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Analogy of being in scholasticism

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As students of the twentieth century delve into the study of philosophy and tread that smooth-worn path which stretches from contemporary thinkers back into the faint misty haze of a by-gone age when Thales first taught that all things are made out of water, they are at times forced to stop and wonder at the marvelous insight and vivid clarity of vision by which certain of the great philosophical luminaries were able to propound difficulties and so admirably tender solutions of them. The astounding problems encountered in that mighty search for truth have appalled in the past even the philosophical geniuses to whom we are indebted for the great evolution and development of philosophical thought. This great advance in the science of the "how" and the "why" may be traced through the ages and likened to a flowery meadow, through which it is the pleasure of the world's thinking few to stroll and inhale the richness of its scented vapours.

As we consider, one by one, the blossoms (if my figurative reference is to be maintained), whose blooming radiance has come and gone with the ages but whose fragrance still pervades the twentieth century atmosphere, our attention is arrested by what is probably the most immense and gigantic problem of them all -- the analogy of being. Down through the ages from time immemorial millions upon millions of humans have professed a knowledge of God. Such is the basic belief of the great Christian world today. And still, no sooner do we affirm a knowledge of God, of His existence and His attributes, than we find ourselves face to face with the stupendous problem of analogical
predication of being. The astounding realization is at once forced upon us that, always and ever, man, in his search for truth, for knowledge of a world beyond his own, must of necessity obtain this knowledge humanly, that what man knows of the Infinite will always be a human knowledge, more specifically, that our predications of the infinite, perfect God must be subject to our finite, imperfect condition.

The question "Is it possible to know God and, if so, how and in what measure can we know Him?" is not a new one. It actually dates back to the writings of the very first metaphysician -- Parmenides. Here in the vague gropings of this primitive philosophy we see emerging for the first time the great problem of Infinite Being and its relation to the world of men. In his "Way of Truth" the first Grecian pioneer in the realm of metaphysical thought sums up his conclusions in regard to the Infinite as follows:

"One path only is left for us to speak of, namely, that It is. In this path are very many tokens that what is is uncreated and indestructible; for it is complete, immovable, and without end. Nor was it ever, nor will it be; for now it is, all at once, a continuous one. For what kind of origin for it wilt thou look for? In what way and from what source could it have drawn its increase?... I shall not let thee say nor think that it came from what is not; for it can neither be thought nor uttered that anything is not. And, if it came from nothing, what need could have made it arise later rather than sooner? Therefore must it be either altogether or not at all.

"Nor is it divisible, since it is all alike, and there is no more of it in one place than in another, to hinder it from holding together, nor less of it, but everything is full of what it is. Wherefore it is wholly continuous; for what is, is in contact with what is." (Early Greek Philosophy -- Burnet, P. 175)
Here-in is expressed the first man-made conception of Infinite Being as understood in the philosophical sense of the term. Parmenides holds the distinction of being the first to recognize the existence of Being, one, universal and eternal, entirely apart and distinct from the world of change and perishability. Although he mentions neither God nor being, the best historians of philosophy assure us that his thought contained the effort to find the eternal amid the shifting, the abiding and everlasting amid the change and the relation of the Infinite to the finite. Even a casual perusal of his doctrine assures the student that, for this pioneer metaphysician, the absolutely real is Being. Only Being truly is. It is the sole reality, the first principle of all things. It is wholly unmixed with not-being, with things that change. It is immutable, indivisible, imperishable. It had no beginning and will not pass away. The world we see about us is a world of appearance and illusion and, since the world of change is the only world visible to us, we can only come to a knowledge of reality through reason. It is at this point in the trend of his thought that Parmenides definitely presents the problem around which anological predications revolves, the problem of his two worlds, the one of reality and the other of appearance. It is most probable that he did not see the mighty chasm between the world of reality and the world of appearance, between that which is essentially one and immutable and that which is divisible and changing, between the Infinite and the finite, -- between God and the world. His attempt at a complete monism failed as every attempt since has failed. To this pioneer in philosophical thought must be given
credit for showing that a completely monistic explanation of the problem is impossible. It was left for succeeding philosophy to show how the unity of being is possible and to explain the relation of the Infinite to the finite -- of God to the universe.

In scanning the systems of the earlier philosophers, the student of Thomism cannot help but be impressed by the theory advanced by Anaxagoras for explaining the origin of matter. At first glance, it may not appear to have much reference to the topic at hand, but, upon further consideration, the realization is soon forced upon us that Anaxagoras added something of prime importance to the vague immaterialistic gropings of Parmenides -- a vague, but nevertheless apparent, notion of spirituality.

Anaxagoras was interested in explaining the "cosmos". The word "cosmos" means an organism, -- an orderly array of parts. In order to explain the cosmos, Anaxagoras found it necessary to assume, in addition to inert, dead matter, an element that possesses a force and intelligence of its own -- the "nous." This element of elements is absolutely simple and homogenous. It is not mixed with other elements and is absolutely distinct from them. Matter is wholly passive, the "nous", however, is endowed with spontaneous activity; it is perfectly free and the source of all movement and life in the world. The inferior elements have no cause of their own; the "nous" knows all things, past, present and future. It has arranged and organized everything according to design and according to its teleological fitness. In the beginning the inert and unintelligible elements were all jumbled together. The intelligent "nous" alone lived a
distinct life of its own. Then it entered the chaos and disentangled it, making the cosmos out of it. This is how movement was imparted to the chaos. The "nous" started a whirling motion which gradually extended over a wider and wider space to all parts of the world. It still continues as is proved by the rotation of the heavens.

The stars are solid masses which were torn from the earth by the rotary motion originally communicated to the whole mass. These thrown-off parts came in contact with the celestial ether and became ignited. The sun, in consequence, is a fiery mass. These views are a forecast of the theories of Buffon, Kant and Laplace.

Inasmuch as "nous" knows all things, past, present and future, and knew them before the organization of matter, it in no wise resembles either the substance of Spinoza or the active idea of Hegel. For the substance of Spinoza and the idea of Hegel know things only through the mediation of the human brain. Anaxagoras is so decided in his assumption that the "nous" is free and continuous in its action that he regards the word "fate" as devoid of meaning. "Nous" signifies for Anaxagoras motive principle, reason, purpose. He seems to make a transcendent being out of it, one that exists independent from other beings and acts upon them in a purely mechanical way. He speaks of the presence of the "nous" in living creatures as though he were a pantheist, but thinkers of this remote age did not broach explicitly the questions of transcendency, immanency, personality or conscious intelligence.

It is undoubtedly true that Anaxagoras was groping for
a concept like that of "spirit", for the "nous" seems to have nothing in common with matter except existence. Yet, on the other hand, there seems to be but a difference of degree between "nous" and material substances: the "nous," in fact, is the most mobile thing of all. Hence we must conclude that it is merely the highest kind of matter and consequently not absolutely opposed to it as in spiritualism proper. The dualistic conception is as yet only vaguely defined in the system of Anaxagoras and, although the fundamentals of teleology are latent in his philosophy, he fails to apply the notion of finality. Aristotle justly centures him for using mind as a "Deus ex machina" to account for motion, but Aristotle also said that Anaxagoras was "a sober man among fools."

From this brief summary of the doctrine of the "nous" it is not difficult to see how that the philosophy of Anaxagoras brings us one step closer to a more perfect notion of an absolute immaterial Being which completely transcends the universe but upon which the universe of movement and things is dependent.

As we continue our survey of the nearly philosophical systems we see this problem, -- the relation of a Prime Cause to the sensible world, -- continually coming to the fore, but with no more significant results until Plato occupies the spotlight. The transition of idea to being, from Infinite to finite, from God to the world, was no easier for him than for Parmenides or Anaxagoras. For Plato the Idea is self-sufficient. It is immutable, eternal and is the cause of all things. By Idea we mean here the supreme Idea of the Good which subsumes all other ideas and which the best writers identify with God.
Plato found it impossible to ascribe real existence to the Idea so he is left with a system of things in which he finds it impossible to show any relation between the intelligible world of perfect Being and the sensible world of real being. The real world in its relation to God is as great a source of trouble as it was to Parmenides. In order to effect some kind of union he is forced to adopt a second principle, -- not-being or matter. But in doing this, he is forced to abandon the absolute monism of the Idea. He has to confess that the Idea constitutes only part of reality and make concessions to materialism and sensualism. In the Timaeus, where he tries to explain the relation of God to the universe and human knowledge of Perfect Being, he is forced to say that we can only know the world of Perfect Being "by a spurious kind of knowledge which is hardly a 'matter of belief'" (Timaeus, P. 52). Here lies the great flaw in Platonic philosophy. To derive the limited from the unlimited, the partial non-being from Being is a task which neither Plato nor Spinoza could fulfil consistently with their first assumptions. Plato had to have recourse to such vague expressions as 'participation,' 'community,' 'imitation.'

When we come to Aristotle, we find an attempt to steer a middle course between the thorough-going idealism of Plato and the crude materialism of Democritus and Empedocles. Aristotle points out that Plato's great mistake lay in conceiving the ideas as real beings existing apart from the individuals which express them. In vain do we search Plato for proof that ideas subsist apart from things. Indeed, a theory of separate ideas accomplishes nothing. We are at a loss to explain what is
the relation between things and Ideas, -- between God and the world. Besides, if the general Idea is the substance of things, how can it exist apart from the things of which it is the substance and the essence? However, Aristotle agrees with Plato in teaching that the world of sense is subject to change and that we must go beyond it to find the world of reality. But here they differ. Aristotle places the world of Ideas in sensible objects. It is therefore against the doctrine of a separate world of Ideas that all Aristotle's criticism of Plato is directed. For Aristotle, the universal and the particular do not lie apart in different worlds. Universal and particular, matter and form, are inseparable. The connection between them is not mechanical but organic. However, the question here arises: "Does Aristotle, by this means, solve the difficulties left by Plato?" The answer must be in the negative. Aristotle finds it quite as impossible to show how matter arises out of form, how the material world is united to the Absolute Form, as Plato? Absolute Form and matter must exist side by side from all eternity. If form be the Absolute, the whole world must flow from it. In Aristotle's system it does not. But from the point of view of this treatise a more serious difficulty arises. Since the main point in his doctrine is that form is never divorced from matter, he finds it impossible to prove that there is an Absolute Form, or God, existing apart from the world without contradicting himself. Moreover, if there is an Absolute Form, undefiled by matter, he finds it as impossible to show how it can be related to the real world and to the world of human knowledge as does Plato.
And now the way is paved for a consideration of the metaphysics of St. Thomas and his doctrine of the analogy of being. Contrary to the tenets of many of his predecessors, being, to the mind of St. Thomas, is not something mysterious or obscure. On the contrary, it is what our mind knows best and grasps immediately in everything.

As soon as our intellect is aroused and comes in contact with reality, St. Thomas clearly points out the fact that the very first object of our knowledge, the first concept we form, -- no matter what the things that have impinged on our senses, -- is that of being, of something that is. We have here an initial, imperfect, confused notion, telling us next to nothing about the constituent elements of the real, yet, for all that, comprising them all, down to their last determinations. Moreover, if we penetrate its profound meaning, if we reach down to the true reasons of being, this notion, in the most universal and analogical unity of its content, becomes ever more clear and distinct; it appears "quasi quoddam seminarium totius cognitionis sequentis," a kind of nursery of all subsequent cognition, and enables us to rise to the very summit of intellectual life, to the perfect Being, and thence to descend again to all other beings.

On further scanning the Thomistic doctrine we find that, in the order of knowledge, our thought is enclosed between two points. At the point of departure we have an initial cognition of being; at the point of arrival we find nothing else than a perfected cognition of this same being. In this effort of elaboration and attainment we can add nothing to the concept of
being that is not already implicitly contained in it. To every
generic idea we can add a specific difference not included in
the genus; not so when the notion of being is in question:
though expressing what was not formally signified before, I
never succeed in stating or coming upon something that is not
being. It was on this that St. Thomas founded his doctrine of
the analogy of being. The notion of being, he argued, is not
univocal, it is not a genus, it does not indicate realities
formally identical; and yet, neither does it signify things
entirely different: it is not an equivocal idea. It is analogi-
cal, inasmuch as God and creatures, substance and accidents, in
a word, the most dissimilar realities, agree in this that they
are beings.

While on this vital phase of the question it is not be-
side the point to note, in passing, that the same is found to
hold good in the ontological order.

"Quidquid est, si quid est, ens est," -- all that exists,
if existence, is being, say the followers of St. Thomas in uni-
son with their master. In all reality, actual or possible, pres-
ent, past or future, discover, if you can, something to which
this idea of being does not apply. Strain your imagination to
the utmost to find something in the domain of reality that is not
being. Impossible! We can, of course, distinguish the various
grades of being; we can conceive what universally follows upon
all being. But we cannot even imagine something that is not
being because the principle of contradiction stands in the way.
Whether we turn back on our consciousness and study ourselves,
or direct our attention to sensible reality, or by way of reason-
ing come to know separated substances (angels) and God, — in every grade of reality we find being, something that is, something that has existence.

Here, too, the notion of being presents to us all reality united in one single embrace. From Being by essence proceed all other beings. In the cognitive process we take our point of departure from being imperfectly grasped to reach a more elaborate idea. The contrary process prevails in the ontological order: here we must start from the most perfect Being in order to explain everything that exists or can exist.

The foregoing suffices to point out the motive for the very numerous passages in the works of St. Thomas, -- from the De Veritate to the De Ente et Essentia, from the two Summae to his commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle, -- where this primacy of being in our intellect and in things existing or possible is asserted.

"Being is what the intellect conceives first, as something most known and into which it resolves all conceptions" (De Veritate, qu. I, art. 1)

"The intellect naturally knows being and whatever essentially belongs to being as such, and on this cognition the knowledge of first principles is founded... The formal object of the intellect is being, just as color is the formal object of vision... That under which is comprehended whatever the intellect knows...is nothing else than being" (Contra Gentiles, II, c. 83)

"What is grasped first of all is being, the understanding of which is included in every apprehension" (Summa Theologica, I, II, qu. 92, art. 2)

Thus we see that the whole philosophy of St. Thomas hinges around his notion of being. We shall now go on to observe the importance that the doctrine of the analogy of being plays in this system. Whereas earlier philosophers presented notions of
the Infinite and the finite and then invariably failed to link
the two into a concrete, logical system of philosophy, rendering
their systems but futile monisms, the analogy of being in the
Thomistic doctrine has the supreme and important function of re-
lateing the Infinite to the finite, not only in the realm of
metaphysics, but also in the realm of knowledge.

In the preceding paragraphs in which I outlined briefly
the Thomistic notion of being I pointed out the fact that being,
for St. Thomas, is an idea, not univocal nor equivocal, but anal-
ogical, inasmuch as God and creatures, substance and accidents,
in a word, the most dissimilar realities, agree in this that they
are beings. And now the task at hand is to show how these dis-
similar realities actually do agree, in other words, just what is
meant by analogical predication and how the Schoolmen use it in
their doctrine.

"Analogy", in general, implies a proportion, involving at
once a certain agreement and a certain diversity between two con-
cepts or things. Thus it is seen that, in predicating analogically
we express a similarity between two different objects of thought
but the likeness is not identically but only proportionately the
same; the predication represents not a mere likeness between di-
verse objects, but a proportion or relation of object to object,
each in its own order. "It is, therefore, neither a merely
equivocal or verbal coincidence, nor a fully univocal participa-
tion in a common concept; but it partakes of the one and the
other" (St. Thomas, Summa Theologica, I, xiii). "Healthy" is
predicated of exercise and of nourishment in so far as both bear
a direct relation to the health of the individual. In reference
to the topic at hand an analogical idea is that which denotes an object that is beyond the adequate grasp of the mind and requires for its representation a comparison with something else known with experienced knowledge: thus we form an analogous idea of life in God from our knowledge of created life.

Joseph Bittremieux puts forth the relation entailed in the word "analogy" as follows: "idem nomen de diversis praedicatur secundum rationem partim eandem, partim diversam." Before proceeding to the "ratio" of which the eminent author writes, we must first establish the exact nature of the "diversa" under consideration in this thesis. Since being holds the spotlight here, the "diversa entia" can be none other than the two great divisions of ens, the Divine and the created, the Perfect and the imperfect, the Infinite and the finite. These truly constitute the "diversa" of the question at hand. The analogy of being, the exact relation existing between the divine Being and our human knowledge of such a Being indeed must be the task at hand. In the ensuing paragraphs we shall see how St. Thomas and the Scholastics solved the mighty problem and gave to succeeding generations a firm foundation on which to base all analogical predication.

The problem of the analogy of being confronts the philosopher when he undertakes an investigation of what reason can tell us of the essence of God, His nature. A true appreciation of just how immeasurable a gulf separates the Infinite from the finite, God from creatures, can only be had after pondering briefly on the nature of God, or, more correctly, on our concept of the divine Being. William J. Brosnan summarizes our human
concept of the Divine as follows:

"When more fully developed, it (the human concept) shows God to be absolutely infinite, i.e., actually possessing all possible perfections limitlessly, absolutely simple, intrinsically immutable, immense, eternal, with an infinitely perfect knowledge from all eternity of absolutely everything knowable, even the free future acts of man, all holy, all merciful, all just, all mighty, the creator of the world, on whom all creatures absolutely depend for their coming into existence, and in every action they perform, whose wise providence continually governs all things and is in no way to be impugned because of the evils in the world, be they physical or moral" (God and Reason, P. 89).

In reference to our concept of God and the problem of knowing him Etienne Gilson writes as follows:

"His condition is such as to exclude all additions; He is neither in a species nor in a genus; He has not even an essence, since His essence is none other than His being; Deus non habet essentiam, quia essentia ejus non est aliquum quam suum esse. We are therefore far from confusing Him with creation; what distinguishes the Divine Being from all other being, is His absolute purity and His perfect simplicity. Between the Being of God and the participated being which we are, no common measure can be found, and we might say, using the Augustinian formula, that while the creature has its being, God is His being. A strictly infinite distance separates these two modes of existence, and so far from fearing any confusion, henceforth impossible, we shall call God by the name which He gave Himself: "He Who Is," being certain of applying thus to Him a name which fits Him as no other name could, because it designates nothing but the being which is above all essence and all form: an infinite ocean of substance" (The Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas, P. 85).

Right at the outset the student must be discouragingly awed by the apparently unfathomable gulf which separates the created Divine from the (human). The two spheres are, so to speak, two mighty orbs suspended in a limitless void, the one separated from the other as far as the limitless expanse permits, no mite of commonness discernible between the two, not so much even as the slightest overlapping to allow of a predication divine, and at the same time human. It is not astonishing that this
mighty problem should have proved a nemesis to earlier philosophers.

The whole difficulty hinges around the fact that we are able to know only as human beings. Our knowledge of God is but reasoned and, consequently, is not as He is "in Se" or as He knows Himself; for it will ever be a human knowledge and our predications of Him will ever be subject to our condition.

Right at the outset of the problem the Schoolmen realised the fact that the word "being" is not the very same of God as of humans, but by reference to reasoned knowledge, though clarified by differentiation, negation and eminence.

"This concept (of God), which, morally speaking, all who have the use of their reason tenaciously possess, is derived, almost spontaneously and through an informal reasoning process, from a consideration of ourselves and things round about us" (Brosnan -- God and Reason, P. 23, 24).

In stating, above, that our concept of God is derived by reference to reasoned knowledge, I mention "negation" and, lest the impression be created that our ideas of the Infinite are only negative, it is fitting that, in passing, I pause briefly on this phase of the problem.

It is quite true that certain conclusions about God are, despite their often affirmative appearance, nothing but disguised negations. For an absolutely simple or completely immaterial being cannot constitute an object proportionate to our human understanding. When we say: "God is simple," we have no interior conception of this absolutely simple being; and when we say: "God is eternal," we cannot grasp with our changing thought this perpetual present which is eternity. Even when we describe God as the absolute and supereminent being, we do not claim in
any way to apprehend Him as such. We have, therefore, faithfully followed the negative path which we had mapped out for ourselves. Let us now examine whether it might not be possible to acquire some positive knowledge, however imperfect, concerning the infinite essence of God.

There is doubtless no affirmation which can be applied in the same sense to God and to creatures; and we can easily see the reason. All judgments applied to both the Divine and the human nature, employ the copula "est." But it has been established that God "is" not in the same sense in which creatures "are." In my outline of the Thomistic notion of "being", I stressed the fact that the created being owns such perfections as it may possess, inasmuch as it has received them, while, on the contrary, in God there is nothing which is not His own being. We must consequently expect to find that every proposition about the nature of God, even when it conveys some positive knowledge, retains a good deal of negative meaning. When we apply to a man the term "wise", we indicate thereby a perfection distinct from the essence, the power and the being of the man. But when we apply this term to God, we mean to express nothing distinct from His essence and His being. Accordingly, the word "wise", applied to man, professes in a certain measure to describe and to contain the reality it signifies; but, in speaking of God, it fails to contain or (even) to grasp the reality signified by it. We express this negative aspect of all our judgments concerning the Divine nature, by saying that nothing can be predicated of God and creatures in an univocal sense.

Upon fully realising this aspect of the problem, the
student of Thomistic analogy is forced, at this juncture, to ask himself: "Are we therefore to conclude that a proposition about a creature loses necessarily all meaning when applied to God?" Such a conclusion would be inaccurate, and moreover dangerous. For to accept it would be practically to admit that, taking our starting point from creatures, we can know nothing of God nor prove anything concerning Him without continual equivocations. We must accordingly admit a certain analogy or proportion between the creature and the Creator, the basis of which is not hard to discover.

It is quite apparent that our statements about God and creatures are, in no way, univocal nor are they used in a purely equivocal sense: they must bear, as I have previously pointed out, an analogical sense. Here a final difficulty must be removed. As long as we confine ourselves to negation, we clearly run no risk of breaking up the unity and perfect simplicity of the Divine being. For these negations aim mainly at excluding from the Absolute Being everything that might divide and thereby limit it. Will this danger not arise and, indeed, become inevitable when we affirm of God positive analogical perfections, such as are displayed by creatures?

"In that case, the perfections will either be conceived by us as identical, and the terms applied to God will in that case be pure synonyms, or the terms represent distinct perfections, and then the Divine essence will lose its eminent simplicity. Perhaps, however, we may escape from the horns of this dilemma. The attempt to secure the perfect idea of the Divinity, more specifically, of the Divine unity, by means of a number of concepts would evidently be self-contradictory. On the other hand, a direct intuition of this intelligible unity is denied us in the world. Now, it is a fundamental principle of Thomistic philosophy that, if we are unable to attain to the Oneness and Simplicity,
we should endeavor to imitate it in some way by multiple means. Thus the universe, the defective image of God, imitates by its diverse forms the one and simple perfection of God. In the same way again, our intellect, by gathering up the various essences and perfections which it finds in things, forms in itself the resemblance of this inaccessible unity by means of multiple conceptions. Our assertions about the Divine essence are, therefore, not purely synonymous, for our intellect invents different names signifying different conceptions to attribute them to God; and yet they do not introduce into God any diversity, because our intellect aims at designating by these different terms a reality which is absolutely one. In short, the intellect does not necessarily attribute to things the mode according to which it understands them. Therefore, if the intellect affirms the unity of an object by complex propositions, whatever is diverse and complex in the propositions must be referred to the intellect making them, but the unity described by them, must be referred to the object. Bearing in mind these reservations we can apply to God terms which describe the perfections of creatures" (Gilson, The Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas, Ps. 88, 89).

In attributing perfections to God, Scholastics have been attacked on the grounds that everyone of these so-called perfections must, of necessity, contain imperfection, but I feel that I have answered this objection satisfactorily from what I have stated above. The Schoolmen of old certainly distinguished between such a perfection and that which they attributed to God, staunchly affirming the latter to be an "absolutely simple" perfection, one whose concept formally excludes all imperfection whatsoever. They realised that the perfection which they attributed to God, recognized in Him either from spontaneous knowledge or as the result of philosophic argumentation, did not contain the character of infinity of perfection. It was only by a further deduction that they drew from their first conclusions the idea of this eminent perfection. They accomplished this by reasoning on existent perfections which, of necessity, needed a prime cause.
According to Descartes and the Ontologists who follow him, the human mind has positive and proper concepts of what is immaterial, especially of the Infinite (doctrine of limitation and negation), but this theory of innate ideas is unmistakably erroneous. It is foolish and illogical to suppose that any of the notes which formally belong to the world perceived by our senses can be predicated in the same sense of the Divine Being, which even Descartes himself allows is supersensible and infinite. Not one, then, of the positive and proper notions of the mind, deduced from experienced sense data, can be applied as such to God. It is beyond a doubt that we can have but a negative and analogical knowledge of what is by nature spiritual.

"The finite intelligence of man is capable only of receiving finite intelligible forms. It is clearly impossible for any finite intelligible form to represent the Infinite in a positive and proper way. Our finite intelligence then cannot conceive a proper idea of the Infinite. The Beatific Vision, the promise faith gives us of eternal life, cannot be by means of concepts. It is not given to imperfect beings such as we are to reach God by adequate and proper concepts of the Infinite" (Cardinal Mercier, Natural Theology).

"Our human consciousness of reality is not of a kind that is mere sense knowledge of the material world, immediate spiritual apprehension of the immaterial, intuistic vision of the Divine nature. If we admit the fact of diverse knowledge at all, the natural inference is that the process leading to the supersensible and to God should follow a path similar to that leading to a knowledge leading to anything; for it is perfectly obvious that the knowing subject remains the same under all conditions of cognition. Whatever man knows, he knows according to his nature. Consciousness denies the theory that the animal alone in man grasps the visible world, that the rational supposit apprehends the supersensible, that a 'divinity' in man knows God" (E. J. Welty -- De Simplicitate Dei, Ps. 24, 25).

In reference to this very question Dr. Fulton Sheen asks: "Can the mind, whose object is being in all its latitude,
whose principles are transcendental and necessary, rise up to a
knowledge of what is beyond the factors disclosed by experience?"
His answer follows, as briefly written as the query:

"First of all, there is nothing impossible about such knowledge, for all that is is capable of being known by the mind. Secondly, since the principles of reason are not empirical but necessary, they are capable of leading us out of the morass of a spatial-temporal universe into the realm of causes, finalities and even God" (Religion Without God).

Human knowledge, indeed, proceeds from the data of the senses, directed and interpreted by reason, and it is certainly evident that man cannot arrive at a perfect knowledge of the nature of God which is essentially spiritual and finite. Yet, as I have shown by demonstration and the testimony of eminent authors, the various elements of perfection, dependence and limitation, which exist in all finite beings, while they enable us to prove the existence of God, furnish us also with a certain knowledge of His nature. For dependent beings must ultimately rest on something non-dependent, relative beings on that which is non-relative, and even if this non-dependent and non-relative Being cannot be conceived directly in itself, it is necessarily conceived to some extent through the beings which depend on it and are related to it.

There can be no doubt in the mind of the student who has ardently investigated the Thomistic theory of the analogy of Being, that the various elements of perfection which exist in finite beings furnish us with a certain knowledge of the nature of God, for he will understand that pure perfections, since they formally exist in God, are predicated of Him according to their strict or proper signification: his predications of God and
creatures will not be made in exactly the same way, but analogically.

"For they are predicated of God as they exist in Him, that is, primarily, i.e., in His own right; and hence, with absolute necessity, absolute independence, and in an infinite degree; and they are necessarily predicated of creatures as they exist in them, that is, secondarily, i.e., consequent on God's will; and hence, contingently, with absolute and continued dependence on God, and in a finite way. As God, then, in His own right and in an infinitely perfect way possesses these perfections, and as creatures possess them as a free gift of God, with essential dependence on Him, and in a finite way, they may be said to be predicated not only properly of God, but more properly of Him than of creatures" (Brosnan -- God Infinite and Reason, P. 59)

In summing up this phase of my thesis, I can do no better than to quote Joseph Bittremieux. A clearer notion of the problem and the scholastic solution thereof can be put down in no briefer form.

"Quia objectum adaequatum intellectus est ens, intellectus valet apprehendere etiam divinam essentiam et divina attributa, quae sunt maxime Ens. Ex alia parte repugnat conceptus horum proprietus intellectum abstrahere a rebus materialibus, siquidem haec supra ordinem materialum se habent. Sola igitur via mentis relicta ut ascendat ad cognitionem essentiae et perfectionum divinarum, est per conceptus ex rebus materialibus: conceptus igitur de Deo a nostro intellectu efformati sunt per species alienas: SUNT IGITUR CONCEPTUS ANALOGI" (De Analogica Nostra Cognitione et Praedicatione Dei).

Having outlined the origin of the problem which gave rise to the analogy of being in scholasticism and having completed a demonstration of how St. Thomas surmounted the difficulty through the medium of analogical predication, there now remains but a consideration of the most prominent systems of thought which contradict the solution just expounded.

Probably the most famous of the opposing doctrines comes in the form of tenets after which the Agnostics were named.
Many and varied are the beliefs held by the followers of the system, the predominating element of which is the denial of any possibility for man to acquire knowledge of God. The absurdity of absolute Agnosticism is so pronounced that even the existence of it is questioned. That "I know nothing, not even that I know nothing" is too evidently erroneous to merit refutation here. It is impossible to construct theoretically a self-consistent scheme of total doubt and unbelief. It is the systems of partial Agnosticism, therefore, which merit examination.

These systems of partial Agnosticism do not aim at constructing a complete philosophy of the Unknowable, but at excluding special kinds of truth from the domain of knowledge. "They are buildings," states Edmund T. Shanahan, "designedly left unfinished" (Encyclopedia Catholica, Vol. XIII). An individual survey of "partial Agnosticism," of Shanahan's so-called "unfinished buildings," would require a most extensive separate tract and would not aid to such an extent the purpose of the topic at hand. A general review of the system as a whole will suffice to show that the Agnostics have, in no way, weakened the foundation from whence rises the mighty structure of Thomistic "being."

As previously stated, the exponents of Agnosticism attribute to man the inability to know, not all, but certain kinds of truth. For our purpose, that view which asserts a knowledge of God impossible, is the one to be considered. Having clearly seen how man is quite capable of having a human knowledge of the Divine, we can appreciate the position of E. J. Welty as he asks in his "De Simplicitate Dei:" "If such natural knowledge (of God)
is common to all men, whence the theological agnostic?" His answer comes in the same line: "From the same land as the sceptic, for the agnostic is a theological sceptic."

In tracing the origin of Agnosticism, we are attracted by the teachings of Locke, who is often called the parent of English psychology. He teaches that sensation and reflection are the two sources of knowledge. The former embraces the knowledge of external objects. The latter is so much like this that it might be properly called the internal sense. It is a more refined form of sensation. The radical difference between sense and thought is obliterated; the one runs into the other, of which it is a more shadowy form. The higher powers of mind are ignored. As a consequence we only know the qualities or sensitive appearances of things; the real substance or essence is beyond reach. Thus in Locke we find traces of the modern school of Agnosticism.

Starting from Locke's principle that the mind knows external objects only through mental representations, Berkeley quickly developed into Idealism and his famous "esse est percipt" precludes any possibility of knowing God. Hume combined the Agnosticism of Locke and taught an open and radical scepticism.

The destructive character of Hume's writings aroused Kant and, after he had completed his great work "A Critic of Pure Reason," he was confident that he had given a death blow to scepticism and placed human knowledge on a firm lasting basis.

Kant taught that the mind independent of all experience, creates in itself certain pure forms of knowledge. Into these forms and clothed by them are fitted the materials of knowledge,
i.e., the phenomena furnished by the senses. The forms of Intuition are space and time; the forms of thought are the twelve Categories. The categories are purely ideal; they have no objective validity. Yet they are the direct object of the perceiving mind. For the mind in the act of apprehending an object clothes the object with its own ideal vesture. The forms or vesture constitute with Kant the phenomena. The real objects as they are in their own concrete existence independent of the mind, are never known. Thus we see in Kant that the ideal appearances make up our knowledge; the real things are unknown and unknowable. The speculative reason cannot know God. Thus in attempting to refute Hume, Kant becomes the parent of modern Agnosticism.

That the Creator, manifested to us in the universe, is unknowable was a doctrine sacred to Spencer also and, in varying forms, to many other great philosophical lights of the past century. As I have stated, this is the principle fallacy of nearly all Agnostics. Some, like Huxley, hold for an abstract knowledge of God, which, indeed, is not a rational demonstration of His being and attributes. "It is no actual knowledge of the existent God" (E. J. Welty -- De Simplicitate Dei). Hamilton, following in the lead of Kant, asserts that all human knowledge is relative in respect to things in themselves, to our consciousness, to the objects of our knowledge.

It is beyond a doubt that these relations exist, but herein is no ground for the agnostic position. God becomes known to us precisely because of the relation between various kinds and degrees of being.
"We distinguish the Supreme Being, manifested by predication of attributes peculiar to His nature as recognized by us, through the reasoning process out of the world of experience round about us in the relation of cause and effect. That such a knowledge in the manifestation of His being as one correlative and the cognition in the manifestation in our being as the other correlative does not give us God as He is in Se and to Himself is quite another thing from saying that such a conscious relation is not knowledge at all. It is not divine knowledge, indeed, but it is very valuable human knowledge" (E. J. Welty, De Simplicitate Dei).

The position of the Agnostics becomes all the more insecure when they confuse, as did Spencer, the question of knowing God and the question of defining Him. To conceive the Infinite and Absolute was, for Spencer, a "self-contradictory and unthinkable process." In view of the fact that we are concerned merely with the knowability of a real Being and under no necessity of proving that we can know the "abstract and unlimited and unrelated," this phase of Agnosticism really refutes itself, for knowledge, even though it fall short of definition or explanation, is knowledge still.

I might consider in detail the distinctive notes of many other Agnostics, but they would add little or nothing to the distinctive character of Agnosticism as a system of thought. It teaches with all its disciples that we can only know the external appearances of things, that what we term substance is only a bundle of qualities united by the laws of association, that the real essence is unknown and unknowable. The bounds of human knowledge it ever confines within the domains of sense. The notions of cause, of substance, of essence are explained in what I can no better term than an "agnostical meaning." God, soul, etc., may exist; the human mind is unable to say so; there-
fore to us they are as good as not existing.

Such is the basic teaching of Agnosticism proper and included in it the basic error of confusing concepts, of confounding intellectual with sense knowledge.

"It is clothed in a garb of false humility. It ex-
tols the greatness of the infinite or absolute and be-
littles the strength of the human intelligence. It
thus tends to separate the soul from God by an impass-
ible barrier. Of its nature it is destructive of re-
ligion whose office is the union of man and his maker.
Hence it comes that from one point of view Mr. Spencer
is considered by many thinkers to be a continuator of
the Deism of the last century; whereas from another he
is held to represent what is best in Spinoza's teach-
ing, and thus to stand as the ablest defender of Cos-
mic Theism or rather Cosmic Pantheism.

"Against Agnosticism we teach that there is a Phil-
osophy as well as a History of Religion. It is a
science which deals with the fundamental questions of
the soul. It infers conclusions from physical, moral
and intellectual data. From a study of the world and
of man it rises to the conception of an infinite mind
which has fashioned and guides all. The inference is
sound and certain. The course of reasoning by which
it was reached can be thrown into a system and we have
the science of Theodicy. The light which guides us is
the light of reason. Philosophy teaches the possibil-
ity and History the fact of divine revelation. God
has taught us more about Himself. The only-begotten
of the Father hath revealed the treasures of grace and
of glory hidden from the human mind. The revealed
truths form the science of Theology. In the beginning
of the Summa of Theology, St. Thomas discusses the
problem whether Theology may be termed a science, and
answers in the affirmative. The reasons he deduces
are valid today" (J. T. Driscoll -- Christian Philo-
osophy, Ps. 22, 23).

Thus it is seen how the Agnostic errs in confining the
bounds of human knowledge within the domains of sense. For our
knowledge of God is indeed finite and relative and conditioned
to our capacity. Our concepts are not contradictory, but in-
adequate.

"God is by reason of His fullness, of His greatness,
of His pure reality, exactly by reason of that which
we try to designate in the terms of infinity and absol-
uteness at once the most knowable and the least completely
known. The Agnostic must perforce be content with nebulous abstractions, -- this because of a fallacious theory of knowledge. Scholasticism develops the inherent germ of divine knowledge by reasoning on the data given in the surrounding world of reality and proceeds through it to an equally real Being, independent of and the Cause of all else" (E. J. Welty -- De Simplicitate Dei).

Having pointed out the "absurdum est" of the Agnostic "belief," little remains to be said of the dyed-in-the-wool Atheist, he who calls into question the existence of any form of Deity. Agnosticism is certainly akin to Atheism, and if the Agnostic errs in asserting that a knowledge of God is impossible, i.e., if it is possible to have a knowledge of the Infinite, and, as I have shown, we do have this very knowledge, how ridiculous and untenable must be the atheistic belief, -- that there is no God at all. For certainly a divine Being must exist if we humans have knowledge of such a Being. Virtually every phase of this treatise may be found, upon analysis, to be a direct refutation of what the pure Atheist (if such there be) asserts, -- that there is no God. Despite the fact that the common opinion of thinking men does not allow for the existence of such an atheist, still there are certain advanced phases of materialistic philosophy which should rightly be included under this head. Materialism, which professes to find in matter its own cause and explanation, may go farther and positively exclude the existence of any spiritual cause. That such a dogmatic assertion is both unreasonable and illogical needs no demonstration, for it is an inference not warranted by the facts nor justified by the laws of thought.

It is apparent that Atheism can result from only two misconceptions, the first from a consideration of the paucity
of actual data available for the arguments proving the existence of a supersensible and spiritual Cause, the second, which amounts to the same thing, from the attributing of all cosmic change and development to the self-contained potentialities of an infinite matter. From whichever thesis this Atheism proceeds it issues in Agnosticism or Materialism.

The explanation offered by the Materialists bristles with even greater absurdities than does that of the Agnostics. Many reasons could be given for its rejection but it suffices to note here that the "one substance" of the materialists, by means of which they attempt to explain the sensible world and its origin, is actually defined in terms of the material -- as the sum of atoms, or of chemical and physical processes. Similarly they apply to what they call the Unknown Reality specific attributes of the physical universe. Among the many absurdities contained herein will be noted that the fundamental substance postulated by the Materialists has all the attributes of a produced being, and yet it is said to be unproduced. Moreover the motion it postulates from eternity is impossible. It necessarily implies that an infinite duration of time has been passed in reaching the present moment in the world's history. This implication is impossible. Finally it is beyond question that matter and material energy and motion cannot explain the lower forms of life, much less can they explain intellectual life, the origin of the soul, free-will, etc. In the light of these absurdities the Materialists and their doctrine of "unproduced cause" and "infinite matter" fails to effect the Thomistic notion of the Infinite and the manner in which men, by means of analogical predi-
cation, come to know It. Contrary to what they hold I have already shown that, above the notions we have concerning the material world, our human minds are capable of possessing analogical conceptions of God. We are not, indeed, able to predicate adequately of Him what is common also to material beings; nevertheless, these concepts which we have taken originally from the material world of things, are, so to speak, "refined" (c.f. Mercier, Natural Theology) by the process of which every element of imperfection is eliminated. Without strictly signifying what in a positive manner is peculiar to God, these concepts are in reality applicable to Him alone, and thus they afford us a true knowledge of the divine Being, the first Cause, the Summum Ens, the Creator of all things. The Atheist, whether he traverse the highroad of Agnosticism or Materialism, goes sadly amuck in the maze of incontrovertible facts, the most important of which I have enumerated.

A consideration of the analogy of being in Scholasticism cannot be complete without a word devoted to the Pantheists, those who identify God and the sensible world. If, as they teach, beneath the apparent diversity and multiplicity of things in the universe, there is one only being, absolutely necessary, eternal and infinite, the analogical predication of my earlier paragraphs will take on an altogether new aspect, for then, in truth, man may have a positive direct knowledge of the Divine, of the God in nature. Could the Schoolmen in all their years of study have overlooked this possibility elaborated by the Pantheists?

In reviewing the history of Pantheism, we find that it dates back to the very dawn of philosophical speculation. In
the remnants and records of human thought, preserved through the ravages of time and the changing fortunes of the human race, this theory appears in all its phases. The Pantheism of the Hindus is set forth in the Upanishads and exerted a deep and lasting influence on subsequent Indian thought. The Eleatic school in Greece, e.g., Xenophanes, Parmenides, the most powerful philosophical school in Rome, e.g., the Stoics, perpetuated the teaching for centuries. We find it proposed in the crude and bold teachings of Scotus Erigena, in the subtility of Avincennes, in the mystic dreamings of Master Eckart, in the ever-changing and strangely contradictory systems of the German disciples of Kant. In our own time it is worded in all the charms of prose and poetic diction, with a certain elevation of tone and a dreamy aspiration after the ideal of all that is, and a vague fellowship with nature and with man, that appeals to the cultured and meditative mind and seems to contain the promise of what the human soul has ever longed for: Light, strength and rest. But the promise is belied, the appearance is deceiving; an alluring but dry and empty husk is offered, or a shadow which takes form and substance only in the darkening mist, but recedes further and further from the eager seeker and vanishes into thin air before the growing light.

The fundamental and characteristic doctrine of Pantheism consists in identifying God with all that exists. Thus, everything is God and God is everything, or rather God is the only real substance. In setting forth this principle, its defenders separate into different schools. Historically and philosophically viewed, Pantheism assumes different phases. Created
things are considered as emanations from, or manifestations of, the one divine substance; or God, the universal, indeterminate Being, by a process of self determination constitutes the universe of beings distinct from one another.

To delve into a complete survey of every pantheistic school would be to degress from the topic at hand. However, the Upanishads, Gnostics and Neo-Platonists as well as Scotus Erigena with their theory of emanation, the Stoics and Spinoza with their theory of manifestation, together with Kant, Fichte, Schelling, Schopenhauer and Hartman, standard-bearers of German Transcendentalism, could be met on their own ground -- and vanquished -- by the logical theories of Thomas Aquinas and his followers. It will suffice to call attention to the fact that, far from giving us an exalted idea of God's wisdom, goodness and power, Pantheism, in point of fact, makes void the attributes which belong essentially to the Divine nature. For the Pantheist, God is not a personal Being. He is not an intelligent Cause of the world, designing, creating and governing it in accordance with the free determination of His wisdom. If consciousness is ascribed to Him as the One Substance, extension is also said to be His attribute (Spinoza) or He attains to self-consciousness only through a process of evolution (Hegel). But this very process implies that God is not from eternity perfect: He is forever changing, advancing from one degree of perfection to another. Thus God is not only impersonal, but also changeable and finite, -- which is equivalent to saying that He is not God. It is quite obvious that the identification of Creator with creatures would result in many contradictions in the sphere of Theodicy alone.
A word remains to be said about the Modernists and the purpose of this treatise will have been accomplished. A host of modern philosophers, more or less Kantian, and in the true sense of the word Agnostics, teach, in part, that God's existence in the actual world cannot be demonstrated, but that, through a natural though blind instinct, an existence of some kind is to be accorded to Him.

In a previous chapter dealing with Agnosticism, I referred to Kant as the parent of modern Agnosticism, and correctly, because he is the father of the system which attributes, to what in that system is called the "Practical Reason," whatever belief or faith man has in the existence of God, the freedom of the human will, and the immortality of the human soul. We say "whatever belief man has," for according to Kant, man neither has nor can have any knowledge of these affairs. Whatever else may be said of Kant's Practical Reason, this may be said here, that it is in no sense a cognitive faculty, but the will of man, which acts independently of reason, and with absolutely no reasonable foundation. It is a blind guide, born of a system that is destructive of all truth, morality and religion.

In a previous paragraph I described Kant's position as an Agnostic and outlined the principle fallacies in his system. It will be sufficient here to note that, though abounding in glaring inconsistencies, -- "glorious inconsistencies" one of his admirers calls them -- the influence of Kant's system on modern thought is almost beyond estimation. Modern philosophy has all but rejected reason universally as a guide to God, or in any of the weightier interests of life, and to Kant as to an in-
fallible teacher it appeals for justification in this rejection. This is the destructive heritage that Kant has left to modern philosophy.

An explanation has already been given (P. 24) of how that, for Kant, ideal appearances make up our knowledge, real things are unknown and unknowable and the speculative reason cannot know God. Kant's system, however, does not stop here. The prime motive he had in destroying reason's power to reach God, he tells us, was not to bring about Atheism, on the contrary, it was to protect God, religion and morality from the many enemies who were making use of reason to destroy them. So we see that by removing the fundamental truths of religion and morality from the reach of reason, Kant wished to protect them, little seeing that such removal would necessarily destroy them. Heine saw with clear vision the result of Kant's philosophy, — "I can hear the bell. Kneel down. They are bringing the Sacraments to a dying God." In this brief statement, he evinced the soul of Modernism.

Briefly, the Modernists blindly postulate a god of a kind to render service to man such, that man may find it possible to obey laws which emanate from himself. Their knowledge of God then hinges around an act of the will, setting up a God with a man-fashioned nature to serve a man-created desire. The intellect, therefore, no longer discovers a God existing outside of man, whose existence and attributes are His by divine right, eternally and absolutely, on whom man utterly depends, whose supreme will man is bound to obey, who is to be reverenced, worshipped and adored; but the will of man conjures up a god, whose
existence is not known and cannot be known, and who cannot con-
sequently be treated as a real being, and whose nature and at-
tributes are fashioned by man to suit man's self-made needs.

The Modernists err at every turn but the vital fallacy
which permeates their whole system of thought is seen to be the
same as that made by the Agnostics, -- that man by the natural
light of human reason cannot come to a knowledge of God. Hence,
for them, all proofs for God's existence advanced in Natural
Theology are worthless. Neither, they say, can the word of man,
nor the teaching of man reveal God to us. God is the object of
faith-knowledge, and as such is known only by a direct revelation
made by God to each individual man.

"The complaint of Scholasticism against modernity
is not its progress or its thought but its modern
thinkers, its rejection or degradation of the intelli-
gence, man's highest means of attaining truth and the
best of life. They would have us be angelic in know-
ledge, not human. Ideally modernity sets up an in-
telligence which has broken with the lower order of
things. De facto it grants us but a degenerate sense
knowledge and has broken with the higher order of
things, the higher order of being. The hypothesis of
intuistic vision is simple hypostasis of sense and
emotion. So far from explaining and unifying the
world of facts it tears down the whole edifice of con-
tinuity and unity. It is not a philosophy" (E. J.
Welty, -- De Simplicitate Dei, P. 4).

In view of what I have demonstrated concerning the anal-
ogy of being in the Thomistic system and the fallacies I have
pointed out in the opposing schools of thought, I can not more
fittingly conclude this treatise than does Rev. E. J. Welty his
chapter on "The Modern Irrational Approach to God:"

"The Thomistic theory of knowledge has this Aristote-
lian virtue of the mean in that it explains all our
knowledge -- that of God not excepted -- from the
world without as a starting point, by assimilation on
the basis of immateriality. Thus it avoids the Scylla
of extreme realism and the Charybdis of pure idealism. The human personality is by no means fathomed to its depths, but the crown of its many-sided perfection is the intellect. Intelligence is the highest thing in life. "Intelligere, vita quaedam est et est perfectissimum quod est in vita." This faculty goes outside to look for its God, and finds Him: through matter as the creating Cause, through living things as the Source of life, through man as the Supreme Intelligence" (De Simplicitate Dei, P. 7).

The unconquerable barrier separating the Infinite from the world of the finite, the barrier before which Parmenides and Anaxagoras stood awed and hopelessly lost, to pass which Plato and Aristotle fought gallantly in vain, in the face of which Agnostics, Materialists, Pantheists and Modernists built so many towers of Babel and left us but a "confusion of tongues," this barrier the Scholastics have destroyed. In their doctrine of the analogy of being they have given to the philosophic world a "bridge of thought" whereby the one, eternal, infinite Being can be known by the many, created, human beings of earth.
Conclusion

In these pages, though considering only one phase of
the Thomistic system, I have pointed out that the focal center
where all rays of the mighty system meet and from which they
radiate is being. Whatever problems were faced by St. Thomas
all become clarified by a new light and find their solution in
a constant reduction to being. In the ontological order nothing
exists or can exist that is not being. In the field of know-
ledge, with which I have been concerned, nothing is conceivable
except through the mediation of being. Analogical predication
of being enables us, finite though we be, to reach and know,
though imperfectly and always with a human knowledge, the Infin-

ite.

If these pages carry the convincing impression that this
"highroad of being" is capable of leading us, through the pro-
cess of analogical predication, out of the morass of a spatial-
temporal universe into the realm of causes, finalities and God
then I have accomplished my purpose and the success of the en-
deavor is assured.
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