

Forword to the Article: “The Pseudo-Dionysian Treatise *De Divinis Nominibus* in Aquinas’ Commentary *Super Librum De Causis Expositio*”

Summary

*The present work is about how St. Thomas Aquinas used Pseudo-Dionysius¹ *De Divinis Nominibus*² in order to interpret the *Liber de Causis*³. In order to see and emphasize the unity of the present work, we note that the use of DDN in the *Super Librum de Causis Expositio* of St. Thomas can be categorized into 3 major themes which the work proposes to address: 1) Where are the in se⁴ perfections? 2) God’s unique causality 3) Order in the Creation. The present article will deal with the first major theme: Where are the in se perfections? Other articles will follow to deal with the second and third themes.*

Resumo

*No presente trabalho, trata-se de como São Tomás de Aquino utilizou o *De Divinis Nominibus* do Pseudo-Dionísio para interpretar o *Liber de Causis*. Para ver e enfatizar a unidade do trabalho presente, notamos que o uso do DDN na *Super Librum de Causis Expositio* de São Tomás pode ser categorizado em três temas principais que o trabalho se propõe a abordar: 1) Onde estão as perfeições in se? 2) A causalidade única de Deus 3) A Ordem na Criação. O presente artigo tratará do primeiro tema principal: Onde estão as perfeições in se? Outros artigos seguirão para lidar com o segundo e terceiro temas.*

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¹ Henceforth, in order to simplify, I will use “Dionysius” when referring to this mysterious individual, but all the while understanding thereby the *Pseudo-Dionysius*.

² Henceforth “DDN”.

³ Henceforth “DC”.

⁴ By “in se” I mean pure perfections as opposed to merely derived perfections, had by participation.

Introduction

The present article is about how St. Thomas Aquinas used Pseudo-Dionysius⁵ *De Divinis Nominibus*⁶ in order to interpret the *Liber de Causis*⁷. In order to see and emphasize the unity of the article, it is necessary to give a brief overview of the subject-matter. The use of DDN in the *Super Librum de Causis Expositio* of St. Thomas can be categorized into 3 major themes which the article proposes to address: 1) Where are the *in se*⁸ perfections? 2) God's unique causality 3) Order in the Creation.

F.1 Where are the *in se* perfections first and foremost

I would like to start with an oxymoron. Dionysius says at one point⁹ that the First Cause **transcends** *esse*. So He is **beyond** being. Sounds very Neoplatonic. Plotinus or Proclus could have written that! The First Cause **transcends** *esse* (ὑπερούσιος οὐσία [Dionysiaca I, 321⁴]). But if you read just a couple lines up, just before he says that the First Cause **transcends** *esse*, he calls the First Cause “**TRUE** *esse*” (ὄντως ὄν [Dionysiaca I, 321²]). It's a contradiction! How can you **transcend** *esse* and **be** *esse* at the same time? But, at least in Aquinas' interpretation, the contradiction is only apparent—hence, as Cristina D'Ancona would say, something of an oxymoron.

The contradiction is only apparent because when Dionysius says that God **transcends** *esse*, it is not because his perfection **excludes** *esse*. Dionysius means that the way God transcends *esse* is not, for example, the way an **angel** transcends “healthy”. Here, in this example, the subject (Angel) transcends this predicate (healthy) so completely that the Angel **excludes** health. Health is not an absolute perfection, but only a perfection inside the kingdom of bodily life. (The Angel has no physical body and a physical body is the only kind of thing that is, properly speaking, **healthy**!).

⁵ Henceforth, in order to simplify, I will use “Dionysius” when referring to this mysterious individual, but all the while understanding thereby the *Pseudo*-Dionysius.

⁶ Henceforth “DDN”.

⁷ Henceforth “DC”.

⁸ By “*in se*” I mean pure perfections as opposed to merely derived perfections, had by participation.

⁹ DIONYSIUS, *De Divinis Nominibus*; V, 1.

Instead, God transcends *esse* in the thought of Dionysius, because, unlike any other *esse*, His *esse* is not limited by any potency. Nothing can be added to unlimited *esse* that would be foreign to it¹⁰. God thus pre-contains *formally*, in his simple perfection, all the intelligible perfections-of-being that he causes in creatures (by “intelligible perfections” I mean perfections like “goodness”, “life”¹¹, “intelligence”: perfections where it is always better to have them than not to have them. These we will call “pure perfections”¹²). God is *each one* of these perfections, in such a way that being *one* of these *essentially* does not exclude also being the *others essentially*.¹³ In this sense he is TRUE being, because his Being is the un-created activation of all real, intelligible perfections that being can imply.

So what does this oxymoron mean for DC?

In DC, just like in DDN, all Plato’s separate, self-subsisting ideas (those that are *pure* perfections) become ways of *naming* the First Cause; in fact, they name *Him* first and foremost, and are applied to creatures in a proper, but merely derived way (by participation).

So the First Cause *is* Being and, at the same time, the cause of all other being outside of himself.

On this point, the author of DC did something quite Dionysian. Even though the *Liber de Causis* is essentially a rearranged paraphrase of the *Elementatio Theologica* by Proclus, on *this* point, the author clearly does *not* follow Proclus. Proclus would never *dream* of saying that the First Cause, the *Unum-Bonum*, is *being*; and neither is *Plotinus’* One by any means “being”¹⁴.

¹⁰ THOMAS AQUINAS, *De Potentia* 7, 2, ad 9. Henceforth: “De Pot.”.

¹¹ Although the perfection “soul” is an integral part of DC, it is not an absolute perfection. It is better to have an intellectual life without a soul like Angels and God. Though we cannot say that God is soul, we can say that he is Life, and by his Life, he moves everything that has life...

¹² Other perfections that are not pure perfections are contained in God as well, but *virtually* instead of formally.

¹³ The same vision is that of DC as we shall see..

¹⁴ Nevertheless, in the Arabic paraphrases of Plotinus, we do find the *roots* for the doctrines of monotheism and creation. That the First Cause is *esse*, for example: “The First Creator is ... mere being ...” (*The Greek Sage* [an offspring of the supposed Arabic Plotinus Source]. We see this in the transmission of *Enneads* V, 1, 10 in some Arabic stars in philosophy during the Middle Ages; See D’Ancona, “Avicenna and the *Liber*”, p. 105).

For Dionysius, God is pure *esse*. This is also what DC¹⁵ says: in prop. 2: “...*esse vero quod est ante aeternitatem est causa prima*”¹⁶. There you have it: “...*esse...est causa prima*”. Still clearer is prop. 9: “*Et causae*

¹⁵ A further example would be the following: “*Et causa prima est supra res intellectibiles sempiternas et supra res destructibiles, quapropter non cadunt super eam sensus neque meditatio neque cogitatio neque intelligentia.*” (Text of DC, in: Thomas D’Aquin, *Super Librum de Causis Expositio*, Saffrey (ed.), Vrin, Sorbonne, 2002, prop. 6, p. 42; Pa., p. 149, ll. 54-58). An explanation of these 2 different critical editions of DC will be given later on. This work of St. Thomas, the *Super DC*, Henceforth will be referred to as “Saffrey” in citations.

¹⁶ Text of DC, in: Saffrey, prop. 2, p. 10; Pa., p. 138, ll. 74-75. In the parallel text of Proclus’ *Elementatio*, Proclus is not speaking of the First Cause when he mentions the *ens* that is *ante aeternitatem*. The “First Cause” according to Proclus is the *Unum-Bonum*. For Proclus, as we have just affirmed, the *Unum-Bonum* is not *esse*, but *above esse*. The *Unum-Bonum* is a *cause* for Proclus, but it should be remembered that his *Unum-Bonum* has a peculiar causality in that it does not produce beings *directly*. (See Proclus’ *Platonic Theology* III, 8, Michele Abbate, ed., Bompiani, Milano, 2005, p. 347 ll. 12-20.) Thus, the First Cause is not in any way considered when we talk about the perfections we find in creatures. He is not being. He is not *ipsum esse separatum*. The fact that for Proclus, the *hyparxes* are something other than the *Unum-Bonum* itself, puts the First Cause out of the loop regarding names of the *hyparxes*. (These *hyparxes* would be being-itself, life-itself, intellect-itself, and even more so, the One and the Dyad. More on the Proclean *hyparxes* later. See chapter 3 of this article.) For Proclus, instead of the First Cause, what *directly* causes is the dyad: both a “determined” (*πέρας*) and an “indetermined” (“*ἀπειρία*”) principle, (Proclus, *Teologia Platonica* III, 8, p. 340, l. 20). Proclus took these names from the *Philebus* (Proclus, *Teologia Platonica*, *ibid.*, ll. 19-20, emphasis mine). Plato says: “...πολλῶν ὄντων τῶν αἰεὶ λεγομένων εἶναι, *πέρας* δὲ καὶ *ἀπειρίαν* ἐν αὐτοῖς ζῶμφτον ἐχόντων.” (Plato, *Philebus* 16C, Jeffrey Henderson, ed., Harold North Fowler, trans., LCL (= Loeb’s Classical Library) 164, Harvard University Press, Cambridge [MA]. London, 1925, p. 220). English: “...that all the things which are ever said to exist are sprung from one and many and have inherent in them the **finite** and the **infinite**.” (*ibid.*, p. 221). For Proclus, these two originating principles or genera come hierarchically *after* the First Cause (the supreme God). “Τί γὰρ ἄλλο μετὰ τὴν ἐνωσιν τῆς ὅλης θεότητος ἢ τὴν δυάδα τῶν ἀρχῶν ἀνάγκη τετάχθαι;” (Proclus, *Teologia Platonica* III, 7, p. 338, ll. 12-13) “*Cos’altro infatti si deve porre dopo l’unità della natura divina universale se non la diade dei principi?*” (Proclus, *Teologia Platonica* III, 7, p. 339, ll. 12-13). This Proclean position, according to the opinion of Giovanni Reale, was probably not the original position of Plato, for whom, it seems, the dyad was alone the *ἀπειρία*, i.e., without *πέρας*; in the place of *πέρας* was the One itself and no other principle (cf. Giovanni Reale, *Per Una Nuova Interpretazione di Platone*, 10ª Edizione, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Milano, 1991, pp. 694-697, 707, 710-711). In any case, the two principles were no secondary matter, but already in the Old Academy were very important (cf. *ibid.*, p. 710), and were known by still other names, e.g.: “One”-“Dyad” or “Odd”-“Even” (which may be traced back to Pythagoras).

quidem primae non est yliathim, quoniam ipsa est esse tantum”¹⁷, and in prop. 20: “[Causa prima] *non est bonitas nisi per suum esse....*”¹⁸

This Dionysian maneuver is the core reason for my theme: that DDN can help in interpreting DC. The importance of the unification of the *in se* principles in God is what makes my theme worth researching at all.

Proclus’ First Cause (*Unum-Bonum*) is, according to him, not *being* at all, but *transcends* being **altogether**. For Proclus, this also involves transcending completely **intelligence**. For **Proclus**, the First Cause is **unthinkable**; unthinkable¹⁹ not only in the sense that I or an Angel cannot think Him, but, yes, in the sense that He does not even *think* Himself (the way Aristotle’s First Mover *thinks* Himself). The First Cause, according to Proclus, **knows** Himself all right, but, in a way that completely excludes intelligence: “a mode of cognition which *we* cannot hope to grasp”²⁰ and

¹⁷ Text of DC, in: Saffrey, prop. 9, p. 57; Pa., p. 157, ll. 100-102, emphasis mine. *Yliatim* means, for Thomas, something potential. Thomas understands it as a limiting essence (which limits *esse*). (Cf. Saffrey, prop. 9, p. 64, ll. 1-25.)

¹⁸ Text of DC, in: Saffrey, prop. 20, p. 108; Pa., p. 177, ll. 13-14, emphasis mine.

¹⁹ For Plotinus, this would be likewise impossible. For the First Cause to think himself would, for Plotinus, make for a duality (1. the intellect and 2. its activity) (*Enneads* V, 3, 12; details from the critical edition later on). For other Platonics, the duality consists in the idea of intelligence as a form **plus** being (which would accrue to the form), but the intellect would receive being and not be being itself.

²⁰ These words of Dodds (Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, Eric Robertson Dodds, ed., 2nd edition, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1963, see Dodds’ commentary on prop. CXXIV, p. 266) seem to describe the knowledge of Plato’s Limited and Unlimited.

However, it should be noted that Proclus’ meaning here is not clear for modern commentators. See, e.g., John Joseph Cleary, *Studies on Plato, Aristotle and Proclus*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p. 557. The problem is that Proclus sometimes uses “gods” in the strict sense: the Limit and the Unlimited, and sometimes in a wider sense. (Sometimes in such a way as to intend “to insert the traditional cult gods” into his system). To exemplify the wide sense, Cleary indicates, e.g., prop. CXIV of the *Elementatio*, where Proclus says “Πᾶς θεὸς ἐνὰς ἐστὶν αὐτοτελής, καὶ πᾶσα αὐτοτελής ἐνὰς θεός.” (Proclus, *Elementatio*, prop. CXIV, Dodds, p. 100, ll. 16-17) “Every god is a self-complete henad or unit, and every self-complete henad is a god.” (ibid., p. 101). Cleary explains that the problem is “compounded by the subsequent proposition ... which claims that, as a self-complete henad, every god is above Being, Life, and Intelligence.” (Proclus, *Elementatio*, prop. CXV, Dodds, p. 100, l. 28: “Πᾶς θεὸς ὑπερουσίος ἐστὶ καὶ ὑπέρνους.”) Here, the sense of “god” seems to be restricted to mean only the Limit and the Unlimited. (To see what these principles are, see footnote 103).

Based on prop. VII (“Πᾶν τὸ παρακτικὸν ἄλλου κρείττον ἐστὶ τῆς τοῦ παραγομένου φύσεως.” [Dodds, p. 8, ll. 1-2]; English: “Every productive cause is superior to that which it produces” [ibid., p. 9]), a cause of knowledge cannot be without knowledge, it would

therefore also cannot name. Between the divine way of knowing and intelligence, there is no comparison, so similarity; hence, the name “**intelligence**”, just like the name “**being**” will not **serve** for the First Cause.

Dionysius, on the contrary, seeing the link between being with intelligence, says that it is exactly because God is **true** being, that He is also true **wisdom (intelligence)**: “...*quod non aliud sit ipsum esse et ipsa sapientia*”.²¹ The same is true for DC because: “...*quod est causati est causae iterum, verumtamen per modum sublimiorem*...”.²² In the author’s thinking, this means that a pure perfection like intelligence, must be found in the First Cause.

F.2 God’s Unique Causality as Creator in Comparison to the Causality of Creatures

In DC, the First Cause alone is ultimately responsible for causing *being* in others exactly because He alone is *Ipsum Esse* and none of them is. Being the origin of all perfection **whatsoever** puts the First Cause in a special order all by Himself.

By putting all the *in se* principles in **God**, DC does not wish to eliminate the causality of creatures. The First Cause is Creator. Nevertheless, He is not the **only** cause. The highest creatures **also** cause being and life and intellect, but as **second** causes—I am speaking about the highest intellects and the highest souls. How, then, does their causality compare with the causality of the First Cause? We have said that the First Cause **creates**: taken broadly, this means he gives things being. Do the highest intellects and souls have any role in creation? The author of DC gives us a problematic phrase about this. He says: “*Causa prima creavit esse animae mediante intelligentia*”²³. The query that all would like to make to the author of DC is: **what kind** of mediation of the intelligence or intelligences is possible when one speaks of **creation, mediante intelligentia**? St. Thomas goes through the different possibilities and settles on the idea

thus be worse off than its inferiors. Because of this, Dodds’ commentary would seem to be applicable even more so to the First Cause, but it does not seem to be possible to be absolutely certain if Proclus meant that.

²¹ Saffrey, prop. 3, p. 24, ll. 4-8; cf. DDN V, 2; *Dionysiaca* I, 326²-327¹.

²² Text of DC, in: Saffrey, prop. 6, p. 42; Pa., p. 149, ll. 60-63. Literal citation from Pattin’s edition.

²³ Text of DC, in: Saffrey, prop. 3, p. 17; Pa., p. 140, ll. 13-14, emphasis mine.

that the only way to interpret this in accord with the truth of things is to say that it is a reference to *illumination*²⁴. Since this is a recurring theme in Dionysius' works, St. Thomas brings us some quotes from DDN and from *Caelestis Hierarchia* in order to explain the various degrees of illumination that DC mentions: first, illumination from the First Cause to the highest intelligences²⁵, then from the highest intelligences to lower intelligences²⁶, and finally from the intelligences to souls²⁷.

We will show that this way of explaining the troubling phrase: "*Causa prima **creavit** esse animae mediante intelligentia*"²⁸ is by no means arbitrary, but quite solid. In fact, DC does *indeed* speak about how the higher intelligences pass on intelligible forms to lesser intelligences in prop. 10.²⁹ "*Quapropter fit quod intelligentiae secundae proiciunt visus*

²⁴ See my original thesis p. 16ff and p. 63ff (not available). Part of this analysis is found in 3.1 of this article. The other part of it will appear in a subsequent article that continues the present article.

²⁵ E.g., text of DC, in: Saffrey, prop. 16, p. 93; Pa., p. 171, ll. 6-14, emphasis mine.

²⁶ E.g., Saffrey, prop. 10, p. 71, ll. 18-25.

²⁷ E.g., "*Dionysius dicit in IV^o capitulo De divinis nominibus quod animae per angelos fiunt participes illuminationum a Deo emanantium.*" (Saffrey, prop. 3, p. 24, ll. 13-17, emphasis mine; DDN IV, 2; *Dionysiaca* I, 154¹-155¹). This citation will be treated in a further article that will be a continuation of the present article.

²⁸ Text of DC, in: Saffrey, prop. 3, p. 17; Pa., p. 140, ll. 13-14, emphasis mine.

²⁹ "...formae quae adveniunt ex intelligentiis primis secundis sunt debioris processionis et vehementioris separationis..." (Text of DC, in: Saffrey, prop. 10, p. 66; Pa., p. 159, l. 35–p. 160, l. 41; Literal citation from Pattin's edition.) "...intelligentia dat causatis suis scientiam, quod est quia omnis scientia vera non est nisi intelligentia et intelligentia est primum sciens quod est et est influens scientiam super reliqua scientia. ...**per modum formae**." It is probably accidental forms that are meant by this last phrase: "...**per modum formae**". (Text of DC, in: Saffrey, prop. 18, p. 100; Pa., p. 173, l. 48 - p. 174, l. 53.61, emphasis mine.) But the question remains: whether the author means accidental forms or rather informing something subsisting with yet another substantial form—in support of the theory of a plurality of substantial forms in one and the same individual. Prop. 10 may offer a clarification in favor of accidental forms of knowledge. It reads: "*Omnis intelligentia plena est formis...*" (Text of DC, in: Saffrey, prop. 10, p. 66; Pa., p. 158, ll. 8-10). The kind of form here meant is specified later in the following sentence: "[...Et similiter aliqua ex rebus non recipit quod est supra eam nisi **per modum secundum quem potest recipere ipsum,**] non per modum secundum quem est res recepta [Something above the soul is received not purely as the thing is itself, but according to the mode of the receiver (broken down, translated)]." (Ibid., Pa., p. 160, ll. 46-49, brackets original). Here, at least, we have it secured that the author of DC uses, at least in this case, "formis" in the sense of accidental forms (knowledge).

*suos super universalem formam, quae est in intelligentiis **universalibus**, et dividunt eam et separant eam....”*

Our forword up to here has been about where to place *esse*, *vita*, and *intelligentia* taken as universal causes, both in the First Cause Himself and in the highest creatures. This was surely the biggest theme to deal with, in the use of DDN in the Super DC.

F.3 Order (DC, DDN, Two Planes of Universal Causes³⁰)

As the title suggests, the *Liber de Causis* is about causes—particularly the *first* causes of things. The word “cause” automatically implies a certain *order* of effects. Each effect has a reference to the cause on which it depends. Some of these references are **stronger**, some **weaker**. The purpose of DC is precisely to explain the *order* of the universe according to the stronger or weaker reference of a thing to the First Principle of causality. That is the *reason* why DC gives such a detailed explanation about the first universal causes of things (God, intelligence, and soul).

“Order”³¹ here means a level of creatures that have a specific perfection common to each one in the group. The principle orders are: the order of intelligences, the order of souls, and the corporal order. Dionysius uses the term “analogy”³², in the Aristotelian sense, to describe the perfections that have the same name but are in different orders. For example, the perfection of knowledge is found in the order of intelligences and in the order of souls). He relates the orders of being to each other by emphasizing that the higher creatures help the lower and the lower thus give the higher an opportunity to show forth the goodness God has put in them, because toward the lower creatures, the higher creatures exercise causality and providence³³. (The highest Angels, for example, break down their

³⁰ In both planes or levels, we see a hierarchy based on causality and an analogy (proportion between the two levels) which produces an analogy of any pure perfections that are found in all the subsequent effects of the first cause as we shall see.

³¹ In a wider sense, God can also be said to be in his own “order” all by himself.

³² See the paragraph just below.

³³ E.g., place: THOMAS AQUINAS, *In Librum Beati Dionysii De Divinis Nominibus Expositio*, [Henceforth: “*In DDN*”], C. Pera, ed., IV, lectio 7, Marietti, Taurini. Romae, 1950; *Dionysiaca* I, 187²ff.: “...providentias superiorum aeternae habitudines coordinatorum, conversiones inferiorum...”

own intellectual species for an inferior intellect: so that the inferior will be able to understand.)³⁴

The analogy of perfections between orders is also what the author of DC recognizes throughout his whole work, but says it in a language that is much less explicit and less familiar to our fellow Aristotelians. Though he does not use the word analogy explicitly, he implies it by identifying (through similarity), also implicitly, the analogon and the analogates. He uses terms like, “containing” or “exemplar” in the higher analogate and “image” (“*yconice*” [adverb form]) on the part of the lower.

F.4 Conclusion

Dionysius’ closeness to pagan Neoplatonism permits us to understand, using Dionysius as a key for interpretation, many truths from the Neoplatonists, and later Neoplatonists (like the author of DC). For example, even though the author of DC may not have meant to include **human** souls among the highest souls that he speaks about, St. Thomas, following Dionysius’ teaching on the human soul, saw that one can draw from DC’s teaching on soul, truths about the **human** soul³⁵, and with that, even a philosophical support for the possibility of man’s resurrection with an incorruptible body³⁶.

³⁴ “*Unaquaeque essentia intellectualis, donatam sibi a diviniore uniformem intelligentiam, provida virtute dividit et multiplicat ad inferioris ductricem analogiam.* (Saffrey, prop. 10, p. 72, ll. 6-8; Dionysius, *Caelestis Hierarchia* XV, 3; *Dionysiaca* II, 1006²-1007¹.) DC does not mention this particular type of providence.

³⁵ What they have in common: 1) gives life and movement 2) horizon (The soul is a mediator: see #4 in this list.) 3) susceptible to illumination (being under the custody of the intelligences) 4) Their substance is in eternity, their operation in time

³⁶ **Proclus’ reason** for corruptibility of man: not really a natural union. **DC’s reason**: weak impression of soul itself on the body; if the soul could only receive this power from the First Cause... to impress itself permanently on the body! Such might be the result of a special *coniunctio animae ad Causam Primam*. (Such a *coniunctio* could be seen as grace and glory, which is also the reason for calling a **human** soul divine instead of cosmological souls.)

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Pseudo-Dionysius³⁷

The works of the Pseudo-Dionysius³⁸ were ascribed to St. Paul's "Athenian convert"³⁹. The same was, in addition, thought to have been the Dionysius who was the first bishop of Paris. The writings enjoyed great esteem of authority from the theologians of the Middle Ages because of this identification. Later, however, it became clear that they depended too much on "important elements" of Neoplatonism to have existed before Neoplatonism. (And, to say the least, the pagan Neoplatonists were not likely, on their part, to get their ideas from Christian theological works.)

The Pseudo-Dionysian⁴⁰ corpus can best be dated to approximately the year 500 A.D. No one has been able to identify the author, but it is "reasonable" to think he was a Syrian cleric and theologian.

1.2 Thomas Aquinas and the Works of Dionysius and Their Place in His Commentary on the *Liber de Causis*⁴¹

Thomas Aquinas was a 13th century Dominican Theologian. The Church has made his doctrine her own⁴² because no one better than he has synthesized the truth of Revelation into one body, with the help of philosophy. He has synthesized the teachings of the Bible and the explanations of the Fathers of the Church and the great Councils. All the while, he has considered the true and legitimate contributions to knowledge that human reason (philosophical disciplines) has to offer.

Though Aristotle was no doubt his preferred philosopher, Thomas was able to blend the truth found in Aristotle with the truth that is to be found in Neoplatonic thinkers such as Dionysius, Proclus, and the author of the *Liber de Causis*.

³⁷ Frederick COPLESTON, *A History of Philosophy: Augustine to Scotus*, Vol. II, Search Press, London, 1950, pp. 91-93.

³⁸ Henceforth: "Dionysius".

³⁹ Act 17.

⁴⁰ Henceforth: "Dionysian".

⁴¹ The Commentary is called *Super Librum De Causis Expositio*; henceforth *Super DC*.

⁴² IOANNES A SANCTO THOMA, *Tractatus de approbatione et auctoritate doctrinae angelicae divi Thomae*, Prooemium, in: *Cursus Theologicus*, ed. Solesmes, I, p. 222.

Because Thomas did not know Greek, he had to depend on the available Latin translations of Dionysius' works. For this reason, in this work, whenever we are speaking of doctrines of Dionysius that are explained in St. Thomas' commentary, we will be citing Dionysius in Latin instead of the original Greek.

The two oldest Latin versions of Dionysius' works, i.e., the translation of John Eriugena and that of John Saracen, were certainly known and used by Thomas.⁴³ Eriugena completed his translation around the year 858 at the request of Charles the Bald⁴⁴. John Saracen wished to clear up the obscurities of Eriugena's translation.⁴⁵ John Saracen finished his translation around 1167⁴⁶. It is quite evident that Eriugena's translation of DDN was not Thomas' preferred version. B. Sammon says that St. Albert preferred the John Saracen version, and he has no doubt that Thomas used Saracen's translation in the commentary on DDN⁴⁷. It was only logical, therefore, that Thomas would again prefer it to Eriugena's version in

⁴³ "Maria Burger...found a manuscript from Cologne's Cathedral church library (Codex 30) that contained an 11th-century copy of the works of Pseudo-Dionysius, running the gamut from the Celestial Hierarchy to the Divine Names. . . But found in the margins and between the lines of the 11th-century hand were notes written in the telltale *littera illegibilis* of the young Thomas Aquinas. It turns out that his task had been to compare the Latin text found in Codex 30 (which contained the original Eriugena translation) with Eriugena's revised translation and with John the Saracen's translation—all of which Thomas did with diligence. As Burger showed in her original article, Albert then used Thomas' marginal and interlinear notes in the course of composing his commentaries on pseudo-Dionysius." (Mark Johnson, "Thomas Aquinas: St. Albert's onetime lackey?", *Thomistica News*, Thomistic Center of Ave Maria University, 02-28-2011, accessed 12-17-2016, <http://thomistica.net/news/2011/2/28/thomas-aquinas-st-alberts-onetime-lackey.html>). In his commentary on prop. 6 of DC, Thomas reveals that he knew the Dionysian works in the translations of both Eriugena and Saracen Dionysius' works, by citing both versions of a word in the *Celestial Hierarchy*: "Unde DIONYSIUS dicit II^o capitulo *Caelestis Hierarchiae* quod *negationes in divinis sunt verae, affirmationes vero incompactae* [Eriugena] vel *inconvenientes* [Saracen]" (Saffrey, prop. 6, p. 43, ll. 16-18. See also Saffrey's footnote: "*Vox 'incompactae' sumitur ex versione Ioannis Scoti et vox 'inconvenientes' ex versione Saraceni*").

⁴⁴ Frederick COPLESTON, *Ibid.*, p. 91.

⁴⁵ Philippe CHEVALLIER, ed., *Dionysiaca* (tome I), Desclée de Brouwer & Cie Éditeurs, Bruges, 1937, p. LXXV.

⁴⁶ *Dionysiaca* I, LXXIV.

⁴⁷ Brendan Thomas SAMMON, *The God Who is Beauty: Beauty as a Divine Name in Thomas Aquinas and Dionysius the Areopagite*, James Clarke and Co., Cambridge, 2014.

the *De Causis* commentary⁴⁸.⁴⁹ There is no trace of Robert Grossetest's translation in Thomas' works. It was perhaps written too late to have found a great circulation by 1272, when, according to Saffrey⁵⁰, Thomas wrote his Commentary on *De Causis*.⁵¹

The Dionysian corpus is one of only three sources that Thomas cites *literally* in his *Expositio Super Librum de Causis*⁵². The other two sources are Proclus' *Elementatio Theologica* and the *Liber de Causis*⁵³ itself. In this commentary, Aquinas cites works other than these three *ad mentem* only. According to Torrell, this fact itself reveals Thomas' main purpose of exposition: to compare *these* three texts. As for his own views expressed in the commentary on DC, "...he rejects separated forms and divine hypostases, which is to say Neoplatonic polytheism, as well as its emanationism and the priority of the one and of the good over being, 'but he will also carefully preserve in his synthesis the great orders of creation'⁵⁴: being, living things, intelligences, and God over and above all"⁵⁵.⁵⁶

⁴⁸ See the confirmation of Hyacinthe-François Dondaine: Saffrey., Preface, p. XXXVI (Saffrey's footnote 2).

⁴⁹ We could take, just as an example, a Dionysian quote in the commentary on prop. 4: "*Et, si est fas dicere, bonum quod est super omnia existentia et ipsum non existens desiderat.*" (Saffrey, prop. 4, p. 28, ll. 20-23; DDN V, 5; *Dionysiaca* I, 158⁴-159¹) Looking at the *Dionysiaca*, it is obvious that Thomas used the Saracen version, which is the same, word for word. There is no contest among the other translations. E.g. the Eriugena version reads: "*Et (si iustum dicere) optimum quod est super omnia existentia et id quod non ON* [Greek letters] *appetit*".

⁵⁰ Cf. Saffrey, Preface, pp. XXXIII-XXXVI.

⁵¹ Irena BACKUS, ed., *The Reception of the Church Fathers in the West*, Vol. 1, Brill, London, New York, Cologne, 1997. Bl. John Duns Scotus used the Grossetest version, which, by his day, had had enough time to circulate well.

⁵² Henceforth: "*Super DC*".

⁵³ Henceforth: "DC"; a repetition for the sake of those who skip the forward. For the same reason, other similar repetitions will follow.

⁵⁴ An example of this preservation of the great orders of creation is the commentary on prop. 19: Cf. Thomas D' Aquin, *Super Librum De Causis Expositio*, 2nd Edition, Henri Dominique Saffrey, ed., Vrin, Paris, 2002, prop. 19, p. 106, ll. 4-9. Henceforth: "Saffrey".

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, Preface, pp. XXXVI-XXXVII.

⁵⁶ Jean-Pierre TORRELL, *St. Thomas Aquinas*, Vol. 1, 2nd Edition, CUA, Washington, 2005, pp. 222-223.

1.3 Introduction to *De Divinis Nominibus*

Some things we say about God completely transcend reason, like the Unity of his Substance in the Trinity of Persons. Dionysius treated this subject matter in a work called *De Divinis Hypotyposibus (Characteribus)*⁵⁷. Those names of God that are accessible to unaided reason can be subdivided into the *intelligible* names and the *symbolic* names. These are the subject matters of two other Dionysian works.

The symbolic names of God are said properly of creatures; they are then transferable to God only by way of metaphor (e.g., “lion”, “stone”, and “sun”). Such symbolic names of God are the subject matter of Dionysius’ *De Symbolica Theologia*.⁵⁸ The intention of *De Divinis Nominibus*⁵⁹ is to deal with God’s intelligible names⁶⁰. These are the names of perfections that are really and properly found in God, and we find these same properties in a derived way in the created order, by means of a certain likeness. As to the essence of God as it is in itself: the essence of God that is properly named life or being, it remains unknown⁶¹ to us, and this is the subject of a fourth Dionysian work: the *Theologia Mystica* (or *Occulta*).

1.4 Introduction to DC and the Version Thomas Used

DC was widely used by the scholastics of the 13th century. While at first thought to be a work of Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas saw that it was a kind of compendium of Proclus’ *Elementatio Theologica*⁶². DC adapted

⁵⁷ I.e., *On the Divine Characters* (L.: *Characteribus*), Thomas tells us that this work had not been preserved. It remains unknown today.

⁵⁸ This work has also not come down to us, as Thomas indicates with the phrase: “*in quodam suo libro quem De Symbolica Theologia intitulavit*” (*In Librum Beati Dionysii De Divinis Nominibus Expositio*, Prologue, p. 1, [Henceforth: “*In DDN*”]).

⁵⁹ Henceforth: “*DDN*”. The content of this paragraph is taken from the Prologue of Thomas Aquinas’s *In DDN*, pp. 1-2.

⁶⁰ *In DDN* IV, 4, p. 107, n. 322.

⁶¹ Unknown because of its infinity. But, in the mind of Thomas, even the inner core of the Divinity is known by us to a certain extent by means of the analogy of these intelligible names. Whether Dionysius would share this thought with Thomas and up to what point is perhaps not so clear.

⁶² St. Thomas discovered that the author was not Aristotle, as people assumed, but an Arab philosopher who wanted to pass on the doctrine of Proclus’ *Elementatio Theologica* (henceforth: “*Elementatio*”). This work had just been translated by William of Moerbeke, which permitted Thomas to see the correspondence of content between it and DC. (Cf.

Proclus to monotheism and the doctrine of creation⁶³, a development that has roots already in the Arabic translations and transmission of Neoplatonism, e.g., the Arabic paraphrases of the *Enneads* IV-VI⁶⁴.⁶⁵

Thomas used the Latin translation of DC, which was translated from a version in the original, Arabic language. Today, that Arabic version exists in only one manuscript. Gerhard of Crémone translated DC from the Arabic into Latin at the end of the 12th century. There are an estimated 120 to 150 manuscripts of this Latin translation still around today. The most recent critical edition of the Latin version is that of Adriaan Pattin. We will always cite where to find in Pattin's edition the DC texts we cite in our work; we will indicate wherever we quote directly Pattin's edition. However, for convenience, we will also use direct citations from the critical version of DC found in Saffrey. The numbering of the propositions of DC will always be from Saffrey. The critical edition reproduced by Saffrey was the work of Otto Bardenhewer⁶⁶. The reason for maintaining this numbering is that this work is principally about *Thomas' commentary* on DC; due to the corresponding numbering of the propositions of DC between the manuscript from which Thomas cites and the version of Bardenhewer, it is helpful to mention the numbering of Bardenhewer's edition so that readers will not be confused by Pattin's numbering, which differs from Thomas'. In the text proper of our work, when we refer to a proposition of DC by a number, it will always be the number according to the Bardenhewer edition.

Moreover, speaking of the propositional structure, it should be noted that since there are two works cited in this article that have this structure, it will be fitting to have an easy way to distinguish them. Thus the propositions of DC will be numbered with Arabic numerals (e.g., prop.

Pasquale Porro, ed., *De Ente et Essentia*, 2^a Edizione, Bompiani, Milano, 2013, p. 147, his footnote 35; cf. Saffrey, Prologue, p. 3, ll. 1-10).

⁶³ Cf. Cristina D'Ancona Costa, ed., *Commento al "Libro delle Cause"*, Rusconi, Milano, 1986, p. 110.

⁶⁴ The *Enneads* are the writings of Plotinus arranged by Porphyry. (cf. Jean JOLIVET, *La Teologia degli Arabi*, Jaca Book, Milano, 2001, pp. 57-58). Besides with DC, the content of these paraphrases survives, at least partially, also with the *Pseudo-Theology of Aristotle*, *Sayings of the Greek Sage*, *Epistle on Divine Knowledge*.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* Jolivet is quoting D'Ancona. See also Saffrey (*idem*, Preface, p. XXIV) who holds this to be plausible.

⁶⁶ OTTO BARDENHEWER, *Die pseudo-aristotelische Schrift Über das reine Gute bekannt unter dem Namen Liber de causis*, Freiburg im Breisgau, 1882.

10), those of the *Elementatio Theologica* of Proclus with Roman numerals (e.g., prop. X).

1.5 Putting DDN and DC Together

DC is about the first **causes** of things. The word “cause” automatically implies a certain *order* of effects with reference to the causes on which they depend. The purpose of DC is precisely to explain the *order* of the universe according to the principle of causality, and this requires a detailed explanation about the first causes of things (God, intelligence, and soul).

In Plato’s world of ideas, everything we know exists outside of us in exactly the same way we know it, i.e., as abstract ideas. These, for the Platonists, are the causes of sensible things as well as commonalities among species and genera. Such is Plato’s exaggerated realism. DC, however, presents the order in the universe without dependence on separately existing, abstract ideas. So it was, as Saffrey indicates⁶⁷, that St. Thomas considered DC comparable to Dionysius’ works on this point; DDN is a “*précurseur du réalisme modéré*”⁶⁸ for DC. Both are a rethinking of Neoplatonism by means of an explanation of the order of the universe without recourse to separately existing, abstract ideas. In the words of D’Ancona Costa, “*Tommaso li mette insieme*” (i.e., DC and DDN)⁶⁹. Dionysius is a precursor for DC in *moderate* realism as a contrast to Platonic *exaggerated* realism.

In his commentary on DC, St. Thomas often brings DDN to bear directly on DC or at least on the subject matter of DC (17 explicit citations in all!). Due to the extensiveness of the bearing DDN has on the *Super* DC, I am obliged to limit the present research about this based only on Thomas’ **explicit** citations of DDN. The key issue here is that DC rejects separated Platonic forms as such, and does so according to the method of Dionysius⁷⁰. This means that the first of *all* intelligible perfections is the First Cause Himself. This understanding has a profound influence on how the author of DC understands causality in second causes; i.e., causes

⁶⁷ Cf. Saffrey, Preface, pp. XXVI and XXX.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. XXX.

⁶⁹ D’ANCONA, *idem*, pp. 80-81.

⁷⁰ E.g., “...oportet ergo dicere quod, a prima causa a qua [the soul] habet essentiam, habet etiam intellectualitatem. Et hoc concordat sententiae DIONYSII supra positae, scilicet quod non aliud sit ipsum bonum, ipsum esse et ipsa vita et ipsa sapientia, sed unum et idem quod est Deus” (Saffrey, prop. 3, p. 24, ll. 4-8).

which have a universal influence of sorts: the highest intelligences and the highest souls. I will mention all 17 citations⁷¹ at least once and explain at least *some* aspects of their influence on Thomas as a tool for interpreting the doctrine of DC, be that an influence on Thomas' interpretation of what the author of DC meant, be it an influence on Thomas' own doctrine that he gives in his commentary on the subject matter.

Chapter 2: Intelligible Names of God

2.1 “Unum-Bonum” Is *Esse*

Intelligible names of God designate *perfections* “absolutely”. This means that, though they exist according to many different modes of participation, according to the form of each being (*ens*), no *particular mode* of participation is necessarily implied in their signification.⁷² The expression “**universal forms**” conveys this meaning. “Form” is another word for perfection because its opposite, potency, is the *possibility* for perfection. Form is what *activates* a potency, bringing to *real* perfection what was a merely *possible* perfection. “Universal” means common to many. *Ens* is the most special case of existent universal forms (the intelligible names). It is the **most universal**, because in this case, universal means not only common to many, but common to all. *Ens* is form conceived simply “*qua* form”, or “*qua* act”; it does not, in any way at all, imply

⁷¹ See Appendix.

⁷² In order to clarify, we can take a look at symbolic names of God in order to see better, by contrast, the specific nature of the intelligible (transcendental or semi-transcendental [see footnote 83]) names. “Lion” and “stone”, for instance, are names used for God which, by their very signification, clearly imply *imperfection*, i.e., a determined and limited mode of participation in being. Such names can be said only metaphorically of God.

form *qua such* form⁷³. For this reason, St. Thomas explicitly calls “*ens*” *the* “universal form”⁷⁴.

Platonists and Neoplatonists called the First Cause both “*Unum*” and “*Bonum*” but considered *Esse* as a form distinct and less universal than the First Cause, the transcendent *Unum-Bonum*. For Proclus, e.g., *esse* is very clearly an altogether separate *hypostasis*⁷⁵, as are all “*in se*” principles for him.⁷⁶ For Dionysius, on the other hand, the universal “*in se*” principles become ways of *naming* the First Cause. It is principally this correction of Neoplatonism⁷⁷ that, for St. Thomas, is the key for understanding the position of the author of DC regarding Platonic ideal forms. In his commentary on DC, St. Thomas has recourse to the Dionysian re-elaboration *whenever* he has to deal with the ordering of platonic ideas.⁷⁸ D’Ancona

⁷³ Lawrence DEWAN, *Form and Being: Studies in Thomistic Metaphysics*, CUA, Washington, 2006, pp. 42-43; cf. THOMAS AQUINAS, *De Substantiis Separatis*, c. 7, p. D 52, l. 91 - p. D 53, l. 102: “*Amplius, cum actus naturaliter sit prior potentia et forma quam materia, potentia quidem dependet in suo esse ab actu et materia a forma, forma autem in suo esse non dependet a materia secundum propriam rationem, vel actus <a potentia>; non enim priora naturaliter a posterioribus dependent. Si igitur [for example] aliquae formae sint quae sine materia esse non possunt, hoc non convenit eis ex hoc quod sunt formae sed ex hoc quod sunt tales formae, scilicet imperfectae, quae per se sustentari non possunt sed indigent materiae fundamento*”. Emphasis mine.

⁷⁴ STh, I, 19, 6, Ed. Leon., Tom. IV, p. 241.

⁷⁵ Christoph HELMIG and Carlos STEEL, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2015 Edition), Edward N. Zalta, ed., <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2015/entries/proclus/>, accessed on 12-04-2015.

⁷⁶ Cf. D’ANCONA, *idem*, p. 114.

⁷⁷ “*Et, quia deos appellabant primas formas separatas... Hanc autem positionem corrigit DIONYSIUS quantum ad hoc quod ponebant ordinatim diversas formas separatas quas ‘deos’ dicebant....Et hoc est quod dicit V^o capitulo De divinis nominibus (DDN V, 2; Dionysiaca I, 326²-327¹): non autem aliud esse bonum dicit, scilicet Sacra Scriptura, et aliud existens et aliud vitam aut sapientiam neque multas causas et aliorum alias productivas deitates excedentes et subiectas, sed unius esse omnes bonos processus....Et hoc sequitur AUCTOR huius libri. Non enim invenitur inducere aliquam multitudinem deitatis, sed unitatem in Deo constituit, distinctionem autem in ordine intellectuum et animarum et corporum...anima nobilis, id est divina anima...divina dicitur eo modo loquendi quo etiam apud homines qui universalem curam rei publicae habent ‘divi’ dicuntur....Et hoc habet per virtutem participatam a causa prima...*” (Saffrey, prop. 3, p. 19, ll. 28-29 and p. 20, ll. 5-7.11-15.21-25 and p. 21, ll. 4-5.9-10).

⁷⁸ D’ANCONA, *idem*, p. 112.

Costa even sees DDN as a probable *source*⁷⁹, albeit a *mediated* source, for the author's (the author of DC) accepting that the *Unum-Bonum* **co-incides** with *Esse*.

Of all those most universal forms that the author of DC puts in God, according to the method of Dionysius (be that consciously or unconsciously), it is most easy to see this in the case of *Esse*: "*esse vero quod est ante aeternitatem est causa prima*"⁸⁰. There you have it: "*esse...est causa prima*". Still clearer is prop. 9: "*Et causae quidem primae non est*

⁷⁹ Pasquale PORRO, ed., *L'Ente e L'Essenza*, 2ª Edizione, Bompiani, Milano, 2013, pp. 148-149; G. Emery (Torrell, idem, p. 346) also says that Thomas identified the author of DC as an Arab philosopher who borrowed ... a great deal ... from Dionysius. For an example of what may be a *direct* influence of DDN on DC, consider the following paragraph here in this footnote.

As we mentioned in the forword, there is an apparent contradiction in Dionysius. This happens first of all with the attribute *esse* in DDN V, I. (This example helps because the same is true, then, for other attributes of God, like "eternity" which is our topic here.) The First Cause **transcends** *esse* (ὑπερούσιος οὐσία [Dionysiaca I, 321⁴]), **but is at the same time true esse** (ὄντως ὄν, Dionysiaca I, 321²). This "oxymoron" is deliberate, says D'Ancona. It is the "...modo di dare fondamento teorico alla compresenza di teologia negativa e teologia affermativa dei nomi divini...". In Dionysius, the Divine Names, like *esse*, are thus not meant to name the nature itself of the First Cause, but instead are "*sulla sua causalità*" (Cristina D'Ancona Costa, "*Causa Prima Superior est Omni Narratione*. Il Tema delle *Ṣifāt Allā* nel Primo Neoplatonismo Arabo", in: *Oriente Moderno*, Anno 19 [80], 3 [2000], Istituto per l'Oriente C. A. Nallino, Roma, p. 552). **The First Cause does not, however transcend "being" and "intelligence" in such a way as to exclude them, but He transcends them "proprio in quanto precontiene nella sua perfetta semplicità tutto l'essere—ossia tutte le cause intelligibili—, il primo principio non possiede alcun carattere determinato ad esclusione di altri caratteri.**" (ibid.) This method is proper to Dionysius; it is lacking in the Arabic paraphrases of Plotinus and Proclus. Through Christian translators of philosophical text from Syriac into Arabic, Dionysius seems to have entered Arabic philosophy and influenced some Arabic works with this method. (Cristina D'Ancona Costa, "'Cause prime non est ylatim' *Liber de causis*, prop. 8[9]: le fonti e la dottrina", in: *Documenti e Studi sulla Tradizione Filosofica Medievale*, Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo, Spoleto, I,2 [1990], pp. 347-349). This could thus explain, in the words of D'Ancona, the "striking parallel" ("The *Liber de causis*", p. 144, her footnote 41) between Dionysius' method and prop. 2 of DC: "*Esse vero quod est ante aeternitatem est causa prima, quoniam est causa ei.*" (Text of DC, in: Saffrey, prop. 2, p. 10; Pa., p. 138, ll. 74-75, emphasis mine). And at the same time, Dionysius will affirm that the First Cause **is eternal** (see our very next words in the text proper), and he does this according to the method we have been describing in this footnote.

⁸⁰ Text of DC, in: Saffrey, prop. 2, p. 10; Pa., p. 138, ll. 74-75. In the parallel text of Proclus' *Elementatio*, Proclus is not speaking of the First Cause when he mentions the *ens* that is *ante aeternitatem*. See footnote 16 for details. For Proclus, as we have just affirmed. *Unum-Bonum* is not *esse*, but **above** *esse*.

yliathim, quoniam ipsa est esse tantum”⁸¹, and in prop. 20: [The First Cause] *non est bonitas nisi per suum esse....*”⁸²

2.2 Vita and Intelligentia

Vita and *Intelligentia*, while not absolutely universal⁸³ in their effects (not absolutely universal like *esse* and those universal notions that are convertible⁸⁴ with *ens*: *unum*, *verum*, and *bonum*), they are nevertheless also universal causes in the sense that they do not carry any imperfection in their signification itself, or limitation to only one genus. That is to say, they too express perfection *absolutely* and so can be applied to God literally.⁸⁵ And while they do not exist as such in the lowest forms of being, nevertheless, they exist in the higher beings, which, by their life, *move* all that is below them and *contain* what is below them by way of cognition.⁸⁶

⁸¹ Text of DC, in: Saffrey, prop. 9, p. 67; Pa., p. 157, ll. 100-102.

⁸² Text of DC, in: Saffrey, prop. 20, p. 108; Pa., p. 177, ll. 13-14, emphasis mine.

⁸³ They are not predicated of all beings whatsoever, but are all the more present the higher the hierarchical ladder of being is climbed. For this reason, we might call them “semi-transcendentals”.

⁸⁴ By convertible, I mean that they are concepts with the same extension (an absolutely universal extension in this case).

⁸⁵ Cf. STh, I, 13, 4, ad 1, Ed. Leon., Tom. IV, p. 145. The examples used in this response are actually being, good, and living. *Intelligentia* is not specifically included. But in any case, the passage serves to show in what way *Intelligentia* can also be considered a universal cause that implies no imperfection. Being and Good are even more universal; hence, I chose to explain their universality first. *Vita* and *Intelligentia* are important universal causes in *Super DC* and so one must speak about them in an attempt at listing and then ordering names of God according to *Super DC*.

⁸⁶ “...*omnes rerum gradus ad tria videtur reducere quae sunt esse, vivere et intelligere. Et hoc ideo quia unaquaeque res tripliciter potest considerari: primo quidem secundum se, et sic convenit ei esse, secundo prout tendit in aliquid aliud, et sic convenit ei moveri, tertio secundum quod alia in se habet, et sic convenit ei cognoscere quia secundum hoc cognitio perficitur quod cognitum est in cognoscente non quidem materialiter sed formaliter. Sicut autem habere aliquid in se formaliter et non materialiter, in quo consistit ratio cognitionis, est nobilissimus modus habendi vel continendi aliquid, ita moveri a seipso est nobilissimus mobilitatis modus, et in hoc consistit ratio vitae; nam ea dicimus viventia quae se aequaliter movent. Esse igitur, quod est primum, commune est omnibus...*” (Saffrey, prop. 18, p. 101, ll. 9-21, emphasis mine). Regarding self motion in living things, the text goes on to specify that the higher living beings move both themselves and others (“*motiva sui ipsorum vel aliorum*” (*Ibid.*, l. 24). This could even be interpreted to show that their causality (of “life”) extends to things that do not formally have the perfection of life, but are moved. [This is, of course, would be an equivocal use of the term “life”.]

2.3 A Created Primum Esse

Though DC affirms the creation of all by the First Cause, the First Being, which is “*esse ante aeternitatem*” and that his *ylatim* “*est suum esse infinitum*”⁸⁷, the author also posits another primum esse, a *primum esse in the created order*. Among other things, this leads Saffrey to suspect that the author of DC posits this “*prima rerum creatura*” as “*une espèce de primum esse, qui sera cause de cette perfection dans les autres êtres*”⁸⁸. According to this view, the First Cause creates only the first creature, *esse creatum*, and everything else that *is*, receives being from that first creature by a production that we may not call creation, because it is not out of absolutely nothing, but rather something somehow already existing in that first creature.⁸⁹ Thomas⁹⁰, however, prefers to understand the author

⁸⁷ Nowhere in DC is the First Cause called *Vita* or *Intelligentia*, though this is implicit, when DC says He is “*bonitas pura*” which is “*influens super intelligentiam omnes bonitates*” (Text of DC, in: Saffrey, prop. 9, p. 57; Pa., p. 158, ll 5-7, emphasis mine). For among these bonitates are *vita* and *intelligentia*: “*Et reliquae bonitates simplices, sicut vita et lumen et quae sunt eis similia, sunt causae rerum omnium habentium bonitates*” (Text of DC, in: Saffrey, prop. 16, p. 93; Pa., p. 171, ll. 6-8).

⁸⁸ Saffrey, Preface, p. XXXI, emphasis mine.

⁸⁹ Perhaps, an *esse* that has preexisted in the inferior part of the first creature (intelligence).

⁹⁰ See Thomas’ commentary on prop. 3:

“*Et, quia deos appellabant primas formas separatas... Hanc autem positionem corrigit DIONYSIUS quantum ad hoc quod ponebant ordinatim diversas formas separatas quas ‘deos’ dicebant....Et hoc est quod dicit 1^o capitulo De divinis nominibus (DDN V, 2; Dionysiaca I, 326²-327¹): non autem aliud esse bonum dicit, scilicet Sacra Scriptura, et aliud existens et aliud vitam aut sapientiam neque multas causas et aliorum alias productivas deitates excedentes et subiectas, sed unius esse omnes bonos processus.... Et hoc sequitur AUCTOR huius libri. Non enim invenitur inducere aliquam multitudinem deitatis, sed unitatem in Deo constituit, distinctionem autem in ordine intellectuum et animarum et corporum...anima nobilis, id est divina anima...divina dicitur eo modo loquendi quo etiam apud homines qui universalem curam rei publicae habent ‘divi’ dicuntur....Et hoc habet per virtutem participatam a causa prima...*” (Saffrey, prop. 3, p. 19, ll. 28-29 and p. 20, ll. 5-7.11-15.21-25 and p. 21, ll. 4-5.9-10).

Consider also the commentary on prop. 4: “*Videtur tamen non esse eius intentio ut loquatur de aliquo esse separato, sicut PLATONICI loquebantur...*” (Saffrey, prop. 4, p. 29, ll. 8-12), the commentary on prop. 6: “*Et, quia AUCTOR huius libri non concordat cum PLATONICIS in positione aliarum naturarum separatarum idealium, sed ponit solum primum...superior narratione. [emphasis mine]*” (ibid., p. 44, ll. 17-20), and the commentary on prop. 12: “*...secundum intellectum huius AUCTORIS, haec tria [i.e., Esse, Vita, Intelligentia] non sunt quaedam res subsistentes, sicut dictum est...*” (ibid., p. 80, ll. 21-22).

of DC in such a way that, the first being in the created order, which is also called *intelligentia*⁹¹, has an influence on the beings below it, yet it is not the first cause of *esse* in them⁹² nor, consequently, can lower beings be said to participate in this created being, as we shall see⁹³, but only the First Cause is participated in: as pure *Esse*, pure *Vita*, and pure *Intelligentia*.

Chapter 3: Two Orders of the Universal Causes: Two Metaphysical Places for Intelligible Forms as Universal Causes

Thomas understands DC to speak of all three intelligible perfections: *esse*, *vita*, and *intelligentia*, as primary causes in **two different orders**, or two different *planes*, if you will: the *uncreated* plane and the *created* plane. On the uncreated plane, these perfections are the First Cause Himself: divine names. On the created plane, he speaks of these perfections, which come from God, as existing in *beings* that are intelligent and alive. Apart

⁹¹ *Intelligentia* is also called the first created thing, and so one could assume that the *esse* which is called the *prima creatura* is numerically identical with the intelligence that similarly called the *primum creatum*: “*Et intelligentia quidem...est primum creatum*” (Text of DC, in: Saffrey, prop. 7, p. 48; Pa., p. 151, ll. 97-98).

⁹² But rather is the cause of a particular *type* of being—an activity of a substance: thinking, which is a form of being. Thinking is *being*, but under the explicit aspect of “intelligent understanding”. Thinking is an unfolding of the perfection that being, in and of itself, implies (STh I, 4, 2, ad 3). Being, in and of itself and not as subject to limitations, contains virtually and implicitly the perfection of thinking. But the only way to interpret this doctrine (of creation “*mediante intelligentia*”) in a way that is healthy, says Thomas, is if the first created being, intelligence, does not give the act of thinking except in a way that is *indirect*. The first intellect, imitating the causality of the First Cause the best that the first intellect can, merely assists in the thinking of other intelligences by way of illumination, passing on intelligible forms to the lower intelligences so that, by the activity of the First Cause, who is Intelligence by essence, they can understand. Thus, the First Cause is the only one that is participated in because He is the only one that is these pure perfections (life and intellect) by essence. (Saffrey, p. 23 l. 20-p. 24 l. 15) It seems that Thomas is aware that this interpretation about no creatures being participated in, regarding perfections other than *esse* (by creation [Saffrey, p. 104, l. 13]), probably is not exactly what the author of DC historically meant (cf. Saffrey, p. 23, ll. 1-20). Nevertheless, Thomas makes a similar interpretation on prop. 18 (Saffrey, p. 103, ll. 19-20). Our next chapter will bring some quotes from prop. 16 of DC that give support to Thomas’ interpretation.

⁹³ This will be shown in a future article that will be a continuation of the present article. There we must examine in detail the words of DC in Prop. 3: “*Causa prima creavit esse animae mediante intelligentia*”. It is hinted at already in our footnote 92.

from *beings* that are intelligent and *beings* that are alive, these perfections do not exist as separate forms or natures like a *pure Intelligentia* and a *pure Vita* in the way some Platonics might propose. They do not exist as separate subsisting Platonic ideas or hypostases, but they *do* exist. And, though creatures, they exist as universal causes. Instead of existing separately, they exist *together* in the highest order of creation: in the separate intelligences (especially in the *highest* separate intelligences and souls). Here, the created plane of universal causes.

In prop. 16, Thomas sees a clear presentation of the **uncreated order** as well as the **created order** of *esse*, *vita*, and *intelligentia*. The proposition⁹⁴ reads:

Et reliquae bonitates simplices [besides *esse*], *sicut vita et lumen et quae sunt eis similia, sunt causae rerum omnium habentium bonitates, scilicet quod infinitum* [i.e., the intelligence, which is relatively infinite: infinite with respect to the beings that are below it, but not in the same way⁹⁵ as the First Cause, because it is a derived infinity, had according to participation] *est a causa prima et creatum primum est causa omnis vitae et similiter reliquae bonitates descendentes a causa prima super causatum primum in primis, et est intelligentia, deinde descendunt super reliqua causata intellectibilia et corporea, mediante intelligentia.*

Commenting on the first words of our quotation: “*Et reliquae bonitates simplices, sicut vita et lumen et quae sunt eis similia, sunt causae rerum omnium habentium bonitates, scilicet quod infinitum est a causa prima*” as well as the words “*bonitates descendentes a causa prima*”, St. Thomas notes the universal causality of these perfections according to their mode of existence in the First Cause. He says: “...*sicut enim causa prima est ipsum infinitum*”⁹⁶ *et omnia alia ab eo habent infinitatem, ita etiam causa prima est ipsa vita et ipsum lumen, et ab ipsa creatum primum, scilicet*

⁹⁴ Text of DC, in: Saffrey, prop. 16, p. 93; Pa., p. 171, ll. 6-14, emphasis mine.

⁹⁵ “...*secundum rei veritatem causa prima est supra ens in quantum est ipsum esse infinitum, ens autem dicitur id quod finite participat esse, et hoc est proportionatum intellectui nostro...*” (Saffrey, prop. 6, p. 47, ll. 12-14).

⁹⁶ Proclus’ “*infinitum*” was not the First Cause (see footnote103), but a medium between the idea of Good and the idea of being (Saffrey, prop. 16, p. 97, ll. 18-19). DC however calls the First Cause Himself “*infinitum primum*” in this proposition, according to the Dionysian positing of one *per se* principle, Who is each of the intelligible perfections through His *Esse* (Saffrey, prop. 16, p. 95, ll. 4-5).

*intelligentia, habet vitam et lumen intelligibile...*⁹⁷ In DC, “Causa prima” refers only to God and never to the intelligence.

In the second part of our quotation from prop. 16, the author of DC mentions the universal causality of these perfections according to the way they exist in the **created order**. These perfections of being⁹⁸ come from the First Cause and descend first of all upon the highest intelligence, and **from it**, they descend onward to other creatures. Thomas comments:

*...et ab ipsa [a causa prima] creatum primum, scilicet intelligentia, habet vitam et lumen intelligibile; et similiter etiam aliae bonitates descendunt a causa prima **primo quidem super creatum primum, quod est intelligentia**, et deinde super alia mediante intelligentia, sive illa alia accipiantur animae intellectuales, sive res spirituales.*⁹⁹

Thomas’ commentary gives a similar interpretation to prop. 12¹⁰⁰:

*Sed quia AUCTOR huius libri non videtur ponere formas separatas, quod hic dicitur esse et vitam et intelligentiam in se invicem esse, est intelligendum **secundum quod inveniuntur in habentibus esse, vivere et intelligere**; quia in ipso esse secundum propriam rationem invenitur causaliter vivere et intelligere... . Sed quia, secundum intellectum huius AUCTORIS, haec tria non sunt quaedam res subsistentes, sicut dictum est, consequenter applicat istam propositionem ad res quae per se subsistent, quae sunt: esse primum quod est Deus, intelligentia, anima intellectiva et anima sensitiva. Et dicit quod hoc modo causa est in effectu et e converso...*¹⁰¹.

⁹⁷ Saffrey, p. 97, ll. 22-25. If DC’s intellect were *per se* intelligence, it would not **receive** this perfection from anywhere. Dare we conclude from this an inkling in the author of DC himself about Thomas’ later interpretation: that the First Cause alone is the origin not only of all being, but also of all intelligence?

⁹⁸ This is what the author of DC means by “*bonitates*”, as we shall see in more detail in a future article that continues the present article. There we must consider the Order of the Universe and more specifically God’s perfect dominion over creation.

⁹⁹ Saffrey, p. 97, l. 24 - p. 98, l. 4, emphasis mine.

¹⁰⁰ “*Primorum omnium sunt quaedam in quibusdam per modum quo licet ut sit unum eorum in alio. Quod est quia in esse sunt vita et intelligentia, et in vita sunt esse et intelligentia, et in intelligentia sunt esse et vita . Verumtamen esse et vita in intelligentia sunt duae intelligentiae, et esse et intelligentia in vita sunt duae vitae, et intelligentia et vita in esse sunt duo esse.*” (Text of DC, in: Saffrey, prop. 12, p. 77; Pa., p. 161, l. 64ff.).

¹⁰¹ Saffrey, prop. 12, p. 80, ll. 7-10.21-26. The emphasis is mine: to stress that Thomas interprets the author of DC to mean *Esse* and *Vita* and *Intelligentia* as they are found in the beings that have them and not as separate hypostases in themselves.

The commentary on prop. 4¹⁰² is also worth noting in order to show how Thomas interprets the author of DC on this point. Thomas says the author posits a first *created esse*, *vita*, and *intelligentia* according to the Dionysian rejection of separated ideas, i.e., not as independently subsisting ideas (or perfections *per se*, that are separate hypostases) but rather as referring to these perfections as they are found together in individual creatures that are not *in se* principles, in particular in the highest intelligence. Since DC is a re-elaboration of Proclus' *Elementatio*, we should see this move of the author particularly as a rejection of *esse*, *vita*, and *intelligentia* as Proclus' *hyparxes*.¹⁰³

¹⁰² "Prima rerum creatarum est esse et non est ante ipsum creatum aliud. Quod est quia esse est supra sensum et supra animam et supra intelligentiam, et non est post causam primam latius neque prius creatum ipso. Propter illud ergo factum est superius creatis rebus omnibus et vehementius unitum." (Text of DC, in: Saffrey, *ibid.*, prop. 4, p. 26; Pa., p. 142, ll. 37-43).

¹⁰³ In Proclus' system, each intelligible principle designates an order (τάξις) of subsistence (ὄν) ("Subsistence" is the translation according to the Johnson edition: Proclus, *Metaphysical Elements*, Thomas M. Johnson, trans., Press of the Republican, Osceola, 1909, prop. XXII and XXVI, pp. 21.26; Dodds translates with a variant of "existent" [Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, Eric Robertson Dodds, trans., 2nd Edition, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1963, prop. XXII, p. 27]. The Dodds edition carries the Greek text.) These orders of "subsistences" or "existents" are, e.g., being, life, intelligence, soul, body. Each order of subsistence is made up of two types of unities (ἐνάδες) of subsistence. (Proclus notes this "...τῶν ἐνάδων διττὸς ὁ ἀριθμός..." (Dodds, prop. CXIV, p. 100, l. 18), and Dodds translates (p. 101): "two orders of henads" (emphasis mine); we will say two "classes" of henads so as not to confuse these sub-orders with the greater order (τάξις), which, as we said, designates subsistences such as being, life, intelligence, etc., to which they belong. **The first class in an order of subsistence is called the hyparxis (ὕπαρξις) of the order.** It is a whole, and is all by itself (with no equal); hence, there is always only *one* subsistence of this type and so it is also called a monad (μονάς). The monad or hyparxis generates the second type of subsistence in the order, which is a multitude. The multitude is called series (σειρά). Each subsistence in the series has, in a diminished way, the common characteristic of the order; **the hyparxis of the order, however, is that characteristic essentially.** It participates in nothing as regards that characteristic, but is, as it were, the first cause of that characteristic in all its participants (cf. Dodds, prop. XXI-XXIV, pp. 25-29). Each hyparxis participates in the perfection designated by the order hierarchically above it; it transcends the perfections of the orders below it. Thus, the hyparxis "intellect" participates in *being* (I leave out "life", which is in the original scheme of Proclus. The author of DC feels free sometimes to leave "life" out of his scheme and sometimes he includes it) because it itself is not being *per se*, but only by reception and in a diminished way. At the same time, "intellect" is intellect without participating in any other hyparxis. In relation to its inferior in this perfection (i.e., soul), intellect is totally exempt from soul and transcends soul because soul comes after it and is its effect

3.1 Attempt to Harmonize Dionysius and DC on the Created Order of Universal Causes

In order to find harmony between Dionysius and DC on the created order of universal causes, one of the passages from DC that we just cited above needs to be examined in particular on a certain point of difficulty in its doctrine. We cite the passage once more here:

*Et reliquae bonitates simplices, sicut vita et lumen et quae sunt eis similia, sunt causae rerum omnium habentium bonitates, scilicet quod infinitum est a causa prima et causatum primum est causa omnis vitae et similiter reliquae bonitates descendentes a causa prima super causatum primum in primis, et est intelligentia, deinde descendunt super reliqua causata intellectibilia et corporea, mediante intelligentia.*¹⁰⁴

(Proclus, *Elementatio*, prop. XXIII [Dodds, pp. 27-28], and XCIX [Dodds, p. 89]. See also Johnson's footnote 12 on p. 22 of his edition.)

The multitude of the second class is ordered to the hyparxis in which it participates. All hyparxes, on their part, are ordered to the One. The One is alone at the vertex of these monads, but without producing them directly. Instead there is a mediation between the One and the monads by two henads of an order yet superior to that of all the hyparxes we have mentioned. Even if Proclus also uses "gods" or "henads" in a wider sense (prop. CXIV), these names are due especially to these two highest principles on account of their nearness to the One and their transcendence of even being and intellect. (Proclus, *Elementatio*, prop. XC-XCV, especially prop. XCII, Dodds, p. 82, ll. 31-34: "οὐτε γὰρ τὸ πρῶτον ἡ ἀπειρία (μέτρον γὰρ πάντων ἐκεῖνο, τάγαθόν ὑπάρχον καὶ ἓν) οὐτε τὸ ὄν (ἄπειρον γὰρ τοῦτο, ἀλλ' οὐκ ἀπειρία)· μεταξὺ ἄρα τοῦ πρώτου καὶ τοῦ ὄντος ἡ ἀπειρία..." "Infinity is not the First Principle; for that is the measure of all things, being the Good (prop. XII) and Unity (prop. XIII). Neither is it Being; for Being is infinite but not Infinity itself. ... Infinity falls between the First Principle and Being."; see also Eric D. Perl, *Theophany: The Neoplatonic Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 2007. These two highest principles with which we have just become acquainted, called "πέρας" and "ἀπειρία", and are considered to be beyond being because all beings are composed of them, i.e., all beings are a mixture of infinity and finiteness, and so presuppose them. ("Εικότως ἄρα καὶ ὁ Σωκράτης ἔλεγεν ἐκ πέρατος εἶναι καὶ ἀείρου τὰ ὄντα πάντα καὶ τὰς δύο ταύτας νοητὰς ἀρχὰς ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ πρώτως ὑφεστάναι. Τὸ γὰρ καὶ συνάγον ἀμφοτέρας καὶ τελειοῦν καὶ διὰ πάντων ἐκφαῖνον τῶν ὄντων τὸ πρὸ τῆς δυάδος ἐστὶν ἓν..." [Proclus, *Teologia Platonica*, Michele Abbate, ed., Bompiani, Milano, 2005., p. 346, ll. 12-16.] "A ragione dunque anche Socrate diceva che tutti gli enti sono fatti di limite e di illimitato e che questi due principi intelligibili sussistono in modo primario da Dio. Infatti ciò che al contempo mette insieme entrambi questi principi, che li rende perfetti e che li fa apparire attraverso tutti i livelli degli enti è l'Uno che viene prima della Diade." [ibid., p. 347, ll. 12-17]) Because πέρας and ἀπειρία are beyond being, they are also beyond intellect, because the intellect understands only being, not what is beyond being. (See also footnote 16 for more details about these two principles.)

¹⁰⁴ Text of DC, in: Saffrey, prop. 16, p. 93, emphasis mine; Pa., p. 171, ll. 6-14. Literal citation from Pattin's edition.

The question is: What are these “*bonitates*” that are communicated first to the intelligence and then to other creatures? If it were in any way to mean a *creation* on the part of the intelligence or the communication of the perfection of intelligence from the intelligence as from the first source of that perfection, then there are difficulties both with the Catholic Faith and with sound reason, as we will see when we discuss illumination in souls. In the *De Potentia*¹⁰⁵, an earlier work than the *Super DC*, St. Thomas says flat out that DC is just plain wrong on this point of doctrine. Nevertheless, he affirms here in the *Super DC* that it can be held true only if understood in a certain way.¹⁰⁶

St. Thomas notes that the truth of things can be safeguarded if we interpret these *bonitates* mediated by second causes as perfections caused by illumination: “...*si referatur non ad naturam intellectualem, sed ad formas intelligibiles quas animae intellectivae recipiunt per operationem intelligentiarum; unde et DIONYSIUS dicit IV^o capitulo De divinis nominibus quod animae per angelos fiunt participes illuminationum a Deo emanantium*”.¹⁰⁷ Saffrey says that St. Thomas exposes this passage “*reverenter*”¹⁰⁸. However that may be, one cannot deny that DC really does speak of the higher intelligences’ passing on intelligible forms to lower intelligences: “...*formae quae adveniunt ex intelligentiis primis secundis sunt debilioris processionis et vehementioris separationis. Quapropter fit quod intelligentiae secundae proiciunt visus suos super universalem formam, quae est in intelligentiis universalibus, et dividunt eam et separant eam*....”¹⁰⁹ Moreover, one sees in prop. 18 that the influence of the first intellect on lesser intellects and souls is about causing *knowledge*, not about giving *being* or the nature of lesser intellectual creatures: “...*intelligentia dat causatis suis scientiam, quod est quia omnis scientia vera non est nisi intelligentia et intelligentia est primum sciens quod est et est influens scientiam super reliqua scientia. ...per modum formae*.” It is probably accidental forms that are meant by this last phrase: “...*per*

¹⁰⁵ THOMAS AQUINAS, *De Pot.*, 3, 4, ad 10, p. 48.

¹⁰⁶ Saffrey, prop. 16, p. 97, l. 24 - p. 98, l. 4.

¹⁰⁷ Saffrey, prop. 3, p. 24, ll. 14-17; *Dionysiaca* I, 154¹-155¹.

¹⁰⁸ Saffrey, Preface, p. XXXI, his footnote 2.

¹⁰⁹ Text of DC, in: Saffrey, prop. 10, p. 66; Pa., p. 159, l. 35-p. 160, l. 41. Literal citation from Pattin’s edition.

modum formae”¹¹⁰. I hesitated to use this quote because, for Dionysius and St. Thomas, the First Life and First Intellect are *the First Cause*, and here the first created intelligence is called the *primum sciens*. But Thomas puts it this way: *even if* the author of DC meant a separated intelligence as the first intellect that causes knowledge, then at the very least it is clear that the author means causality by information not a causality of a substantial nature *per modum creationis*, since to understand already presupposes life and being. To interpret this section as teaching that the intellect creates would be opposed to the causality which DC in this proposition explicitly calls “*per modum formae*”, for creation in the strict sense is only about causing something to be with nothing else at all presupposed; yes, out of nothing¹¹¹, whereas the impression of added forms presupposes something already existing.

A second point of our attempt at the harmonization of Dionysius and DC on universal created causes is that, though DC posits, along with Dionysius, a first *esse* as referring to this perfection as it is found among creatures, St. Thomas notes that DC does so in a way that is a little different from Dionysius. Dionysius speaks about “*esse participato communiter in omnibus existentibus*”¹¹². That is to say: “...inter...perfectiones a Deo participatas *in rebus*, primo [DIONYSIUS] ponit esse...”¹¹³ But DC speaks about created *esse* in the **highest created being**. The question is, if DC, like Dionysius, does not posit a separate *esse*, why does it bother to single out this created *esse*? What sense would that have? St. Thomas notes that

¹¹⁰ Text of DC, in: Saffrey, prop. 18, p. 100; Pa., p. 173, l. 48 - p. 174, l. 53.61, emphasis mine. The question is whether the author means accidental forms or rather informing something subsisting with yet another substantial form—in support of the theory of a plurality of substantial forms in one and the same individual. Prop. 10 may offer a clarification in favor of accidental forms of knowledge. It reads: “*Omnis intelligentia plena est formis...*” (Text of DC, in: Saffrey, prop. 10, p. 66; Pa., p. 158, ll. 8-10). The kind of form here meant is specified later in the following sentence; i.e., secondary forms that change a subject presumably *per accidens* only: “[...Et similiter aliqua ex rebus non recipit quod est supra eam nisi per modum secundum quem potest recipere ipsum,] non per modum secundum quem est res recepta.” (Ibid., Pa., p. 160, ll. 46-49, brackets original. Literal citation from Patten’s edition.)

¹¹¹ Saffrey, prop. 18, p. 104, ll. 3-17.

¹¹² Saffrey, prop. 4, p. 29, ll. 10-11, emphasis mine. The passage of DDN in question is: “*Ante alias Dei participationes esse propositum est, et est ipsum secundum se esse senius, eo quod est per se vitam esse, et eo quod est per se sapientiam esse, et eo quod est per se divinam similitudinem esse.*” (DDN V, 5; *Dionysiaca* I, 337¹⁻³).

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 28, ll. 18-19, emphasis mine.

the author of DC gives this emphasis just to single out and stress the “... *esse participato in primo gradu entis creati, quod est esse superius*”; i.e., the *esse* of the highest created being. “*Videtur tamen non esse eius intentio ut loquatur de aliquo esse separato...*”¹¹⁴. The author of DC gives this *esse* emphasis because *esse* is found in this highest being in a very special way: *as a universal cause*. The author wishes to denominate this creature “*esse*”, although this higher being is also clearly intelligence¹¹⁵. The reason for this is because *esse* is the most fundamental perfection. Intelligence presupposes being; without being, there is not, nor can there be, a really existent intelligence. And so, Thomas says: *Et quamvis esse superius sit et in intelligentia* [actually, as we shall see, it *is* intelligentia as the same prop. 4 says a little later¹¹⁶] *et in anima* [considered also as a universal cause], *tamen in ipsa intelligentia prius consideratur ipsum esse quam intelligentiae ratio, et similiter est in anima; et propter hoc praemisit quod est supra animam et supra intelligentiam.*¹¹⁷

3.2 Where DC Prefers Plotinus to Proclus

What we have just seen is the affirmation of Thomas’ position in contrast to that of Saffrey’s interpretation of DC (where Saffrey understands a kind of *plurality* of first causes). Thomas recognizes the difficulty of interpreting the text on this point; the most he can say is “*Videtur...*”. Saffrey¹¹⁸ says he is sure that the concept of existence does not really appear in DC. For the creature, there is a relationship of dependence on the absolute, but in what exactly the dependence consists is left in shadows. Saffrey, in defending his position mentions a very peculiar choice of the author of DC and that is that he uses the Plotinian system of causality even though his work is a summary of **Proclus’** *Elementatio Theologiae*. The author of DC is indeed faithful to the Plotinian system of causality in the first proposition, says Saffrey, but since this system was used to the benefit of *existence* only since Boethius’ *De Hebdomadibus*, it seems

¹¹⁴ Saffrey, prop. 4, p. 29, ll. 8-9.11-12, emphasis mine.

¹¹⁵ “...*intelligentia...est primum creatum quod creatum est a causa prima*” (text of DC, in Saffrey, prop. 7, p. 48; Pa., p. 151, ll. 98-99).

¹¹⁶ “*Et esse quidem creatum primum est intelligentia totum...*” (Text of DC, in: Saffrey, prop. 4, p. 26; Pa., p. 143, ll. 64-65).

¹¹⁷ Saffrey, prop. 4, p. 29, ll. 12-16.

¹¹⁸ The content of the rest of this paragraph is taken from Saffrey, introduction, p. XXXI.

to Saffrey that the causal dependence considered by the author of DC consists in the formally determined *content* of being (the essence) rather than existence as an act and real component of every finite being (an act with makes real all that is in a finite being). We will not be able to pursue Saffrey's position further, but we must look into this preference of Plotinus that Saffrey observes.

Now Proclus, contrary to Plotinus (and to DC, which uses Plotinus on this point), does not have the First Cause produce directly but through two principles that are above the orders of hyparxes: a determined and an indetermined principle.¹¹⁹ The author of DC does not follow this idea, but prefers, on this point, to part company with Proclus and follow Plotinus'¹²⁰ position—that the intellect is also being and emanates¹²¹ *directly* from the One.¹²² It is in this spirit that DC says: "...*intelligentia...est primum creatum quod creatum est a causa prima.*"¹²³

To say that the intellect is the first created thing is not a contradiction to what was said in prop. 4 about the first creature ("*Prima rerum creatarum est esse et non est ante ipsam creatum aliud.*"¹²⁴), but rather

¹¹⁹ See footnote 103.

¹²⁰ "ἡ ὅτι οὐδὲν ἦν ἐν αὐτῷ, διὰ τοῦτο ἐξ αὐτοῦ πάντα, καὶ ἵνα τὸ ὄν ἦ, διὰ τοῦτο αὐτὸς οὐκ ὄν, γεννητὴς δὲ αὐτοῦ · καὶ πρώτη οἷον γέννησις αὐτῇ · ὄν γάρ τέλειον τῷ μηδὲν ζητεῖν μηδὲ ἔχειν μηδὲ δεῖσθαι οἷον ὑπερερρῦν καὶ τὸ ὑπερπλήρες αὐτοῦ πεποίηκεν ἄλλο · τὸ δὲ γενόμενον εἰς αὐτὸ ἐπεστράφη καὶ ἐπληρώθη καὶ ἐγένετο πρὸς αὐτὸ θεὰ τὸν νοῦν. ἐπεὶ οὖν ἔστη πρὸς αὐτό, ἵνα ἴδῃ, ὁμοῦ νοῦς γιγνεται καὶ ὄν." (Plotinus, *Enneads* V, 2, 1, Jeffrey Henderson, ed., A. H. Armstrong, trans., Loeb's Classical Library [=LCL] Vol. 444, Harvard University Press, Cambridge [MA]. London, 1984, p. 58, ll. 5-13.) English: "It is because there is nothing in it that all things come from it: in order that being may exist, the One is not being, but the generator of being. This, we may say, is the first act of generation: the One, perfect because it seeks nothing, has nothing, and needs nothing, overflows, as it were, and its superabundance makes something other than itself. This, when it has come into being, turns back upon the One and is filled, and becomes Intellect by looking towards it. Its halt and turning towards the One constitutes being, its gaze upon the One, Intellect. Since it halts and turns towards the One that it may see, it becomes at once Intellect and being." (*ibid.*, p. 59).

¹²¹ In the case of DC, if we call it emanation, is an emanation by *creation*.

¹²² D'ANCONA, "The *Liber de causis*" in: *Interpreting Proclus: From Antiquity to the Renaissance*, edited by Stephen Gersh, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2014, p. 151. See text of DC: ("[The First Cause] *est creas intelligentiam absque medio...*") in: Saffrey, prop. 9 p. 57; Pa., p. 157, ll. 88-89. The passage cited in footnote 120 serves as an example of D'Ancona's understanding of Plotinus.

¹²³ Text of DC, in: Saffrey, prop. 7, p. 48; Pa., p. 151, ll. 97-99.

¹²⁴ Text of DC, in: Saffrey, prop. 4, p. 26; Pa., p. 142, ll. 37-38.

a complement. The author of DC combines these two perfections, being and intelligence, in the first creature: "...*primum ens creatum, scilicet intelligentia*..."¹²⁵, and St Thomas is conscious of that and points it out to his reader already in the commentary on prop. 4: "...*esse creatum primum est esse participatum in natura intelligentiae*...."¹²⁶

3.3 Two Reasons for Preferring Plotinus on this Point

3.3.1 The First Reason: The First Cause Is Somehow Accessible

The importance of the author's affirming direct creation of the first creature by the First Cause, i.e., contrary to Proclus' system, *without* the intermediary of the determined (πέρας) and indetermined (ἀπειρία) principles, is because it is a consequence of his teaching that the First Cause Himself is the place of all Platonic ideal forms and that those ideal forms that imply no imperfection *are* the First Cause Himself.¹²⁷ He is somehow accessible by the fact that by knowing the transcendental forms (*ens, unum, bonum*) and the semi-transcendental forms¹²⁸ (*intelligentia* and *vita*), we know something of the First Cause¹²⁹ as we will see more clearly in the next section, entitled "The Second Reason". But by the One's direct creation of the intellect, i.e., without the mediating principles of the determined (πέρας) and the indetermined (ἀπειρία), DC does not wish to say that there is no mediation at all for the rest of beings that are below the first intelligence. The First Cause, according to DC, creates them all *through the intelligence*.¹³⁰ This means, for the author of DC,

¹²⁵ Text of DC, in: Saffrey, prop. 16, p. 92; Pa., 168ff. Cf. also Text of DC, in: Saffrey, prop. 9, p. 57; Pa., p. 154ff.

¹²⁶ Saffrey, prop. 4, p. 30, ll. 2-3, emphasis mine.

¹²⁷ This will hold if St. Thomas' interpretation of DC is correct—that the author posits a First Cause that *is* Being and Intellect and Life.

¹²⁸ See footnote 83.

¹²⁹ The following words of DC are challenging to the apofatism characteristic of Neoplatonism: "...*et non nominatur per nomen causati sui primi* [he means the name "intelligence"] *nisi per modum altiore et meliorem, quoniam quod est causati est causae iterum, verumtamen per modum sublimiorem et meliorem et nobiliorem*..." (Text of DC, in: Saffrey, prop. 6, p. 42; Pa., p. 149, ll. 60-63. Literal citation from Pattin's edition).

¹³⁰ "*Verumtamen* [the First Cause] *est creans intelligentiam absque medio et creans animam et naturam et reliquas res mediante intelligentia*", see Text of DC, in: Saffrey, prop. 9, p. 57; Pa., p. 157, ll. 88-90.

that all the “*bonitates*”, i.e., all the perfections of *being* that “shine” on creatures, have the First Cause as their source and exemplar. The shining of these perfections is reflected by the participation of these creatures in these perfections.

Since perfections of being from the First Cause “shine” first of all on the first intelligence, this intellect’s reflection or participation in them is greater than that of all other beings. The intellect not only participates eminently in all the formal intelligible perfections that are predicated properly of the First Cause, but as intellect, it also participates eminently in his knowledge. (This is true for DC, and Plotinus’ doctrine of direct creation from the One offers support for DC on this point although Plotinus himself would not have drawn such a conclusion. The One, for Plotinus, is too lofty to be called by the same name as creatures’ perfections like “knowledge” and “intelligence”). This participated knowledge in the intellect means participation in the ideas, which are those intellectual patterns or structures that inform the whole creation. We will come back to this in more detail shortly.

Finally, thanks to its participation in the knowledge of the First Cause, the first created intelligence participates in the very causality itself of the First Cause, in the quality of a *second* cause. It is the second cause of all that below it. This means that the First Cause is responsible for all the effects the intellect produces. The First Cause operates *through* that second cause. The First cause remains the *ultimate* reason for everything, by letting its own light shine out: “*per eam* [i.e., through the divine power], [the intellect] *est causa rerum*”¹³¹.

This scheme of secondary causality on the part of the intellect, as we have just described, is to be found, at least to a certain extent, in Plotinus already. In order to explain the causality of the intellect in Plotinus, a fine professor once commented that for Plotinus, the divine light (to use an image) of act (“ἐνέργεια”¹³²) is communicated *through the intellect* to those beings that are below it. Thus, the light the intellect communicates is not the intellect’s own light. The intellect’s job is merely to “refract” that great divine light, which is totally simple, into a multiplicity of forms.

¹³¹ Text of DC, in: Saffrey, prop. 9, p. 57; Pa., p. 155, ll. 57-58. Litteral citation from Patten’s edition.

¹³² D’ANCONA, “Pseudo-‘Theology’”, p. 103.

This seems to be an apt way of describing what Plotinus says if we read the following three passages together:

As far as using the image of light for intelligibility as well as taking the first intellect as the primary knower [after the One]:

If we are to make a rational statement, we shall state that the first activity, which so to speak flows from it [the One] like a light from the sun, is Intellect and the whole intelligible nature, but that he himself [the One], staying still at the summit of the intelligible, rules over it; he does not thrust the outshining away from himself—or we shall make another light before light¹³³—but he irradiates for ever, abiding unchanged over the intelligible. For what comes from him has not been cut off from him¹³⁴, nor is it the same as he, nor is it the sort of thing not to be substance, or to be blind, but it sees and knows itself and is the primary knower.¹³⁵

In the following passage the activity of the intellect as refractor of light is apparent:

Therefore, this multiple Intellect, when it wishes to think that which is beyond, [thinks] that itself which is one, but in wishing to attain to it in its simplicity¹³⁶ comes out continually apprehending something else made many in itself; so that it moved to

¹³³ That is to say, if the intellect were to separate away from the One, it would be light by itself. It would be the original light. But the One has a causal influence that never stops affecting the intellect with its light.

¹³⁴ It is not material; therefore, the One does not diminish in any way by emanating the intellect.

¹³⁵ PLOTINUS, *Enneads* V, 3, 12, LCL 444, Jeffrey Henderson, ed., A. H. Armstrong, trans., Harvard University Press, Cambridge (MA), London, 1984, p. 115 and 117; Greek: “ἐι κατὰ λόγον θεσόμεθα, τὴν μὲν ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ οἶον ῥυεῖσαν ἐνέργειαν ὡς ἀπὸ ἡλίου φῶς νοῦν θεσόμεθα καὶ πᾶσαν τὴν νοητὴν φύσιν, αὐτὸν δὲ ἐπ’ ἅκρῳ τῷ νοητῷ ἐστηκεν βασιλεύειν ἐπ’ αὐτοῦ οὐκ ἐξώσαντα ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ τό ἐκφανέν--ἢ ἄλλο φῶς πρὸ φωτὸς ποιήσομεν--ἐπιλάμπειν δὲ αἰεὶ μένοντα ἐπὶ τοῦ νοητοῦ. οὐδὲ γὰρ ἀποτέμνεται τὸ ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ οὐδ’ αὖ ταῦτ’ αὐτῷ οὐδὲ τοιοῦτον οἶον μὴ οὐσία εἶναι οὐδ’ αὖ οἶον τυφλὸν εἶναι, ἀλλ’ ὁρῶν καὶ γινώσκον ἐκτὸ καὶ πρῶτον γινώσκον.” (*ibid.* p. 114, l. 40 - p. 116, l. 48). The One, of course, for Plotinus is above knowledge.

¹³⁶ The translator notes that there is some objection to this translation, which, if correct, could have serious implications for understanding the relationship between the One and intellect. The correct version, according to this other theory instead of “attain to it in its simplicity”, the text would read “flower upon it in its simplicity”. (Plotinus, *Enneads* V, 3, 11, LCL, pp. 108-9, LCL footnote 1). I suppose the implications would be that creation (in the sense of eternal dependence) is not entirely of the One, and the Intellect would not be a mere refractor.

it not as Intellect but as sight not yet seeing, but came out possessing the multiplicity¹³⁷ which that sight itself made.¹³⁸

The next passage argues for the emanation of all things from the One and the Intellect:

But why is the generator not Intellect, whose active actuality is thinking? Thinking, which sees the intelligible and turns towards it and is, in a way, being perfected by it, is itself indefinite like seeing, but is defined by the intelligible. This is why it is said: from the Indefinite Dyad and the One derive the Forms and Numbers: that is, Intellect.¹³⁹

This Plotinian image (the intellect as a refractor of light) is useful for conveying to us that the causality of the intellect (causality exercised over the multiplicity of beings that are below it) is only secondary. The image may be helpful for grasping the theory of DC regarding that secondary character the causality of the intellect, i.e., a causality totally dependent on the First Cause which is the only principle that one can term “Creator”¹⁴⁰. *“Et significatio eius est illud cuius rememoramur: intelligentia est regens omnes res quae sunt sub ea per virtutem divinam quae est in ea et per*

¹³⁷ The intellect cannot get a hold on the One. It comes out with multiplicity-the forms are born! These were already pre-contained in the One. The Intellect becomes the treasury of forms. In a somewhat similar way, Thomas explains the multiplicity of ideas from the one idea (the Logos), but Thomas in a way that does not imply any imperfection (STh I, 15, 2).

¹³⁸ PLOTINUS, *Enneads* V, 3, 11, p. 109 “Διὸ καὶ ὁ νοῦς οὗτος ὁ πολὺς, ὅταν τὸ ἐπέκεινα ἐθέλῃ νοεῖν, ἔν μὲν οὖν αὐτὸ ἐκεῖνο, ἀλλ’ ἐπιβάλλειν θέλων ὡς ἅπλῳ ἔξεισιν ἄλλο ἀεὶ λαμβάνων ἐν αὐτῷ πληθυνόμενον· ὥστε ὥρμησε μὲν ἐπ’ αὐτὸ οὐχ ὡς νοῦς, ἀλλ’ ὡς ὄψις οὐπω ἰδοῦσα, ἐξῆλθε δὲ ἔχουσα ὅπερ αὐτὴ ἐπλήθυνεν· ὥστε ἄλλου μὲν ἐπεθύμησεν ἀορίστως ἔχουσα ἐπ’ αὐτῇ φάντασμά τι, ἐξῆλθε δὲ ἄλλο λαβοῦσα ἐν αὐτῇ αὐτὸ πολὺ ποιήσασα.” (*ibid.*, p. 108, ll. 1-8).

¹³⁹ PLOTINUS, *Enneads* V, 4, 2, LCL, p. 145. Greek: “διὰ τί δὲ οὐ νοῦς, οὗ ἐνέργειά ἐστι νόησις; νόησις δὲ τὸ νοητὸν ὁρῶσα καὶ πρὸς τοῦτο ἐπιστραφεῖσα καὶ ἀπ’ ἐκείνου οἷον ἀποτελειουμένη [καὶ τελειουμένη] [the foregoing brackets are not mine they are in the LCL text], ἀόριστος μὲν αὐτὴ ὥσπερ ὄψις, ὀριζομένη δὲ ὑπὸ τοῦ νοητοῦ. διὸ καὶ εἴρηται· ἐκ τῆς ἀορίστου δυνάδως καὶ τοῦ ἐνὸς τὰ εἶδη καὶ οἱ ἀριθμοί· τοῦτο γὰρ ὁ νοῦς.” (*ibid.*, p. 144, ll. 4-10). This last point is the principle point of contrast to Proclus’ system (see footnote 103): that Plotinus interprets Plato’s determinate One and his indeterminate dyad not as two principles *between* the One and the Intellect, but that the One itself *is* the determinate (limit) and the dyad, if I understand right, *is* the intellect. Plotinus’ thought seems to be as follows: Plato’s Dyad was an indefinite principle of things - just as the intellect is the indefinite (potential) principle of everything it thinks. So why not identify the dyad and the intellect?

¹⁴⁰ See footnote 130.

eam retinet res, quoniam per eam est causa rerum...."¹⁴¹ The First Cause acts more vehemently in a thing's acquisition of being and the generation of things than the intellect does. The First Cause, through the intellect, causes all that the intellect causes. ("[The First Cause is] *creans animam et naturam et reliquas res mediante intelligentia.*")¹⁴² This is all consonant with the *first proposition* of DC: "*Omnis causa primaria plus est influens super causatum suum quam causa universalis secunda.*"¹⁴³

However, despite the similarity, the Plotinian doctrine does not arrive all the way to the theory that DC and DDN propose (that the First Cause is *Ipsum Esse*, pure *Esse*). The failure to reach that theory can be attributed at least to Plotinus himself—the Greek Plotinus. There are, however, many passages in the Arabic Plotinus Source¹⁴⁴ that support the teaching that the First Cause is *Esse*¹⁴⁵. In St. Thomas' teaching, and at the very least *implied* by the very doctrine itself of God as *Ipsum Esse*, He Himself can *be* not only each one of the intelligible perfections by which we (according to analogy) name Him, but also each one of His *ideas*. The multiplicity of His ideas is not a multiplicity in Him because they are all identical with His essence and known by knowing his own essence.¹⁴⁶ The First Cause *is* each one of His ideas, which are, each one,

¹⁴¹ Text of DC, in: Saffrey, prop. 9, p. 57; Pa., p. 155, ll. 54-58. Literal citation from Pattin's edition.

¹⁴² Text of DC, in: Saffrey, prop. 9, p. 57; Pa., p. 157, ll. 89-90.

¹⁴³ Text of DC, in: Saffrey, prop. 1, p. 4; Pa., p. 134, ll. 1-2. Literal citation from Pattin's edition.

¹⁴⁴ This source is a hypothesis formed by Franz Rosenthal as the mother text of the various sources that bear the doctrine of the First Cause as *Esse* and were produced in what we might call a circle of al-Kindī (cf. Cristina D'Ancona Costa, "Pseudo-*'Theology of Aristotle'*", Chapter 1: Structure and Composition", in: *Oriens*, 36 [2001], Brill, Leiden, p. 104 and 106). Its offspring would be, e.g., the Pseudo-*Theology of Aristotle*, *Sayings of the Greek Sage*, and the *Epistle on Divine Knowledge*. (See Cristina D'ANCONA COSTA, "Avicenna and the *Liber de causis*: a Contribution to the Dossier", in: *Revista Española de Filosofía Medieval*, 7 [2000], SOFIME, Zaragoza, p. 96). The Arabic Plotinus Source transmitted Plotinus' *Enneads* by paraphrase, with some interpolations/commentary.

¹⁴⁵ One such example would be the Arabic transmission of *Enneads* V, 1, 10 found in the *Sayings of the Greek Sage*: "The First Creator is ... mere being" (D'ANCONA, "Avicenna and the *Liber*", p. 105).

¹⁴⁶ "...ideam operati esse in mente operantis sicut quod intelligitur; non autem sicut species qua intelligitur ... Non est autem contra simplicitatem divini intellectus, quod multa intelligat: sed contra simplicitatem eius esset, si per plures species eius intellectus formaretur..." (STh I, 15, 2c, Ed. Leon., Tom IV, p. 202).

His very essence under a certain aspect of its intelligibility (imitability through a mode of participation)¹⁴⁷.

In order to see the difference that the doctrine of the First Cause as *Ipsium Esse* makes, a more detailed contrast with the doctrine of Plotinus will be helpful. For Plotinus, in fact, the One, in a certain sense, *needs* the intellect if a multiplicity is to be created, because "...in so far as it [the intellect] is active, there is one thing after another", i.e., the intellect provides for exactly that which the One, as One, cannot have: multiplicity. The One has no multiplicity of any kind, not even the kind which thinking causes: the rational division of self into subject and object. So, if activity (making, governing...) upon *multiple* objects is to happen, it is the intellect that provides the plan, the forms¹⁴⁸ (or separate intellectual structural patterns), according to which such activity happens. For the One to be a maker without diversity (which, according to Plotinus comes from the intellect) would have no meaning. For the One to go outside Himself, i.e., for there to be a *multiple* emanation, a *direction* first of all is needed for this emanation. Such direction comes from intellect. Without there being a knowledge of the *multiplicity* of things that emanate (which knowledge can itself only be multiple since Plotinus does not have the doctrine of God as *Ipsium Esse*, i.e., where his *Esse* is his very essence and his knowledge), there will be no sense or order or being. In the words of Plotinus: "...if there is not one thing and then another, what will the intellect [or for that matter the One] make, or where will it proceed? Therefore that which is active must either be acting on something else, or must itself be a multiple thing, if it is to be active within itself."¹⁴⁹ This problem is resolved by the doctrine of God as *Ipsium Esse*, which we will continue to explain presently as we take a look at the second reason for preferring Plotinus' doctrine of the intellect created directly by the First Cause.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ "...each [substance] has a kind of shape [form may be a better translation of "μορφήν", though it is not always so]. Being must be fixed by limit and stability..." (Plotinus, *Enneads* V, 1, 7, LCL, p. 37). Greek: "...καὶ οἷον μορφήν ἑκάστον ἔχει τὸ δὲ ὄν δεῖ οὐκ ἐν ἀόριστῳ οἷον αἰωρεῖσθαι, ἀλλ' ὁρῶω πεπῆχθαι καὶ στάσει..." (*ibid.*, p. 36, ll. 24-26).

¹⁴⁹ PLOTINUS, *Enneads* V, 3, 10, LCL, p. 105. "ἢ γὰρ ἐνεργεῖ, ἄλλο καὶ ἄλλο· εἰ δὲ μὴ εἴη ἄλλο, τὸ δὲ ἄλλο, τί καὶ ποιήσει; ἢ ποῦ προβήσεται; διὸ δεῖ τὸ ἐνεργοῦν ἢ περὶ ἄλλο ἐνεργεῖν, ἢ αὐτὸ πολὺ τι εἶναι, εἰ μέλλοι ἐνεργεῖν ἐν αὐτῷ." (*Ibid.*, p. 104, ll. 18-23).

3.3.2 The Second Reason: The Intellect Is the Best Image of the First Cause (According to Analogy)

Another reason DC posits the immediate creation¹⁵⁰ of the first intellect by the First Cause is to serve as an explanation as to why one, through knowledge about the intellect, can have analogical knowledge of the First Cause. The thesis of DC is that the First Cause "...has the intellect as its first and most revealing image"¹⁵¹. This is because the perfections of being in the intellect are first of all and maximally in the First Cause: "... *quod est causati est Causae iterum, verumtamen per modum sublimiorem et meliorem et nobiliorem...*"¹⁵² The reason the First Cause is equal to all the intelligible perfections we can name (not just intellect, but being, life, and all the rest) is because, in DC, He is *Ipsum Esse*. And there is no reason at all to doubt the author's intention to attribute the perfection *esse* itself to the First Cause (analogically in relation to the creaturely being we are familiar with) and not something other than *esse*, e.g., just the *causality* of *esse*. The author repeats and confirms it time and again: The First Cause is *Esse*!¹⁵³

The Neoplatonists saw the existents that emanated from the *Unum-Bonum* as composed of their own form and *esse*, i.e., these existents would participate in the form *esse* (which is *identified* with intellect in Plotinus¹⁵⁴). The Neoplatonists were worried that if the First Cause were *esse*, then He would seem to have this same composition as the created

¹⁵⁰ From Plotinus' point of view it is an *emanation*, not a creation.

¹⁵¹ D'ANCONA, "The *Liber de causis*" in: *Interpreting Proclus.*, idem, p. 151; Plotinus uses the word "image" too: "Εἰκόνα δὲ ἐκείνου [i.e., of the One, the Good] λέγομεν εἶνα τὸν νοῦν" (PLOTINUS, *Enneads*, V, 1, 7, LCL, p. 32, l. 1).

¹⁵² Text of DC, in: Saffrey, prop. 6, p. 42; Pa., p. 149, ll. 62-64. Literal citation from Pattin's edition.

¹⁵³ Besides the passages from prop. 9 and 20 that follow, there is also prop. 22: "*Est creans res... quoniam est bonitas... quoniam est bonitas cui non est finis neque dimensiones*", (Text of DC, in: Saffrey, prop. 22, p. 114; Pa., p. 182, ll. 80-82) (In prop. 20, the author already said: "*bonitas et ens sunt res una*". [Text of DC, in: Saffrey, prop. 20, p. 108; Pa., p. 177, ll. 12-14]).

¹⁵⁴ "ἐγκείσθαι δεῖ τίθεσθαι ἐν τῷ νοοῦντι τὰ ὄντα, τὴν δὲ ἐνέργειαν καὶ τὴν νόησιν ἐπὶ τοῖς οὖσιν, οἷον ἐπὶ πῦρ ἤδη τὴν τοῦ πυρὸς ἐνέργειαν, ἴν' ἐν ὄντα τὸν νοῦν ἐὰρ' ἑαυτοῖς ἔχη ἐνέργειαν, αὐτῶν. ἔστι δὲ καὶ τὸ ὄν ἐνέργεια· μία οὖν ἀφοῖν ἐνέργεια, μᾶλλον δὲ τὰ ἅμωφ ἐν. μία μὲν οὖν φύσις τὸ τε ὄν ὃ τε νοῦς..." (Plotinus, *Enneads* V, 9, 8, p. 306, ll. 12-18). English: "...we must assume that the real beings have their place in the thinking subject, and that the active actuality of thinking is in the real beings, as the active actuality of fire is in fire already existing, in order that they may have Intellect in its unity in them

intelligence, i.e., form *plus* being (being as an extra form [a predicate in addition to the One]). So, for the Neoplatonists, the First Cause is *above* being in such a way that He is *not* being. He has *not* the form of being—he has *no form* at all. This is in order to avoid any composition (i.e., the First Cause plus a form or the First Cause plus the activity of thinking [a type of form]). So, for them, He clearly cannot be intelligence because what does not have a form, what is not being, also cannot be known (the object of thought). He cannot be one and at the same time divide: divide himself (even if only rationally) into knower and known.

The author of DC *also* says explicitly that the First Cause has **no “yliatim”** (which means “form”: from the Arabic *hilya*), but his reason is not anything from either Plotinus¹⁵⁵ or Proclus; it is *not* because the *Unum-Bonum* is “not being”, i.e., beyond being. His reason is rather **something Dionysian**. It is exactly *because the First Cause is pure Esse* that he can *also* be, in an eminent way, *Ipsium Bonum* and all other intelligible forms¹⁵⁶. “*Et hoc est quod DIONYSIUS dicit in I^o capitulo De divinis nominibus: Quoniam autem Deus est ipsa bonitatis essentia per ipsum suum esse, omnium est existentium causa.*”¹⁵⁷ “*Etenim Deus non quodammodo est existens, sed simpliciter et incircumscripse totum in seipso esse praeaccepit.*”¹⁵⁸ This means that the First Cause, as pure *Esse*, is endowed with all the formal, intelligible perfections (the “pure perfections” of which we have already spoken) of being, such as “science and knowledge”. **The same teaching on exactly this point is what warrants the use of DDN as a viable instrument for understanding DC about the First Cause.** The depth of Thomas’ explanation in other works of

as their active actuality. But being is active actuality: so both have one active actuality, or rather both are one thing. Being and Intellect are therefore one nature...” (*ibid.*, p. 307)

Even here, though, there is another kind of composition: that of the intellect and its activity (“Καὶ τί κωλῶει οὗτω πλῆθος εἶναι, ἕως ἐστὶν οὐσία μία; τὸ γὰρ πλῆθος οὐ συνθέσεις, ἀλλ’ αἱ ἐνέργειαι αὐτοῦ τὸ πλῆθος.” (Plotinus, *Enneads* V, 3, 12, LCL, p. 112, ll. 1-4.) “But what prevents it from being a multiplicity in this sense, as long as it is one substance? For the multiplicity [of intellect] is not a plurality of compositions, but its activities are the multiplicity.” (*ibid.* p. 113).

¹⁵⁵ D’ANCONA, “The *Liber de causis*”, in: *Interpreting Proclus*, idem, p. 151; this does not hold for the Arabic Plotinus Source (see my footnote 144).

¹⁵⁶ Text of DC, in: Saffrey, prop. 9, p. 57 (Pa., p. 154, l. 48) and in: Saffrey, prop. 20, p. 108 (Pa., p. 177, ll. 12-14).

¹⁵⁷ Saffrey, prop. 9, p. 58, ll. 16-18; DDN V, 1; *Dionysiaca* I, 41³⁻⁴, emphasis mine.

¹⁵⁸ Saffrey, prop. 3, p. 20; DDN V, 4; *Dionysiaca* I, 333⁴-334¹.

his is unique to himself. For Thomas, *esse* is the act that, if not limited by a creaturely essence (form), is the actuality of all these perfections in their unlimited fullness. In the Godhead, none of them is really something other than the perfection of unlimited being itself.

However, an important *caveat* to be placed on analogical knowledge and speech follows. One can say, for instance, that the First Cause has science and knowledge “provided that one is aware that there is no common measure between this ‘science’ and that of creatures”¹⁵⁹. Thus, the First Cause as *Ipsium Esse* is the reason which permits the use of analogy between the First Cause and the created intellect: if what He is is unlimited Being, then He can be all the perfections of being, including, for example, the perfection of intellect (and can be *called* Intellect).

Though we will treat specifically of analogy later, we wish, already at this point, to bring up two texts from St. Thomas¹⁶⁰ about analogy in order to make this still clearer. There is, of course, still an infinite difference between the created intelligence and the First Cause. If the intelligible names of God can be affirmed of Him, it is only due to the signification of the name and not its mode. Looking at the “*name of the notion*”¹⁶¹ that we attribute both to God and creatures, we see that the notion *itself* (i.e., the mode of being or of life or of intellect) in both God and creatures is *per se* different. It is only the proportion of God to *His* being or life or intellect that is similar to a creature’s proportion to *its* being or life or intellect. This is why St. Thomas admits that the intelligible names of God could very well also be *denied* of God.¹⁶² In this sense, Dionysius calls

¹⁵⁹ D’ANCONA, “The Liber”, pp. 151-152; “*Et scientia quidem divina non est sicut scientia intellectibilis neque sicut scientia animalis, immo est supra scientiam intelligentiae et scientiam animae, quoniam est creans scientias.*” (Text of DC, in: Saffrey, prop. 9, p. 57; Pa., p. 157, ll. 91-94. Literal citation from Pattin’s edition); Saffrey, prop. 3, p. 20, l. 8ff.

¹⁶⁰ If one is to apply the historical critical method to St. Thomas’ teaching on analogy, one may find an evolution process for the position we transmit here. A study of Benoit Montagne’s work (*La doctrine de l’analogie de l’être d’après saint Thomas d’Aquin*, Publications Universitaires, Louvain, 1963) would be very useful for this. It would, no doubt, have an impact on what we limit ourselves here to say about St. Thomas and analogy. Here, we present only from the *Summa Contra Gentiles* (henceforth: “SCG”) and *In DDN*, which were written around the same period of Thomas’ life. The cited passages of the SCG and *In DDN* have a place here in order to show what, according to Thomas, the role of Dionysius’ negative theology in analogy was.

¹⁶¹ SCG I, 30, 3, Ed. Leon., Tom. XIII, p. 92.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

God “*non-existens*”, “*non-vivens*”, “*sine mente*”, and similar to prop. 9 of DC¹⁶³, “*non formatorum*”¹⁶⁴. St. Thomas explains¹⁶⁵ that the names of these notions are denied of God, not because the perfection denoted by the name is missing in Him, but because he has those perfections in a mode that exceeds all we have ever experienced of them: “*quaecumque sunt in bono, scilicet Deo, de numero non formatorum per negationem dicta, et deinde sunt excedentis formationis, quia illae formae in eo sunt per excessum.*”

Analogical knowledge of God is especially efficacious by means of what we know about the *intelligence*. The author of DC says: “...causa prima *non significatur* in his quae de ipsa dicuntur, *nisi ex causa secunda quae est intelligentia*”.¹⁶⁶ The author of DC follows Dionysius in not positing any multitude in the deity, “*sed [the author of DC] unitatem in Deo constituit, distinctionem autem in ordine intellectuum et animarum et corporum*”¹⁶⁷. Precisely intellect reflects this very attribute—unity—in a superb way. (“*Et virtus [quidem] intelligentiae est vehementioris unitatis...*” than that of the creatures that come hierarchically after it.)¹⁶⁸ This unity¹⁶⁹ in the nature of the intellect, which we will presently explain in more detail, is so far removed from the composition of lesser beings, that these inferior beings, if they have some cognitive power, will never be able to “*attingere ad cognoscendum intelligentiae substantiam*”¹⁷⁰.

Created things are in the intellect: not in a substantial way, but in an *intellectual* way¹⁷¹, which means the *reasons*, or essences, of things are in it, i.e., things are in the intellect not as separately subsisting things, but all together, in the one being that is intellect—in a unity. “All there [in the

¹⁶³ “*Et causae quidem primae non est yliathim...*” (Text of DC, in: Saffrey, prop. 9, p. 57; Pa., p. 157, ll. 00-01).

¹⁶⁴ DDN IV, 1; *Dionysiaca* I, 158³.

¹⁶⁵ In DDN IV, lectio 2, p. 97, n. 298; the words in italics appear in DDN itself.

¹⁶⁶ See Saffrey, prop. 6, p. 47, ll. 24-25 (italics from DC itself).

¹⁶⁷ Saffrey, prop. 3, p. 20, ll. 21-24, emphasis mine.

¹⁶⁸ Text of DC, in: Saffrey, prop. 9, p. 57; Pa., p. 154, ll. 49-50, emphasis mine. Litteral citation from Pattin’s edition

¹⁶⁹ Of course, the intellect is still a composed thing, since it is not its own being.

¹⁷⁰ Saffrey, prop. 9, p. 59, ll. 13-14.

¹⁷¹ Cf. Saffrey, prop. 8, p. 56, ll. 9-21.

intellect] is a unity”, says Plotinus¹⁷², a unity that is more similar to the unity of the One than any other similarity to the One in any other creature. Thus, the intellect is the ‘image of the one’¹⁷³. Like the First Cause, it contains the beings it knows, not as they are in their own existences, for “*res...non sunt virtus substantialis ei* [to {of} the intelligence]”¹⁷⁴. But the intellect does contain them *intellectually*.¹⁷⁵ The forms or “reasons” of other things find a place in the intellect. In this sense, the intellect contains them. “Unde DIONYSIUS dicit IV^o capitulo *De divinis nominibus*, quod *intellectus supermundane intelligent et illuminantur secundum existentium rationes*. Et hoc est quod dicitur [by the author of DC] quod *intelligentia est plena formis...*”¹⁷⁶

In fine, it is by the description “an intelligent substance” that we can best speak of God¹⁷⁷: “et hoc ideo quia intelligentia est *suum causatum primum*, unde est Deo simillima et per ipsam maxime cognosci potest.”¹⁷⁸ Yet, again, we must be careful to understand, as St. Thomas reiterates from the doctrine of DC: “non sufficienter cognoscitur per eam, quia illud quod est intelligentia est in causa prima *altiori modo*, causa autem

¹⁷² PLOTINUS, *Enneads*, V, 1, 7, LCL, p. 35. Greek: “...ὁ κύκλος τοιοῦτος οἷος μερίζεσθαι· τοῦτο δὲ οὐχ οὕτως. ἡ καὶ ἐνταῦθα ἐν μέν, ἀλλὰ τὸ ἐν δύναμις πάντων.” (ibid., p. 34, ll. 9-10, emphasis mine).

¹⁷³ “Εἰκόνα δὲ ἐκείνου [i.e., of the One, the Good] λέγομεν εἶναι τὸν νοῦν” (ibid., p. 32, l. 1).

¹⁷⁴ Text of DC, in: Saffrey, prop. 9, p. 57; Pa., p. 156, l. 71. Litteral citation from Pattin’s edition.

¹⁷⁵ See especially: Saffrey, prop. 18, p. 101, ll. 16-18: “...*habere aliquid in se formaliter et non materialiter; in quo consistit ratio cognitionis, est nobilissimus modus habendi vel continendi aliquid*”. Dionysius uses “contain” for intellect too: e.g., “...*a qua* [the divine unity] *et ex qua et per quam et in qua et ad quam omnia sunt et coordinata sunt et manent et continentur et adimplentur et convertuntur*.” (DDN XIII, 3; *Dionysiaca* I, 547¹⁻³, emphasis mine). He is obviously speaking of the divine intellect in this case.

¹⁷⁶ Saffrey, prop. 10, p. 69, ll. 11-14, emphasis mine; DDN IV, 1; *Dionysiaca* I, 148⁴⁻¹⁴⁹2.

¹⁷⁷ Some classic Thomists (Giovanni di Napoli mentions John of St. Thomas, Gonet and the Salmanticenses) have affirmed that the metaphysical essence of God is something along the lines of *actualis superintellectualitas* (which includes explicitly the two perfections *esse* [actualis] and intellectuality) (GIOVANNI DI NAPOLI, *Manuale Philosophiae*, Vol. 3, Marietti, Roma, 1963, p. 62).

¹⁷⁸ Saffrey, prop. 6, p. 47, ll. 25-28, italics from the text of DC.

excedens effectum non sufficienter cognosci potest per suum effectum.”¹⁷⁹ Fr. Martin Vaske¹⁸⁰ gives the example of a beaver dam. I might make a replica of a beaver dam. If you did not witness who made the dam, you should not say that the cause of the dam was a beaver’s know-how. You should instead say that the cause has *at least* the know-how of a beaver. In other words, you will not be able to know all there is to know about a cause just by looking at the effect. Otherwise you will be absolutely sure that I, the cause, am a beaver instead of a man! In the same way, Thomas and DC remind us that, by saying that God is intelligence, we must not mistake him for a mere human or angelic intelligence because he has caused the human or angelic intelligence.¹⁸¹

3.4 A Plurality of Intellects or One Supreme Intellect

“DIONYSIUS dicit IV^o capitulo *De divinis nominibus*, quod *intellectus supermundane intelligunt et illuminantur* secundum existentium rationes.”¹⁸² We just used this quote when explaining the intellect and its relation to the First Cause. Dionysius is speaking of intelligences in the *plural* when he says this. But in prop. 4, 9 and 16 of DC (as well as in Plotinus and Proclus), *one* intellect is singled out after the First Cause—the highest.¹⁸³ The quotes Thomas brings in from DDN seem not to consider the first and highest created intellect singularly, but the highest intelligences (in general). Might this signal a conflicting view between Dionysius and the author of DC that Thomas just passes over here?

We want to take a look at a passage where Dionysius is explaining that all ideal forms are in God.¹⁸⁴ Here, this doctrine is an indirect attack on the first intellect as understood by certain Neoplatonists. Thomas comments:

¹⁷⁹ Saffrey, prop. 6, p. 47, l. 28 - p. 48, l. 2, italics from the text of DC.

¹⁸⁰ Cf. Martin VASKE, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, Creighton, Omaha, 1962, p. 125.

¹⁸¹ This is of course the case in what Thomas calls “equivocal” causality: where the effect is not in the same species or genus as the cause.

¹⁸² Saffrey, prop. 10, p. 69, ll. 12-13, emphasis mine; *Dionysiaca* I, 148⁴-149².

¹⁸³ ...though it could be observed that other places of DC also consider the universal causality of **various** intelligences, e.g., this line from prop. 4: “*Et intelligentiae primae influunt super intelligentias secundas bonitates quas recipiunt a causa prima*”. (Text of DC, in: Saffrey: prop. 4, p. 26; Pa., p. 144, ll. 82-84. Litteral citation from Pattin’s edition.).

¹⁸⁴ ...*et vere laudatur omnium substantia principalis et perfectiva et contentiva, custodia et cibus, et ad se ipsam conversiva, et haec unitive et communicabiliter segregate.*

Deinde, cum dicit [26]: *Et vere laudatur...* excludit quorumdam errorem. Fuerunt enim quidam Platonici qui processiones perfectionum ad diversa principia reducebant, ponentes unum principium esse vitae, quod appellabant primam vitam, et **aliud principium esse intelligendi**, quod appellabant **primum intellectum** et aliud existendi quod appellabant primum ens et bonum. Et ad hoc excludendum, dicit quod Deus *vere laudatur* ut *principalis substantia omnium*, inquantum est principium existendi omnibus; et dicitur causa *perfectiva* omnium, inquantum dat omnes perfectiones rebus...¹⁸⁵

Thus, Dionysius certainly condemns the idea of a first intellect that is the form of intellectuality itself and the ultimate source of that perfection in creatures. But he does not thereby exclude that among the intelligences there is a first—one that is highest among all other intelligences on the scale of being and operation.

There is another passage in DDN where Dionysius not only does not exclude, but positively affirms the superior character of the highest of the Angels (intelligences). He refers to something that escapes the intellect of the Angels; it escapes even—what evidently should cause more admiration—the intellect of the first of the Angels. He says: “...*Jesu secundum nos divina compositio, et ineffabilis est verbo omni, et ignota menti omni, et ipsi primo dignissimorum angelorum*”.¹⁸⁶ That there is a first and highest intelligence is key to the whole idea of an angelic hierarchy if each Angel is a whole species in itself as St. Thomas teaches.¹⁸⁷ No two will be on the same level, so there must be one among them that is the highest, whose causality will thus be more universal (extensive) than all the others.

Intermediary Conclusion

Our first set of quotes from DDN which Thomas used in the *Super DC*, treated in this article, is about the nature of the *in-se* principles. It is not easy to know exactly what the position of DC is about the “*in se*” principles that Proclus posited as separate hypostases. Because of the

Non enim continentiae aut vitae aut perfectionis solum causa est, ut a sola hac aut alia providentia bonitas quae est super existentia praeacceperit perfectissimus unius et ejusdem et omnium causae providentiae bonitatibus, sed ex existentibus universis convenienter laudatur et nominatur. (DDN I, 7; *Dionysiaca* I, 49³-51²).

¹⁸⁵ In DDN, I, lectio 3, p. 30, n. 100.

¹⁸⁶ DDN II, 9; *Dionysiaca* I, 101⁴-102².

¹⁸⁷ STh I, 50, 4, Ed. Leon., Tom. V, p. 10.

riddle-like style¹⁸⁸ of DC, St. Thomas’ interpretation of it, on this point, is neither easy to prove nor disprove. His interpretation is that all the “*in se*” intelligible patterns, starting with *esse*, are not separate hypostases, but *are* the First Cause Himself. Thomas interprets that the author of DC did not admit these principles, in themselves, to be separate platonic ideas that were different from the First Cause, whose causality as creator is absolutely unique. At the same time, however, Thomas notes that the author taught that these principles are present in a special way in the highest intelligences and highest souls, which are also universal causes (*secondary* universal causes). They both move lower beings and transmit intelligible species to those lower beings which have intellectual capacity. When one looks at some of the quotes I have introduced in this work, it is evident that St. Thomas himself does not seem affirm this interpretation with absolute certainty as the historical interpretation of the author, but as the interpretation most in conformity with the truth of things.

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Appendix

	Explicit citations from DDN found in the <i>Super DC</i> : (book, chapter)	The same citations in the <i>Dionysiaca</i>	Corresponding section of this article: where the given citation is treated
1	I, 4	<i>Dionysiaca</i> I, 34 ²⁻³	Will be treated in a subsequent article
2	I, 5	<i>Dionysiaca</i> I, 35 ²⁻⁴	Will be treated in a subsequent article

¹⁸⁸ Thomas himself, in one particular case, makes a rather wry comment about this: “...et dum brevitati studuit, obscuritatem induxit” (Saffrey, prop. 11, p. 73, ll. 22-23.)

3	I, 5 “ <i>Quoniam autem Deus est ipsa bonitatis essential per ipsum suum esse, omnium est existentium causa.</i> ”	<i>Dionysiaca</i> I, 41 ³⁻⁴	3.3.2 and will also be treated in a subsequent article
4	II, 8	<i>Dionysiaca</i> I, 99 ³⁻⁴	Will be treated in a subsequent article.
5	IV, 1 “ <i>intellectus supermundane intelligent et illuminantur secundum existentium rationes</i> ”	<i>Dionysiaca</i> I, 148 ⁴ -149 ²	3.3.2, 3.4 and will also be treated in a subsequent article
6	IV, 1	<i>Dionysiaca</i> I, 147 ⁴	Will be treated in a subsequent article
7	IV, 2 “ <i>animae per angelos fiunt participes illuminationum a Deo emanantium</i> ”	<i>Dionysiaca</i> I, 154 ¹ -155 ¹	F. 2, 3.1, and will also be treated in a subsequent article
8	IV, 2	<i>Dionysiaca</i> I, 153 ⁴ -155 ²	Will be treated in a subsequent article
9	IV, 3	<i>Dionysiaca</i> I, 158 ⁴ -159 ¹	Will be treated in a subsequent article
10	V, 2 “ <i>Non autem aliud esse bonum dicit Sacra Scriptura et aliud existens et aliud vitam aut sapientiam neque multas causas et aliorum alias productivas deitates excedentes et subiectas, sed unius esse omnes bonos processus.</i> ”	<i>Dionysiaca</i> I, 326 ² -327 ¹	F.1, 1.5, 2.1, 2.3
11	V, 4 “ <i>Etenim Deus non quodammodo est existens, sed simpliciter et incircumscripse totum in seipso esse praeaccepit.</i> ”	<i>Dionysiaca</i> I, 333 ⁴ -334 ¹	3.3.2

12	V, 5 “ <i>Ante alias Dei participationes esse propositum est, et est ipsum secundum se esse senius, eo quod est per se vitam esse, et eo quod est per se sapientiam esse, et eo quod est per se divinam similitudinem esse.</i> ” [Thomas refers to this passage without citing literally.]	<i>Dionysiaca</i> I, 337 ¹⁻³	3.1, and will also be treated in a subsequent article
13	VII, 2	<i>Dionysiaca</i> I, 388 ¹⁻²	Will be treated in a subsequent article
14	VII, 3	<i>Dionysiaca</i> I, 407 ³⁻⁴	Will be treated in a subsequent article
15	X, 3	<i>Dionysiaca</i> I, 492 ²⁻³	Will be treated in a subsequent article
16	X, 3	<i>Dionysiaca</i> I, 492 ² -493 ³	Will be treated in a subsequent article
17	XII, 2	<i>Dionysiaca</i> I, 529 ²⁻⁴	Will be treated in a subsequent article

Abbreviations

c.: *caput*

c [no period]: *corpus articuli*

cf.: *confer*

DC: *Liber de Causis*

DNN: *De Divinis Nominibus*

ed.: editor or edition

eds.: editors

e.g.: *exempli gratia*

Ed. Leon.: *Editio Leonina*

ff.: and following (pages or lines)

gen. ed.: general editor

ibid.: *ibidem*

i.e.: *id est*

LCL: Loeb's Classical Library (series)

ll.: lines

n.: number

nn.: numbers

p.: page

Pa.: Patin's 1966 critical edition of DC

Prof.: Professor

prop.: proposition

props.: propositions

pp.: pages

q.: question

s.c.: *sed contra*

trans.: translator

Tom.: tomus

URL.: uniform resource locator

Vol.: volume

Works of St. Thomas

De Ver.: *De Veritate*

De Pot.: *De Potentia*

In DDN: *In Librum Beati Dionysii De Divinis Nominibus Expositio*

SCG: *Summa Contra Gentiles*

STh: *Summa Theologiae*

Super DC: *Super Librum De Causis Expositio*

Works of Aristotle

Metaph.: *Metaphysica*

Phys.: *Physica*

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Index

Introduction	158
F.1 Where are the <i>in se</i> perfections first and foremost	158
F.2 God’s Unique Causality as <i>Creator</i> in Comparison to the Causality of Creatures	162
F.3 Order (DC, DDN, Two Planes of Universal Causes).....	164
F.4 Conclusion	165
Chapter 1: Introduction	166
1.1 Pseudo-Dionysius	166
1.2 Thomas Aquinas and the Works of Dionysius and Their Place in His Commentary on the Liber de Causis.....	166
1.3 Introduction to De Divinis Nominibus	169
1.4 Introduction to DC and the Version Thomas Used	169
1.5 Putting DDN and DC Together.....	171
Chapter 2: Intelligible Names of God	172
2.1 “Unum-Bonum” Is Esse.....	172
2.2 Vita and Intelligentia.....	175
2.3 A Created Primum Esse	176
Chapter 3: Two Orders of the Universal Causes: Two Metaphysical Places for Intelligible Forms as Universal Causes	177
3.1 Attempt to Harmonize Dionysius and DC on the Created Order of Universal Causes	181
3.2 Where DC Prefers Plotinus to Proclus.....	184
3.3 Two Reasons for Preferring Plotinus on this Point	186
3.3.1 The First Reason: The First Cause Is Somehow Accessible	186
3.3.2 The Second Reason: The Intellect Is the Best Image of the First Cause (According to Analogy).....	192
3.4 A Plurality of Intellects or One Supreme Intellect.....	197

Intermediary Conclusion..... 198

Appendix..... 199

Abbreviations 201

 Works of St. Thomas..... 202

 Works of Aristotle 203

Bibliography 203

 Primary Sources 203

 Secondary Sources (Studies) 205

 Dictionaries..... 208