

The Trial of the Angels in the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas

Summary

In this article the author offers an in-depth study of the development of St. Thomas Aquinas' thought concerning the nature of the trial and the sin of the fallen angels. He first establishes the presupposition in St. Thomas' teachings that the angels knew by faith of the mystery of the Incarnation during their period of trial. Then the author presents the writings of Peter Lombard and Dionysius which influenced St. Thomas, and the saint's own writings, in order to show the progress of his thought concerning the trial of the angels. This presentation makes clear the impasse to which St. Thomas arrived in the face of the mystery of evil due to the conviction that the angels had to attach their will to some real good that was really possible for them to attain as the object of their beatitude.

Finally, treating the subject for the last time in De Malo, St. Thomas resolves the impasse by distinguishing between a finis ad quem and a finis a quo. In the former, the rational creature proposes a positive good as his final goal, which he must judge to be attainable. In the latter, finis a quo, the "good" which must be achieved is successful flight from something which is dreaded. In the case of the fallen spirits, the dreadful something from which they "successfully escaped into hell" was the concrete proposal of beatitude under the precise terms of the economy of salvation.

While St. Thomas does not delineate the precise nature of that proposal, the author offers a solution based upon the teachings of St. Thomas, according to which, the sin of the angels was an aversion from or a rejection of the divine rule that their supernatural beatitude was to be obtained through the instrumentality of the Incarnation.

Resumo

Neste artigo o autor oferece um estudo aprofundado do pensamento de Santo Tomás referente à natureza da prova e do pecado

dos anjos caídos. Ele primeiro estabelece a pressuposição no ensinamento de Santo Tomas de que os anjos conheciam o mistério da encarnação pela fé durante o seu tempo de prova. Depois o autor apresenta os escritos de Pedro Lombardo e Dionísio, que influenciaram Santo Tomás e também os próprios escritos do santo para mostrar o progresso do seu pensamento acerca da prova dos anjos. Esta apresentação manifesta o impasse a que Santo Tomás chegou perante o mistério do mal, devido à convicção de que os anjos teriam que aderir com a sua vontade a um bem real, de fato atingível por eles como objeto de sua bem-aventurança.

Finalmente, tratando o assunto pela última vez no De Malo, Santo Tomas resolve o impasse distinguindo entre finis ad quem e finis a quo. No primeiro caso, a criatura racional propõe um bem positivo como meta final, julgada alcançável. No caso do finis a quo, o “bem” que se deve alcançar é uma fuga bem sucedida de algo odiado. No caso dos espíritos caídos, a coisa odiada da qual eles “escaparam com sucesso para o inferno”, foi a proposta concreta de bem-aventurança segundo as precisas exigências da economia da salvação.

Enquanto S. Tomás não delineia a natureza exata desta proposta, o autor oferece uma solução em base aos ensinamentos do santo, segundo os quais, o pecado dos Anjos foi uma aversão ou rejeição do desígnio divino que a sua bem-aventurança sobrenatural devia ser alcançada por meio da Encarnação.

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I. Introduction: Setting the Stage

1. Scope and Aim

Discussion in this essay shall focus directly on the major texts in which St. Thomas formally examines the *trial* and *sin* of the created spirits. Attention fixes, accordingly, on the original *negative* response of the *reprobate* spirits, not on the *positive* response of the holy angels. Thomas' texts will be analyzed in chronological order. The purpose is to elucidate his doctrine both with respect to its immediate content and with regard to the development of his doctrinal thought. By the end it will become evident that the position of the juvenile Aquinas is quite

distinct from that enunciated towards the end of his life. Indeed, the study depicts Thomas struggling to explain the “mechanics” to the sin of the fallen spirits. Alongside his biblical reflections, his intellectual journey is punctuated by his encounters with Peter Lombard and Dionysius; he does not achieve complete equilibrium until his very late work, *De Malo*.

The development of thought in his reflections on the angelic trial manifests itself already in the material presentation of the question. In the first two works (*Sentence Commentary* and *Contra Gentiles*), Thomas *initially* explains the very possibility of a sin on the part of the pure spirits. Then, *secondly*, he asks if they desired to be like God. And *thirdly*, he asks if that was a sin of pride.

In his commentary of Dionysius’ *Treatise on the Divine Names*, Thomas naturally submits himself to the order and exigency of the work under consideration. He refrains, moreover, from his customary scholastic method of articles with objections, substantial response and rebuttals (clarifications). Nonetheless, the brief commentary on the sin of the devil is of maximum importance to the development of his subsequent thought. Dionysius had managed to speak of the sin of the reprobate spirits without a single mention of the word “pride”¹. While St. Thomas accepts and follows the intuition of Dionysius: “Aversio therefore is in them the evil”²,

¹ Cf. *De Divinis Nominibus*, IV, lect. 19, §§ 533-541 (Marietti, Romae 1950).

² *De Divinis Nominibus*, IV, lect. 19, § 537. It is given as a quote from Dionysius by St. Thomas. While treating the trial of the angels in the *Sentence Commentary*, Thomas used the word “aversion” but a single time, and that only to indicate another form of pride, distinct from the pride he (following Lombard) attributed to the fallen spirits (cf. *II Sent.*, dist. 5, q. 1, a. 3c).

Dionysius’ statement in one English translation reads: “The evil then, in them, is a turning aside and a stepping out of things befitting themselves, and a missing of aim, and imperfection and impotence, and a weakness and departure, and falling away from the power which preserves their integrity in them” (chap. IV, section 23). Translation by C. E. Rolt, 1897 (digital publication in *Christian Classics Ethereal Library*).

From the direct presentation of Lombard’s thought above, it is apparent that he too thought in the categories of “*conversio*” and “*aversio*”. St. Thomas even materially mentions the fact, writing: “After these things reflection leads to the inquire, what the consequences were, when they were divided by ‘*aversio*’ and ‘*conversio*’. Having already shown in what condition the angels were created, he now shows their difference from one another in terms of ‘*aversio*’ and ‘*conversio*’. He divides this in two parts; in the first he discourses on the aversion of the angels.” (*II Super Sent.*, dist. 5, q. 1 pr.). Yet, he practically sets aside this doctrine, which will later become the corner stone of his final synthesis.

he does not yet fully appreciate the momentousness of the proposition. Thomas was aware that Lombard had presented the divided camps of the spirits under the headings of “*conversio*” and “*aversio*”³, but no special significance was attached to this.⁴ Whatever influence Dionysius exercised on Lombard, apart from his conception of the angelic choirs, must have been indirect; he mentions Dionysius by name only twice.⁵

In the *Summa Theologiae* and in *De Malo* Thomas’ approach is quite different. Moreover, the pertinent texts in the *Prima Pars* indicate a period of deep and somewhat uncertain interrogation regarding the rebellion of the spirits (a fact curiously overseen by commentators). First, he departs from the pattern in the *Sentence Commentary*. Now he first asks whether the angels sinned by desiring equality with God. Only thereafter does he ask whether this was a sin of pride. These modifications pave the way for a significant revision of the definition of pride.

The principal texts to be discussed are as follows:⁶

- 1) *Super Sententiis*, lib. II, dist. 5, q. 1, aa. 1-2 (1254-1256)
- 2) *Summa Contra Gentiles* III, qq. 109-110 (1261-1264)
- 3) *De Divinis Nominibus* IV, lect. 19 (1265-1266)
- 4) *Summa Theologiae* (= *STh.*) I, q. 63, a. 1-3 (*Prima Pars*: 1266-1268)

³ “*Conversio*” and “*aversio*” are standard opposing concepts in moral theology. They play a key role in the present discussion. The English word “aversion” is a good translation for the Latin “*aversio*”. But the basic Latin sense of “*conversio*” cannot be simply rendered with our idea of religious “conversion”. “*Conversio*” means a turning to some good on the basis of attraction. In this essay, I will often simply use the Latin term, lest through circumlocutions the evident pairing “*conversio*” et “*aversio*” be lost from sight.

⁴ *II Super Sent.*, dist. 2, q. 1pr.

⁵ Cf. *II Sententiae*, dist. 10, cap. 2, aa. 2 et 3, where he discusses the ministries and missions of the holy Angels.

⁶ The dates for the works are taken from Raymundi VERARDO, in: *Opuscula Theologica*, Vol. I, Marietti, Romae 1954, pp. x-xi. Luigi BOGLIOLO, *Guida alla Ricerca Scientifica e allo Studio di S. Tommaso* (Lateran U. Press, Rome 1967, inserted at p. 128) sets the commentary on *De Divinis Nominibus* as contemporaneous with *Contra Gentiles* II-IV. In point of fact, in *Contra Gentiles*, 21 of the 43 express references to Dionysius are drawn from the *De Divinis Nominibus*. Still, in *Contra Gentiles* III, only 6 of the 21 references are drawn from *De Divinis Nominibus*, not one of which addresses the question of the demonic rebellion. Hence, it is reasonable, at least with respect to the present topic, to follow Verardo’s chronology.

5) *De Substantiis Separatis* (1268-9)⁷

6) *De Malo* q. 16, aa. 2-4 (1268-1269)

2. Presuppositions & Unmet Expectations

Before addressing particular texts, let us note certain theological or doctrinal presuppositions against which Thomas develops and articulates his thought. A complete work would have to include a thorough and chronological analysis of these as well. Submitting, however, to the delimiting exigencies of this essay, suffice it to mention the most important factors. According to St. Thomas, the trial of the angels – like that of man – took place in the state of grace in the obscurity of faith.⁸ Proportionate to their spiritual, intuitive nature, this trial, once proposed, was decided in an instant.⁹ Those angels who lovingly accepted the divine plan were

⁷Raymundi Verardo is evidently uncertain about the date to this work, giving a span from 1268-1273. Jacques Maritain gives the date 1269 (in an appendix to: *St. Thomas Aquinas, 1958* [digital edition from Notre Dame University, USA]) adding a year to the 1268 estimate of I.T. ESCHMANN, in: *A Catalogue of St. Thomas' Works. Bibliographical Notes*, originally in: E. GILSON, *The Christian Philosophy of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, Random House, New York 1956, 381-439 (WEISHEIPL, 355), but actually drawn from Wikipedia.

⁸“It is natural for the angel to turn to God by the movement of love, according as God is the principle of his natural being. But for him to turn to God as the object of supernatural beatitude, comes from infused love, from which he could be turned away by sinning.” (*STh.* I, q. 63, a. 1 ad 4). That they were also created in the state of grace he holds to be the most probable position (cf. *STh.* I, q. 62, a. 3; I, q. 62, a. 2).

⁹The “history” of the angelic trial and sin demands, at least, two instants, for the first knowledge and act of will by the created spirits could not even embrace the entire natural universe, to say nothing of the order of grace which presupposes the former (*STh.* I, q. 63, a. 4; *De Malo* q. 16, a. 4c). Moreover, the first act (operation) of a creature, deriving from the Creator, must needs have been a positive act of love (*STh.* I, q. 63, a. 5c). Hence, minimally, two instants were required: the first adverting and responding according to nature; and a second, taking in and responding to the supernatural.

On the assumption that the angels were created in grace (Thomas' assumption), the act of the first instant was already meritorious in all the angels, but *imperfectly* so. First, the good action of any creature in the state of grace is meritorious (cf. *II Sententiae*, dist. 40, q. 1, a. 1c; *De Malo* q. 2, a. 5 ad 7), but since the angels in that first moment could not advert to the supernatural order and opt for the beatific vision according to the required modality foreseen in the divine plan, that original, imperfect choice did not suffice for beatitude but had to be re-iterated in the faith's knowledge and consent to the plan. This is the doctrine implicit in St. Thomas' statement: “God did not distinguish between the angels before the turning away of some of them, and the turning of others to Himself, as Augustine says (*De Civitate Dei* XI, 15). Therefore, as all were created in grace, all

immediately glorified; those who rejected it were immediately and definitively damned.

Secondly, lest the reader's attention be distracted by certain expectations, it is opportune from the outset to underscore what St. Thomas did *not* do! Regarding the precise object of the *trial* of the Angels, St. Thomas did *not* specify any particular mystery in the economy of salvation which might have precipitated the angelic trial, e.g., the Incarnation of the Son of God. Still, he did maintain, along with other theologians, that the created spirits, while yet in the state of faith and trial, did have a knowledge about the coming of Christ:

All the angels had some knowledge from the very beginning respecting the mystery of God's kingdom, which found its completion in Christ; and most of all from the moment when they were beatified by the vision of the Word, which vision the demons never had.¹⁰

It is remarkable and a telltale sign of St. Thomas' state of quandary that only a few articles before (*STh.* I, q. 57, a. 5 et ad 1) he had offered a different opinion. Moreover, in each of these texts (one placed *before* the treatment of the sin of the spirits and one immediately *after*), St. Thomas refers to and interprets an identical text in Augustine (*Super Genesim ad Litteram*, lib. V. cap. 19). In the earlier text (q. 57) he is only willing to speak of the natural and beatific knowledge of the angels (while ignoring completely the knowledge of faith crucial to the state of trial); there, he interpolates Augustine's statement into a comment on the *beatific* knowledge of the good angels. By contrast, in *STh.* I, q. 64, a. 1

merited in their first instant. But some of them at once placed an impediment to their beatitude, thereby destroying their preceding merit; and consequently they were deprived of the beatitude which they had merited." (*STh.* I, q. 63, a. 5 ad 4).

¹⁰ *STh.* I, q. 64, a. 1 ad 4. Dom Benoist D'Azy interprets the text in this wise: "All the angels knew the Mystery of the Reign of God, 'maxime ex quo' their beatitude. The 'maxime ex quo' should not be translated 'especially because of' but rather 'especially since'. Accordingly, they knew about it already beforehand." (*Le Christ et ses Anges dans l'œuvre de Saint Thomas*, (in: *Bulletin de Littérature Ecclésiastique* 49 (1949) Toulouse, avril-juin. p. 9 fnt. 16), (cf. also, *STh.* I, q. 57, a. 5c et ad 1).

In *STh.* I, q. 57, a. 5c et ad 1) he is only willing to speak of the natural and beatific knowledge of the angels (while ignoring completely the knowledge of faith), and so interprets Augustine's statement into a comment on the beatific knowledge of the good angels. By contrast, in *STh.* I, q. 64, a. 1 ad 4 he presents the Christological knowledge of the angels according to *f a i t h* and to glory and to supernatural wisdom. All the spirits had the first kind of knowledge at the beginning. And he refers this again to the mentioned passage in Augustine.

ad 4 – as shown – he presents the Christological knowledge of the angels according to faith, glory and to supernatural wisdom. All the spirits had the first kind of faith knowledge at the beginning.

In his *Expositio Super Isaiam*, St. Thomas – referring there again to the same text of Augustine! – is more explicit. The questions are: who is the grape-treader, and who asks his identity?

First he gives the question, then the response: “I who speak”. It is well known that all the saints together understand this of Christ. The question belongs to the angels, who namely did not fully understand the mystery of the incarnation of Christ, and therefore ask, as though ignorant, according to Jerome. Opposed to his view is Augustine in his *Literal Commentary on Genesis* (lib. V. ch. 19). He states that the angels, from the (very) beginning of their creation knew everything that he would be doing, whether the rational seeds of things he had imprinted into them, or whether things he withheld to himself that would come to be, although they were in them, so that they could come to be. And so it can be seen that the angels knew about such mysteries.¹¹

Reflecting on the whole position of St. Thomas, Benoist D’Azy draws a valid conclusion:

Despite a certain fluctuation of expression, which is perfectly explainable, St. Thomas, at the different periods of his life, always taught that the angels knew by faith the mystery of the Incarnation during their period of trial.¹²

¹¹ *Expositio Super Isaiam*, cap. 63, 1ff; line 10-24. After tossing back and forth somewhat divergent positions from the biblical gloss to Ephesians 3 and Dionysius, who understands the question to be posed by the highest angels, not by the least, St. Thomas draws, at a minimum, the conclusion: “The highest angels knew these sort of mysteries with respect to the substance of the fact, nevertheless with regards to particular circumstances they were not perfectly in the know.” The knowledge of the higher angels regarding the economy of salvation, though was shared with the lower angels as well, for this belongs to the very nature of the angelic hierarchies. While with respect to some bits of information, a postponement in communication might be argued, in the key and cornerstone of the entire economy of salvation, such a delay is scarcely conceivable.

¹² Dom Benoist D’Azy, *loc. cit.*, p. 9. In a subsequent article, *Les anges devant le Mystère de l’Incarnation*, he repeats his conclusion: “The Angelic Doctor held that Christ was revealed to the angels during their trial as their Consummator in glory and as the Redeemer of mankind” (in: *Bulletin de Littérature Ecclésiastique* 49 (1949) Toulouse, juillet-septembre, p. 141). Francesco Suarez SJ comes to basically the same conclusion: “Nevertheless I judge it to be much more probable that all the angels in the state of pilgrimage knew about the Incarnation of the Word of God by means of revelation, and so knew it by faith. This the divine Thomas *STh.* I. q. 64, a. 1 ad 4 “It is to be said that

Notwithstanding having affirmed such Christological knowledge, Thomas never expressly posited this as the focal point in the angelic trial. At best, inferences may be drawn in this direction from certain (supposed?) implications on his part. Strongest among these, it seems, would be his rather emphatic affirmation that *e v e r y* grace of all the Holy Angels – including their *sanctifying grace*, *ergo*, their *light of glory* – are Christological graces.¹³ The further point in his doctrine, that their peccability could only have been detonated over some rule or standard set up by the divine will,¹⁴ practically begs the question.

In his biblical commentaries, though, – whether directly in his own name, as when commenting Isaias 14:12ff,¹⁵ or Ezechiel 28¹⁶ or John 8:34ff, Ephesians 1:20, etc., or when collecting the thoughts of the Fathers in the *Catena Aurea* – St. Thomas disappoints such inferences by his sheer silence, “failing”, as he does, to establish the desired link. I do not deny that such a link may be reasonably drawn, . . . only that the “check” may not be drawn from the account of express statements by the Angelic Doctor.

the mystery of God, which is complete through Christ, etc. . . . Where he says ‘maxime’, etc. he has declared with sufficient clarity in the prior words that he is talking about all the angels, all of whom were in the state of pilgrimage.” (*De Angelis*, Lugduni 1630, lib. cap. 6, p. 405 § 9).

¹³ St. Thomas clearly attributes the graces of the Angels to Christ, not only in terms of finality but also in terms of efficient, instrumental causality (see my essay, *The Relationship of the Grace of the Angels to Christ in the Writings of St. Thomas Aquinas*, in: *Sapientia Crucis* 4 [2003], 113-163). But even then, he does not affirm the mystery of the Incarnation to have been the formal object of their trial. There is no necessary and intrinsic cognitive link between an instrumental cause and the beneficiaries of its efficacy. An individual could evidently receive an inheritance without any prior knowledge or love of the benefactor.

¹⁴ Cf. *STh.* I, q. 63, a. 1c: “But every created will has rectitude of act so far only as it is regulated according to the divine will, to which the last end is to be referred”. Again: “In another way sin comes of free-will by choosing something good in itself, but not according to proper measure or rule” (*STh.* I, q. 63, a. 1 ad 4).

¹⁵ In *Super Isaiam*, Thomas focuses his literal exegesis on the historical king of Babylon. Only in passing and without having drawn any link to Christ, does he note: “All this is exposed mystically [anagogically] of the devil.” In *STh.* I, q. 63, a. 5 he calls reference to the devil “metaphorical”, literally, “*sub figura principis Babylonis*”.

¹⁶ Thomas understands *Ez* 28 “mystically” (*Super Isaiam*, cap. 11) or “metaphorically” (“*sub figura*” = Prince of Babylon; “*sub persona*” = King of Tyre in *STh.* I, q. 63, a. 5c; cf. I, q. 63, a. 3sc: “*ex persona diaboli*”) of the devil, but literally of the King of Tyre). Nowhere is the mystery of Christ presented as a material cause of the angelic trial. See also the same position in *De Substantiis Separatis*, cap. 20.

3. Magisterial status questionis

Finally, the Church's Magisterium is quite succinct on the question of the trial of the created spirits and the reprobation of those who rebelled against God. The actual sin of the devil is not directly addressed until the fourth Lateran Council (1215), which declared: "The devil and other demons were created by God naturally good, but they became evil by their own doing."¹⁷ Still, the doctrine is mentioned much earlier in many contexts; we cite merely an excerpt from Pope Leo's Letter to Flavian, confirming the Council of Calcedon (453):

It was the devil's boast that humanity had been deceived by his trickery and so had lost the gifts God had given it; and that it had been stripped of the endowment of immortality and so was subject to the harsh sentence of death. He also boasted that, sunk as he was in evil, he himself derived some consolation from having a partner in crime; and that God had been forced by the principle of justice to alter His verdict on humanity, which He had created in such an honorable state. All this called for the realization of a secret plan¹⁸ whereby the unalterable God, whose will is indistinguishable from His goodness, might bring the original realization of His kindness towards us to completion by means of a more hidden mystery, and whereby humanity, which had been led into a state of sin by the craftiness of the devil, might be prevented from perishing contrary to the purpose of God.¹⁹

Similarly, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* deals briefly with the trial of the angels and the sin of the fallen spirits:

391 Behind the disobedient choice of our first parents lurks a seductive voice, opposed to God, which makes them fall into death out of envy [Cf. Gen 3:1-5; Wis 2:24]. Scripture and the Church's Tradition see in this being a fallen angel, called "Satan" or the "devil" [cf. Jn 8:44; Rev 12:9]. The Church teaches that Satan was at first a good angel, made by God: "The

¹⁷ DS 800: "The devil and the other demons were indeed created naturally good by God, but they became evil by their own doing." Cited in the CCC n. 391 as well. See also *Statuta Ecclesiae Antiqua*, saec. V, (DS 325).

¹⁸ The "secret" in the plan could regard, yes, the Mystery of the Incarnation, ... but it could also be predicated of the mystery of the Cross alone.

¹⁹ Pope LEO I., *Letter to Flavian, Bishop of Constantinople, about Eutyches*, in: *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, edited by Norman P. Tanner SJ, Sheed & Ward, Georgetown University Press 1990, Vol. I. p. 79. The text, as given, is a translation from the more authoritative Greek of the original Latin Letter, since the Greek text was read to the Council Fathers at Chalcedon, and some of those formulations found their way into the decrees of the Council.

devil and the other demons were indeed created naturally good by God, but they became evil by their own doing” [IV Lateran Council].

392 Scripture speaks of a sin of these angels [cf. 2 Pt 2:4]. This “fall” consists in the free choice of these created spirits, who radically and irrevocably rejected God and his reign. We find a reflection of that rebellion in the tempter’s words to our first parents: “You will be like God” [Gen 3:5]. The devil “has sinned from the beginning”; he is “a liar and the father of lies” [1 Jn 3:8; Jn 8:44].²⁰

The net result, thus far, simply establishes the fact that the evil spirits, as free personal agents, knowingly and willingly chose (caused) their own evil state by radically and irrevocably rejecting God and His Kingdom.

Act I. Commentary on Lombard’s Sentences

Scene 1. Letting Peter Lombard speak for himself

First let us consider what Peter Lombard taught. Lombard addresses the question of the trial of creatures in book II of the *Sentences*. He comes to the question of the actual choice of the spirits in their trial in the 5th distinction of the second book of *Sentences*. Prior to this, though, he had discussed the creation of the angels and indicated the parameters of the trial in the economy of the divine plan. Created in a state of goodness, there was a slight delay before the trial and fall.²¹ Their goodness, according to Lombard, was a mere *natural* state of innocence.²² Access to the supernatural order of grace and glory was to be gained only in and through a trial. Those who responded well were to be confirmed simultaneously in grace and glory; those who responded badly would be reduced to a state of abject reprobation:

All the angels were created good, and in the very beginning of creation they came forth in goodness, that is, without vice. They were also just, that

²⁰ CCC 391-392. The biblical references and footnote have been inserted directly into the text.

²¹ *II Sententiae*, dist. 3, cap. 4, n. 5.

²² “So the spiritual and angelic nature was formed at its foundation according to habit of nature, and yet that form, which it was afterwards to accept through love of and conversion to its Creator, it did not have, but it was formless without it.” (*II Sententiae*, dist. 2, cap. 5). He takes his cue from Augustine’s statement that creation began in an unformed state, this being Lombard’s interpretation of *De Genesi ad litt.*, lib. I, c. 1, n. 2 (PL 34, 247; CSEL 28-1, 4).

is, innocent; but they were not just in the sense of having the exercise of virtues. They were not yet provided with the virtues, with which those who stood in the trial were endowed in their confirmation in grace; whereas the other, having become proud by free choice, fell away. They say there was a short delay between [their] creation and the fall or confirmation. And in that brevity of time they were all good, though not yet by the use (exercise) of free will, but by the beneficence of creation. And such there were, who were able to stand firm, that is, not fall through the goods of creation, [and others] who fell. They could, therefore, sin or not sin, but *they could not advance to the merit of life except grace be superadded*,²³ which in fact was added to some at their confirmation.²⁴

In Lombard's scenario, therefore, there was never really a state of grace and supernatural faith prior to the choice during the trial which resulted in either confirmation or reprobation.²⁵ The very acceptance or rejection of the proposed supernatural order precipitated the definitive resolution of their destiny. Following Origen he saw that original evil choice encased in a lie.²⁶

Lombard presents the angelic trial under the moral categories of “*conversio*” and “*aversio*”. The mark of the good angels is that they turned (*conversio*) to God's plan and were confirmed in the good, whereas the evil spirits turned away from God in aversion and became fixed in evil.

Concerning the “*conversio*” and confirmation of those who remained standing and the **aversion** and failure of those who fell. After this, reflection invites one to inquire what the effects might be, when they are divided by **aversion** and **conversion**. After creation, namely, some were quickly **con-**

²³ In passing, this phrase becomes immortalized through Thomas, who applies it to man requiring the supernatural help of grace, coming through the angels in *STh.* I, q. 114, a. 3 ad 3 (obliquely referred to in *CCC* 350).

²⁴ *II Sententiae*, dist. 3, cap. 4, n. 5. His affirmation, that they did not have the use of virtues must be understood of the supernatural virtues in harmony with the following statement, namely that they had not yet been infused. For in the pure spirits, the natural virtues are not acquired by repetition, they are simply possessed with nature.

²⁵ In *II Sententiae*, dist. 3, cap. 5 he affirms that at their creation the spirits only had natural knowledge and in *II Sententiae*, dist. 3, cap. 6, natural love. For this reason, their good actions did not merit heaven. The good choice for God would be an act of supernatural faith and charity, to be immediately (in the next instant) rewarded with eternal glory.

²⁶ *II Sententiae*, dist. 3, cap. 4, n. 10. At this juncture Lombard presents Jesus' affirmation that the devil was a liar and a murderer from the beginning (*Jn* 8:44). Had he treated it as the Christological focal point of the trial, we would have to present it, ... but presents it as a posterior ramification of the original rebellion (*II Sententiae*, dist. 3, cap. 4, n. 11).

verted to their Creator, others felt **aversion**. To be **converted** to God was to adhere to Him in praise; to withdraw in **aversion** was to have hatred or envy, inasmuch as the mother of envy is pride, by which they wanted to be on a par with God. And these are they who **turned to** and were illuminated by God applying grace; and those, indeed, are blinded, not by an injection of evil but by the desertion of grace. They were deserted not in the sense that what had been priorly given was withdrawn, but rather that it was never applied so that they be converted. This is therefore the “*conversio*” and “*aversio*” according to which they who were naturally good were divided: such that some be placed above that goodness by the justice of goodness; whereas others be through the same corrupted by the guilt of evil. “*Conversio*” made these to be just; “*aversio*” made the others to be unjust. Each was [an effect] of the will; and the will of each, a will of liberty.²⁷

In converting to God the holy angels freely adhered to him joyfully; concomitant with this choice they were enlightened, became participants of the divine wisdom and shared in supernatural justice. By contrast the reprobate spirits freely turned away (aversion) from God in prideful hatred *or* envy. Envy, Lombard informs us, the mother of pride,²⁸ by which they wanted to put themselves on a par with God. The camps were diametrically opposed: on the one side divine light, on the other side blindness. The good angels experienced an elevation beyond nature; the evil spirits fell beneath nature.

Hence, they who stood firm and faithful did so in virtue of the cooperating grace of God;²⁹ and they who fell, did so through their prideful resistance to grace, rendering it ineffective.³⁰ Among the latter Lombard

²⁷ *II Sententiae*, dist. 5, cap. 1.

²⁸ If “mother”, then prior in the order of causality. Thomas will not buy this; indeed, he holds the opposite to be true. However, this oft repeated thesis can gain credibility when the parameters of reflection go beyond sinful choices and also take in velleities, which Thomas rightly affirms do not constitute a moral decision in themselves. Still, they can be the “background music” against which choices are made. While not “causing” the actual choice, they can exercise persuasive sway. “No, you shall not die the death. Rather, God knows ...” (*Gn* 3:4-5) did not efficiently cause Eve’s rebellion, but it certainly did persuasively influence and prepare its way. “He who hesitates is lost” has a special application in trials where velleities play their part, since they tend to focus the intellect and will on the wrong point, such that one can defect from the right rule of conduct.

²⁹ *II Sententiae*, dist. 5, cc. 3-4.

³⁰ *II Sententiae*, dist. 5, cap. 5 n. 3. “However that it [grace] was not given to the others, was their fault, because, when they could stand, they did not want to, as long as

numbers the highest created spirit, Lucifer.³¹

The respective trials for angels and mankind called for their docile obedience to a *d i v i n e r e g u l a t i o n*, which ultimately had their confirmation and exaltation in view:

Therefore, because (man), as an example to the rational spirit, was in part humbled unto the sharing of the lot [*usque ad consortium*] of an earthly body, lest perhaps in this he would seem to be exceedingly depressed, God's Providence added, that after a while when having been glorified with the same body, he would be raised to the sharing of the lot [*ad consortium*] of those who remained in their own purity, so that because he had accepted less out of the dispensation of his own Creator as one founded, he would after a while accept through the grace of the Same (to be) glorified. Thus, therefore, God our Founder, disposing rational spirits according to differing lots [*varia sorte*] in virtue of the judgment of His own Will, established for those, whom He had left in their purity, a mansion above in Heaven; but those, whom He associated with earthly bodies, a dwelling below on Earth; imposing a rule of obedience for each, so that *both the former from there where they were, should not fall down, and these latter from there where they were, should ascend to where they were not.*³²

A “divine regulation” would be proposed to each of them separately (“*utrisque*” not “*amboque*”). It remains undetermined whether Lombard saw that as essentially the same rule (two sides of a single coin) or disparate regulations. Here, like Thomas after him, Lombard draws no specific, at least, express link to the Incarnation.³³

grace was apportioned, just as the others did persist, until, with the former falling down through pride, grace was apportioned to them.”

³¹ *II Sententiae*, dist. 6, cap. 1-2.

³² *Sententiae*, Editions S. Bonaventurae Ad Claras Aquas Grottaferrata (Romae) 1971 [digital edition] lib. II, dist. 1, cap. 6, n. 4. (<http://www.franciscan-archive.org/lombardus/opera/ls2-01.html>). The final verse in Latin reads: “*utriusque regulam imponens obedientiae, quatenus et illi ab eo ubi erant, non caderent, et isti ab eo ubi erant, ad id ubi non erant, ascenderent*”. The Franciscan-Archives falsely translated this as: “imposing a rule of obedience for each, to the extent that both the former from that where they were, would not fall down, and these latter from that where they were, **would not ascend** to that where they were not”. The translation, *in italics*, has been emended to correspond to the Latin text.

³³ This is interesting in view of Lombard's (ca. 1100–1160) probable source for the position here affirmed, namely, Gottschalk von Limburg's (d. 1098) sequence on the Blessed Mother and the Incarnation, which contains the verse: “*Angelus ne cadat, homo / lapsus hinc ut redeat / temptator nec resurgat*”. [That the angel not fall; that fallen man return; that the tempter not rise.] Interestingly, these are given as finalities of the Incarnation.

While considering the “place” of the angels in creation, Lombard also indicates the moral cause for the fall of so many:

By the witness of a number of authorities it has been shown the angels were in “heaven” before the fall; and that some fell from thence by pride, while others did not but remained there standing firm.³⁴

In what did this pride consist?

Lucifer said: “I will ascend up to heaven and exalt my throne, I will be like the Most High” (cf. Is 14). — He solves it. But there he calls “heaven” the heights of God, to whom he wishes to compare himself; and as such “I will ascend into heaven, that is, up to equality with God”.³⁵

The “pride” in question is the capital sin of pride: the inordinate attachment and pursuit of one’s own excellence or honor. He affirms as much himself:

After he was created, pondering the eminence of his nature and the depth of his knowledge, he prided himself in comparison to his Creator, to such a degree that he wanted to be equal to God, as it is said in Isaias: “I shall ascend to heaven, up over the stars of heaven I will exalt my throne and I will be like the Most High.” He wanted, therefore, to be like God, not by imitation but by an equiparity of power.³⁶

Scene 2. Thomas Amends Lombard’s Position

a) Created State of the Angels

Although the *Sentence Commentary* was among Thomas’ earliest works, written during his first years as a lector at the University in Paris, he was still an autonomous thinker, even when commenting the theological master, Peter Lombard. This is apparent in this particular question on the trial of the angels. He follows Lombard in affirming that the angels were not created in the *beatific* vision, but enjoyed a kind of natural,

Neither does he specify the Incarnation to be the trial of the angels, but he does affirm it to have been the confirming cause of their final grace. Lombard is silent on this latter matter. (Cf. Alois WINKELHOFER, *Angelus ne cadat*, in: *Archiv für Liturgiewissenschaft* VI/1 (1959), 58-59).

³⁴ *II Sententiae*, dist. 2, cap. 4. n. 2.

³⁵ *II Sententiae*. dist. 2, cap. 6.

³⁶ *II Sententiae*, dist. 6, cap. 1.

intellectual vision of God.³⁷ However, while acknowledging Lombard's thesis, to wit, that the more common opinion holds the angels to have been created in a purely natural state of innocence, Thomas, nevertheless, asserts that the more reasonable thesis holds that they had been created in the state of grace.³⁸

Finally, Lombard maintained that the angels only received grace and glory as a fruit out of the trial.³⁹ Later in the *Summa* Thomas rejects this position as impossible:

An act cannot be meritorious as coming from free-will, except in so far as it is informed by grace; but it cannot at the same time be informed by imperfect grace, which is the principle of meriting, and by perfect grace, which is the principle of enjoying. Hence it does not appear to be possible for anyone to enjoy beatitude, and at the same time to merit it. Consequently it is better to say that the angel had grace ere he was admitted to beatitude, and that by such grace he merited beatitude.⁴⁰

In short, if they were not created in grace, ... they had to have received grace posteriorly, yet before the trial, in order to merit heaven. For Heaven (a supernatural reward) could not be merited without grace.

b) The Sin of the Angels

St. Thomas, like Lombard, declares that the sin of the reprobate spirits was a sin of pride. Because the word is used in multiple fashions, he specifies the precise formality of pride which constitutes the formal sin of the evil spirits.

I respond, saying that pride can be taken in three ways:

³⁷ "In this beatitude of the divine vision which is owed to the angels naturally, the angels were created ... But there is another perfection into which they cannot arrive by nature, of which they are nevertheless capable: namely that they behold God in his essence, not by means of any received similitude, such that their beatitude be conformed to the divine beatitude. Now they were not created in this beatitude, but – while others fell [into sin] – they arrived at it." (*II Super Sent.*, dist. 4, q. 1 a. 1c). Already in the *Prooemium* to this distinction he reiterated Lombard's "naturalistic" position (*II Super Sent.*, dist. 4, q. 1pr.). In *II Super Sent.*, dist. 4, q. 1 a. 1 ad 1 Thomas interprets St. Augustine's statement (text to footnote 20) of a natural state (cf. also, ad 2, holding the same position).

³⁸ *II Super Sent.*, dist. 4, q. 1, a. 3c. Moreover, this position, he says, is the position of the saints. In the *Summa Theologiae* Thomas will continue to hold the same position (cf., *STh.* I, q. 62, a. 3).

³⁹ *II Sententiae*, dist. 3, cap. 4, n. 5 (cited above, footnote 24).

⁴⁰ *STh.* I, q. 62, a. 4c.

First, as it is taken habitually, indicating a certain inclinability towards pride, whether arising solely from a certain inflexibility of nature, or whether coming from a corruption of desire. And in this fashion pride is said to be the beginning of every sin

In another way, pride is said to be that which actually carries one outside the limits of a precept, such that one is not subject to the law giver. As such it is not a special sin but rather a certain general condition, for every sin follows on the side of aversion.

Thirdly, pride is said to be the inordinate appetite for one's own proper excellence, especially in matter of dignity and honor. And in this way it is a special sin, one of the seven capital vices. And in this wise the first sin of the angel was pride. This is evident not only from the side of the **desire**, for he craved the eminence of dignity, but also on the part of the **motive**, for out of the consideration of his own beauty he fell into sin.⁴¹

Here, he distinguishes *three* different denotations of the word pride (“*superbia*”):

First, “*inclinibilitas*” occurs only twice in the works of St. Thomas, both in this article of *Sentence Commentary*. Inscribed in every created nature is the longing for the supreme good. In spiritual creatures this is the ground of free will, for the immediate manifestation of the supreme good alone would necessarily elicit the act of love. In the case of every other “good” in creation, falling short of this limit of necessity, rational creatures can freely take it or leave it. But that which they take or opt to desire they tend to vigorously (*inclinibilitas*) or to tend to cling to firmly (*inflexibilitas*) once in possession. This is a natural quality or penchant of creatures as such, ... that was only augmented after the fall. In the state of innocence it is linked with the very peccability of creatures, for there must be some material object (some good thing) motivating a deviation from the rule of the superior, in which formality alone the angels could have sinned.⁴² Hence, this penchant – here termed “pride” in a broad sense – is at the root of all sin. This is not, he contends, the sin of the angels, but a natural disposition or quality of creatures.

Secondly, pride is predicated of any act of insubordination whereby one refuses to follow the directives of a superior. In this sense one is not speaking about a specific kind of sin, but rather the general condition of all sins, inasmuch as every sin includes a turning away (aversion) from

⁴¹ *II Super Sent.* d. 5 q.1 a. 3c.

⁴² Cf. *STh.* I, q. 63, a. 1c.

some regulation. This second meaning is distinct from the first in that “*inclinibilitas*” only indicates the penchant or potentiality, whereas in this second case real sin is the subject of predication: actual insubordination. Still, Thomas does not detect the precise sin of the angels under this heading either.

Finally, pride indicates a disordered appetite for one’s own proper excellence and exaltation, especially in the area of dignity and honors. This constitutes the special sin of pride, one of the seven capital sins. And it was in this sense, he claims, that the devil sinned, seeking eminence for himself, motivated by the consideration of his own extraordinary beauty.

Accordingly, the youthful Thomas, following the Master, Peter Lombard, identified the sin of the fallen angels with the capital sin of pride.

Act II. Sin of the Separated Substances in the *Summa Contra Gentiles*

The *Sitz im Leben* of the *Summa Contra Gentiles* – written precisely as an on-going debate with non-believers – severely limits the scope of St. Thomas’ interest in the trial and sin of the spirits. In *CG* III, cc.109-110 his discourse is directed against the pagans of the platonic sort. The Platonists, namely, held two *ad rem* doctrines concerning the “spirits”: *First* that they were not only capable of evil, but actually did evil; and *second* that, existentially, they possessed an aerial body. Were the second thesis true, St. Thomas points out, the “spirits” would not really be s p i r i t s , but actually a subtle species of animals. Moreover, having a body would necessarily include the passions, which in turn would open the possibility to sins of passion, which were commonly attributed to the “spirits” in the pagan world. Having already demonstrated the pure spirituality of the separated substances in *CG* II, cc. 49-51, St. Thomas contents himself with the scriptural verification of the fact of moral sin among the spirits.⁴³ This is followed by the categoric denial, based on the pure spirituality of the separated substances, that their own sin could in any way be one of

⁴³ *CG* III, q. 109 n. 1: “However, that there is sin of the will in demons is obvious from the text of Sacred Scripture. In fact, it is said in *I Jn* (3:8) that ‘the devil sins from the beginning’; and in *John* (8:44) it is said that ‘the devil is a liar and the father of lies’ and that ‘he was a murderer from the beginning’. And in *Wisdom* (2:24) it is said that “by the envy of the devil, death came into the world”.

sensuality or passion; rather it could only be a spiritual sin proportionate to their purely intellectual nature.⁴⁴

St. Thomas then shows the two modalities according to which a spiritual sin a priori could take place in a separated substance. He bases his argument on a double principle of order: there must be an order among causes hierarchically arranged; there must be an order with respect to the final goal⁴⁵:

We must give some consideration to the fact that, as there is an order in agent causes, so also is there one in final causes, so that, for instance, a secondary end depends on a principal one, just as a secondary agent depends on a principal one. Now, something wrong happens in the case of agent causes when a secondary agent departs from the order of the principal agent. For example, when the leg bone fails because of its crookedness in the carrying out of the motion which the appetitive power has commanded, limping ensues. So, too, in the case of final causes, when a secondary end is not included under the order of the principal end, there results a sin of the will, whose object is the good and the end.⁴⁶

Here again, we meet the idea of a deviation from an “order” established by a superior authority. God alone has no superior, He is Himself the final end; in Him alone therefore can there be no deviation from order. But in all other beings (creatures!) there is a possibility for error when the achievement of the goal involves a middle term.⁴⁷ Why is this so and how can this be? Thomas explains:

Indeed, although natural inclination of the will is present in every volitional agent to will and to love its own perfection so that it cannot will the contrary of this yet it is not so naturally implanted in the agent to so order its perfection to another end, that it cannot fail in regard to it, for the higher

⁴⁴ Cf. *CG* III, q. 109 n. 4.

⁴⁵ Order and hierarchy are practically prime assumptions of the Medieval world view. Aquinas’ deeper assumption, as Joseph Pieper notes with such acumen in *The Silence of St. Thomas*, is the fact of creation, which gives ground to all goodness, truth, order and hierarchy among creatures, standing together, as they do, in a relationship of dependence upon God, first cause and final end. [Regnery Logos Editions, Chicago²1965, 47; original title: *Über Thomas von Aquin – Philosophia Negativa*, Kösel Verlag, München].

⁴⁶ *CG* III, q. 109, n. 5.

⁴⁷ *CG* III, q. 109, n. 7: “But in any other kind of volitional agent, whose proper good must be included under the order of another good, it is possible for sin of the will to occur, if it be considered in its own nature.”

end is not proper to its nature, but to a higher nature. It is left, then, to the agent's choice, to order his own proper perfection to a higher end.⁴⁸

Accordingly, a created spirit could sin by refusing to order himself and his finality to the higher end, or by refusing to pursue these ends in conformity with the standard set by the higher good.

Therefore, it was possible for sin to occur in the will of a separate substance, because it did not order its proper good and perfection to its ultimate end, but stuck to its own good as an end. And because the rules of action must be derived from the end, the consequence is that this separate substance tried to arrange for the regulation of other beings from himself wherein he had established his end, and thus his will was not regulated by another, higher one. But this function belongs to God alone. In terms of this, we should understand that "he desired to be equal to God" (Is 14:14). Not, indeed, that his good would be equal to the divine good, for this thought could not have occurred in his understanding, and in desiring such a thing he would have desired not to exist, since the distinction of species arises from the different grades of things, as is clear from previous statements.⁴⁹

In this solution, St. Thomas has coalesced in some fashion the 2nd and 3rd forms of pride he had presented in the *Sentence Commentary*: rebellion and the capital sin of pride. Paramount, however, still remains the affirmation that the capital sin of pride was the real motive behind the sin of the devil, for it was by preferring his own subjective glory, which he thought attainable, that he was led to deviate from the divine rule. As such, his doctrine remains in substantial agreement with the position he articulated in the *Sentence Commentary*.

Act. III. Rebellion of the Spirits in *De Divinis Nominibus*

In Dionysius Thomas met a peer with extraordinary intellectual acuity. Dionysius capably raised and entertained the challenging questions of evil with frontal bluntness:

If the Beautiful and Good is beloved and desired, and esteemed by all ...
How is it that the host of demons do not desire the Beautiful and Good?
What is that which depraved them, and in short, **what is evil?** And from

⁴⁸ CG III, q. 109, n. 7.

⁴⁹ CG III, q. 109, n. 8.

what source did it spring? ... And how does any existing thing desire it, in comparison with the Good?⁵⁰

The encounter with Dionysius must have fascinated Thomas;⁵¹ here was a thinker who discoursed on the deepest moral and metaphysical levels on the nature of evil and who never once, when explaining demonic evil, even referred nominally to pride! A seed is planted in the mind of Thomas that was difficult in birthing, that left him in a state of quandary, perplexity which he could not fully resolve. Both the questions in *Summa Theologiae* and in *De Substantiis Separatis* belie his immense travail, as we shall show. Thomas took the seed of truth from Dionysius; he nevertheless failed to identify it for what it really was, because the essential kernel of truth was encased in an equivocal shell. He culled the conclusion:

For we do not say “*the demons because evil except in this*” that they lacked in habit and operation by which they ought to have been ordered to the divine good.⁵²

Hence, the demons are not naturally evil, but become so by their own deeds:

Through the lack of some “goods” which ought to be in the angels.⁵³

“*They are said to be evil for this reason*” that in their action they conduct themselves defectively in what is due their nature. And in what order this takes place, he subsequently indicates, saying, “aversion is in them the evil”.⁵⁴

Reflecting on the matter, Thomas reformulates the truth, without its fully coming to light in his own mind.

Every will of angel and man is naturally subject to God. The good therefore of the angelic and human will is that it be regulated by the divine will. Aversion therefore from the rule of the divine will is an evil in the demons.

⁵⁰ DIONYSIUS, *On the Divine Names*, transl. C.E. Rolt 1897 (digital edition), ch. IV, sect. 18.

⁵¹ St. Thomas refers nominally to St. Augustine well over 11,000 times in his works. Dionysius, notwithstanding the parcify of his writing and narrower scope of topics, is cited over 2,200 times. Before him in importance in theological matters come St. John Chrysostomus and St. Gregory. We leave it up to the reader to rank Lombard and Aristotle, whose works Thomas commented upon at length.

⁵² *De Divinis Nominibus*, cap. IV, lect. 19, § 533.

⁵³ *De Divinis Nominibus*, cap. IV, lect. 19, § 534.

⁵⁴ *De Divinis Nominibus*, cap. IV, lect. 19, § 537.

Every appetite which falls short of its regulatory rule tends towards its object in a way beyond that which is proper, like the concupiscible appetite tending more than it should towards the sensually delectable, when it is not ruled by reason. Thus therefore, the will of the demons, reacting aversely to the rule of the divine will, tended more than it should have in the desire of their good. And hence what follows: “*and exceeding/departing from what was befitting for themselves*”, for they desired namely for themselves something which exceeded their state.⁵⁵ Everything that is made to achieve some goal in a determined manner, if it would deviate from this manner it cannot achieve the goal. The manner in which the angels are made to achieve the ultimate end of their will is through a will [strictly] moderated in accordance with the divine rule. If therefore they exceed this measure, they do not achieve the goal.⁵⁶

Indeed, Thomas’ text demonstrates that he, perhaps by simply misreading the Latin translation,⁵⁷ misrepresented the thought of Dionysius and so was inadvertently confirmed in his own erroneous position and quest, searching for the possible real good that the demons ostensibly sought to achieve in their trial. After defining that “they are said to be evil for this reason, moreover, because they are weakened with respect to the operation according to nature”, John Sarracenus continues translating:

... et convenientium ipsis excessus et non consecutio et imperfectio et impotentia et salvantis ipsius perfectionem virtutis infirmitas et fuga et casus. Et aliter: quid est in daemonibus malum? Furor irrationabilis, demens concupiscentia, phantasia proterva.

John Parker renders the text thus:

The **evil** then, in them [the demons], is a turning aside [aversion] and a **stepping out** of things befitting themselves, and a missing of aim, and imperfection and impotence, and a weakness and departure, and falling away from the power which preserves their integrity in them.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ It is practically necessary to include the Latin here, due to an equivocation contained in the usage of “*excessus*”, which will be explained subsequently: “*Sic igitur voluntas Daemonum, aversa a regula divinae voluntatis, magis debito in appetitum sui boni tendit; et hoc est quod subdit: et convenientium ipsis excessus; quia scilicet appetiverunt sibi aliquid quod excedebat conditionem eorum.*”

⁵⁶ *De Divinis Nominibus*, cap. IV, lect. 19, § 537.

⁵⁷ St. Thomas used the translation by John Sarracenus (done about 1233), critically comparing it at times with the translation of Scotus Eriugena (cf. Petrus CARAMELLO, *De Fortuna Operum Dionysii*, Introduction to: S. THOMAE AQUINATIS, *In Librum Beati Dionysii de Divinis nominibus, expositio*, Marietti, Romae 1950, p. xxii).

⁵⁸ Cited from: S. THOMAE AQUINATIS, *In Librum Beati Dionysii de Divinis nominibus*,

Thomas understood the *excessus* in a secondary meaning comparable to the English sense of *excess*, namely, of going beyond the measure. This line of thought fell in well with his prior thesis: the fallen spirits wanted some befitting good in an *excessive* manner, and *so* violated the divine rule. But another fundamental meaning of “*excessus*” is “a stepping out of”, a departure from a standard, or definitively by death. Modern translations of Dionysius follow this pattern, suggesting that Dionysius’ statement is simply negative.⁵⁹ In a word, he does not say they departed from the rule in a “greedy” pursuit of some particular good, but rather that they fell short of the mark for an undisclosed reason.

Subsequently Dionysius reiterates his thought metaphorically:

And again, differently: what is the evil in the demons? irrational fury, insane concupiscence, reckless fantasy.⁶⁰

St. Thomas feels constrained to assure the reader that Dionysius didn’t hold that the spirits had bodily passions, but was only reporting an opinion of the Platonists.⁶¹ But it is probably closer to the mark to say Dionysius saw their deviation from the rule accompanied by a frenzy of insane, hate-filled raging, which he expresses in this anthropomorphic fashion. In itself this is practically a tautology, ... but Dionysius’ intention seems to underscore the rage they felt against the divine rule. And herein lies the secret which Thomas misses in this commentary and will only discover at the end of his career in *De Malo*. St. Thomas will spend the next 12 years trying to figure out how the demons could have thought to achieve some real kind of happiness when departing from the divine rule. He constantly comes up against this wall of impossibility. He agrees fully with Dionysius on this point: Whereas in man there can be defective

expositio, Marietti, Romae 1950, cap. IV, lect. 19, nn. 219.220, p. 194. Dionysius, *On the Divine Names*, ch. IV, sect. 23. Translation by John Parker, James Parker and Co., Oxford 1897.

⁵⁹ The BAC edition, translated by Teodoro H. Martin (Madrid 1990, p. 317) reads: “La depravación pues, es el mal para ellos; la ausencia y abandono de aquellas cosas que les son connaturales. Es privación, imperfección, impotencia. Es debilitamiento, caída, ausencia de la facultad que los conservaría perfectos.”

Maurice de Gandillac (Aubier, Paris, 1941): “Le mal qui est en eux, c’est une déviation, un abandon des biens qui leur conviennent, un insuccès, une imperfection, une défaillance, un affaiblissement de la puissance qui conservait leur perfection, un faux-pas et une chute.”

⁶⁰ *De Divinis Nominibus*, cap. IV, lect. 19, Text of Dionysius, § 220, p. 194.

⁶¹ *De Divinis Nominibus*, cap. IV, lect. 19, § 538.

reason with respect both to the universal as well as to the particular good, this is not the case with the pure spirits. “But he excludes this both with respect to the universal good, which is God, from whom they cannot [simply] recoil in aversion, and with respect to participated goods, which are natural goods given to the angels.”⁶²

Accordingly, the problem is not one of ignorance, ... and still the demons don't see!

But that “they don't see”, this comes from the fact that they themselves by a free choice closed their “faculties for inspecting the good”, that is to say, they voluntarily averted their intellect, not from the consideration of the true, but from an inspection of the good, inasmuch as good, since they evidently *did not want to follow it*.⁶³

Why they would voluntarily focus their attention on the “wrong thing” was the enigma. The last three words are the key; yet they are equivocated in Thomas' mind, they are demoted to a subordinate, *consequential* position. He cannot find an up-front motive without it becoming the formal object of their choice. That this was not the intention of Dionysius, was already expressed by himself, when he stated:

The **evil** then, in them [the demons], is a **turning aside** [aversion] and a **stepping out** of things befitting themselves, and a **missing of aim**, and ... **departure**, and **falling away** from the power which preserves their integrity in them.⁶⁴

These are all purely negative. Hence, in this commentary there is a colossal equivocation at play. When Dionysius says “aversion”, Thomas responds, as it were, “Yes, I know! For every moral decision entails both an aversion from the true good *as a result, following upon a ‘conversio’ to an apparent good*”. This basic moral doctrine was basic stock in the presentation of Peter Lombard, “So, what's new?!”

Precisely the perfect “symmetry” is false; we would do better to say that the black election of the reprobate spirits was asymmetrical. Bishop Fulton Sheen, coming across a drunken woman on the street, observed: “Men go for booze because they like it; women go to booze, because they don't like something else. What's your problem, woman?”

⁶² *De Divinis Nominibus*, cap. IV, lect. 19, § 541.

⁶³ *De Divinis Nominibus*, cap. IV, lect. 19, § 541.

⁶⁴ DIONYSIUS, *On the Divine Names*, ch. IV, sect. 23. Translation by John Parker.

Another illustration: suppose Edward were to tell Tim, “Jeff went bad, because he disobeyed. *Disobedience* was his evil.” And Tim – reflecting that every sin “disobeys” some law – replies, “Aye, disobedience (= aversion), but what was his real sin (= conversion to what good)? sensuality? avarice? vanity? What was he really after?”

But Edward returns laconically, “No, nothing else, . . . just disobedience! He didn’t like the boss! He just wanted to disobey him, to show him that he doesn’t have command of everything!”

Thomas could not buy into Edward’s remark for most of his life; he couldn’t grasp the scenario of an aversion without an effective conversion to some good. This is just what he did in his *Sentence Commentary* when delineating three meanings of pride. He rejected the “privative” generic form of insubordination (which corresponds to the position of Dionysius!) in favor of the “positive” form of the capital sin of pride (= conversion), which, really aspiring to some good, accepts the concomitant disobedience (= aversion) in the transaction.

We shall see how this works out in the subsequent acts of this drama.

Act IV. Trial and Sin of the Evil Spirits in the *Summa Theologiae*

In the *Summa Theologiae* Thomas first establishes the possibility of an angelic sin.

But every created will has rectitude of act only insofar as it is regulated according to the divine will, to which the last end is to be referred . . . thus . . . there can be sin in the will of every creature; considering the condition of its nature.⁶⁵

Since the will for the good is indelibly inscribed by the Creator in the creature’s will, evil can not be chosen directly, but only under the formality or appearance of good. Man, due to the impediments of the body and the plodding nature of his rationality, often sins through ignorance by choosing an apparent good. Such an ignorant election is not possible in case of the pure spirits due to their intuitive lucidity. They could only sin “by choosing something good in itself, but not according to proper measure or rule; so that the defect which induces sin is only on the part of

⁶⁵ *STh.* I, q. 63, a. 1c.

the choice which is not properly regulated, but not on the part of the thing chosen”.⁶⁶ Moreover, an occasion for such a deficient election could only arise in a *supernatural* order,⁶⁷ since the angels enjoyed natural beatitude immediately upon creation in virtue of their intuitive, intellectual nature. Their sin could only be spiritual in nature. A priori, it would have to regard the supernatural end, either directly or indirectly, that is to say, with regards to the means. Each scenario would involve communion in the same modality of fault: deviation from the right path, which is pride:

But there can be no sin when anyone is incited to good of the spiritual order; unless in such affection the rule of the superior be not kept. Such is precisely the sin of pride — not to be subject to a superior when subjection is due. Consequently the first sin of the angel can be none other than pride.⁶⁸

Herein there is a certain shift, at least of accent, from the definition he had given to pride in the *Sentence Commentary*. There, rebellion was simply a generic quality of all sin, ... here it constitutes a formal element of the angelic pride. Still, this diabolic pride is characterized by a singular pursuit, an equality with God which they intend to achieve.

Thomas dedicates the third article to differentiate this pursuit: “It is said, in the person of the devil (*Is* 14:13.14), ‘I will ascend into heaven ... I will be like the Most High’.”⁶⁹ “Without doubt the angel sinned by seeking to be as God.”⁷⁰

He first observes that there are two fundamental ways in which one could, a priori, aspire to equality with God, by sheer equality or by similarity. The first would be by way of strict metaphysical equality with God. In this fashion “He could not seek to be as God in the first way; because by natural knowledge he knew that this was impossible”⁷¹. This is a principle that he should have applied with even greater rigor! He articulates it more completely elsewhere in the *Summa Theologiae*:

⁶⁶ *STh.* I, q. 63, a. 1 ad 4.

⁶⁷ *STh.* I, q. 63, a. 1 ad 3: “It is natural for the angel to turn to God by the movement of love, according as God is the principle of his natural being. But for him to turn to God as the object of supernatural beatitude, comes of infused love, from which he could be turned away by sinning.”

⁶⁸ *STh.* I, q. 63, a. 2c.

⁶⁹ *STh.* I, q. 63, a. 3, sc.

⁷⁰ *STh.* I, q. 63, a. 3c.

⁷¹ *STh.* I, q. 63, a. 3c.

Now no one is moved to the impossible. Consequently no one would tend to the end, save for the fact that the means appear to be possible. Therefore the impossible is not the object of choice.⁷²

We can, he explains, foster light wishes or velleities about impossible things, but we cannot effectively will such things we deem to be impossible, especially when it comes to a matter of the final good of happiness, to which all other things must be ordered.

Wherefore the complete act of the will is only in respect of what is possible and good for him that wills. But the incomplete act of the will is in respect of the impossible; and by some is called “velleity”, because, to wit, one would will [*vellet*] such a thing, were it possible. But choice is an act of the will, fixed on something to be done by the chooser. And therefore it is by no means of anything but what is possible.⁷³

In this way the devil could not have willed to be equivalent to God. Now, in order to facilitate the critical reading of the text, I insert the second half of the corpus from *STh.* I, q. 63, a. 3:

Now it is quite evident that God surpasses the angels, not merely in accidentals, but also in degree of nature; and one angel, another. Consequently it is impossible for one angel of lower degree to desire equality with a higher; and still more to covet equality with God.

To desire to be as God according to likeness can happen in two ways.

In one way, as to that likeness whereby everything is made to be similar to God. And so, if anyone desire in this way to be Godlike, he commits no sin; provided that he desires such likeness in proper order, that is to say, that he may obtain it of God. But he would sin were he to desire to be like unto God even in the right way, as of his own, and not of God’s power.

In another way one may desire to be like unto God in some respect which is not natural to one; as if one were to desire to create heaven and earth, which is proper to God; in which desire there would be sin.

And it was in this way that the devil desired to be as God. Not that he desired to resemble God by being subject to no one else absolutely; for so he would be desiring his own “not-being”; since no creature can exist except by holding its existence under God. But he desired resemblance with God in this respect:

(1) by desiring, as his last end of beatitude, something which he could attain

⁷² *STh.* I-II, q. 13, a. 5c.

⁷³ *STh.* I-II, q.13, a. 5, ad 1.

by the virtue of his own nature, turning his appetite away from supernatural beatitude, which is attained by God's grace.

Or (2), if he desired as his last end that likeness of God which is bestowed by grace, he sought to have it by the power of his own nature; and not from divine assistance according to God's ordering. This harmonizes with Anselm's opinion, who says [*De casu diaboli*, iv.] that "he sought that to which he would have come had he stood fast".

These two views in a manner coincide; because according to both, he sought to have final beatitude of his own power, whereas this is proper to God alone. Since, then, what exists of itself is the cause of what exists of another, it follows from this furthermore that he sought to have dominion over others; wherein he also perversely wished to be like unto God.

Rather than *equiparity*, Thomas affirms, the devil sought *similarity* to God. This can take two forms. In the first, one becomes similar to God in a befitting modality. If one did this in conformity with the divine will (rule!), there would be no sin; indeed, it would be virtuous. For example, to practice justice is to be like God. However, one would sin, if one tried to achieve this befitting form of similarity by dint of one's own efforts and not with the help of God. And one would also sin, if one tried to be similar to God in an unfitting, unnatural way. For example, he says, by wanting the power to create heaven and earth, which is proper to God. "In this way", he claims, "the devil aspired to be like God".

Two observations are due at this point: *First*, this last example is misplaced, for the desire to have the power to create is nothing less than the wish to be metaphysically equal to God, since this power accrues to God precisely as *Ipsum Esse*. Every creature has participated *esse*. Hence, this example falls under the impossible category of perfect equiparity with God, which Thomas had just rejected as impossible. *Secondly*, taking the matter from a slightly different angle, the example is inopportune, for even if rightly placed, the desire for creative power is evidently impossible for a creature. Hence, such a desire cannot exceed a mere *velleity*. For this very reason, it could not be the material object of the angels' sin. This point is all the more interesting, for Thomas himself accentuates that the devil didn't aspire to metaphysical autonomy from God, since, as a creature, his every good, beginning with his being, depends fully upon this metaphysical dependence.

A further clarification is also due. The statement, "And it was in this way that the devil desired to be as God" is to be understood of the both kinds of *similarity* and not just the latter. That is to say, the antecedent of

“in this way” is “the way of similarity” in opposition to “way of equiparity”. This proves itself in the light of the two options which he presents, each “fulfilling” one of the species of similarity to God.

First, he presents the disordered pursuit of a naturally good assimilation to God. He suggests that the devil wanted to be like God by achieving the beatitude to which his *nature* was innately capable, turning his will away from that form of supernatural beatitude which came at the price of accepting grace from God. This scenario is doubly curious. First, because natural beatitude was not something to which the angel could arrive (“*poterat pervenire*”), but rather a beatitude which came with his nature:

As regards this first [natural] beatitude, which the angel could procure by his natural power, he was created already blessed. Because the angel does not acquire such beatitude by any progressive action, as man does, but, ... is straightway in possession thereof, owing to his natural dignity.⁷⁴

Hence, it could not have been a question of coming to something, but rather of *wishing* to remain in something, by *refusing* something higher, that is, supernatural beatitude. However, the angel could not be ignorant that the refusal of the finality of grace together with the loss of grace did not leave any alternative of natural felicity in the knowledge of God. In a word, this hypothesis is morally impossible. The angel could not have sinned by wanting to achieve natural beatitude by his own strength.

If that wasn't the case, Thomas now tells us, then the devil desired to achieve supernatural beatitude, not by the grace of God but by dint of his own effort. Here the contradiction is even more striking and impossible. The angel was not ignorant as to the fact that the beatific vision of God is impossible without the grace of God.

The only things that would remain true out of this discussion are these:

- 1) on the supposition that these efforts were possible (and they were not), then the angel would have become like God in an improper manner.
- 2) the two (impossible) suppositions would have coalesced in the same formality inasmuch as the demons wanted to have happiness and beatitude as the fruit of their own labor.

⁷⁴ *STh.* I, q. 62, a. 1c.

Yet the demons themselves knew these options were not real possibilities. They had no illusion that they would really achieve happiness through such choices as these.

As a chaser, St. Thomas notes that by that choice, whereby they would have been the principle of their own beatitude, they would also have been perverse delight of exercising principality over others. I am not sure that it adds anything to his argument, but it may offer an insight into his own hidden reflections on the angelic trial. Where the two arguments really coalesce into one is that in each scenario, they didn't want to cooperate with the plan (rule) of God. That was where Thomas had situated pride in the preceding argument at the negative point of aversion. Here in this argument, he fails to offer any realistic scenario in which the evils spirits were really striving to achieve some form of happiness which they truly deemed attainable through their rebellion.

This Waterloo experience leads us to reflect upon his solution in the next act, on the mystery of Evil in the *Separated Substances*.

Act V. The Trial of the Angels in the Treatise on Separated Substances

Thomas' *Treatise on Separated Substances* is like a mini-*Summa Contra Gentiles* on angelology. While he deals with the philosophers, it is to measure and correct their writings against the truths of the faith. The treatise is a celebration of faith, undertaken as he said, to honor the spirits with his mind, since he was not able to take part in a liturgical celebration in their honor.⁷⁵ When, in chapter 17 the hour has finally come to set things straight about evil in the spirit world with the light of Christian Doctrine, St. Thomas selects Dionysius to guide him through the spheres of heavenly doctrine,⁷⁶ as later Beatrice would be selected to guide Dante through the heavenly spheres.

⁷⁵ *De Substantiis Separatis*, prooemium, § 42 (in Marietti edition, Italy 1954).

⁷⁶ *De Substantiis Separatis*, cap. 17, § 144. (N.B., the chapter numbering in the digital edition of the works of Thomas from Navarre University deviates from the Marietti edition; I follow the Marietti numbering, which also includes paragraph numbers, lacking in the digital edition.)

This work is either “tellingly” or “frustratingly (sadly)” incomplete, cut off precisely in the area of our present discussion. The preferred attribution stands in close relation to the date assigned to the work. The editor, Spiazzi OP, would have us believe that it was begun in 1268 and that Thomas worked on it until 1273, the year before his death. This explains the lugubrious panegyric epilogue by the editor: “The holy Doctor Angelicus wrote up to this point, but prevented by death he could not complete this treatise, and for that matter many others which he left uncompleted.”⁷⁷ Vansteenkiste OP can dispense with the epilogue, as he assigns the early date of 1259 to the work, at a point when Thomas was newly being introduced to the works of Dionysius.⁷⁸ Still, if Thomas could present the Dionysian doctrine with such lucidity at the end of the 1250’s, why was the parallel article in the *Summa* (I, 63, 3) left in a state of conundrums? Hence, more reasonable are I. T. Eschmann’s and Jacques Maritain’s assignments of 1268 and 1269 respectively. The reasons, both why Thomas wrote the work why it was left incomplete may well have been the same: the enigma that stumped him in the *Summa* (I, q. 63, a. 3c) still stumped him. And still, he made progress which prepared the way for his final insights.

What was his progress in thought? We may affirm that it was negative, that it had exhausted itself. The “unfinished symphony” *On Separated Substances* ends in a crescendo of arguments that indicate that the pure intellects of the created spirits could not fall culpable prey to any error, and since by nature their will can only choose good, as it is presented to them by the intellect, there was no room for an evil election in them. The arguments he raises are not just “paper tigers” that he will easily tear up like flimsily stage props in Hollywood, rather they were “beasts” which tormented him, because his mind adhered to their logic, while in faith, he knew that the demons were evil through their own voluntary election, inflated somehow by their perverse knowledge.⁷⁹

He reiterates the position of Dionysius, like someone suspecting that he holds the key to a riddle, but does not know how to apply the decryption key:

⁷⁷ S. THOMAE AQUINATIS, *Opuscula Philosophica*, Marietti 1954, p. 58.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 59. cf. Daniel GALLAGHER, *The Platonic-Aristotelian Hybridity of Aquinas’ Aesthetic Theory*, in: *Hortulus. The Online Graduate Journal of Medieval Studies*, Vol. 2, n. 1, May 2006.

⁷⁹ *De Substantiis Separatis*, cap. 19, § 161. Especially *in fine* where he refers to *1 Cor 8:1*.

Therefore we shall have to say that the demons were not always evil but some of them began to be evil, when by their own choice, they followed the inclination of the passions. And accordingly, Dionysius says in the fourth chapter of *On the Divine Names* that “aversion”, namely from God, “is an evil for the demons themselves, and it is a forsaking of those things which are fitting to them because they were carried away by pride beyond themselves”. And later on, he adds certain remarks pertaining to punishment as “not reaching the ultimate end” and imperfection through a lack of a due perfection, and “impotence” of pursuing that which they desire by nature and an “infirmity” of the power conserving in them, a natural order, calling them back from evil.⁸⁰

The following text presents his insolvable impasse:

For in an incorporeal and intellectual substance, there seems to be no appetite except the intellectual, which is of that which is absolutely good, as appears through the Philosopher in XII *Metaphysics*. Now no one is made evil from the fact that his intellect tends toward that which is good absolutely, but from the fact that it tends toward a qualifiedly good thing, as though it were absolutely good. Therefore it does not seem possible that an incorporeal and intellectual substance should be made evil by its own appetite.

112. — Again, appetite can be only of the good or of the seeming good, for the good is that which all beings seek and one is not rendered evil because he seeks the true good. Therefore, every individual who is made evil through his own appetite, must seek a seeming good as though it were truly good. This, however, cannot be unless he is deceived in his judgment, which does not seem capable of happening in an incorporeal and intellectual substance which, as it seems, cannot have a false apprehension. For even in our case, insofar as we understand something, there can be no falsity. Accordingly, Augustine says in the *Book of Eighty-Three Questions*, “Everyone who is deceived, that, indeed, in which he is deceived, he does not understand”. And accordingly, concerning those things which we grasp properly by our intellect as well as concerning the first principles, no one can be deceived. Therefore it seems impossible that some incorporeal and intellectual substance should become evil through its own appetite.⁸¹

So typical of the objections he customarily raises, one might easily oversee that Thomas had come to an impasse. He could not intellectually understand how the demon could effectively choose some false but

⁸⁰ *De Substantiis Separatis*, cap. 19, § 108, transl. Francis J. Lescoe, 1959 (§ 165 in Marietti).

⁸¹ *De Substantiis Separatis*, cap. 19, §§ 111-112 (§§ 169-170 in Marietti).

apparent good as the converging point upon which his pride depended and to which he clung. This conclusion is valid. In this, at least, he has come beyond *STh.* I, q. 63, a. 3.

It is not until the *Disputed Questions on Evil*, that he gains the definitive insight.

Act VI. The Dénouement in *De Malo*

Scene 1. Rhetoric Musings

It is indulgent and, yes, romantic to entertain the thought (not without good reason!), that Thomas after so many “defeats” and frustration should so willingly enter the arena of jousting with such blunted and unsuccessful lances, to enter unarmed, as it were, into the hostile arena of disputed questions! While other saints, at the evening of their lives, are relishing flames of love, heavenly mansions, clouds of heavenly contemplation and the sublimities of love, Thomas, that unpredictable ox, leaps into to the midst of evil to exonerate his God, and there acquits and exonerates himself so well. I call it a romantic thought in line with the school of thought which would hold David’s going out with a sling to slay Goliath a romantic undertaking.

Thomas, who despite his great mind, had not been able to resolve the riddle which held the secret to the first birth of evil, finally, in the midst of battled disputations, was handed, as it were, the light, the insight, the key to understanding the sin of the devil.

Let us “literate” for just a moment, with a “Hamlet-Moment” about “the question”. The digression is justified, since it will lead us straight to the heart of the matter. Shakespeare had the key too, though anthropologically enflashed. Consider Hamlet’s reflection. Then disengage it from the flesh, so that it become an archetypal monologue in the realm of spirits,⁸² where doubt and fear played no role!

To be, or not to be: that is the question:
Whether ‘tis nobler in the mind to suffer

⁸² It is interesting and surely no mere chance how many of Jesus’ words are simultaneously an answer to archetypal questions and reproaches coming from the spirit world. Moreover, this was the problem with the texts from Isaiah 14 and Ezechiel 28: disengaging the epic metaphors from the flesh, so that only the spiritual propensities of pure spirits remains.

The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
 Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
 And by opposing end them? To die: to sleep;
 No more! and by a sleep to say we end
 The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks
 That flesh is heir to, 'tis a consummation
 Devoutly to be wish'd. To die, to sleep;
 To sleep: perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub;
 For in that sleep of death what dreams may come
 When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
 Must give us pause: there's the respect
 That makes calamity of so long life;
 For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,
 The oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,
 The pangs of despised love, the law's delay,
 The insolence of office and the spurs
 That patient merit of the unworthy takes,
 When he himself might his quietus make
 With a bare bodkin? who would fardels bear,
 To grunt and sweat under a weary life,
 But that the dread of something after death,
 The undiscover'd country from whose bourn
 No traveller returns, puzzles the will
 And makes us rather bear those ills we have
 Than fly to others that we know not of?
 Thus conscience does make cowards of us all;
 And thus the native hue of resolution
 Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,
 And enterprises of great pith and moment
 With this regard their currents turn awry,
 And lose the name of action.⁸³

- 1) "*To be or not to be: that is the question.*" An existential question about life: whether in the face of the present circumstances life should go on.
- 2) "*The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune*", seen from the side of offended spirits, are the horrible "present circumstances", are the

⁸³ W. SHAKESPEARE, *Hamlet*, Act III, Scene 1.

divine rule supernaturally set by God before the spirit world, who by embracing them in loving, humble service would be eternally beatified in God. But the very offer is an awful, awesome slight to their honor!

- 3) “*Or to take arms against a sea of troubles, and by opposing end them?*” Oh, if only they could oppose the divine will and come out triumphant. (Behold, a velleity!) But what can they achieve against Almighty God? What can they hope for?
- 4) “*To die: to sleep; No more! and by a sleep to say we end the heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to, ‘tis a consummation devoutly to be wish’d.*” Indeed, there is one alternative: Suicide! But how could a spirit commit suicide? Is this too not a mere velleity? Or is there a spiritual analogy?
- 5) “*To die, to sleep; to sleep: perchance to dream: ay, there’s the rub. ... For who would bear the whips and scorns of time, the oppressor’s wrong, the proud man’s contumely, The pangs of despised love, the law’s delay, the insolence of office and the spurns that patient merit of the unworthy takes, when he himself might his quietus make with a bare bodkin?*”

Oblivion, nirvana, “the Woods are lovely dark and deep”, in a word, suicide under any name is such a sweet beckoning for those who hate the alternatives life presents! Conscience and the fear of punishment after death only “makes cowards of us” men, ... for the spirits, though, fear is not a factor in their choice.⁸⁴

St. Thomas came to this insight in demonic psychology apparently in the course of the Disputations on Evil. Let us see his resolution to the question.

Scene 2. Rhetoric Aside: Thomas’ (unpolished) Solution

Finally, the *Disputations on Evil* afforded Thomas with the formal elements necessary for the essential, if not definitive, solution to the enigma of the Trial and Sin of the created spirits. However, our expectations may not be too high: we say he discovered the “formal elements” to the solution, but a polished formulation of the solution was not forthcoming.

⁸⁴ This was a key in the trial of Eve; the Enemy had to remove the fear of death from the heart of Eve so that she more easily dare scorn God.

Let us survey the yield from the disputation. Two significant factors in Thomas' solution may be stated by way of statistics. First, in *De Malo* articles on the sin of the angels St. Thomas has practically abandoned the use of the word "pride"; there, the word "pride" appears only three times.⁸⁵ The proper meaning of "pride", which Thomas had pointed out in his *Sentence Commentary*, consists in a conversion to one's own proper goodness (perfection, honor). On the order of nature, though, St. Thomas has proven that the angel could not have an inordinate love for himself, since he is created in a state of natural perfection and beatitude. Accordingly, the trial of the angels could only have transpired on a supernatural plane upon which the angels were still *pilgrims* underway, that is, in potentiality, and called to a new final end or beatitude.⁸⁶ About a beatitude not yet achieved, the angel could not be self-inflated through a positive attachment to self.

Any form of "pride" would therefore have to consist in a reaction to the supernatural economy of grace and the particular rule by which supernatural glory was to be attained. The possibility of such "pride" therefore could consist only in a deviation, a rebellion against the divine rule. That was the generic form of "pride" which youthful Thomas discarded from consideration in the *Sentence Commentary*. Avoiding further equivocation and in strict line with the doctrine of Dionysius, Thomas expresses the formal motivation behind the guilt of the spirits in terms of *a v e r s i o n*. Under the varying verbal and substantive forms, the root form of "aversion" appears some 30 times in Question 16 on the demons.

⁸⁵ I think that it is safe to assert that this is a very conscious affirmation on the part of St. Thomas. Public disputations were practically a regulated "free for all". Any question or objection could be raised on the proposed topic. After the public disputation the Master had but a few days to reduce his note to a text that had to be published. I find it practically inconceivable that the "pride" (superbia) went practically unheard throughout the discussion. May we not perceive the editorial hand of Thomas, the editor, at work behind this conspicuous silence?

⁸⁶ *De Malo* q. 16, a. 3c: "And his evil could not have consisted of anything else belonging to the order of nature. For only things in which potentiality can be distinguished from actuality, not things that are always actual, can have evil, as the *Metaphysics* says. But all angels were instituted such that they immediately at the moment of their creation had everything proper to their nature, although they had potentiality for supernatural goods that they could obtain through God's grace. And so we conclude that the devil's sin regarded something supernatural, not something belonging to the order of nature." (transl. Richard Regan, Oxford University Press 2003).

Since, whatever the will immediately wills or *converges upon* (“conversion”) is good, in some positive sense, Thomas will identify the formal, evil element in sin with the aversion from the proper rule more than aversion from the proper end.

Therefore, we can note two things in faults, namely, departure from the rule or measure and departure from the end. . . . And it is evident from [the examples] that it belongs more to the nature of fault to disregard a rule of action than even to fail to attain the end of the action. Therefore, it belongs intrinsically to the nature of fault, whether in nature or human skills or moral matters, to be contrary to a rule of action.⁸⁷

Dispensing therefore from the use of term “pride” (signifying a turning to some good), Thomas orchestrates the angels’ trial and sin as an election by means of which the reprobate spirits strove to be like God in such a way that they rebelled against His ordinance in the process. Hence, there was a “positive” element of pursuit, but the principal element was the rebellion. Thomas, in company with the traditional position, held the devil’s sin to be the paradigm behind the epic metaphors for proud, reprobate princes in the Old Testament (*Is* 14,12-14; *Ez* 28, 2-19).

Having been tormented in the past by the question how the devil could choose to do evil and what good he might have truly aspired to, we should not be surprised to find Thomas passionately concerned with the possible and the impossible in the pursuit of divine likeness. In the single article on whether the devil sought to be like God (*De Malo* q. 16, a. 3), the “possible” and the “impossible” are hashed about so much that the words appear more than 20 times. And notwithstanding, – even here in *De Malo* – Thomas does not sieve matters with sufficient rigor.

In this crucial article, where Thomas proves that the enemy sought the divine likeness, he excludes, first of all, those forms of divine similitude which are absolutely impossible. First, God alone is “*Ipsum Esse*”, of which there can evidently only be one. Every other being exists by participating in being by a divine gift, which is absolutely less than God. Concerning this truth the pure spirits could not have been ignorant. So he draws a conclusion, based on a principle, ready for further application:

And so we conclude that his intellect could not have understood equality with God to be within the nature of the possible. And **no one strives for what the person understands to be impossible**, as he *De Caelo et Mundo*

⁸⁷ *De Malo* q. 2, a. 1c.

says. And so the movement of the devil's will could not have inclined to desire equality with God absolutely.⁸⁸

Not only from the side of "divine" metaphysics would such a will be impossible, but also from the side of "personal" metaphysics. First, "the devil evidently did not desire something whereby he himself would no longer be the same individual. But he would no longer be the same individual if he were to be equal to God, even if this were possible".⁸⁹ That is to say, if it were possible in itself, it would mean his existential dissolution as a person.⁹⁰ By the same token, the devil could not actually wish to be absolutely independent from God, since his own participated hold on existence depends solely on God.⁹¹

St. Thomas then posits, what he holds to be the resultant, possible aspiration of the devil in sinning. The answer is quite complex, and, to my mind, still defective. First, the text, and then a particularized analysis:

And so we conclude that the devil's sin regarded something supernatural, not something belonging to the order of nature. Therefore, the devil's first sin was that, to attain the supernatural happiness consisting of the complete vision of God, he did not elevate himself to God so as to desire with holy angels his ultimate perfection through God's grace. Rather, he wanted to attain his ultimate perfection by the power of his own nature without God's bestowing grace, although not without God's acting on his nature.

And so Augustine in his work *On Free Choice* [ch. 24] holds the *devil's sin to consist of his pleasure in his own power*. And Augustine in his *Commentary on the Book of Genesis* says that "if an angelic substance were to turn to itself, and the angel were to delight in itself more than in the one in whose participation it is happy, it would swell with pride and fall".

And because having one's ultimate perfection by the power of one's own nature, not through the favor of something higher, is proper to God, the devil in this regard evidently desired equality with God.

⁸⁸ *De Malo* q. 16, a. 3c.

⁸⁹ *De Malo* q. 16, a. 3c.

⁹⁰ Francisco de Suarez will spill intolerable quantities of ink to p r o v e that the devil sinned by desiring the Hypostatic Union for himself, after having acknowledged that the devil would have known it to mean his own non-existence as a person (*De Angelis*, V. cap. 8ff).

⁹¹ *De Malo* q. 16, a. 3c: "And by like argument, he could not have desired not to be absolutely subject to God, both because this is impossible, and he could not understand it to be possible, as the foregoing makes clear, and because he himself would cease to exist if he were not completely subject to God."

And he also desired in this regard *not* to be subject to God, namely, so as not to need God's grace in addition to the power of his nature.

And this agrees with what I said before, that the devil did not sin by desiring an evil but by desiring a good, namely, his ultimate happiness, improperly, that is, not as a happiness obtained through God's grace.⁹²

Having rejected the "impossible dreams", Thomas indicates the actual object that purportedly moved the angelic will in its positive movement of conversion to a positive good. In order to achieve supernatural beatitude as his final perfection,⁹³ which consists in the beatific vision of God, the devil did not turn to God as the holy angels did, desiring to receive it as a fruit of God's grace, but the evil one tried to achieve this end by the power of his own nature and not by grace, knowing as he did, that having been created immortal, God would not withdraw his natural powers from him.

We repeat, that simply speaking it is impossible that a natural power can produce any supernatural effect, let alone the supreme effect in the order of grace, the beatific vision. Hence, strictly speaking, the wish to achieve the good of the beatific vision by the dint of solely natural powers is precisely that, a wish, that is a velleity, which is not the kind of will capable of consummating either a sin or a virtuous act. John of St. Thomas, perceiving this anomaly, tries well to come to the Angelic Doctor's rescue, by introducing a useful distinction, though he too fails to overcome the essential difficulty:

We affirm that also in the first sin of the angel, pride could have entered in with respect to supernatural beatitude, by refusing and despising it, in such wise that virtually and interpretively he wanted to have them but not from divine grace, but rather from his own strength. Neither did he want to have it in common with many. Formally, however he only wanted effectively to refuse it, and rest in his natural felicity and beauty. Accordingly, the refusal of supernatural beatitude on the part of the angel should not be separated from his delight of resting and remaining in his natural felicity.⁹⁴

The major contribution is that he understands that "supernatural beatitude gained by natural virtue alone" was merely the object of an angelic

⁹² *De Malo* q. 16, a. 3c.

⁹³ Note that in contradistinction to *STh.* I, q. 63, a. 3c St. Thomas does not now include a wish for natural beatitude as a possible motive for the angelic sin.

⁹⁴ JOANNES A S. THOMA, *Commentarium in Summam Theologiae. De Angelis in I. Partem*, qq. 59-63, Marietti, Romae 1951, disp. 43.

velleity. This means, the angels saw it as something good, but refused it because it could only be achieved by grace. And precisely here, in company with Suarez and in modern times Molinie, he fails to profit from his own insight.

Suarez, as was pointed out, contemplated the metaphysical possibility of the Hypostatic Union as the formal object of the angelic trial. He suggests that the devil, so upset by the very idea that another creature, a human nature, should enjoy this prerogative and so be elevated above him, had effectively preferred that this mystery had been accomplished at the fitting time in his own nature. The devil would have been aware that this would have been the end of his own *personal* existence, but not the end of the existence of his created nature, which would have continued to exist *consciously* by subsisting the Logos. John of St. Thomas' point bears repeating. The devil could only have *wished* that that had been the plan of God, but *effectively* he could only refuse to cooperate with the plan of God.

Molinie (a French Dominican in the midst of French existentialists!) expounds upon the anguish of metaphysical poverty into which the elevation into the order of grace would have plunged the angels. For, by nature they had already committed themselves in a supreme natural love to the God of nature; but now, in grace, they were being called to disengage this natural oblation in favor of an unknown God! In this moment of anguish the angels would also have perceived the perverse option of rendering this oblation not to God with the help of grace but to themselves or to another (higher) angel:

For there is at the same time [alongside the oblation of self to God in grace] another possibility, which constitutes exactly the temptation, namely to adopt a false god in an act, which in any case (narcissism or idolatry) would allow him to confer upon himself a divine importance, evidently a lie (as he well knows!), but nonetheless true for his appetite.⁹⁵

Generally an acute thinker, in this particular point Molinie's reflection is better drama than theology. Similarly, the devil's dramatic reply to

⁹⁵ M. D. MOLINIE: "Car il a en même temps [à côté de l'oblation de soi même en grâce à Dieu] une autre possibilité, celle que constitue précisément la tentation, adopter un faux dieu dans un mouvement qui, de toute façon (narcissisme ou idolâtrie), lui permettra de se donner un importance divine, évidemment mensongère (il le sait), mais pratiquement vraie pour son affectivité.", in: *L'Épreuve de la Foi et la Chute Originelle*. Polycopy edition, Nancy (France), pp. 59-60.

Faust's question as to how he could get out of hell to visit him, while also theologically deficient in particulars, does point in the direction of the real question:

Why this is hell, nor am I out of it. Think'st thou that I who saw the face of God, and tasted the eternal joys of Heaven, am not tormented with ten thousand hells, in being deprived of everlasting bliss?⁹⁶

It is not only "impossible things" which can't be willed (but only wished), but it is likewise impossible to will as one end (but not to wish) certain "possible things", namely, those which cannot possibly constitute true happiness. Man, to be sure, especially in his fallen state, suffers many illusions in this regard, but the angels in their original integral state of natural beatitude could not be ignorant about this. They knew full well that a greater good awaited them in the beatific vision.⁹⁷ Likewise, the supposed angelic anguish over their metaphysical poverty (if not aggravated by other concomitant factors) would have to have been greater in their natural state than in the state of faith, inasmuch as the divine promises in grace are the greatest assurance for the conservation of contingent beings in existence. Surely, the security of a son is superior to that of a servant: "Now the servant abides not in the house for ever: but the son abides for ever. If therefore the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed" (*Jn* 8:35-36).

This is the second major point in Thomas' response above (*De Malo* 16, 3c), namely that in refusing to follow the divine rule the devil experienced a perverse pleasure and *effectively* did accomplish his goal – the same he had promised to Eve – that he would become like God knowing, (determining) good and evil. He became his own rule of conduct, which is proper to God alone. In this, he cut off his nose to spite his face! That is to say, he exploited the option to rebel, n o t because he thought he would be happy in that choice, but because his only perverse happiness consisted in slapping God in the face and screaming, "I will not serve!"

Hence, when it is affirmed that the spirits *would* have wished to have supernatural beatitude, but n o t by the grace of God, ... this formula must be completed, in order to make theological sense. It is n o t the case that the fallen spirits really wanted or thought they could have supernatural

⁹⁶ Christopher MARLOWE, *Doctor Faustus*, Scene III, lines 74-78.

⁹⁷ They knew this, yes, with the certitude of faith, but also knew by nature that such a divine gift is possible.

beatitude by dint of their own natural efforts without the help of divine grace (an impossibility). Rather what they actually and effectively decided to do was this: they refused to pursue and accept the sole, possible supernatural beatitude with the help of grace. Now it is not a question of just any grace, but precisely that particular modality of grace that was presented to them in the actual economy of their salvation.

Thomas has repeated it again and again, that their sin was a sin of aversion to the divine rule. The angels were already in a state of grace; a single act of divine charity *could have been sufficient* for their elevation to eternal happiness in the vision of God. God, however, did not establish that possible economy of grace, rather he established another economy of grace. And in that “other economy” (the only one offered to the angels), there was something in the “rule” – the means to glory – that somehow provoked a sense of slight in certain angels.

Suppose a king were to invite one of his common subjects to marry his daughter and so become a member of the royal family and heir to the kingdom. There is nothing in this scenario of elevation (Molinie’s imagination) that would justify anguish or rebellion on the part of the servant. But suppose that the king made this offer contingent upon the fact that the servant renounce his profession in order to accept the offered elevation. Here problems may or may not ensue. If the king were to require that the subject repudiate his Christian faith in order to receive the honor, clearly the subject would have to refuse the evil king’s evil suggestion. Suppose though, the king would require that the subject renounce his autonomy as a master gold smith in order to serve under the royal gold smith. Here, *secundum quid*, problems again can arise.

By nature the highest spirit was prince over all of creation.⁹⁸ In the order of nature, therefore, he would have been the cause for the highest degree of natural beatitude for all the other spirits and mankind; he had, namely, the natural position and power to communicate to all other intellectual and rational creatures a more perfect intellectual knowledge of the Divinity. In a way, this mission could have continued in a supernatural economy as well. While the beatific vision could only be communicated directly by God, still Lucifer’s light and vision would have remained the highest in creation, and so he would have exercised principality over all

⁹⁸ I limit reflection to the devil alone, but the argument analogically follows for all the spirits.

the other spirits and mankind with respect to the governance of creation; all illuminations would have their highest creaturely articulation in his, the Light Bearer's light! He would have been the high priest of the universe! In such an economy, Lucifer and his followers might well have been pleased to accept and comply with the divine offer. There were only advantages, nothing humiliating or degrading, . . . indeed, one could hardly speak of any renunciation. There were, moreover, no material grounds for any attempt or presumption to attain to supernatural beatitude by mere natural powers, as this was patently impossible.

That original idyllic order came crashing down with the unveiling of the actual economy of salvation which God called His first creatures to embrace. Were that plan (rule!) the mystery of the Incarnation, then the angelic world would have been plunged into a deep darkness of trial by the inscrutable obscurity of faith. Thomas doesn't take us through this door, but he practically brings us to it. He has made it clear that the stumbling block for the fallen spirits was the divine rule: "The stone which the builders rejected; the same is become the head of the corner. This is the Lord's doing, and it is wonderful in our eyes" (*Ps* 118:22-23). He has affirmed time and again, especially here in *De Malo* that aversion to the divine rule (Economy of Salvation) was the evil and sin of the fallen spirits. In fact, this was the only kind of evil they could have committed, since the natural object of the will is always good. But in the obscurity of supernatural faith the goodness of the divine plan could itself have become obscured, such that the angels divert their attention to another more manifest good. Here, was the stumbling block in Thomas' angelic psychology. He had been impeded for so long by the conviction that the angels had to attach their will to some real good that was really possible for them to attain as the object of their beatitude. Given the pure intellect of the spirits, he knew there was no room for such a speculative error. He couldn't find the leverage necessary to explain their moral evil which could only consist in deviation from a superior's mandate:

Evil consists both of the privation of form and the privation of due measure and order, as Augustine says in his work *On the Nature of the Good*. And so acts of the will have evil both from their object, which gives the acts their form because one wills evil, and from taking away the due measure or order of the acts themselves, as, for example, if one in the very course of willing good does not observe due measure and order. And such was the sin of devils that made them evil. For they desired a suitable good, not an evil. But they desired it inordinately and immoderately, namely, in that they desired to acquire it by their own power and not by God's grace, and

this exceeded the due measure of their status. Just so, Dionysius says in his work *On the Divine Names*: “Evil for devils, therefore, consists of a turning away”, namely, inasmuch as their desires turned away from the direction of a higher rule, and “too much of suitable things”, namely, inasmuch as they exceeded their due measure in desiring suitable goods. But regarding sin, defect of intellect or reason and defect of will always accompany one another proportionally. And so we do not need to suppose that there was in the devils’ first sin such a defect of intellect that they judged falsely (e.g., that evil is good), but that they failed to comprehend the rule governing them and its ordination.⁹⁹

From this text it is clear that St. Thomas still thinks the devil actually sought to attain some good that was befitting to him: “he wanted some good appropriate to himself”. *Simpliciter*, this was true, but *secundum quid*, it was not true. In *De Malo* q. 16 a. 3c he will identify this befitting goodness as the beatific vision. He will mistake the devil’s intention, namely to want this by the power of nature alone. Thomas still lacks an insight here because he has only considered the “divine rule” against which the devil rebelled in a formal way, but not in an existential or material fashion.

The devil wanted to achieve supernatural beatitude by grace, not by mere nature, but in such a way that he was moved thereto only by God and not by the instrumentality of any other creature. This may be affirmed, because this is the only modality in which the “supernatural good” was, at least, a priori really possible. Yet this possibility lost its footing in reality, when God set the foundation stone to the economy of Salvation: “And again, when he brings in the first begotten into the world, he says: And let all the angels of God adore him” (*Hb* 1:6). At this juncture it was no longer possible effectively to aspire to supernatural beatitude by a direct and non-mediated collaboration with divine grace. But if “mediated”, then the first creature would, perforce, have lost his singular post in creation and in the divine plan. What had, a priori, been a possible object of will, ... had become the impossible dream of a mere velleity. It was in the savoring of these two that the devil made his choice: “If I can’t have the one, I won’t take the other!” A mere velleity was the tag on the “conversion” to the positive good, he *would* have wanted, were it possible! Milton, the blind poet, had better insight than Thomas on this point, perhaps having had

⁹⁹ *De Malo* q. 16, a. 2 ad 4.

closer existential encounters with evil. In *Paradise Lost* Satan, having fallen into the abyss, defiantly exclaims and reveals his true intent:

“Is ... this the seat ...
That we must change for Heaven? – this mournful gloom
For that celestial light? Be it so, since he
Who now is sovereign can dispose and bid
What shall be right:¹⁰⁰ farthest from him is best¹⁰¹
Whom reason hath equalled,¹⁰² force hath made supreme
Above his equals.¹⁰³ Farewell, happy fields,
Where joy for ever dwells! Hail, horrors!¹⁰⁴ hail,
Infernal world! and thou, profoundest Hell,
Receive thy new possessor—one who brings
A mind not to be changed by place or time.
The mind is its own place,¹⁰⁵ and in itself
Can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven.
What matter where, if I be still the same,
And what I should be, all but less than he
Whom thunder hath made greater? Here at least
We shall be free; th’ Almighty hath not built
Here for his envy, will not drive us hence:
Here we may reign secure; and, in my choice,
To reign is worth ambition, though in Hell:
Better to reign in Hell¹⁰⁶ than serve in Heaven.¹⁰⁷”

¹⁰⁰ This phrase is a great equivocation. It’s like this: “Since God reigns in heaven, He can make the rule there; but since I reign here below, I will make the rule!” And the gloating is over t h i s equality with God.

¹⁰¹ Aversion!

¹⁰² He has become like God, knowing (determining for himself) “good” and “evil”.

¹⁰³ By his choice he remains supreme among the rebels. By implication he would have lost this first place by complying to the divine rule.

¹⁰⁴ The evil spirits had no illusion about achieving true happiness through their decision.

¹⁰⁵ The frightening logic of philosophical idealism, which also “knows” good and evil.

¹⁰⁶ Cf., *De Malo* q. 16, a. 3 sc. 7: “Isidore says in his work *On the Supreme Good* that the devil sinned in that he wanted his power to be preserved by himself and not by God. But preserving creatures and not being preserved by anything higher belongs to God. Therefore, the devil wanted what belongs to God and so to be equal to God.”

¹⁰⁷ John MILTON, *Paradise Lost*, book I, lines 244-263.

“Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven”, this is the bitterness and “joy” of aversion: to stand unbeaten; to flaunt the Most High; to “know” his own truth – “he stood not in the truth, because truth is not in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks of his own: for he is a liar, and the father thereof” – (*Jn* 8:44), confident that he can foil God’s plan: “He was a murderer from the beginning” (*Jn* 8:44).¹⁰⁸

Without orchestrating the climactic rebellious choice in the light of the Incarnation, Thomas finally did come to understand how the devil could make an everlasting choice about a final goal knowing full well that he could never be truly happy in it. Only a perverse happiness would remain his lot. Again from Milton: the Archfiend exhorts his fallen cherub companion:

Fallen Cherub, to be weak is miserable,
Doing or suffering: but of this be sure—
To do aught good never will be our task,
But ever to do ill our sole delight,
As being the contrary to his high will
Whom we resist. If then his providence
Out of our evil seek to bring forth good,
Our labour must be to pervert that end,
And out of good still to find means of evil;
Which oft times may succeed so as perhaps
Shall grieve him, if I fail not, and disturb
His inmost counsels from their destined aim.¹⁰⁹

Thomas expresses this knowledge in the 5th *sed contra* to *De Malo* q. 16, a. 3. In the process he draws a double distinction: first, with respect to the final end; and secondly, with respect to the natural object and their possible division in the spirit.

Things indivisible by nature are sometimes divisible by the will and reason. And so nothing prevents a person desiring something (e.g., to be free of miseries) that results in the person’s nonexistence, although such a person does not desire not to exist. Therefore, it likewise seems that nothing prevents the devil’s having desired equality with God although the consequence of this is for the devil himself not to exist.

¹⁰⁸ This text is commonly interpreted with respect to Original Sin. This is true, but only as a calculated step in the implementation of the more ultimate design against the Incarnate Word. By both nature and grace the devil knew that God would respect the laws he had imbued into creation; according to these “rules of the game” the devil gave himself a prognosis of victory, he would defeat the Plan of God.

¹⁰⁹ John MILTON, *Paradise Lost*, book I, lines 157-168.

The two points coalesce in one reality here. To escape a fire in a burning building, one might leap out the window, even though one is on the 20th story. Now that's one, single leap! But in the mind and the will it can be separated into "fire escape" and "death leap". The latter, of course, is evil. Still, the mind can separate the two formalities of "departure" and "arrival" such that one reflect and choose only one portion. Thomas clarifies and refines his thought further in his response:

When one wishes something to be taken away from oneself, one constitutes oneself as the starting point [*"termino a quo"*], which does not need to be preserved in the process, and so one can desire not to exist so as to be free of miseries. But when one desires a good for oneself, one constitutes oneself as the end point [*"termino ad quem"*], and such a terminus needs to be preserved in the process. And so one cannot desire for oneself a good, the possession of which would result in the person's not existing.¹¹⁰

Every moral action is like a coin: it has two sides, *heads* and *tails*; they are inseparably part of one coin, but formally distinct. Let us call *heads*, the positive **conversion** to some real or apparent good, a "*terminus ad quem*"; and *tails*, the **aversion** from some opposing evil, a "*terminus a quo*". The pursuit of a positive goal ("*terminus ad quem*"), as Thomas had always maintained, must be attainable. However, a choice motivated by aversion to some evil can be taken without reference to the real possibility of actually attaining a positive goal; escape from the hated evil is sufficient ground to make a choice based on aversion. The reason for this, as Thomas shows, is because in flight one subjectively is removing *oneself* from the evil. And this undertaking will be also a success, even if it is by death. The man who leaped from the window did escape the fire. And the devil who leapt down to the fires of hell did subjectively escape the evil of the divine rule.

This is a quantum leap forward in Thomas' thought and the solution to his dilemma. Because he had always focused on the positive goal, he had always been stumped by the necessity that it be truly possible. Given the perfection of the angelic intellect, there could, of course, be no mistakes on their part in this regard. But now that he has finally grasped Dionysius' affirmation, that aversion from the divine rule was the only possible moral evil in the evil spirits, the impossible suddenly becomes possible. That is to say, a mere velleity – directed to an impossible supernatural

¹¹⁰ *De Malo* q. 16, a. 3 ad 5sc.

good – was a sufficient *heads* to the coin toss of demonic fate, since they chose *tails!* That is to say, the velleity was not their choice, but it served to derail their attention, to focus it only on their loss of honor, in the light of which they chose to say, “*Non serviam!*”.

We are acquainted with the phenomenon on every side: it is the rationale in suicide. It is an effective escape from some evil. And it is the mentality of a pouting brat: “If I can’t play by *my rules*, then I won’t play at all!”

3. *Curtain Time*

The stage has gone quiet; the curtains have fallen. Yes, it was curtains for the bad guys! The chips (the dice, the cards, the coins) have fallen where they may! Curiously, like 30 coins strewn into the temple, they lie face down, tails up, ... a plunge of despairs into the depths. All that was and could have been! Saul, jealous of his place, envied David and fell on his own sword; Jonathan, like a disciple of an earlier Michael, bowed to the divine plan, rejoiced at David’s anointing and elevation above him. He would have been happy to serve as David’s first minister. Oh Jonathan, a worthy go-before “patron saint” to a later John, also a friend of the bride-groom, glad to hear his voice, glad to confess that he was not the Christ. Yes, we know the storyline.

Thomas, like a fiddler, visited the dramatic scene of the crime five times, seeking to pluck, note by note, a theme song gone wrong.

First try (*Sentence Commentary*): a disciple of Lombard, he held that the bad guy suffered an incurable bout of the capital sin of pride, wanting to exalt and conserve his position of excellence in the created universe.

Second try: discoursing to non-believers (*Contra Gentiles*), he maintains his course: the bad guys, seeking to really gain something good, sought to disregard the guide-lines of the manufacturer (= Creator).

Third try: along comes Dionysius affirming, “aversion is the bad guys’ evil”. Thomas: “Been there, heard it before, ...” It’s really Greek to Thomas. Having already been working with “*conversio*” and “*aversio*”, since it was ABC’s for Lombard as well, Thomas, consequently, only imperfectly assimilates Dionysius’ deepest point: aversion is the whole package, not the down side of it. Still, Thomas is evidently intrigued that one can speak of the fall of the bad guys without using the word “pride”.¹¹¹

¹¹¹ The capital sin of pride should have been excluded a priori given that fact, already known to Thomas, that the angels were created in a state of natural beatitude. Their natural

Fourth try (*Summa Theologiae*): Thomas is trying to crack a hard nut; he replaces the capital sin of pride with a “pride” more closely in tune with Dionysius, but still stumbles on an impossible discordant chord: he is still trying to prove/discover the positive good the bad guys positively sought to attain. “It couldn’t have been a velleity, that doesn’t rhyme.”

Fifth try (*De Substantiis Separatis*): a bitter-sweet success: he demonstrates the failure (impossibility) to find a positive good the devil sought to achieve, because he couldn’t have one. Perhaps too humble to acknowledge the truth of his find or too much in the dark to know where to take this light, the work is chopped off, an uncompleted puzzle.

Sixth Try (*De Malo*): Thomas buys in more deeply to Dionysius’ take on aversion. Velleities beaten back and dispersed, still hover about. A tautological truth had never been articulated: every sin committed against the final cause for any reasons, must – in this precise sense – ultimately fail: the good desired cannot be possibly achieved. The “good” that could be achieved is achieved only through the alchemy of equivocation: “Evil, be thou my good!”¹¹² So great is its power, that velleities (morose thoughts about what might have been), though they cannot be willed in and for themselves, precipitate by instigation not themselves but rather a bitter rebellion against an author’s script which had rendered them impossible. That is to say, the “velleitous” reverie on an impossible dream (“*fnis ad quem*”) can set the stage for the free creature’s tragic, self-chosen demise:

When all is done, divinity is best;
Jerome’s Bible, Faustus, view it well.

“*Stipendium peccati, mors est.*” Ha! *Stipendium &c*:
The reward of sin is death? That’s hard.
Si peccasses, negamus, fallimur, et nulla est in nobis veritas.
If we say that we have no sin
We deceive ourselves, and there is no truth in us.
Why then belike we must sin,
And so consequently die.
Ay, we must die, an everlasting death.

love for themselves was already consummated in an orderly fashion.

¹¹² John MILTON, *Paradise Lost*, book IV, lines 106-111: “So farewell, hope; and with hope farewell, fear; farewell, remorse! all good to me is lost; evil, be thou my good; by thee at least Divided empire with Heaven’s King I hold, by thee, and more than half perhaps will reign; as Man ere long, and this new world, shall know.”

What doctrine call you this: *Che sera, sera*,
What will be, shall be? Divinity, adieu.
These metaphysics of magicians,
And necromantic books are heavenly;
Lines, circles, letters, characters.
Ay, these are those that Faustus most desires.
... A sound magician is a demi-god.
Here, tire my brains to get a Deity.¹¹³

And so the world began with the holy joy of the blessed angels and the *Schadenfreude* of the demons.

VII. Epilogue

The play is over, ... the chips (now cards) lie there uncovered before, but now less like coins or cards; nay, rather they are like so many pieces striving to form a puzzle. And the puzzle is still incomplete. At the hand of Thomas, we now know *how* the devils flung their cards down; we know that they rebelled against the rules of the game and refused to play.

Has Thomas played his cards so close to the breast, that we can not even catch a glimpse of the actual rule, the stumbling block that materially precipitated such a falling out? But first, has God kept it such a complete secret? Following Augustine, Thomas taught that the angels knew about the Incarnation from the beginning of their life in faith, that is during the trial. Thomas himself taught rather emphatically that each and every grace of the angels was Christological in nature. And so, though he never himself formalized these reflections into the affirmation: the trial of the angels was based upon the Mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God in order to recapitulate all things in Christ, we may wonder if in his silent way, Thomas beckons us: "Read my lips"!

To this I add four further cards/pieces of the puzzle, which Thomas has tucked up his sleeve, which indicate how he perceives our union with the angels, particularly in the light of their sacred ministry in complementation to the sacred ministry and hierarchy of the Church. They are texts which may suggest what Thomas had in his heart, but did not openly express on parchment.

¹¹³ Christopher MARLOWE, *The Tragedy of Dr. Faustus*, Act I, Scene 1.

1. Angels, ministers of Christ's Priesthood

Hierarchical power appertains to the angels, inasmuch as they also are between God and man, as Dionysius explains (*Coel. Hier.* IX), ... Now Christ was greater than the angels, not only in His Godhead, but also in His humanity, as having the fullness of grace and glory. Wherefore also He had the hierarchical or priestly power in a higher degree than the angels, so that even the angels were ministers of His priesthood.¹¹⁴

The angelic ministries are a share in the priestly, ministerial power of Christ.

2. Formal principle of the angelic and priestly ministries

[Holy] Orders in the angels is not based on the distinction of nature, except in an accidental way, namely insofar as the distinction of their grace followed upon the distinction in nature. Per se, their orders are based on the distinction of grace, for their orders regard the participation of divine things and their communication in the state of glory, which is according to the measure of grace, as the end and effect of grace as it were.

But [holy] Orders in the militant Church regard the participation and communication of the sacraments, which are causes of grace, which therefore precede grace in a certain respect. Hence, sanctifying grace is not necessary for our orders, but only the power of dispensing the sacraments. And for this reason too [holy] orders [in the church] are not based on the distinction of sanctify grace, but upon the distinction of power.¹¹⁵

The angels' ministerial powers, "orders", are their Light of Glory, a Christological grace they merited in their trial! It is essentially superior to the "holy orders" which men exercise only in virtue of the priestly character – distinct from grace and glory – imprinted on their souls.

3. Mode of the operation of the angelic ministry

Comparing the priestly sacramental ministry to the angelic ministry, Thomas affirms:

What men do in a less perfect manner, i.e. by sensible sacraments, which are proportionate to their nature, angels also do, as ministers of a higher

¹¹⁴ *STh.* III, q. 22, a. 1 ad 1.

¹¹⁵ *IV Super Sent.*, dist. 24, q. 1 a. 1 qc. 1 ad 3. Thomas maintains this doctrine in the *Summa Theologiae* (I q. 108, a. 4c); the expression here, though, is more pregnant.

degree, in a more perfect manner, i.e. invisibly — by cleansing, enlightening, and perfecting.¹¹⁶

Equal effects, by higher ministers in a superior manner! Yes, Thomas used “purification”, “illumination” and “perfection” to discuss and describe the efficacy of the sacraments.

4. The union of the angelical and ecclesial hierarchies in Heaven

According to Dionysius, just as our hierarchy or Church stands to the celestial [hierarchy], even so stood the hierarchy of the Old Law to ours. Consequently, just as the old hierarchy was underway to ours and signified it and, because it signified it, upon the coming of the new the old was assumed into and to its [holy] orders, even so our hierarchy is underway to the celestial [hierarchy] and at once a sign of it; hence, in the [eternal] fatherland there will not be two hierarchies, one of men and another of angels, but one and the same, and mankind shall be distributed among the orders of the angels.¹¹⁷

The Angelic Doctor’s vision of the union of men and angels in the grace of Christ and in the complementarity of ministries far exceeds what is commonly held to be his position. Since the unity he predicates is based essentially on the unifying grace of Christ, there seems to follow from this certain pressing implications also about the material object and formality in the angelic trial, such that the good angels were beatified in the grace of Christ and the reprobate spirits’ quintessential mark is their identity as the antichrist.

By this is the spirit of God known: Every spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God. And every spirit that dissolves Jesus is

¹¹⁶ *STh.* III, q. 64, a.7 ad 1. The priestly ministry exceeds the angels’ in this: in the Sacrifice of the Mass, and in the fact that the angelic ministry does not normally impress a sacramental character upon the souls as do the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Orders.

¹¹⁷ *II Super Sent.*, dist. 9, q. 1 a. 8 ad 4. Cf. *STh.* I, q. 108, a. 1c et 8c, where, corroborating this opinion, he also appeals to Augustine: “Augustine says (*De Civitate Dei* XII, 9), that “there will not be two societies of men and angels, but only one; because the beatitude of all is to cleave to God alone” - “*non erunt duae societates hominum et angelorum, sed una*”. “*Ordo*” is a technical term for St. Thomas and has a threefold, interconnected meaning: 1) the ministerial power of the angels; 2) the several choirs of the angels, precisely as a hierarchical gathering of the angelic ministers; and 3) the designation for the ministry power of the priesthood, hence, the sacrament of Holy Orders.

not of God. And this is Antichrist, of whom you have heard that he cometh: and he is now already in the world. (*1 Jn 4:2-3*)

The fact that a single **r u l e** discerns all spirits, good and bad, tells more than their current good and bad dispositions, it also indicates the ultimate source of these dispositions: a “*Non serviam*” on the one side, and a “*Quis ut Deus*” on the other side: each a response to the mystery of Christ proposed in the very beginning.

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