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Maimonides and Aquinas
on Divine Attributes
The Importance of Avicenna

RICHARD C. TAYLOR

It is well known that Shlomo Pines's translation of Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed* and Pines's learned, stimulating introduction to the text have long influenced not only students of the rabbi's work but also scholars of the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Abrahamic traditions of medieval philosophical and religious thought. In scholarship on the Latin tradition, the use of the *Guide* by thinkers such as Alexander of Hales, William of Auvergne, Roland of Cremona, Giles of Rome, Albertus Magnus, Meister Eckhart, and other Christian Aristotelians of the thirteenth century has been duly noted. Nonetheless, major studies have focused mainly on the importance of Maimonides for the teachings of Thomas Aquinas, the best-known Latin theologian and philosophical thinker of that period.¹ With few exceptions,² the research has also centered on the direct relation between Maimonides and Aquinas without consideration of their wider context, even though recent studies of Aquinas have repeatedly shown the invaluable importance of key

1. Some examples are the following: Dienstag 1975; Haberman 1979; Kluxen 1986; Dobbs-Weinstein 1995; Hasselhoff 2001, 2002, 2004; Rubio 2006.

2. Various boundaries are valuably crossed in Burrell 1986; see also Burrell et al. 2010.

philosophers of the Arabic/Islamic classical rationalist tradition³ for the development of Aquinas's metaphysics of being and God and for his teachings on the nature of human knowing.⁴ The significance of this wider context has become all the more clear with recent studies published by members of the Aquinas and "the Arabs' Project."⁵ Furthermore, Maimonides wrote the *Guide* in Arabic and was himself strongly influenced by the Arabic/Islamic tradition, as were many other medieval Jewish thinkers, both those living in the lands of Islam and those in Christian Europe. Thus Aquinas's understanding of Maimonides and their philosophical relation cannot be isolated and abstracted from this broader Arabic context. In this chapter, I offer a detailed case study in order to show the importance of reorienting our approach to take into account the broader Arabic philosophical context in assessing the impact of Maimonides on Scholastic philosophy. In particular, through close philosophical analysis, I focus on the importance of Avicenna, not only for Aquinas in general but specifically for Aquinas's understanding of Maimonides' teachings on divine attributes—negative teachings that Aquinas attacked and countered with a vigorous defense of positive divine attributes that are knowable to human beings.

I also want to propose a second shift in our approach to the impact of Maimonides on Aquinas. What has proven to be most valuable for understanding Aquinas and the Arabic philosophical tradition is intensive study of his earliest writings, in particular his very lengthy *Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard* (hereafter *CS*) and his very brief *On Being and*

3. For a work that emphasizes that Arabic/Islamic philosophy is part of the Western tradition and belongs in philosophy classrooms, see Taylor and López-Farjeat 2016.

4. Some examples are Houser 2007, 2013; Wietecha 2016; López-Farjeat 2012; Krause 2015b; Cory 2015; Taylor 2012a, 2013.

5. In 2008 the Aquinas and "the Arabs' Project" (AAP) was founded at Marquette University as an international collaboration of scholars from North America and Europe to further the study of philosophy in Aquinas and the medieval European tradition and in the classical rationalist Arabic/Islamic tradition as an equally integral part of Western philosophy. The AAP particularly encourages and supports studies of the influence of the Arabic/Islamic tradition through Latin translations on the development of European medieval philosophy—an influence that is especially evident in the work of Aquinas. Thinkers such as the Muslim philosophers al-Fārābī, Avicenna, and Averroes and Jewish philosophers such as Maimonides and Ibn Gabirol made many direct and indirect contributions to Aquinas's own theological and philosophical doctrines and to the teachings of other European Latin writers. Since its inception, the AAP's International Working Group has held annual workshop conferences in the fall in North America and in spring or summer in Europe as well as sessions at other conferences. More detailed information is available at <http://www.AquinasAndTheArabs.org>. The scholars referenced in n. 4 are all members of this group.

Essence (De ente et essentia).⁶ While it has been common for many modern scholars to focus on his theological *Summa theologiae*—written for novices in theology—or his *Summa contra Gentiles*—a mature work well known for its cogent philosophical reasoning—his early and widely circulated *CS* has proven to be an invaluable source both for evidence of his extensive study and use of Arabic sources in translation and for insight into the initial approaches and analyses that are the foundations for a great many of his later, well-known doctrines.⁷ As I shall show, the *CS* is also a rich and precious source for exploring how Aquinas read and interpreted Maimonides' *Guide*.

In this essay, my focus is on one key issue in the thought of Maimonides as analyzed by Aquinas in the *CS*: human access to knowledge of the nature of God as considered by Aquinas at *CS* 1, d. 2, q. 1, where he deals with the question of whether the plurality of *rationes* or “notions” by which divine attributes differ are only in the human mind or are also present in God. Here Aquinas lays the doctrinal groundwork on the basis of which, later in *CS* 4, d. 49, q. 2, a. 1, he gives a philosophical account of how human beings in heaven are able to see God in His own essence (*per essentiam*) and “face-to-face.” Yet the analysis of the account in book 1 of the *CS*, where Aquinas directly opposes the famous agnosticism of Maimonides, is complicated by the fact that article 3, the most important of the five articles at *CS* 1, d. 2, q. 1, was not present in the original version of the *CS*. Rather, it was added some years after the original composition. Furthermore, the text of Aquinas as we have it mentions as a proponent of agnosticism not only Maimonides but also Avicenna—a major source for Aquinas's own metaphysics. As we shall see, what is particularly intriguing is that in grouping these two thinkers together, Aquinas implies that Maimonides' account is based primarily on the rabbi's understanding of Avicenna's teachings on the nature of God as the *Wājib al-Wujūd/Necesse Esse/Necessary Existent*.⁸

6. For the Latin texts of Aquinas's *Commentary on the Sentences*, I use Aquinas 1929a, 1929b, 1933, and 1947 and a superior draft edition of the Latin text of book 4, d. 49, q. 2 provided by Dr. Adriano Oliva of the Commissio Leonina in Paris. References to these are abbreviated as *CS* with book number indicated. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from Arabic and Latin are mine.

7. Three members in this working group, R. E. Houser, Luis López-Farjeat, and myself, have focused on a more methodical project to discover and analyze the importance of the Arabic philosophical tradition for Aquinas, starting with his earliest works. Our goal is to track and critically evaluate the penetrating influence of Arabic philosophy in translation on Aquinas's philosophy and theology.

8. As will be made clear in what follows, Aquinas's understanding of Avicenna's reasoning on the Divine Nature is established earlier in the *CS*. The use of that interpretation a

In what follows, I first list texts of the *CS* in which Aquinas cites the work of Maimonides. This brief survey will suffice to give us a sense of Aquinas's wide and deep familiarity with Maimonides and the points of potential impact. Second, as one case study, I proceed to consider Aquinas's reasoning in the *CS* on the nature of divine attributes. Third, I analyze Aquinas's assertion that Avicenna held an agnostic doctrine regarding divine attributes like that of Maimonides, and consider how Aquinas's metaphysics, in large portion derived from Avicenna, nevertheless undergirds his positive doctrine of analogy. Finally, I conclude with remarks on the metaphysical foundations of the teachings of Maimonides, Avicenna, and Aquinas on divine attributes.

Maimonides in the *Commentary on the Sentences*

Aquinas cites the work of Rabbi Moses in twenty-eight passages of the *CS*.⁹ Among the topics are (i) the notion that God is subsistent being and nothing but being without essence,¹⁰ (ii) that names said of God and creatures are equivocal,¹¹ (iii) that the name being is the ineffable name of God because of its highest dignity,¹² (iv) that God is the knowing author of the ends and purposes of things,¹³ (v) that God has perfect knowledge of singulars with his knowledge being something equivocal with human knowledge,¹⁴ (vi) that God's knowledge, though different from that of humans, equally encompasses both singulars and universals,¹⁵ (vii) the question of the eternity of the world and the difficulty of establishing the nature of the world in the past based on its present state,¹⁶ (viii) reasoning relevant to the non-demonstrative nature of Averroes' view that souls do not remain a pluralia after the death of the body,¹⁷ (ix) that the easiest way (*facillima via*) to

decade later in the inserted article 3 seems to be for the sake of clarifying Aquinas's analysis of Maimonides' teaching, and grounding it philosophically in Avicenna. In the first version of the *CS*, Aquinas had not mentioned any connection between Maimonides and Avicenna.

9. This is the result of a search using the *Index Thomisticus*, available at <http://www.corpusthomicum.org/it/index.age>.

10. *CS* 1, d. 2, q. 1, a. 3, resp.
11. *CS* 1, d. 2, q. 1, a. 3, resp.
12. *CS* 1, d. 8, q. 1, a. 1, sed contra 1.
13. *CS* 1, d. 35, q. 1, a. 2, resp.
14. *CS* 1, d. 36, q. 1, a. 1, resp.
15. *CS* 1, d. 39, q. 2, a. 2, resp.
16. *CS* 2, d. 1, q. 1, a. 5, resp.
17. *CS* 2, d. 1, q. 1, a. 5, ad contra 6.

show that God exists and is the cause of all things is from the supposition of the *de novo* creation of the world,¹⁸ (x) that the heavens function in the universe as the heart functions in an animal,¹⁹ (xi) that the heavens and the elements do not have a common matter,²⁰ (xii) that angels mentioned in Scripture are signs of divine power, but the number of separate substances is in accord with the determinations of the philosophers,²¹ (xiii) on natural elements and the interpretation of Genesis,²² (xiv) on the observance of the Sabbath for the sake of inculcating belief in the newness of the world (*novitas mundi*),²³ (xv) explanation of Aristotle's view (*Topics* IV.5.126a34–35) that even God is able to do bad things if He so wishes,²⁴ (xvi) on the five considerations that make it difficult for all people to understand God through reason, thereby justifying the need for faith,²⁵ (xvii) on the postponement of circumcision to the eighth day,²⁶ (xviii) on why earlier offerings to idols were permitted to be offered to God,²⁷ (xix) on the view that before the time of the law, fornication was not a sin,²⁸ (xx) on family habitation of those who are unmarried,²⁹ (xxi) on Maimonides' reasoning against the idea that the world was created for the sake of human beings,³⁰ and (xxii) on prophecy and its gradations.³¹

Based on the evidence of this limited but still somewhat wide-ranging set of texts, it is clear that the young Aquinas was familiar with substantial parts of the Latin translation of the *Guide of the Perplexed*. Still, it is not clear in the *CS* whether Aquinas fully comprehended the teachings of Maimonides in the *Guide* in fact to be a mixture of two modes of discourse, one religious and anthropomorphic and the other Aristotelian and scientific.³²

18. *CS* 2, d. 2, q. 1, a. 3, ad 2.

19. *CS* 2, d. 2, q. 2, a. 3, resp.

20. *CS* 2, d. 3, q. 1, a. 1, resp.

21. *CS* 2, d. 3, q. 1, a. 3, resp.

22. *CS* 2, d. 14, q. 1, a. 2, ad 2.

23. *CS* 2, d. 2, q. 1, a. 3, ad 2. See also *CS* 3, d. 37, q. 1, a. 5, qc. 1, sed contra 2; *CS* 3, d. 37, q. 1, a. 5, qc. 1, resp.

24. *CS* 3, d. 12, q. 2, a. 1, ad 4.

25. *CS* 3, d. 24, q. 1, a. 3, qc. 1, resp.

26. *CS* 4, d. 1, q. 2, a. 3, qc. 1, resp.

27. *CS* 4, d. 1, q. 2, a. 5, qc. 2, resp.

28. *CS* 4, d. 33, q. 1, a. 3, qc. 3, resp.

29. *CS* 4, d. 40, q. 1, a. 4, resp.; *CS* 4, d. 42, q. 2, a. 2, resp.

30. *CS* 4, d. 48, q. 2, a. 3, ad 6.

31. *CS* 4, d. 49, q. 2, a. 7, ad 2.

32. An older contemporary of Maimonides, however, was well aware of this issue of diverse discourses. It can be found in the methodology of Averroes, expressed in the *Faṣl*

CS 1, d. 2, q. 1, a. 3

“Whether the plurality of notions (*rationum*) by which attributes differ is only in the intellect or also in God.”³³

As indicated above, the issue of teaching the impossibility of predicating positive attributes of God occurs in at least three different passages where Aquinas references the text of Maimonides. This issue is clearly very important for Aquinas, particularly since he famously disagrees with Maimonides, instead insisting on the legitimacy of such predications. Rather than follow the philosophical agnosticism of the rabbi, Aquinas offers his own well-known doctrine of analogy that allows for the assertion of the truth of certain positive predicates of God while denying to human beings full

al-maqāl and confirmed in the opening pages of *Al-kashf‘an al-manāhij*. In contrast to the usual translation of the title *Faṣl al-maqāl* as the *Decisive Treatise*, a more literal rendering of the Arabic title would be *The Book of the Distinction of Discourse and the Establishment of the Connection between the Religious Law and Philosophy* (following El Ghannouchi 2002, 139–45). The discourses distinguished are that of religion (which involves rhetoric and dialectic wherein truth is only *per accidens*) and that of philosophy (wherein the ideal methodology of demonstration attains truth *per se*). That this is a sound rendering of the title is reinforced by Averroes’ reference in the opening pages of the *Kashf* to that earlier work when remarking that religion has two parts, the apparent or external and the interpreted. He writes, “In a separate work we have already made clear the congruity of philosophy with religion (*al-ḥikma li-shar‘*) and the command of religion for [the doing of philosophy]. We said there that religion (*al-shar‘a*) has two parts: [one] evident and [one] interpreted (*zāhir wa-mu‘awwal*). The evident is obligatory for the majority (*al-jumhūr*) and the interpreted obligatory for the learned (*al-ulamā‘*). The obligation of the majority in regard to it is to take it according to its evident sense and to refrain from interpreting it; for the learned it is not permitted to inform the majority of its interpretation” (Averroes 1998a, 99). The apparent or external (*zāhir*) is to be taken literally by the masses without any interpretation permitted, while the interpreted (*mu‘awwal*) is understood with the philosophical tools expounded in the *Faṣl al-maqāl* and reserved for the learned who are forbidden to divulge it to the masses. In contrast to Averroes’ firm prohibition against confusing the majority by displaying apparent contradictions between religious interpretations of Scripture and philosophical and scientific teachings, Maimonides openly displays contradictions between these two distinct methods of discourse and leaves it to his readers to discern their own way through the contradictions. For further discussion of these issues of method in Averroes, see Taylor 2014; see also Taylor 2012c. Both Maimonides and Averroes were working under the influence of al-Fārābī’s conception of representation according to which philosophical truths can be expressed imitatively or by representation in another mode of discourse, as happens in religion; see Vallat 2004, 297ff., especially 297–301, 336–40.

33. Rubio (2006) discusses this article at length and analyzes its context. In what follows here, I provide my own account, focusing on the importance of Avicenna for Aquinas and Maimonides in a manner she does not.

knowledge of the content of those predicates when said of God.³⁴ Aquinas's critical engagement with the views of Maimonides in this early passage of the *CS* is important for the coherence of his theology, since he needs to open clearly the way to a human vision of God. Later, in the fourth book of the *CS*, Aquinas, explicitly using a philosophical model drawn from Averroes and Alexander of Aphrodisias³⁵ as recounted by Averroes in the *Long Commentary on the "De Anima" of Aristotle*, provides a rational and clearly philosophical account of the ultimate human end and the religious promise of the vision of God "face-to-face" in knowing God's very essence. Had Aquinas acceded to the reasoning of Maimonides, the vision of God's essence would have been precluded and his Christian teaching undermined. In contrast, Aquinas takes a bold approach, asserting that God can be known in the present life and God's essence can be seen in the next one. With this he sets out with confidence a rationalist philosophical theology that differs radically from the dual methodological approach of Maimonides.³⁶

The immediate context of the article examined in detail here is a consideration of Trinity and unity. *CS* 1, d. 2, q. 1 has five articles: (a. 1) Whether God is only one; (a. 2) Whether there are many attributes in God; (a. 3) Whether the plurality of notions (*rationum*) by which attributes differ is only in the intellect or also in God; (a. 4) Whether there are many persons in the Divinity; and (a. 5) Whether the divine persons differ in reality or only by reason. (Since our concern is with philosophical reasoning, I leave aside articles 4 and 5, which are specific to Christian theology.) In article 1, he argues that every multiplicity must be preceded by a unity and that the whole plurality of beings must be reduced to or founded on one first principle of all beings, which is God, something he says faith presupposes and reason demonstrates. In article 2, he reasons that all being and goodness in creatures come from God, yet their imperfection is a result of their natures as created *ex nihilo*. Drawing on the notion discussed by Aristotle (*Physics* III.3.202a12–b29) that the actuality of an agent qua agent consists in the

34. A standard understanding of Maimonides is recounted in Seeskin 2014.

35. See Taylor 2012a; Krause 2015a.

36. For Aquinas, there is a unity of truth that brings together the weakness of human natural reason with the ultimate truth, God. In contrast, Averroes follows and exaggerates a Farabian approach to religion and philosophy—a rationalist account that places philosophy over religious discourse and declares the study of metaphysics the greatest worship that humans can perform. On Averroes' notion of a religious law specific to philosophers, see Taylor 2012c.

actualization of the patient and on the notion that characteristics of a cause can be inferred from characteristics of an effect (*Metaphysics* II.1.993b23–27),³⁷ Aquinas asserts that “whatever . . . is the cause of something has that [characteristic] in a more excellent and more noble way,” and draws the consequence that “all the excellences (*nobilitates*) of creatures are found in God in the most noble of ways and without any imperfection; and for this reason those [excellences] that are diverse in creatures are one in God owing to [His] highest simplicity.”³⁸ The various excellences, such as wisdom, goodness, and the like, are all one in the Divine Essence according to the highest reality of each in such a way that they differ only according to reason and not in reality:

And so it is that He is not at all an equivocal cause of things since He produces effects similar to His [own] form, not in a univocal way but in an analogical way . . . according to the teaching of Dionysius. Hence, He is the exemplar form of things, not only for those things in His wisdom, namely, according to ideal reasons, but also for those things that are in His nature, namely, the attributes. Some, however, say that those attributes do not differ except regarding their connotations in creatures, which cannot be the case. For a cause does not have something from the effect, but the converse, and so God is not called wise because wisdom exists as something from Him whereas a created thing is called wise insofar as it imitates divine wisdom. Likewise, because creatures do not exist from eternity, [and] even if they were never to exist in the future, it was true to say that there is [something] wise, good, and the like. Nor does it signify for one and another what is absolutely the same, as [is the case when] the same thing is signified through synonymous names.³⁹

37. “Now we do not know a truth without its cause; and a thing has a quality in a higher degree than other things if in virtue of it the similar quality belongs to the other things (e.g. fire is the hottest of things; for it is the cause of the heat of all other things); so that that which causes derivative truths to be true is most true” (Aristotle 1984, 2:1570).

38. *Quod autem est causa alicuius habet illud excellentius et nobilius. Unde oportet quod omnes nobilitates omnium creaturarum inveniantur in Deo nobilissimo modo et sine aliqua imperfectione: ete ideo quare in creaturis sunt diversa, in Deo propter summam simplicitatem sunt unum* (CS 1, d. 2, a. 2, resp., p. 62).

39. *Et inde est quod ipse non est causa rerum omnino aequivoca, cum secundum formam suam producat effectus similes, non univoce, sed analogice; sicut a sua sapientia derivatur omnis sapientia, et ita de aliis attributis, secundum doctrinam Dionysii. Unde ipse est exemplaris forma rerum, non tantum quantum ad ea quae sunt in sapientia sua, scilicet secundum rationes ideales, sed etiam quantum ad ea quae sunt in natura sua, scilicet attributa. Quidam autem dicunt, quod ista attributa non differunt nisi penes connotata in creaturis: quod non*

As set out at this stage in the development of the CS, the foundation for Aquinas's view is the account of the Areopagite in *On Divine Names*, chapters 5 and 7. Thirteenth-century thinkers had already found peace and reconciliation with those teachings in an interpretation that turned away from that text's denial of human intellectual knowledge of the Divine Essence Itself to a more positive reading. In 1241, William of Auvergne, in his function as bishop of Paris, condemned the view that the vision of God is unavailable to humans or angels, and it is in accord with that condemnation that both Aquinas and his teacher Albert adopted positive understandings of the knowability of God.⁴⁰ William's theological determination of the issue confirmed the attribution of divine names in support of the literal interpretation of 1 Corinthians 13:12: "Now we see darkly as in a mirror, but then face-to-face. Now I know partially, but then I will know even as

potest esse: tum quia causa non habet aliquid ab effectu, sed e converso: unde Deus non dicitur sapiens quia ab eo est sapientia, sed potius res creata dicitur sapiens in quantum imitatur divinam sapientiam: tum quia ab aeterno creaturis non existentibus, etiam si nunquam futurae fuissent, fuit verum dicere, quod est sapiens, bonus et hujusmodi. Nec idem omnino significatur per unum et per aliud, sicut idem significatur per nomina synonyma (CS 1, d. 2, q. 1, a. 2, resp., p. 62). In his later *Commentary on the "On Divine Names" of Dionysius*, Aquinas reads in the Latin: *Omnia quidem in seipsa prae habet secundum unum simplicitatis excessum, omnem duplicitatem refutans; omnia autem eodem modo continet, secundum supersimplificatam ipsius infinitatem et ab omnibus singulariter participatur* (He pre-contains all things in Himself according to one excess of simplicity, refusing all duplication; however, He contains all things in [one and] the same way according to His supersimplified infinity and He is participated by all individually). On this Aquinas writes: *Ratio quare potest esse omnium causa est ista: quia omnia existentia prae habet in sui unitate; et quia ex eo quod habet unumquodque et causat aliquid ad similitudinem sui, sequitur quod ille qui in se habet omnia, subsistere faciat omnia, praesens omnibus rebus et ubique, non secundum diversas sui partes, sed secundum unum et idem et secundum idem est omnia, in quantum in sua simplici essentia, omnia virtualiter prae existunt; et similiter secundum idem procedit ad omnia causative et tamen manet in seipso, immutabilis existens in causando et stans est in quantum non mutatur et motus in quantum diffundit ad alia sui similitudinem* (The reason why He can be the cause of all things is this: He pre-contains all existing things in His unity. And because He holds each thing and causes a thing as His likeness, it follows that He who has all things in Himself makes all things to subsist, being everywhere present to all things, not according to diverse parts of Himself, but as one and the same and as the same He is all things, insofar as all things are virtually pre-contained in His simple essence. Likewise, as the same He proceeds to all things in a causative way while yet remaining in Himself, immutable and existing in the causing and remaining still insofar as He is not changed and moved, He diffuses His likeness to other things). Latin text of Dionysius, chap. 5, sect. 9, #284 (Aquinas 1950, 248); text of Aquinas, #672 (Aquinas 1950, 250).

40. See De Contenson 1959, 1962. An extensive discussion of this can be found in Aquinas's later *Summa theologiae*, prima pars, q. 13. Of particular interest is a. 2, where the views of the CS are repeated.

I am known.”⁴¹ This is important for the philosophically rich explication of human vision of the Divine Essence in heaven that Aquinas presents at CS 4, d. 49, q. 2, a. 1. In light of that, it is not surprising that Aquinas repeatedly rejects the negativity and agnosticism of Maimonides as expressed in the *Guide* at I 51–52 and I 56–58. His firm belief in the truth of the religious doctrine that God will be seen “face-to-face” in the afterlife is clearly a motivating factor for Aquinas to work to provide a philosophically compatible account. However, thus far in the *CS*, Aquinas has not provided or brought together the needed metaphysical underpinnings for this doctrine.

In book 1, d. 2, q. 1, a. 3 of his *CS*, Aquinas deals with the issue of whether the plurality of *rationes* or “notions” by which divine attributes differ are only in the mind or are also in God. This article, however, was not found in the initial version of the *CS*; some scholars have contended that it is a late insertion made perhaps about a decade after the original composition of the *CS*. As A. Dondaine reasoned and Mercedes Rubio worked to confirm in her book-length study,⁴² Aquinas might have composed this lengthy article—perhaps from a formal *quaestio*—after having been assigned the task of evaluating Peter of Tarantasia’s *Commentary on the Sentences* for doctrinal error. According to Rubio, after discovering weaknesses in the accounts of Peter, who had based his views on Aquinas’s own account in the *CS*, Aquinas not only returned to reflect on the challenges of Maimonides but even decided to insert a new article, the present article 3, into the already-circulating original version of the *CS*.⁴³ More recently, however, Adriano Oliva has reasoned convincingly that the insertion of article 3 likely took place in Paris only a few years after the completion of the original version of the first book of the *CS*.⁴⁴ But let us return to Aquinas’s reasoning in this article.

41. *Videmus nunc per speculum in aenigmate: tunc autem facie ad faciem. Nunc cognosco ex parte: tunc autem cognoscam sicut et cognitus sum* (Latin Vulgate 2001).

42. Dondaine 1933, 1938; Rubio 2006. See also Lemaigre 1966.

43. According to Rubio, her “study supports the view that what provoked Aquinas’ review of Maimonides’ position on the knowledge of God was not a renewed concern for Maimonides’ controversial answer to the problem, but a much closer concern, that is, the need to criticize and at the same time justify his colleague Peter of Tarantasia’s writings on the matter. It also shows that Aquinas’ review of Maimonides’ *Guide* at this critical stage led him not in the direction of an enhancing of the role of analogy—the notion is paid little attention in the *Quaestio*—but in that of searching for a comprehensive explanation of why our knowledge of God is so scarce in this life, and the hints we find for a future, clear knowledge of God in the world to come” (Rubio 2006, 7–8).

44. See Oliva 2006, 160–61, 130–39. Two recent doctoral dissertations have dealt with the issue of divine names. See Brian Carl, “The Order of the Divine Names in the Writings of

In the course of his response, Aquinas spells out several approaches to the issue with that of Maimonides playing a prominent role in the discussion. The aim of his discussion, however, is to understand how various interpreters understand the *ratio* (notion, nature, character) of an attribute. The importance of this aim must be highlighted, since Aquinas adds the comment that “on this depends nearly all the understanding of the things said in book 1” of his *CS*.

Aquinas addresses the issues of the senses and the use of the term *ratio* under four considerations: (i) what it means when it is said that things differ by *ratio*; (ii) how it is said that a *ratio* in a thing exists or does not exist; (iii) whether or not there exist diverse *rationes* of attributes in God; and (iv) whether the plurality of *rationes* of those attributes exist only in human intellects or in some way in the thing itself (namely, God). He proceeds to consider each of these in detail, expounding the last two at length, since they are so important for his conception of divine attributes.

(i) In its first sense, *ratio* is just the signification of a name that the intellect apprehends. This is the case for definitions as well as other understandable things that do not have strict definitions, since these things, such as quantity, quality, and the like, can be signified even if not defined. In the case of God or God’s wisdom, though we do not have a definition, the notion of wisdom when applied to God is the human intellect’s conception of the signification of the name. Here, what is signified is not the human concept itself but the intended referent of the concept. We use the human concept (*ratio*), but what is signified in this usage is not that concept but the intended referent—namely, the wisdom that is God’s essence.

(ii) Thus, the *ratio* in the soul signifies something in a thing external to the soul as corresponding to the mind’s concept. The concept can be related to that external thing in three ways. First, it may be a likeness of the thing external to the soul founded in the thing and in conformity with what is in the soul so that what is in the soul is true of the thing. Second, it may signify something that is consequent upon the way of understanding the external thing. These things are intentions of the mind, such as genus and species, that have a remote foundation in the external thing but a proximate foundation in the human mind. Third, it may signify fantastic, imagined notions that have no foundation in reality. What is most important to note here

Thomas Aquinas” (2015) and Garrett Smith, “The Problem of Divine Names from Thomas Aquinas to Duns Scotus” (2013). I am glad to extend my thanks to Brian Carl for calling my attention to the work of Oliva and these two dissertations.

concerns the second, “namely, that a *ratio* is said to be in a thing insofar as the thing signified by the name to which the *ratio* accrues is in the thing; and this happens properly when the concept of the intellect is a likeness of the thing.”

(iii) On the issue of *rationes* of attributes actually being in God, Aquinas distinguishes two options. For the first, he remarks that both Maimonides and Avicenna hold that God is some sort of subsistent being that is nothing other than being—being without essence.⁴⁵ Aquinas writes that everything else other than being that is attributed to God is asserted to be true either through the way of negation or through the mode of causality.⁴⁶ Negation involves removing defects (such as saying God is wise to remove the defect of lacking wisdom), or it involves eliminating something consequent upon negation (such as describing God as one for the sake of denying plurality, or saying He is immaterial to negate the idea that He is matter or material, yielding by way of negation the common conclusion that God possesses intellectual understanding, since immateriality entails intellectuality). The way of causality is proposed in two ways. The first is, as it were, top down, insofar as something can be said to be in God Himself because it is produced

45. The precise language is worth noting: *Res illa quae Deus est est quoddam esse subsistens nec aliquid aliud nisi esse, in Deo est: unde dicunt quod est esse sine essentia* (The very thing which is God is a certain subsistent being and nothing else but being is in God. Hence, they say that [God] is being without essence). However, the issue is more complex and subtle than Aquinas indicates here. Avicenna, early in book 8 of the *Metaphysics of the Shifā'*, holds that God has an essence (*dhāt*) and this essence is His existence: “Hence, everything except the One—who is one by His essence (*li-dhāti-hi*) and who is the Existent (*al-mawjūd*) who is existent by His essence—acquires existence from something else and is existing through it and is not [existing] in its own essence” (Avicenna 2005, 272; translation modified). Yet later he goes on to explain more fully that God cannot have an essence in the way creatures do, so God properly speaking does not have an essence. He writes, “For the One has no essence (*māhiyya*) and He emanates existence (*al-wujūd*) from Himself onto the things having essence” (Avicenna 2005, 276; my translation). As Bertolacci puts it, “Since the First Principle has no cause, It cannot rely on a cause conferring existence to Its essence and cannot therefore be affected by any distinction of essence and existence” (Bertolacci 2012, 282). Hence, Avicenna ultimately seems to deny essence of God. See Bertolacci 2012 for a more detailed discussion of essence and existence in Avicenna; regarding *Metaphysics*, book 8 in particular, see pp. 282–84. Maimonides, on the other hand, allows that God is a simple essence, not denying essence but asserting that His essence involves existence and also that the Divine Essence Itself is beyond creaturely description except through negation or causality, neither of which positively characterizes the Divine Essence. This is the task of the lengthy discussion in the *Guide* that begins at I 51 and continues through I 65 (Pines 112–60).

46. Here Aquinas follows the metaphysical account of Avicenna; see the next section below, “Avicenna and Aquinas in the Context of Maimonides’ Agnosticism.”

by God in a creature in a less perfect way. (This requires a knowledge of the Divine Essence.) The second is, as it were, bottom up, as it is related to the less perfect way it exists in creatures; God is called willing and pious, since He produces those *rationes* in creatures. Thus, one can use causality to reason from Creator to creature or from creature to Creator. Aquinas then explains:

According to this view [of Avicenna and Maimonides], it follows that all the names that are said of God and creatures are said equivocally and that there is no likeness of the creature to the Creator from the fact that the creature is good or wise or anything of that sort; Rabbi Moses says this explicitly. According to this, what is conceived regarding the names of attributes is not referred to God so that it is a likeness of what is in Him. Hence it follows that the *rationes* of those names are not in God as if they were to have a proximate foundation in Him, but rather He is a remote foundation. . . . In this way, according to this view, the *rationes* of these attributes are only in the mind, not in the reality that is God; and the intellect reaches these from the consideration of creatures, either through negation or through causality.⁴⁷

Aquinas immediately follows this with the Latin tradition's contrasting positive analysis of the predication of attributes based on the common view of Dionysius and Anselm on Divine perfections.⁴⁸ Any perfection found in creatures exists preeminently in God with regard to universality (since in God are found all the excellences that could not possibly be gathered in a single creature), plenitude (since wisdom and other attributes are in God without defect), and unity (since God pre-contains all things such that He causes all, knows all, and all things are made like Him analogically). Aquinas writes:

According to this opinion, the conceptions that our intellect conceives from the names of attributes are truly likenesses of the reality (*in re*) that is God, although they are deficient and not in their fullness (*plena*) as is the case concerning other things that are similar to God. Hence

47. *CS* 1, d. 2, q. 1, a. 3, resp., p. 68.

48. Regarding Dionysius, see n. 39. Aquinas merely mentions Anselm as being in accord with Dionysius in holding that God possesses all perfections. The reference is to Anselm's perfect being theology as found detailed in his *Monologion*. For a discussion of this work as well as the *Proslogion*, see Leftow 2004.

notions (*rationes*) of this sort are not just in the intellect because they have a proximate foundation in the reality that is God. And from this it happens that whatever follows on wisdom, insofar as it is of this sort, belongs rightly and properly to God. These opinions, however, although seemingly diverse on the surface, still are not contrary [to one another] if one considers the reasons for the things stated with respect to the grounds for stating them.⁴⁹ The first [namely, Avicenna and Maimonides] considered created things themselves on the basis of which the names of attributes are imposed, as when the name “wisdom” is imposed on a certain quality and the name “essence” [is imposed] on a certain thing that does not subsist. These are far from God. And for this reason, they said that God is being without essence and that there is no wisdom as such in Him.⁵⁰

Aquinas’s point here is that if essence can in no way be attributed to God insofar as He is only being or only subsisting being, then, properly speaking, attributions through causality from creatures cannot pertain to Divine Essence at all. Although he is discussing the specific problem of anthropomorphism, Kenneth Seeskin captures the general issue in a clear and succinct way in the conclusion to his *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* article on Maimonides:

How one assesses Maimonides’ philosophy depends on one’s own philosophic view. For a traditional theist like Aquinas, he [Maimonides] is right to say that there are issues, e.g. creation, that cannot be resolved by demonstration and to insist that all attempts to anthropomorphize God are misguided. The problem is that in rejecting anthropomorphism, he may have gone too far. If God bears no likeness to the created order, and if terms like *wise*, *powerful*, or *lives* are completely ambiguous when applied to God and us, the conception of divinity we are left with is too thin for the average worshipper to appreciate. . . . Finally, for an atheist, Maimonides’ philosophy shows us what happens if you remove all anthropomorphic content from your conception of God: you remove all

49. Cf. Rubio’s translation: “These opinions, although they may seem superficially diverse, are nonetheless not opposed to each other, if we base the rationale of their statements on the speakers’ positions” (Rubio 2006, 260n26).

50. *CS* 1, d. 2, q. 1, a. 3, resp., p. 69.

content of any kind. In the end, you are left with a God whose essence is unknowable and indescribable. Of what possible value is such a conception either to philosophy or religion?⁵¹

Others consider the modes of perfection that are used as the foundation for divine names and hold that because God is simple and perfect in all ways, positive names are applicable to Him. This is true for those with views (i) and (ii). Regarding (iii), we see that it must be the case that *rationes* are attributed to God as truly existing in Him because “the *ratio* of the name holds more on the part of that from which the name is imposed than from the part of that on which it is imposed.” That is, the *ratio* belongs more to God than to that which possesses it as derived from God’s causality.

(iv) Equally important is this final consideration: whether the plurality of notions (*rationes*) of those attributes exist only in human intellects or in some way in the thing itself (namely, God). The requisite task here is clear: Aquinas must provide grounds for the position that these notions as attributes of God are actually in the Divine Essence, which is a complete and simple unity. Aquinas’s view is also evident enough. Since we attribute a plurality of names to God but we also hold that God is a simple unity without essential and per se plurality, the plurality of names must be imposed from the plurality they have in the human intellect. This is explained in light of the deficiency and inability of the finite human intellect to comprehend God in one simple essential notion:

It is clear . . . that the plurality of names comes from the fact that God exceeds our intellect. However, that God exceeds our intellect is on the part of God Himself owing to the plenitude of His perfection and on the part of our intellect that is deficiently related to its comprehension.⁵²

The limitation, then, is on the part of the human intellect when faced with the fullness of being and essence in God, who is the unitary ground for human attributions:

It is . . . not from the fact that He makes good things or because He is related to the mode of good things that He is good. Rather, because He is

51. Seeskin 2014.

52. *CS* 1, d. 2, q. 1, a. 3, resp., p. 70.

good He makes good things and other things are related to His mode by participating in His goodness.⁵³

In this way, the fourth [consideration of *ratio*] is clear because the plurality of those names is not only on the part of our intellect forming diverse conceptions of God that are said to be diverse in notion (*ratione*), as is evident from the things already said, but [also] on the part of God Himself—that is, insofar as there is something in God corresponding to all those conceptions, namely, His perfection that is full and in all modalities. According to this, it happens that any of the names signifying those conceptions is truly and properly said of God. However, this is not the case in such a way that diversity or multiplicity is asserted to be in the reality that is God on the basis of those attributes.⁵⁴

Aquinas then spells out his position with clarity, here drawing on the assertion that it is simply the case that the nature of which the plurality of attributes is said is the actually existing unitary Divine Nature Itself. This is found in the response to the preceding article, *CS* 1, d. 2, q. 1, a. 2:

I respond that whatever there is of entity (*entitatis*) and goodness is wholly from the Creator. Imperfection, however, is not from Him but occurs on the part of creatures insofar as they are from nothing. *However, what is the cause of something has that in a more excellent and more noble way.* Consequently, it is necessary that all the excellences (*nobilitates*) of all creatures be found in God in the most noble way and without any imperfection. For this reason, what [excellences] are diverse in creatures are one in God owing to [His] highest simplicity. In this way, then, it should be said that there is wisdom, goodness, and the like in God, any of which is the Divine Essence Itself and in such a way that all are one in reality.⁵⁵

In God the attributes have their most perfect *ratio*, while in creatures they exist analogously as less perfect. In creatures these notions are derived from and imitative of their highest reality found in God.

Without a clearly established foundation, the reasoning I have set out

53. *CS* 1, d. 2, q. 1, a. 3, resp., p. 71.

54. *CS* 1, d. 2, q. 1, a. 3, resp., p. 71.

55. *CS* 1, d. 2, q. 1, a. 2, resp., p. 62; my emphasis.

here would remain tenuous even if the concerns of Seeskin are recognized. For that reason, I call attention to Aquinas's reference to the scriptural promise from 1 Corinthians 13:12 that we will see God "face-to-face" in heaven. Aquinas writes in his response as follows:

If . . . our intellect sees God in Himself (*per seipsum*), it could impose one name on that thing, which will take place in heaven. And for this reason, the book of Zechariah [14:9] has, "On that day there will be one Lord and His name [will be] one." That name, however, would not signify just goodness or just wisdom or anything of this sort; rather, it would include all the things signified by all those [names]. But still, if the intellect seeing God in His essence (*per essentiam*) were to impose the name of the thing that it sees and to name through a mediating concept what it has of the thing, it would still be necessary that it impose a plurality of names. This is because it is impossible that a concept belonging to a created intellect represent the whole perfection of the Divine Essence.⁵⁶

Note that while the text of the book of Zechariah references just one name for God, Aquinas interprets the verse so that it fits the religious aspect of his teachings in this article and, in particular, the promise of 1 Corinthians 13:12. To see the essence of God or to see God "face-to-face" is not somehow to see or know pure being or subsisting being without any essence, since there would be no quiddity or essence to see or to know. Created intellects know things and their natures through the essences of things, not through some apprehension or judgment regarding the act of being or existing. This is simply because creatures cannot have *comprehensive* knowledge of the infinite being of God, which is undelimited by finite form. Form or essence is the principle of human knowing in the primary sense, as found in demonstrations *propter quid* or *dioti*, even if an apprehension of the existence of something can be had without apprehending the essence, as is the case in demonstrations *quia* or *hoti*.⁵⁷ For Aquinas, following 1 Corin-

56. CS 1, d. 2, q. 1, a. 3, resp., p. 70.

57. Demonstration *quia* is knowledge that God exists and is the extent to which knowledge of God can be had through natural human powers *in via* (i.e., in the present life), though *in patria* (i.e., in the afterlife in heaven) God's essence will be known to human beings through Divine grace. On this point, see Taylor 2012a; Krause 2015b. For Aquinas, when this sort of demonstration is combined with the analysis of God as *ipsum esse* (being itself), a foundation for positive predication of attributes is available. That is, demonstration *quia* does yield knowledge of God as a referent essence and provides a foundation for

thians 13:12, human knowledge of God necessarily implies and includes the reality of the Divine Essence as essence even if such human knowledge is not comprehensive. As we have seen, in this article of the *CS*, Aquinas has interpreted the doctrines of Avicenna and Maimonides as asserting that there can be no knowledge of God in essence, since His pure being or subsistent being itself entails no essence as such. Hence, his attack is precisely against these agnostic teachings, and key to the foundations of his attack is the scriptural confirmation of 1 Corinthians 13:12 that God will be seen “face-to-face,” which is understood to mean God being seen in His very essence in heaven. At this point in his reasoning in the theological account of the *CS*, knowledge of the existence of God is assumed, though it will elsewhere be proven through demonstration *quia*. But knowledge or sight of God in His essence is promised by 1 Corinthians 13:12 and accepted by Aquinas even if such knowledge cannot be comprehensive due to His infinite incomprehensibility.

Were he to use that interpretation and conception of 1 Corinthians 13:12 as a premise in his reasoning, Aquinas would be founding his reasoning mainly on the understanding of that scriptural promise—which is so central to Christian theological teaching—as meaning that in heaven the saints will in fact have intellectual apprehension of God. Aquinas raises this issue later in *CS* 4, d. 49, q. 2, a. 1, where he considers whether seeing God “face-to-face” is the same as the philosophers’ doctrine of knowing separate substances.⁵⁸ He recounts in detail the teachings of al-Fārābī, Ibn Bājja, and Avicenna, explaining how each of them had made knowledge of separate substance in some way less than direct and immediate.⁵⁹ Aquinas concerns himself in particular with the account of the separate substances or angels

predication even if the complete meaning of what is predicated is beyond complete human comprehension *in via*. For clear discussions of this, see Porro 2016, 23–24, 129–32. See the classic account in Owens 1963, 353ff.

58. Aquinas does not mention Maimonides in this passage of *CS* 4. Of course, when writing *CS* 4, Aquinas did not have *CS* 1, d. 2, q. 1, a. 3, the text that he later inserted into the original version of the *CS*.

59. Aquinas rejects the natural epistemology of Averroes’ *Long Commentary on the “De Anima”* in which human knowing involves a connection with higher intellectual substances, but he accepts that model for supernatural knowing of the Divine Essence; see Taylor 2012a, 2013. But the case of Averroes is problematic. On the one hand, he indicates that there is no afterlife for individual human beings, but, on the other hand, he seems to hold that ultimate happiness involves some sort of human path to knowledge of the Essence of God. Regarding the former, see Averroes 1938–52, 3:1612.4–1613.4, with English translation in Averroes 1984, 157; see also Taylor 1998b, 2012b. For the latter, see Averroes 1938–52, 1:7.14–8.13; 1966, 55.51–56.67; Steel 2001.

as emanating from individual human rational souls. In the following section, he writes that, according to Avicenna, “the separate substances are understood by us through the intentions of their quiddities, which are certain likenesses of them—not abstracted from them, because they are themselves immaterial, but impressed by these [intellects] on our souls.” The point here is that, in Avicenna’s view, the separate substances are understood through mediating likenesses and not directly.⁶⁰ Hence, the same will hold regarding the knowledge of God, with the meaning that He too can be apprehended only through a likeness and not directly. Aquinas rejects this Avicennian approach because of the principle that “everything that is received in something is in this in the mode of the recipient,” which yields the problematic consequence that “the likeness of the Divine Essence impressed by it on our intellect will be through the mode of our intellect.” That is, whatever is in the human intellect will be imperfect and diminished in accord with the mode and nature of our imperfect human intellects, not in accord with the Divine Essence as it is in itself. In this way, even if the *ratio* of the Divine Essence is present to the human intellect, it will be present there not as it is in itself but rather in accord with the recipient’s own incomplete and weaker mode of accidental receptive perfection, as if the human intellect were to have in it a small bit of whiteness in regard to what has in itself a great deal of whiteness.

For Aquinas, then, to see God “face-to-face” or to understand the Divine Essence is to apprehend it immediately in a way that requires no mediating likeness, in contrast to what is found in the epistemology of Avicenna—an epistemology that might be termed a sort of representationalism. Any mediating likeness will, as something created, be a representation and not the Divine Essence Itself. In this article of *CS* 4, Aquinas similarly dismisses the accounts of al-Fārābī and Ibn Bājja. Yet Aquinas—more than a little surprisingly—returns to Averroes and his account of the teaching of Alexander of Aphrodisias, an account found in the *Long Commentary on the “De Anima” of Aristotle*, for the model for supernatural knowing. Averroes had followed Alexander and used the term “form for us” for the Agent Intellect and had written that the two separate substantial intellects (Agent Intellect and Material Intellect) are “in our soul.” In this he was merely following the language of Aristotle at *De anima* III.5.430a13 (*en tē psychē*), who asserts that for a change from not knowing to knowing there must operate in us a certain receptivity and also a certain actuality. Following the model of

60. See Avicenna 2005, 107–9. This issue is discussed in Black 2014.

Averroes in which a supervening intellect brings the lower human being an enhancing power that raises it up to have intellectual knowledge, Aquinas holds that in beatitude in the afterlife, God plays a dual role. God in His very essence is the object known or seen “face-to-face” as the unmediated object of this supernatural understanding, although without complete human comprehension of the infinite totality of what God is. This is to say that God is *quod est*, what is seen or known. And since God is the very agent bringing about this vision in the human knower in heaven, He is *quo est*, that by which a supernatural receptivity comes about in the saintly knower.⁶¹

The cogency of this account of knowing God in CS 4 relies on that of the earlier reasoning in CS 1 on the very possibility of God being a knowable object. As I have set it out thus far, 1 Corinthians 13:12 functions as an accepted religious premise reinforced by a second, Zechariah 14:19: God will be seen “face-to-face” and God will be known by one true name.⁶² Together these premises provide a religious grounding for the vision of God and for the notion that God *in se* will have one name. However, as I remarked earlier, positive philosophical teachings on the names and attributes of God are concerned with what can be known and said regarding God, not with what follows mysteriously from revelation. For Aquinas, the philosophical doctrine of the positive analogical predication of names must be founded on metaphysical grounds about the very nature of God if they are to be properly philosophical and not remain only theological or religious.

Avicenna and Aquinas in the Context of Maimonides’ Agnosticism

In his solution to CS 1, d. 2, q. 1, a. 3, Aquinas places both Maimonides and Avicenna in the camp of those who

say that . . . the thing that is God is a certain subsistent being (*esse subsistens*), and nothing but being (*esse*) is in God; hence, they say that He is being without essence. All other things that are attributed to God are,

61. See Taylor 2012a; Krause 2015a, 2015b. In CS 4, d. 49, q. 2, a. 6, ad 4, Aquinas notes that God exceeds the powers of human and angelic intellects and that these intellects in themselves are not possessed of a disposition sufficiently capable of union with the Divine Essence.

62. Romans 1:20 is also relevant, since it asserts that God’s invisible qualities of eternal power and divine nature are clearly evident to human beings through consideration of things in the created world.

according to them, established (*verficantur*) regarding God in two ways: either by way of negation or by way of causality.⁶³

Again, Aquinas goes on to explain that the way of negation is the basis for attributing wisdom, unity, and intellectual knowledge to God, not as asserting something positive of God but by denying that God lacks wisdom, division, and matter. Moreover, to deny that God is material entails affirming that God is intelligent, as also noted above. The way of causality, says Aquinas, allows, for example, predicating goodness of God in virtue of His being the cause of goodness in creatures (as it were, top down) or in virtue of His being related to creatures by willing or acting as a pious deity (*pius*) who produces willing or piety in the effects (as it were, bottom up). As indicated earlier, Aquinas writes, “According to this view, it follows that all the names that are said of God and creatures are said equivocally and that there is no likeness of the creature to the Creator from the fact that the creature is good or wise or anything of that sort; Rabbi Moses says this explicitly.”⁶⁴ Hence, there is no proximate foundation for these names in God, and so the foundational notions (*rationes*) for such attributes are only in the intellect by negation or causality.

In his analysis here, Aquinas brings together Avicenna and Maimonides, implicitly claiming that Maimonides’ account is based on Avicenna’s metaphysical analysis. Could that be the case? Although Avicenna is not cited explicitly in the *Guide*, W. Z. Harvey has pointed out the presence of Avicennian argumentation in *Guide* II 1 (“third speculation”) and I 69, and also in Maimonides’ *Mishneh Torah*, where he describes belief in an Avicennian Necessarily Existent Being in virtue of Itself as “the foundation of foundations.”⁶⁵ Regarding this metaphysical issue, Pines points to likely Avicennian influences in the introduction to his 1963 English translation of the *Guide*:

63. *Quidam enim dicunt, ut Avicenna et Rabbi Moyses quod res illa quae Deus est, est quoddam esse subsistens, nec aliquid aliud nisi esse, in Deo est: unde dicunt, quod est esse sine essenti. Omnia autem alia quae Deo attributuuntur, verificantur de Deo dupliciter secundum eos: vel per modum negationis, ver per modum causalitatis* (CS 1, d. 2, q. 1, a. 3, p. 67).

64. *Et secundum hanc opinionem sequitur quod omnia nomina quae dicuntur de Deo et creaturis, dicantur equivoce, et quod nulla similitudo sit creaturae ad Creatorem ex hoc quod creatura est bona vel sapiens vel hujusmodi aliquid; et hoc expresse dicit Rabbi Moyses* (CS 1, d. 2, q. 1, a. 3, resp., p. 68). See above, n. 47.

65. W. Z. Harvey 2008a, 111, 119. See also J. Stern 2001. Avicenna does not play a prominent part in the analyses of Rubio 2006; see also Rubio 1998.

It seems probable that it was Avicenna who conferred upon negative theology the philosophic reputability that made it possible for Maimonides to introduce it as the apparently central part of his, i.e., the philosophic, doctrine of God; in fact he lays even greater stress upon it and uses more radical formulas than Avicenna.⁶⁶

In the *Metaphysics* of the *Shifā'*, Avicenna writes that “the primary attribute of the Necessary Existent consists in His being a ‘that [He is]’ and an existent (*takūn al-ṣifatu al-ūlā li-wājibi al-wujūdi anna-hu innun wamawjūdun*). Then, [respecting] the other attributes, some will include the meaning of this existence with [something] additional, [and] some [will include the meaning] of this existence with a negation. Not one of [the attributes] necessitates at all either multiplicity or difference in His essence.”⁶⁷ In a recent account of Avicenna, Peter Adamson explains how this passage provides a rule for understanding divine attributes according to Avicenna. Here Avicenna asserts that the Necessary Existent exists and that what can be said of it consists of negations and relations.⁶⁸ Adamson goes on to show how Avicenna argues that, in the case of God, the attributes of uniqueness, simplicity, ineffability, and intellectuality all follow from the meaning of the Necessary Existent. And Avicenna’s reasoning to the existence of a first unique Necessary Existent yields Its nature as simple and free of composition. Regarding ineffability, Adamson remarks:

66. Pines 1963, xciv. Other authors have raised the issue of the importance of Avicenna’s metaphysics for Maimonides’ thought. The late Mauro Zonta did much work on Avicennian and Jewish philosophy; see, e.g., Zonta 2005. See also Freudenthal and Zonta 2012, which is criticized in S. Harvey 2015, to which they responded in Freudenthal and Zonta 2016. Stern discusses Avicenna’s importance for Maimonides in multiple sections of his recent study of the *Guide*; see J. Stern 2013, 142–44, 153–57, 265–69; for Avicenna’s importance for the development of Maimonides’ skepticism in particular, see pp. 198–204. Davidson (2005) has many references to Avicenna, the most relevant of which for present purposes are on pp. 103–6. Classic studies that must be mentioned include Altmann 1953 and 1978.

67. Avicenna 2005, bk. 8, chap. 7, par. 12, p. 296. The vocabulary of being may be another point of contact between Maimonides and Avicenna’s work, though perhaps both knew the terminology of being in the *Plotiniana Arabica*, which I discuss below in connection with the Arabic version of the *Liber de causis*. Cf. J. Stern 2013, 225–26, where *an*, *anna*, and *anniyya*, the related forms expressing being or existence, are discussed.

68. “According to this rule, there are three kinds of thing we can say about the necessary existent. First, that there is indeed a necessary existent; second, that this existence lacks certain features; and third, that this existence enters into certain relations with its effects” (Adamson 2013, 173; Adamson’s emphasis).

This allows Avicenna to exclude both genus and differentia from the necessary existent (VIII.4.14–16), which implies that it has no definition (VIII.4.16). For good measure, he adds that it also has “no demonstration (*burhān*), because it has no cause” (ibid.); he later remarks that we can provide for it a *dalīl*, but not a *burhān* (VIII.5.14).⁶⁹

That is, there may be indications, even to the point of a demonstration *quia*, but not a demonstration *propter quid* of God. As Adamson details, for Avicenna, the nature of God as the Necessary Existent can be known through his famous argument based on the division of all reality into the necessary and the possible, and the attributes that are consequent on that division.

If Aquinas had his eye on *Guide* I 51 and I 56–58, as he surely did, he may well have had good reason to assert the importance of Avicenna. In I 51 and I 57, Maimonides insists that no accidental attributes can be added to the Divine Essence, and in I 52 he asserts, like Avicenna, that “He . . . has no causes anterior to Him that are the cause of His existence and by which, in consequence, He is defined. For this reason it is well known among all people engaged in speculation, who understand what they say, that God cannot be defined.”⁷⁰ That, however, is a topic for another study.

Since Aquinas’s *CS* is a commentary on the work of Lombard, it is not a work constructed and wholly conceived with a view to the author’s own ends, as we find in his *Summa contra Gentiles* and *Summa theologiae*; rather, it is largely, albeit not wholly, controlled by the contents and ordered structure of Lombard’s *Sentences*. As such, it is not a systematic treatise, though a systematic treatment of God and creatures can be extracted from it. In Aquinas’s short *De ente et essentia*, written while he was composing the *CS*, the existence of God is established philosophically through a metaphysical account based on Avicenna’s dialectical reasoning in the opening book of the *Metaphysics* of the *Shifa*,⁷¹ not demonstrated in the manner of the famous Five Ways of the late *Summa theologiae* or the proofs in his early to mid-1260s *Summa contra Gentiles*. Still, in book 1 of the *CS*, Aquinas discusses whether the existence of God is something knowable by humans (*CS* 1, d. 3, q. 1, a. 1), whether it is something known *per se* (*CS* 1, d. 3, q. 1, a. 2),

69. Adamson 2013, 182. Adamson’s references are to the book, chapter, and paragraph of the Arabic text found in Avicenna 2005.

70. *Guide* I 52 (Pines 115).

71. For a discussion of Aquinas’s argument for the existence of God in *De ente et essentia*, see Houser 2007; Wietecha 2016.

and whether it is known through creatures (CS 1, d. 3, q. 1, a. 3); whether being (*esse*) is properly said of God, whether God is the very being of all things, and whether “He who is” (*qui est*) is the first of the names of God (CS 1, d. 8, q. 1, a. 1–3); issues such as the nature of eternity (CS 1, d. 8, q. 2, a. 1–2), divine simplicity (CS 1, d. 8, q. 4, a. 1), divine names (CS 1, d. 22), and divine knowledge (CS 1, d. 35–36); as well as other theological topics in later books. As I will discuss below, it is important to keep in mind that teachings on divine attributes and names require a cogent account of how humans use language, but, most importantly, they require a cogent account of the metaphysics underlying any act of naming.

Although Aquinas generally follows the account of the nature of God and the distinction of essence and existence found in Avicenna’s *Metaphysics*, he systematically avoids what was key to the thought of Avicenna: the nature of God as the Necessary Existent. In chapter 4 of *De ente et essentia*, Aquinas follows a simplified version of Avicenna’s view that existence is other than quiddity in all entities except God, and that all other quiddities, even simple substances without matter, must receive existence from God.⁷² And in chapter 5, he even recounts the Avicennian teaching that God is without quiddity or essence, since His essence is not different from His existence, though he holds that as existence alone (*esse tantum*) God is perfect and lacks no excellences whatsoever.⁷³ God is characterized as having all excellences most perfectly together in His unitary nature. Aquinas writes:

Although He is only being (*esse tantum*), it is not necessary that He lack any perfections or excellences. Rather, He has all excellences that exist in all the genera [and] on account of this He is called absolutely perfect, as the Philosopher and the Commentator say in *Metaphysics* book five, but He has them in a way more excellent than all things because in Him they are one, but in other things they have diversity. This is because all those excellences belong to Him according to His simple being (*secundum esse suum simplex*). [This is] just as if someone were able to carry out the activities of all qualities through one quality, then in that one quality he would have all the qualities; so too God in his very being has all the excellences.⁷⁴

72. Aquinas 1976, chap. 4, lines 41–166, pp. 376–77.

73. Aquinas 1976, chap. 5, lines 1–14, p. 378. It should be noted here that the term *esse tantum* is not found in the Latin Avicenna.

74. Aquinas 1976, chap. 5, lines 30–43, p. 378.

For Aquinas, the conception of God as pure being yields the view that God has all perfections in their primary fullness. What we see here is that, rather than choosing to follow Avicenna's account of the Necessary Existent—which, as Adamson indicates, grounds the consideration of divine attributes on the notion of the Necessary Existent and what derives from it—Aquinas instead turns to the denomination of God as “only being,” which he found in the pseudo-Aristotelian *Liber de causis*.⁷⁵

In Arabic proposition 8 (Latin 8 or 9, depending on the version) of the *Kalām fī maḥḍ al-khayr* (*Discourse on the Pure Good*), known to Aquinas as the *Liber de causis*, the author explains that all things except for the First Cause—which is “only being” (*anniyyatun faqat/esse tantum*)—are composed of being and form (*ḥilya*).⁷⁶ He then goes on to state that “if someone says: He must have form (*ḥilya*), we say: His form is infinite and His essential nature is the Pure Good pouring forth all goods on the intelligence and on all other things through the mediation of the intelligence.”⁷⁷ Unlike nearly all of the others, this proposition has no source in the *Elements of Theology* of Proclus.⁷⁸ Rather, the doctrine set out here is derived from the *Plotiniana Arabica*, the selections of Plotinus's *Enneads* that were transformed and explicated by additions on the part of the author-translator.⁷⁹ In that material we find it asserted that the First Agent which is also the First Creator is unlike any created things:

75. On the meaning of this denomination in Arabic and Latin, see Taylor 1979. For the relevant texts of the *Plotiniana Arabica*, see Wakelnig 2014, 94–97, 100–101. The teaching of the *Liber de causis* is based on that of the *Plotiniana Arabica*, but neither work has what we find in Aquinas on analogical predication.

76. I take *ḥilya* (decoration, form, formal shape) either to denote the presence of form or to be synonymous with *ṣūra* (“form,” *eidos*).

77. For the Arabic text, see Taylor 1981, 179–80. The Latin here is the following: *Et intelligentia est habens yliathim quoniam est esse et forma et similiter anima est habens yliathim et natura est habens yliathim. Et causae quidem primae non est yliathim, quoniam ipsa est esse tantum. Quod si dixerit aliquis: necesse est ut sit yliathim, dicemus: yliathim suum est infinitum et individuum suum est bonitas pura, influens super intelligentiam omnes bonitates et super reliquas res mediante intelligentia* (Pattin 1966, 157–58).

78. The Arabic *Liber de causis* is not a simple translation of this Greek work. Rather, the author selected portions of Proclus's book, sometimes transforming them into very different teachings. Its main concerns are the issues of primary and secondary causality and creation. Contrary to Avicenna, who allows for two senses of creation ex nihilo (*ibdā*), one absolute by God alone presupposing nothing and another by intermediate entities presupposing their own creation by God, this work asserts that creation ex nihilo belongs only to God, though He creates first Intellect and through Intellect creates all else.

79. See Adamson 2002. See also Taylor 1998a.

The First Creator never came to resemble any of [the things] because all the things [created] are from Him and because He has no distinctive inherent formal shape or form (*lā ḥilyatun lahā wa-lā šūratun lahā khāṣṣatun lāzimatum*). For the First Creator is one alone, that is, He is only being (*anniyyatun faqaṭ*) without having any attribute (*ṣifatun*) proper to [His being] because all attributes spread from [His being]. Therefore all things came to be from [His being], whereas [His being] is in none of the things except in the manner of a cause.⁸⁰

Furthermore, the author states that while all other things have form, the First Creator has no form (*lā šūratun lahā*) and “is infinite (*ghayra mutanāhin*) in all ways.”⁸¹ Though the author of the *Plotiniana Arabica* explicitly denies attributes of God, that denial is not explicit in this passage of the Arabic or Latin *Liber de causis* on which Aquinas explicitly draws for the term “only being” (*esse tantum*). However, the Arabic and its Latin translation provide concluding remarks that are particularly interesting and worth repeating, since they are distinct from what is found in the *Plotiniana Arabica* and enticingly suggestive for the doctrine of Aquinas. As already noted, the author writes, “So if someone says: He must have form (*ḥilya*), we say: His form (*ḥilya*) is infinite and His individual nature (*shakhsuhā*) is the Pure Good (*al-khayr al-mahḍ*) pouring forth all goodnesses on the intellect and on the rest of things through the mediation of the intellect.” That is, form, if it could in any way be predicated of the First Cause, would have the unique nature of the Pure Good that is the wholly unlimited cause of goodnesses or perfections in the rest of reality. As such, It is itself replete if not infinite with perfections and goodnesses, though It is in Itself the unique True One.

Providing his own understanding of the Latin *Liber de causis* in chapter 4 of *De ente et essentia*, Aquinas considers Divine Being here as what is uniquely the fullness of being in its infinite perfections and in Its very nature and essence as the referent and source of all perfections found in creatures. In this way attributes are not derived from creatures but rather derived to creatures from the First Cause where they are found in their perfection. Here Aquinas draws on the teachings of Dionysius as understood in his historical Latin context and on the thought of Anselm.

In *CS* 1, d. 8, q. 1, a. 1, solution, Aquinas cites three theological author-

80. Wakelnig 2014, 94–97; translation modified.

81. Wakelnig 2014, 100–101.

ities and then provides the metaphysical reasoning founded on the understanding of God's existence that he set out in *De ente et essentia*. He writes:

The fourth reason is taken from the works of Avicenna in this way: Since in the case of everything that is, one considers its quiddity in virtue of which it subsists in a determinate nature and its being (*esse*) in virtue of which one says of it that it is in act, then this word "thing" (*res*) is imposed on a thing from its quiddity. According to Avicenna, this name "he who is" (*qui est*) or "a being" (*ens*) is imposed by the very act of being (*essendi*). However, although in any given created thing its essence differs from its being, that thing is properly denominated from its quiddity and not from the act of being, as a human being [is] denominated from humanity. However, in God His very being is his quiddity. For this reason, the name taken from being (*esse*) properly names Him, and is His proper name, as the proper name of a human being is taken from its quiddity.⁸²

The metaphysics for this is spelled out again—and again with attribution to Avicenna—in *CS* 1, d. 8, q. 4, a. 2, solution, where Aquinas reasons that being and quiddity differ in creatures, that being is received in a creature, and that "in God . . . His being is His quiddity, for otherwise it would be accidental to the quiddity. In that way it would have been acquired by Him from something else and He would not have being in virtue of His own essence."⁸³ These metaphysical foundations allow Aquinas to argue in *De ente et essentia* and in the *CS* for the distinction between essence and existence and to assert the existence of God as *esse tantum*. It also allows him to explain in positive terms that God is an infinite plenum of ultimate perfections or excellences. This is not argued from creatures but rather from the nature of God Himself. With this reasoning arranged in its proper order instead of the sequential order of the *CS*, it becomes clear that Aquinas's foundations for asserting a positive doctrine of analogy are found in his own metaphysical analysis of essence and existence—an analysis that is inspired by, but distinct from, that of Avicenna.⁸⁴ In sum, instead of following his reading

82. My translation is quite similar to that of Macierowski in Aquinas 1998, 41–43.

83. My translation. This text is cited in Wietecha 2016, 157–58.

84. Macierowski (1988, 85) notes the importance of Aquinas's Avicennian metaphysical reasoning in *CS* 1, d. 2, q. 1, a. 3, but is unaware that a. 3 is a later insertion. He offers the valuable comment at the end of his article that "*Esse* is more basic than *Necesse Esse*" for

of Avicenna's account of God as the Necessary Existent without knowable essence, Aquinas uses the reasoning on the intrinsic nature of God as the Good (*individuum suum est bonitas pura*) that he finds in the *Liber de causis*—a conception of the pure being of God as an infinite plenitude—and reads it in accord with his understanding of Dionysius and Anselm.

From the discussion presented in this section, several important implications follow. First, Aquinas's suggestion that Avicenna is a source for Maimonides' denial of divine attributes should prompt further reflection on the importance of Avicenna for the thought of Maimonides. Aquinas here seems to have discovered something he had not noticed when composing his first version of *CS* 1, d. 2, q. 1—namely, an identification of the teaching of Maimonides with the metaphysics of Avicenna. Second, Aquinas is critical of Avicenna and clearly rejects what he understands to be Avicenna's (and Maimonides') teaching on divine attributes—a teaching that seems to be grounded in Avicenna's notion of God as the Necessary Existent. Third, while Aquinas is critical of Avicenna with respect to his equation of necessity with ineffability, it is still Avicenna's metaphysical reasoning on essence and existence that is foundational for the development of Aquinas's own distinctive teaching. This is clear in *De ente et essentia* and in the *CS*, though he has modified the metaphysical teaching with his own understanding of the nature of God as pure being under the influence of the *Liber de causis*, Dionysius, and also the perfect being theology of Anselm. For Aquinas, God alone is the sole creator and immediate primary cause of all other beings, containing in Himself all perfections. Fourth, Aquinas's conception of God as pure being or even *ipsum esse per se subsistens* draws on the *Liber de causis*'s notion of the First Cause as *esse tantum*, a notion ultimately drawn from the *Plotiniana Arabica* sources. Aquinas associates this with the Avicennian

Aquinas. In his dissertation, Macierowski (1979) highlights that, with respect to the metaphysics of Avicenna and Aquinas, “the chief point of divergence is that Aquinas explicitly states that *being* names an act; Avicenna does not, but allows existentially neutral essences to play the central role in his argument.” This quotation is taken from Macierowski's abstract; the arguments grounding the statement are in chaps. 2 and 3. The notion of the First Principle as pure act is found in Plotinus, *Enneads* 6.8, as well as the *Plotiniana Arabica* and the *Liber de causis* / *Kalām fī maḥḍ al-khayr*, works that were likely available to Avicenna; see Taylor 1998a. While it is correct to say that Avicenna's most prominent characterization of God is as the Necessary Existent, it is highly questionable whether he would eschew the description of God as pure act. A more detailed consideration of the metaphysics of Avicenna and Aquinas and the roles played in their reasoning by sources such as the *Plotiniana Arabica*, the *Liber de causis* / *Kalām fī maḥḍ al-khayr*, and the writings of Dionysius and Anselm is beyond the bounds of this essay. I hope to pursue this in greater depth elsewhere.

distinction between essence and existence and with the understanding of God as being or existence itself. In doing so he leaves aside Avicenna's account of the Necessary Existent and its limitations. Instead he provides his own conception of God as "only being" and replete with perfections, and supports this conception by making use of what he found in the *Liber de causis*, where the author of that work writes, "His form is infinite and His essential nature is the Pure Good pouring forth all goods on the intelligence and on all other things through the mediation of the intelligence."⁸⁵ Fifth, Dionysius provides the final resource in the formation of Aquinas's revised use of Avicenna, as indicated in CS 1, d. 8, q. 1, a. 1, solution:

The third reason [for the affirmation of He Who Is as the most proper name of God] is taken from the words of Dionysius, who says that, among all the other participations of the divine goodness, such as living, understanding, and the like, being is the first and, as it were, the principle of the others, pre-possessing all the others in a way united within itself; and so too God is the divine principle and all things are one in Him.⁸⁶

In sum, Aquinas grounds his teaching on divine attributes and human naming of God in a novel metaphysics of being that arises from his study of Avicenna but is reformulated through his incorporation of ideas found in his philosophical understanding of the *Liber de causis* and the theological account in the thought of Dionysius, with a nod to the perfect being theology of Anselm.

Conclusion

In his solution to CS 1, d. 2. q. 1 a. 3, Aquinas remarks that "wisdom and goodness and all things of this sort are altogether one in reality in God," and shortly after adds that "on this depends nearly all the understanding of the things said in book 1." Here his reference is not only to his doctrine

85. See above, n. 77.

86. Aquinas 1998, 41. Later in his *Summa theologiae*, at prima pars, q. 75, a. 5, ad 1, Aquinas refers to God when he writes, "The First act is the universal principle of all acts because it is infinite, pre-containing all things in Himself (*in se omnia prae habens*) virtually, as Dionysius says." This is a reference to Dionysius, *On the Divine Names*, chap. 5, sec. 9. For this text and Aquinas's comments on it, see above, n. 39.

of analogical predication of divine names but also to the metaphysics that underlies that doctrine.

As Avicenna, Maimonides, and Aquinas all knew well, a doctrine of divine attributes involves two modes of consideration, one that reflects the condition of the human intellect and another that follows from the reality to which names are attributed, God. The initial impetus for such a doctrine arises in the context of religious scriptures where names and descriptions of the Creator are set out for general human understanding, thereby permitting the expression of an affective relationship toward the Creator. However, unless those names and expressions are to remain creations of the human mind and impossible to predicate properly of God, as the agnosticism of Maimonides would have it, they must have a foundation in reality grounded in philosophical metaphysics. As I have shown, that grounding is set out in detail by Aquinas in the *CS* and in *De ente et essentia*. On the basis of that metaphysical account, Aquinas reasons that the plurality of *rationes* used in religious scripture and human discourse to express divine attributes truly indicates the divine nature in itself, but as it is reflected in caused creatures. In his view, this is explained by the pure nature of the Deity as only being and infinite being—a reality that transcends human comprehension and therefore compels finite human intellects to express what is in itself a perfect simplicity using a plurality of attributes.

For Aquinas, the challenge of Maimonides' agnosticism to Christian belief was an invaluable prompt to reconsider the metaphysics of Avicenna and to see in it the foundation for Maimonides' own views. In *CS* 1, d. 2, q. 1, a. 3, which he added to his original version of the *CS*, Aquinas provided a new analysis that discovered the basis of Maimonides' teaching in Avicenna's metaphysics of the Necessary Existent. He found in Avicenna just what Maimonides himself found, a doctrine of being and unity that precludes the possibility of human understanding of the Divine Essence that would allow for essential predications denoting real perfections in God. For Aquinas, predications of those perfections take place through negation and causality, as they do for Avicenna and Maimonides, but the new metaphysics of being that Aquinas developed under the influence of Avicenna, Dionysius, and the *Liber de causis* led him to assert a doctrine of analogy and a positive understanding of what can be derived from demonstrative argumentation.⁸⁷

When composing his *CS*, Aquinas was well acquainted with the broad spectrum of religious and philosophical teachings and issues found in Mai-

87. Cf. J. Stern 2013, 162, 198ff.

monides' *Guide*. He was also well acquainted with the purely philosophical writings of Avicenna and Averroes, whose thought also played an important role in the formation of his teaching on divine attributes and in his philosophical explanation of the theological teaching that ultimate human happiness is to be found in heaven in the vision of the Divine Essence "face-to-face" or *per essentiam*. The present study, though focused narrowly on the issue of divine attributes and human knowledge of the nature of God, can serve as a case study of the value of the methodical study of Aquinas's works in the context of his sources from the Arabic tradition, including Judeo-Arabic thinkers like Maimonides.⁸⁸

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