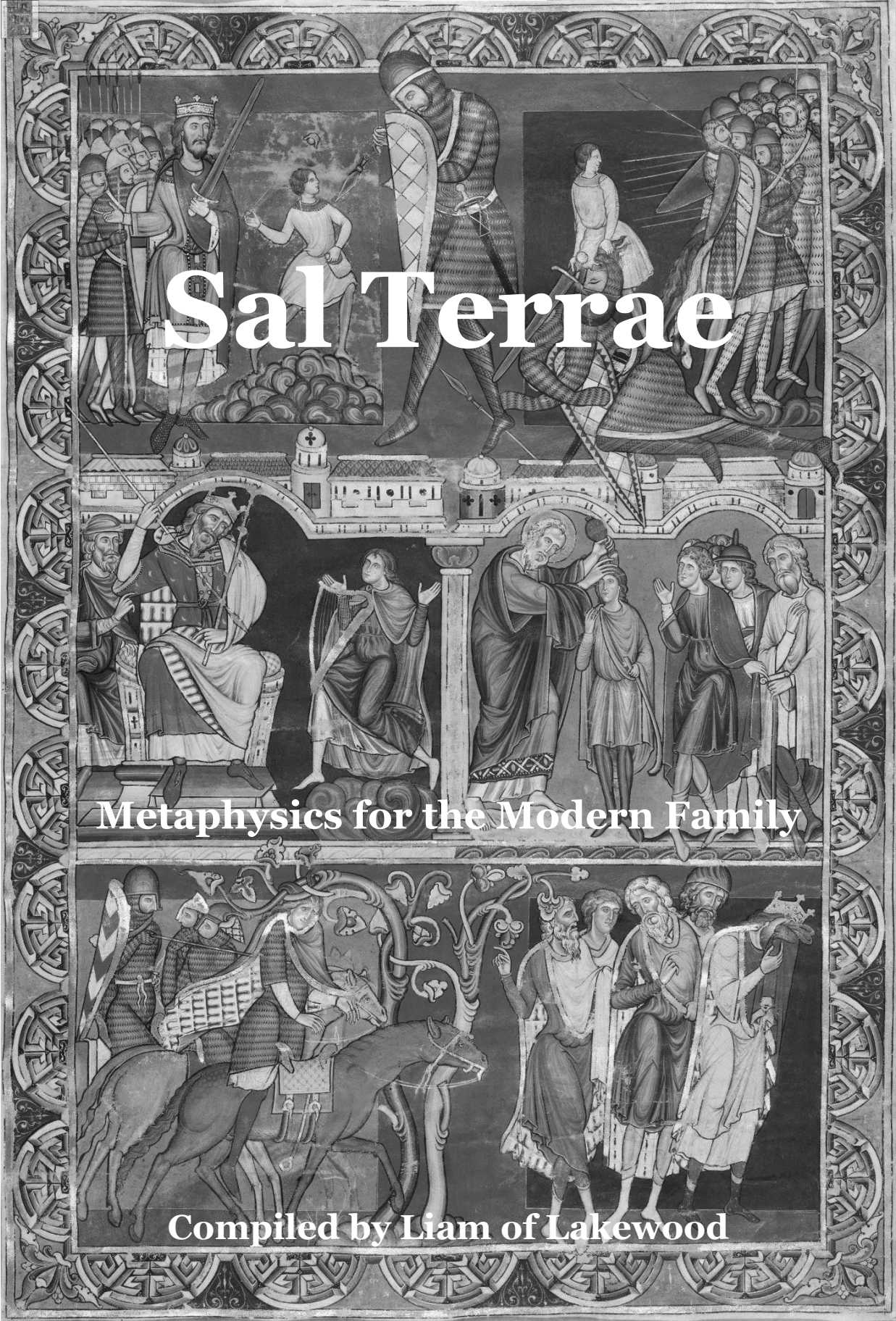




Sal Terrae

Metaphysics for the Modern Family

Compiled by Liam of Lakewood

“Today... man no longer believes he needs justification before God, but rather he is of the opinion that it is God who must justify himself because of all the horrible things in the world and the misery of human beings, all of which ultimately depends on Him.”¹
—Pope Benedict XVI

¹ Pope Benedict XVI, “Faith Is Not an Idea But Life,” interview by Jacques Servais, in *The Christian Doctrine of Justification*, ed. Catholic Culture (Rome: Vatican Press, 2016), p. 4–6.

I. Mission Objective: Sal Terrae

Latin translation: “Salt of the Earth”

Consider: What was salt good for in ancient times?

The battle for Christians today is primarily at home. As institutions have capitulated, we the laity are the last line of defense. The Crusade is in the home. We need to protect our families from the lies of the devil. The wisdom of philosophy will grow us in our faith, put us on a stronger footing of natural reason. Reconnecting with the wisdom of the ancients, we will see every human being as a walking miracle. Philosophy will help us to recognize that God is with us in every moment and that His law is written in nature itself. It will also give us the tools to help other Christians as well as inquiring secular people who have a sincere desire to understand. We can defend Mother Church with reason supported by charity. Precise answers, given with a loving spirit, could be a critical bridge for someone down the road in their journey.

Some Thoughts from the Saints

“Our work is not in persuasion, for Christianity is most powerful when it is hated by the world.”

—St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Romans*, Chapter 3, Section 3

“Philosophy is important not to complete Christian truth but to ward off sophistry.”

—St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata*, Book I, Chapter 20

“Crede ut intelligas.”

—St. Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, Tractate 29.6

“Do not dispute over the truth with someone who does not know the truth; but from the person who is eager to know the truth, do not withhold words from him.”

—St. Isaac the Syrian, *Ascetical Homilies* 5

“Let peoples newly brought to Christ be nourished in a mild manner, as infants are given milk—for instruct them brutally, and the risk then, their minds being weak, is that they will vomit everything up.”—St. Alcuin of York, *Letters* (To Charlemagne), Letter 110

“Faith arises from the will, not from compulsion. You can persuade a man to believe, but you cannot force him. You may even be able to force him to be baptized, but this will not help to instill the faith within him.”—St. Alcuin of York, *Letters* (To Arno of Salzburg), Letter 113

Three awkward consequences of knowing God through the power of human reason.

1. Few men would possess the knowledge of God. Many are lacking in ability, too busy and lazy.
2. Men would only know after a great deal of time. Due to the profundity of this truth.
3. The investigation of human reason has errors in its use. Many would still doubt things that have been proved.²

² St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Book I, Chapter 4.

II. The Foundations of Wisdom

What is Philosophy?

Philosophy is the use of natural reason to ask and answer foundational questions.³

“The words philosopher and philosophy were coined, according to legend, of great antiquity.

- Pythagoras said, ‘No man is wise and all-knowing. At the very most man might call himself a lover of wisdom and seeker after knowledge, a philosopher.’
- Plato speaks in the same tone in the *Phaedrus* where he asks what to call Solon and Homer; Socrates there decides that ‘to call him wise seems to me, O *Phaedrus*, altogether too much, for it is only applicable to God; but a philosopher, one who loves and seeks wisdom, or something of the kind, seems to me suitable.’

Philosophy, then, is not merely the loving search for any kind of wisdom—it is concerned with wisdom as it is possessed by God. Aristotle actually calls metaphysics, the most philosophical part of philosophy, ‘the divine science’, because it deals with a wisdom that is only fully possessed by God.

The relation of theology and philosophy as it emerges in Plato and the whole of Greek philosophical thought comes more or less to this: theology is always prior to philosophy, and not in a merely temporal sense, but with respect to inner origin and their relationship in that origin. Philosophical inquiry starts with a given interpretation of reality and of the world as a whole; and in that sense, philosophy is intimately connected, not to say bound, to theology.”⁴

St. Thomas Aquinas calls Philosophy the Handmaid of Theology. Philosophy serves as a preamble to faith, providing the rational tools to understand and defend Christian Truth.

Why is Philosophy Important?

Philosophy is a method of thought that underpins all disciplines.

“PhD” is a Doctor of Philosophy. There’s a philosophy of mind, of physics and so on.

Most academics scoff at philosophy. Just listen to the way Neil DeGrasse Tyson or Richard Dawkins speak of it (though their discipline of biology or astrophysics can’t be done without presupposing some philosophy). Before a scientist begins his work he must first know the world is orderly, predictable and knowable to the human mind. Only then can the scientist conclude objective truth exists. The root of the word science actually stems from the Latin *scientia*.

Scientia: Certain and evident knowledge of something through its primary causes. This encompassed any organized body of provable knowledge or systematic study. The study of the natural world was originally called natural philosophy. Philosophy as a whole was viewed as the ultimate umbrella for exploring wisdom, existence, and the universe. So philosophy is taken for granted and most think it’s just some opinionated subject like literature, but just as there is pseudoscience, there is pseudophilosophy.

³ Michael Gorman, *A Contemporary Introduction to Thomistic Metaphysics* (Washington, D.C.: CUA Press), p. 5.

⁴ Joseph Pieper, *Leisure* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press), p. 121-130.

What are Metaphysics?

Metaphysics: The study of being as being and the fundamental structures of reality (such as act and potency, causation, and essence).

Act (Actuality): Act is the mode of being in which a thing is fully realized, complete, or operational. It is reality as opposed to mere possibility. Act is what determines, limits, and defines a thing right now. It is the perfection of a being. For example, a cold cup of coffee is actually cold.

Potency (Potentiality): Potency is a real, intrinsic capacity or receptivity in a thing to undergo change or receive a new mode of being. Potency is not sheer nothingness. That same cold coffee is potentially hot because it has the capacity to be heated. Potency is a real feature of the coffee, but it is a hidden or latent feature awaiting realization.

Syllogism: A deductive argument in which two premises are arranged so that, if the premises are true, a conclusion necessarily follows from them.

III.A. Bioethics

A sound metaphysics of the human person (the being of a human person as composed of form and matter) is required to address modern bioethical issues.

What is an Abortion?

The intentional killing of an innocent human organism in the womb.

What is Murder?

The direct, intentional, and unjust killing of an innocent human person.

What is a Person?

A person is an individual subsisting being possessing a rational nature. Human beings have a capacity for rational thought. They are ordered towards it, regardless of mental deficiencies.

What is an Organism?

An organism is a substantial unity possessed of a single nature, whose parts are intrinsically ordered from within by a substantial form to cooperate for the realization and perfection of that whole organism. An organism needs time, nutrition, a proper environment, and has the capacity to develop into a mature member of a species.

Removing an ectopic pregnancy is the excision of a damaged organ to save the mother's life, which is not murder because the tragic death of the embryo is an unintended side effect rather than the chosen means to that end.

IVF (in vitro fertilization) is eugenics and possibly another silent genocide being committed in a petri dish.

Surrogacy is human trafficking.

Now imagine some possible objections.

III.B. Sexual Morality and Transgenderism

What Is Marriage for?

Marriage unites a man and a woman with each other, and any children born from the union.

The Catholic Church defines three ends to marriage: the procreation and education of children, the mutual good of man and wife, the remission of concupiscence.

Sex is for the expression of marital love.

Reproduction is ultimately the purpose of sex.

Is Gender Tied to Sex?

Gender roles are the psychological and social outgrowths of these biological functions. The physiology and psychology of males exist for the sake of being fathers, and for females, mothers. Making up genders as new arbitrary terms is subjective social construction, rather than divinely ordained, objective nature.

What Is a Man, a Woman?

Do not make a common right-wing mistake of reducing a person to parts (e.g. 'a woman is a person with a uterus') rather than using a metaphysical basis.

A woman is a human who is naturally ordered towards gestation and ovum production.

A man is a human who is ordered towards impregnation.

Can One Have a Misgendered Brain?

The post hoc fallacy occurs when someone assumes that because event B (an adult brain pattern) follows event A (being born male or female), then A must be the cause of B.

Correlation vs. Causation: Just because a brain characteristic correlates with a certain sex does not mean sex is the cause.

Ignoring Neuroplasticity: The brain is highly plastic, meaning it changes in response to experiences, social roles, and stereotypes throughout a person's life.

Narrative-Driven Interpretations: These scientists often work backward from existing gender stereotypes to explain their data.

The Fallacy of Reductionism: Trying to explain gender or identity solely through brain scans is a category error. The mind and soul aren't just brain functions, so looking for gender in a synapse is like looking for the plot of a novel by analyzing the chemistry of the ink. The parts are only intelligible in light of the whole human being.

Final Causality (Teleology): Organs have ends or purposes. Modern brain science often ignores the telos (purpose) of the human person as a whole, focusing instead on efficient causes (like hormones or neural pathways) while missing the bigger picture of human nature. Since mankind is composed of distinct male and female primary and secondary sexual characteristics, there is a clear purpose and end to their genitals.

Formal Cause: A human is a composite of body and soul. The form or structure that makes up a human person is intrinsically tied to biological sex, regardless of what a plastic, changing brain looks like at any given moment.

What if Someone Is Born with Abnormal Chromosomes? What if Someone Is Born with both Male and Female Primary Sex Characteristics?

Even if physical characteristics are ambiguous, (following Thomistic principles) the individual is still aimed at being one of the two sexes.

Ambiguous sex characteristics are treated as a privation. There is a real lack of natural material making up the human body.

These cases are biological accidents and do not constitute a metaphysical problem; rather, it is an epistemological (knowledge) problem.

People with gender dysphoria should be treated similar to how we treat anorexic or obese people—with love and truth. Not by lying to them!

“The virtuous man will sometimes not shrink from bringing sorrow to those among whom he lives.”⁵—St. Thomas Aquinas

So How Did We Stumble into Such Confusion Today?

G.W.F. Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* is a foundational source for transgender ideology primarily because it introduces a subject-centered metaphysics that prioritizes human consciousness and historical progress over fixed biological natures. Hegel was followed by existential thinkers who put the human will as the creator of its own essence, rather than a recipient of a natural order.

Bad Philosophy leads to bad psychology (and morality)!

Homosexual and heterosexual became terms in the 1860s, giving credence to what Dante Alighieri would call a crime against nature and get you sent to the Seventh Circle of Hell.

So, now human beings, after rejecting our human nature, are reducing our identities to a mere inclination. Inclination: An urge or tendency.

Should we start labeling people Alcoholics or Drug Addicts?

No, we shouldn't reduce people to an inclination.

People may struggle with same-sexual attraction, but it doesn't constitute their human nature.

“Apparently, a delusion does not matter as long as it is a materialistic delusion. Instinctively most of us feel that, as a practical matter, even the contrary is true. I certainly would much rather share my apartments with a gentleman who thought he was God than with a gentleman who thought he was a grasshopper.”⁶—G.K. Chesterton

⁵ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Second Part of the Second Part, Question 114, Article 1, Reply to Objection 3.

⁶ G.K. Chesterton, *Heretics* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1905), p. 18.

III.C. Combating Scientism and Providing a Rational Basis against Atheism/Agnosticism

What Is Scientism?

Scientism: The dogmatic error that only the empirical, mathematical methods of the material sciences provide genuine knowledge, while philosophy, metaphysics, and logic are mere opinion or emotion.

A circular argument: The material sciences cannot prove logic and mathematical truths. Material science presupposes logic and math. So to prove logic and math with material science would be arguing in a circle.

Metaphysical truths: There are other minds besides my own. The external world is real. The past was not created five minutes ago without an appearance of age.

Ethical beliefs: The intellectual grasp of objective, factual truths regarding human nature and its built-in natural ends. Material science cannot show whether or not a scientist experimenting on a live person is a good or evil action.

Aesthetic judgements: The beautiful, like the good, cannot be deduced by the scientific method alone.

Material science itself cannot be justified by the scientific method. It is permeated with unprovable assumptions if held only to its own standard.⁷

IV. Brief Historical & Methodological Context

Aristotle “The Philosopher”

- Aristotle, born 384 years before Christ in Stagira, Greece.
- Studied under Plato for about twenty years before starting his own school. He would give his lectures while walking through the grove with his students.
- We only have about one third of his writings. These are mostly lecture notes, not designed to be published.
- He tutored a very famous future leader of Greece, Alexander the Great, when Alexander was thirteen years old. Alexander collected specimens from his campaign for Aristotle to study.
- Eventually Aristotle was charged with impiety in Athens and decided to flee. Not allowing the Athenians to “sin twice against philosophy.”
- “Aristotle got 70% of philosophy 70% right.”⁸

⁷ William Lane Craig, *The Craig/Atkins Debate*: “What Is the Evidence for/against the Existence of God?” Atlanta GA, April 3, 1998.

⁸ Michael Gorman, *A Contemporary Introduction to Thomistic Metaphysics* (Washington, D.C.: CUA Press), p. 3.

St. Thomas Aquinas “The Angelic Doctor”

- Synthesized Greek reason with Christian revelation.
- Thomas the Dumb Ox, as his classmates referred to him, because of his height and quiet personality.
- He had a fear of thunderstorms, probably to his infant sister being killed by a lightning strike in the same room as him.
- Thomas's disapproving family locked him in a family castle for nearly a year when he decided to join the Dominicans. His brothers sent a prostitute in his cell, who he notoriously drove out with a burning log from the fireplace.
- During dinner with King Louis IX, St Thomas slammed the table and burst out, “That settles the argument against the Manicheans!”
- Aquinas corrected some of Aristotle’s teachings, for example, Aristotle had taught that:
 1. The universe had no beginning but was eternal. Not created, because no thing could come out of nothing.
 2. A perfect God would only contemplate himself, not what is imperfect (human beings).

Scholasticism: A method of learning more than a philosophy or a theology, since it places a strong emphasis on dialectical reasoning to extend knowledge by inference and to resolve contradictions. Endeavoring to harmonize Aristotle's metaphysics and Latin Catholic theology, monastic schools of scholasticism became the basis of the earliest European medieval universities and thus became the bedrock for the development of modern science and philosophy in the Western world.

Scholasticism was a movement predominant in European education from 1100-1500.⁹

The Analytic Aristotelian-Thomistic (A-T) Tradition: A philosophical methodology, championed by thinkers like Edward Feser, who use modern logic to defend classical scholasticism.

V. The Immateriality of the Soul

How Could We Know the Human Soul Exists with Reason Alone?

Nutritive Soul (Bacteria/Plant): Nutrition, Growth, and Reproduction.

Animal Soul: Same as Nutritive plus, Sensation, Movement, Desire/Appetite.

Human Soul: Same as Animal plus, Rationality.

What Is Human Reasoning?

Concept: A simple apprehension (like man).

Proposition: A judgement (like all men are mortal).

Argument: Reasoning, (like Proposition+Proposition=Conclusion).

⁹ Gracia, Jorge JE, and Timothy B. Noone, eds. *A Companion to Philosophy in the Middle Ages*. John Wiley & Sons, 2008, p. 55–64.

Syllogism for the Immateriality of the Intellect

By James F. Ross.¹⁰

- 1.** Some human formal thought processes are completely determinate in their conceptual content (e.g., pure mathematics or the absolute Law of Non-Contradiction).
- 2.** No purely material structure or process can ever be inherently determinate, because matter is always fundamentally open to multiple algorithmic interpretations (indeterminate).
- C.** Therefore, those determinate human formal thought processes cannot be purely material structures or processes.

Common Objections

Objection: The mind is the brain, because drugs/trauma change the mind.

Rebuttal: The brain is the necessary instrument for the intellect to function in this life, but not its seat. The intellect cannot be pinpointed materially. If the hardware of the brain is damaged, the software is inhibited. The intellect is intrinsically immaterial but extrinsically dependent on the brain to communicate within the natural order.

O: Thoughts are material.

R: Physical objects possess spatial dimensions like length, weight, and location. If a thought were purely material, its meaning would have physical coordinates. While a scientist can measure the physical carrier of a thought, such as a three-inch electrical pathway in the prefrontal cortex, but they cannot measure the content itself. You cannot ask how many inches long the concept of “justice” is, or whether your belief in gravity sits to the left or right of your desire for coffee. Brain activity has a physical location, but the meaning of a thought does not. Because meaning lacks spatial properties, thoughts cannot be reduced to purely material objects.

O: Thoughts are just patterns of neurons firing.

R: A neural pattern has voltage, chemical release, and a location.

A neural pattern does not have meaning.

Material patterns are indeterminate. A pattern is to be interpreted.

This is because the act of thinking is immaterial, coupled with a material process of the brain’s neurons. If the thought is the meaning of words on a page, the neurons are simply ink.

O: I can pinpoint a specific action like the neurons that fire to flex a tendon.

R: This is called the homunculus fallacy. A flexing of a tendon or bile secretion does not make for the entire human soul. There is no conflict since physical functions need not be immaterial.

O: The intellect is just the simultaneous firing of the entire brain.

R: Adding up material processes never gets you to an immaterial process. It’s like saying that if you pile up enough maps of the United States, the pile will eventually become the United States.

¹⁰ James F. Ross, *Thought and World: The Hidden Necessities* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), 116–117.

O: There is some unified structure in the brain that houses the intellect.

R: If the thought exists in the structure, which part of the structure is thinking the whole thought? Even a unified structure is still a physical fact. Physical facts are always indeterminate (they could represent many different things). Only an immaterial power can fix a concept (like addition vs. quaddition) with absolute, 100% determinacy.

O: The mind emerges from the brain.

R: If the mind emerges from the brain, it is either material (in which case it's still indeterminate and divisible) or it is immaterial. If the materialist admits the mind is a new, immaterial thing that emerged, they have just conceded that materialism is false.

O: Animals have intellects, monkeys know what a banana is. Whales name each other.

R: A monkey knows a banana because it has a phantasm (a sensory image) of its color, shape, and smell associated with the pleasure of eating it. This is a material process of the brain's estimative power, which tracks particular physical objects in a specific environment. While they have memory, they do not grasp the universal essence of banananness.

A whale's "name" is a highly complex sensory signal used to trigger a specific behavioral response. Indexical: it points to a specific physical individual in a specific location. Human names and words are symbols that represent abstract concepts. We are intentionally referring to a reality that exists independently of the current sensory environment. The infinite, abstract range of the human intellect is not reached by other animals.

O: Hume's Bundle Theory

There is no self, only a bundle of passing perceptions.¹¹

R: Hume describes a theatre where perceptions pass and repass. For this analogy to work, there must be a screen or a spectator. A bundle of loose images cannot compare themselves to one another. If "Self A" at minute five vanishes, it cannot pass information to "Self B" at minute six. A fictional entity cannot possess habits, nor can a non-existent past self construct a memory for a present self. There must be a persistent underlying substance—a substantial form—that bridges the gap across time. If the self is a fiction created by memory and habit, then the theorist claiming it is a fiction is himself a fiction. A fiction cannot formulate arguments, gather evidence, or engage in rational debate. By claiming "I look inside and find no self," the Humean theorist implicitly affirms the very continuous, rational ego they are trying to deny.

O: The mind is just phantasms (sensory images) in memory.

R: This objection takes ideas or concepts as fainter copies of things we have literally perceived or felt. René Descartes has pointed out that while your concept of a chiliagon (a one-thousand-sided polygon) is different from your concept of a myriagon (a ten-thousand-sided polygon), your mental images or phantasms of these are indistinguishable. This proves concepts are not just mental images.¹²

¹¹ See David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2009), Book 1, Part 4, section 6, SBN 251.

¹² René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, AT VII 72–73 (CSM 2:50–51).

O: Cartesian Dualism

René Descartes views the mind as an unextended thinking thing (*res cogitans*) and the body as a mechanical extended thing (*res extensa*). Because he treats them as two completely separate substances, he creates a severe mind-body interaction puzzle.¹³

R: If the mind were a separate substance piloting the body, our experience would be like a telekinetic puppet show where we merely read brain data like a dial and pull bodily strings. Instead, our deep immersion in the flesh—evident through the holistic experience of pain—proves a unified organism. Cartesianism contradicts true biology: organs like the heart cannot even be defined without reference to the whole living human they naturally sustain. Furthermore, while the A-T intellect is immaterial, it remains extrinsically dependent on the physical brain to communicate within the natural order.

O: Daniel Dennett's Eliminativism

Beliefs, meanings, and the self don't actually exist; they are just useful fictions or user-illusions.¹⁴

R: If Eliminativism is true, then Dennett does not actually believe Eliminativism is true, nor does his book mean anything. To argue for the theory, he must use intentionality (aboutness) and logical inference. If those are illusions, his argument is not a rational proof, but mere physical noise. The act of denying the mind performatively relies on the very intellect being denied. Furthermore, a “user-illusion” logically requires a unified subject to experience the illusion, rendering the entire claim completely self-refuting.

¹³ René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 2:54 (AT VII 78).

¹⁴ Daniel C. Dennett, *From Bacteria to Bach and Back: The Evolution of Minds* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2017), p. 340–344.

VI. The Existence of God: The First Way (Argument from Motion)

How Could We Know God Exists with Reason Alone?

Why did God make it so hard to find Him?

Two internal inclinations inscribed in the soul of the human person are the desire for truth and the desire for happiness. St. Thomas argues that they lead us forward, ultimately, toward the natural desire to see God and the natural desire to possess the perfect good, Who is God Himself.

“Since the ultimate beatitude of man consists in the use of his highest power, which is the operation of the mind. If we suppose that the created intellect can never see God, it would either never attain to beatitude or its beatitude would consist in something else besides God. This opinion is against reason, for there resides in every man a natural desire to know the cause of any effect in which he sees, and thus arises wonder in man. But if the intellect of the rational creature could not reach so far as to the first cause of things, this natural desire would remain vain, but no natural desire is in vain.”¹⁵—St. Thomas Aquinas

Fish don't desire to fly. Birds desire to fly and attain it. How would our nature desire something that we can't possibly have? That desire must be fulfilled at some time. It must be possible to know God (the First Cause) in the next life.

When speaking of God, we are doing it analogously.

“From effects not proportionate to the cause, no perfect knowledge of the cause can be obtained. But from every effect the existence of its cause can be clearly demonstrated.”¹⁶

—St. Thomas Aquinas

So we can demonstrate the existence of God from His effects, even though from them we cannot know God as He is in His Essence.

What is Change? Why is this a problem for Aristotle?

What was his answer to Parmenides and Heraclitus?

What is modal collapse? Why is it a problem?

Change defined by Aristotle is an actualization of a potential.

Heraclitus stated, “No man ever steps in the same river twice,” emphasizing that reality is a continuous process of becoming rather than a static substance.

Parmenides pioneered the principle that out of nothing, nothing comes (*Ex nihilo nihilo fit*).

Modal collapse occurs when modal distinctions (the differences between what is necessary, possible, and actual) disappear.

Parmenides proposed all change to be an illusion, collapsing all potentiality, or what he called “non-being,” into actuality. Heraclitus violates the law of non-contradiction by claiming that everything is in a constant state of flux and opposites are the same. This leads to a collapse where everything is equally contingent and nothing has a necessary, stable essence.

¹⁵ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, First Part, Question 12, Article 1.

¹⁶ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, First Part, Question 2, Article 2.

Syllogism for Aquinas's First Way

Modern Rendition by Edward Feser.¹⁷

- 1.** Change is a real, mind-independent feature of the physical universe.
 - 2.** Change is precisely defined as the reduction of a thing's potentiality to a state of actuality (e.g., cold water possessing the potential to become hot water).
 - 3.** No potential can actualize itself, because a potential does not yet exist physically; therefore, any potential being actualized requires something already actual to actualize it (the Principle of Causality).
 - 4.** The continuous change and operation of any composite substance at any given moment presuppose a concurrent, simultaneous hierarchy of active actualizers (an essentially ordered/hierarchical causal series).
 - 5.** A hierarchical causal series cannot regress infinitely, because the secondary members have no causal power of their own and merely transmit power; an infinite regress of instrumental causes without a source is a logical absurdity (like a mirror reflecting a light that does not exist).
 - 6.** Therefore, there must exist an absolutely Primary Actualizer that initiates and sustains the causal series without being actualized by anything else.
- C.** This Primary Actualizer must be Pure Actuality (Actus Purus), completely devoid of any passive potency, meaning it is necessarily unchanging, atemporal, immaterial, and the continuous Sustainer of all being.

One

To differentiate two things, they must have unactualized potentials. We see that the Primary Actualizer cannot have any potentiality. Thus, there can only be one Primary Mover. Multiple gods would imply a difference. One would have something missing or one would be perfect while the others are not. This is why the Trinity is consubstantial, of the same God.

Changeless

Pure Act has no potency; thus, it does not change. Change implies a cause, but God is Pure Actuality, so He does not change.

Outside of Time

Existence inside time demands changeability. Pure Act does not change; thus, God exists outside of time.

Immaterial

Materiality implies changeability. But God cannot change, thus God is immaterial.

Perfect

Whenever we say something is imperfect we mean that some unactualized potential remains in a thing. But the first cause has no potency; thus, God is perfect.

¹⁷ Edward Feser, *Five Proofs of the Existence of God* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2017), p. 35–41.

All-Good

Grant that evil or badness is just a privation (a lack of good). All evil and bad things are defective in some sense, falling short of what is good. A liar's speech is deficient in the truth. But God is perfect and does not lack; thus, He is all-good.

All-Powerful

To have power is to be able to change things or actualize potentials. The more things you are able to change, the more power you have. All causal changes end with the first, which is God. Thus, God is the ultimate cause of all effects. Thus, He is all-powerful.

Rational

What is in an effect is in the cause in some way. Example: What is in fire is the ability to cause fire-like friction or fire itself. Since God is the ultimate cause to all things, all things must exist within Him abstractly. Material things cannot exist within an immaterial being completely. But abstracts (like math or shapes) can only exist in the mind. So God knows all His creation and has a rational mind.

All-Knowing

Since what is in all effects exists in the mind of God, then there is nothing in the universe that can exist outside the range of that mind. But to say that nothing can exist outside a range of a mind is just to say that the mind is all-knowing. Thus, God is all-knowing.

Common Objections

Objection: If everything has a cause, then God must have a cause or creator as well.

Rebuttal: This is a misunderstanding of the premise. Aquinas does not say "Everything has a cause." He says that whatever is in motion (changing from potentiality to actuality) is moved by another. God, by definition in this argument, is Pure Actuality with no potentiality to be actualized. Since there is no potential in God to become anything else, He cannot be moved or changed, and therefore requires no mover.

O: If the universe has always existed, there is no need for a First Mover to start the chain.

R: The First Way is not about a beginning in time (like the Kalam argument). It concerns an essentially ordered series (a hierarchical series) where the power of the effect depends on the cause right now. Even if the universe had no beginning, it would still require a First Mover to sustain its existence and any change occurring within it at this very moment. Aquinas himself famously held that reason alone cannot prove the universe had a temporal beginning.

O: A simple divine being itself cannot change, but it must change if it goes from not being the creator to being the creator. The act of creation somehow changes God, which is in contradiction with His unchanging nature.

R: The change is in the effect, not the cause. If a tree falls, I go from "not being taller than the tree" to "being taller than it." The relation changed, but I did not change. This is called a Cambridge change. God's act of creation is identical to His eternal essence. From our perspective it looks like a new event, but from God's point of view it is a single, timeless act. There may be an assumption

being made here about God creating in time, but we have deduced that the eternal, Pure Actualizer is outside of time.

Objection: An all-good, all-powerful God would not allow evil to exist. Since evil exists, God does not (Problem of Evil).

Rebuttal:

R1: Metaphysical Nature of Evil: Evil is not a thing but a privation; an absence of a good that ought to be there (like blindness is the absence of sight).

R2: Divine Agency: God is not a moral agent in the same way humans are; He has no obligations to His creation that He could fail to meet.

R3: Greater Good: God allows certain natural evils (like decay) because they are necessary for the functioning of a material ecosystem where things must change and pass away for others to exist.

R4: This objection doesn't attempt to address a first actualizer.

O: If God existed and loved us, He would make His existence obvious to everyone so we could have a relationship with Him. (Divine Hiddenness).

R: This assumes God's primary goal must be to make His existence obvious in a modern epistemic sense. From a Thomistic view, the evidence for God is metaphysically certain through demonstrations like the Five Ways, but humans may fail to see it due to intellectual or moral obstacles. Furthermore, God may allow hiddenness to bring about a greater good, such as the preservation of human freedom or the development of specific virtues. This argument is, once again, a personal whim that holds no philosophical weight against a necessary, Pure Actualizer.

O: David Hume argued we cannot reason from observed effects to an unobserved cause,¹⁸ and that the First Mover might simply be the universe itself.¹⁹

R: Hume's skepticism fails because his denial of necessary causal connections implicitly relies on a stable matrix of causal reasoning to construct the skeptical argument itself. Furthermore, the universe cannot be the First Mover. The universe is merely a collection of changing parts shifting from potency to act. It cannot ground its own existence and logically requires an external foundation that is entirely devoid of potency, which is Pure Actuality.

O: Modern mathematics shows that infinite series (like the set of negative integers) are coherent, so an infinite regress of movers is possible.

R: This is self-refuting because it confuses a mathematical series with a metaphysical/causal one. In a per se (essential) series, the lower members have no power of their own. If you have an infinite number of mirrors reflecting light but no actual light source, you will never get a reflection. Denying the first member means denying the power that makes the entire infinite chain possible in the first place. Existence needs a grounding in Pure Act. Accepting infinite regress is like saying "if we just have a bunch of gears turning, we don't need a power source to do the turning, as long as the gears stack infinitely."

¹⁸ David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Tom L. Beauchamp (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 11.12–15 (p. 190).

¹⁹ David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, ed. Richard H. Popkin, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1998), p. 49–50, 56.

Objection: Existential Inertia

Existential Inertia Thesis (EIT) suggests that once a thing exists, it naturally persists on its own without needing continuous divine sustenance. If a chair is created, it stays a chair. It doesn't need God to pump existence into it every microsecond; it just has the property of remaining.²⁰ Just as Newtonian objects stay in motion, a chair—or the fundamental physical building blocks of the universe (as Graham Oppy argues)—simply retains the property of remaining.

Rebuttal:

R1: Since a cat's essence doesn't include existence (you can imagine a cat without it actually existing), something outside the cat must be joining its essence to existence at every moment. If that joiner stopped working, the cat wouldn't just sit there; it would vanish. Existence isn't a battery that gets charged once; it's more like the music coming from a speaker—if the player stops, the music doesn't persist by inertia.

R2: Objects are composite. A molecule depends on atoms; atoms depend on subatomic particles; those depend on quantum fields. To say a composite thing has “inertia” is to ignore that its existence is being lent to it by its parts right now.

R3: EIT violates the Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR). If a thing's existence is not part of its essence, there must be a reason why it exists now rather than not existing. To say it exists “Just because it did a second ago” isn't a metaphysical explanation of its cause of being, it's just describing a sequence.

R4: Self-Retorsion: To even propose EIT, you have to use your mind to actualize a series of thoughts. If your thoughts had inertia, you'd be stuck on the first syllable of your objection forever. The fact that you can move from one thought to the next shows that your mind is constantly transitioning from potentiality to actuality, which requires an external actualizer, the very thing EIT tries to deny.

O: Kant argues that we only know things as they appear to us (phenomena), not as they are in themselves (noumena).²¹

R: Is the statement “we only know appearances” a statement about reality (a thing-in-itself)? If Kant is right, he can't know that his theory is objectively true of the human mind; he only knows it appears that way to him. To state the limit of human knowledge, you have to be able to see both sides of the limit. By claiming to know the boundary of the mind, the critic proves their intellect has already crossed it. This was Kant's attempt to save empirical science from Hume, while keeping a largely skeptical framework.

²⁰ Joseph C. Schmid and Daniel J. Linford, *Existential Inertia and Classical Theistic Proofs* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2022), p. 105–129.

²¹ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. and trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), B294–315 (p. 354–365).

O: Richard Dawkins

In *The God Delusion*, Dawkins argues that the First Way arbitrarily conjures up a terminator to an infinite regress and that there is no reason this terminator (like a Big Bang singularity) should have divine attributes like omniscience.²²

R: Dawkins attacks a straw man. Aquinas does not argue for a beginning in time but for a First Mover that sustains the world's existence at every moment. Aquinas spends hundreds of subsequent pages deriving divine attributes from the nature of Pure Actuality.

O: Christopher Hitchens rarely engaged with the formal metaphysics of the Five Ways, focusing instead on the “immoral” nature of religion or historical errors. In debates, he often used a version of the “who designed the designer?” or the Occam's Razor argument, suggesting that adding a complex God adds more mystery than it solves.

R: Edward Feser criticizes Hitchens for historical oversimplification and for begging the question by presupposing naturalism (only natural laws and forces operate in the world) to disprove theism. He notes that Hitchens's verbal rhetoric lacked philosophical rigor.

O: Some claim that quantum mechanics proves that some events (like radioactive decay) are uncaused, thereby refuting the Principle of Causality.

R: Quantum mechanics actually vindicates Aristotelian metaphysics by reintroducing the middle ground between being and non-being; potency. A particle in a superposition of states is not nowhere or nothing; it is in a state of real, physical potency that is actualized upon measurement. Radioactive decay is an actualization of a built-in potentiality, not a violation of causality.

Objection: Minkowski's block universe framework, which underpins Einstein's theory of relativity (and the B-theory of time), implies that the past, present, and future are equally real and that change is merely a subjective illusion.²³

Rebuttal:

R1: Relativity is a mathematical model used to predict observations across different frames of reference. While it spatializes time for calculation purposes, this is a methodological choice, not a metaphysical discovery that change doesn't exist. While coordinate systems are relative, the light-cone structure of spacetime provides an objective causal order. Relativity still requires a background of real causal powers to function. If change were an illusion, even the experience of the illusion would require a transition from “not having the experience” to “having the experience.” This is a change (actualization of a potential), which relativity cannot explain away without a self-contradiction.

R2: Even if the universe is a static block, its existence at any coordinate is still a composite of act and potency (essence and existence).

The block universe requires a ground of existence to actualize the entire structure.

R3: Experience of change in the mind must still be accounted for; if change is “real in the mind,” it still requires an actualizer.

²² Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006), p. 77–78.

²³ Hermann Minkowski, “Space and Time,” in *The Principle of Relativity*, trans. W. Perrett and G. B. Jeffery (New York: Dover Publications, 1952), p. 75–91.

O: Wave Function Monism (Alyssa Ney/North)

Reality is just a single, high-dimensional wave function; the objects we see moving are just patterns in this one thing. This challenges the Aristotelian view of distinct substances moving one another.²⁴

R: Patterns in a wave function still require formal and efficient causes. If the wave function has the potential to manifest as a table or a chair, that potential still needs to be actualized. If our senses are totally wrong about the existence of distinct objects, we have no reason to trust the scientific experiments that led to Wave Function Monism in the first place.

O: Priority Monism (Jonathan Schaffer)

The whole universe is ontologically prior to its parts. Therefore, there is no series of parts moving each other;²⁵ there is just the one whole.²⁶

R: Even the one whole universe is a composite of parts or properties. In Thomism, any composite requires an external cause to explain why its parts are unified. The universe as a whole is still contingent. It doesn't have to exist. Therefore, its act of existing must be granted by something that is purely actual and not a composite at all.

O: Oppy Singularity (The Quantum Vacuum or First State)

The universe began from a simple quantum state or singularity that exists by brute fact, requiring no further actualization.²⁷

R: A physical law or singularity is not Pure Act. It is a thing with specific properties (potencies) that must be actualized to produce effects. If we allow brute facts for the start of the universe, we destroy the basis of material science, which assumes everything has an explanation. This objection is also denying the Principle of Sufficient Reason.

O: Structural Realism

Only mathematical structures and relations are real; there is no underlying substance or potency.²⁸

R: A mathematical structure is an abstraction. For a structure to exist physically, it must be the structure of something. That something involves a distinction between the structure (form) and the existence of the thing (act).

²⁴ Alyssa Ney, *The World in the Wave Function: A Metaphysics for Quantum Physics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), p. 197–250.

²⁵ Jonathan Schaffer, "The Action of the Whole," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* 87, no. 1 (June 2013): p. 67–87, doi.org.

²⁶ Jonathan Schaffer, "Monism: The Priority of the Whole," *The Philosophical Review* 119, no. 1 (January 2010): p. 31–76, <https://doi.org/10.1215/00318108-2009-025>.

²⁷ Graham Oppy, *Arguing about Gods* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 137–142.

²⁸ James Ladyman and Don Ross, *Every Thing Must Go: Metaphysics Naturalized* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 130–145.

O: Dynamic Physical Principles (Newton)

Newton's First Law (Inertia) says objects keep moving on their own. Therefore, they don't need a mover to stay in motion.²⁹

R: Inertia describes a state of motion. Aquinas's argument is about the transition from potentiality to actuality. An object does not exist on its own. The First Way is about the concurrent sustaining of the object's existence and its power to move at every moment.

"One might perhaps call it an objective tendency or possibility, a *potentia* in the sense of Aristotelian philosophy. In fact I believe that the language actually used by physicists when they speak about atomic events produces in their minds similar notions as the concept *potentia*. So the physicists have gradually become accustomed to considering the electron orbits not as reality, but as a kind of *potentia*."³⁰—Renowned Quantum Physicist, Dr. Werner Heisenberg

VII. The Fifth Way (Teleology)

Unintelligent things act toward a goal (like a heart pumping blood). This teleology implies an underlying intelligence directing them.

Syllogism for Aquinas's Fifth Way

Modern Rendition by Edward Feser.³¹

1. Unintelligent physical entities operate with regular, non-random directionality, consistently tending toward specific, reproducible effects or ranges of effects (Intrinsic Teleology).
 2. For a physical entity to be regularly directed toward a future effect that does not yet physically exist, that future effect must somehow be present to, or operative within, the entity right now to determine its causal trajectory (Final Causality).
 3. A future, non-existent effect cannot be present to or determine a physical entity right now unless that effect exists intentionally—meaning it exists as a conceptual blueprint or representation.
 4. An intentional blueprint or representation can only exist within, and be sustained by, an actual Intellect.
 5. Because natural objects and their immediate ordering principles are contingent and changing, they cannot be the self-sustaining source of their own teleological laws; therefore, the ultimate ordering principle must be a transcendent Intellect outside the physical universe.
- C.** Therefore, there must exist a transcendent, supreme, and uncaused Intellect that directs natural entities toward their ends, which men call God.

²⁹ Isaac Newton, *The Principia: Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy*, trans. I. Bernard Cohen and Anne Whitman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), p. 416.

³⁰ Werner Heisenberg, *Physics and Philosophy* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), p. 154-155, p. 15, 27, 134.

³¹ Edward Feser, "Natural Theology," in *Aquinas: A Beginner's Guide* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2009), Chapter 3, p. 62-129.

Common Objections

Objection: We don't need an intelligent designer.

Rebuttal: Matter can only explain how a process happens. Our premise is deducing for the why. The ordering of a goal between the present and the non-existent future requires a mind to hold the goal in existence.

O: Paley's Watchmaker. For Paley, organisms are just biological machines. He looks for gaps where biology can't explain something (like the irreducible complexity of a flagellum) and sticks God in the hole. Paley's God is an architect who could leave the building once it's finished.³²

R: Aquinas and Paley's watchmaker are two different arguments.

Paley's intelligent design falls to the God of the Gaps fallacy.

Aquinas (Fifth Way): A living thing is an organism with an intrinsic nature. An acorn doesn't need to be pushed by a tiny engineer to become an oak; it has a built-in tendency to do so. Aquinas's God is like a singer, if he stops singing, the song (the universe) ceases to exist.³³

O: We can explain teleology through chance and material cause alone.

R: Organic life displays regularity; the heart always (or nearly always) pumps blood, and acorns always tend toward becoming oaks. If a process reliably produces a specific result, that result is not lucky, it is a built-in end.

O: The Fallacy of Composition

Just because parts of the universe have ends, it doesn't mean the universe as a whole has an end.

R: The Fifth Way doesn't require the whole universe to have one giant goal. It starts with the fact that any single instance of regular causality (like a phosphorus atom reacting with oxygen) displays finality. If even one thing is directed toward an end but lacks an intellect, it must be directed by another. The composition of the universe is irrelevant to the logic of the syllogism.

O: Evolution can explain teleology without an intelligent designer.

R: Natural Selection cannot explain the origin of teleology because it presupposes it. Natural selection requires reproduction to work (it selects from a population that is already reproducing). Reproduction is itself an intensely teleological process.

O: DNA is the designer of nature.

R: DNA doesn't solve the problem; it just moves it back a step. The physical DNA molecules (cytosine, guanine, etc.) are like ink and paper. The teleological orientation and structural development directed by DNA are not reducible to the bare material properties of the chemicals themselves. A collection of atoms could be a rock, a puddle, or a strand of DNA. Because matter can be many things, it cannot direct itself toward one specific, complex goal (like develop into a whale) unless there is a formal and final cause (the telos) governing it. DNA is a material tool. A tool cannot be the source of its own purpose. A hammer is for driving nails, but the "for-ness"

³² Paley, William. *Natural Theology: or, Evidences of the Existence and Attributes of the Deity, Collected from the Appearances of Nature*. London: J. Faulder, 1802.

³³ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, First Part, Question 2, Article 3.

doesn't come from the iron; it comes from the mind that designed it and the person using it.

O: Abiogenesis (the natural process by which life originated from non-living matter) explains the teleology of nature better than an intelligent designer.

R: Category error. The issue isn't whether life can emerge from non-life through a physical process, but rather what makes any process, including abiogenesis, possible in the first place. Goal-directedness is immanent; built into nature. A chemical soup can only evolve or self-assemble if the chemicals involved already have inherent tendencies to behave in specific, goal-oriented ways. To say "abiogenesis explains it better" is like saying "the assembly line explains the car's function better than the engineer." Abiogenesis is just a description of a physical transition. It does not explain why matter has the intentional structure that allows it to transition from non-life to life. Since the goal doesn't exist in reality yet, it must exist in an intellect that directs nature toward its ends.

O: The Multiverse: the idea that with infinite universes, one is bound to look ordered by pure chance.

R: The Fifth Way isn't about fine-tuning or the low probability of life. It's about the fact that law-like regularity itself (even in a chaotic universe) requires an explanation. Even in a multiverse, each individual universe would still operate on some form of if-then causality. That if-then structure is the finality that points to an underlying intellect.

O: The laws of physics are what cause nature to be.

R: The laws of physics are the ultimate proof of teleology because they aren't just descriptions, they are tendencies. Electrons always act in specific, predictable ways (like being attracted to a positive charge). The electron is internally directed toward a specific range of effects. It has a goal to behave a certain way.

1. The hardware (matter) just sits there.
2. The software (laws of physics) tells the hardware what to do.
3. But you cannot have an intelligible matrix of regular tendencies without a transcendent Intellect that conceives and continuously sustains the teleological order of these active powers.

O: Quantum Physics proves there is no designer, everything is random.

R: Just because a physical theory (like quantum mechanics) doesn't mention a cause for an event (such as radioactive decay), it doesn't mean the event has no cause. Even if quantum events are indeterminate at the individual level, they are statistically predictable. Possible states are potential: real, built-in tendencies that are waiting to be actualized. Hence, there must be an external actualizer of these potentials.

O: The majority of gene mutations in evolution are deleterious.

R: This is the argument of evil applied to biology. You can't call a mutation deleterious (harmful) unless there is a standard of what is good or functional for that species. Bad mutations are just the corruption of a prior, intentional design. You can't have a bad version of something that doesn't have a proper way to be. Physical things are contingent; they can break, decay, or be interfered with. If God creates a world with consistent laws of physics (like radiation hitting DNA), then bad mutations are a mathematical necessity of those laws. While God does not positively will the mutation for its own sake, He permissively wills a system where such failures can occur, preserving the stability of a physical ecosystem. Even if 99% of mutations are bad, the fact that life persists, adapts, and maintains complex ends (like sight, metabolism, and reproduction) over billions of years suggests a deeply biased system. In a truly random universe, you wouldn't just get bad mutations; you'd get chaos where the very concept of a gene or organism couldn't form. The fact that we have a functional enough system to even have a mutation is evidence of an underlying teleological framework. A deleterious mutation is a parasite on a functional system. You can't use the parasite to disprove the existence of the host.

O: All metaphysics is theoretical knowledge and it's not like data we see in scientific studies.

R: Material science cannot even begin without metaphysical first principles. You can't do a scientific study without first recognizing that the world is intelligible and follows patterns, causality is real (not just a mental projection), and logic (like the Law of Non-Contradiction) holds true.

A Bonus About the Fifth Way: We Can Know Natural Morality

We know nature has an intrinsic purpose that we are to follow as rational human beings. What is wrong according to the laws of nature?

- Frustrating the ends of the sexual act would be intrinsically against nature.
- Staying up at night on purpose for days on end.
- Cutting off pieces of the body that are healthy and function normally.
- Consuming drugs or alcohol until we compromise rational thinking.
- Bulimia would be frustrating the ends of eating, which is digestion.
- Listening to loud noises to destroy your hearing on purpose.
- Huffing chemicals to restrict oxygen.

O: "If using an organ for something other than its primary biological function is wrong, then wearing earplugs or walking on your hands should be a sin too."

R: There is a difference between ignoring a function and frustrating an essential one. There are also organs with multiple purposes like hands and eyes. The difference with the reproductive system is that it has one essential purpose.

Invoking a natural power but frustrating the very result which that power exists to produce, is telling the Architect of Nature that His design is secondary to your immediate pleasure/will.

VIII. The Perennial Philosophy

While many philosophers have interesting and intelligent things to say, they do not replace Aristotelian-Thomistic metaphysics, and many are still full of errors (see below).

Relativism, Deconstruction, and Skepticism

These systems fail by attempting to assert an objective truth about the impossibility of objective truth.

- **Moral Relativism**

This worldview asserts “there are no absolute moral truths.” If this statement is absolutely true, it refutes itself; if it is only relatively true, it is merely an expression of personal preference that carries no normative weight for anyone else. Be objective or sit down and shut up!

- **Deconstructionism**

This method seeks to subvert logocentrism (the Western concern with truth and logic) and the stability of objective truth. However, the act of writing and communicating a deconstructionist argument fundamentally relies on the very rationality, logic, and linguistic clarity it seeks to dismantle.

- **Hume's Skepticism**

Hume argues we cannot know ultimate metaphysical principles because our knowledge is restricted to sensory impressions.³⁴ Aristotelian-Thomism (A-T) responds that the act of reasoning toward this skeptical conclusion implicitly presupposes the intellect's objective ability to grasp logic and the true nature of causality.

Existentialism, Nihilism and Absurdism

These meaningless systems are dismantled by the inherent teleology (goal-directedness) of creation and the human mind.

- **Existentialism**

This system claims “existence precedes essence.”³⁵ A-T argues that to choose meaning, a human must already possess a fixed nature (essence) featuring intellect and free will. Furthermore, asserting this as a universal truth about humanity accidentally defines a universal human essence, rendering the claim self-defeating.

³⁴ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2009), Introduction, SBN xvii–xviii.

³⁵ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, trans. Carol Macomber (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), p. 20–22.

- Nihilism

This worldview asserts that life has no meaning. This is a performative self-negation because making the assertion is itself a meaningful, goal-directed act intended to communicate truth.

- Absurdism

This philosophy claims that the world is irrational.³⁶ A-T notes that we can only recognize absurdity by measuring it against an objective standard of rationality. If the world were truly irrational, intelligibility itself would collapse, making the rational formulation of the absurd impossible.

Scientism Branches

These systems attempt to reduce reality to matter or utility, but they subvert themselves by ignoring the formal and final causes required for material science.

- Materialism/Naturalism

This worldview claims that only matter exists. It subverts itself because it abstracts away qualitative features (like redness or meaning) into the mind, and then attempts to explain the mind away as just more matter.

- Hard Empiricism

This philosophy asserts that we only know what the senses provide. This is a metaphysical claim that cannot be proven by the senses alone, rendering it entirely self-refuting.

- Pragmatism

This system defines truth strictly by what works.³⁷ A-T argues that working is relative to an end (telos); if there is no objective truth about what our natural ends are, pragmatism has no objective direction.

³⁶ Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, trans. Justin O'Brien (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), p. 21–28.

³⁷ John Dewey, “The Need for a Recovery of Philosophy,” in *Creative Intelligence: Essays in the Pragmatic Attitude*, ed. John Dewey (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1917), p. 12.

Rationalism and Dualism

A-T philosophy critiques modern mechanistic systems for reducing the human being to a “ghost in a machine” rather than recognizing man as an inherently unified hylomorphic person.

- **Cartesian Rationalism**

By doubting the senses to find certainty in the cogito, Descartes creates a dualism that makes the mind's interaction with the body a miracle.³⁸ A-T already has the solution of hylomorphism: the soul is the form of the body, not a separate substance.

- **Platonic Dualism**

While Descartes isolated the mind from a mechanical body, Plato isolated the entire physical world from a higher realm of unchanging Forms, treating the material realm as a mere shadow.³⁹ A-T avoids this by arguing that universals (forms) exist directly inside material things as their formal causes, not in the separate, ghostly realm that Plato imagines.

Kant, Heidegger, and Phenomenology

These systems focus on the subject, which A-T views as an unnecessary retreat from reality.

- **Kant's Metaphysics**

Kant claims we only know the phenomenal (how things appear) not the noumenal (things-in-themselves).⁴⁰ If the noumena is entirely unknowable, Kant cannot claim it causes our phenomenal experiences, as causation is a category he restricts only to appearances. To state the limit of human knowledge, you have to be able to see both sides of the limit. By claiming to know the boundary of the mind, the critic proves their intellect has already crossed it.

- **Hegel's Phenomenology & Heidegger**

By reducing reality to historical consciousness (Hegel) or human experience (Heidegger),^{41,42} these philosophers ignore the objective metaphysics of act and potency that explains how independent things actually exist and change.

³⁸ René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 2:54 (AT VII 78).

³⁹ Plato, *Phaedo*, trans. G. M. A. Grube, in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), 64c.

⁴⁰ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. and trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), B294–315 (p. 354–365).

⁴¹ G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), Paragraph 165.

⁴² Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), H. 53.

The Crux of the Problem

Before you can ask *how* you know something (epistemology), you must understand *what* exists to be known (metaphysics).

Modern thinkers like Descartes, Hume, and Kant tried to build a bulletproof theory of knowledge first, putting the cart before the horse. They treated the mind as if it were trapped in a box, trying to guess if the outside world matches its thoughts. Because they started inside the mind, modern philosophy inevitably slid into skepticism, idealism, and relativism. They discuss epistemology as if it yields truth, yet its foundations are constantly contradicted and shifted. When a modern philosopher or scientist claims that “only the material world exists” or “everything is just atoms in motion,” they are making a massive metaphysical assumption, not an empirical one.

The Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition does not suffer from these epistemological crises because it begins with scholastic realism. It recognizes that the mind’s capacity to know reality cannot be treated as a mere assumption, because any attempt to deny it implicitly relies on the very knowledge being denied. When modern philosophy abandoned Aristotle and Aquinas, it created artificial puzzles (like the mind-body problem or radical skepticism) that it can no longer solve.

O: Skeptics often claim that scholastic metaphysics are just an unproven assumption.

R: Scholastic metaphysics is not an assumption, because it cannot be denied without implicitly using metaphysics itself. Aristotle and Aquinas did not start with a set of blind dogmas. Instead, they started with undeniable facts of experience and showed that those facts are impossible to explain without Aristotelian concepts.

To say that metaphysics is all just a mere assumption, the skeptic must use their intellect to change their mind, move their lips, write or type on a keyboard. Such change, thought, and action require moving from potency to act (potentiality becoming actualized). Thus, by arguing against Aristotle, the skeptic is actively demonstrating Aristotelian change. One cannot deny change without proving it true in the very act of denial. These undeniable first principles are necessary.

IX. Aquinas's Reality Meat Grinder

Now, I will philosophize with a ~~hammer~~ meat grinder like Nietzsche. It just so happens that all of modern philosophy lives within a butcher's shop. I will admit, I am a thief, and the true philosophy is not my own; my conclusion comes from my very faith. It is distributed by the grace of wings from Saint Thomas Aquinas, the angelic butcher. He feeds the minds of Western civilization and gives us the firm ground we now take for granted. Anyone doing philosophy is now in his shop. They run, they try to escape but they will never find true freedom without humility. But enough of flapping my own wings; let us take a tour of this philosophical slaughterhouse!

Universal Retorsion

Aristotle and Aquinas did not invent an arbitrary philosophy; they mapped reality. Aristotelian-Thomistic (A-T) metaphysics is true and structurally airtight because any attempt to invalidate its core principles requires the critic to implicitly rely on those exact principles to formulate the denial. Thus, modern secular systems end up collapsing into linguistic self-deletion because they mistake their self-invented cognitive frameworks for objective reality; however, traditional A-T scholastic realism remains entirely immune to their criticisms.

First Principles: A primary, self-evident law of reality and thought that cannot be deduced from anything more fundamental. It is unconditional, not a placeholder or a shortcut. It cannot be proven, otherwise you fall into an infinite regress (A to B to C to ...). It cannot be denied without immediate contradiction. To deny a first principle requires you to use that exact principle to make your argument, which means you are denying reason itself. Therefore, all reasoning must rest on unconditional, self-evident First Principles.

The Indestructible Principle of Non-Contradiction: Within the system of logic, you cannot prove everything. You cannot prove the Principle of Non-Contradiction; in order to try and prove it, your argument must already presuppose that your words mean what they mean and don't mean their opposites (i.e. that there is no contradiction).

The Indeniability of Being: You cannot think about nothing without treating it as a concept. Thinking inherently engages being. You cannot step outside of existence to check whether being is a mere assumption. Secular systems treat their foundations as mere assumptions.

Assumptions: Propositions taken for granted, without proof, to see where they lead (a postulate or hypothesis). An assumption is conditional; its truth value is not self-evident, and it is accepted only to build temporary models. It can be denied without contradiction; you can easily conceive of a reality where an assumption is false.

Because their axioms are optional, secular systems can never achieve objective certainty. They use their minds to build models that claim those very minds don't matter, thus paralyzing their own ability to track what is true.

Integrating Modern Logic and Physics

Aristotelian-Thomistic metaphysics is a dynamic, living fortress, not a static historical relic. Some structural concessions must be made first regarding certain errors of medieval science: planets are not moved by angels or celestial spheres (as St. Thomas thought), and Aristotle's empirical physics of local motion is outdated. Modern A-T thinkers fully acknowledge Newtonian inertia and quantum mechanics, reframing Aquinas's First Way around the existential state and ontological potency of physical systems rather than active, local pushers. Furthermore, Aristotelian term logic is structurally incomplete—not wrong but purely formal. Scholastic realism means logic maps to being. The kind of logic that A-T deals with is grounded in observable reality; actual contradictions are ontologically impossible.

Ontological: Pertaining to being as being—the objective, mind-independent reality, essence, and causal architecture of things as they exist in themselves.

Epistemological: Pertaining to the nature, scope, and validity of human knowledge—specifically, the structural capacity of the human intellect to abstract, track, and conform to objective reality.

Anthropological: Pertaining to the fundamental nature of the human being as a unified, hylomorphic substance—specifically, the intrinsic composition of a physical material body and an immaterial rational soul.

The Law of Identity: Pertaining to the foundational truth that every existing thing is objectively what it is, possessing a determinate, mind-independent nature and essence that distinguishes it from all other being.

The Law of Non-Contradiction: Pertaining to the unyielding ontological reality that a real substance cannot both exist and not exist, or possess and lack the exact same property, at the same time and in the same respect.

The Law of the Excluded Middle: Pertaining to the absolute binary architecture of being, which dictates that any given proposition about reality must be either objectively true or false, leaving no room for a third option or an alternative framework.

Scholastic realism easily absorbs modern breakthroughs to sharpen its technical tools:

- From Bertrand Russell: A-T freely strips away traditional term logic's limitations and picks up modern predicate, modal, and symbolic logic for the A-T toolkit to map multi-variable relations with precision.
- From Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz: A-T explicitly absorbs the formal articulation of the Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR), utilizing it to demonstrate that contingent, composite realities cannot exist as uncaused brute facts. A-T scholastic metaphysics is the only framework that satisfies the Principle of Sufficient Reason, which states that everything that exists must have an explanation for why it exists and why it is the way it is. If a skeptic claims reality is just a collection of brute, unexplainable facts, they destroy the basis for material science and rationality. If things have explanations, then we must distinguish between what a thing is (its essence) and the fact that it exists (its existence). This distinction is the core of Thomistic metaphysics, not an assumption.

Objection to A-T Logic: There are valid alternative logical systems, such as Graham Priest's paraconsistent logic and dialetheism, which prove that true contradictions can objectively exist in reality (e.g., the Liar's Paradox or boundary states in quantum mechanics). Therefore, the Law of Non-Contradiction is not an absolute law of being, but merely an optional rule of traditional Western logic.

Rebuttal: The Liar's Paradox is a purely linguistic, self-referential puzzle; it does not apply to mind-independent reality. A-T throws out the rotten meat of Graham Priest's dialetheism before it hits the grinder because it attacks the principle of being, is a pure language game, and paralyzes the critic. Just because human sentences can tie themselves into a semantic knot on a chalkboard does not mean an actual, physical object can simultaneously possess and lack the exact same property, at the exact same time, and in the same respect (i.e. violate the Principle of Non-Contradiction).

Ultimately, those who reject Aristotle and Aquinas do not end up with no metaphysics—they end up with bad metaphysics that contradict human experience.

The Bedrock of the Universe

The A-T system rests on an unshakeable, mind-independent foundation:

1. Real things exist outside our minds (Scholastic Realism).
2. Real things change and act on each other (Causality/Act and Potency).
3. A thing cannot both be and not be at the same time and in the same respect (Law of Non-Contradiction).

A Retorsion of Reality: Any attempt to deny that human logic maps onto objective being (the external world) requires the doubter to implicitly map his own logic onto objective being in order to communicate and validate that very denial.

The Question of Modern Philosophy: Realism vs. Escapism

The following broad retorsion crushes anyone—from radical relativists to realist-adjacent Platonists and rival scholastics—the moment they attempt to attack scholastic realism:

“Every proposition you utter either accurately describes mind-independent reality, or it is a human fiction. If you claim that your objection mirrors objective reality, you have surrendered to scholastic realism. If you claim your objection is merely a pragmatic tool, an epistemic map, or a linguistic framework, you admit your position has no objective authority over reality.”

Choose your slot, because the butcher has you cornered.

The Three Philosophical Meat Grinders

The moment the secularist attempts to find a path to escape the reality of objective truth, his objection automatically feeds into three structural meat grinders:

1. The Epistemic Retorsion (Refuting the Non-Realists)

Skeptics and hard empiricists claim that “objective truth does not exist,” or “we can only know what science can test.” This statement itself claims to be an objective truth that science cannot test. In asserting this rule, they immediately violate the rule. It is a self-deleting proposition.

This attack destroys human knowledge. By reducing truth to a mere subjective perspective or an ungrounded linguistic rule, it strips the human mind of its capacity to ever actually know the real universe. It turns all philosophy and everyday human reason into a localized, meaningless illusion.

2. The Ontological Retorsion (Refuting the Materialists/Scientific Realists)

Materialists claim the universe is just an accidental machine of blind matter, with no inherent form or teleology. In order to even formulate such an objection, write it down, and present it as an intelligible, rational argument, the materialist must rely on a stable, predictable, highly ordered universe where nature's laws perfectly track logic. This is intellectual theft of metaphysical structure, used to attempt to argue that such structure does not exist.

This attack destroys natural science. By removing formal and final causality from nature and treating everything as an uncaused brute fact, it strips the universe of its intelligibility. If things happen for no underlying metaphysical reason, the laws of physics become arbitrary, temporary miracles which cannot be relied upon, rendering the scientific method entirely paralyzed.

3. The Anthropological Retorsion (Refuting the Dualists/Gnostics)

Proponents of Cartesian mind-body dualism and posthumanism claim that the human mind is an independent, immaterial “ghost” that happens to inhabit a purely mechanical physical body, or that the mind can be detached from human biology and uploaded into a machine. Yet they simultaneously claim to be materialists who believe that the mind is a mere byproduct of physical brain chemistry. They switch between a radical, disembodied spiritualism and a hard, reductionist materialism whenever it is convenient to dodge the integrated design of human nature.

This attack destroys the human person. By treating the physical body as an accidental machine rather than an essential, hylomorphic part of who we are, it fractures our identity. It renders our physical senses untrustworthy, reduces the living human organism to disposable parts, and makes the mind's daily interaction with our own flesh an inexplicable, impossible miracle.

The Unyielding Fortress

In addition to the generalized objections given above, let us also give some very brief rebuttals to the ideas of specific philosophers. Hume must use the stable vocabulary of causation to argue that causation is just a mental habit. Kant traps reality within the limits of human perception, yet paradoxically claims to know the exact boundaries from the outside while claiming no one can see through it. By declaring the senses untrustworthy while relying on his physical body to write and his eyes to read his own argument, Descartes falls into a performative contradiction.

Every secular system ultimately takes the plunge into retorsion. They are all running around in the butcher's shop, losing ground from the very Thomistic reality they are trying to escape. Yet all they need to do is simply take a walk outside in order to see the objective beauty and ethics of God's creation.

Will they see the logic of the universe eventually? Most will not. As a Catholic, I understand that the secularist's barrier to accepting A-T metaphysics is actually moral and psychological, not intellectual as they would claim.

The philosopher Schopenhauer complained that the PSR is a "magic cab to God."⁴³ Well, that simply is reality! Modern philosophers who deny that, playing logical mind-games that separate themselves from ontological truth, are simply masturbating on an academic campus, thinking that their fapping will lead to a child of truth. All these modern philosophers are parasitic on the true Good of God. They are simply playing in the rubble of Scotus, Ockham and Suarez. No one during Aquinas's time was stupid enough to deny the objective world.

To conclude, if a friend or a secular professor admits that your logic is perfect, they have to admit that the universe has an objective design. If the universe has an objective design, then natural law is real, and they are no longer the absolute masters of their own destiny. They cannot invent their own morality, nor can they sin without consequences. They will not only look foolish but will run to nonsensical nuances, constantly changing their arguments on the fly rather than bending the knee to reality.

"For without the Creator the creature would disappear...

But when God is forgotten the creature itself grows unintelligible."⁴⁴

—*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 36

⁴³ Arthur Schopenhauer, *On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason and Other Writings*, trans. David E. Cartwright, Edward E. Erdmann, and Christopher Janaway (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), chapter 5, section 20.

⁴⁴ Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et spes* [Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World], December 7, 1965, Vatican Archives, Section 36, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html.

X. Misunderstanding Evolution

Evolution is not nominalism (the metaphysical position that only particular, concrete things exist, while denying the objective reality of universals or abstract objects). Modern biologists often make the mistake of saying “species are just labels” but we apply labels that point to a real, objective essence outside our minds. Nominalism in evolution is self-refuting: “There are no universals, only individuals,” yet this statement relies on a universal category of individuals. So evolution must have a realist basis.

Is change happening at this very moment? Yes, because change is the progressive actualization of a potential. Does flour or an egg undergo a substantial change when it is baked into a cake? When we digest deer skeletal muscle, does this too undergo substantial change? Yes. What a thing is in its essence is fixed and objective. Evolution doesn't change an essence; rather a new essence is instantiated when the material conditions are right for a new form to be actualized.

Current observation shows accidental change (longer teeth, longer limbs) in animals. Substantial change is a metaphysical event. Pre-bird reptiles undergo millions of accidental changes (feathers, bone density), eventually reaching a point where the parental matter is so disposed that it can no longer sustain the reptile form, resulting in a substantial change where the offspring instantiates the bird form. There is no “half-bird” or “half-reptile.” An organism is either one or another. Even if the new species “bird” looked 99% like its reptile parents, its substantial form has changed and is fundamentally different. Substantial form is invisible (what a thing is). Accidental form is what a thing looks like. At some point the ancestral genetic lineage crossed a threshold where the matter became disposed to receive the form of a bird rather than that of a reptile.

Creationists and scientists are both looking for missing links, which is a trap. Creationists want a clear “no” to the idea that one thing can become another. Atheists say there are no “kinds” at all, just the slow slide of DNA. All they see is material, ignoring the formal cause. Following the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition, one thing can become another but they are distinct kinds of substantial forms. Evidence can't solve a metaphysical question. Even in a perfect video of evolution, you still have to decide: “Is this a reptile being modified or is a new nature beginning to exist?” Evolution produces a new form via small, accumulative changes. A substantial change does not break the law of identity; it is the actualization of a potential already inherent in a thing's nature.

Creationists need to stop arguing for the God of the gaps. Argue for the God of the whole. The fact that nature has the stable power to evolve and produce new intelligible forms is proof for a divine designer Who sustains the entire system, since these forms are directed towards a goal without possessing an internal intellect. See Aquinas's Fifth Way teleological proof.

Furthermore, the mind of a human being is immaterial (see James F. Ross's syllogism). This immateriality cannot be accounted for by evolution, since evolution is a material process. Aristotle and Aquinas both believed in spontaneous generation (e.g., that non-living matter could give rise to a maggot), showing that classical theology has never been inherently terrified of life emerging from unexpected physical conditions.

It's sad that Christian creationists demand direct evidence of evolution, because they make the same mistake as the mechanistic framework. They have more in common with atheists than classical Christianity. This sort of thing happens when you break from the Church: you lose knowledge and borrow it from the scientism crowd.

But how does death exist before sin? If we look at both Genesis and St. Paul, what kind of death is spoken about as being brought about by sin? Animal death? No, specifically the consequence of human sin is death to mankind.

Genesis 2:17 “But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.”

Genesis 3:19 “By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

Genesis 3:22-24 “Then the Lord God said... 'Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever—' therefore, the Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden...”

1 Corinthians 15:21-22 “For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ.”

Romans 5:14 “Yet death exercised dominion from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who is a type of the one who was to come.”

Wisdom of Solomon 2:23-24 “For God created us for incorruption, and made us in the image of his own eternity, but through the devil's envy death entered the world, and those who belong to his company experience it.”

Before Study

A Prayer of St. Thomas Aquinas

Ineffable Creator,

Who, from the treasures of your wisdom,
 have established three hierarchies of angels,
 have arrayed them in marvelous order
 above the fiery heavens,
 and have marshaled the regions
 of the universe with such artful skill,

You are proclaimed
 the true font of light and wisdom,
 and the primal origin
 raised high beyond all things.

Pour forth a ray of your brightness
 into the darkened places of my mind;
 disperse from my soul
 the twofold darkness
 into which I was born:
 sin and ignorance.

You make eloquent the tongues of infants;
 refine my speech
 and pour forth upon my lips
 the goodness of your blessing.

Grant to me
 keenness of mind,
 capacity to remember,
 skill in learning,
 subtlety to interpret,
 and eloquence in speech.

May you
 guide the beginning of my work,
 direct its progress,
 and bring it to completion.

You who are True God and True Man,
 who live and reign, world without end.

Amen

At the Elevation of the Body of Christ

A Prayer of St. Thomas Aquinas

O Sacrifice for our salvation,
heavenly gates you open wide.
Our enemies press hard around us.
Give us strength; our help provide.
You are Christ, the king of glory.
 You are the Son, coeternal with the Father.
To liberate mankind,
 you did not disdain to enter a virgin's womb.
Having conquered the sting of death,
 you opened heavenly realms to the faithful.
You sit at the right hand of God
 in the glory of God the Father.
We believe
 you are the judge on who is to come.
Therefore we ask you
 to come to the aid of your servants
 redeemed by your precious blood.
Include us among your saints in eternal glory.
Bring salvation to your people, Lord,
 and bless them as your heirs.
Govern them and lead them into eternity.
Day after day we bless you.
 We praise your name now and forever.
Lord, preserve us this day from sin.
 Have mercy upon us, Lord, have mercy.
Grant us your mercy, Lord,
 even as we have placed our hope in you.
In you, Lord, have I trusted;
 let me not be confounded in eternity.
 Amen

For the Attainment of Heaven

A Prayer of St. Thomas Aquinas

God of all consolation,
 you who see nothing in us
 but what you have given us,
 I invoke your help;
 after this life has run its course,
 grant me
 knowledge of you, the first Truth,
 and enjoyment of your divine majesty.

O most bountiful rewarder, endow my body
 with beauty of splendor,
 with swift responsiveness to all commands,
 with complete subservience to the spirit,
 and with freedom from all vulnerability.

Add to these
 an abundance of your riches,
 a river of delights
 and a flood of other goods,

So that I may enjoy
 your solace above me,
 a delightful garden beneath my feet,
 the glorification of body and soul within me,
 and the sweet companionship
 of men and angels around me.

With you, most merciful Father,
 may my mind attain
 the enlightenment of wisdom,
 my desire
 what is truly desirable,
 and my courage
 the praise of triumph.

There, with you,
 refuge from all dangers,
 multitude of dwelling places,
 and harmony of wills.

There, with you, resides
 the cheerfulness of spring,
 the brilliance of summer,
 the fruitfulness of autumn,
 and the gentleness of winter.

Give me, O Lord my God,

that life without death
and that joy without sorrow
where there is
the greatest freedom,
unconfined security,
secure tranquility,
delightful happiness,
happy eternity,
eternal blessedness,
the vision of truth,
and praise, O God.
Amen

Devoutly I Adore You, Hidden Deity

A Prayer of St. Thomas Aquinas

Devoutly I adore You, hidden Deity
under these appearances concealed.
To You my heart surrenders self
for, seeing You, all else must yield.

Sight and touch and taste here fail;
hearing only can be believed
I trust what God's own Son has said.
Truth from truth is best received.

Divinity on the Cross was hid;
humanity here comes not to thought.
Believing and confessing both,
I seek out what the good thief sought.

I see no wounds, as Thomas did,
but I profess You God above.
Draw me deeply into faith,
into your hope, into your love.

O memorial of the Lord's sad death,
show life to man, O living bread.
Grant that my soul may live through you,
by your sweet savor ever fed.

Jesus Lord, my Pelican devout,
With your blood my sins dismiss.
One single drop could surely save
from sin the world's dark edifice.

Jesus, whom now I see enveiled,
what I desire, when will it be?
Beholding your fair face revealed,
your glory shall I be blessed to see.

Amen

Glossary

Being: Defined as that which is. Being is not a genus, but is analogical, meaning it is applied differently to God (Pure Act) than to created things.

Essence: Defined as “what” a thing is—its nature or quiddity, acting as a metaphysical boundary or receiver that limits the act of existence to a specific nature (e.g., a cat or a tree).

Existence: The act of being (esse); the precise metaphysical principle that actualizes an essence, turning a mere possibility or concept into a concrete actuality.

The Four Causes: The four whys of a thing's being and becoming.

Material Cause: The underlying, passive principle or stuff out of which a concrete thing arises (e.g., rubber).

Formal Cause: The intrinsic principle of organization or structure that makes matter a specific kind of thing (e.g., sphericity).

Efficient Cause: That which actualizes a potency or produces an effect. It includes both the cause that created the ball and the current cause holding its molecules together right now (sustaining cause).

Final Cause: The inherent disposition, goal-directedness, or pointedness of a thing toward a specific end or range of effects.

Substance: An individual, complete entity that exists per se (in itself) and possesses a substantial form, serving as the ontological subject that underlies and supports accidents (e.g., a specific dog).

Accident: An incomplete reality that exists in alio (in another), meaning it cannot exist on its own and must inhere in a substance (e.g., a dog's brown color, its weight, or its location).

Aggregate: A mere collection or accidental unity of distinct substances that interact with one another through extrinsic relations, lacking a single substantial form or common nature (e.g., a pile of bricks, a clock, or a city).

Change: The progressive actualization of a potency as still being in potency. It is the transition of a subject from potential being to actual being.

Univocal: Using a term in the exact same sense in different contexts. Example: “the baseball player swung the bat” and “the cricket player swung the bat.”

Equivocal: Using a term in completely unrelated senses. Example: “the player swung the bat” vs. “a bat flew in the window.”

Analogical: A middle ground where a term is used in senses that are partly the same and partly different. “Being” is the paradigm of an analogical term; for instance, a substance and an accident both exist, but in different ways.

Qualia: The subjective, first-person features of conscious experience, like the way red looks or pain feels. The modern “qualia problem” exists because modern material science redefined matter to exclude these qualitative features, leaving them with no place in a purely materialist world.

Qua: A Latin term meaning in the capacity of or as. To isolate specific aspects of a subject, such as “being qua being” (studying things specifically in terms of their existence).

Prime matter: Pure, unformed, and featureless physical potentiality. It is the ultimate underlying subject of all substantial change, possessing no actual characteristics of its own until it is conjoined with a substantial form. Not “matter” in the modern physics sense (atoms or quarks), because those things already have a specific form, structure, and behavior.

Prime matter has absolutely zero actuality. It is not a thing, but an intrinsic metaphysical principle of physical things.

"Any arguments alleged against the teachings of faith do not proceed logically from first principles of nature, principles of themselves known, and so do not amount to a demonstration; but are either probable reasons or sophistical; hence room is left for refuting them."⁴⁵

—St. Thomas Aquinas

⁴⁵ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Book I, Chapter 7.

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