

A History of Philosophy

25 Aquinas on God

By Dr. Arthur Holmes of Wheaton College

We want this afternoon to give attention to what Thomas Aquinas has to say about God, our knowledge of God, and something of the nature of God. And I've put on the board the general outline that I would like to follow, starting with discussion of the existence of God. Now, remember the line of thought that we've been trying to develop.

Namely, that in response to the Averroist interpretation of Aristotle, which was incompatible with either Muslim or Christian theology, Thomas Aquinas set out to modify Aristotle's position in order to satisfy the needs of Christian theology. We saw how he did that in relation to his metaphysics. Then we noted that the *Summa Theologica*, that major work written with this in mind, the *Summa Theologica* proceeds to discuss the relationship of faith and reason, reason and revelation, in order to stake out a position that repudiates the two-fold truth notion of the Averroists, and sees the mutually complementary nature of reason and revelation.

He proceeds directly from that to talking about the existence and the nature of God, so that the metaphysical changes that he has made immediately begin to bear fruit, as long as you keep in mind the active interrelationship of reason and revelation. That is to say, for Thomas Aquinas, when he tries to argue the existence of God, that's a rational undertaking. But the conclusion he wants to come to is something that is compatible with the God of the Judeo-Christian revelation.

Now, actually, what he does is to start, and you have these three articles in the anthology, he starts by asking, is the existence of God self-evident? Which sounds like a pretty innocuous kind of question, until you realize that the objections which he is addressing right at the outset of that article are objections raised to what is going to be Aquinas' position, objections raised by people like the Neoplatonists, and Anselm, and Augustine, that is to say, the Platonic tradition. The Platonic tradition, which by and large favored the view that the existence of God is either self-evident or can be shown to be a logically necessary assertion, is the sort of thing that produced Anselm's ontological argument. So if you look on page 524, you can see quickly what it is he's doing.

Objection 1 poses the claim that the existence of God is self-evident, in that, as the Damascene, John of Damascus, says, the knowledge of God is naturally implanted in all. Is it self-evident because of an innate idea? Now, obviously, innate ideas is a Platonic doctrine, you see. And he's going to reply that, no, the idea is not innate in us, except in a very vague and general way, there naturally arises some awareness of a supreme being, but not any clear, innate idea of God.

Objection 2, those things are said to be self-evident, which are known as soon as the terms are known, and as soon as the signification of the name God is understood, it is once seen that God exists, well, that's Anselm, inasmuch as existence is of the very nature of God. And in Objection 3, the existence of truth is self-evident, and God is truth itself, God exists. And that is Augustine's argument, you remember, who argued from Truths to the Truth with a capital T, in which all Truths participate, the Divine Logos, who therefore exists.

Now, you have three attempts to claim that the existence of God can be known a priori. A priori. That is to say, independently of any empirical evidence.

Independent of any appeals to experience. A priori arguments for the existence of God, such as the ontological argument. And all of those Aquinas rejects.

He's too much the empiricist, being an Aristotelian, to have a rationalist's a priori argument, as the Platonists did. So he's consistent here with the Aristotelian tradition on which he's going to draw. Now, you can see this very quickly if you look at his I Answer That.

And that is the way to read Aquinas: always read the I Answer That. And you see the way he puts it. A thing can be self-evident in either of two ways.

On the one hand, self-evident in itself, but not to us. And on the other, self-evident to us. And he goes on at the end of the I Answer That to say that the proposition God itself, God exists, rather, God exists, is self-evident in itself, because God is his own existence, as will be shown hereafter.

Existence is necessary to God. But that is only valid as long as we know that about God. So it's not self-evident to us.

The fact that God is a necessary being, who necessarily exists, means that it's self-evident in and of itself, if you know that about God. But if you don't, then it's not self-evident to us. So he rejects any a priori argument.

Maybe you had that feeling about Anselm's ontological argument. I have the idea of a perfect being, and that no such being, none greater can exist. Well, that's fine if you have that idea.

But what if you don't? You'll see. And he's saying we don't have an idea of such. Existence is a necessary predicate, a necessary part of the idea.

So he moves then from that, which is an acceptance, really, of a more Aristotelian approach than a Platonic one. He moves from that to the corollary. Well, if we do not

know God on the basis of some a priori concept, then the other alternative is that the knowledge of God is a posteriori, that is to say, is dependent, in some sense, on experience.

And the experience we have is an experience of God's creation, presumably. So the question is whether the existence of God can be known from the effects of God. Arguing from effect to cause.

And to that, very simply, his response is, of course, affirmative. So that we can anticipate that his arguments for the existence of God are going to be cause-effect arguments with premises drawn from human experience. Okay? With premises drawn from human experience.

So in that sense, his path becomes pretty clear. And then he dives in the third article right into his proofs for the existence of God. Aquinas' famous five proofs.

Now, I'm inclined to think that when these proofs are handled outside of their context in the Summa Theologica, and outside of the historical context of trying to adapt the Aristotelian tradition for Christian purposes, outside of those contexts, these proofs are very often misunderstood. The assumption seems to be that they are intended to be neutral, such that anybody should agree that they prove the existence of God. But in fact, not.

Because if you look at the premises for the five proofs, they're not philosophically neutral premises. They're Aristotelian premises. For while they are premises drawn from experience, they are premises that represent a knowledge of principles abstracted from experience.

Remember Aristotle's knowledge? By abstracting the essence from the species. You see? So it begins, if you like, with Aristotelian concepts, drawn from experience in Aristotelian ways. In the first proof on page 527, under the I answered that for five ways, the first is the argument from motion, or change.

And as you read about eight lines into it, at the top of the second column, you notice that he defines motion, or change, as nothing other than the reduction of some potentiality to actuality. Good old Aristotle. Potentiality and actuality.

All change is movement from potentiality to actuality. And the second way, at the bottom of that column, is from the nature of efficient cause. Because in the world of sensible things, there is an order of efficient causes.

That's an Aristotelian conception. And the third way, on 528, is from possibility and necessity. That again is an Aristotelian distinction.

Contingency and necessity. And the fourth way, in terms of the gradation to be found in things, some more or less good, more or less true, more or less noble, that's that hierarchy of being and goodness, which is an ingredient, among others, to the Aristotelian way of thinking. And the fifth way, from the governance of the world, everything, even if it lacks knowledge, such as natural bodies do, everything in nature, acts for an end.

Final causes. That's Aristotelian. So here he is, you see, trying to modify the Aristotelian metaphysic to serve Christian purposes.

And he's picking up on Aristotelian premises. Now, what sort of a god can you argue for from Aristotelian premises? It is not an Aristotelian god. It's much closer to a Christian god. It is plainly a theistic being, not an unmoved mover just thinking on his own.

Look at the conclusions of the five proofs. And you see what he's doing. The first proof, on 527, leads to the conclusion that there is a first mover moved by no other, and this everyone understands to be God.

You say the language is Aristotelian. Yeah. A first mover.

A prime mover. But notice the difference. Aristotle's prime mover is only a final cause.

This prime mover is an actuality, and he says that a series of movers cannot go on to infinity, because then there would be no first mover, no other mover, seeing that subsequent movers move only inasmuch as they're moved by the first mover, as the staff moves only because it's moved by the hand. All right, then someone has got to move the staff. There's got to be a hand to move the staff.

At the very beginning of the series, that sounds like an efficient cause, not a final cause. And in the second case, it's explicitly a matter of efficient cause. The second proof ends, it's necessary to admit a first efficient cause, to which everyone gives the name of god.

So Thomas immediately, right at the outset of his summer, has a god who is the efficient cause. A theistic god, not an Aristotelian one. And you move to the third way, and god is a necessary being.

The fourth way concludes there must be something which is to all beings the cause of their being and goodness and every other perfection. God is the good. That's a Platonic notion, but here it is on Aristotelian premises.

You'll see. And the fifth way from the governance of the universe leads to the conclusion that some intelligent being exists by whom all natural things are directed to their end, and this being we call god. An intelligent being who doesn't just think on his own, but knows what the creation is up to and directs the creation to its ends.

You'll see. A knowing god, not just Aristotle's god. An all-knowing creator.

Well, that's a remarkable transformation, you'll see. On Aristotelian premises, to offer arguments for a non-Aristotelian god. But he does it.

You'll see. Arguing for a non-Aristotelian god from an Aristotelian premise. Okay? And those five proofs have been debated ever since, and my guess is you ran into them in the introduction to philosophy course that you took.

You'll see. Standard fare. Well, the fact that he has God as the highest good in mind comes out in the reply to objection one.

You may just want to take a look at that. 528. Since God is the highest good, says Augustine, he wouldn't allow any evil to exist in his works unless his omnipotence and goodness were such as to bring good even out of evil.

And Aquinas adds this is part of the infinite goodness of God, that he should allow evil to exist, and out of it produce good. You see, the greater good argument concerning evil. Existing for the greater good.

We'll come back to that later on. Any questions or comments thus far? Yeah. Ryan.

He made a note that most people consider it a horizontal movement. Yeah. But he said no, it's more of a vertical movement.

I didn't understand exactly. Yeah. The question is whether, in this series of movers going backwards, backwards, backwards, whether to speak of the first mover is to speak of number one back here that got the whole series going, and the whole domino theory, you see.

Whether it's first in that sense. Or whether what he's speaking of is a metamover. That one seems to be dead.

Let's try another one. Or whether what he's speaking of is a metamover up here, who is involved in maintaining the motion, the actualization of potential of the whole series. Now, the reason for supposing it's the latter is, I think, twofold.

The second proof talks of an order of efficient causes. Not what is the cause of the most ultimate cause we can think of, but what is the cause of the whole causal order. Get it? There's a meta-cause for the causal order.

And I think it's in the Summa Contra Gentiles that that becomes even more explicit. So, yeah, that's a worthwhile thing to notice. You see, a deist would be content to have God as number one back there, who starts the ball rolling, and it keeps on rolling.

Starts the domino effect, and it keeps on toppling dominoes. But Aquinas is not satisfied with that. Another way you can see that he's not satisfied with it is that he tells us, and we've already talked about this in his metaphysics, that God is the very essence of existence.

As Gilson puts it, God is not simply an essence that exists. He's the very essence of existence. You see, it's in his nature to exist.

And Gilson comes back to the statement in the book of Exodus 3.14 when God says to Moses from the burning bush, I am that I am. Now, what sort of name is that? I am that I am. It's been pointed out that the Hebrew Yahweh, Yah, is the verb to be.

I am that I am. You see, and Gilson takes that to mean necessary existence. The very essence of existence.

Well, Thomas himself, regardless of the way Gilson puts it, Thomas himself is very plain that the essential characteristic of God is his existence. Yeah, through and through. But it's in that existence that he continually imparts existence to every created thing, which is contingent on him for its existence.

We're not just contingent on God for the beginning of our being, but for our continued being. You see? God, who sustains existence, doesn't just start it. So, if you take that continuous dependence of creation on the creator, if you take that seriously, then I think it's pretty plain that he at least ought to be arguing in the first, second, and third proofs.

Not for a God who's number one at the beginning of a series, but for the God who's a meta-cause of the whole series. Does that come through clearly? I see vague nods. I'm not sure if you mean them or not.

Yeah? Okay. Okay. Anything further? This is in reference to article two, the second article.

Yeah. Okay. Yeah, it depends on what you mean by really know.

You tie it to reply to objection three, in which he says, from effects not proportioned to the cause, no perfect knowledge of the cause can be obtained. And, yeah, certainly God is to be understood as not just sufficient to produce those effects, but as far, far more than sufficient. So, in that sense, disproportionate to the effects.

Yet, from every effect, the existence of the cause can be demonstrated, so that we can demonstrate the existence of God, though from them we cannot know God perfectly as he is in his essence. Now, what that last sentence seems to say is that we can know his existence, okay, but that does not give us perfect knowledge of his essence or nature. Okay, that's where the limitations are.

Now, at the same time, it's a perfectly valid question as to whether the proofs from the effects of God are such that the knowledge of his existence is logically certain, beyond all question, you see. Are these knock-down, drag-out proofs in that sense? And I think if I'm right in interpreting Aquinas as I did in reference to his modification of the Aristotelian view and so forth, and that these are Aristotelian premises, I find that hard to deny, I think Aquinas would have to say that these proofs are system-dependent. Yes, sir? In other words, you have to go to Aristotle, Aristotelian.

Yeah, yeah. You know, if you are convinced of the premises that they are true, of reality, then the conclusions would follow if the arguments are valid. It's true of any argument, isn't it? You've got to have true premises and a valid argument, you see.

But my point is that the truth of the premises is a system-dependent thing. Now, plainly, Aristotle held, take it back, that Aquinas held, that Aristotle was preferable to Platonic metaphysics. He held, then, that Aristotle's concepts here are true.

But with what degree of logical certainty would he hold that? You see, and that isn't as clear. That isn't as clear. I'm inclined to think that the quest for absolutely indubitable certainty is more a product of 17th and 18th-century epistemology than it is of Greek thought carrying on, even though they have a very high degree of expectation, beginning with Plato.

And my reason for saying that is something that will be coming out in two or three weeks. There was a... Well, let me anticipate it in this way. With the breakdown of the authority of the Church at the end of the Middle Ages, the authority of the Roman Church on matters where Scripture isn't explicit, there was an epistemological vacuum.

With the development of the Protestant Reformation, with the emphasis on the priesthood of believers, and therefore the ability of the individual to read and interpret the Scripture for himself, there developed the fear of anarchy and sectarianism in religious matters. Now, into this epistemological vacuum, one leading

voice was that of Greek and Roman skepticism. The writings of Sextus Empiricus, remember him? Had been rediscovered.

So that skepticism became a viable force in the 16th century again. And it was in response to that that the quest for certainty became one of the urgent priorities. That's what Descartes was about when he started, I doubt, therefore I exist.

He wants to find an argument out of skepticism. That's what a debate between Luther and Erasmus was about. Erasmus wanted to simply submit to the teachings of the Church on certain things.

Not so Luther. Not so Luther, you see. So that the whole question of what to do in a vacuum of authority seemed to precipitate the Enlightenment quest for logical certainty.

And in the end, what it turned out to be in the Enlightenment was that they turned to modern science as the authority, rather than anything else. Now, I think that the concern about knowledge was not motivated in the same way in the Middle Ages, and so the level of expectation, the level of demand, is not the same. Okay, let's go one step further than talking about the existence of God to the nature of God.

And on the first topic that I've listed, we've already made a start. In the Aristotelian traditions, so it is with Aquinas, that our knowledge of the nature of natural objects is on the basis of experience by abstracting the essence, the nature, the form from our experience of the whole range of members of any given class. Knowledge by abstraction.

But when it comes to talking of God and our knowledge of God, there's a problem. Because there's no species of gods to gain experience with from which we could abstract the essence of God. So, knowledge by abstraction from experience does not work in relation to our knowledge of God.

Do you follow, Randy? Kind of. Do you want me to run it again? All right, let me just rerun it in case you missed it, because it's important. In matters of science and our knowledge of nature, we can know the essence of things, the forms, the universal principles by abstracting them from our experience of species, genera, and so forth.

That's fine when there are species and genera, but there aren't in the case of God. There's only one, you see. God is, as we say, sui generis, meaning he has his own genus of his own genus.

The one and only member of the genus of gods is God. So then, we don't have experience of a whole class of gods from which to abstract the nature of God. How,

then, do we know anything about the nature of God? And, basically, the answer is not by abstraction, but by analogy.

Not by abstraction, but by analogy. And, um, that analogy depends, of course, on the whole hierarchy of beings, which is in step with the whole hierarchy of good and the whole hierarchy of truth or intelligible form, you see. Um, so he talks about two kinds of analogy, an analogy of degrees, where God is, of course, altogether good, infinite in perfection, that is to say, the greatest conceivable degree, analogy of degrees, and, in addition, an analogy of proper proportionality, where proportionate to the degree of goodness is the degree of being, vice versa.

So, if God is a necessary being at the top of that hierarchy, God is perfect goodness, God is perfect truth; you see, everything in proportion. So that human beings are down here with a degree of goodness and a degree of intelligible order to their existence, and, um, California mudslides are down here somewhere, you see, with a relatively low degree of good or intelligible order to California mudslides, and so forth. So, we know God, and we can talk of God by way of analogy; our language is analogical language.

Now, in the piece you're reading on the principles of nature, you'll notice at the end he distinguishes three kinds of predication, which, again, is borrowed from Aristotle. There is univocal predication, where a word is used in one and the same sense. There is equivocal predication, where it's used in a wholly different sense.

And there is analogical predication, where it's a similar sense. And so what Thomas does is to refine the notion of analogical predication. Now, that refining depends plainly on the concept of being, and, um, being is, um, not that easy.

When, um, one of Shakespeare's characters says, to be or not to be, that is the question, from Aquinas' viewpoint, that's wrong. Being is a much more complex thing than just existing or not existing. Uh, being has a certain nature of its own.

That is to say, there are certain transcendental attributes of all being. Or, if you like, of all beings. Attributes that transcend the differences between species and genera and larger classes, and apply to every being.

You see. Every being. Now, to be or not to be, to exist or not to exist, is sort of a notion of stripped-down existence, uh, devoid of those transcendental attributes of being.

The bareness of existence. A hollow echo of our own, to use Tennyson's line. You see.

Oh, you get it in the concept of matter, and I think this came out in, um, one of the discussions in the conference. I forget which one it was. Uh, where, um, for Aquinas, matter is pure potentiality.

But to say pure potentiality is to say, oh, it comes loaded, even bare matter, loaded with possibilities for good. You see. Whereas the concept of matter in 18th century mechanistic science is of something devoid of all, um, secondary qualities, color, smell, feel.

You see. Dead, inert, impersonal, lifeless. So that Tennyson could never have written in Memoriam about that wasteland if he had been thinking of Aquinas's conception of being.

Being for Aquinas isn't a wasteland. It was in mechanistic science. But not in Aristotelian science converted by, um, Aquinas to Christianity.

So then, um, whenever we think of being, the notion of being includes the notions of goodness, truth, and beauty. Transcendental attributes. You see.

Now, insofar as these are transcendental attributes, we know them down here on the scale, and here on the scale, and here on the scale, and here on the scale in varying degrees. And by extrapolation, we, um, readily, um, speak of, um, God by analogy of degrees. You see.

Or with more logical precision, doing it with, uh, proportionality. So we have a knowledge of God which is by analogy. Now, the, um, two examples of that that I want to pick up on have to do with truth and goodness.

Truth and goodness. And I pick up on these two because those materials, um, at least some of them are available to us in the anthology. And we can, um, see it fairly well.

On page 529, the mystifying question is posed whether truth resides only in the intellect. And from our standpoint, that is a mystifying thing because, um, nowadays, if we were to be discussing the question, what is truth? Uh, we would likely end up, um, saying that truth is a property of propositions. Uh, a property of propositions that corresponds to some extra-mental state of affairs.

And inasmuch as propositions are thought, and propositions are true, then truth is in the intellect, in the thinking. In correct thinking. Thinking about correct propositions.

We'd say the truth is in the intellect. In other words, truth is an epistemological category. But as you read that, um, that article, Aquinas doesn't answer it that way.

Truth doesn't reside only in the intellect. The other alternative is whether truth resides in the thing. In the being of a thing.

And so we get a distinction, you notice, between truth that is epistemic and truth that is ontological. Ontological truth. The truth of a proposition or the truth of a being.

What do you mean, the truth of a being? Well, you can distinguish, I think, in English terminology, between the truth about philosophers and true philosophers. What is a true philosopher? One that's true to type. True to type? Well, it sounds like an archetype.

Heh. That's right. A true philosopher is one who is true to the essence of being a philosopher.

You see? Yes, doesn't the creed say that Jesus Christ is true God and true man? What do you mean, true man? True man? Is man just a proposition? No. A true man is a man who conforms to the very essence of what it is to be human. He is truly human.

True to type. Ontological truth. So you have these two conceptions of truth, wherein one, the reference is simply to a proposition, propositional truth.

You see, and when we talk theologically about propositional revelation, we're talking about a revelation which can be expressed in terms of propositions. It can be thought, understood. Propositions that are either true or false.

You see? Or, so either then, truth of an epistemic sort, truth of propositions, or ontological truth, true beings. True to type. Yeah.

And, you see, that's the way it is with regard to this business of truth. True to type, what? Well, the archetypes are in the mind of God. The archetypes that provide those patterns in accordance with which God creates.

You see? That archetypal truth. That is to say, God conceived as truth is the Logos. Yeah.

The Logos. He's bringing Augustine's Logos concept into Aristotelian philosophy. This is God the Logos.

In whom are hid all treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Remember the phrase from Colossians? You see? So, in that sense, all truth has its source in God. Because all propositional truth is truth either about God or some aspect of God's creation.

You see? So the reference point in talking of anything in nature is to the archetypes in God. When you say this is true, you're saying in effect God knows it's true. That's the point of reference.

Talking about the truth. And God, as a true being, is the very epitome of being. With the transcendental attributes of being to perfection.

That than which nothing greater can be conceived. So ontological truth. This is, so obviously in the tradition of Augustine and the Church Fathers, it means that the source of truth as we know it, whether ontological truth down here or whether propositional truth, the source of it all is God.

God is the source of all truth. God is the standard for truth. In that sense, all truth is God's truth, no matter where it's found, if it's true.

You see? Propositional truth. Ontological truth. It's always thanks to God, the Creator.

Well, that's the theme, then, that runs through that first article. His definition of truth, propositional truth, is that truth is the equation of thought and thing. That's a kind of correspondence definition.

Truth is the equation of thought and thing. When the proposition corresponds to the way the thing is, you've got a true proposition. Well, he asks, however, whether ontological truth or epistemological truth comes first.

And his response is, truth is first in the intellect and therefore in the being. That is to say, truth is first in the mind of God, in those archetypes, and then in created beings, which are true this, true that, true the other. So, look over that article thoroughly.

It's a rich one and continues the tradition we found in Augustine. He goes on from that article, however, to the fifth article, whether God is truth. Whether God is truth.

And there he develops the logos side of things. Okay, let's move from there to the goodness of God. I want to come back to the will of God subsequently, but on the goodness of God, where we want, oh, I think page 534, 535, in that general area.

Any questions on truth? Comments there? That essential and accidental, is the accidental truth the same as the epistemic? Yeah, well, essence and accident are basically metaphysical things. That is to say, the essence is the essential nature of a thing. Accidents are things that aren't essential to its nature, but which happen to it.

I sort of got the impression that we can only know the truth accidentally. Oh, I see what you mean. Yeah, yeah.

That is to say, knowing the truth about something is not of our essence. It's something that happens to us. Exactly.

Yeah, that's right. We have a capacity for knowledge. But only accidentally.

Yeah, but actually achieving true knowledge depends on conditions that make knowledge possible. So in that sense, it's an accident that happens rather than a necessity that just emerges by nature. Right.

Just to make sure I had this raised, when he says that truth is first in the mind of God, and then created beings, is he saying psychological truth or not? No, he says that truth is first in the intellect. Now, I think in that context, he's talking about truths about nature, and even true types of things in nature. You'll see.

Because of God, truth for any created thing is first in the intellect of God. First in the intellect. Now, you might say, yes, but in God, isn't God's true being, that he's true God, prior to the truths in the mind of God? To which I think Aquinas would say, no, nor is it the other way around.

Because to be God is to be omniscient, all-knowing. You'll see. And if God were not all-knowing, truth in the intellect, he wouldn't be God.

You'll see, because that is one of the transcendental attributes of... Okay. Yeah. Yeah.

Okay. Do you see the tradition continuing that we've been working with ever since the Greeks? The tradition grows, gets gradually Christianized in the early church, in St. Augustine, and onwards now, in Aquinas. Watch this, because it's this Christian philosophical worldview that's going to disintegrate all of a sudden.

When William of Ockham comes along, the thing seems to fall apart. We'll be getting to that on Monday, perhaps Wednesday of next week. Goodness.

Goodness. Which is another of those transcendental attributes. The goodness of God is evident in his providence.

That is to say, in the good things all the way down through his creation. An all-being is good. That is to say that an apple has its own kind of good.

A dog is good in the way that dogs are, in their very nature, good things. A human being is good in the sense that there is a kind of quality to human beings fitting into the overall interwoven goodness of the creation. Good there.

Where there is evil, evil is a privation of that good. A deprivation, if you like. So, a bad apple is one that is no longer true to its essence.

In fact, if it gets bad enough, it rots away into nothing. Where there is no goodness, there is no being. All being is, in degree, good.

You see. So the goodness, then, is manifested in the creation, at every level of the creation, in every aspect of the creation. Even in those that are rotten insofar as they still are, there is to that degree some evidence of God's goodness in imparting being with transcendental attributes in varying degrees.

And the piece you have on predestination, 531, you see. Predestination is treated by Aquinas in relation to divine providence that permits certain things to occur. Providence is the goodness of God in allowing something for good purposes.

You see. And on 534, you see this goodness summarized in the article, Whether God Can Do Better Than What He Does. Where the answer is, the goodness of anything is twofold.

One belongs to its essence; to be rational belongs to the essence of man. As regards this good, God cannot make a thing better than itself. You can't make a man better than a man is made to be good.

You see. But there is another kind of goodness. The goodness of a man is to be virtuous, or wise, or knowledgeable, to use the other example.

That's not of the essence; that's something which is achieved, something which is actualized. And in regard to that, God can make better the things that he has made. He can make you virtuous and wise.

You see. So, the goodness of God. Now, that general topic you may have felt was an echo of something that went on in the conference.

In fact, the first speaker on Saturday morning criticized some work done by Tom Morris at Notre Dame. In her paper on praising God in the best of all possible worlds. Paper on Anselm.

She was essentially agreeing with this position, which Anselm and the tradition, therefore Aquinas, accepted. That God makes a creation that is the best of possible worlds that he could make. According to their essence.

You see. In contrast to Morris, who, rejecting this tradition, says, No, God could have made a better creation than this one that he did. So, that matter came up in debate.

Look at 534 and the reply to objection 3 at the top of the page. Although the present order of things is restricted to what now exists, divine power and wisdom are not thus restricted. Whence, although no other order would be suitable and good for the things which now exist, yet God could make other things and impose on them another order.

So, this isn't the only possible world. God could make other possible worlds vastly different, which are as good. But for this particular world, it's the best possible world.

Okay? Now, you say in relation to that, well, what about the problem of evil? And his response, we already saw, was that evil is allowed for a greater good. And that is developed further on page 535. Where, in answering the question whether God is the cause of evil, he writes that evil consists in the defect of action caused by the defect of the agent.

But in God, there is no defect. Hence, evil, which consists in defect of action caused by defect of agent, is not reduced to God as its cause. You have to look for a defective agent.

And that look for a defective agent, of course, is the acceptance of Augustine's free will argument concerning the existence of evil. Due to the free will of defective agents. Human beings, fallen angels, so forth.

But on the other hand, evil, which consists in the corruption of some things, is reduced to God as the cause. And here he's speaking of the natural corruption of things, like apples that rot. And it's manifest that, halfway through that paragraph, it's manifest that the form which God intends in created things is the good of the order of the universe.

And if the good of the order of the universe requires that apples should rot, then rotting apples, in that sense, are good. And after all, where would the apple crops be without rotting apples? I mean, you wouldn't have apple seeds in order to seed more apple trees to produce more apples. So, rotting apples are, are they not, for the good of the universe? The good of the whole.

So, in the case of natural evils, he's maintaining that the greater good argument applies. With regard to moral evil, the free will argument applies. But God allows even that for the greater good.