



# On angels and human beings : Did Thomas Aquinas succeed in demonstrating the existence of angels ?

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**ON ANGELS AND HUMAN BEINGS :  
DID THOMAS AQUINAS SUCCEED IN DEMONSTRATING  
THE EXISTENCE OF ANGELS?**

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*Résumé*

*Les seules preuves philosophiques de l'existence des substances séparées qui répondent aux exigences épistémologiques de Thomas sont des arguments aristotéliens dont les conclusions, basées sur des prémisses d'une astronomie et une physique obsolètes, sont inacceptables. Thomas prit des distances à leur égard et, laissé sans alternative philosophique, proposa une série d'arguments théologiques dont la cohérence et valeur logique sont mis en question. Puisqu'il n'y a pas de preuve philosophique de l'existence des substances séparées, leur notion devrait être exclue du discours philosophique.*

*Abstract*

*The only philosophical proofs of the existence of separate substances that meet Thomas' epistemological principles are Aristotelian arguments whose conclusions, based on obsolete astronomical and physical premises, are unacceptable today. Thomas distanced himself from them and, left without philosophical alternatives, he proposed a series of theological arguments whose consistency and logical value are put into question. Since there are no philosophical proofs that separate substances exist, their notion should be excluded from philosophical discourse.*

*Resumen*

*Las únicas pruebas filosóficas de la existencia de sustancias separadas que responden a la exigencias epistemológicas de Tomás son argumentos aristotélicos cuyas conclusiones, basadas sobre premisas de una astronomía y una física obsoletas, son hoy inacceptables. Tomás se distanció de ellos y, ya sin alternativa filosófica, propuso una serie de argumentos teológicos cuya coherencia y valor lógico son puestos en duda. Dado que no hay prueba filosófica de la existencia de sustancias separadas, su noción debería ser excluida del discurso filosófico.*

[Mots-clés : Thomas d'Aquin, substances séparées, anges]

Separate substances were an undisputed part of the world in which Thomas lived every day\*. Ever since Anaxagoras postulated a separate Intelligence as the organizing principle of the world, philosophers have asserted the existence of separate entities. Plato's Ideas, Aristotle's Movers of the heavenly spheres and Plotinus' Intelligences and Subsistent Souls were considered more real than our material world. This tradition was confirmed and elevated to the status of incontrovertible truth by the authority of the Scriptures and the teachings of the theologians, among which the ps.-Dionysius, a Neoplatonist, was considered by Thomas Aquinas as the highest authority in matters related to separate substances (angels)<sup>1</sup>. But how can we establish philosophically the existence of separate substances and, if they exist, what kind of knowledge can we have of their nature? Thomas did not provide any original philosophical demonstration of the existence of separate substances. He used Aristotle's proofs with critical independence, and grew disappointed with these arguments for theological reasons. As for the knowledge of their nature, he recognized that, due to our abstractive way of understanding, philosophers have said nothing by way of demonstration (*demonstrative*) and very little in terms of probable opinions (*probabiliter*) about their essence<sup>2</sup>. He concluded that Philosophy can prove that separate substances exist, but it cannot prove what they are<sup>3</sup>. But if that is so, the existence of separate substances cannot be proved by means of demonstrative syllogisms in which the essence of the separate substance plays the role of middle term, or by arguments in which the existence and essence of a cause is proved from its effects because these are proportionate to the cause in essence and power; it can only be proved by demonstrations in which effects that are *not* proportionate to the cause in essence and power are used as means to prove the existence of the cause. In Thomas terms: the philosophical discourse on separate substance does not use «*propter quid*» demonstrations, but only «*quia*» demonstrations<sup>4</sup>, because there is no proportion

\* A synthesis of this paper was read, on November 7, 2008, at the John Wippel's Lectures Series, organized by The Catholic University of America in homage to the distinguished historian of Thomas's thought.

(1) In chapters 1 and 2 of *De substantiis separatis* (Editio Leonina, 1969, tomus XL, p. D 41-46), Anaxagoras, Plato and Aristotle are recognized as the principal sources in matters related to the knowledge of separate substances; in chap. 18, v. 8-12, the supreme authority of the ps.-Dionysius, «*qui super alios ea quae ad spirituales substantias pertinent excellentius tradidit*», is asserted. The text was written between 1271-1273.

(2) THOMAS AQUINAS, *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum* II (hereafter *II Sent.*), d. 3, q. 1, a. 3, ed. R. P. MANDONNET, Paris, Lethielleux, 1929: «*Philosophi de illis nihil quasi demonstrative, et pauca probabiliter dixerunt*».

(3) THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa contra Gentiles* (hereafter *Scg*) III, 41, Editio Leonina Manualis, Roma, 1930, p. 267a: «*Non est enim aliqua speculativa scientia quae doceat de aliqua substantiarum separatarum quid est, sed solum quia sunt*»; ID., *Quaestio de veritate*, q. 18, a. 5, v. 142-171, Editio Leonina, Roma, 1970-1976, tomus XXII, (distinction between *cognitio «an sit»* et «*quid sit*»), notice: «*Et ideo naturali cognitione homo non potest pertingere ut cognoscat angelos per essentiam*».

(4) ID., *Summa theologiae* (hereafter *STh.*) I, q. 2, a. 2, Editio Leonina, Roma, 1888-1906, tomus IV-XII: «*(Una demonstratio est) per causam, et dicitur propter quid, et haec est per priora simpliciter. Alia est per effectum, et dicitur demonstratio quia, et haec est per ea quae sunt priora quoad nos*». In

between our knowledge, dependant on sensible images, and the pure essence of separate substances<sup>5</sup>, or between the sensible effects that we take as point of departure of our demonstration, namely the movement of heavenly bodies, and their cause. Given this double disproportion, we can understand what separate substances are *not* rather than what they are<sup>6</sup>.

Thomas's arguments for the existence of separate substances or angels are of two kinds. Some are strictly philosophical, «*quia*» demonstrations, based on sensible effects; others are based on theological principles. Obviously, there are no philosophical «*propter quid*» demonstrations.

#### I. DEMONSTRATION OF THE EXISTENCE OF ANGELS BASED ON THEIR EFFECTS

«*Quia*» demonstrations are found in Thomas's *Commentaries* on Aristotle's *Physics*, *Treatise on Heaven* and *Metaphysics*, as well as in his personal writings. They should be distinguished from the proof of the existence of an immobile, eternal mover found in *Metaphysics* XII, 6, a text that can be read as referring to a First Mover (in singular) or to separate substances (in plural), which for Aristotle are also divine<sup>7</sup>. In his commentary of this passage Thomas, following Aristotle,

«*propter quid*» demonstrations, the *medium demonstrationis*, i.e. the cause of the truth of the conclusion, is the essence. Cf. ID., *Expositio Libri Posteriorum* II, 1 v. 186-187, Editio Leonina retractata, Roma, 1989, tomus I\* 2: «*Causa est medium demonstrationis que facit scire*»; *ibid.*, II, 13 v. 13-14: «*Quod quid est uel propter quid accipiatur ut medium in demonstratione*»; ID., *In duodecim libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis Expositio* (hereafter *In Metaph.*) VI, 1, n. 1149, ed. M. R. CATHALAN-R. SPIAZZI, Roma, Marietti, 1964: «*Definitio est medium in demonstratione propter quid*»; THOMAS AQUINAS, *Compendium Theologiae* I, c. 10 v. 2-3, Editio Leonina, Roma, 1979, tomus XLII: «*Essentia enim uniuscuiusque rei est illud quod significat diffinitio eius*»; ID., *Sententia Libri De anima* I, 4 v. 244-250, Editio Leonina, Roma, 1984, tomus XLV: «*Diffinitio est principium demonstrationis rerum, res autem diffiniuntur per essentialia, unde diuersae diffinitiones rerum diuersa principia essentialia demonstrant, ex quibus una sciencia differt ab alia*»; *In Metaph.* V, 10, n. 902: «*Quidditas rei, quam significat definitio, dicitur substantia uniuscuiusque*».

(5) ScG III, 47: «*Substantias separatas in hac vita intelligere non possumus propter connaturalitatem intellectus nostri ad phantasmata*».

(6) THOMAS AQUINAS, *Quaestiones disputatae de anima* (hereafter *Q. de anima*), q. 16, v. 318-338, Editio Leonina, Paris-Roma, 1996, tomus XXIV-1: «*In tantum igitur anima, dum est unita corpori, potest ad cognitionem substantiarum separatarum ascendere, in quantum potest per species a fantasmatis acceptas manuduci. Hoc autem non est ut intelligatur de eis quid sunt [...] set possumus hoc modo de substantiis separatis aliquo modo cognoscere quia sunt: sicut per effectus deficientes deuenimus in causas excellentes ut cognoscamus de eis tantum quia sunt; et dum cognoscimus quia sunt causas excellentes, scimus de eis quia non sunt tales quales sunt earum effectus. Et hoc est scire de eis magis quid non sunt quam quid sunt*». Scg III, 41, p. 267a: «*Si etiam ponamus quod substantiae separatae orbes moveant [...] hic modus cognitionis substantiae separatae ex sensibilibus non sufficit ad sciendam quidditatem ipsarum [...] nam virtutes substantiarum separatarum excedunt effectus sensibiles omnes quod intellectu comprehendimus*».

(7) Aristotle himself uses the singular and the plural in *Metaphysics* XII, 6, 1071b 3 *sqq.*: «*There must be some substance which is eternal and immutable [...]. Therefore there must be a principle of this kind whose essence is actuality. Furthermore these substances must be immaterial; for they must be eternal if anything is*» (ARISTOTLE, *The Metaphysics*, trad. H. TREDENICK, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1961).

switches occasionally from the singular to the plural, giving the impression that the argument proves not only the existence of the First Mover, but also the existence of separate substances. According to Thomas, the argument proving the existence of an eternal mover rests on the premise that the movement is eternal, but since the reasons given in the *Physics* to support this premise are not necessary, the argument is only probable, not demonstrative. However, Aristotle succeeds in proving necessarily that the First Cause must be eternal, immaterial and pure actuality, because the existence of a non eternal world could not be explained if the First Cause did not possess those ontological properties. This confirms that, for Thomas, *Metaphysics* XII, 6 concerns the existence of God rather than the existence of separate substances<sup>8</sup>, and that the proofs presented in this chapter of the *Metaphysics* and in the *Physics* are proofs of the existence of the First Mover (God) only<sup>9</sup>. In this paper I will not discuss Thomas's demonstrations of the existence of God which, in spite of their weaknesses, are more philosophical and rigorous than his demonstrations of the existence of angels.

*The movement of celestial bodies is caused by separate substances*

The philosophical arguments for the existence of separate substances are based on the presumption that, besides the movement of the sphere of the whole universe, situated beyond the sphere of the fixed stars and caused by the First Mover, there are also the perpetual movements of the heavenly bodies, each one of which is caused by a perpetual and immobile mover, an immaterial substance which has the infinite power to move for an infinite time. An argument of this kind

(8) *In Metaph.* XII, 5, n. 2488-2499. Notice: «(n. 2492) *Primo* (ostendit) quod ad sempiternitatem motus sustinenda necesse est ponere substantiam sempiternam semper moventem vel agentem [...]. (n. 2494) *Secundo* [...] quod non solum sit aliqua substantia sempiterna movens et agens, sed etiam quod eius substantia sit actus [...]. (n. 2495) *Tertio* [...] concludit huiusmodi substantiam esse immaterialem [...]. Ex praedictis sequitur quod huiusmodi substantias quae sunt principia motus sempiterni [jump to the plural, following Aristotle] oportet esse sine materia [...]. Oportet igitur eas esse sempiternas si aliquid aliud est sempiternum, utpote motus et tempus. [...] (n. 2496) Aristoteles [...] credit necessarium fore quod motus sit sempiternus et similiter tempus [...]. (n. 2497) Sed tamen sciendum quod rationes ab eo inductae in VIII Physicorum, ex quarum suppositione hic procedit, non sunt demonstrationes simpliciter sed probabiles rationes [...]. (n. 2499) Sed quamvis rationes probantes sempiternitatem motus et temporis non sint demonstrativae et ex necessitate concludentes, tamen ea quae hic probantur de sempiternitate et immaterialitate primae substantiae ex necessitate sequuntur, quia si non fuerit mundus aeternus, necesse est quod fuerit productus in esse ab aliquo praexistente [...]. Et cum hoc non possit procedere in infinitum [...] necesse est ponere aliquam substantiam sempiternam in cuius substantia non sit potentia, et per consequens immaterialem ».

(9) *In Metaph.* XII, 6, n. 2508: «Ex perpetuitate motus caeli concludit perpetuitatem primi moventis immobilis [...]. (n. 2517) [...] si caelum est perpetuum et motus est perpetuus, necesse est aliquid esse movens perpetuum [...] quod non movetur. Probatum est enim in VIII Physicorum quod cum non sit abire in infinitum in moventibus et motis, oportet devenire in aliquod primum movens immobile ». Cf. also *In Metaph.* XII, 8, n. 2547, and THOMAS AQUINAS, *In Aristotelis libros De caelo et Mundo, De generatione et corruptione, Meteorologicorum Expositio* (hereafter *In De caelo*) II, 8, n. 373, ed. R. M. SPIAZZI, Roma, Marietti, 1952.

is found in Thomas's *Commentary on the Metaphysics*, XII, 9. It is strictly a «*quia*» argument because it argues from a sensible effect (the perpetual movement of the celestial spheres) to the existence of a cause (the separate substances) which is more perfect in essence and power than the effect. The sources of this argument, according to Thomas are found in Aristotle's *Physics* and *Treatise on Heaven*. Before analyzing the argument, it is important to emphasize that by «heavenly bodies» it must be understood the «celestial spheres», that the number of separate substances is not related to the number of heavenly bodies but to the number of movements affecting these bodies, and that «there are more spatial motions than there are bodies which move in space, as it is obvious to those who have even a modest grasp of Astronomy» (*Metaph.* XII, 8, 1073b 8-10). According to Aristotle, the total number of motions of the spheres, taking into account «both those which move the planets and those which counter act these, will be 55, but if we do not invest the moon and the sun with the additional movements proper to them, there will be 47» (*ibid.*, 1074a 10-14). Aristotle is not sure of these numbers and is happy to leave the logical deduction of the correct number of motions to «more competent thinkers». But he is firmly convinced of the strict correlation between the number of movements and the number of movers. Thomas understood correctly this aspect of the theory<sup>10</sup>, but he rejected it because it is not necessary that every separate substance be the mover of a celestial sphere and not logically inconvenient that separate substances exist which have a higher status than those which are movers of spheres, and because the theory subordinates the separate substances, which are spiritual, to the celestial spheres, which are material<sup>11</sup>.

(10) *In Metaph.* XII, 9, n. 2556: «Ostendit quod post primum principium necesse est ponere plures instantias immateriales sempiternas, dicens quod *praeter simplicitatem motum localem universi* [...] quem motum causat prima substantia immobilis, *videmus* aliquod motus planetarum qui etiam sunt sempiterni, quia corpus circulare, scilicet caelum, est sempiternum, unde sempiternitas motus non tollitur per corruptionem mobilis [...]. Et ista probata sunt in scientia naturali, tam in libro *Physicorum* quam in libro *De caelo*. Unde *necesse est quod quilibet horum motuum moveatur a motore per se immobili et a substantia sempiterna*. (n. 2557) [...] ideo necesse est *quia astra sempiterna sunt et substantiae quaedam sunt, unde oportet quod movens ea etiam sempiternum sit et substantia* [...] necesse est *quot sunt lationes astrorum tot esse substantias* quae sunt naturaliter sempiternae et secundum se immobiles et sine magnitudine, propter causam supra assignatam, quia scilicet movent tempore infinito et sic per consequens virtute infinita. Manifestum est igitur quod sunt aliquae substantiae immateriales secundum numerum *motuum* astrorum, et quod earum etiam ordo est secundum ordinem eorundem motuum». For Aristotle's evolution concerning what is moved by the First Cause; cf. *ibid.*, n. 2558 and *In De caelo* II, 17, n. 456.

(11) *In Metaph.* XII, 10, n. 2586: «Concludit ex numero motuum caelestium numerum substantiarum immaterialium[...]. (n. 2589) Non est necessarium scilicet quod omnis substantia immaterialis et impassibilis *sit finis alicuius motus caelestis*. Potest enim dici quod sunt aliquae substantiae separatae altiores quam ut sint proportionatae quasi fines caelestibus motibus, quod ponere non est inconueniens. Non enim substantiae immaterialis sunt propter corporalia sed magis e converso». Similar critique in *ScG* III, chap. 92: «Haec autem probatio *non habet necessitatem*» and *STh.* I, q. 50, a. 3, ad 3.

Thomas's critique is not well founded. A «*quia*» demonstration cannot conclude that there are more causes than those which are required to explain the effects that are its point of departure. And while the mere logical possibility of the existence of separate substances that are not movers of the spheres is not in itself «inconvenient», it certainly is inconvenient to infer their actual existence from their possible existence, which is exactly what Thomas does. Finally, Thomas attributes to the *Metaphysics* a meaning not intended by its author. Aristotle says that «if everything which moves exists for the sake of that which is moved, and every motion for the sake of something which is moved, no motion can exist for the sake of itself or of some other motion». If that were the case, the series of motions would be infinite, which is impossible. Consequently, «all motions must exist for the sake of the stars [...] the divine bodies that are moved through the heavens» (*Metaph.* XII, 8, 1074a 20-32). This does not mean that the mover (the separate substance) is subordinated to the mobile (the heavenly body), as Thomas suggests, but only that a movement for the sake of movement is impossible. The superiority of the movers is guaranteed because they are not mere efficient causes, but final causes as well, which «should be regarded as an end» (*ibid.*, 1074a 20-21), a distinction that he acknowledged in his treatise *De substantiis separatis* (chap. 2, l. 50 et *sq.*), and because, even as efficient causes, they are superior to the mobile as that which is in actuality is superior to that which is in potency. The thesis that movement is for the sake of that which is moved is indeed equivalent to the principle «*actus actiui et motiui fit in paciente et non in agente et mouente*» that Thomas has always accepted (*Sentencia libri De anima* II, 26 v. 146-183; *In Phys.* III, 5, n. 309-317). If his critique were well founded, he would never have tried to demonstrate the existence of God as the First Mover.

When the «*quia*» argument of the *Commentary on the Metaphysics* is analyzed in the light of its sources, namely the *Physics* and the *De caelo* it appears that its premise, *i.e.*, the regularity and perpetuity of the celestial movements, more than an observable fact, is the result of an inference that Thomas Litt did not hesitate to call a «pseudo-déduction»<sup>12</sup>. According to Aristotle's theory, there is a correspondence between the two simple geometrical lines, the straight and the circumference, and the two simple movements, the straight one and the circular. The straight movement is divided in two, one towards the centre of the universe, the other towards the periphery (*De caelo* I, 2, 268b 17-24) and affects the inferior bodies, which have not reached the perfection of its essence or their proper place. The circular movement is proper to the hollow celestial spheres, which have reached indefectibly the perfection of their essence and exist in their proper place (*locus*). The difference of movements proves that celestial bodies and inferior bodies are different in nature: since movement is proportionate to the mobile as the act is to its potency, a body which is only subject to a circular movement is not

(12) Th. LITT, *Les Corps célestes dans l'univers de saint Thomas d'Aquin*, Louvain-Paris, Institut supérieur de philosophie-B. Nauwelaerts, 1963 (Philosophes Médiévaux, VII), p. 44-45.

subject to generation and corruption and cannot be separated from its place by an act of violence, while bodies affected by a straight movement, the term of which is the acquisition of the form or the arrival to their natural place, are subject to generation and corruption<sup>13</sup>. The incorruptible nature of celestial bodies is attested then by their circular movement. These very same ideas are found in Thomas's most personal theological writings. He writes, for instance, in the *Summa Theologiae*: « Since [Aristotle] says that heavenly bodies have a natural movement different from that of the elements, *it follows* that they have a different nature from them. For movement in a circle, which is proper to the heavenly bodies, is not by contraries, whereas the movements of the elements are mutually opposite, one tending upwards, another downwards: so therefore the heavenly body is without contrariety, whereas the elemental bodies have contrariety in their nature. And as generation and corruption are from contraries, it follows that, whereas the elements are corruptible, the heavenly bodies are incorruptible »<sup>14</sup>.

The incorruptibility of the heavenly bodies affects the very notion of « matter ». Defined as the subject of potentiality and privation vis-à-vis the form, matter was originally used by Aristotle to explain the substantial movement of generation and corruption. The matter of a heavenly body, however, is in potentiality only to the form that it actually possess. It is perfected by its form « in such a way that there remains in it no potentiality with respect to being, but only to place ». Consequently « *the matter of the heavenly bodies and of the elements is not the same, except by analogy, in so far as they agree in the character of potentiality* »<sup>15</sup>. While the matter of terrestrial bodies is in potentiality to all the forms it can receive and is the subject of privation, the matter of celestial bodies is not in potentiality to another form but only to a place (in the circle) and is not the subject of privation. Heavenly bodies and their immaterial movers, characterized by the absence of contrariety, constitute the realm of incorruptibility<sup>16</sup>.

(13) *In De caelo* I, 4, n. 37 (cit. in Th. LITT, *Les Corps célestes...*, op. cit., p. 47).

(14) *STh.* I, q. 66, a. 2 (cit. in Th. LITT, *Les Corps célestes...*, op. cit., p. 48-49); cf. *II Sent.*, d. 14, q. 1, a. 3, ad 3: « Corpus caeleste non est generabile nec est corruptibile sicut corpus nostrum »; *ScG* III, 82 et IV, 84: « Corpora caelestia sunt incorruptibilia et transmutari non possunt a sua naturali dispositione »; *Compendium Theologiae* I, c. 74 v. 44-52: « Corpora caelestia, que generationi et corruptioni non subiciuntur quia in hiis contrarietas non inuenitur ».

(15) *STh.* I, q. 66, a. 2 et ad 4. Cf. THOMAS AQUINAS, *Quaestio de spiritualibus creaturis* (hereafter *Q. de spiritualibus creaturis*), q. 8, v. 215-218, Editio Leonina, Paris-Roma, 2000, tomus XXIV-2: « Materia inferiorum corporum, que est potentia ad esse, differt a materia caelestium corporum, que est potentia ad ubi »; *In De caelo* I, 6, n. 63: « Materia caelestis corporis est alia et alterius rationis a materia inferiorum corporum ».

(16) *Q. de veritate*, q. 5, a. 2, ad 6: « Potentia ad generationem et corruptionem inest alicui secundum quod eius natura in potentia est ad contrarias formas; et hoc modo corpora caelestia et substantiae spirituales neque ad generationem neque ad corruptionem potentiam habent »; THOMAS AQUINAS, *Quaestiones disputatae de potentia* (hereafter *Q. de potentia*), q. 5, a. 8, in *Quaestiones disputatae*, Editio IX revisa, ed. P. BAZZI-M. CALCATERRA et alii, Roma, Marietti, 1953: « In corporibus inferioribus non est tota potentialitas completa per actum, eo quod materia substans uni formae remanet in potentia ad formam aliam [...] materia corporis caelestis non est in potentia ad aliam formam, unde sua potentialitas tota est terminata per formam quam habet »; THOMAS AQUINAS,

This Astronomy, which denies the universal validity of the laws of nature and the community of matter that links the Earth to the rest of the Universe, has no scientific value, but it is the foundation of the only «*quia*» demonstrations of the existence of angels that Thomas knew. If neither the heavenly bodies nor their movement are incorruptible, it is not necessary to introduce separate causes of these movements. And even if they were, I doubt that anyone would be prepared to say that they are moved by angels. On those premises however rest the «*quia*» arguments that Thomas has to prove the existence of angels.

There is no doubt that Thomas assumed these Aristotelian arguments as his own. In *Summa contra Gentiles* II, chapter 91, he writes that the cause of a continuous, regular and *indefectible* movement is a mover which is not moved *per se* or *per accidens*, and that there must be as many movers as there are movements. Since astronomers teach us that there are many celestial bodies, each one of which moves continuously, regularly and *indefectibly*, there must be many movers which are *not* moved *per se* nor *per accidens*. But corporeal movers do not move unless they are *per se* moved, and incorporeal movers united to a body (like a soul) are moved *per accidens* following the movement of their body. Therefore only separate intellectual substances can be the causes of the continuous and *indefectible* movement of celestial bodies<sup>17</sup>. The incorruptible movement (*indeficiens*) of the celestial bodies proves their incorruptible nature and this incorruptibility of nature and movement in celestial bodies is the effect from which the existence of angels is inferred. The proof is worth what the premise is worth.

In chapter 23 of Book III of *Summa contra Gentiles* Thomas presents four other «*quia*» arguments for the existence of angels<sup>18</sup>. They are all based on outdated physical and astronomical theories and have no demonstrative value. They won't be the object of detailed critique because from their premises nothing true can be inferred. According to the *first*, elemental bodies are moved only by their generator or by that which removes the obstacles that hinder their movements. Now elements and heavenly bodies are both simple bodies. If the latter were moved like the former, they would be moved *per se* by a generator, or accidentally by that that removes obstacles. But it is impossible that heavenly bodies be generated, because their form fulfills all the potentiality of their matter

*Quaestiones disputatae de malo*, q. 16, a. 2, ad 6, v. 395-401, Editio Leonina, Paris-Roma, 1982, tomus XXIII; *De substantiis separatis*, chap. 8, v. 122-129. Cf. Th. LITT, *Les Corps célestes...*, *op. cit.*, p. 56-57. Each heavenly body is simple, incorruptible, unique in its species, and immediately created. The difference between the heavenly bodies and the terrestrial bodies is complete.

(17) *ScG* II, 91: «*Motum continuum, regularem et, quantum de se est, indeficientem, oportet esse a motore qui non movetur neque per se neque per accidens [...]. Motus autem caelestes sunt ab aliquo intellectu (cf. II, chap. 70). Sunt igitur plures substantiae intellectuales corporibus non unitae*». Cf. also (not articulated as an argument) *II Sent.*, d. 14, q. 1, a. 3: «*Utrum motus caeli sit ab intelligentia*».

(18) There are two more arguments in this chapter 23, but they are not «*quia*» arguments leading specifically to the existence of angels. One is a theological argument (cf. *infra*, n. 70); the other leads to the existence of an absolute First Cause.

and there is no contrary in them; and their movements cannot be hindered, because they are circular and perpetual. Consequently they must be moved by an intellectual mover<sup>19</sup>.

According to the *second*, if heavenly movements were caused only by nature, *i.e.*, by a non-intellectual natural form, as it happens in the case of terrestrial bodies, heavenly bodies would move to a certain place (*locus*) by virtue of the tendency of their form to move towards the natural place. But celestial bodies do not move to a particular place, but circularly and in perpetuity. Therefore their mover is not a natural form, but an intellectual mover (*movens per apprehensionem*)<sup>20</sup>.

According to the *third*, nature always tends to one thing, wherefore things caused by nature come always in the same way. Consequently what by definition is not uniform cannot be the term towards which nature tends. But movement by definition is not uniform, because a thing in movement is different now and before the movement. Therefore nature does not intend movement for its own sake, but intends rest through movement. If heavenly bodies were moved by nature, they would be moved to a certain rest; but it is the contrary that we perceived (*apparet*), because their movement is incessant. Ergo their mover is not nature, but an intellectual substance<sup>21</sup>.

In the *fourth*, Thomas argues that if it is natural for a movement caused by nature as an active principle to seek a certain term, it is unnatural and against nature for that movement to recede from that term (*e.g.*: for a heavy things it is natural to seek a lower place and unnatural to recede from it). Consequently, if the movement of the heavenly bodies, which is commonly from the east towards the west, were caused by nature, it would be not only unnatural for them to move from the west to the east, but also impossible, for nothing in the heavens is violent or unnatural. <But some heavenly bodies move from the west to the east, namely the « planets »>. Consequently it is impossible that the heavenly bodies be moved by nature; they must be moved by a separate intellectual substance<sup>22</sup>. The premise that the movements of the planets are caused by the movements of different spheres, one of which carries the planets from east to west (the universal, simple,

(19) *ScG* III, 23: « Corpora gravia et levia moventur a generante et removente [...] etc. ».

(20) *ScG* III, 23: « Si principium motus caeli est sola natura, *absque apprehensione aliqua* [...]. Oportet igitur quod principium motus eius sit aliquid per apprehensionem movens ».

(21) *ScG* III, 23: « Natura semper ad unum tendit [...]. Non est igitur motus caeli a natura sicut a principio activo, sed magis a substantia intelligente ». Cf. *STh.* I, q. 70, a. 3: « Quod autem corpora caelestia moveantur *ab aliqua substantia apprehendente* [...] patet ex hoc quod natura non movet nisi ad unum, quo habito quiescit; quod in motu corporum caelestium non apparet ». The same argument, but in a theological context, is found in *Q. de spiritualibus creaturis*, a. 6, v. 211-231, cf. *infra*, n. 71.

(22) *ScG* III, chap. 23: « Omni motu qui est a natura sicut a principio activo oportet quod, si accessus ad aliquid sit naturalis, quod recessus ab eodem sit innaturalis et contra naturam [...]. Movetur igitur corpus caeleste *a substantia intellectuali* ». For the counter movements of the planets, cf. *In II Sent.*, d. 15, q. 1, a. 2, ad 5; *In Metaph.* I, 7; XII, 9 and 10; *In De caelo* II, 10, 15 and 17; and Th. LITT, *Les Corps célestes...*, *op. cit.*, p. 306.

uniform and fastest *motus diurnus* of the supreme sphere), while another counteracts this movements (the *motus stellarum fixarum* of the inferior sphere) under the influence of intellectual movers, is the weakest of all.

None of the phenomena and astronomical or physical principles on which the previous arguments rest was ever questioned by Thomas. Although he never accepted the animation of heavenly bodies, and was inclined to deny it, he embraced all the other elements of Aristotle's Astronomy requiring separate intellectual movers of those bodies. All the arguments reviewed so far are demonstrations «*quia*», but since they are based on astronomical premises that are false, their conclusions cannot be accepted as true. Thomas himself seemed inclined to reduce the demonstrative power of these arguments when he stated that it made no difference if they conclude that the celestial bodies are moved by intellectual substances united to them as their souls, or by separate substances, or by God (directly or by intermediaries), *provided that it is concluded that an intellectual substance is the cause of the heavenly movements*<sup>23</sup>. Since any of these hypotheses could be the conclusion of the arguments, none of them proves necessarily that separate substances (in plural) exist<sup>24</sup>.

Thomas was not at ease with the only philosophical demonstrations that he had at his disposal. This became apparent in the *Disputed Question on Spiritual Creatures* where, after reviewing the doctrines of the philosophers who first reached knowledge of separate substances, he declared his disagreement with the foundations of their arguments, namely with Anaxagoras' doctrine of a separate Intellect conceived as merely being the cause of the distinction of previously mixed things, with Plato's doctrine of separate Ideas, and with Aristotle's doctrine on the eternity of the world, judged to be philosophically indemonstrable. This dissatisfaction explains why he considered necessary to prove the existence of angels by other, theological ways (*aliae viae*), which will be presented in the following paragraphs<sup>25</sup>.

(23) *ScG III*, 23: « Non differt autem, quantum ad praesentem intentionem, utrum corpus caeleste moveatur a substantia intellectuali coniuncta quae sit anima eius, vel a substantia separata; et utrum unumquodque corporum caelestium moveatur a Deo immediate vel nullum, sed mediantibus substantiis intellectualibus creatis; aut primum tantum immediate a Deo, alia vero mediantibus substantiis creatis; *dummodo habeatur quod motus caelestis est a substantia intellectuali* ». Cf. *Q. de anima*, q. 8, ad 3: « Hoc igitur pro firmo tenentes, quod corpora caelestia *ab aliquo* intellectu moueantur, saltem separato »; cf. also ad 18.

(24) Elsewhere, however, Thomas states without reserve that heavenly bodies are moved by separate intellectual substances (plural) and that this thesis is supported by philosophers and theologians; cf. *ScG II*, 97: « Substantiae separatae movent per intellectum corpora caelestia, secundum philosophorum doctrina » (cf. also chap. 98 et 99); THOMAS AQUINAS, *Super librum De causis Expositio*, prop. 5, ed. H. D. SAFFREY, Fribourg-Louvain, Société philosophique-E. Nauwelaerts, 1954, p. 38-39: « Corpora autem caelestia, etiam secundum doctores fidei christianae, scilicet Augustinum et Gregorium, ponunt a creaturibus spiritualibus moveri, quae dicuntur angeli sive intelligentiae vel intellectus separati »; *ScG II*, 91, cf. *supra* n. 17.

(25) *Q. de spiritualibus creaturis*, a. 5, v. 188-194: « Set iste uie non sunt multum nobis accommode, quia neque ponimus mixtionem sensibilibum cum Anaxagora, neque abstractionem

The same reservations concerning the «*quia*» arguments of the philosophers were expressed in the *Treatise on Separate Substances*, a mature work (1270-1273) written by Thomas with the purpose of manifesting the excellence of angels. He made it explicit that he would judge the philosophical doctrines in the light of the catholic faith and that he would accept only those which are compatible with the tenets of this faith<sup>26</sup>. In chapter 1 he revisited the doctrines of Anaxagoras, Plato and Aristotle and criticized them for the reasons already expressed in *Q. De spiritualibus creaturis*. In chapter 2, he acknowledged that Aristotle's theory had a greater degree of certitude because it is based on phenomena that are accessible to sensible knowledge, but criticized it because it did not explain as efficiently as Plato's theory certain things that appear in human beings who are under the control of demons or that are done by magicians (chap. 2, v. 104-105). He also criticized it because, by restricting the number of separate substances to the number of movements of heavenly bodies, it subordinated superior beings to inferior ones (chap. 2, v. 129-133). The first critique is not philosophical; the second one is not well founded because for Aristotle the mover is not for the sake of the mobile, as was already proved. Aristotle's idea that the first sphere had the supreme substance as its proximate end (cf. *Metaph.* XII, 8, 1073a 23-26) was also considered improbable by Thomas, who preferred to say, with Avicenna, that the First Cause is not the proximate end of any of the heavenly movements; only separate intelligences are<sup>27</sup>. And he repeated that Aristotle assigned mere probability to his arguments concerning the number of separate substances, which is an incorrect interpretation of *Metaphysics*, 1074a 15-18 (cf. *supra*, n. 11)<sup>28</sup>.

My conclusion is that Thomas did not have any other «*quia*» demonstrations of the existence of angels than those provided by Aristotle and the ancient Astronomers. He did not question the premises of those arguments, with the exception of the philosophical necessity of the eternity of the world – a premise that he could easily replace by a created perpetuity of the world- and the limitation of the number of angels by the number of heavenly movements – a thesis that he misinterpreted and could not replace by another thesis equally based on «*quia*» arguments. It is surprising that in spite of his increasing dissatisfaction with Aristotle's arguments Thomas did not elaborate in his treatise *De substantiis separatis* a philosophical alternative. In this final work on the subject he just questioned the necessity of Aristotle's premises, rejected with arguments that

uniuersalium cum Platone, neque perpetuitatem motus cum Aristotile: unde oportet nos *aliis uis* procedere ad manifestationem propositi ».

(26) *De substantiis separatis*, Prologus, v. 4-10, notice: « Si quid inuenerimus fidei consonum accipiamus, quae uero doctrinae repugnant catholicae refutemus ».

(27) *Ibid.*, chap. 2, v. 178-183. Notice that in this text Thomas presents the relationship between mover and mobile in the correct Aristotelian way: the mover is not for the sake of the mobile, but is its final cause.

(28) *Ibid.*, v. 194-196: « Non enim reputabat se sufficientem ad hoc quod in talibus aliquid ex necessitate concluderet ».

*assume* the existence of spiritual substances some theological errors concerning their creation, and presented a purely theological doctrine on angels based on the ps.-Dionysius. The fact that Thomas did not elaborate any original philosophical proof could be a sign that he thought that there were no better ones than those he had criticized, and that only Theology offered a satisfactory « way » (*via*) to discuss the existence of separate substances.

## II. THEOLOGICAL DEMONSTRATIONS OF THE EXISTENCE OF SEPARATE SUBSTANCES

These arguments, which do not meet the methodological requirements set by Thomas for philosophical demonstrations, are found in *ScG* II, chapters 46 and 91; *ScG* III, chapter 23; *STh.* I, q. 50 and q. 51 and *Q. de spiritualibus creaturis*, a. 5. They will be presented in English; footnotes are limited to a few key words to help the reader find the original Latin text. The discussion of these arguments is not an incursion into Theology because it will be limited to determining whether they are logically sound and consistent with Thomas's own principles.

### *The Summa contra Gentiles*

Book II of *ScG* contains a long treatise on intellectual substances that stretches from chapter 46 to chapter 101 and comprises three parts. In the first (chap. 46 to 55), which is an Introduction to the nature of spiritual substances *in genere*, the existence of intellectual substances and their fundamental ontological properties are demonstrated without taking into consideration the modes of being of the different species included in the genus. The second part is devoted to the human soul, which is a spiritual « substance » united to a body as a substantial form (chap. 56 to 90). The third deals with spiritual substances that are separated from bodies. The method applied by Thomas in the general Introduction is characteristic of his early writings. This approach – more proper to a logician than to a metaphysician or natural philosopher – led him to define the nature of the human soul as the last of intellectual substances in the *Commentary on the Sentences* and to include the soul among the separate substances in the *De ente et essentia*: « Nunc restat uidere per quem modum sit essentia in substantiis separatis, scilicet in anima (!), intelligentia et causa prima »<sup>29</sup>. In *ScG* it allowed Thomas to give two

(29) THOMAS AQUINAS, *De ente et essentia*, chap. 4, v. 1-3, Editio Leonina, Roma, 1976, tomus XLIII. The method caused some embarrassing « faux pas », as when Thomas declared that separate substances – among which he included human souls – are unique in their species (cf. *De ente et essentia*, chap. 4, v. 79-89). He corrected this blunder partially, in chap. v, p. 378, v. 56-68, by making of the body the « occasion » for the multiplication of souls. In *ScG*, the method causes also inconsistencies, as when Thomas argues (chap. 51) that if the intellectual substance were a form of matter, intellection should be attributed to the composite, which is impossible (« Intelligens esset compositum ex materia et forma, quod est impossibile »). Paradoxically that is precisely what he argues against Averroes: *hic homo intelligit*. Even in his mature works Thomas uses a misleading

series of theological demonstrations of the existence of intellectual substances, a general one in II, 46, and another specifically devoted to separate substances, in II, 91<sup>30</sup>.

*Arguments in ScG II, chap. 46*

Thomas confirms the theological nature of chapter 46 by declaring that the discussion on the existence and ontological properties of intellectual substances is guided by the perspective of his catholic faith (*quantum ad fidei veritatem pertinet*), which teaches that the existence of intellectual substances is consistent with the goodness of God, who grants the universe all possible finite perfections in order to ensure that it is the best possible representation of his infinite perfection.

In each of the six arguments elaborated in chapter 46, Thomas appeals to the Neoplatonic principle (or one of its variants) according to which effects attain their ultimate perfection when they convert (*redeunt*) to their cause by resembling God as far as it is possible (*quantum possibile est*), not only in their being but also in their operations. This idea is also supported by the Aristotelian principle «every agent produces its like». In each of the six arguments it is claimed that, since God is an intelligent and free cause of the universe, the universe could not achieve its perfection if it does not include some creatures who are intellectual and free by nature; consequently it is necessary for the perfection of the universe that some intellectual creatures exist<sup>31</sup>.

The conclusion to which the six arguments arrive makes it superfluous to discuss the premises. It suffices to say that, if the perfection of the universe requires the existence of intellectual creatures, that requirement is met by the existence of human beings, who are intellectual creatures. There is no compulsive reason to go beyond them in order to verify the conclusion. Nothing, indeed in these arguments, forces us to accept the existence of separate intellectual substances, specially after Thomas had clarified that the perfection of the universe

language; cf. *STh.* I, q. 8, a. 2, ad 2: «Aliud autem indivisibile est quod est extra totum genus continui, et hoc modo *substantiae incorporeae, ut Deus, angelus et anima* dicuntur esse indivisibile ».

(30) For the «*quia*» demonstrations found in Book II, 91 and III, 23, cf. *supra*, n. 17-23.

(31) *ScG* II, chap. 46: 1) «Effectus maxime perfectus est quando in suum redit principium [...] necesse fuit ad creaturarum perfectionem quod *aliquae creaturae* essent intelligentes»; 2) «Oportuit igitur ad perfectionem optimam universi esse *aliquas creaturas intellectuales*»; 3) «Assimilatur autem perfecte aliquid alteri in agendo [...]. Oportuit igitur *aliquas creaturas* esse intelligentes et volentes»; 4) «Similitudo effectus ad causam agentis attenditur secundum formam effectus quae praeeexistit in agente [...]. Oportet igitur ad summam perfectionem universi esse aliquas creaturas [...] secundum suam naturam intellectuales»; 5) «Nihil autem movet Deum nisi sua bonitas [...] oportuit quod divina bonitas rebus per similitudinem communicaretur non solum in essendo, sed cognoscendo [...]. Oportuit igitur esse *creaturas intellectuales*»; 6) «In omnibus decenter ordinatis habitu secundorum ad ultima imitatur habitum primi ad omnia, secunda et ultima, [...] Deus omnes creaturas simplici modo, et non quantitatis extensione, continet. Ut igitur nec in hoc modo continendi Dei imitatio creaturis deesset, factae sunt creaturae intellectuales » (This argument, based on a pseudo symmetry of the universe, is the weakest. Thomas never used it again).

requires the achievement of the resemblance only as far as it is possible (4<sup>th</sup> arg.: *quantum possibile est*).

*Arguments in ScG II, chap. 91*

The failure of the previous arguments is due to the fact that they do not take into consideration the different modes of being of intellectual creatures. Chapter 91 of book II of the *ScG*, on the contrary, deals specifically with *separate* intellectual substances. Curiously, however, it offers only one «*quia*» argument of the existence of angels (cf. *supra*, n. 17). None of the other seven meets the methodological requirements set by Thomas.

The first is based on the incorruptibility of the human soul (proved in chapter 79). If the substance of the *intellect* (the soul, by *synecdoque*) remains in perpetuity after the corruption of the body, it can be said that it is suitable for some intellectual *substances* to subsist without a body. But this separation suits the human souls only by accident, because they are naturally the form of a body. Now that which is *per se* is prior to that which is *per accidens*. Therefore there are intellectual substances for which it is *per se* suitable to subsist apart from the body<sup>32</sup>.

The existence of substances which are *per se* separated from matter is inferred from the existence of an incorruptible soul which is *per accidens* separated from its body. Notice that for this latter separation to be possible the soul must be a subsistent form, subsisting by itself independently from the body; and that to be considered accidental the soul must be a substantial form, essentially linked to its body. To overcome this inconsistency Thomas argues (cf. *infra*, n. 99) that being results from form, and that form itself does not depend on matter to exist, as the existence of separate substances, whose complete essence is nothing but a form, proves it. The argument then could be considered circular. But it is flawed for still another reason. When the principle «what is *per se* is prior to what is *per accidens*» is applied to the soul, it can be concluded that the *per accidens* status of the separated soul is preceded by the *per se* status of the soul united to the body, *i.e.*, by the *per se existens* human composite. It can also be concluded that such status of separation is *contra naturam* (cf. *infra*, n. 40). Or even that what is *per accidens* cannot last forever (cf. *IV Sent.*, d. 43, q. 1, a. 1, qc 2; *Q. de veritate*, q. 24, a. 10, arg. 1 et ad 1; *Comp. Theol.* I, 151). But it is not possible to conclude that prior to the *per accidens* status of the separated soul there must be a *per se existens* separate substance.

In the second argument Thomas maintains that whatever belongs to the definition of a genus belongs also to the definition of all its species, but what belongs to the definition of a species and not of the genus is not necessarily found

(32) *ScG* II, 91: «Ostensum est enim supra (chap. 79), corporibus corruptis, intellectus substantiam quasi perpetuam remanere [...]. Eo autem quod est per accidens, oportet prius esse id quod est per se. Sunt igitur aliquae substantiae intellectuales [...] quibus per se inest sine corporibus subsistere».

in all the species of the genus. Now, by virtue of the principle *agere sequitur esse*, to be *per se* subsistent (*i.e.* to be subject of the act of being) is proper to the genus of intellectual substances because all of them understand (operate) *per se*, independently from the body, while to be united to a body belongs only to one species, namely the human soul. Therefore there *are* some intellectual substances that are not united to a body<sup>33</sup>. This is begging the question, because it is assumed in the premise that the human soul is a species *among other existing* species of the genus « intellectual substance », from which it differs by the non generic characteristic of being united to a body. It is also an ontological argument because the real existence of separate substances is deduced from their generic definition as *per se* subsistent entities. Finally it contradicts a central thesis of Thomas's anthropology, namely that the soul is not a species, but a part of a species (*ScG II*, 94 : « *Substantia separata habet per seipsam speciem : anima autem non, sed est pars speciei humanae* »).

The third is based on the neoplatonic principle according to which the higher nature in its lowest degree touches the lower nature in its highest degree. Since the intellectual nature is higher than the corporeal and touches this lower nature with the human intellectual soul, the human body must be the highest in the genus of bodies and the soul must be *the lowest* in the genus of intellectual substances. Therefore, according to the order of nature, there are some intellectual substances not united to a body which are superior to the soul<sup>34</sup>. This argument is worth what its premise is worth. From the assumption of a well proportionate order of nature where the human soul is declared – by the mere fact of being in contact with the body – to be the « lowest » entity in the genus of intellectual natures, it concludes *a priori* that, if there is a « lowest », there must be a « highest » level of perfection in that genus, and that this level should be defined by a complete separation from corporeal reality. Nothing has really been proved. Besides, it conveys a dualistic conception of the human nature as an agglomerate of two substances belonging to different genera.

The fourth argument presents the same idea in Aristotelian terms. According to the order of nature, when something imperfect is found in a genus, there must be, *prior* to it, something that is perfect in the same genus : the perfect, indeed, is by nature prior to the imperfect. But « forms » that exist in matter are imperfect acts, because they do not have complete being. Ergo there must be « forms » that are complete acts, subsist in themselves (not in matter) and have a complete

(33) *ScG II*, chap. 91 : « *Omne quod est de ratione generis oportet de ratione speciei esse [...]. Quicquid autem est de ratione speciei, non autem de ratione generis, non est necesse omnibus speciebus generis inesse [...]. Substantiae autem intellectuali secundum suum genus convenit quod sit per se subsistens [...]. Non est igitur de ratione substantiae intellectualis secundum suum genus quod sit corpori unita. Sunt igitur aliquae substantiae intellectuales corporibus non unitae* ».

(34) *ScG II*, chap. 91 : « *Natura superior in suo infimo contingit naturam inferiorem in eius supremo [...]. Sunt igitur aliquae substantiae intellectuales non unitae corporibus, superiores secundum naturae ordinem anima* ».

essence. But such is the ontological status of intellectual substances, which are defined by their immunity to matter. Therefore intellectual substances that are not united to a body do exist<sup>35</sup>.

To understand the principle «the perfect is *prior* to the imperfect», or its equivalent «what is in actuality is prior to what is in potentiality» (*Metaphysics* IX, 1049b 14-1050a 3), we must take into consideration that «prior» can mean what is prior simply and by nature, or what is prior in time. With respect to a particular thing, being in potentiality is prior in time than being in actuality; but simply and by nature, actuality is prior to potentiality, because potentiality does not actualize itself and must be actualized by something actual<sup>36</sup>. The «perfect» which simply and by nature has priority over the «imperfect» is *the agent* who possess in actuality the perfection of an essence, while the «imperfect» is the entity which is in the process of acquiring this perfection. The perfect confers the form to the imperfect by a process called movement, which is defined precisely as the actuality of the imperfect<sup>37</sup>. The principle then is not designed to deduce, from the *actual* existence of beings belonging to an allegedly imperfect species of a genus, the *actual* existence of beings belonging to a *different*, hypothetically perfect species of the same genus, but to explain the process of acquisition of forms through movement and generation. From the existence of an imperfect being (*e.g.*, a human embryo), it can be deduced the prior existence of perfect beings of the *same species* (*i.e.*, the parents); but from the existence of intellectual substantial forms of a composite, it cannot be deduced the existence of angels, under the pretext that the former are imperfect and the latter perfect.

Besides, it must be noted that the imperfect «forms» that are the *subject of the minor premise* are substantial forms, which exist in correlation with matter within a composite substance. They are not substances, but parts of a substance; they are not a species, but only a part of a species; they do not belong in a genus, only species do. Composites of matter and form are «*per se*» in a species and in a genus; forms are «*per reductionem*» in the species and genus of the composite of

(35) *ScG* II, chap. 91: «Si est aliquid imperfectum in aliquo genere, invenitur ante illud, secundum naturae ordinem aliquid in genere illo perfectum: perfectum enim natura prius est imperfecto [...]. Sunt ergo aliquae substantiae intellectuales corporibus non unitae».

(36) THOMAS AQUINAS, *De principiis naturae*, chap. 4, v. 48-58, Editio Leonina, Roma, 1976, tomus XLIII; *ScG* I, chap. 16: «Quamvis id quod quandoque est in potentia quandoque in actu prius sit tempore in potentia quam in actu, tamen simpliciter actus est prior potentia, quia potentia non educitur se in actum, sed oportet quod educatur in actum per aliquid quod sit in actu»; *STh.* I, q. 3, a. 1: «Licet enim in uno et eodem quod exit de potentia in actum prius sit potentia quam actus tempore, simpliciter tamen actus prior est potentia, quia quod est in potentia non reducitur in actum nisi per ens actu». Cf. also *STh.* I, q. 70, a. 2, ad 5; q. 82, a. 3, ad 2; *STh.* III, q. 1, a. 5, ad 3; *Sentencia libri De anima* III, 4, v. 180-187; *In De caelo* II, 5, n. 347.

(37) THOMAS AQUINAS, *Sentencia libri De anima* I, 6, v. 221-222: «Motus autem et operatio differunt quia motus est actus imperfecti, operatio uero est actus perfecti»; cf. also I, 10, v. 209-210; III, 6, v. 20-32, and ARISTOTLE, *Physics* III, 1-5, 200b12-202b29.

which they are a part<sup>38</sup>. Substantial forms are the «imperfect» vis-à-vis their composite, which is the «perfect» (that is why what is perfect for the soul is to be united to the body<sup>39</sup> and to be separated from it is *contra naturam*<sup>40</sup>). Both the «perfect» and the «imperfect» are in the *same genus*<sup>41</sup>, namely in the *genus of corporeal substances*. But the «forms» that are the *subject of the conclusion* are not parts of a substance, but substances themselves, the essence of which does not include matter. In their case, form, essence and substance (in the sense of subject of the act of being) coincide<sup>42</sup>. If they existed, they would belong to the genus of incorporeal or immaterial substances, where each of them would constitute a different species. Therefore «substantial forms» and «forms that are substances» *are not in the same genus*. Thus souls and separate substances can only be placed in the genus of «intellectual substances» by a logician who chooses to not consider their modes of being; the metaphysician and the natural philosopher however, who cannot afford such an abstraction, could not place the soul, which is a part of a substance, in the genus of separate substances<sup>43</sup>, but would place it, by reduction<sup>44</sup>, in the genus and species proper to the human composite, *i.e.*, in the

(38) *STh.* I, q. 3, a. 5: «Aliquid est in genere dupliciter. Uno modo simpliciter et proprie, sicut species quae sub genere continentur. Alio modo per reductionem, sicut principia (matter and form) et privationes».

(39) THOMAS AQUINAS, *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum* IV (hereafter *IV Sent.*), d. 49, q. 4, a. 5, qc. 2, ad 1, ed. F. M. MOOS, Paris, Lethielleux, 1947: «Perfectius esse habet corpori coniuncta quam a corpore separata»; *ibid.*, q. 5, a. 5, qc. 3: «Anima separata a corpore non habet perfectum esse et ita nec perfectam operationem»; *Q. de potentia*, q. 5, a. 10: «Non potest esse quod natura animae sit perfecta nisi sit corpori unita».

(40) *ScG* IV, chap. 79: «Est igitur *contra naturam* animae absque corpore esse»; cf. *Compendium theologiae* I, chap. 151: «Necesse est autem hoc quod est animam a corpore separatam esse, per accidens esse et *contra naturam*»; *I Pars*, q. 118, a. 3: «Esse sine corpore est sibi *contra naturam* et *sine corpore existens non habet naturae suae perfectionem*».

(41) THOMAS AQUINAS, *In octo libros Physicorum Aristotelis Expositio*, III, 1, n. 281, ed. P. M. MAGGIOLO, Roma, Marietti, 1954: «Omne autem quod est imperfectum sub eodem genere cadit cum perfecto, non quidem sicut species, sed per reductionem (sicut materia prima est in genere substantiae)»; cf. also *ibid.*, III, 5, n. 324.

(42) *De ente et essentia*, chap. 4, v. 38-40: «Intelligentia est habens formam et esse: et accipitur ibi *forma pro ipsa quidditate uel natura simplici*»; cf. *Q. de potentia*, q. 9, a. 1: «In substantiis vero simplicibus nulla est differentia essentiae et subiecti [...]. Et hoc patet per Avicennam qui dicit in sua *Metaphysica* quod quidditas simplicis est ipsum simplex»; *Q. de potentia*, q. 7, a. 4: «In angelis enim quodlibet suppositum est sua natura: quidditas enim simplicis est ipsum simplex, ut dicit Avicenna»; *Q. de spiritualibus. creaturis*, a. 5, ad 9: «*Essentia eius est ipsummet indiuiduum subsistens*, ut patet per Philosophum in VII *Metaphysice* (1039a25-33)».

(43) For the distinction between logical and natural consideration of a genus, cf. *I Sent.*, d. 19, q. 5, a. 2 and *II Sent.*, d. 3, q. 1, a. 1, ad 2; *Q. de potentia*, q. 7, a. 7, ad s.c. 1: «Ea quae habent diversum modum essendi non communicant in aliquo secundum esse quod considerat naturalis; possunt tamen communicare in aliqua intentione quam considerat logicus».

(44) *Q. de anima*, q. 1, ad 13: «Neque anima neque corpus sunt in specie uel genere nisi per reductionem, sicut partes reducuntur ad speciem vel genus totius». Cf. *ibid.*, q. 14, ad 2; *STh.* I, q. 76, a. 3, ad 2; etc.

genus « animal » and the species « human being »<sup>45</sup>. Since the term « form » has different meanings in the premise and in the conclusion, the argument is not demonstrative.

The fifth argument claims that it is *possible* for « substance » *to be* without « quantity », while it is not possible for « quantity » to be without « substance » because substance « precedes all other genera (of being) in time, definition and knowledge » (*Metaphysics* VII, 1, 1028a 33). But no corporeal substance exists without quantity. Therefore *it is possible* for some things in the genus of substance to exist entirely apart from the body. This purely logical possibility provides enough ground to infer the actual existence of such substances, provided that it is supported by two principles. First, that all natures which are possible actually exist because, if that were not the case, the universe would be imperfect; and second, that « in the realm of eternal things there is no difference between actual “being” (*esse*) and being “possible” (*posse*) », or between what is and what is possible (cf. *Physics* III, 4, 203b 30). He then concludes : « Ergo some substances that subsist apart from a body do exist »<sup>46</sup>.

Let's examine the point of departure. In *Metaphysics*, 1028a 33, Aristotle does not state that it is possible for a substance *to exist without quantity*; but only that substance does not exist in another being and does not depend on accidents to exist (even if it could not exist without accidents). Substance does not exist *in* accidents as in a subject (*non est in subiecto*), but is itself the subject of being, while the accidents exist in the substance as in their subject. Substance is the *primary subject of being* in definition and in knowledge and in time, because « none of the other categories can exist separately, but substance alone » (1028a 34-35). This capability of existing independently from another being (*χωριστόν*) as an essentially « complete individual » (τόδε τι, 1029a 27-29) define substance as the primary and proper subject of being. Accidents, on the contrary, depend on the substance to be (*sunt in subiecto*) and to be known (the substance enters into the definition of the accident). Quantity, being an accident, belongs primarily to a substance and depends on it to exist (1029a 15-17). But from the capability of existing independently that defines substance Aristotle did not infer that incorporeal substances exist or can exist; on the contrary, he stated that « substance is thought to be present most obviously in bodies » (1028b 9-10) and that the question whether there are « any substances besides the sensible substances *or*

(45) *Q. de anima*, q. 2, ad 10 : « Cum anima intellectiua sit forma hominis, *non est in alio genere quam corpus*; set utrumque est in genere animalis et in specie hominis per reductionem ». Cf. *STh.* I, q. 90, a. 4, ad 2.

(46) *ScG* II, chap. 91 : « Substantia potest esse sine quantitate, licet quantitas sine substantia esse non possit [...]. Sed nulla substantia corporea est sine quantitate. *Possunt igitur esse quaedam in genere substantiae omnino absque corpore. Omnes autem naturae possibiles in rerum ordine inveniuntur; aliter enim esset universum imperfectum.* In sempiternis etiam *non differt esse et posse* (III *Phys.* 4, 203b 30). Sunt igitur aliquae substantiae absque corporibus subsistentes; post primam substantiam [...] et supra animam ». Concerning the value of this argument, cf. *In octo libros Physicorum Aristotelis Expositio* III, 7, n. 341-342.

*not*» is yet to be determined (1028b 30-31). The definition of substance then does not imply the existence of incorporeal substances. Of course, if and when the existence of these substances is proved, the definition will apply to them, but not before. Thomas's statement that it is possible that separate substances exist because the substance's being does not depend on quantity should be understood as meaning only that the notion of separate substances is not contradictory<sup>47</sup>.

Had Thomas followed Aristotle more closely, he would have added that nothing has been proved yet about their existence; had he been consistent with his own principles he would have added that, although corporeal substances do not depend on quantity, they do not exist without quantity. Quantity, indeed, is a «proper» accident of corporeal substances<sup>48</sup>, which is caused by the principles of the substance and is *never separate from its subjects*<sup>49</sup>. In fact, as soon as (*statim*) a corporeal substance is constituted by a form, quantitative dimensions follow, making it divisible and capable of receiving other forms and other accidents<sup>50</sup>. While a genus or species of substance can be *understood* without its proper accidents, it cannot be understood *as existing* without its proper accidents<sup>51</sup>. Consequently the corporeal substance can be understood without quantity, but it cannot be understood as existing without quantity. This difference is reflected in the two operations of the intellect. By the simple apprehension the intellect can understand substance without its proper or common accidents because it is possible for it to abstract (separate) things which are not separated in reality when the intelligibility of what is abstracted does not depend upon that with which it is united in reality. But by the operation of composition and division the intellect cannot truthfully understand a substance without its proper accidents because judgment deals with real existence, with the thing's *esse*, and things do not exist without its proper accidents<sup>52</sup>.

(47) In his commentary on *Metaphysics* VII, 1, 1028a 34-35, Thomas is even bolder, because from the «separability» of the substance he infers that *there actually is* a substance without accidents: «*Aliqua substantia invenitur sine accidente*» (*In Metaph.* VII, 1, n. 1257). Had he repeated such statement of fact in the *ScG*, he would have turned his argument into a *petitio principii*.

(48) *IV Sent.*, d. 10, q. 1, a. 2, qc. 3: «Quantitas et alia accidentia propria corporis»; *ibid.*, d. 12, q. 1, a. 1, qc. 3: «Prima dispositio materiae est quantitas, quia secundum ipsam attenditur divisio eius»; *Q. de spiritualibus creaturis*, a. 3, ad 18: «Dimensiones, que sunt propria accidentia huius generis»; *STh.* I, q. 76, a. 6, ad 2: «Dimensiones quantitativae sunt accidentia consequentia corporeitatem».

(49) *Q. de veritate*, q. 3, a. 7: «Accidentia propria ex principiis subiecti causata, quae secundum esse numquam a suis subiectis separantur».

(50) *Q. de anima*, q. 9, v. 206-221: «Ex hoc quod materia constituitur in esse corporeo per formam, statim consequitur ut sint in ea dimensiones per quas intelligitur materia divisibilis per diversas partes».

(51) *Q. de anima*, q. 12, ad 7: «Quedam (accidentia) causantur ex principiis speciei et dicuntur *propria* [...] de re intelligimus quid est absque hoc quod intelligamus aliquid accidentium eius. Set species *non potest intelligi esse sine accidentibus que consequuntur principium speciei*».

(52) *Q. de spiritualibus creaturis*, a. 11, ad 7: «Duplex est operatio intellectus [...] una qua intelligit quod quid est; et tali operatione intellectus potest intelligi essentia rei, et sine proprio et sine accidente [...]. Alia est operatio *intellectus componentis et diuidentis*: et sic potest substantia intelligi

John Wipfel called our attention to Thomas's doctrine according to which a negative judgment by which the intellect distinguishes one thing from another by understanding that the one *does not exist* in the other is correctly called «separation»<sup>53</sup>. This kind of judgment is proper to Metaphysics (*separatio* [...] *competit scientiae divinae sive metaphysicae*). Thomas explains, in his *Commentary on Boethius' De Trinitate*, that when we deal «with things that *can exist* in separation from one another, *separation obtains rather than abstraction*»; now «substance, the intelligible matter for quantity, *can exist without quantity*; therefore to consider substance as such apart from quantity pertains to separation rather than to abstraction»<sup>54</sup>. In other words, when it is said that «substance *can exist without quantity*», what it is meant is «*not all instances of substance exist with quantity*». It is important to notice that the proposition «*Substantia potest esse sine quantitate*» of the *De Trinitate* is identical to the premise of the fifth argument in *ScG* II, 91. Since in the *De trinitate* it was considered to be a case of «separation», it was concluded that it meant that, in some cases at least, substance *actually exists without quantity*. If it were not the case, «substance» would not be a «neutrally immaterial» metaphysical notion, as *De Trinitate* implies. The proposition then *assumes that separate substances exist*; otherwise it would be impossible to truthfully *deny* that all instances of substance exist with quantity. Consequently, if the proposition had in the *ScG* the same meaning as it has in the *Commentary on De Trinitate*, the fifth argument of the *ScG* would be a *petitio principii*, because the proposition that should be inferred in the conclusion would be assumed implicitly in the premise. Conversely, if in the premise of the *ScG* «*substantia*» means «corporeal substance», the proposition would be unintelligible and false, because quantity cannot be excluded from the understanding of an existing substance of this kind. Consequently the proposition «*substantia potest esse sine quantitate*» is *not* in *ScG* II, 91 a case of «separation» and should be considered as expressing a purely logical possibility or absence of incompatibility between the predicate and the subject<sup>55</sup>.

From this logical possibility Thomas infers the actual existence of separate substances. But since *a posse ad esse non valet illatio*, he tries to overcome the

sine accidentali predicato etiam si secundum rem sit inseparabile [...] *hac uero operatione intellectus non potest intelligi substantia sine proprio* ».

(53) J. WIPPEL, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, Washington (D.C.), The Catholic University of America Press, 2000, p. 45; Wipfel refers to THOMAS AQUINAS, *Super Boetium De Trinitate*, q. 5, a. 3, v. 159-171, Editio Leonina, Roma-Paris, 1992, tomus L.

(54) *Id.*, *Super Boetium De Trinitate*, q. 5, a. 3, v. 270-274: «*Substantia autem, quae est materia intelligibilis quantitatis, potest esse sine quantitate; unde considerare substantiam sine quantitate magis pertinet ad genus separationis quam abstractionis*» (cit. in J. WIPPEL, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas, op. cit.*, p. 47).

(55) *STh.* I, q. 25, a. 3: «*Dicitur autem aliquid possibile vel impossibile absolute, ex habitu terminorum; possibile quidem quia praedicatum non repugnat subiecto, ut "Socratem sedere"; impossibile vero absolute, quia praedicatum repugnat subiecto, ut "hominem esse asinum"*». The «*impossibile absolute*» implies contradiction and, as such it is impossible even for God; cf. *STh.* I, q. 25, a. 4: «*Sub omnipotentia divina non cadit aliquid quod contradictionem implicat*».

paralogism by invoking the Neoplatonic principle according to which what is possible in the order of things is actually realized, or the universe would not be perfect. From the perspective of an eternal and necessary emanation of being from a principle which is One and Good, there is indeed no reason to think that what is possible would not emanate and become actual at some point of the process. For Thomas however the First Cause is an Infinite Being and the universe is the effect of an intelligent and free act of creation (*STh.* I, q. 44, a. 1). The First Cause does not operate to acquire something, but out of goodness, and the goal of creation is that this goodness be communicated to creatures and represented by them (*ibid.*, q. 44, a. 4). Since no creature can represent this goodness adequately, God produced multiple and diverse creatures in order that the whole universe might represent his goodness more perfectly than any particular creature (*ScG* II, 45; cf. *Comp. Theol.* I, c. 72, v. 6-16). An inevitable inequality among creatures results, because the universe would not be perfect if only one degree of perfection were found in things (*STh.* I, q. 47, a. 2). The universe is perfect as the completion or plenitude of an order of things, not as the highest and absolute perfection, because, absolutely speaking, God «can do other things by his absolute power than those foreknown and preordained that he would do» (*ibid.*, q. 25, a. 5 ad 1m), and is free to create some *other* things and some *other* universe *better* than those he has made (*ibid.*, q. 25, a. 6 c. and ad 3). This universe is perfect and complete as a unity of order in which all created things in it are related to each other in the best possible way. And it is unique because, in the context of the purpose of creation, it would make no sense to replicate numerically (materially) *the same* representation of the goodness of God (*ibid.*, q. 47, a. 3). But it remains possible for the absolute power and wisdom of the First Cause to create *other* things and to organize them into a *different and better* unity of order or universe (cf. *IV Sent.*, d. 44, q. 1, a. 2). Our created universe, then, does not exhaust all the possibilities of finite being.

In this context the notion of a perfect universe is relative to a given unity of order, and not every unity of order that is «possible absolutely» has been necessarily created. The passage from absolute possibility to actuality, which is the key of Thomas' argument, is no longer justified, let alone necessitated. The fact that the existence of *separate* substances is possible is not a sufficient reason to conclude that they actually exist, or that they are needed for the perfection of *our* universe. And if what is required for this perfection is merely the existence of *intellectual* substances, human beings easily satisfy this condition because, as «*rational* creatures, possessing intellect and will», they are not only «vestiges» of the Trinity but also «images» who represent the goodness of God and the form of his causality (*STh.* I, q. 45, a. 7).

Another attempt to legitimize the passage from possibility to actuality is made with the help of the principle «in eternal entities there is no difference between

actuality and possibility (*non differt esse et posse*)»<sup>56</sup>. In the Aristotelian world, where eternal realities (τά αἰδία) have no efficient cause of their being, it is indeed unconceivable that something eternal had not actualized its «absolute» potentiality in the course of an eternity. But this logic does not work in a universe suspended from a free act of creation. The principle «non differt esse et posse», explains Thomas, applies to the passive potentiality of eternal entities, not to God's causality<sup>57</sup>. The statement shows a fundamental difference between Aristotle and Thomas regarding the scope of the aforementioned principle. For Aristotle, passive potentiality (*potentia ad esse tale*) is present only in things that are composed of matter subject to contrariety, while for Thomas, passive potentiality affects also the separate substances because – whether they are considered eternal or not – they are not pure acts and do require an efficient cause of their actual being. Though they are free from the passive potentiality of matter, which is the principle of corruption, separate substances still have *potentia ad esse*, have received the act of being in which they participate, and depend from the Infinite Being who is the free cause of their being (*STh. I, q. 45, a. 5*).

This First Cause, whose goodness is perfect, can exist without other things because none of them increases its perfection; it is not necessary for it to will that the world should exist, let alone always exist (*STh. I, q. 19, a. 3; q. 46, a. 1*). Neither the eternity of the world nor its temporal beginning can be demonstrated philosophically (*ibid.*, q. 46, a. 2); theologically speaking, though God's will to create is eternal, no eternal effect was actually created (*ibid.*, q. 46, a. 1 ad 6). Consequently the principle «in sempiternis esse et posse non differunt» has only a hypothetical value: *if a creature receives being with the possibility of being always, it cannot sometimes be and sometimes not be; but before having that power it did not exist (ibid.*, q. 46, a. 1 ad 2); *if God creates – freely – a substance which has no principle of corruption (matter), and whose passive potency is fully actualized by the act of being, the esse of such a substance would be identical to its posse, but, of course, praesupposita creatione*<sup>58</sup>. Therefore it cannot be said that the existence of separate substances *follows* the identity of their *posse* and *esse*; instead it must be said that this identity *follows* the existence received by these substances from a free creator. The possibility of being always that an *existing creature* possess should not be confused with the logical possibility of its existence before it was created. Consequently, when the proposition «it is possible that separate substances exist» is understood *absolute, i.e.*, without

(56) ARISTOTLE, *Physics* III, 203b 30. This is the *Vetus* translation of James of Venice; in his *Commentary on the Physics*, Thomas uses the *Nova* of William of Moerbeke; cf. *Q. de spiritualibus creaturis*, a. 8, Apparatus fontium, n. 46-47. The principle can also be read in *Metaphysics* IX, 4, 1047b 3-7 and IX, 8, 1050b 7-8.

(57) *Q. de potentia*, q. 1, a. 1, ad 6: «Cum dicitur quod in perpetuis non differt esse et posse, intelligitur de potentia passiva, et sic nihil facit ad propositum, quia talis potentia non est in Deo». Thomas made this remark against those for whom the acts of God follow the mode of his being (*esse*) instead of the mode of his will (*potentia activa*); cf. *Q. de veritate*, q. 23, a. 5, ad 1.

(58) *ScG* II, chap. 36: «Virtus essendi semper praesupponit substantiae productionem».

reference to an active power, it means only that its terms are not contradictory<sup>59</sup>. And when it is understood in reference to the power of the First Cause, the *actus essendi* of these substances appears as suspended from a free act of creation and the necessary link between *posse* and *esse* that Aristotle established in eternal entities can no longer be invoked to justify the passage from logical possibility to actual existence. The First Cause can create anything that is not contradictory, but that doesn't mean that it actually creates it; and if one of its possible effects is not created, its perfection of infinite free agent would not be diminished<sup>60</sup>. In the context of Thomas' theology of creation, the Aristotelian principle is merely hypothetical: *if eternal entities are created (i.e., if they exist), their posse and esse coincide; it cannot be used to infer their actual existence from their logical possibility without committing a paralogism.*

In the sixth argument Thomas claims that if something is composed of two things, and the one of these which is the less perfect is found to exist by itself, the one which is more perfect and less dependent on the other must also be found to exist by itself. Now the human being is composed of an intellectual substance and a body. But bodies, which are the less perfect, exist by themselves, as it is attested by inanimate bodies. *A fortiori* then, intellectual substances must exist by themselves, not united to bodies<sup>61</sup>.

The argument shows a degree of Platonism seldom found in Thomas writings. The statement that a human being is a composite of two things is contrary to Thomas's conception of the unity of substance<sup>62</sup>, and contrary to his understanding of human nature. Hylomorphic substances, including human beings, are not composed of two things, but of two correlative principles, matter and form,

(59) *STh.* I, q. 46, a. 1, ad 1: «Dicitur aliquid *absolute* possibile, non secundum aliquam potentiam, sed ex sola habitudine terminorum qui sibi non repugnant, secundum quod possibile opponitur impossibili»; cf. also q. 25, a. 3, ad 4 and *supra*, n. 55. The *potentia passiva* of separate substances is the *potentia ad esse* (cf. n. 57).

(60) *Q. de potentia*, q. 3, a. 14, ad sed contra 5: «Non sequitur: "si Deus aliquid potuit facere quod illud fecerit", eo quod est agens secundum voluntatem, non secundum necessitatem naturae. Quod autem dicitur quod in sempiternis non differt esse et posse, intelligendum est secundum potentiam passivam, non autem secundum activam. Potentia enim passiva actui non coniuncta corruptionis principium est, et ideo sempiternitati repugnat. Effectus vero activae potentiae actu non existens perfectioni causae agentis praeiudicium non affert, maxime in causis voluntariis. Effectus enim non est perfectio potentiae activae sicut forma potentiae passivae ». Cf. also *supra*, n. 57.

(61) *ScG* II, chap. 91: «Si ex aliquibus duobus invenitur aliquid compositum, et alterum eorum invenitur per se quod est minus perfectum, et alterum quod est magis perfectum et minus reliquo indigens per se invenitur [...]. Corpus autem invenitur per se, sicut patet in omnibus corporibus inanimatis. Multo igitur fortius inveniuntur substantiae intellectuales corporibus non unitae ».

(62) Cf. for example, *ScG* II, chap. 56: «Ex duabus enim substantiis actu existentibus non potest fieri aliquid unum»; *In Metaph.* VII, lectio 13, n. 1588: «Si substantia particularis est una, non erit ex substantiis in ea existentibus actu»; cf. *ibid.*, lectio 16, n. 1647: «Nulla substantia fit ex substantiis actu existentibus ».

none of which is a complete essence<sup>63</sup>. That is why none of those co-principles, neither matter (the less perfect) nor form (the most perfect), « is found » (*invenitur*) existing by itself. Human beings and non intellectual beings do not differ because the former are composed of two things while the latter are only bodies, as the argument suggests. Both of these kinds of beings are composites of matter and form and differ in perfection because of their respective forms. Using Thomas's own principles the argument could then be reformulated in these terms : « there are intellectual composites and then there are non intellectual composites, so there must be angels ». It lacks completely of demonstrative power.

The seventh argument is again based on a notion of absolute perfection, and on the thesis that immateriality is the condition of intelligibility and intellection. The substance (essence) of a thing, argues Thomas, is proportionate to its operation. Since intellection is the proper operation of intellectual substances, intellectual substances should have the disposition that makes them capable of exercising their operation. But intellection is not exercised by means of a corporeal organ. Ergo an intellectual being *does not need* essentially a body, except when its intelligible objects are abstracted from sensible data. This, however, is an *imperfect* mode of intellection, because the objects of a *perfect* intellection are *things that are intelligible by nature*. Therefore, since before what is imperfect there must be what is perfect *in the same genus*, it follows that before human souls, who understand imperfectly by abstracting from sensible images, there must be some intellectual substances, completely separate from bodies by nature, who understand things that are intelligible *per se*, not by abstraction<sup>64</sup>.

This argument contradicts some of Thomas's doctrines. For example, the human soul and the angels (if they exist) are not in the same genus (except for logicians, but for metaphysicians and natural philosophers, who don't put the *modus essendi* into brackets, angels and human souls are in different genera). According to Aristotle and Thomas there are three genera of substances : the sensible and corruptible substances, the sensible but everlasting substances (the heavenly bodies), and the non sensible and incorruptible substances which are simple forms<sup>65</sup>. Thomas had some trouble placing the human soul in one of those three genera, especially at the beginning of his career, when he considered the soul to be *the last* in the genus of intellectual substances, but in his mature writings he

(63) Cf. *Q. de anima*, q. 2, ad 11 : « Ex duabus substantiis actu existentibus et perfectis in sua specie et natura non fit aliquid unum. Anima autem et corpus non sunt huiusmodi, cum sint partes humane nature ».

(64) *ScG II*, chap. 91 : « Substantiam rei oportet esse proportionatam suae operationi... Intelligere autem, cum sit operationem per organum corporeum non exercita, non indiget corpore nisi in quantum intelligibilia sumuntur a sensibilibus. Hic autem est imperfectus modus intelligendi [...]. Si igitur ante omne imperfectum oportet esse perfectum aliquid in genere illo, oportet quod ante animas humanas [...] sint aliquae intellectuales substantiae intelligentes ea quae sunt secundum se intelligibilia ».

(65) Cf. *Compendium Theologiae I*, 74; *ScG II*, 30; *In Metaph.* XII, 2, n. 2424-2427, and *De substantiis separatis*, c. 8, v. 109-158.

considered it to be a *part* of the human essence, and placed it – together with its material correlate – in the genus « animal » and the species « human » (cf. *supra*, n. 45), as *the most perfect* of substantial forms<sup>66</sup>. For such a form, what is « perfect » is not a substance of another genus, but the hylomorphic composite of which it is a part. The composite (*hic homo*) is the subject of intellection, not the soul<sup>67</sup>, and it is to the essence of this composite, made of these bones and flesh<sup>68</sup>, that the correspondent mode of intellection is proportionate. That is why there is no human intellection without the body; if that were not the case, the union of soul and body would not be justifiable. The soul indeed joins the body *to be and to operate* in conformity to its nature<sup>69</sup>, and being separated from the body is against its nature (cf. *supra*, n. 40). Notice finally that the *intelligibilia secundum naturam*, presented as the objects of the perfect intellection with respect to which human intellection is declared « imperfect » in order to justify ultimately the existence of « perfect » intellectual substances, are indeed the same separate substances whose existence the argument tries to prove (cf. *ScG* III, 45: « Ea quae sunt secundum se intelligibilia, scilicet substantias separatas »). The conclusion « there must be some intellectual substances which understand things that are intelligible in themselves » is equivalent to « there must be some separate intellectual substances which understand separate intellectual substances ». The *petitio principii* is apparent.

### *Theological argument in ScG III, 23*

This is a hybrid argument that mixes philosophical and theological principles and combines Aristotle's finalistic vision of the universe with theological theses concerning the place of human beings in the universe. Its background is that God is the first cause and the final end of the universe (*ScG* III, 18), that all things tend to be like unto God (*ibid.*, 19) and to imitate God's goodness in their substantial being and their operations (*ibid.*, 20), particularly by generating other things (*ibid.*, 21), and that the final goal of the movement of the heavens is the generation of man. That is what Thomas reads in *Deuteronomy*, IV, 19: « God made the heavenly bodies for the service of all nations » (*ibid.*, 22).

(66) Cf. *Compendium Theologiae* I, c. 92, v. 62-63; c. 93, v. 33-34; *Q. de anima*, q. 8, ad 1, q. 9, v. 275-276; *Q. de spiritualibus creaturis*, a. 2, v. 296, a. 10, v. 252-254; *STh.* I, q. 76, a. 1, ad 1, *et passim*.

(67) *STh.* I, q. 75, a. 2, ad 2: « Anima intelligit sicut oculus videt, sed magis dicitur quod homo intelligit per animam »; cf. *Q. de spiritualibus creaturis*, a. 2, ad 2: « Homo enim uidet oculo, ambulat pede, et similiter intelligit per animam »; *Q. de veritate*, q. 2, a. 6, ad 3: « Non enim proprie loquendo sensus aut intellectus cognoscunt sed homo per utrumque ut patet in I De anima ».

(68) *Sententia libri De anima* II, 12, v. 113-118: « Non enim est homo nisi in hiis carnibus et in hiis ossibus »; *Compendium Theologiae* I, c. 154, v. 81-83.

(69) *STh.* I, q. 89, a. 1: « Modus intelligendi per conversionem ad phantasmata est animae naturalis, sicut et corpori uniri; sed esse separatam a corpore est praeter rationem suae naturae, et similiter intelligere sine conversione ad phantasmata est ei praeter naturam. Et ideo ad hoc unitur corpori, ut sit et operetur secundum naturam suam ».

Since such is the end of the heavenly movements, the mover of heavenly bodies must be necessarily an intellectual substance. Nothing indeed that acts according to its nature intends a form higher than its own, because every agent intends its like. But the heavenly bodies by their movement intend the human intellectual soul, which is higher than any corporeal form. Therefore they cannot be the principal agents of generation acting by virtue of their specific form, but must be the instruments of a superior agent, namely an intellectual substance, which is their mover<sup>70</sup>.

The idea that the end of the movement of celestial bodies is the generation of the human beings could be considered philosophical, within Aristotelian parameters, provided that is accepted that the celestial bodies are animate, that the end of heavenly movements is the generation of living beings, and that the human soul is generated, just as any substantial form of a living being. But for Thomas heavenly bodies are not animated and the human soul is not generated (a thesis that I consider theological). Obviously, if you assign to an inanimate agent an end that is beyond its reach, it is easy to demote the agent to the rank of instrument and to introduce in the picture a superior agent capable of attaining the goal. But the human soul is neither generated nor created by the intermediary of angels, but immediately and exclusively by God. Ergo the argument does not lead to the existence of angels. Thomas never used it again.

A modified version of it is found however in the *Disputed Question on Spiritual Creatures* where, after concluding that the perpetual movement of the heavenly bodies must be explained by a separate intelligent substance (cf. *supra*, n. 21), Thomas adds that the end of such movement is a separate intelligible good (*quoddam bonum intelligibile separatum*) that only an intellectual mover can grasp. By the celestial movement that it causes, this mover tries to achieve a resemblance (*similitudo*) with that intelligible good and to actualize all that is contained potentially in the celestial movement, mainly the completion of the number of the Chosen Ones, which is the end of Creation<sup>71</sup>. This version cannot be received as a valid philosophical proof of the existence of angels because it depends on an outdated astronomy and a theological eschatology.

(70) *ScG III*, 23 : « Nihil enim secundum propriam speciem agens intendit formam altiore sua forma [...]. Corpus autem caeleste, secundum quod agit per motum suum, intendit ultimam formam, quae est intellectus humanus, quae quidem est altior omni corporali forma [...]. *Corpus igitur caeli non agit ad generationem <hominis> secundum propriam speciem, sicut agens principale, sed [...]* sicut instrumentum ad agens principale [...]. Movetur igitur corpus caeleste ab aliqua intellectuali substantia ». This last idea is found in *Q. de potentia*, q. 3, a. 11, ad 13 and q. 6, a. 6, ad 10; *Q. de spiritualibus creaturis.*, a. 6, ad 12; *ScG III*, 99 : « *Quidquid provenit ex motu corporum caelestium attribuitur ipsis corporibus sicut instrumentis [...]* substantiis autem separatis moventibus *sicut principalibus agentibus* ».

(71) *Q. de spiritualibus creaturis*, a. 6, v. 222-231 : « Motus celi <est> ab aliqua substantia intelligente : nam finis huius motus non potest esse nisi quoddam bonum intelligibile abstractum, propter quod mouet substantia intelligens que mouet celum, ut scilicet assequatur eius similitudinem in operando, et ut explicetur in actu id quod uirtute continetur in illo intelligibili bono, et precipue completio numeri electorum, propter quos omnia alia esse uidentur ».

The balance of Thomas's effort to demonstrate the existence of separate substances in the *ScG* is negative. There are philosophical arguments based on obsolete astronomical ideas (II, 91, 8<sup>th</sup> argument and III, 23); theological arguments in which it is perfectly legitimate to substitute human beings for separate substances in the conclusion (II, 46); and theological arguments that are seriously weakened by formal errors or contradict Thomas' own principles. Up to this point in his career Thomas has not provided a convincing philosophical proof of the existence of angels.

### *The Disputed Questions on Spiritual Creatures*

The *Disputed Question on Spiritual creatures* offers three theological arguments. The first – a refined version of the fifth argument of *ScG* II, 91 (cf. *supra*, n. 46) – infers the actual existence of separate substances from their possible existence without appealing to the principle « *in sempiternis non differt esse et posse* ». Thomas relies only on the principle of perfection of the universe, presented as an unquestionable theological truth confirmed by *Genesis* I, where it is said of each creature that is « good », and of the universe of all creatures that is « very good ». The perfection of the universe requires the existence of separate substances because it cannot lack of any nature whose existence is *possible*. Thomas argues that it is evident that if a thing does not depend by definition on another, it is possible for it to exist without the other : for example, « animal » does not depend by definition on « rational », ergo it is possible to find animals that are not rational. But « substance », defined as what is per se subsistent, does not depend by definition on a body, because the definition of « body » includes quantitative dimensions, which are not the cause of subsistence. Then it *is possible* that separate substances exist. Therefore after God, who is not in a genus, *there are* in the genus of « substance » some substances utterly free from bodies<sup>72</sup>.

This argument could be dismissed with the same critique that was addressed to the fifth argument of the *ScG*, *i.e.*, that it does not meet the requirements of a philosophical « *quia* » argument and that it infers the actual existence of separate substances from their logical possibility. I'll discuss it briefly, however, to show how Thomas moves « very quickly from the order of logic and conceptual distinctions to the order of real composition and distinction »<sup>73</sup>. In this case, indeed, he bases the possibility of the existence of separate substances on the logical relationship between a genus and its species. Thomas knows that genera are diversified into species by differences that are not included in the comprehension of the generic notion and are distinct from the essence of the genus (*In Metaph.*

(72) *Q. de spiritualibus creaturis*, a. 5, v. 195-214. Notice : « Talis enim uidetur esse uniuersi perfectio, ut non desit ei aliqua natura quam possibile sit esse [...]. Manifestum est autem quod, si aliqua duo sunt, quorum unum ex altero non dependeat secundum suam rationem, possibile est illud sine aliud inueniri, etc. ».

(73) J. WIPPEL, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, *op. cit.*, p. 160.

I, 9, n. 138 and Aristotle, *Metaphysics* VII, 1037b 18-19). A genus can be understood without its species because it can be defined without them. The independence of the genus with respect to its species is thus purely logical. When Thomas says that « animal » and « rational » are two things (*aliqua duo*), and that the former does not depend on the latter he is talking about mental entities, not real ones. Since the understanding of « animal » does not depend on the understanding of « rational » we can logically infer that the notion of « irrational animal » is possible; but from this logical possibility we do not infer the actual existence of irrational animals. In the real world a genus does not exist independently from its species, and the actual existence of species is established by experience, not by logical inference. If that were not the case, the intellect could declare possible the existence of any species whose specific difference is not already present in another species and does not contradict the generic essence, and then, invoking the principle of perfection of the universe, declare such a species actually existent. No empirical testing would be required. That is what Thomas does when he argues that, since the notion of « substance » (genus) does not depend on the notion of « corporeal » (difference), it is possible to find substances which are not affected by that difference, and then, invoking the principle of perfection, he concludes that angels exist. He moves from possible existence to actual existence with the support of a theological principle.

The second argument is based on the idea of a hierarchical order of the universe, where no degree of perfection could be missing, used in the sixth argument of *ScG* II, 46 (*cf.* n. 31) and in the third and fourth arguments of *ScG* II, 91 (*cf.* n. 34 and 35). The existence of separate substances is required by the order of the universe, which is such that from one of its extremes it is impossible to reach the other without intermediaries. For example, between the heavenly body and earth is necessary to place fire, air and water, according to a sequence based on the nobility and subtlety of these elemental bodies. Similarly, between God, who is the apex of the universe, absolutely simple and one, and the corporeal substances, which are composite and divisible, it is necessary to place numerous intermediaries, some of which would be incorporeal substances not united to bodies, and some others, incorporeal substances united to bodies<sup>74</sup>.

According to the *Apparatus Fontium* of the Leonine Edition, the source of the thesis requiring intermediaries between one of the extremes of the universe and the other is found in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, a hypothesis supported by Thomas' *Commentary*<sup>75</sup> and by the example of the sequential order of the

(74) *Q. de spiritualibus creaturis*, a. 5, v. 214-229: « Potest idem considerari ex ordine rerum, qui talis esse inuenitur ut ab uno extremo ad alterum non perueniatur nisi per media [...] oportet ponere multa media per que deueniatur a summa simplicitate diuina ad corpoream multiplicitatem; quorum mediorum aliqua sint substantie incorporee corporibus non unite, aliqua vero substantie incorporee corporibus unite ».

(75) ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysics* X, 7, 1057a 2-22: « All intermediates are in the same genus as the things between which they are intermediate. By intermediates we mean those things into which that

elements (cf. *De caelo* II, 287a 32-34). The problem with this hypothesis is that the extremes of which Aristotle and Thomas refer are the contraries between which a movement takes place, not the extremes of a static hierarchy of perfections in the Universe. The « extremes » in the process of movement are the contrary forms by which the mobile is actualized at the beginning and at the end of movement. Aristotle and Thomas state that these extremes and all the intermediaries in the process « are in the same genus » (cf. X, 7, 1057a 20-21; 1057a 29-30), because « change from one genus into another is impossible » (1057a 27-28). Thomas repeats this principle often: « Opposita [the extremes] sunt circa idem » or « opposita sunt unius generis ». If the principle is based on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, the argument is not conclusive because neither the extremes (God and the corporeal substances) nor the intermediaries (incorporeal substances) are in the same genus, and because even if they were, the intermediaries between the absolute simple and the corporeal substances would still have to share properties of both according to Aristotle<sup>76</sup>, in this case simplicity and corporality, which is impossible. Angels, being completely incorporeal, can't be intermediaries between God and corporeal substances.

I think, however, that the source of this theological argument is the ps.-Dionysius<sup>77</sup>. The principle « *ab uno extremo ad alterum non pervenitur nisi per media* » is related to texts of the type: « (Deus) hanc legem naturalem posuit omnibus, ut ultima per media perficerentur, et media per prima, ut Dionysius dicit » (*IV Sent.*, d. 24, q. 1, a. 1); « Iste ordo est divinitus institutus in rebus, secundum Dionysium, ut per media ultima reducantur in Deum » (*ibid.*, d. 45, q. 3, a. 2); « Secundum Dionysium, in libro II De celesti ierarchia, infima a supremis moventur per media » (*Q. de malo*, q. 16, a. 9, v. 144-146); « A superioribus in ultima per media actiones perveniunt » (*II Sent.*, d. 14, q. 1, a. 3). Each element of the major premise of the argument is found in these texts: the order of the universe instituted by divine decree and the idea that the extremes of the universe are joined by intermediates. The advantage is that ps.-Dionysius does not require that extremes and intermediaries be in the same genus, or that the intermediaries participate in the nature of both contraries, as Aristotle did. But the appeal to the greatest religious authority in matters related to angels only confirms the theological and *a priori* nature of the argument.

The last argument is based on principles that supported the fourth and seventh arguments in *ScG* II, 91 (cf. *supra* n. 35 and n. 64). Thomas claims that, since intellection is an operation which is not performed by the body, the substance to

which changes must first change ». Cf. *In Metaph.* X, 9, n. 2098: « Omnia media sunt in eodem genere cum his quorum sunt media [...] quia hec est definitio mediorum, quod media sunt in quo prius venit illud quod mutatur de uno extremorum quam in alterum extremum ».

(76) *Metaphysics* X, 7, 1057b 2-4: « Since intermediates are in the same genus, as has been shown, and are between contraries, they must be composed of those contraries ».

(77) Cf. *De ecclesiastica hierarchia* V, 4, PG 3, 504; *De caelesti hierarchia* IV, 3, PG 3, 181 A *et passim*.

which this operation is attributed must have an act of being independent from the body, because the mode of operation follows the mode of being. Consequently, if an intelligent substance is united to a body, it won't be qua intelligent (*in quantum est intelligens*), but for some other reason (*secundum aliquid aliud*). Such is the case of the human soul, which is united to the body because its abstractive intellectual operation requires sensible images provided by corporeal senses. This characteristic is certainly accidental to the intellectual operation, and is due to its imperfection, just as it is due to an imperfection that the bat's eye can see only in darkness. Now what is accidental to an operation does not affect necessarily all the subjects who perform it. And since what is perfect in a genus is prior to what is imperfect in the same genus, because the perfect is naturally prior to the imperfect just as actuality is prior to potentiality, there must be some intellectual substances that are not united to a body because they do not need a body to perform the intellectual operation<sup>78</sup>.

The premises of this argument were discussed and criticized in the course of our analysis of arguments 4 and 7 of *ScG* II, 91, so I can be brief here. First, I remind that to argue that our abstractive mode of intellection is «imperfect» in comparison to a hypothetical «perfect» intellection whose objects are intelligible in actuality and need not be abstracted is begging the question, because such intelligible objects are the separate substances whose existence must be proved. Besides, the claim that we can infer from the alleged imperfection of the human knowledge the existence of a perfect intellection in the same genus is inconsistent with Thomas's teachings. The principle according to which the «perfect» is prior to the «imperfect» *in the same genus* cannot be applied to prove the existence of angels for three reasons: because the soul is just a part of the human species and belongs in the genus animal and the species rational, which is certainly *not* the genus of separate substances; because what is «perfect» for a substantial form like the soul is not a separate substance, but the composite of which it is a component; and because the «perfect» that precedes an «imperfect» composite which has not fully finished acquiring its substantial form is a couple of perfect human beings who have generated it, not a separate substance. It is not possible to deduce the existence of angels from the existence of human souls because they are not related to each other as the «imperfect» to the «perfect» in the same genus.

### *The Prima Pars of the Summa Theologiae*

No article of the *Prima Pars* is explicitly devoted to the demonstration of the existence of separate substances. Indeed, only article 1 of question 50, where

(78) *Q. de spiritualibus creaturis*, a.5, v.230-258, notice: «Manifestum est enim quod intelligere est operatio que per corpus fieri non potest [...]. Si ergo aliqua substantia intelligens corpori uniatur, hoc non erit ei *in quantum est intelligens*, set secundum aliquid aliud [...]. Quod autem per accidens adiungitur alicui non in omnibus cum eo invenitur. Oportet *etiam* quod ante esse imperfectum *in aliquo genere* inueniatur id quod est perfectum *in genere illo*, quia perfectum est naturaliter *prius* imperfecto sicut actus potentia. Relinquitur igitur etc ».

Thomas discusses whether angels – whose existence is assumed – are absolutely incorporeal, comes close to play that role. The *Prima Pars* is nonetheless very important because in it Thomas explained why he was disappointed with Aristotelian demonstrations, and why he decided to turn to ps.-Dionysius's method of «*remotio*» when dealing with angels. The reasons for his disappointment are given in *STh.* I, q. 50, a. 3 ad 3, and are the same as those that he advanced in *ScG* and in his *Commentary on the Metaphysics* (cf. *supra*, n. 11 and 28). Since I already showed that Thomas's reservations were not justified, there is no need to revisit the subject. Whether his reasons were founded or not, the fact is that, after criticizing Aristotle's «*quia*» arguments, he was left without philosophical, *a posteriori* proofs of the existence of separate substances. This might help understanding why, even after reiterating in the *Prima Pars* that we can only reach some knowledge of separate substances by comparing them with corporeal substances of which we have sensible images, Thomas decided to embrace ps.-Dionysius's method according to which, while God is known by way of causality, excess and remotion, separate substances are only known by way of remotion (negation) and some comparison with material things<sup>79</sup>. The elimination of the way of causality disqualifies not only the Aristotelian proofs but also of any other possible «*quia*» proof arguing from effect to cause. As a result of this methodological choice, Thomas' metaphysical proofs of the existence of God are more rigorous than his theological proofs of the existence of angels. Be that as it may, the arguments of the *Prima Pars*, q. 50, a. 1 seem designed to clarify questions regarding the essence of angels, rather than to prove their existence.

The first argument discusses whether angels are incorporeal realities or not. All its steps can be traced to previous writings. The premise of the first step is the purpose of creation: things should participate in God's creative goodness and imitate as much as possible this goodness in their substantial being as well as in their operations (*ScG* III, 46). This can only be achieved when creatures are capable of imitating the *modus operandi* of their cause. Since God operates by intellect and will, the perfection of the universe (arguments 1-4 in *ScG* II, 46) requires that *some intellectual creatures exist* who are capable of acting by intellect and will (arguments 3 and 5 in *ScG* II, 46). This conclusion is articulated in the second step with the premise that the intellectual operation cannot be performed by a body or a power of a body (argument 7 in *ScG* II, 91, cf. *supra*, n. 64; *Q. De spir. creaturis*, a. 5, argument 3). Thomas concludes: therefore, for the universe to be perfect, *there must be some incorporeal creature* in the world<sup>80</sup>.

(79) *STh.* I, q. 84, a. 7, ad 3: «Deum autem, ut Dionysius dicit (*De div. Nominibus*, chap. 1, paragr. 5), cognoscimus ut causam, et per excessum, et per remotionem; alias etiam incorporeas substantias in statu praesentis vitae cognoscere non possumus nisi per remotionem vel aliquam comparationem ad corporalia».

(80) *STh.* I, q. 50, a. 1: «Quod praecipue in rebus creatis Deus intendit est bonum quod consistit in assimilatione ad Deum. Perfecta autem asimilatio effectus ad causam attenditur quando effectus imitatur causam secundum illud per quod causa producit effectum [...]. Deus autem creaturam

For a detailed critique of this kind of argument I refer to my analysis of *ScG* II, chapters 46 and 91 and *De spiritualibus creaturis*, a. 5. Concerning the idea that the existence of intellectual beings is necessary for the perfection of the universe, I repeat that there is no need to go beyond the existence of human beings to satisfy this requirement. Maybe that is why Thomas felt compelled to introduce, in the second step, the equation between being *intellectual* and being *incorporeal*, which allowed him to declare necessary the existence of angels. Concerning this equation I would like to remark, first, that the only intellectual operation that we know and experience, even if it is not performed *by* the body, cannot be performed *without* the body because its object is the essence of material beings which are known only through sensation. Even if the activity of an agent intellect is required and the intelligible species have immaterial being in the intellect, there is no abstraction, no understanding and no judgment without sensible images. We need them to think, to understand previously acquired knowledge, to reflect on our intellectual operation, to grasp the first principles of science, to communicate among ourselves, and to know the individual singular entities where the nature that is understood has real existence (*STh.* I, q. 85, a. 2 ad 2). My second remark is that the equation between being intellectual and being incorporeal is of little use to those trying to demonstrate the existence of angels if it does not express a strict identity between intellectuality and incorporeality: only incorporeal beings are intellectual. But if it does, it puts the natural philosopher before a dilemma: humans could not be considered intellectual beings unless their nature is reduced to their spiritual soul; or they could not be considered corporeal beings without denying that they are intellectual. Unfortunately, as he often does in his theological discussions on angels, Thomas does not seem concerned with the consequences of his discourse on human beings. That is why he confirms not only that the equation expresses an identity between being intellectual and being immaterial, but also that it has an unrestricted scope and an absolute meaning: *every* intellectual substance is *altogether* immaterial<sup>81</sup>. This statement is so broad and unqualified that, just as it happened with statements in the *ScG* and in the *Q. De spiritualibus creaturis*, it contradicts some of Thomas' teachings, in this case the point of departure of his noetics, namely that *hic homo* – who is a particular, *material* composite – *intelligit*.

In another question related to the existence of separate substances Thomas argues that what is accidental to a certain nature is not found universally in that

producit per intellectum et voluntatem [...]. Unde ad perfectionem universi requiritur quod sint aliquae creaturae intellectuales. Intelligere autem non potest esse actus corporis [...]. Unde necesse est ponere ad hoc quod universum sit perfectum quod sit aliqua incorporea creatura ».

(81) *STh.* I, q. 50, a. 2: « Operatio enim cuiuslibet rei est secundum modum substantiae eius. Intelligere autem est operatio penitus immaterialis, quod ex eius obiecto apparet, a quo actus quilibet recipit speciem et rationem. Sic enim unumquodque intelligitur, in quantum a materia abstrahitur, quia forma in materia sunt individuales formae quas intellectus non apprehendit secundum quod huiusmodi. Unde relinquitur quod *omnis* substantia intellectualis est *omnino immaterialis* ».

nature; that intellection is not an act of a body or of a corporeal power (*virtus*); and consequently that it is not of the nature of intellectual substances *qua intellectual* to have a body united to it, but it can occur accidentally to a particular one of them on account of something else (*propter aliquid aliud*). Such is the case of the human soul which, due to its imperfection and degree of potentiality in the genus of separate substances, does not have the fullness of knowledge in its own nature but must acquire it from sensible things through bodily senses. Now, continues Thomas, whenever something imperfect is found in a particular genus, something perfect must preexist in such a genus. Therefore there must be some perfect substances in the intellectual nature which do not need to acquire knowledge from sensible things. Consequently not all intellectual substances are united to bodies, but there are some which are separate from bodies, and these are the angels<sup>82</sup>.

This argument has the same flaws than the one in *Q. de spiritualibus creaturis*, a. 5 (*supra*, n. 78). First, what is accidental for the human soul and contrary to its nature is not indeed to be united to the body, but to be separated from it (*IV Sent.*, d. 43, q. 1, a. 1, qc 2; *Comp. Theol.* I, 151, and *supra*, n. 40). Second, souls and the angels (if they exist) are not « in the same genus » (except for logicians who ignore their *modi essendi*). Finally, it is a *petitio principii* to declare « imperfect » in the premise the mode of intellection proper to human soul by comparing it to a « perfect » mode of intellection proper to substances whose existence has yet to be proved in the conclusion.

### III. GENERAL ASSESSMENT OF ALL THE PROOFS

Since the essence of separate substances is unknown to us (*Q. de veritate* 18, 5 ad 8), there could not be demonstrations « *propter quid* » of their existence, because the *medium demonstrationis* in these arguments is the essence (*In Analyt. Post.*, II, 7, v. 262-263). The only valid arguments are « *quia* » demonstrations, in which effects that are not proportionate to the cause are used as means to prove the existence of the cause. Only the arguments based on Aristotelian Astronomy and Physics meet Thomas's methodological requirements, but their conclusions, based as they are on false astronomical premises, cannot be accepted as true. Thomas distanced himself from these arguments after writing the *ScG*. We can safely conclude that there are no satisfactory philosophical proofs of the existence of angels in Thomas's writings.

The theological arguments are dominated by the idea that the existence of intellectual substances befits the goodness of God, who wants to make of the universe the best possible representation of his infinite perfection. Angels must

(82) *STh.* I, q. 51, a. 1. Notice: « Habere corpus unitum non est de essentia substantiae intellectualis in quantum huiusmodi, sed *accidit* alicui substantiae intellectual [... ] humanae animae competit uniri corpori *quia est imperfecta* [...]. In quocumque autem genere invenitur aliquid *imperfectum*, oportet praeesistere aliquid *perfectum* in genere illo. Sunt igitur aliquae substantiae *perfectae intellectuales in natura intellectuali* ».

exist, otherwise the world would not be perfect. Due to their theological nature and deductive method, these arguments could have been ignored. They were discussed however in order to determine their consistency and logical value. The arguments developed in *ScG* II, chap. 46 do not require to extend their conclusions beyond the existence of intellectual human beings. The arguments developed in *ScG* II, 91 and III, 23, *Q. De spiritualibus creaturis* and *Prima Pars* were found to be inconsistent with central points of Thomas's natural philosophy and anthropology, or to be formally flawed. It was also shown that some of the Aristotelian or Neoplatonic principles used to demonstrate the existence of angels were incompatible with a creationist Theology.

Since there are no valid philosophical demonstrations of their existence, separate substances should no longer be a subject of philosophical consideration. The elimination of the discourse on separate substances could however greatly improve our understanding of Thomas's conception of human nature. This is so because in the course of his unsuccessful efforts to prove the existence of angels Thomas made some confusing statements that are not consistent with his most fundamental anthropological doctrines. He said, for example, that it is «accidental» for the human soul to be united to matter; that the human being is an agglomerate of two substances; that the mode of intellection proper to our soul is «imperfect» in comparison with the hypothetical mode of intellection of separate substances; that the human soul is not united to the body «qua intellectual», *i.e.*, that it is not because of its very nature that it is united to the body and does not need a body *to be* what it is. All these theses undermine the proportion that exists between our intellectual nature and our corporeal mode of being, as well as the substantial unity of body and soul. Only if it frees itself from a discourse that tends to undervalue human nature by unfairly comparing it to hypothetical superior realities, Thomas's philosophical anthropology will be able to maintain its consistency, show its most distinguishing qualities and regain relevance.

#### IV. ANGELS, THE SUBJECT OF BEING AND THE SUBSISTENT-SUBSTANTIAL FORM

The term «*subiectum*» designates any potentiality that receives an actuality<sup>83</sup>. Accordingly, the subject of being (*esse*) is what meets the conditions required to receive and exercise the act of being (*actus essendi*). John Wippel has rightfully notice that Thomas's terminology when referring to the subject of being is not fixed: he «refers to the participating and receiving principle as being (*ens*), or as "that which is", or as quiddity (essence), or as substance, or as form, or as a creature, or as a thing (*res*), or as nature, or simply as that which participates (*participans*)». Wippel was confident that the meaning of the expression «subject of being» «will usually be captured if we simply employ the terms

(83) Cf. *De substantiis separatis*, chap. 8, v. 84-88: «Esse subiectum [...] universaliter consequitur omnem potentiam; omne enim quod se habet ad alterum ut potentia ad actum ei natum est subici».

“essence” or “nature”, to express this, as he himself also does »<sup>84</sup>. However, early in his career Thomas taught that although «being» (*esse*) is predicated analogically of all its categories, in its primary sense it is predicated properly and truly only of the first category, *i.e.* of the substance<sup>85</sup>; that is why substance is defined as «what is capable of subsisting»<sup>86</sup>, or «capable of receiving the act of being by itself», because only those beings are said to subsist (*subsistere*) that are capable of existing *by themselves*, not in another subject<sup>87</sup>. That is what Aristotle meant when he defined first substance as «*separabilis*», *i.e.*, capable of independent existence (*χωριστόν*, *Metaphysics* 1028a 34-35). But Thomas insisted that *subsistere* meant not only to be the subject of being (*esse*), but also the subject of a complete, determined (finite) mode of being (*modum essendi*)<sup>88</sup>: substance is what exists in itself as a «determined individual entity» (τόδε τι, *Metaphysics* 1029a 27-29)<sup>89</sup>. The subject of being is then an individual substance which subsists as a complete reality in one species and genus of substance (*hoc aliquid*)<sup>90</sup>. Both properties of the subject of being, namely independent existence and

(84) J. WIPPEL, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, *op. cit.*, p. 133; he quotes *Q. de veritate*, q. 21, a. 5, v. 137-141: «Ipsa autem natura vel essentia divina est eius esse; natura autem vel essentia cuiuslibet rei creatae non est suum esse sed est esse participans ab alio». Cf. also *Q. de potentia*, q. 9, a. 5, ad 19: «Esse semper ad essentiam pertinet»; *Q. de spiritualibus creaturis*, a. 11, v. 205-206: «Ipsum esse est actualitas quedam essentie».

(85) THOMAS AQUINAS, *Quodlibet IX* (1257), q. 2, a. 2, v. 31-59, Editio Leonina, Paris-Roma, 1996, tomus XXV: «Esse dicitur actus entis in quantum est ens [...] esse non attribuitur nisi rebus ipsis que in decem generibus continentur [...] esse attribuitur alicui rei dupliciter. Uno modo, sicut ei quod proprie et vere habet esse uel est; et sic attribuitur soli substantie per se subsistenti [...]. Esse ergo proprie et vere non attribuitur nisi rei per se subsistenti»; cf. ad 2.

(86) THOMAS AQUINAS, *Scriptum super Sententiis III* (hereafter *In III Sent.*), d. 6, q. 1, a. 1, qc. 1, ed. M. F. MOOS, Paris, Lethielleux, 1956: «Ratio substantiae est quod per se subsistat, inde est quod nullum istorum (scil. “res naturae”, “suppositum”, “hypostasis” et “persona”) dicitur nisi de re completa per se subsistente»; THOMAS AQUINAS, *Expositio libri Boetii De hebdomadibus* 2, v. 58-65, Editio Leonina, Paris-Roma, 1992, tomus L: «Non enim dicitur ens proprie et per se nisi de substantia cuius est subsistere» (text written in 1259); *Q. de potentia*, q. 9, a. 1, ad 3: «Substantia individua proprium habet quod per se existat»; *STh.* I, q. 29, a. 2: «Uno modo dicitur substantia quidditas rei quam significat definitio [...]. Alio modo dicitur substantia subiectum vel suppositum quod subsistit in genere substantiae».

(87) *STh.* I, q. 29, a. 2: «Illa enim subsistere dicimus quae non in alio sed in se existunt»; *I Sent.*, d. 23, q. 1, a. 1, ad 3: «Subsistere vero dicitur aliquid in quantum est *sub esse suo, non quod habeat esse in alio sicut in subiecto*»; *Q. de potentia*, q. 7, a. 3, ad 4 et q. 9, a. 1: «Substantia vero quod est subiectum duo habet propria, quorum primum est quod non indiget extrinseco fundamento in quo sustentetur, sed sustentatur in seipso, et ideo dicitur *subsistere quasi per se et non in alio existens*; aliud vero est quod est fundamentum accidentibus substantens ipsa, et pro tanto dicitur *substare*».

(88) *I Sent.*, d. 23, q. 1, a. 1, ad 2: «*Subsistere* duo dicitur: [...] *esse et determinatum modum essendi*. Et esse simpliciter non est nisi individuorum, sed determinatio essendi est ex natura vel quidditate». *Q. de potentia*, q. 9, a. 2, ad 6: «Prima vero substantia significat eam (naturam generis) ut *individualiter subsistentem*».

(89) *In Metaph.* VII, 2, n. 1291-1293: «Duo enim sunt quae maxime propria videntur esse substantiae [...] unum est quod sit *separabilis* (accidens enim non separatur a substantia, sed substantia potest separari ab accidente); aliud est quod substantia est *hoc aliquid demonstratum*».

(90) *Q. de anima*, q. 1, v. 197-200: «Individuum autem in genere substantie non solum habet ut per se possit subsistere, set quod sit aliquid *completum in aliqua specie et genere substantie*».

essential completeness, go together and are inseparable<sup>91</sup>. First substance is, unequivocally, the true subject of being.

The texts where Thomas refers to essence (or nature) as the receptive potentiality of the act of being cannot be explained by the polysemy of the term «substance», because Thomas is well aware of it and insists that the subject of being is not substance in the sense of essence, but in the sense of first substance<sup>92</sup>. What he really means, then, when he says that being is the actuality of the essence («*natura*», «*quod quid est*») is not that essence is the subject of being, but the principle «by which» the subject of being, *i.e.*, the first substance, receives the act of being<sup>93</sup>. The real subject of being is the supposit, first substance or hypostasis, «*cuius proprie est subsistere*» (*cf.* n. 92); the essence, by completing the substance, is the correlate of the act of being, but does not exist except in its supposit<sup>94</sup>. *Esse* and *essentia* are thus the co-principles of the existing finite substance, which *subsists* as a *complete* entity.

The practice of referring to essence as the subject of being is unjustifiable in the case of substances composed of matter and form. Their essence indeed is not identical to the substance or supposit, which is the subject of being, because it does not include in its meaning all the determinations arising from matter that distinguish and separate the existing individual substance from other members of its species<sup>95</sup>. «*Nulla res naturae, si materiam habeat, est ipsum quod quid est*»<sup>96</sup>. Only the individual subsists, not the essence. But *if* immaterial substances existed, the essence and the individual substance, though still distinguishable by definition (*ratione*), would coincide *in re*<sup>97</sup>, a doctrine that Thomas attributes to Avicenna in

(91) *ScG* II, chap. 55: «*Substantia completa est proprium susceptivum ipsius esse*»; *Q. de potentia*, q. 9, a. 3, ad 13: «*Substantia individua (est) quoddam completum per se existens*»; *STh.* III, q. 16, a. 12, ad 2: «*Substantia individua quae ponitur in definitione personae importat substantiam completam per se subsistentem*».

(92) *In Metaph.* X, 3, n. 1979: «*Substantia dicitur dupliciter. Uno modo suppositum in genere substantiae, quod dicitur substantia prima et hypostasis, cuius proprie est subsistere. Alio modo quod quid est, quod etiam dicitur natura rei*»; *cf.* *STh.* I, q. 29, a. 2, *supra* n. 85 and 87.

(93) *STh.* III, q. 17, a. 2: «*Esse autem pertinet et ad naturam et ad hypostasim; ad hypostasim quidem sicut ad id quod habet esse; ad naturam autem sicut ad id quod aliquid habet esse*».

(94) *III Sent.*, d. 2, q. 2, a. 3, qc. 1: «*Nulla natura habet esse nisi in supposito suo: non enim humanitas potest esse nisi in homine*».

(95) *III Sent.*, d. 5, q. 1, a. 3: «*Quidditas vero compositi non est ipsum compositum [...] in significatione humanitatis seu quidditatis, sive naturae, continentur tantum essentialia principia hominis secundum quod est homo, non autem ea quae pertinent ad determinationem materiae, per quam natura individuatur, quae tantum continentur in significatione Socratis, quia per ea Socrates est hic, et divisus ab aliis. Et ideo, quia humanitas non includit in sua significatione totum quod est in re subsistente in natura [i.e., hic homo], cum sit quasi pars, non praedicatur; et quia non subsistit nisi quod est compositum [al. : suppositum], et pars a suo toto habetur, ideo humanitas [ed. Moos: anima!] non subsistit, sed Socrates*». *Q. de potentia*, q. 9, a. 1: «*In rebus ex materia et forma compositis essentia non est omnino idem quod subiectum; unde non praedicatur de subiecto*».

(96) *In Metaph.* VIII, 11, n. 1535.

(97) *III Sent.*, d. 5, q. 1, a. 3: «*In quibusdam differunt natura et persona secundum rem, in quibusdam vero secundum rationem tantum [...]. In simplicibus autem, quae carent materia, ut dicit Avicenna, ipsum simplex est sua quidditas*»; *Q. de potentia*, q. 9, a. 1: «*Essentia vero in substantiis*

many texts (*cf.* n. 42 and 97). Once matter is removed, essence, individuality and supposit would merge into one single subsisting reality: a form which is a complete essence, a substance whose individuality doesn't add anything to its essence except incommunicability to other *supposita*<sup>98</sup>. But the hypothesis that in such a substance the subject of being and the essence coincide doesn't mean that the essence qua essence is the subject of being, but that the substance which is the subject of being is also the sole supposit of a simple, complete essence. Just as we should not say that an angel is a «species» because it is unique in its species, neither should we say that the essence of an angel is «what exists»; only first substances are subjects of being. But since the existence of angels has not been proved, this discourse is merely hypothetical.

If that is the case, the central thesis of Thomas's philosophical anthropology, *i.e.*, that the human soul is a subsistent substantial form, loses one of its most important supports, because the idea on which this thesis rests, namely that *form qua form* does not depend on matter and consequently that it is *possible* for the form to exist without matter<sup>99</sup>, could only be substantiated by the existence of separate substances. Without separate substances it must be said that, just as the proposition «substance can exist without quantity» is false if it refers to the only substances of whose existence we are certain, namely the corporeal ones, because these substances cannot exist or be conceived as existing without quantity, so the proposition «form can exist without matter» is equally false if it refers to the only forms of whose existence we are certain, namely substantial forms of corporeal substances, because none of the co-principles of an hylomorphic composite exist without the other<sup>100</sup>. A form cannot subsist by itself without matter unless it is a

quidem materialibus non est idem cum eis secundum rem neque penitus diversum, cum se habeat ut pars formalis; in substantiis vero immaterialibus est omnino *idem secundum rem, sed differunt ratione* ».

(98) *Q. de spiritualibus creaturis*, a. 5, ad 9: «In compositis ex materia et forma indiuiduum addit supra naturam speciei designationem materie et accidentia indiuiduantia. Set in formis abstractis non addit indiuiduum supra naturam speciei aliquid secundum rem, quia in talibus *essentia eius est ipsummet indiuiduum subsistens* [...] addit tamen aliquid secundum rationem, scilicet hoc quod est non posse existere in pluribus»; *cf. In Metaph.* VIII, 3, n. 1710: «Si qua vero res est quae sit forma tantum, non habet aliqua principia indiuiduantia praeter naturam speciei, cum ipsa forma per se existens *per seipsam indiuiduetur*. Et ideo ipsa res nihil aliud est quam quod quid est esse suum».

(99) *De ente et essentia*, chap. 4, v. 42-50, *op. cit.*, p. 376: «Quecumque enim ita se habent ad inuicem quod unum est causa esse alterius, illud quod habet rationem cause potest habere esse sine altero, sed non conuertitur. Talis autem inuenitur habitudo materie et forme quod *forma dat esse materie*, et ideo impossibile est esse materiam sine aliqua forma; tamen *non est impossibile* esse aliquam formam sine materia: forma enim in eo quod est forma non habet dependentiam ad materiam» (the text was written between 1252-1256); *Q. de anima*, q. 6, v. 227-242; *Q. de spiritualibus creaturis*, a. 1, ad 6; *ibid.*, a. 5, ad 10; *De substantiis separatis*, chap. 8, v. 228-235.

(100) *Cf. De principis naturae*, par. 4, p. 44, v. 37-42: «Materia enim dicitur causa forme in quantum forma non est nisi in materia; et similiter forma est causa materie in quantum materia non habet esse in actu nisi per formam: *materia enim et forma dicuntur relative ad inuicem*, ut dicitur in II Physicorum; dicuntur enim ad compositum sicut partes ad totum et simplex ad compositum». The claim that the form can exist without matter is even weaker than the claim that the corporeal substance

separate first substance<sup>101</sup>, *i.e.*, a *suppositum* of a simple essence and the subject of the *actus essendi*<sup>102</sup>. But since the existence of such substances has not been demonstrated, the proposition «form qua form can exist without matter» cannot be substantiated and cannot therefore support the notion of «subsistent substantial form».

This conclusion raises questions about the consistency of Thomas's philosophical anthropology. Since the human soul, as the substantial form of the human composite, is only a part of the human essence (*pars speciei*)<sup>103</sup>, includes matter in its definition<sup>104</sup>, is united immediately to its material correlate and communicates with matter in the same act of being, it is impossible for it to be a first substance, a supposit, a hypostasis or a person, *i.e.*, a proper subject of being<sup>105</sup>. Only the composite of body and soul possess the essential completeness required to be a person, a hypostasis or a supposit<sup>106</sup>. Thomas insists however that the human soul is subsistent, *i.e.*, the subject of being («*ipsa est quae habet esse*»), which requires the soul to be a first substance, a hypostasis, a supposit, and a person. The inconsistency is apparent. He was aware of it<sup>107</sup>, and tried to solve it, unsuccessfully in my opinion. But that is the subject of a forthcoming work.

can exist without quantity, because substance at least can be defined without the accidents, while the substantial form cannot be defined without matter.

(101) *De ente et essentia*, chap. 4, v. 37-40: «In commento none propositionis libri De causis dicitur quod intelligentia est habens formam et esse: et accipitur ibi forma pro ipsa quidditate uel natura simplici».

(102) *Q. de anima*, q. 6, v. 234-242: «Esse consequitur ipsam formam, nec tamen forma est suum esse [...] forma tamen, in quantum est forma, non indiget materia ad suum esse, cum ipsam formam consequatur esse, set indiget materia cum sit talis forma que per se non subsistat. Nichil igitur prohibet esse aliquam formam a materia separatam que habeat esse; et in huiusmodi forma ipsa essentia forme comparatur ad esse sicut potentia ad proprium actum».

(103) *Q. de anima*, q. 7, v. 317-321: «Vnde [...] ex ipsa conditione sue nature competit (anime) quod corpori iniat, et quod sit pars speciei humane, non habens in se speciem completam», et *passim*.

(104) *Sententia libri de anima* II, c. 1, v. 80-83: «In omni autem diffinitione forme ponitur aliquid quod est extra essentiam forme, scilicet proprium subiectum eius siue materia. Vnde, cum anima sit forma, oportet quod in diffinitione ipsius ponatur materia siue subiectum eius». Cf. *Q. de anima*, q. 7, ad 16.

(105) *Q. de spiritualibus creaturis*, a. 2, ad 16: «Cum sit pars humane nature, non competit (anime) esse in genere uel specie uel esse personam aut ypostasim set composito [...] nec hoc aliquid dici potest, si per hoc intelligatur ypostasis uel persona uel individuum in genere uel specie collocatum»; *Q. de potentia*, q. 9 a. 2, ad 14: «Anima [...] non est persona»; *I Pars*, q. 75, a. 4, ad 2: «Non quaecumque substantia particularis est hypostasis vel persona, sed quae habet completam naturam speciei. Unde manus vel pes non potest dici hypostasis vel persona. Et similiter nec anima, cum sit pars speciei humane».

(106) *Compendium Theologiae* I, c. 211, v. 72-80: «Persona, hypostasis et suppositum designant aliquod integrum [...] in homine persona, ypostasis et suppositum est quod ex anima et corpore constituitur».

(107) *Q. de spiritualibus creaturis*, a. 2, v. 146-152: «Difficultas huius questionis ex hoc accidit quia substantia spiritualis est quedam res per se subsistens; forme autem debetur esse in alio, id est in materia, cuius est actus et perfectio: unde contra rationem substantie spiritualis esse uidetur quod sit corporis forma».

My final remark is that, in the absence of philosophical demonstrations of the existence of separate substances, the notion of substance can no longer be considered « neutrally immaterial » and its place in Metaphysics must be redefined. Metaphysics would still maintain the epistemological profile of science of being qua being, its attributes, its categories and its cause, and « substance » would still be a rightful object of Metaphysics as the first category, *i.e.* as the subject of being. But the same could not be said of « separate substances ». The corollary of this is that, since the only substances of whose existence we are philosophically certain are corporeal and mobile substances, the study of the species of « substance » belongs exclusively to Natural Philosophy.