every composition implies a composition of potency and act, i.e.; either one part entering into the composition is potential in regard to the other or both parts are potential in regard to existing in the whole.

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It follows that there is no accident in God. Difficulty: could someone hold that the last paragraph proves that there is no composition in the substance of God, and yet hold that the substance enters into composition with its accidents?

The effect must somehow be present in the power of the cause; otherwise, the existence of the effect could not be explained by the cause, i.e.; it would be impossible to hold that this effect comes from and depends on this cause. This can be proved by an argument strictly parallel to the argument by which it is established that every agent acts for an end. (How then can one cause produce diverse effects? Either through a multiplicity of powers, which would have to be accidents in God since His substance is simple, or because of the potencies of that on which the cause is acting. [End of original p. 2 (added 2008)] Recall the reason we included "Passion" in the definition of nature. More on this very shortly.) God is the first cause; so He is the cause of anything other than Himself which is caused. Therefore, He must cause His accidents. He causes them, however, in so far as He is in act. But He could receive them only by being in potency to them. Therefore, some composition is placed in the substance of God, i.e., a composition of an aspect of His substance by which He is in act an agent producing the accidents and an aspect of His substance by which He is in potency to receiving the accidents. But there can be no

composition in the substance of God. Therefore ...

Another argument: an accident is a reality over and above the reality contained in one's substance. But if God is the cause of anything which is caused and the effect must pre-exist in the cause, then the reality of anything caused must pre-exist in God. Nothing caused could exist, therefore, that did not already pre-exist in God. But accidents are both caused and contain some reality over and above the reality contained in their substance. Since there can be nothing caused which is not already in God, there is no room in the universe of things which are metaphysically possible for anything which would be an accident of God.

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A very important conclusion follows immediately from the fact that there are no accidents in God. If there are in God acts of intellect and will, then they are identical with His essence rather than being, as they are in creatures, accidents. Thus, if it is true that there is will in God, then it is not only theologically but also philosophically true that God is love, i.e., that His essence is identical with His act of willing.

This follows if it can be shown that realities such as intellect, will, and their corresponding operations, which we find in creatures, do exist in God. We said that every effect must somehow pre-exist in its cause. But there are many things in creation which obviously do not exist in God, i.e., color, size, shape, weight, motion, legs, wings, phonograph records, and an indefinite number of other realities we find present in the created world. How can those pre-exist in God? And why, if we claim that these realities do not pre-exist in the power of God precisely as they are, do we claim that realities such as intellecting and willing, do pre-exist in God?

Another question: To say God is the first cause is to say He is the cause of all things other than Himself which are caused. Is it possible for there to be anything other than God which is not caused, and therefore not caused by God? [End of original p. 3 (added 2008)]

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By "essence" we mean the answer to the question "what is this thing". "Essence" can refer to either accident or substance since the question of what something is can be intended to refer to either. But usually we mean by "essence" the substantial nature of a thing; this is the meaning we will use in the following arguments.

Whatever a thing has in addition to its essence is caused in the thing either by the thing's essence or by some other thing. An example of something in addition to the essence which is caused by the essence would be any necessary accident, e.g., the powers of man necessarily caused in him by His essence. That what a thing has in addition to its essence must be caused by something is obvious from the preceding pages. For every composition implies potency and act and, therefore, efficient causality.

Therefore, if the existence of something is other than the essence, the essence must be caused to exist. But no essence can cause its own existence since to function as an actual cause, the cause must be in the act; but nothing is in act unless it exists since without actual existence things are nothing. Therefore, every essence which is other than its own existence is caused to exist by something other than itself. God is uncaused, therefore, essence and existence in Him are the same.

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Is it possible that there be anything other than God in which essence and existence would be the same? If not, then God is the cause of all things that exist or that could possibly exist. For nothing can be the cause of its own existence; so if essence and existence are distinct, the thing is caused.

Further, if essence and existence are distinct, then essence is related to existence as potency to act. This is easily seen in two ways: Existence is obviously some sort of actuality. And without it, there are no other actualities. If you don't exist, you can't be tall, short, sitting, running, a republican, a man. Therefore, where essence and existence are distinct,

existence is related to its essence as act to potency. Secondly, if essence and existence are distinct, essence exists only because it receives existence from its cause. But anything which receives something from its cause must be related to that which it receives as potency to act. [End of original p. 4 (added 2008)]

An argument showing that there can be only one thing in which essence and the act of existing are the same: Given that existence is the actuality of all acts, i.e., that there can be no other kind of actuality unless there is existence, it follows that everything that exists is either something having existence, in which case it is something distinct from its own existence, or it is its own act of existence. Try to posit, therefore, two things which are their own acts of existence, so that the essence of each, the answer to the question "what is it" for each, is "an act of existence". This means that neither of those two acts of existence would be received in something other than themselves, something of which they would be the acts. But how, then, could there be any differences between these two acts? The object of thought "an act of existence" can be truly predicated of both; it expresses what both of these things really are. But if they are the same to the extent that they are both acts of existence, there must be something more to them, something [some reality (added 2008)] more than simply being acts of existence, to make them different. Therefore, it cannot be true of both of them that they are simply acts of existence.

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An expansion of the preceding argument using notions that cannot be fully developed until next semester and which is therefore offered as helpful, not as required: Generically, there are two kinds of distinctions between things, logical and real distinctions. An example of a logical distinction can be found in any true judgment which uses the verb "to be". For the subject and predicate of any judgment must be identical in reality; otherwise the judgment would not be true [which is not to say that the "is" of predication and the "is" of identity are the same (added 2008)]. Yet the subject and predicate must be somehow distinct in our

intellectual apprehension of them; otherwise every judgment would be a tautology, i.e., would be like "A rose is a rose is a rose" instead of "Roses are red", or like "John is John" instead of "John is tall". The concept "sweating thing" can refer to something really the same as the concept "running thing"; otherwise it would never be true to say "The runner is sweating". Still these concepts are obviously something different to the mind. This is what we mean by a logical distinction, as opposed to a real distinction. But the logical distinction between a running thing and a sweating thing is obviously based on, though not strictly identical with, a real distinction, the distinction between the accidents "running" and "sweating" (as opposed to the [logical (added 2008)] distinction between the running thing and the sweating thing, which is the same thing in reality.)

Now if there are two things who are their own acts of existence, that in them which accounts for the difference between them must be really identical with the existence. (Otherwise, the existence would be received into something else and the thing would have existence, it would not be existence. The [End of original p. 5 (added 2008)] thing would be the result of a union of existence with something which has the existence; and therefore, the thing would not be identical with its existence.) But then what accounts for the difference between the two acts of existence would be only logically distinct from what accounts for the sameness between them. And this logical distinction would not be based on any real distinction, would have no foundation in reality, so the two acts of existence could not be really distinct, but would be really one.

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Therefore, there can only be one being whose essence is its act of existence; and we have already proven that this being is God. In all other things, therefore, existence is distinct from that which exists. And from the last paragraph on page four [of the original (added 2008)], it follows that all things besides God that could possibly exist must be caused to exist by God. It also follows from the last paragraph on page four [of the original

(added 2008)], that in all things other than God essence is a potency for existence. This means that what we are stands to our existence in a manner analogous to the way prime matter stands to form. What we are is nothing but a capacity for, a receptive subject for something else which actualizes this capacity, existence. Other means of expressing this are to say that created and finite essences are simply ways of existing, possibilities for existing, modes in which something can have the act of existing. In other words, what we are, our essence, is simply a way of having in a limited and finite manner the kind of actuality that God is infinitely, or a way of having by participation what God is by essence, a capacity for having by gift what God is by right.

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It follows further that all possible perfection, all possible act, exists in God by identity with His act of existing and, therefore, with His essence. God is, in this sense, all things and infinitely more; infinitely more because, as we shall see, every possible thing and every possible universe of things that could be created must be finite.

One way of proving this is simply to point out that every effect must somehow pre-exist in its cause. We have now proven that everything other than God is an effect of God. Therefore, all possible perfection exists in God.

Another way of proving this is from the nature of created essence itself as a way of participating in what God is by essence, namely, the act of existence. If intelligence were not a characteristic of God's existence, how could intelligence be a characteristic of a created essence? How could finite intelligence be a way of having by participation what God is by essence; how could created intelligence be a way of having in a [End of original p. 6 (added 2008)] limited way what God is infinitely?

Again, every perfection in any given thing belongs to it according to its existence. For a man would have no perfection as a result of his wisdom unless through his wisdom, this accidental essence, he existed as wise. Likewise with other perfections. For the mode of



a thing's perfection is according to the mode of its existence. Higher and lower natures are higher and lower ways of having existence. Therefore, if there is an existence which is not restricted to this or that mode of having existence, that existence must be all perfect.

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It follows that everything is good in so far as it exists. This can be seen from the fact that to exist is to participate in what God is by essence. It can also be seen from the fact that existence is the act that is "natural" to essence inasmuch as essence is merely a capacity for existence. And existence is the final cause of essence, because the reason why there are essences distinct from their acts of existence is so that there can be more than one existent in reality. This is the next point.

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Since there can only be one being whose essence is its existence, God can only create other existents by giving existence to a capacity for existence which is other than the existence itself, so that, as a result, the existence is not absolute existence but is the existence of this or that. Therefore, there could be no multiple acts of existing unless all but one of them is received by an essence distinct from itself. But unless the essence actually has existence, there is no difference between itself and nothing. [The rest of this paragraph is incorrect; existence is in no way a cause. But I have not tried to indicate every error in this document (added 2008).] Causae ad invicem sunt causae. Essence is a material cause in relation to existence; existence is a formal cause in relation to essence. And the causality of one needs the causality of the other but not in the same respect. And act is always a final cause in relation to potency; for potency exists for the sake of the act, not vice-versa. (Recall that the formal cause and the end of the work coincide.)

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[End of original p. 7 (added 2008)]

We are momentarily interrupting the line of thought the preceding pages were

pursuing in order to dwell a little longer on the problem of universals since the class discussion apparently did not clear it up in your minds. And it is a crucial problem not only because of the conclusions we are drawing from it in this particular course but also because the whole evaluation of what human knowledge amounts to, what it means to know, depends on it. On the solution to this problem depends the answer to the question is human knowing a communication of man with the being of things, material things, other men, and God or not. (Not that these pages will give a full answer to that question, answering that question is the take-off point for epistemology. But what has been said in class and will be said here is essential to the full answer to the question.)

When we think "man" we are thinking a certain definite content different from other contents; when we think "man" we are not thinking "dog". To express the content we have to use several terms for it is a complex content. "Man" includes the content "thing", the content "having a body", the content "living", the content "have vegetative powers", the content "capable of sensation", the content "rational". These contents, however, are found not only in our awareness, as objects of our awareness, but also they are found in things. And the same contents can be found present in different things. The object of thought "body" is present in me and it is present in you. It is true of me that I have a body, and it is true of you that you have a body. This means that this content actually exists in both of us. But on the other hand my body is not your body, my sense powers are not your sense powers, i.e., my eyes are not your eyes. Any body that actually exists in the real world is this body and not that body; any thing that actually exists in real world is this thing and not that thing. These contents then can have real existence only as individuals; there is no real body which is not this singular body. But when the contents "thing", "body", "living", etc. are apprehended by the mind, exist as objects of the mind, these contents are not this thing or that thing, this body or that body. If the content present to the mind were this individual body or that individual body, the content present to the mind could not be found in more

than one thing. But the contents present to the mind when we say "man" or "body" are present in more than one thing in reality. They do exist in more than one thing. How is it possible for the combination of contents represented by the word "man" to sometimes have another content associated with it, the content "individual", or "being this singular", and to sometimes have [End of original p. 8 (added 2008)] another content associated with it which is opposite to the content "being this singular"? Or how is it possible for a content, e.g., "man", "red", "republican", which can have reality only as a singular man or singular red thing or singular republican, to be present in the mind in a state in which it is not this man or this red thing or this republican? And what is present in the mind is not this or that, because we find that the content present in the mind can be present in many different things and yet is the same content? What I think when I think "hair" is the same content I find to exist on your head and mine; but your hair is different from mine. What is present on your head is what I think when I think "hair"; what is present on my head is what I think when I think "hair." ([This "is" expresses the identity between thing and object that makes the "is" of predication true. If this identity between the content I think and the content I find present on your head and mine were not the case (modified 2008)], it would not be true to say there is hair on both our heads). Yet your hair is not my hair; my hair is not your hair. Between "is" and "is not" there is a contradiction. One way of expressing the problem of universals is by means of that contradiction. Another way to express it is to say that knowledge of things, really existing things, by means of concepts implies that these things both are and are not the same at the same time and in the same respect.

Aquinas's answer is that the content present to the mind when we think "individual" or "being this singular" and when we think "universal" or "existing in more than one" is something other than, something not identical with, something outside of, the content that is present to the mind when we think "man" or "body" or "animal" or "republican". "Individuality" and "universality" happen to a content like "man," "body," etc; just as it

happens to the content "man" that in one case it is black, in another case it is white, and in another it is yellow. To be black or white does not belong to the nature of man as such, neither does existing in the mind, where it is universal, nor existing in this particular person, where it is individual. Existence, therefore, is other than, not identical with, outside of, what a thing is. Existence is other than that which has existence. For we can replace the word "content" in the above paragraph with the word "essence", what something is, the answer to the question "what is that which exists". There is no contradiction, therefore, with what is present in my minds when I think "man" being the same thing that exists in both Tom and Dick even though Tom and Dick are different. For to be this individual man or that individual man is something outside of and in addition to the content present to the mind when we think "man". Nor is it a contradiction for what is present in my mind when I think "man" to express exactly what these two very different individuals, Tom and Dick, are even though "man" expresses something they have in common. For being [End of original p. 9 (added 2008)] applicable to many individuals is something outside of and in addition to the content which I find present in Tom and which is present to my mind when I think "man".

Another way of putting the fact that the contents "individual" and "universal" are not included among the contents we think when we think the complex content "Man": "Having four legs" is not one of the things included in our notion of man; if it were, we could never truly predicate "man" of anything not having four legs, for instance, you or me. For the same reason concepts like "having cloven hoofs", "having tails", "taking our oxygen from water", "being able to be combined with hydrogen to make water", etc. are not included in our concept of man. And for the same reason concepts like "universal" and "individual" are not included in our concept of man. If "universal" were part of the content, we could not truly predicate this concept of anything that was not universal, for example, you or me. If "individual" in the sense of "being Joe Smith" were included in the content of the concept "man". we could not truly predicate it of anything that was not Joe Smith, for example, you

or me.

On the other hand, being "individual" or being "universal" can happen to the content of the concept "man" without changing the essential or, to use Aquinas's phrase, absolute, content of that concept, while "having cloven hoofs" or "being able to be combined with hydrogen to make water" cannot be added to the absolute content of the concept "man" without changing that essential content. In this sense being "individual" or being "universal" are like "sitting" and "standing" for "sitting" and "standing" can happen to the essential nature of man but are never part of the essential nature of man. If they were a part of it, man would not be man unless he were sitting or standing. Therefore, it can be true to say "the content of the concept 'man' is universal". But this statement can be true only in the same sense as the statement "every man is a sinner is true"; this statement implies that sin happens to every man, not that the fact of being guilty of sin is part of the content of his essential nature. Likewise the statement "the content of the concept 'man' is universal" does not imply that universality is part of the content of the concept "man", but that universality is something outside of the content of this concept which does happen to the content of this concept. And the same analysis could be applied to "individuality" as applied to the content of the concept man.

The important thing about this analysis for the distinction between essence and existence is that these things, being individual and being [End of original p. 10 (added 2008)] universal, which can and do happen to the content of the concept "man", which can be truly predicated of the content of this concept, happen to it and are true of it precisely because of different existences this content can have, precisely as functions of these different existences. In the mind, the content of the concept "man" exists as applicable to these many individuals, as predicable of them. Outside the mind, the content of the concept "man" exists as the nature of this individual man and that individual man, just as my body is not your body, though "body" can be predicate of both. If "man" did not exist in the mind as

universal, it could not be predicated of many individuals. If it did not exist outside the mind as the nature of things which are nothing more than individual things, e.g., Joe Smith and Tom Jones, than it would never be true to say "Joe is a man" or "Tom is a man". For the verb "is" asserts identity [Not the best way to say it; rather, the truth of the "is" of predication requires thing/object identity (added 2008)]; the statement "Joe is a man" asserts that the predicate "man" expresses the being of the subject.

If it is true, that our concepts reveal to us what things are, the essence of things, then the essence of things cannot include actual existence; and real existence must be something outside of and added to the essence of things. For the actual existence of things must be individual; but on the hypothesis that our concepts do reveal the essences of things to us, the essence is not restricted to this or that individual, for it exists in our minds in a state in which it is not restricted to this or that individual.

The question of whether or not our concepts are true of reality is something outside the scope of the present course. But I want to expand some remarks I made in the first paragraph of page 8 [of the original (added 2008)] and in some of the classes about the importance of the question in the hope that you will be able to understand a little better how crucial the question is. If it is not true that the essence of anything considered absolutely is neither individual or universal, then our universal concepts cannot reveal the essence of things to us, since all actually existing things are individual. And if our concepts do not reveal to us what things are, do not allow us to see into the interior of things, what function do they have? The most common alternative that is offered for the function of concepts is a purely pragmatic one. Our concepts tell us nothing about what things are but merely help us to build houses, television sets, bombs, X-ray machines, and help us to modify our surroundings in other pleasing and useful ways. But in the last analysis, if our concepts do not reveal to us the being of things is there any rational standard for determining what things are really useful and what things are not, what goals a man should set for himself,

goals to be achieved by his action and [End of original p. 11 (added 2008)] his modification of the surrounding world, and what goals he should not set for himself? How could there be such rational standards if we could not know what they are and what we ourselves are? Granted, we have desires, that is an empirical fact. But is any given desire good in any given circumstance; is any given desire to be followed in any given circumstance. Unless we can see into the interior of things by means of our concepts, unless our concepts can reveal to us the true meaning of things, does it not follow that it is impossible to raise the question of good and evil? If we cannot answer the question, at the very least it makes no sense to raise it. And how can we answer it unless we are capable of knowing the being of things? Sartre, for instance, recognizes the given fact of desires and calls man a "useless passion". This means the realizing of one desire has no intrinsic merit over the realization of another; there is nothing in the nature of things making one better than another. He says the important thing is to act with awareness of that fact and not lie to ourselves about the intrinsic merit of what we are doing. About this there is at least one thing to say, namely, that even if there was difference in the intrinsic value of different things and actions, it is difficult to see how we could know that difference in value if our concepts do not tell us what things really are. And if we had to act without such knowledge, there could be no merit or guilt in our actions since we could not act with consciousness of the goodness or evil that is contained in our actions.

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We will now return to our main theme and present a commentary on the notions presented in the selections from Garrigou-Lagrange and Clarke in *Readings in Metaphysics*.

The idea that act is limited only by being received into a potency, i.e. only by being a received act, is by no means as abstract and unfamiliar as it might appear at first sight. A glass will only hold as much water as it has a capacity for holding; no matter how powerful the agent trying to force more water in the glass, there comes a point at which it can force

no more water into the glass. Some people do not have the capacity for learning as much mathematics as others. As a result, no matter how much efficient causes such as the teacher and the free will of the student try to produce this act, knowing mathematics, in the student, they cannot do it with the same success they have when the very same teaching methods are used for someone with the same determination of will but with more aptitude for learning mathematics.

That the potency of the receiving subject limits i.e., places [End of original p. 12 (added 2008)] restrictions and determinations on the act it receives is true throughout the whole of nature. For the fact that the motions things undergo, even when they receive these motions passively from an exterior agent, cannot be explained solely by the action of the exterior agent is an example of the same general principle. The action of the sun is essentially the same everywhere in nature; yet the results it produces in the different natures it acts on are different. There is nothing in the action of the sun, as such, which necessitates the result of the action in a given case being this as opposed to that, e.g., the melting of snow as opposed to the tanning of skin. What "restricts" and "determines" the result of the sun's action in a given case to, for example, the melting of snow, is the capacity of the patient to receive the action of the sun. The action of the sun is not restricted to this effect of itself.

Therefore, there are acts subject to limitations which limitations do not come from the act itself but from the potency in which the act is received. Therefore, limitation is not explained by the nature of act as act. For if limitation were explained by the nature of act as such, act would never need potency to limit it. But there are obviously many cases where act is limited by potency; so limitation is not explained by the nature of act as such. Therefore, wherever there is found an act that is limited in some way, the explanation for the limitation must be found outside of the nature of the act precisely as act. But outside of act, the only possible explanation for limitation is found in potency. The reason why the only



other sources for limitation can be potency is that potency and act divide being; i.e., if something is neither an act of some kind nor a potency of some kind, it must be absolutely nothing, pure and simple non-being. Therefore, the reason for limitation must be found in the nature of potency; and it is universally true that act is limited only by potency [An argument *perhaps* moving validly from some to all borrowed from Sikora's *Inquiry into Being* (added 2008)]. The only limited acts are received acts.

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As immediate conclusion from this is that God is infinite. God is pure act with no potency. Act is limited only by potency. Therefore ...

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This gives us another way of seeing the fact that God is one; for there cannot be two things of infinite actuality. To be two, they would have to differ from one another some way. So one of them would have to have something the other lacked; but a being which lacks some possible actuality is not infinite in actuality. [End of original p. 13 (added 2008)]

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Note that the argument of the last paragraph can also be expressed in terms of a specific kind of act, the act of existing. Since act is limited only by potency, and since God's act of existing is not received in any potency, God's act of existing is infinite. Two infinite acts of existing are impossible since to be two their existences would have to differ from one another; and one would have some existence the other lacked.

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From the limitation of act by potency, there also follows another argument for the fact that, in all being other than God, essence, what exists, must differ from its existence as potency differs from act. For there to be many actualities, all but one of them must be limited since there can be only one infinite actuality. But an act of existence is not limited by itself and existence is the act of all acts. Existence can only be limited by not being a

subsistent act of existence, i.e., by not being itself the essence that exists. To be limited, therefore, the existence must be an act for something other than itself, must actualize some potency, namely, essence or that which exists. Therefore, in all beings other than God what exists differs from its existence as potency differs from act.

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[End of original p. 14 (added 2008)]

In the preceding pages, we have seen that existence can be multiplied only if, in all but one of the things which exist, existence is a received act. To be multiplied, existence must be finite and, therefore, must be received in something other than itself. This other thing, essence, is therefore potential in relation to existence since it receives existence and since existence is act in relation to everything else.

But there is another kind of act which can be multiplied; and that kind of act is essence. The same essence can exist in several individuals. We are thinking here of substantial essence although the same reasoning will apply to accidental essence. But a quality like rationality can be derived only from the substantial form of the rational thing; it cannot be an accident caused in the rational thing by an exterior agent (it can be traced back, however, to the causality of whatever exterior agent caused the substantial form itself to exist). But there are many rational beings; therefore, act in the order of essence i.e., the actuality of having this kind of essence rather than another, can be multiplied.

If this actuality is not a received actuality, is not received in something other than the act itself, it could not be multiplied; there would be nothing to distinguish one individual of a particular essence from another individual with the same specific essence. This is another application of the principle that act is limited only by potency. On the level of essence, the fact that act is not limited by itself means, for instance, that it does not belong to the essence "body" as such to be restricted and determined to be this body as opposed to that body, my body as opposed to your body. Yet every body that exists is always this

particular body and not some other particular body. Likewise, it does not belong to the essence "man" as such to be Joe Smith or Tom Jones, this particular man or that particular man. Yet every man that exists is this particular man as opposed to that particular man. Since the nature "man", the essence grasped by the universal concept "man" is not of and by itself restricted and determined to be this individual man as opposed to that individual man, it must be received by something not identical with itself if there is to be this individual man as opposed to that individual man. Act is limited only by a potency which receives it.

Now accidents obviously play a role in our ability to distinguish one individual from another, especially the accidents of quantity and time, since no two things, no distinct individuals, can exist in the same part of quantitatively extended space at the same time. [End of original p. 15 (added 2008)] But it is obviously not that fact that we are or were at a certain place at a certain time that makes us individuals; for you can be at a different place at a different time, and yet we are the same individuals. Perhaps it is the fact that we are quantified bodies that accounts for our individuality. For a quantified body must always be at some place at any given time; and there can only be one body in any one place. But quantity is an accident. An accident presupposes the existence of the substance. And any existing substance must be individual, i.e., must be this thing rather than that thing. There must be something of the substantial order, therefore, which accounts for the fact of the individuation of a substantial essence; accidents cannot do this because they presuppose the individual substance.

To explain the individuation of an essence, then we need something of the substantial order and something which is potential in regard to substantial actuality since it receives the actuality of the substantial essence. Obviously, what emerges from this argument is the existence of something we are already familiar with, prime matter, the subject of substantial actuality. Since in itself it is neither a substance nor an accident, it has no characteristics in itself. Therefore, every individual whose essence is capable of being the

essence of other individuals is composed of a purely potential receptive subject and a principle by which this subject is actualized.

Note that just as we can argue, without appealing to the principle that act is limited only by potency, from the fact of multiple acts of existence to the fact that there must be something other than the acts of existing themselves which differentiates the acts of existing one from another (refer Page 5 [of the original (added 2008)]), so we can argue from the multiplicity of things having the same substantial nature to the distinction in them of prime matter from substantial form without appealing to the principle that act is not limited of itself. Thus from the fact that several individuals have the same nature in common, we can argue that there must be some principle that accounts for the similarities between the. But what accounts for the similarities between them cannot be what accounts for the fact that they are different individuals; for sameness and difference are obviously contrary properties. What accounts for the fact that Joe has characteristics in common with Tom cannot be what accounts for the fact that Joe is not this distinct individual, Tom. Again, accidents alone cannot account for the differences. There must be something of the substantial order but which is not itself a substance; it is not itself a substance since it receives substantial characteristics. If it were a substance, its union with the characteristics it receives [End of original p. 16 (added 2008)] would be accidental union only. Again, therefore, the argument yields the notion of prime matter.

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How can something, prime matter, with no characteristics of its own be the principle of individuation and, therefore, the ultimate source of all the individual accidental characteristics which differentiate one individual from another. It plays this role because it is the ultimate subject incapable of being received by any other subject. Whatever is received by anything is related to that which receives it as set is related to potency; for what receives something must be capable of possessing it. Since prime matter is pure potency and of itself

has no actuality whatsoever, there is nothing which stands to prime matter as receiver to received. But it is by being received in a potential subject that act is multiplied, rendered limited and restricted to this as opposed to that. Since prime matter is the ultimate principle of reception. It is the ultimate principle of limitation and, therefore, of rendering individual that first kind of essential actuality, that first way of being something that has existence, substantial actuality.

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Substantial form is what accounts for the presence in me of substantial characteristics which are similar to the substantial characteristics found in you. Substantial form, therefore, accounts for what you and I have in common on the substantial rather than accidental level. (Substance itself is the principle of individuation for accidents.) Does it follow that you and I have the same substantial form? You and I are individuals in the same species; we have the same specific nature, the nature of man. We acquire a concept of the specific nature by leaving out of consideration individual differences between yourself and myself; but in each of us the nature exists precisely as an individual, as individualized. Likewise our substantial forms are two different individual substantial forms; but these individual substantial forms are specifically the same. What the above analysis shows however, is that no substantial form is individuated in and of itself but is individuated by something other than itself, prime matter. Just as prime matter has no actuality in and of itself yet cannot exist without being actual, so also substantial form is no individual in and of itself yet cannot exist without being this individual form and not that individual form. And just as matter must receive the actuality it needs in order to exist from something other than itself, so also form depends on something other than itself for the individuation it needs [End of original p. 17 (added 2008)] in order to exist. *Causae ad invicem sunt causae.*

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We said that matter never exists as a pure potency, that it never exists unless it has

actually been made something or other by a form. But we said that we can mentally abstract from the fact that matter always has some form and say that matter in itself is a pure potency since whatever actuality it does have in reality, it does not possess because of itself but because of something other than itself. The same mental operation that we perform in regard to matter and its act we can perform in regard to form and its individuation, since form is not individuated because of itself even though it always exists as an individual form. So by mentally separating the form and the matter we can say that form is non-individual in itself.

But there is another way in which form exists as non-individual, as common rather than particular. It exists that way in the power of the agent that can produce many individuals of the same species. A cookie-cutter, for instance, is in itself one thing. But because of the form it has, it can produce many individual forms of the same specific nature in different parts of the cookie-batter. Each of us is capable of leaving individually different but specifically the same finger-prints every place we go. The shape of each individual cookie and the shape of each individual finger-print pre-exists in the power of the cause; but it pre-exists in the cause in a way in which it is not confined to being the shape of this cookie alone or this finger-print only. (And it pre-exists in the cause in a way in which it is not confined to being the shape of this individual effect only even though the cause itself is an individual. It is not entirely true but it is almost entirely true to say that, after 2400 years of philosophy, the implications of this fact about causality are just beginning to be explored.)

But even though the form pre-exists in the agent in a way in which it is communicable to many, the agent cannot communicate it to many unless he causes this form to be received into a potency for this form; for the form is restricted to being the form of this thing rather than that only by being received into a potency. It follows that God must co-create substantial form and a prime matter, i.e., must create form only by creating it in matter just as he can create matter only with some form, if He wishes to create a being of

an essence which can also be the essence of other things, if, in other words, He wishes to create many individuals of the same specific essence. Likewise, as we have seen, He can create another existent, give existence to something [End of original p. 18 (added 2008)] other than Himself, by causing to exist something other than the existence itself, something that is not the existence itself but which is a capacity for existence, which receives the existence, and is made actual by it.

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We are now in a position to talk about what the word "somehow" means when we say that everything other than God "somehow" pre-exists in Him since He is their cause. The answer to this question involves the use of two sets of distinctions: the distinction between what is called a simple perfection and what is called a mixed perfection; and the distinction between what is called virtual presence and what is called formal presence.

Simple and mixed perfections: "Knowledge" and "volition" are names for certain kinds of life. The words "animal" and "vegetable" also refer to certain kinds of life. It can be proven (from, for example the universality of our concepts) that intellectual knowledge has no essential dependence on matter. Intellectual knowledge, then, is a form of life that essentially involve matter. On the other hand, "animal" and "vegetable" refer to specifically material ways of living.

Acts like intellectual knowledge and volition are called simple perfections; acts like being an animal or being a vegetable are called mixed perfections. What the word "animal" refers to essentially involves matter and, therefore, a composition (a mixture) of potency and act. Another way of putting what a mixed perfection is is to say that what word like "animal" refers to is precisely a received act in the order of essence.

Simple perfections, on the other had, do not necessarily involve matter and, therefore, do not have a necessary relation of dependence on that which is the principle of limitation in the order of essence. (Essence, when it is distinct from existence, is the

principle of limitation in the order of existence; it limits existence. Prime matter, correspondingly, is the principle of limitation in the order of essence; it limits essential act.) Since simple perfections are acts in the order of essence and yet do not necessarily imply limitation in the order of essence, they can be predicated of God's essence directly. We can say God has intelligence and will; we can not say he has powers of sensation, growth, nutrition, etc.

Another way of expressing the reason why simple perfections can be predicated of God is that, since they are acts belonging to the essential order which do not necessarily involve limitation in the [End of original p. 19 (added 2008)] order of essence, there is no contradiction in the notion that there is a being of unlimited intelligence, unlimited power, etc. On the other hand, there is a contradiction in the notion that there could be an infinite animal. We think of an animal, for example, as something that can move itself. The very nature of motion, however, implies limitation since it involves potency and the striving after more act. Again, when we think of an animal or a vegetable, we ordinarily think of a complex body, the parts of which are spatially related to one another. But if there were an infinite lion, for example, how could it have four distinct legs or a head distinct from the trunk of his body, things which are included in our notion of a lion. Spatial distinctness implies spatial limitation. Therefore, there could be no unlimited lion.

Virtual presence and formal presence: Because the essence of an intelligent being need not be a limited essence, we can predicate intelligence of the one essence in which there pre-exists every actuality there is or could be in any other essence, the essence of God. But if we can predicate intelligence of God, we can predicate life of God, for knowing is a form of life. "Life" can also be said of animals and vegetables. But what "animal" and "vegetable" or "human" refer to are obviously limited and received forms of this act, life, which is unreceived and unlimited in God.

What follows from this is that we find in the effects of God certain things that pre-



exist in the causality of God formally; i.e., there exists in God something that can properly, as opposed to metaphorically, be called intelligence, will, power, goodness, etc. There does not exist in God anything that can be called, in the true meaning of the words "animal nature" or "human nature". These can only be said of God metaphorically, as when Scripture speaks of "the Lion of Juda". It is of course the simple perfections that pre-exist in God formally; that aspect of reality which is signified by a word such as "life" or "power" is truly and properly found in God. It certainly exists in God in a manner infinitely distinct from the manner in which it exists in creatures. But to point out, for example that there can be a mode of life which is infinitely different from any life we know and still be truly deserving of the term "life", is simply to point out that this aspect of reality, life, which we do find in creatures does not of itself demand limitation since it is not of itself essentially related to matter. Therefore, life can be infinitely distinct from the life we know and still be life.

Although we cannot speak of mixed perfections as existing in God formally, we can speak of them as existing in God virtually. All that [End of original p. 20 (added 2008)] there is of act in a concept like "man" can be expressed by a number of concepts such as "life", "intelligence", "action", etc. To say that all that there is of act in a concept of a mixed perfection such as human nature can be expressed by concepts referring to simple perfections is to say that, although human nature is certainly an actuality and perfection, still human nature is limited instance of some perfections which are not limited of themselves. A concept such as "man" is a concept of one way in which a perfection like life is received. "Living" is included in the concept of man but it is included there precisely in one of the ways in which it is received.

We have already talked about the concept of "virtual presence" in this course. We raised the question of how beings such as men, animals, and plants could each be considered one substance when each of them is composed of so many different parts. Molecules, for instance, constantly pass in and out of living things so that they obviously

possess an existence independent of the living things they can be part of. Why then are not living things merely accidental compositions of many different substances? In response to that difficulty, we pointed out that the higher substantial form contains the lower substantial form virtually, i.e., in its power. This means the higher substantial form can produce in prime matter all the substantial parts and necessary accidents that the lower form can produce. In other words, it can produce all the act that the lower form can produce and still more.

In the same way, Gods essence contains all there is of act in any other being but not the other beings limited way of possessing that act. So God possess mixed perfections virtually, not formally. [End of original p. 21 (added 2008)]

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By "the will" we mean at least this, an efficient cause, a power to bring into existence act that does not yet exist. The effects of this power are two; its own action, namely, a choice or decision, and the action of some other power, e.g., my will causes a decision, its own act, and my decision causes me to get up and walk, walking involving the action of any number of other powers.

The will is a created cause; it depends for its existence on the action of another cause, God. But the will depends on God for more than its existence; it also depends on God for its action. For God is the cause of the existence of the action just as much as He is the cause of the existence of the power to act. We call created causes secondary causes and God the primary cause. Secondary causes do actually cause; but the existence of the causality of secondary causes is produced by God just as much the existence of the secondary cause itself is produced by God.

The need for the action of the will to be caused by God can be seen in the following way: Assume your hand is moving. The movement of your hand needs a cause. Why does it need a cause? Because it involves a reduction from potency to act. The causal analysis of

how your hand moves may be extremely simple or it may be extremely complicated. Sometimes gravity alone is enough to explain the motion. Most of the time, however, the motor mechanism of the body, nerves, muscles, etc., is involved in the explanation of why the hand moves. This is certainly true, for example, when we move our hands during sleep. But very often a conscious decision of the will also enters into the explanation of the movement of the hand; we reach for a cigarette, we write a letter, we tie our shoe laces, etc. Here in addition to all the causal factors in the body, the action of the will enters into the reduction from potency to act on the part of the hand.

But the will was not always deciding to move the hand; when it does so there is a change, a going from potency to act, on the part of the will itself. What is the cause of this going from potency to act? At the end of every conceivable chain of potency-act, cause and effect, relations is the causality of God. He is the first cause of everything and, therefore, the first cause of every single action of our will.

To put this emphatically – because it deserves to be put emphatically, when we make a decision of our own, we do it only because God has made a decision of His own that our decision would be made and that it would be made here, now, in these circumstances, with these implications, etc. This is the only possible explanation for a decision on our part, namely, that God caused it to exist. [End of original p. 22 (added 2008)]

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How then can our decision be free? And does this not make God responsible for evil?

We can be the primary cause of nothing. This is what follows from the fact that even the action of our powers is caused by God. But the statement that we can be the primary cause of nothing means two things. It means first that everything positive, everything in our action that is in any way an act, has God's decision to create it as its first cause. But when there is something lacking in an action, when an action is privated of something, this aspect of the action is nothing positive, is not the existence of any actual thing. And we can be

responsible for the lack of something, say, the lack of due ordering to their proper ends on the part of our actions. This is the second meaning of the statement that we can be the primary cause of nothing i.e., that we can be the primary cause of nothingness, of the introduction of a certain privation into our actions.

By "evil" we mean nothing more than a certain kind of privation, the privation of something which should be there rather than something which is merely potentially there. How do we decide [i.e., not choose but determine, know (added 2008)] what should be there? By the ends of the nature is question. When there is a privation of either the ends, to which the nature in question is nothing more than a tendency, of any means which are necessary to attaining the ends, then the privation is an evil. And when there is such privation on the part of a being who can attain his end by conscious control of his own action, then there is moral evil.

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God, therefore, is the first cause of the moral goodness of our actions, we the first cause of the moral evil in them. God causes a good action by creating an impulse of our will toward taking the proper moral order into account consciously in making a choice. We, however, can "nihilate" this impulse by not considering the proper order. If we do not take the moral order into account, if we nihilate, then the decision that follows will be privated of what should be there, due order. But if we do not nihilate, we do not become the primary cause of any actual being in the action, the decision, that follows. Rather if we do not nihilate, then the impulse created by God causes us to take the moral order into consideration and a good decision takes place, all of its goodness being due to the fact that God created an impulse this action at this time. But the good act was still a free act on our part because we could have nihilated, introduced a lack of what should be there by not taking right and wrong into account. [End of original p. 23 (added 2008)]

This is where the distinction, mentioned by Wild, between antecedent and

consequence will of God comes in. God's will is that we do perform good acts if we do not nihilate. This is what we call His antecedent will. His consequent will decides that a good act actually will be placed in existence, since we have not nihilated. Or His consequent will decides to place in existence all there is of positive perfection and act in an evil decision if we have freely nihilated. This is what is meant by the permission of evil. He does not cause the lack but permits it to exist by causing something that is actual, the decision, but which lacks something it should have, as a result of nihilation on the part of the creature and permission on the part of God. Whatever there is of actuality in the content of the decision is caused by God; the lack of what should be there is caused by us. Thus God is the first cause of the pulling of the trigger by which someone is murdered. He does not cause the fact that the person pulling the trigger has murder in his heart. The death itself is only a physical not a moral evil.

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In regard to physical evil, God can be called a cause *per accidens*. Thus the achieving of a higher good may require a privation of a lower good, e.g. eating the antelope is good for the lion but bad for the antelope. Thus by essentially intending the higher good, Gods action may have the accidental end of the privation of the lower good. Moral evil, however, being a privation in regard to the highest natural good, can in no way be caused by God even *per accidens*.

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In answer to Wild's question about whether the evil we commit is frustrating God's purposes for history, recall that there are two effects of the will, its own decision, and the execution of the decision which involves the will's moving other powers to their acts (e.g., the decisions to walk and the actual walking). Even when God permits an evil by causing all the act there is in the decision, he does not have to allow the execution to occur. Think of how many time times our good as well as bad plans are frustrated. If God wanted JFK to

live, He could have caused the bullets to miss the mark. But through the *per accidens* causing of this physical evil, he is accomplishing the higher good, i.e., the fulfilling of his purposes for history. Therefore, absolutely nothing happens in the order of physical execution of acts which is not accomplishing his purposes. For absolutely nothing happens in the physical execution of acts which was not caused, and therefore, planned by Him.

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A final point: notice that the idea that although God is the primary cause of whatever moral goodness there is in our acts, still our acts are free because we could have nihilated, this idea has obvious relevance for the theological doctrine that although we merit salvation, still it is completely a gift from God.