

“The Pseudo-Dionysian Treatise *De Divinis Nominibus* in Aquinas’ Commentary *Super Librum De Causis Expositio*” (Part II)

Summary

*The present work is about how St. Thomas Aquinas used Pseudo-Dionysius’ *De Divinis Nominibus* (“DDN”) in order to interpret the *Liber de Causis* (“DC”). 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* (“Super DC” or “Saffrey”) of St. Thomas can be categorized into 3 major themes which the work proposes to address: 1) **Where are the in se perfections?** 2) **God’s unique causality** 3) **Order in the creation.***

*As a continuation to Part I [Sapientia Crucis 26(2025) 157-210], the present article will deal with the second and third major themes: **God’s unique causality and order in the creation.** A final article will follow to deal with illumination as a special case of both God’s causality and causality in the greatest creatures. The final article will include man’s participation in the divine, including an eternal life with a resurrected body that is philosophically grounded as a possibility.*

In order to facilitate access to the abbreviations already explained in Part I, see the list of abbreviations provided after the appendix of this article.

Resumo

*O presente trabalho trata de como São Tomás de Aquino usou o *De Divinis Nominibus* (“DDN”) do Pseudo-Dionísio para interpretar o *Liber de Causis* (“DC”). A fim de ver e enfatizar a unidade do presente trabalho, observamos que o uso do DDN no *Super Librum de Causis Expositio* (“Super DC” ou “Saffrey”) 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) *Ordem na Criação.*

Como continuação da Parte I [Sapientia Crucis 26(2025) 157-210], o presente artigo tratará do segundo e do terceiro temas principais: A causalidade única de Deus e a ordem na criação. Um artigo final tratará da iluminação como um caso especial da causalidade tanto de Deus como das criaturas maiores. O artigo final incluirá a participação dos seres humanos no divino, inclusive numa vida eterna com um corpo ressuscitado, filosoficamente fundamentado como uma possibilidade.

Para facilitar o acesso às abreviações já explicadas na Parte I, veja-se a lista de abreviações que se fornece depois do apêndice deste artigo.

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Chapter 4: Which Is First in the Order of Divine Names?

4.1 Some Points from St. Thomas

When referring to God, using “*esse*” instead of “*ens*” can be helpful in order to distinguish better the absolutely infinite divine being from participated being.¹ Nevertheless, the author of DC on occasion uses *ens*.²

For Thomas, *Esse*, *Unum* and *Bonum*, taken in their infinite mode, signify the numerically **one essence** of God under different aspects. St. Thomas notes there is a plurality of things understood *by us* when we think of God. But since the many notions **we** have about God’s essence all refer to God, there is an **order** among these names because of **our** way of understanding³.

¹ “... *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).

² E.g., four times in prop. 20. (Text of DC, in: SAFFREY, prop. 20, p.108; Pa., p. 177 l. 14, p. 178 l. 16, p. 179 l. 41 [two times]).

³ “*Deus autem, in se consideratus, est omnino unus et simplex: sed tamen intellectus noster secundum diversas conceptiones ipsum cognoscit, eo quod non potest ipsum ut in seipso est, videre. Sed tamen, quamvis intelligat ipsum sub diversis conceptionibus, cognoscit tamen quod omnibus suis conceptionibus respondet una et eadem res simpliciter.*”

Our way of understanding discovers the divine names first as properties of *things*. It discovers⁴ them in a certain order based on whether such perfections are more or less universally extensive. “*Primo autem in conceptione intellectus cadit ens: quia secundum hoc unumquodque cognoscibile est, in quantum est actu...*”⁵

Being is also the most fundamental in the order of the divine names⁶. Every other perfection attributed to God will not be something added to pure *esse*, but is necessarily an explanation or aspect of what perfect *esse* means implicitly.

There are two kinds of divine names that are used to designate intrinsic perfections of creatures: those that are 1) convertible⁷ with *esse* and 2) those that, though not convertible with *esse*, nevertheless **presuppose** *esse*.

For DC, *esse* in creatures is the basis of all other perfections in them; *esse* is the perfection that makes creatures real and thereby makes all other perfections in them real. Being a cause is one such perfection. *Esse* is therefore presupposed as giving the highest creatures a *real* causality in relation to other beings. So those creatures, who *have* these perfections in an eminent way, even if not essentially but rather as secondary causes, are, in turn channels for bestowing the same perfections on lesser creatures. In sum, all perfections other than *esse* that exist in the highest creatures and are causal in relation to others are *real* only because the most fundamental perfection in them makes them real: *esse*, as Prof. D’Ancona Costa affirms in the words of St. Thomas⁸:

“...l’essere non è una forma particolare [one among the others], ma la condizione di ogni forma...di ogni attualizzazione”⁹. We understand D’Ancona Costa to mean that virtual forms or properties (those that are

iter. Hanc ergo pluralitatem quae est secundum rationem, repraesentat per pluralitatem praedicati et subiecti: unitatem vero repraesentat intellectus per compositionem.” (STh I, 13, 12, Ed. Leon., Tom. IV, p. 164).

⁴ At least implicitly.

⁵ STh I, 5, 2, Ed. Leon., Tom. IV, p. 58, emphasis ours.

⁶ For Thomas, being is, before all else, that without which no other perfection is real.

⁷ I.e., distinguished only by a conceptual distinction.

⁸ Cf. D’ANCONA, *Commento al “Libro delle Cause”*, p. 115. This position could be confronted with and perhaps challenged by Saffrey’s interpretation [cf. *Sapientia Crucis*, 26(2025), pp. 184-185], which does not see *esse* in DC as the act of existence, but something pertaining rather to essence.

⁹ D’ANCONA, *Commento al “Libro delle Cause”*, p. 115.

intrinsic, intelligible perfections) of a thing are causes (either formal or final or both) of other forms or properties. All of these virtual forms or properties are themselves actualized, made real, by the act of being of the whole suppositum. “[This] *mostra il senso del primato dell’essere nel rapporto causale*”. This is the meaning of “*Dio causa tutte le cose tramite l’essere stesso*”¹⁰. As St. Thomas teaches.

This presupposition of *esse* for all other perfections in creatures can also be applied to God’s perfections provided that this presupposition is understood to be in *us*. Our idea of God as *Esse*¹¹ is presupposed to our idea of God as *Bonum*. In other words, Thomas does not intend to say that *Esse* is before *Bonum* in the perfect simplicity of the divine essence, but just to *us*—to our understanding of God here in this life. *Esse*, the least determinate¹² notion, is the most proper name for us to call God¹³, whose quiddity we do not know. In this sense, it is, for us, “absolutely speaking”¹⁴, the principal name of God.

¹⁰ D’ANCONA, *Commento al “Libro delle Cause”*, p. 115. She is citing *In DDN V*, lect. 1, p. 236, n. 638.

¹¹ In STh I, 5, 2, Thomas is seeking to ascertain which of these two perfections *as found in creatures*, is prior (epistemologically, but also metaphysically). If we want to be faithful to the terminology of the article we are citing, then perhaps the term “*ens*” would be better here than “*esse*”. In STh I, 5, 2, Ed. Leon., Tom. IV, pp. 57-58, Thomas asks: “*Utrum bonum secundum rationem sit prius quam ens*”. But in the s.c., he shows that, using the word “*esse*”, the author of DC was speaking about the same thing Thomas is calling here “*ens*”: “*Sed contra est quod dicitur in libro de Causis, quod prima rerum creaturarum est esse.*” So, even though we are using the term “*esse*” here, we are not thinking of the very abstract *actus essendi*, which requires a few mental maneuvers, but the very first of our ideas, the idea: “something real”.

¹² D’ANCONA, *Commento al “Libro delle Cause”*, p. 115. The least determinate notion encompasses all real things, regardless of the form these things may have (cf. STh I, 13, 11, Ed. Leon., Tom. IV, p. 162). This does not mean that *esse* is the poorest notion. On the contrary, it is the richest because it contains all of its inferiors and even their differences actually, though implicitly. If we disregard all that is imperfection in this notion, we will be left with God himself (cf. John F. X. KNASAS, *Being and Some 20th Century Thomists*, Fordham, New York, 2003, p. 243).

¹³ Our intellect always falls short of the mode of what God is in Himself, so the name that is least determinate is most suitable as far as signification goes. *Esse*, as we have said, is the least determinate name. “*Bonum*” and “*Unum*” are indeed convertible with *Esse*, but at the same time, they add something to it *rationaly*. Things are “one” and “good” only in so far as they are actual (i.e., *existing*). (cf. STh I, 13, 11, Ed. Leon., Tom. IV, p. 162).

¹⁴ The question of STh I, 13, 11 (Ed. Leon., Tom. IV, p. 162) speaks of the name “He Who Is”, but as noted in the body of Thomas’ article, this name signifies simply *ipsum esse* (in its unrestricted mode, i.e., *actus essendi*). Likewise, because it is the least determinate

But Dionysius seems to teach the contrary! He mentions “**Bonum**” as *first* among the divine names because, in a certain sense, it seems to be more universal than *Ens*. In what sense? Well, says Dionysius, even “*non-ens*”, that which does *not* participate in being, does participate in *Bonum*. What does not exist can be called good in that it *tends* toward being.¹⁵

St. Thomas uses this citation in the *Super DC*¹⁶, without offering any correction to this ordering of the divine names with *Bonum* as the first. *Why?*

Thomas, in fact, seems to be genuinely in agreement – not just in the *Super DC*, but in other works as well. Thomas’ *Summa Theologiae* explains that in some sense “*Bonum*” might indeed be thought of as the first of the divine names. It is clear that we name God starting from creatures and the perfections He *causes* in them. That is exactly the reason why Dionysius mentions *Bonum* before the other divine names; in this case, he treats the divine names accordingly as they imply *causality*. If we analyze causality, we see that, of the four different types of causes, the *final* cause comes first; it is *causa causarum*, and precisely the divine name which implies *final* causality is *Bonum*.

Our notion “*bonum*” implies an object of the will: an *end*, according to the adage “*Bonum est quod omnes appetunt*”. Our notion “*ens*”, on the other hand, implies *form*: form *qua* form¹⁷. Just as no agent moves

name and concept, *esse* comes before the concept that has to do with being a cause (i.e. “*Bonum*”), which *presupposes* existence. (The name “*Bonum*” is the first of the names of God insofar as He is a *cause*. [Ibid., ad 2]).

¹⁵ DDN IV, 3; *Dionysiaca* I, 158⁴-159¹.

¹⁶ “*DIONYSIUS autem ordinem quidem separatorum abstulit, sicut supra dictum est, ponens eundem ordinem quem et PLATONICI in perfectionibus quae ceterae res participant ab uno principio, quod est Deus; unde in IV^o capitulo De divinis nominibus, praeordinat nomen boni in Deo omnibus divinis nominibus, et ostendit quod eius participatio usque ad non ens extenditur, intelligens per non ens materiam primam.*” (cf. SAFFREY, prop. 4, p. 28, ll. 10-16).

¹⁷ Cf. *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 ours. See also STh I, 5, 2, ad 2, Ed. Leon., Tom. IV, p. 58.

matter to *form* except for an end¹⁸, so also in the framework of causal relation, the concept “*ens*”, which corresponds to form, follows upon *bonum* which corresponds to end.¹⁹

The *Summa* thereby also clarifies what Dionysius means by saying that *non-ens* would participate in *Bonum* but not in *Esse*: “... *dicendum [est] quod bonum extenditur ad existentia et non existentia, non secundum praedicationem, sed secundum causalitatem*: ut per ‘non existentia’ intelligamus, non ea simpliciter quae penitus non sunt, sed ea quae sunt in potentia et non in actu...”²⁰ With that explanation, it is clear that *bonum* can be said to be more extensive than *esse* only in a very restricted sense, i.e., when *esse* is limited to mean “*esse in actu*” and *bonum* not only as that which is in act but also as that which is in potency for actual being. In this case, *bonum* is taken not only as a real potency for becoming but also as the potency of mere intentional being that is not yet in the real world but only, e.g., in the mind of the Creator (this is the case with the pure potency of prime matter as something isolated from form).

Thomas implies this same explanation of the *Summa* on how “*Bonum*” can be the first of the divine names when he comments on prop. 9 of DC. The proposition reads: “*bonitatem puram quae est causa prima*”²¹. There seems to be, then, some enigmatic link here between goodness and cause. The commentary hints at this *causal* understanding of the name “*Bonum*”, but Thomas leaves out the detailed explanation we found in the *Summa*. He says: “... *prime bonum oportet quod sit prima causa omnium ... semper causa est melior causato, unde oportet id quod est prima causa*

¹⁸ When applied to God, final causality involves a special modality. God’s intention, i.e., the final cause for creation, can be none other than His own divine goodness itself. “*Sed primo agenti, qui est agens tantum, non convenit agere propter acquisitionem aliquius finis; sed intendit solum communicare suam perfectionem, quae est eius bonitas.*” (STh I, 44, 4, Ed. Leon., Tom. IV, p. 461).

¹⁹ “...*Dionysius determinat de divinis nominibus secundum quod important circa Deum habitudinem causae: nominamus enim Deum, ut ipse dicit, ex creaturis, sicut causam ex effectibus. Bonum autem, cum habeat rationem appetibilis, importat habitudinem causae finalis: cuius causalitas prima est, quia agens non agit nisi propter finem, et ab agente materia movetur ad formam: unde dicitur quod finis est causa causarum. Et sic, in causando, bonum est prius quam ens, sicut finis quam forma: et hac ratione, inter nomina significantia causalitatem divinam, prius ponitur bonum quam ens.*” (STh I, 5, 2, ad 1, Ed. Leon., Tom. IV, p. 58).

²⁰ STh I, 5, 2, Ed. Leon., Tom. IV, p. 58, emphasis and quotation marks are ours.

²¹ Text of DC, in: SAFFREY, prop. 9, p. 57; Pa. 154, l. 48, emphasis ours.

*esse optimum; hoc autem est id quod est ipsa bonitatis essentia, unde oportet id quod est **essentialiter bonum** esse **primam omnium causam***". Thomas continues his commentary by alluding to Dionysius, who, in this way, connected the name "*Bonum*" with the notion of causality: "Et hoc est quod DIONYSIUS dicit I^o capitulo *De divinis nominibus*: *Quoniam autem Deus est ipsa bonitatis essentia per ipsum suum esse, omnium est existentium causa*. Unde et intelligentiae quae habent esse et **bonitatem participatam**, oportet quod dependeant a bonitate pura **sicut effectus a causa** ...".²²

Despite all this, in another way (when we look at the divine names as participated perfections in creatures), Dionysius himself names "*Esse*" first among the *other* divine perfections.²³ Thomas cites him: "*Ante alias* [We understand that among these other names is also *Bonum*] *Dei participationes*²⁴ *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*."²⁵ Notice how the style of the sentence brings out the fact that all three additional attributes depend on *esse*, which is mentioned together with each of them. Thomas recognizes in DC the same teaching this style implies: "Secundum quem modum etiam AUCTOR huius libri hoc intelligere videtur. Dicit enim quod hoc ideo est quia esse est supra sensum et supra animam et supra intelligentiam.... Et non est post causam primam latius..."²⁶

4.2 Some Clarifications by Cristina D'Ancona Costa

D'Ancona Costa notes the **twofold** ordering of divine names or attributes by St. Thomas that we have just encountered: one in which **Bonum** comes before all the others, and another in which **Esse** has the first place. For her, as for the interpretation we have given above, "*Bonum*" denotes

²² SAFFREY, p. 58, ll. 11-20, emphasis ours, italics from DDN. See DDN I, 5; *Dionysiaca* I, 41³⁻⁴.

²³ DDN, V, 5; *Dionysiaca* I, 337¹⁻³.

²⁴ By "*ante*", he is referring to *esse participato communiter in omnibus existentibus* (cf. SAFFREY, prop. 4, p. 29, ll. 10-11), and *not* to the perfection of being as found in God. But the argument still holds for the order of the divine names, precisely because these names mean something according as they are applied to God **by man**, and man names God starting from creatures, as we said above (cf. STh I, 13, 12, Ed. Leon, Tom. IV, p. 164).

²⁵ SAFFREY, prop. 4, p. 28, ll. 20-24.

²⁶ SAFFREY, prop. 4, p. 28, l. 20 - p. 29, l. 1, emphasis ours, italics from DC.

especially causal relation *in general* of the perfections proceeding from God to creatures. She says “... il ‘Bene’²⁷ designa, in generale, tutte le ‘processioni’ di perfezioni da Dio alle creature”. She then justifies this affirmation with a quote from St. Thomas’ *In DDN*: “... qualsiasi cosa Dio comunica alle creature, infatti, la comunica per la sua bontà”²⁸.

In other words, “*Bonum*” is the first of the divine names *qua processions* (i.e., communications of perfection *going forth* from God to creatures). The very communication of anything good to others presupposes the goodness of the cause that communicates it and depends on that goodness: i.e., the cause’s ability to communicate (its perfections, i.e., its good qualities) as well as its good intention or end if it is an intelligent cause.

On the other hand, when one considers these same processions *qua their content*, (i.e., what is being communicated), then “*l’essere è il primo*”²⁹. This is because in order for any other perfection in it to be real, the creature must, before all else³⁰, have the perfection of existence.

In order to explain the order of generation of this twofold ordering of divine attributes, one must be aware that the receiver of a divine communication is made into a likeness of the cause. The more pure perfections³¹ the receiver shares in, the greater that likeness will be. Once man knows and begins to differentiate the perfections he sees in creatures: **first**³² *esse*, then *bonum* (taken here as appetible without any special connotation of causality towards others), then *vita*, then *intelligentia*..., this is his starting point for reasoning to the Cause in whose likeness things have been made. As Dionysius says: “*Omnia enim divina et quaecumque nobis sunt manifestata, solis participationibus cognoscuntur*”³³. Only after man comes to the Cause (by this argumentation that starts from creatures), only then, will he turn the order of argumentation around and instead of looking at the *content* of the communications discovered in creatures

²⁷ The quotation marks around *Bene* are mine. They are helpful for understanding *Bene* as a divine name.

²⁸ *In DDN* II, lectio 6, p. 68, n. 213.

²⁹ D’ANCONA, *Commento al “Libro delle Cause”*, p. 112.

³⁰ Not necessarily by a priority of time, but by a priority of causal dependence.

³¹ By “pure perfections” scholastics mean perfections that are always better to have than not to have.

³² At least implicitly first.

³³ *DDN* II, 7; *Dionysiaca* I, 94¹⁻².

and coming from the Cause, he will look also at the *communications themselves exactly as communications* of the Good. And this is where the name “Good” has precedence over all other divine names.³⁴

D’Ancona Costa expresses this contrast as follows: 1) **universal manifestation itself of Divine Providence**³⁵ (where *Bonum* comes first), on the one hand, and, on the other hand, 2) **manifestation of the Divine Providence as to determined effects** (*esse, vita, sapientia [intelligentia]...*), where “*esse*” comes first. She confirms this way of expressing things with the following quote from St. Thomas: “... *c’è un nome che manifesta tutta la provvidenza di Dio, universalmente, ossia il nome ‘bene’*”, and with respect to the other names: “... *altri [names] manifestano la divina provvidenza quanto a effetti determinati, o più universali o più particolari, come ‘ente’, ‘vivo’, ‘sapiente’ e così via*”³⁶.

Chapter 5: Order of the Universe

5.1 The Order of Beings According to DC

The Author of DC is probably thinking of a universe similar to Aristotle’s universe³⁷: the sub-lunar region, above which is the whole system of the spheres of heaven, which the author, like Plato and the young Aristotle, probably thinks of as animated, and finally, like Plato and (we won’t say

³⁴ STh I, 5, 2, Ed. Leon, Tom. IV, p. 58.

³⁵ I.e., the execution of the divine plan whereby creatures reach their end. Already Proclus refers to communicating the good, by the first principle and the henads [for an explanation of the henads in Proclus, see *Sapientia Crucis* 26(2025), pp. 180-181; we will reproduce this explanation in chapter 6 (6.1) of this article], as “providence”. He says: “... δῆλον δῆπουθεν, ὅτι καὶ τὸ ἀγαθοῦ μετέχον διὰ τὴν τῆς προνοίας αἰτίαν τὸ ἀγαθὸν ἔχει” (PROCLUS, *De Decem Dubitationibus*, in: *Tria Opuscula*, Helmut Boese, ed., W. De Gruyter et Socios, Berolini, 1960, p. 31, ll. 5-6). In Latin: “... *palam utique quod et bono participans propter providentie causam bonum habet*” (ibid., p. 30, ll. 5-6).

³⁶ Cf. D’ANCONA, *Commento al “Libro delle Cause”*, p. 113; *In DDN V*, lectio 1, p. 232, nn. 612-613, emphasis ours.

³⁷ This paragraph was partially inspired by D’Ancona’s “Pseudo-‘Theology’”, p. 103, and partially by SAFFREY (Preface, p. XXXI). Its content can be found also in D’Ancona’s “*The Liber de causis*”, pp. 153-155.

like “Aristotle”, but rather like the *Pseudo-Theology of Aristotle*³⁸), the soul of the universe.

The Author of DC orders the causes of things in three levels of beings based on an “... *abstraction de plus en plus grande du temp ou une possession de plus en plus pleine de l’éternité*.”³⁹ The three levels are first of all the First Cause and then two created universal principles.⁴⁰

He individuates one universal principle for all reality that is measured by *time*—the **soul**. The highest soul is an understanding soul and presides as cause, operating on the order of souls (all lesser souls) and everything that is beneath soul (i.e., the whole sensible world) as a generating (life-giving) and moving principle.

In a similar way, the author individuates one universal principle of reason for all reality that is measured by *eternity*—the **intellect**. The Intellect presides as cause over the order of intellect (all lesser intellects) and operates on soul and through soul on the sensible world.

Above the intellect, which is still a creaturely being, is the uncreated First Cause, which is *Ipsium Esse*. He gives being to everything that is and, thereby, gives to the universal principles (soul and intellect) the causality they exercise. And though He really causes, the First Cause does this in keeping with the manner of his absolute simplicity. He is above being and life and intelligence, yet we can say He is being, He is life, He is intelligence if we understand thereby that He is more. He is Being and life and intellect in the most eminent perfection, where there is no real distinction between such perfections.

In a certain sense, Thomas is in agreement with the Author of DC that the First Cause is ineffable (beyond all positive naming). The reason is because his essence exceeds the intellectual capacity of even the highest creatures. We will return to this subject in chapter 7.

³⁸ D’ANCONA, “Pseudo-‘Theology’”, p. 106. D’Ancona holds it quite possible that the Author of DC knew the *Pseudo-Theology*.

³⁹ SAFFREY, p. XXXI.

⁴⁰ Plotinus distinguishes these according to their proximity to the One (cf. PLOTINUS, *Enneads* VI, 2, 11, LCL 445, A. H. Armstrong, trans., Harvard University Press, Cambridge [MA]. London, VI, 2, 11, 1988, p. 146, ll. 5-9). Plotinus observes that intellect has greater unity than soul does (cf. *ibid.*, ll. 9-12). DC would distinguish them according as their being or their goodness approaches or recedes from the First Cause’s richness of Pure Being.

Despite this doctrine of ineffability, however, both Aquinas and the Author of DC are in agreement that whatever perfection is in the caused surely pre-exists in the Cause in an eminent way or else it would not be in the caused⁴¹. In other words, as long as pure perfections imply no necessary imperfection, they are applicable to the First Cause. In order to understand how, we must keep in mind what has been said above: Though in God these perfections are all the very same divine essence, they are known by creatures under different formal notions (being, life, intellect, one, good, etc.) accordingly as they are first found in creatures. The same perfections are participable in varying degrees, while the Godhead as it is in itself is not participable to any creature and remains beyond adequate creaturely comprehension.⁴² As long as we safeguard this transcendence, it is legitimate to say that the First Cause is Being and Life and Intelligence with no prejudice to the ineffability that DC wants to safeguard.

“... causa prima non significatur in his quae de ipsa dicuntur, nisi ex causa secunda quae est intelligentia”⁴³ For Aquinas the perfection intelligence is the highest created perfection in the order of intellectual being (the highest type of being that we know of). If we are to name (*significare*) the First Cause, intellectuality will serve to name Him in a particularly proportionate way since it is the way we name the creature closest to him in nature. The participated intelligences have an analogical similarity to their First Cause, according to various degrees. The first intellect is the most perfect instance of participated intelligence.

⁴¹ To the point, a text we have already seen: “... et [causa prima] 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 sublioriorem et meliorem et nobiliorem...” (Text of DC, in: SAFFREY, prop. 6, p. 42; Pa., 149, ll. 60-63). Literal citation from Pattin’s edition.

⁴² This, of course, according to Aquinas’ reading of DC, through the way he understands Dionysius.

⁴³ “... causa prima non significatur in his quae de ipsa dicuntur, nisi ex causa secunda quae est intelligentia”. For the Author of DC this most probably meant something closer to Proclus’ doctrine of ineffability: that through participation, the first intellect – the universal principle closest to the First Cause in DC – is the first of the orders of causes where what is in the First Cause becomes determinate intelligible being. If that is the case, then, in Himself, the First Cause would be beyond the intellectual way of understanding. The difficulty with that interpretation is that the Author does say that the First Cause is Being. This is a point in Aquinas’ favor because being and intelligibility are closely connected and one would expect that if the First Cause is supereminent Being, he should also be supereminent Intellect.

For Aquinas and probably for the Author of DC, “... causa prima *non significatur* in his quae de ipsa dicuntur, *nisi ex causa secunda quae est intelligentia*” does not mean that we human beings can look directly at the intellect in order to understand the First Cause. However, as will become clearer in the next article, the illumination that the first intellect receives and, in a way that is compatible with its creatureliness, communicates down the hierarchical chain, helps other creatures to know and speak about the First Cause by means of a certain proportional similarity he shares with his effects: analogy (likeness and difference).

So in sum, we have, in DC, the uncreated First Cause, inaccessible and ineffable, and then, under Him, a hierarchy of four orders of created beings according to the ordering of causality. There are two causes that are special in their *universality*: 1) the first intellect, by which the First Cause is best known and named; the first intellect presides as universal cause over the whole intelligible world, and 2) the first soul, which presides as universal cause over the whole sensible world)⁴⁴. In the order of intellect, there are lesser intellects under the first intellect and likewise in the order of souls there are lesser souls under the first soul. Next, comes 4) the order of bodies (which could be distinguished further into celestial bodies and corruptible bodies).

⁴⁴ Intellect and soul were also gods according to the “Platonists”, because they had, after “being” the greatest universality among the ideal forms. Proclus called all of the ideal forms “gods”. But this was not so with the Author of DC. According to the opinion of St. Thomas, when the Author of DC uses, e.g., the word “divina” for the soul, he does not mean it in the literal sense, but metaphorically. *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 I^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).*

5.2 Analogy (a Point of Commonality between DC and DDN)

Dionysius also sees this ordering among beings according to the causes of reality (despite some nuances that we will see later on). Regarding those perfections that are had in more than one order of reality, Dionysius actually uses the term “analogy” in the Aristotelian sense. With the term “analogy”, he describes the relationship among perfections that have the same name but are in different orders of reality.⁴⁵

Following the teaching of Aristotle⁴⁶, Thomas teaches that a perfection had within the same order of reality requires a univocal use of the term, while a perfection had across different orders of reality requires analogical use. Any property (*ratio*) predicated of God, for instance, who is in an Order all by Himself, will be different *simpliciter* from the predicate of the same name applied to a creature (because every creature is in a different order and consequently has the perfection according to a different mode). But *secundum quid*, or *proportionately*, the predicate applied to God and the predicate of the same name applied to the creature are the same.⁴⁷

We can see an example analogical use of the same term in two different orders in prop. 14. Within this proposition⁴⁸, the Author of DC uses consistently the word “*exemplar*”, to describe the soul’s causality on its effects.⁴⁹ Sensible things have their archetype in the soul. The soul has in

⁴⁵ Of course, we do not wish to exaggerate the use of the word “analogy” in Dionysius. In fact, we came across the word only two times in his works.

⁴⁶ See REGINALDUS GARRIGOU-LAGRANGE, *De Deo Uno: Commentarium in Primam Partem S. Thomae*, Marietti, Torino, Roma, 1950, p. 312, his footnote 1. He is speaking, for example, of synonyms, homonyms and derivatives (the ancestors of “analogous” terms). These derivative terms share a common root, but have a different ending (which may indicate a different order of being) as grammarian comes from grammar (cf. ARISTOTLE, *Categories* 1, 1a 1-16).

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 168. Of special importance is also: “*IV C. Lateranensi (Denz., 432)... ‘Inter creatorem et creaturam non potest tanta similitudo notari, quin inter eos major sit dissimilitudo notanda.’ Haec est velut definitio analogiae, prout ratio analogica non est simpliciter eadem in Deo et in creaturis, sed proportionaliter eadem, ut sapientia quae in Deo est causa rerum et in nobis a rebus mensurata* cf. ...[I], 13, 5 ... “*Neque iis quae analogice dicuntur est una ratio, sicut in univocis; nec totaliter diversa, sicut in aequivocis, sed nomen quod sic multipliciter dicitur, significat diversas proportionales ad aliquod unum.*” (GARRIGOU-LAGRANGE, *ibid.*, p. 312, his footnote 2.)

⁴⁸ The word “*exemplum*” appears with a different meaning in prop. 3 (in: SAFFREY, p. 17; Pa., p. 140, l. 12), so it is not a consistent use within the whole of DC, but at least for this particular proposition.

⁴⁹ SAFFREY, prop. 14, p. 85.

itself a model for each type of natural being that it knows. Prop. 14 continues to say: "... *res intelligibiles in ea sunt* [in the soul] *quia scit eas*."

According to St. Thomas, this means that that which is *above* the soul (*res intelligibiles*; i.e. things as understood by the *intelligences*) is known through species less universal and in a way more apt for the soul as proximate cause of sensible things. In support of this, St. Thomas cites the corresponding proposition of Proclus that has been reformulated by the Author of DC. The part of the proposition that the Author of DC modified is exactly that part that explains *what sort* of knowledge the soul has of the things below it and above it. Proclus says: "*Omnis anima est omnes res, exemplariter quidem sensibilia, yconice autem intelligibilia*"⁵⁰.

The soul, in its own way, is "yconice"⁵¹ those perfections of the beings above it and communicated to it by those higher beings. Thomas explains that "yconice" comes from the Greek word for "image" and that it is the counterpart to "exemplar". "... *imago enim est quod fit ad similitudinem alterius, sicut exemplar est id ad cuius similitudinem fit aliud*."⁵²

The word "image" in this context brings Thomas to cite Dionysius who says: "... *causata habent imaginem suarum causarum*..."⁵³ In DDN tells us what to make of this mode of expression. Thomas explains that this text conveys that there is **no "perfect comparison"** between causes and their effects if these are in two different ontological orders. Nevertheless, there is a *comparison of similarity* between the two: the effects, according to their own mode and capacity, carry the image, i.e., the "likeness" of their cause within themselves.⁵⁴ Our example of the perfection of knowledge in intelligences and in souls, shows just such a similitude in perfection across *different orders*: on *different planes* of being.

⁵⁰ SAFFREY, prop. 14, p. 85, ll. 9-11; PROCLUS *Elementatio*, prop. CXCV, cf. PROCLUS, *The Elements of Theology*, Eric Robertson Dodds, trans., 2nd Edition, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1963, p. 171, ll. 4-5.

⁵¹ While Proclus uses this term only for souls in relation to intelligences, there is no reason why it would not apply for the relation from any lower order of beings to the proximate higher order.

⁵² SAFFREY, prop. 14, p. 85, ll. 11-13.

⁵³ SAFFREY, prop. 14, p. 85, ll. 23; DDN II, 8, *Dionysiaca* I, 99³⁻⁴: not a literal citation.

⁵⁴ In DDN II, lectio 4, pp. 57-58, n. 185; see also D'ANCONA, *Commento al "Libro delle Cause"*, prop. 14, p. 310, her footnote 10. Here we are obviously speaking about non-univocal causality, which may be called equivocal or analogical causality.

Here, the teaching of Dionysius overlaps with that of Aristotle and makes possible a real, continuous ascension of perfection in the orders of reality, from the very lowest being to the very highest Being (the First Cause). While Aristotle⁵⁵ and Dionysius use “analogy” to describe this ascending perfection across the orders of reality⁵⁶, the Author of DC means to do the same throughout his whole work, but says it in language that is less explicit.

5.3 Order and Hierarchy in General

Order is always had according to some principle. The ordering principle of the universe is God, who is its First Cause. Everything in the universe finds its place depending upon its greater or lesser approximation to the First Cause’s infinite perfection. Accordingly, the four orders of being we have spoken about and the order of beings *within* each of these orders form a great spectrum of being that is hierarchically arranged.

DDN says: “... per divinam sapientiam *fines primorum coniung[untur] principiis secundorum*”⁵⁷. If we apply this to the whole of creation, it means that the ordering of the universe is a work of great beauty, where no proportion is lacking: neither in the great array as a whole, nor in the transition from one order to the next, which leaves no gaps. This transition is so gradual, that the highest beings of any one order overlap the boundary of their own order by a certain resemblance to the lowest members of the order above their own. E.g., highly developed plants “*participant aliquid de distinctione sexus, quae est propria generi animalium*”⁵⁸. In a top-down view of this, in his *Commentary on the Metaphysics*, St. Thomas gives

⁵⁵ ARISTOTLE, *Topics* I, 18, 108b 7f and ARISTOTLE, *Metaph.* V, 6, 1016b 31-35.

⁵⁶ ... a word that Dionysius himself uses for the intelligible names of God as understood by the minds of mere creatures, (DDN I, 6; *Dionysiaca* I, 9¹, D: “κατὰ τὴν ἀναλογίαν”). The use of the word *analogia* in Greek can mean exactly what we have been talking about: “proportion” according to Karl Schenkl, *Griechisch-Deutsches Schulwörterbuch*, Karl Gerold’s Sohn, Wien, 1867. See also D’Ancona, *Commento al “Libro delle Cause”*, pp. 117-118, 310]. Another place where Dionysius uses this word appears in the *Super DC* and regards the proportion of understanding between a higher and lower intellect is the following: “*Unaqueque essentia intellectualis, donatam sibi a diviniore uniformem intelligentiam, provida virtute dividit et multiplicat ad inferioris ductricem analogiam*” (SAFFREY, prop. 10, p. 72, ll. 6-9; *Cael. Hier.* XV, 3; *Dionysiaca* [Tome II], 1006³-1007¹).

⁵⁷ SAFFREY, prop. 19, p. 107, ll. 2-3, italics are from Dionysius: DDN VII, 3; *Dionysiaca* I, 407³⁻⁴.

⁵⁸ SAFFREY, prop. 19, pp. 106, l. 27 - 107, l. 1.

some examples⁵⁹ of the gradual approximation of the lowest animals (in contrast to the higher animals [dogs, horses]), to the order of plants⁶⁰. He says, for instance, that the lowest animals do not have all five senses but only one—touch (one could think of a slug). Thomas also mentions how some of these lower animals are not able to move themselves locally which is a hallmark for animals. Thomas gives the example of some shellfish⁶¹. These have no interior sense of memory, (which can be quite highly developed in the higher animals—even to the point where it resembles, in some way, the activity of the next order—that of intelligence, and that in its lowest member—man).

In the wonderful hierarchy of being, the superior beings perfect their inferiors; the superior pass on their perfections to inferiors, according to the capacity of these receivers. In this way, the superior beings exercise providence toward them or provide for them. The superiors, as it were, envelop these inferiors with their causal influence, “containing” them, as it were. In a Neoplatonic framework to “contain” something means to exercise supereminent causal influence over it.

The inferiors, on their part, are enriched by these perfections and made to bear in themselves the image, i.e., the similitude, of their superiors. Bearing their superiors’ image, they serve as an occasion for superiors to manifest their causal power, the very power that is at work in these same inferiors.⁶²

So it is that a real mutual enrichment between orders of being occurs—right up to the highest order, the First Cause Himself, but it stops just short of that ultimate order. The reason for this is that, while it is true that the goodness of the First Cause is manifested by what He works in inferior beings, the First Cause, nevertheless, absolutely transcends his inferiors in that his work in them (his creating, conserving and changing them) adds absolutely nothing to his own goodness (not even acciden-

⁵⁹ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Sententia super Metaphysicam*, R. M. Spiazzi, ed., Marietti, Taurini.Romae, 1950, I, lectio 1, p. 7, nn. 10-11.

⁶⁰ Unfortunately, in the passage we have chosen, he does not mention how this pattern applies to plant life with respect to other orders. One might supplement this lack with common experience: e.g., flowers that close at night as a slight approximation to the animal kingdom which is characterized by the motive power.

⁶¹ This is a valid observation. Oysters and some varieties of mussels, in fact, cannot move on their own.

⁶² *In DDN IV*, lectio 6, pp. 118-119, n. 364.

tally). His own goodness is already definitively perfect: perfect in the highest degree. Dionysius teaches this transcendence with these words: “*Deitas autem, quae omnia videt, providentia, et bonitate perfecta omnia circumspiciens et continens et se ipsa implens et excedens omnia providentia ipsa utentia*”⁶³. We will see presently how this teaching is also that of DC as we look more closely to the special mode of causality proper to the First Cause alone.

5.4 God's Perfect Dominion over Creation

According to DC, only God is Cause and Agent in the fullest sense, and this is due to the altogether singular mode of his causality (both as regards creation and governance). This mode is to “act through His *Esse*”. In other words, His action is identical with his *Esse*. Absolutely Pure *Esse*, *Esse* that is essentially *Esse*, can have no essence other than the perfection of *Esse* itself—for if it did, such would be a composition in it and it would no longer be simple, pure *Esse*. If not even the more fundamental⁶⁴ composition *esse/existence* is possible in Him (because it already implies potency), much less will there be any composition substance/accidents in Him.

Pure *Esse* has no accidents, then. By definition, Pure *Esse* is *identical* to all that it is. God *is essentially* all his perfections. DC describes this in prop. 20 with the words: “... *inter omne agens, quod agit per esse suum tantum, et inter factum suum non est continuator*”⁶⁵ *neque res alia media*.”⁶⁶ Thomas⁶⁷ explains in his commentary that by “*continuator*”

⁶³ DDN XII, 2; *Dionysiaca* I, 530²-531¹, emphasis ours.

⁶⁴ We say “more fundamental” in the sense of the greatest and most basic meta-physical dependence.

⁶⁵ Thomas says “*continuator*” here means *habitus*. *Habitus* is an ordering towards something else. According to Thomas it is used in DC for a kind of extension of the essence (besides a real relation, we might possibly translate it as a power whereby the essence is apt to act on the patient). It would be comparable to something like an electronic adaptor in the physical order, meant somehow to fit the receiving piece. The “*continuator*” is a medium between the essence of the agent and the patient. (Cf. SAFFREY, prop. 20, p. 111, ll. 15-18.)

⁶⁶ Text of DC, in: SAFFREY, prop. 20, p. 108; Pa, p. 178, ll. 25-28. Literal citation from Pattin’s edition.

⁶⁷ Using as a key for interpretation Proclus’ explanation of proposition CXXII of the *Elementatio* ...

and “*res alia media*”⁶⁸, the author of DC means either a power of acting or an accidental relation (predicamental) such as a perfection that would accrue to the agent by the agent’s communicating his goodness. Such a perfection⁶⁹ does, however, accrue to every *creature* when it acts, because, unlike Pure *Esse*, the creature is not its own action, but its action is a perfection added over and above its essence.

If God’s mode of acting be such as we have described, then it follows that He is *sufficient* to act of Himself; He needs no cause for acting. He is the archetype of the Socratic ideal of *autarkeia*.

This **divine self-sufficiency** is exactly what the Author of DC seeks to explain in prop. 21. In the *Elementatio*, Proclus seeks to explain this very same trait. Proclus begins from the divine simplicity⁷⁰ (the argument we have just explained about no composition [e.g., accidents + substance] in God). The Author of DC proceeds along the same lines, but uses the attribute “*Unitas*” instead of “*Simplicitas*”, which is an understandable move since “*simplicitas... ad rationem unitatis pertinet*”, as St. Thomas notes⁷¹.

Now any ruler, in order to rule over others, must have “*bonorum abundantiam, ex quibus possit subditis providere*”⁷². But the abundance of good things in the First Ruler, as we have seen, is such that He receives nothing from anyone nor by doing anything in relation to creatures. Only He who is “*dives propter seipsum*”⁷³ is fully a self-sufficient and disinterested giver **exactly because He is Being**. No one can give Him anything He does not already have; He looks for no increase in perfection when He diffuses His goodness exactly because He has the fullness of perfection. He is free to give the perfections of being for the absolutely sole purpose of sharing his goodness without thereby seeking something to achieve

⁶⁸ Text of DC, in: SAFFREY, prop. 20, p. 108; Pa., p. 178, l. 27ff.

⁶⁹ This means a change in operation, which is held to be an accident of quality by many Thomists.

⁷⁰ PROCLUS, *Elementatio*, prop. CXXVI, DODDS, pp. 112-113.

⁷¹ SAFFREY, prop. 21, p. 113, ll. 3-4.

⁷² SAFFREY, prop. 21, p. 112, ll. 5-6.

⁷³ Text of DC, in: SAFFREY, prop. 21, p. 112; Pa., p. 180, l. 48.

or gain or by which he could benefit.⁷⁴ In fact, the perfections of being⁷⁵ are often called “*bonitates*” in DC. An attentive reading of DC shows, however, that though the Author calls them “*bonitates*” and not “perfections of being”, it is very clear to him that these *bonitates* are exactly that: perfections of *being*.⁷⁶

In support of this last claim, we would like here to recall something from DC cited above in chapter 3⁷⁷ of this work: “... *et bonitas [et virtus] et ens sunt res una*”⁷⁸. The reason for recalling this citation is because, in the commentary on this proposition, St. Thomas, at least indirectly, shows that this phrase conforms to the teaching of Dionysius about God’s dominion **through His *esse***. Dionysius speaks of God’s dominion as the perfect possession of *good things*, but the underlying truth here is that God’s dominion over everything is due to the richness of His *Esse* which, because it is separated from every imperfection, virtually contains all other perfections. All other perfections are mere unfolding of what perfect *Esse* implicitly signifies for us.

St. Thomas cites Dionysius on this point: “... *dominatio* [of the First Cause] *est omnis pulchrorum et bonorum perfecta possessio, et regnum*

⁷⁴ St. Thomas explains this very nicely in *De Veritate* 23, 4: “*Non enim divina bonitas est talis finis qui efficiatur ex his quae sunt ad finem; sed magis quo efficiuntur et perficiuntur ea quae ad ipsum ordinantur. Unde Avicenna dicit, quod solius Dei actio est pure liberalis, quia nihil sibi accrescit ex his quae vult, vel operatur circa creaturam.*” (THOMAS AQUINAS, *De Veritate*, Ed Leon. Tom. XXII/3, p. 663, ll. 229-238). According to the Ed. Leon., this is probably a citation Avicenna’s *Metaphysics (Avicenna Latinus) (Philosophia Prima sive Scientia Divina)* VI, 6 (95^a).

⁷⁵ We mean the different facets or aspects of being participated by creatures but contained supereminently and super-unified in the First Cause

⁷⁶ This is especially clear from the very end of prop. 16 “*Et reliquae bonitates simplices, sicut vita et lumen et quae sunt eis similia, sunt causae rerum omnium habentium bonitates, scilicet quod infinitum* [an Angel or “intelligence”] *est a causa prima...*” (Text of DC, in: SAFFREY, prop. 16, p. 93; Pa., p. 171, ll. 6-9); “...*secundum Dionysium primum ens et prima vita et primus intellectus sunt unum et idem quod est Deus...*” (SAFFREY, prop. 18, p. 103, ll. 19-20). It could be argued that this is the position of the author of DC exactly because of the richness of *esse* in his doctrine of God as pure *Esse*. The next paragraph will take us into more detail about this in the teaching of DC and of Dionysius.

⁷⁷ *Sapientia Crucis* 26(2025), 3.3.2, p. 192.

⁷⁸ Text of DC, in: SAFFREY, prop. 20, p. 108; Pa., p. 178, ll. 15-16, brackets original. Literal citation from Pattin’s edition.

est omnis finis et legis et ordinis distributio.”⁷⁹ Prof. D’Ancona Costa⁸⁰ would give us the green light to read this passage in the key of DC’s prop. 20: “... *bonitas... et ens* sunt res una...”, because, as she points out, that was what Dionysius here meant. In order to see this, we have to take a look at two other passages of Dionysius that she cites together. “... *il bene e l’essere non sono principi diversi, né diversi sono la vita, e la sapienza... la processione di tutti i beni deriva da un unico principio*”⁸¹.

D’Ancona leads us to the question: For Dionysius, is there a perfection which, if unlimited, contains all these perfections implicitly in perfect simplicity (without parts)? D’Ancona Costa responds affirmatively with the following citation from Dionysius: “*Infatti Dio... precontiene in sé tutto l’essere in modo semplice e senza limiti*”⁸².

Chapter 6: Eternity on the Created and Uncreated Planes

6.1 Eternity

We have seen that the basic division of reality, even prior to distinguishing the four orders of creatures that we have spoken about, is the distinction between the *created* and the *uncreated*. We find one example of this division in Thomas’ commentary on prop. 2 of DC. It is an example of particular interest to us because there Thomas brings us another citation from DDN. This citation, which we will see at the end of this section, aims precisely at clarifying any confusion between the created and uncreated planes of universal causes. It has to do with duration (whether eternity or time) in the created and the uncreated orders of reality. We will have to build the context before we see the quote just indicated.

Prop. 2 of DC is about the three types of universal causes: God, intelligence, and soul. There is something eternal about each of these orders of being. In order to see how each group is related to eternity, Thomas gives as a starting point a definition of eternity according to the mind of

⁷⁹ SAFFREY, prop. 21, p. 112, ll. 7-9; DDN XII, 2, *Dionysiaca* I, 529²⁻⁴. The citation is literal with a couple of very minor adjustments.

⁸⁰ D’ANCONA, *Commento al “Libro delle Cause”*, pp. 194-195.

⁸¹ DDN V, 2; *Dionysiaca* I, 326-327.

⁸² DDN V, 4; *Dionysiaca* I, 333-334; cf. 4.1 e 5.3 deste artigo.

the author of DC: “*Nomen igitur aeternitatis indeficientiam quamdam sive interminabilitatem importat*”.

So, for the Author of DC, if something is eternal, then by definition it will be unending—in other words, incorruptible. That means, of course, that nothing eternal will be subject to motion because motion or change implies corruption, for motion means that something begins to be (is generated) which before was not or that something *stops* being (corrupts) which was before⁸³.

If *motion* is incompatible with eternity and opposed to it, then so is *time*, for time is the *measure* of motion according to a before and after.⁸⁴ The definition of eternity, so explained, prepares us for a classification of all higher beings, based on the type eternal duration that is attributed to each higher being. Both Proclus and the Author of DC offer us a tripartite division for this.⁸⁵

Proclus’ division is as follows⁸⁶: “*Omne enter*⁸⁷, *vel existenter*, *ens aut ante aeternitatem est*, *aut in aeternitate*, *aut participans aeternitate*.” And DC, mindful no doubt of Proclus’ division, proposes the following derivation of it: “*Omne esse superius aut est superius aeternitate et ante ipsam*, *aut est cum aeternitate*, *aut post aeternitatem et supra tempus*.”⁸⁸

Thomas observes that for both Proclus and the Author of DC there is a duration which is loftier than eternity: *ante aeternitatem* (Proclus) or *superius aeternitate et ante ipsam* (DC). What each understands by *esse ante aeternitatem*, however, is different. Proclus, we must remember, said that the *being* whose duration is *ante aeternitatem* is one of the

⁸³ ARISTOTLE, *Phys.* VIII, 3, 254a 11-12. In the case of locomotion (we should think of the heavenly bodies), the occupancy of a place comes to be or *corrupts* with movement. Though the motion itself is eternal (constant), it takes place in time (successively). The heavenly soul is the immediate principle of this motion (DC, prop. 3). At least *this* aspect of its *operation* (certainly *not* its substance or substantial being as such) is therefore in time. (See also Text of DC, prop. 31, p. 140; Pa., p. 198, ll. 46-48 and following.)

⁸⁴ ARISTOTLE, *Phys.* IV, 11, 219a 17-19.

⁸⁵ Since corporal reality is in time, it need not be mentioned here.

⁸⁶ This is Thomas’ version (SAFFREY, prop. 2, p. 13, ll. 6-8). Moerbeke has “*Omne enter ens aut ante eternitatem est aut in eternitate aut participans eternitate*” (PROCLUS, *Elementatio Theologica* prop. LXXXVIII, Guillelmo de Morbecca, trans., Helmut Boese, ed., Leuven University Press, Louvain, 1987, p. 46, ll. 1-2).

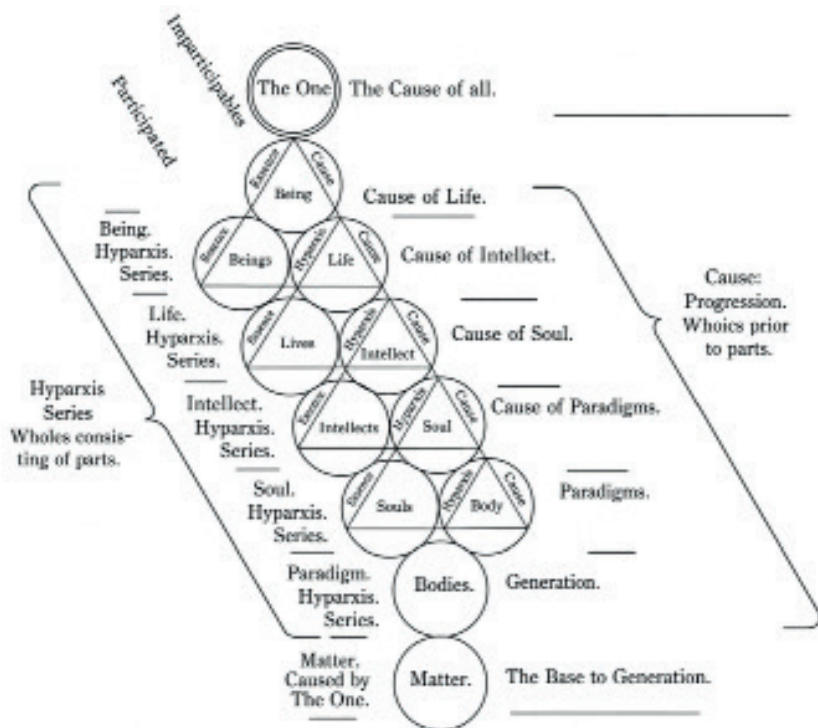
⁸⁷ This is the name Proclus gives to beings that are not mobile (SAFFREY, prop. 2, p. 13, ll. 8-9).

⁸⁸ Text of DC, in: SAFFREY, prop. 2, p. 10; Pa., p. 138, ll. 71-73.

separated ideas⁸⁹. We mean that the being that is *ipsum esse separatum*,

⁸⁹ It is the first of the hyparxes. Information about hyparxes in the teaching of Proclus follows:

I will first give Dodds' diagram and then an explanation of the diagram.



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" [DODDS, 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 ours); 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. It seems that these 2 classes are designating a two-fold consideration of each perfection. **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* 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 (PROCLUS, *Elementatio*, prop. XXIII [DODDS, pp. 27-28], and XCIX [DODDS, p. 89]. See also Johnson’s footnote 12 on p. 22 of this edition.). We left 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.

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. See PROCLUS, *Elementatio*, prop. XC-XCV, especially prop. XCII, DODDS, p. 82, ll. 31-34: “οὔτε γὰρ τὸ πρῶτον ἡ ἀπειρία (μέτρον γὰρ πάντων ἐκεῖνο, τὰγαθὸν ὑπάρχον καὶ ἐν) οὔτε τὸ ὄν (ἀπειρον γὰρ τοῦτο, ἀλλ’ οὐκ ἀπειρία)· μεταξύ 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”, 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. (“Εἰκότως ἄρα καὶ ὁ Σωκράτης ἔλεγεν ἐκ πέρατος εἶναι καὶ ἀπειρου τὰ ὄντα πάντα καὶ τὰς δύο ταύτας νοητὰς ἀρχὰς ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ πρώτως ὑφessestáinai. Τὸ γὰρ καὶ συνάγον ἀμφοτέρας καὶ τελειοῦν καὶ διὰ πάντων ἐκφαίνον τῶν ὄντων τὸ πρὸ τῆς δυνάδος ἐστὶν ἔν...” [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. An indication of the intimate connection between being and thought is that we are unable to think nothingness

does not designate the First Cause for Proclus, but something *separate* from the First Cause.⁹⁰ The passage⁹¹ where St. Thomas talks about this is brief and a bit obscure. There are two ways I can see that one might interpret it. The first way is that *esse ante aeternitatem* is the Platonic idea, *ipsum esse separatum*, that is ontologically *before* and *transcends* all other eternals (the ideas, including the idea “*aeternitas*”). Proclus, in fact, seems to posit a separated idea called “*aeternitas*”⁹². (Plato himself seems never explicitly to have posited a separate idea called “*aeternitas*”, but if he had done so, it would have been in keeping with his theory.⁹³) In

⁹⁰ The “First Cause” according to Proclus is the *Unum-Bonum*. It is a cause, 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 the caused creatures. He cannot be reached by causal reasoning and analogy. 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. 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 ours). Plato says: “... πολλῶν ὄντων τῶν αἰεὶ λεγομένων εἶναι, πέρας δὲ καὶ ἀπειρίαν ἐν αὐτοῖς ζῦμυτον ἐχόντων.” (PLATO, *Philebus* 16C, Jeffrey Henderson, ed., Harold North Fowler, trans., LCL Vol. 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 γάρ ἄλλο μετὰ τὴν ἐνωσιν τῆς ὅλης θεότητος ἢ τὴν δυάδα τῶν ἀρχῶν ἀνάγκη τετάχθαι;” (PROCLUS, *Teologia Platonica* III, 7, p. 338, ll. 12-13). Italian: “*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).

⁹¹ SAFFREY, prop. 2, p. 13, ll. 15-24.

⁹² *Elementatio*, prop. LIII: “Πάντων τῶν αἰωνίων προϋπάρχει ὁ αἰών...” (DODDS, p. 50, ll. 24-25). English: “Prior to all things eternal there exists Eternity...” (DODDS, p. 51).

⁹³ Cf. Michael David ROHR, “Empty Forms in Plato”, in: Simo Knuuttila, ed., *Reforging the Great Chain of Being: Studies of the History of Modal Theories*, Springer-Science

any case, if we interpret Proclus in this sense, then, *esse ante aeternitatem* would mean simply that the idea *esse* (which has the widest range of causality because participated *esse* is the most common of effects) would come before the idea *aeternitas* (which is less embracing, for there are many beings that are not eternal, and every eternal thing is a being) in the hierarchy of being.

The second possibility for interpreting Thomas' rather obscure commentary seems more probable due to the fact that it is founded on Thomas' explanation of Proclus' separate forms in another part of the *Super DC*. This second possibility is as follows. We know that Proclus applies the designation "supersubstantial" to *all the gods*⁹⁴. St. Thomas seems to take this to mean all ideal forms.⁹⁵ So accordingly, St. Thomas mentions in the commentary on prop. 6 of DC the following proposition (CXXIII) from the *Elementatio*: "*Omne quod ens ipsum ... supersubstantial[e] ...*"⁹⁶ And Thomas notes that "*ens ipsum*" here means "*omnem formam idealem secundum Platoniorum positiones*, [i.e., not only the form *esse*, but] *puta per se hominem, per se vitam... quae unitatem, secundum ipsos, supersubstantialem, quia excedunt omnia [their] subiecta participantia*."⁹⁷ Thus, Thomas may well have meant to say in that passage, to which

+ Business Media B.V., Dordrecht, 1981.

⁹⁴ PROCLUS, *Elementatio*, prop. CXV, DODDS, p. 102, ll. 7-8: "... ὁ θεῖος ἀριθμὸς ἅπας ὑπερούσιός ἐστιν" English: "the whole number of gods transcends Being."

⁹⁵ 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 with others that come before the order of "being", 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 ἐνὺς ἐστὶν αὐτοτελής, καὶ πᾶσα αὐτοτελής ἐνὺς 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 and Intelligence" (PROCLUS, *Elementatio*, prop. CXV, DODDS, p. 100, l. 28: "Πᾶς θεὸς ὑπερούσιός ἐστι καὶ ὑπέρνους."). Here, the sense of "god" seems to be restricted to mean only the Limit and the Unlimited with others that come before the order of "being". (To see what these principles Limit and Unlimited are, see the long footnote about hyparxes above in this same section, 6.1, of this article.)

⁹⁶ SAFFREY, prop. 6, p. 43, ll. 19-20.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 44, ll. 2-6.

we just referred as a bit obscure⁹⁸, that, for Proclus, all supersubstantial principles (Proclus would have said *hyparxes*) transcend their inferiors completely and no inferior is able to participate fully in them according to their superessential mode. In that sense they would all be above eternity and in the class of *esse ante aeternitatem* because they are participated only imperfectly even by beings that are eternal in duration. So much for Proclus on “*esse ante aeternitatem*”.

For DC and Dionysius, the First Cause Himself is *Ipsum Esse*, and for that very reason, the First Cause *is* all the separate ideas of Plato that are intelligible perfections, including *Aeternitas*. This being so, why does the Author of DC not call the First Cause just plain “*Aeternitas*”? Why “*superius aeternitate et ante ipsam*”? It is no doubt true that God *is* his own eternity, as St. Thomas points out elsewhere.⁹⁹

To respond, we might follow the two possible interpretations of Thomas’ interpretation of Proclus’ proposition about the matter. Regarding the first, the Author of DC does not seem to posit any separate Platonic ideal forms, he does not posit a caused separate hypostasis “*aeternitas*”.

Regarding the second interpretation of St. Thomas’s obscure passage about Proclus, we find an apt key of interpretation. DC admits *other aeternitates* besides that of the First Cause, where “*aeternitas*” is an attribute of the created separate substances (intellects and souls). The First Cause gave them their unchanging, stable being; therefore, their stable being is a *participated* eternity in relation to the First Cause; theirs is a *received* eternity, not a subsistent eternity. It would be in relation to this *participated* eternity that the First Cause is “*superius*” and “*ante*”. So it may be that the Author of DC wished to refrain from calling the First Cause “*aeternitas*” and to make his main meaning of “*aeternitas*” compatible with the intelligences because *participated* eternity (which the Author of DC calls “*cum aeternitate*”) is more accessible (to us): it is not identical with *esse* as is the eternity of the First Cause. This move makes it all the easier to formulate a three-fold division of immaterial beings according to duration, similar to Proclus’ division. And that is the intent of prop. 2.

⁹⁸ I.e., SAFFREY, prop. 2, p. 13, ll. 15-24.

⁹⁹ E.g., STh I, 10, 2.

6.2 Participated Eternity

Continuing our analysis of the tripartite division of universal causes according to duration, we come to the second type: intelligences, which participate in eternity. Proclus describes intelligences as “*in aeternitate*” and DC as “*cum aeternitate*”. This means, in both cases, that intelligences will not stop existing, nor change (substantially), but are on a par with what participated eternity signifies¹⁰⁰: the measure of interminable entities. For the Neoplatonists and the Peripatetic school, this means that intelligences are co-eternal with God as regards their *duration* though not according to the supersubstantial mode.

In accord with the second interpretation of the aforementioned obscure passage in Thomas’ commentary, when the Author of DC considers eternity, he is only considering participated eternity. *Aeternitas* is simply the measure of an *Esse* that is incorruptible. God is therefore *superius aeternitate* because He causes supereminently¹⁰¹ the participated eternity of creatures. We see that Dionysius also talks about participated eternity when he says, e.g.: “... *proprietas aeterni est antiquum et immutabile et universale esse metiendo*.”¹⁰² St. Thomas makes this somewhat enigmatic phrase more explicit:

... *proprie aevum est quod est antiquum, idest non de novo [i.e., afresh or anew] incepit esse; et quod est invariabile, quia non est mensura motus, sed ipsius esse intransmutabilis; et quod totum secundum totum metitur, per quod differt a tempore: totum enim tempus non mensurat totum secundum se totum, sed secundum diversas sui partes mensurat diversas partes motus: est enim tempus numerus motus secundum prius et posterius. Sed quia esse, quod mensurat aeternitas, non habet prius et posterius cum sit manens et*

¹⁰⁰ “*Et intelligentia [apponitur vel] parificatur aeternitati, quoniam extenditur cum ea; et non alteratur neque destruitur.*” (Text of DC, in: SAFFREY, prop. 2, p. 10; Pa., p. 139, ll. 91-93, brackets original, literal citation from Pattin’s edition) ... Thomas’ explanation is found here: SAFFREY, prop. 2, p. 14, l. 18 - p. 15, l. 8.

¹⁰¹ Text of DC, in: SAFFREY, prop. 2, p. 10; Pa., p. 138, ll. 21-22: “*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. 21-22: D’ANCONA specifies that the last word here, “*ei*” refers to eternity, so that the First Cause is the cause of eternity [D’ANCONA, “*The Liber de causis*”, p. 144].) “*Et significatio quod causa prima est ante aeternitatem ipsam, est quod esse in ipsa est acquisitum*” (Text of DC, in: SAFFREY, prop. 2, p. 10; Pa., p. 138, ll. 84-86: here again D’Ancona says that the reference, this time by the words “*in ipsa*”, is to eternity. I.e., the *esse* in [participated] eternity is acquired [from the First Cause]) (See D’ANCONA, *ibid.*).

¹⁰² DDN X, 3; *Dionysiaca* I, 489³, emphasis ours.

*invariabile, et ipsa aeternitas est simplex non habens prius et posterius et sic quidquid mensurat, secundum se totam mensurat.*¹⁰³

Eternity is therefore a measure, which is according to the *whole*¹⁰⁴, of any permanent *esse*.¹⁰⁵ This is a consequence of the simplicity of spiritual substances as permanent substances; the simplicity of their non-material natures excludes any succession or parts, for such would be a type of composition. Time, on the contrary, is the measure of things in becoming. Time is consequently the measure of a *part* of something; not of a being that is simple and permanent. “... *in ipsis* [the Sacred Scriptures] *quidem et potentius existentia aeterna, et quae in generatione sunt, tempore dicta et declarata sunt*”.¹⁰⁶

St. Thomas does not give any *philosophical* critique to the idea of intelligences’ co-eternal duration with God. He does, however, think it important to enough to make a correction from *Faith’s* point of view, with the following quote from DDN that we have been working up to. Dionysius here notes that there is a major difference between the Eternal God and other beings that Sacred Scripture calls “eternal”.¹⁰⁷ Thomas

¹⁰³ In DDN X, lectio 1, pp. 327-8, n. 871, emphasis ours.

¹⁰⁴ Even PROCLUS (*Elementatio*, prop. LIV) taught this: “...τὸ μὲν καθ’ ὅλον μετροῦν αἰὼν ἔστι...” (Dodds, p. 52, l. 12); English: “That which measures by the whole is eternity...” (Dodds., p. 54).

¹⁰⁵ See also *De Pot.* 5, 1, ad 2.

¹⁰⁶ DDN X, 3; *Dionysiaca* I, 492¹⁻².

¹⁰⁷ As we mentioned in the foreword [SC 26 (2025) 174], there is an apparent contradiction in Dionysius. This happens first of all with the attribute *esse* in DDN V, I. (This example helps because if *esse* is the first of the divine attributes and contains virtually all the others in the way we described in chapter 4 (4.1), then the same is true 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...”. According to the interpretation that dominates today, in Dionysius, the Divine Names, like *esse*, are thus not meant to name the nature itself of the First Cause (Thomas would agree if this means naming the Divine Nature in a univocal way from creatures), 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**

quotes him thus: “... unde et DIONYSIUS dicit X^o capitulo De divinis nominibus quod non simpliciter sunt coaeterna Deo quae in Scripturis aeterna dicuntur...”¹⁰⁸ Even though the being of a created cause lasts indefinitely, according to DDN, its being is not only received (which is taught by DC¹⁰⁹) but also has a **beginning**, as the Faith tells us.¹¹⁰

This quote distinguishes very sharply the difference between being and operation on the uncreated plane, on the one hand, and being and operation on the created plane, on the other. It distinguishes them in a way that was not possible in DC, which does not specify, regarding creation, that created things are co-existent with time and that all created things, including time, had a beginning.

Though not merely philosophical in content, it was nevertheless very fitting for St. Thomas to use this quote in his philosophical commentary on DC because it serves to *reinforce the plan of the author of DC*: division of higher beings (First Cause and second causes) according to their approximation or recession from eternity. This quote helps to bolster DC’s argument in that it shows the duration of intelligences is not only distinguished from the First Cause because intelligences are not eternity

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. (D’ANCONA, “Cause prime non est yliatim” *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 ours). Dionysius will also 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.

¹⁰⁸ SAFFREY, prop. 2, p. 12, ll. 20-22; *Dionysiaca* I, 492²⁻³, the text has been a little altered in St. Thomas’ commentary. The Saracen version reads: “Oportet autem non simpliciter coaeterna Deo qui est ante aevum arbitrari aeterna dicta”.

¹⁰⁹ “Et significatio quod causa prima est ante aeternitatem ipsam, est quod esse in ipsa est acquisitum” (Text of DC, in: SAFFREY, prop. 2, p. 10; Pa., p. 138, ll. 84-86: here again D’Ancona says that the reference, this time by the words “in ipsa”, is to eternity. I.e., the *esse* in [participated] eternity is acquired [from the First Cause] [D’Ancona, “The *Liber de causis*”, p. 144]).

¹¹⁰ SAFFREY, ibid., ll. 18-22.

itself, but also because their participated eternity is not without a beginning and so much the more removed from the eternity of the First Cause.

(Due to the thematic structuring of our work, we shall have to treat of “eternity” in *souls* in our final article.)

Chapter 7: Ineffability on the Created and Uncreated Planes

We have another excellent example of the altogether special position of the First Cause in prop. 6 of DC: “ineffability”. DC says “...*prima sola cuius deficit narratio; et non est ita nisi quia supra ipsam non est causa per quam cognoscatur*”.¹¹¹

Now, just as “*aeternitas*” is found in the different levels of higher beings, so also is “ineffability”, according to Proclus. *All* the separate ideas and souls are unspeakable and unknowable by the beings hierarchically below them. They all have a “supersubstantial” unity¹¹² that cannot be penetrated sufficiently, by those beings that are below them. Yet, as always, notwithstanding this privilege of all ideal forms, the First Cause exceeds them infinitely. Only the First Cause is *completely* unknown, in the sense that He has no other above Him by whom He can be perfectly known.¹¹³ All beings below Him, who are not *Esse* Itself, are creatures. None of them is naturally able to know His essence directly. And what one does not *know* in a commensurate way, one also cannot *name* in a way that is proportionate to His mode of being.

For the same reason we see in Proclus, the First Cause is totally ineffable also according to Dionysius¹¹⁴ (the reason: no being is either on a

¹¹¹ Text of DC, in: SAFFREY, prop. 6, p. 42; Pa., p. 147, ll. 33-35. We could note in passing that being ineffable is linked with *knowledge* about a thing *not had* by its inferiors. Knowledge of superiors and knowledge from superiors has to do with illumination. And so we are proceeding in the direction of illumination, an issue we will have to tackle in the final article.

¹¹² See chapter 6 of this article.

¹¹³ St. Thomas cites this proposition: “... *Omne ens ipsum... indicibile est et incognoscibile omnibus secundis, a participantibus autem capabile est et cognoscibile: propter quod solum primum penitus ignotum tamquam amethectum ens.*” (SAFFREY, prop. 6, p. 43, l. 19 - p. 44, l. 1.) [“*Amethectum*”, notes Thomas (ibid., ll. 16), means “*non post existens alicui*”, which, at least according to the sense, harmonizes with Dodds’ version (*Elementatio*, prop. CXXIII, p. 109), i.e., “unparticipated” being, which means being *essentially*.]

¹¹⁴ “*Non... narrabilis*” is the expression used by DC. It will be helpful to have the text of DC before one’s eyes in order to see the parallel that Thomas is pointing out between

par with the First Cause or superior to Him, whereby that being would be able to know Him directly and in a way that is adequate regarding His knowability):

Et hoc etiam DIONYSIUS ponit I^o capitulo *De divinis nominibus*, dicens: “Et neque sensus est eius, neque fantasia, *quod iste* [Thomas means the Author of DC] *nominat ‘meditationem’*, neque opinio, *quod iste nominat ‘rationem’*, neque nomen, *quod iste nominat ‘loquellam’*, neque sermo, *quod iste nominat ‘narrationem’*, neque scientia, *quod iste nominat ‘intelligentiam’*.”¹¹⁵

Further on in prop. 6, DC offers an even more explicit detail about there being no sufficient understanding regarding the First Cause in His inferiors. It says: “*Et causa prima est supra res intellectibiles sempiternas et supra res destructibiles, quapropter non cadunt super eam sensus neque meditatio neque cogitatio neque intelligentia.*”¹¹⁶ Admitted that the First Cause has no body and is incorruptible, it is easy to see that there is no sensation or imagination of the First Cause. But that the First Cause is also above *intelligible* things is not so immediately evident. DC affirms that He is above intelligible things, but offers no special argument in favor of this. St. Thomas notes that Proclus does give an argument, which we do well to consider:

*Proclus probat per hoc quod omnis cognitio intellectualis vel rationalis est entium: illud enim quod primo acquiritur ab intellectu est ens, et id in quo non invenitur ratio entis non est capabile ab intellectu; unde, cum causa prima sit supra ens, consequens est quod causa prima sit supra res intelligibiles sempiternas. Causa autem prima, secundum PLATONICOS quidem, est supra ens in quantum essentia bonitatis et unitatis, quae est causa prima, excedit etiam ipsum ens separatum...*¹¹⁷

So, there you have it. If something is not being, it will not be intelligible, because only being is intelligible. And what is not being (nothingness) is unthinkable. So far, so good. Proclus’ First Cause (*Unum-Bonum*) is not being, but above being. Therefore, concludes Proclus, (and here it

what DC says and the passage Thomas quotes from DDN. DC has: “... *ipsa* [the First Cause] *non cadit sub sensu et meditatione et cogitatione et intelligentia et loquela; non est ergo narrabilis.*” (Text of DC, in: SAFFREY, prop. 6, p. 42; Pa., p. 148, ll. 46-48).

¹¹⁵ SAFFREY, prop. 6, p. 46, ll. 7-12. See DDN I, 5; *Dionysiaca* I, 35²⁻⁴.

¹¹⁶ Text of DC, in: SAFFREY, prop. 6, p. 42; Pa., p. 149, ll. 54-58. Literal citation from Pattin’s edition.

¹¹⁷ SAFFREY, prop. 6, p. 47, ll. 4-11.

becomes difficult to understand exactly what he means) the First Cause is unthinkable; yes, even unthinkable in the sense that He does not *think* Himself the way Aristotle's God thinks Himself. The First Cause, according to Proclus, knows Himself alright, but in a way that is above intelligence: "a mode of cognition which we cannot hope to grasp"¹¹⁸.

It is, however, Dionysius that explains better this claim that the First Cause is above the intelligible. His explanation is better both as regards the Faith as well as sound reason (according to Aristotle's argument against separate forms). It is true that the First Cause is above *created* being. The First Cause exceeds *ens*¹¹⁹; however, not because He has nothing to do with *esse*, says St. Thomas, but because He is "*ipsum esse infinitum*". What He exceeds is *participated esse*. "[E]ns autem dicitur id quod finite participat esse, et hoc est proportionatum intellectui nostro..."¹²⁰

According to this understanding, we have the explanation of Dionysius, cited by Thomas: "*Si cognitiones omnes existentium sunt, et si existentia finem habent, in quantum scilicet finite participant esse, qui est supra omnem substantiam ab omni cognitione est segregatus.*"¹²¹ In the same way, we saw that he exceeded eternity, because He is above creatures that are eternal merely by participation. Finally, and this is our point here, He exceeds intellect, not because intelligence is lacking in *Him*, but because no other can naturally know Him as He is in Himself (as we showed earlier in this section on ineffability). This is also what DC teaches.¹²² That is why, according to DC, we know the First Cause only by means of His image,

¹¹⁸ These words of Dodds (commentary on prop. CXXIV, p. 266) seem to describe the Limited and the Unlimited as we noted in the footnote citing John Joseph Cleary in chapter 6 (6.1). (To see what Limited and Unlimited are, see the long footnote in the same section [6.1] about the henads in Proclus). 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]). So, a cause of knowledge cannot be without knowledge. Otherwise, the cause would be worse off than its inferiors. Because of this, Dodd's commentary seems to be applicable all the more so to the First Cause.

¹¹⁹ *Ens commune* (participated being).

¹²⁰ SAFFREY, prop. 6, p. 47, ll. 13-14.

¹²¹ Ibid., ll.19-22. DDN I, 4; *Dionysiaca* I, 34²⁻³.

¹²² "*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: SAFFREY, prop. 6, p. 42; Pa., p. 149, ll. 54-58; literal citation from Pattin's edition).

the intellect.¹²³ One can know Him truly, but *imperfectly* (analogically) through the intellect, as we have seen¹²⁴, and name Him accordingly.¹²⁵

Conclusion

In our first article we examined a group of the quotes Thomas chose from DDN that helped elucidate the question of the place of the *in se* principles in DC. We saw that this meant that the intelligible perfections we find in creatures (perfections that imply no imperfection) exist in the First Cause essentially or supereminently.

In the present article, we sought to make a further contribution to the analysis. This time, however, the group of DDN quotes chosen by Thomas for his commentary on DC are about loosely related themes: the order of divine names, the order of reality, the relationship among the different orders.

When we discussed which of the divine names should come first, the result was that *Bonum* is first for signifying causality in general and *esse* is first regarding the actual *content* of the perfections caused in creatures.

We explained the order of the universe according to the three highest principles in DC:

- First Cause
- Intelligence
- Soul

There, we noticed that the analogical relationship among these three orders can be expressed as a causal relation between exemplar and image (icon). We saw that the three highest orders of the universe can be classified and ranked also according to their modes of duration—depending on their approaching or receding from the **supersubstantial eternity** of the First Cause. Absolute **ineffability** belongs to the First Cause in the sense that no creature can ever comprehend him adequately (which would require something greater than He is). Creatures can know him naturally

¹²³ As we saw in chapter 3 (3.3.2) of Part I of this work in: *Sapientia Crucis*, 26 (2025), 192f. and 5.1 of this article.

¹²⁴ See chapter 3 (3.3.2) of Part I of this work in: *Sapientia Crucis* 26 (2025), 192f. and 5.1 of this article.

¹²⁵ D'ANCONA, "The *Liber de causis*", p. 150.

by means of an analogy with pure perfections in creatures (intellect has a prominent role here). By analogy, we mean that no creature will be able to grasp the supereminent mode of these perfections in God.

Just as there was a relative eternity in creatures, so too there is a relative ineffability in the highest creatures with respect to other creatures hierarchically below them who cannot adequately comprehend them.

The final article will address a particular case of causality within these orders: illumination, followed by the impression of soul on body.

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Appendix

	Explicit citations from DDN found in the <i>Super DC</i> : (book, chapter)	The same citations found in the <i>Dionysiaca</i>	Corresponding numbered section of this work ¹²⁶	Ano da publicação na <i>Sapientia Crucis</i>
1	I, 4	<i>Dionysiaca</i> I, 34 ²⁻³	7	2026
2	I, 5	<i>Dionysiaca</i> I, 35 ²⁻⁴	7	2026
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 4.1	2025 2026
4	II, 8	<i>Dionysiaca</i> I, 99 ³⁻⁴	5.2	2026
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	2025 2025
6	IV, 1	<i>Dionysiaca</i> I, 147 ⁴		

¹²⁶ F (Forward) and chapters 1-3 are from Part I of this article. See *Sapientia Crucis* 26(2025) 157-210.

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	2025
8	IV, 2	<i>Dionysiaca</i> I, 153 ⁴ -155 ²		
9	IV, 3	<i>Dionysiaca</i> I, 158 ⁴ -159 ¹	4.1	2026
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, 5.2	2025 2025 2026
11	V, 4 “ <i>Etenim Deus non quodammodo est existens, sed simpliciter et incircumscripse totum in seipso esse praecepit.</i> ”	<i>Dionysiaca</i> I, 333 ⁴ -334 ¹	3.3.2 5.4	2025 2026
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 4.1	2025 2026
13	VII, 2	<i>Dionysiaca</i> I, 388 ¹⁻²		
14	VII, 3	<i>Dionysiaca</i> I, 407 ³⁻⁴	5.3	2026
15	X, 3	<i>Dionysiaca</i> I, 492 ²⁻³	6.2	2026
16	X, 3	<i>Dionysiaca</i> I, 492 ² -493 ³		
17	XII, 2	<i>Dionysiaca</i> I, 529 ²⁻⁴	6.2	2026

Abbreviations

c.: *caput*

c [no period]: *corpus articuli*

cf.: confer

DC: *Liber de Causis*

DDN: *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)

l.: line

ll.: lines

n.: number

nn.: numbers

p.: page

pp.: pages

Pa.: Pattin's 1966 critical edition of DC

prop.: proposition

props.: propositions

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*

Saffrey: *Super Librum De Causis Expositio* (for citations)

Super DC: *Super Librum De Causis Expositio* (for speaking about this work without giving a citation)

Works of Aristotle

Metaph. *Metaphysica*.

Phys. *Physica*.

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