1 Demonology of St. Thomas Aquinas

1.1 *Summa Theologiae* I, Questions 50–64 and 106–114 — a study of the nature, freedom, and activity of created spirits

Publication version. Prepared from the Polish text approved by the author. This study is not an instruction for pastoral practices.

1.2 Introduction

The angelology of St. Thomas Aquinas is not an isolated treatise on invisible beings. It forms part of a great metaphysical vision of creation, in which everything comes forth from God, exists by participating in His being, and is directed by Providence to its proper end. Therefore Questions 50–64 and 106–114 form two complementary blocks. The first answers the question of what angels are, how they know and love, in what manner they were created, and how their fall could have occurred. The second presents their activity within the order of Providence: mutual illumination, speech, hierarchies, influence upon the material world and upon the human being, the mission of the good angels, and the temptations that come from the demons.

The central principle of the entire treatise is the difference between God and every creature. Angels surpass human beings in mode of knowing, in the simplicity of their nature, and in the power of their action, but they are not divine beings. They are created, finite, dependent upon God, and capable of moral error. Thomistic angelology thus stands opposed both to a materialistic imagining of angels and to their quasi-divine idealization.

The study distinguishes between a reconstruction of Aquinas's synthesis, its biblical and patristic sources, and contemporary pastoral reflection. It does not identify the language of medieval metaphysics with medical or psychological diagnosis, nor does it ascribe suffering or crisis automatically to spiritual causes. Its aim is to present a coherent metaphysics of created good, freedom, and Providence, of which demonology—understood realistically yet without sensationalism—is a part.

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1.5 1. The method of the question and the article: from difficulty to resolution

Every scholastic quaestio, and in particular one concerning immaterial beings, for St. Thomas functions as a tool for ordering thought: it is not merely a catalogue of theses but a regulated discourse whose very structure has epistemic weight. In Thomistic practice this architecture of the article — from the set of difficulties contained in objectiones, through the brief sed contra, to respondeo and the answers ad singula — guarantees that theology about supernatural things does not become an arbitrary collection of assertions but a critical reflection grounded within the framework of metaphysics and fidelity to Revelation. In the context of demonology this order permits the systematic sifting out of mistaken transfers from the sensible order, the precise delimitation of the bounds of rational speculation, and the exposition of which elements of knowledge come from the nature of reason and which require the light of Revelation.[1]

1.5.1 The architecture of the article as a tool for ordering knowledge about demons: from analysis of difficulties (videtur quod) to the synthetic answer (respondeo)

The basic sequence of each article — objectiones, sed contra, respondeo, ad primum, ad secundum etc. — plays in Thomas a dialectical and heuristic function. The objectiones are not mere foils: they often record existing philosophical positions, scriptural fragments, authoritative statements of the Fathers, or the natural doubts that arise when we consider immaterial beings. Their presence indicates what must be explained; the sed contra, in turn, signals the turning point, usually appealing to Scripture or an acknowledged authority, which shows that there is in the tradition a reasonable counter to the difficulties given. In the respondeo Thomas does not so much "dig out" a solution from this opposition as construct a system of distinctions that release us from the misunderstandings contained in the objectiones. In demonology these distinctions concern primarily: nature (quidditas) and action (actus), substance and action, natural knowledge and revealed knowledge, first cause and secondary causes. Thanks to such an architecture it is possible to show that certain opposing arguments result from an unordered joining of orders — for example, the application of the categories of causes as we know them in the bodily world to spiritual beings that are ontologically organized otherwise.

In practical use this construction has an additional formative value: it forces the reader to confront the difficulties before knowing the solution and obliges the author to situate the answer with respect to both poles — the opposing reasons and the criteria of authority. This in turn reduces the risk of arbitrariness and excessive trust in one kind of argument (e.g., purely philosophical argument without regard for Revelation). ST I, q. 50, aa. 1–2 and related quaestiones indicate that in angelology this form of disputation is particularly necessary, since the subject does not admit direct sensory observation but only analogous reasoning and reading of the signs written into creation that order our understanding.

[1] St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, ST I, q. 50, aa. 1–2; q. 51, a. 1; q. 63, a. 1; q. 114, aa. 1–3, online edition.

1.5.2 The methodological significance of the "sed contra" in demonology: how Thomas uses Sacred Scripture and Tradition to set limits to rational speculation

The sed contra, although brief, has critical weight for the theological procedure. In the case of the problematics of angels and demons Thomas often appeals to texts of Scripture or to authorities of the Church in order to signal that reason ought to operate within the limits established by Revelation. This appeal functions not as a decisive proof but as an interpretive direction: it shows which rational hypotheses are worthy of further inquiry and which are contrary to the basis of faith. In demonology this has practical significance — it excludes certain extravagant speculations (e.g., the simultaneous ascription to demons of divine attributes) and protects against reductionism (e.g., reducing all spiritual disorders to mere natural imaginings). Thus the sed contra performs the role of a criterion of conformity with Revelation and Tradition, and the part of the respondeo sets forth the consequences of such a starting point.

1.5.3 The dialectic of truth and error: analysis of the manner in which Thomas deconstructs false beliefs about the nature of demons through rigorous distinctions (distinctio)

One of Thomas's central instruments is the distinctio — a precise conceptual distinction that reveals the opponent's error. In demonology one most often distinguishes here: essence from action, internal cause from external cause, intellectual knowledge from revealed illumination. Erroneous inferences often arise from equivocation: for example, when one argues that since bodily sensibility can compel certain behaviors, a spiritual being ought to have analogous means of compulsion. Thomas rejects such transfers of causal structures from one order of being to another without prior verification that the categories are at all proportionate. In practice this means that he must show why a given feature is possible (or impossible) in intellectual beings, referring to their simplicity, their mode of knowing, and their dependence on the Creator.

For instance, when the opposing thesis posits a demonic reading of the human heart, Thomas demonstrates that such a claim wrongly transfers to an intellectual being a capacity that in the human world is the result of particular causal relations between the senses and the mind. He uses distinctio to show that the sources of knowledge in spiritual beings are different and that their simplicity entails different ontological consequences. Thanks to this one can maintain both the reality of demonic influence (as a spiritual fact) and the protection of the mystery of the human person from arbitrary penetration by creatures — which has enormous dogmatic and pastoral significance.

1.5.4 The application of metaphysical principles (act and potency, form and matter) to the description of spiritual beings in questions 50–63 as the foundation of the method

Metaphysical categories of act and potency, form and matter serve in Thomas as points of departure for understanding what differentiates spirit from body. In ST I, q. 50, aa. 1–2 Thomas considers the immateriality of the intellectual essence: since the spirit has no matter, it is not composed of form and matter in the sense in which material substances are composed; its "form" is not a form composed with matter, but a true ontological simplicity. That simplicity yields consequences: a spiritual individual cannot be "decomposed" into material parts, its existence depends on God as first cause, and its act of being and its nature are internally linked in a different way than in material beings. On this basis Thomas formulates

limitations concerning what the knowledge and action of demons can be: their knowing and agency will have a character adequate to their simplicity, not analogous to bodily causality.

Act and potency also serve to understand how a spiritual being may have certain capacities without their actualization in the same manner as in a material being. For example, a demon can influence lower powers of creatures by producing phantasms or inclinations — this action is real and can be causally efficacious in the order of effects — yet its modality of causation does not consist in mechanical coercion nor in the introduction of new matter into the being of a human. From this follows a clear separation between the nature of temptations and the nature of compulsion: the demon acts as an efficient cause in the world of creatures, but it is not the first cause of the being of the human will nor of an internal compulsion of the will itself.

1.5.5 Analysis of a specific argument: a demon cannot coerce a free decision nor know future free acts — premises and limits of Thomas's reasoning

To see how the method functions in practice it is worthwhile to break down one of the central arguments occurring in ST I, q. 114, aa. 1–3 and to refer to related quaestiones concerning the knowledge of angels. Thomas rejects the belief that demons can directly coerce the human will or directly know future free decisions. His argumentative sequence consists of the following premises:

1. The ontological simplicity of spiritual beings: demons are intellectual, immaterial creatures organized differently than bodily beings (ST I, q. 50, aa. 1–2). Their simplicity determines the kind of agency and knowing they possess.
2. The cognitive limitation of created intellects: created intellectual beings have knowledge proportionate to their nature and do not participate in divine omniscience. While they may know general things and, under certain conditions, particular things thanks to given cognitive images, they do not have a capacity for insight into free, future decisions of human persons as such; future acts are not necessarily beforehand accessible to them.
3. The difference between direct and indirect influence: if a demon exerts influence, it usually does so indirectly — through lower powers of the soul, by producing phantasms and suggestions — and not by an internal compulsion of the will itself (which would be an intrusion into the order of first cause and into the nature of moral responsibility).
4. Supernatural permission and the order of Providence: God, as first cause, can permit such demonic influence, but He does not make them first causes of the nature of the will; their action is therefore contingent upon and within the limits of divine permission.

From this structure follow Thomas's conclusions: demons can be the cause of temptation and external inducements, but they cannot introduce an internal act of will that would be necessarily morally obligatory or devoid of responsibility. Nor do they possess direct access to the secret of future free acts or to the secrets of the heart without special revelation or natural indications.

A logical analysis of this reasoning reveals its strengths and limits. The strength lies in the consistent derivation of conclusions from ontological premises regarding the nature of spiritual beings and from the moral necessity of preserving personal responsibility. The limits are epistemological and methodological: Thomas begins from metaphysical premises (simplicity, dependence on God) and derives certain consequences — but these premises require acceptance of a metaphysical system in which the categories of actuality and potency and hylomorphism operate (applied analogically but cautiously to spirits). If

one rejects that system or applies other metaphysical principles, the conclusions need not be accepted. Moreover, the practical application of this reasoning requires a distinction between what is theoretically demonstrable and what in a given concrete case must be adjudicated by pastoral and clinical methods.
Finally — Thomas's methodological caution: the argument does not lead to the automatic nullification of the experiences of people who describe strong, apparently external compulsions. Rather, he proposes an interpretive framework that preserves both the reality of demonic influence (as a metaphysical fact) and the limits of its power with respect to the human person. This distinction has practical consequences — one cannot automatically ascribe every form of bodily or psychological enslavement to demons; yet one must admit the possibility of genuine demonic temptation, understood in accordance with Thomas's metaphysical and theological principles.

1.5.6 The specificity of argumentation in questions 106–114: the move from a static analysis of nature to a dynamic description of the action of demons in the world

Although the first series of quaestiones (50–64) concentrate on the nature, structure, and knowledge of spiritual beings, the later articles (including the part to which q. 114 belongs) shift the emphasis to action: how do demons enter into relations with the created order? Methodologically we observe a transition from an ontological assumption (what the demon is) to an analysis of its effects in the causal order. Argumentation in these questions combines analogy (drawn from earlier assumptions about the nature of the spirit) with the criterion of divine permission and the judgment of Providence: Thomas shows that on the one hand demons have real capacities to influence lower creatures, and on the other hand their actions never override God's causal sovereignty nor become an autonomous cause of ultimate moral outcomes.
In practice the argumentation is cumulative: the particular metaphysical and epistemological premises formulated in the first part are now set against concrete difficulties arising from the texts of Revelation (e.g., narratives of temptation) and from the experience of the Church. Scripture and experience point to certain phenomena (temptation, deceit, apparent miracles), and reason supplies criteria to distinguish true divine interventions from demonic action or from natural phenomena mistakenly interpreted as supernatural. Thus the argument is both philosophical and hermeneutical: philosophical in deriving consequences from the ontology of the spirit; hermeneutical in applying interpretive criteria to texts and experiences.[2]

1.5.7 The distinction between theological justification of the permission of temptations and contemporary interpretation of anxiety states and psychopathology

The Thomistic method is essentially theological: its aim is to explain how events can occur in the created order that are not directly God's acts yet may be permitted in the order of Providence for a greater good. In this sense Thomas admits temptations and satanic action as real events in salvation history and in the life of man. At the same time his method clearly rejects reductionism — neither can the whole realm of evil be reduced to demonic action, nor should every mental state be automatically interpreted through a demonological lens. Such a distinction saves theology from magicalizing experiences and simultaneously protects pastoral practice from an excessive psychologizing of the spiritual sphere. Methodologically,

[2]The biblical texts cited in this chapter should be read in their own canonical context; in this study they serve as a point of reference for the reconstruction of Thomas's argumentation, not as an independent resolution of every subsequent speculative question.

Thomas calls for a rational discernment that takes into account both natural psychophysical causes and the supernatural possibilities of action by spiritual creatures.

1.5.8 Thomas's rigorous terminology versus common demonological language: why conceptual precision is key to avoiding pastoral errors

Finally: the Thomistic emphasis on conceptual precision has practical dimensions. Popular religious language and folklore often mix categories — speaking of "possession," "compulsion," "reading the heart" in ways that do not respect the metaphysical differences established by Thomas. Such simplifications lead to two errors: either an excessive demonization of natural problems or a trivialization of real spiritual phenomena. Precise concepts — essence, action, knowledge, divine permission, first/secondary cause — allow one to separate what is a real object of theological adjudication from what ought to be referred to other disciplines or to pastoral and medical practice. Thomas does not offer ready-made diagnostic lists; he provides, however, a rational tool by which one can more accurately recognize and name phenomena, preserving respect for the mystery of the person and for God's sovereignty as the sole Lord of the human heart.

In summary: the method of the question and the article in St. Thomas is an epistemic and hermeneutical procedure by which demonological theology preserves a balance between rational consistency and fidelity to Revelation. This architecture enables both a defence against excessive fantasy and the recognition of the reality of demonic evil without overstepping the limits set by the ontology of creation and the moral order of human responsibility.

The form of the quaestio in Thomas's Summa Theologiae I is not merely a rhetorical licence for free speculation but a procedure regulating the conditions of valid reasoning. Its very structure requires that every assertion be grounded with respect to the authority of Revelation and with respect to rational premises — not as alternatives but as hierarchically related sources of truth. In practice this means that speculation must be brought onto a common field of discussion: if reason proposes a hypothesis, the sed contra indicates the limits drawn by Scripture or binding Tradition; the respondeo must show how the hypothesis fits within that space. This precedence of faith in the theological procedure over arbitrary invention of content protects theology from constructing concepts contrary to the foundation of Revelation.

Conceptual control within the quaestio is rigorous: Thomas requires the definition and differentiation of concepts before analogies are used. It is not enough to cite colloquial terms or metaphors — every predication must be subjected to distinctio, and the use of names must take into account whether they are used univocally, analogically, or equivocally. In Summa Theologiae I Thomas shows that without such discipline of thought it is easy to displace categories (e.g., conceptual projections from the sensible order to the spiritual order), which undermines the validity of conclusions. This control is an epistemic condition of the admissibility of a hypothesis: if the concepts cannot be precisely related to the premises, the quaestio obliges suspension of the assertion rather than its arbitrary acceptance.

The limits of analogy concern particularly spiritual substances. For Thomas analogy is not a free bridge transferring attributes between orders of being, but an operation of proportionality: what is said correctly of a material being can be said of a spiritual being only insofar as there is proportion between them. In theological practice Summa Theologiae I implies that one cannot freely ascribe to angels or demons attributes derived from bodily causality without first demonstrating the appropriate proportion. Hence

important limitations follow: granting demons a real power of influence does not automatically entail attributing to them modes of action and knowledge identical to sensory mechanisms.

From these procedural and epistemic rules practical consequences also follow: the quaestio forces a distinction between what can be known on the grounds of the nature of creation and what remains in the realm of mystery or the exclusive competence of Revelation. By admitting in the Thomistic context that an angel and a demon are created beings, Thomas rejects direct insights into the heart, knowledge of future free acts, or the possibility of coercion of the will by spiritual creatures — and he does so not by arbitrariness but by the consequence of conceptual rigor, analogical limitation, and the precedence of Revelation. In this way the form of the quaestio acts as a methodological brake: it does not forbid inquiry but requires that it be conducted with respect for the principles that eliminate intellectual fantasy and protect the integrity of both metaphysics and faith.

1.6 2. Questions 50–53: spiritual substance, place and motion

1.6.1 Incorporeal substance: the structure of Thomas's argument and its limits

In Question 50 of the Summa Theologiae St. Thomas constructs the central argument for the immateriality of angelic substance, and thus also of the demonic, on the basis of an analysis of the way of knowing. His line of reasoning has three principal premises: (1) the act of cognition is proportional to the nature of the knower; (2) intellectual knowledge, which grasps universal natures, is independent of the conditions of a particular sensible representation; (3) therefore a being whose immanent cognitive power operates exclusively at the universal level does not need matter as a principle of individuation, and so is not composite of matter and form. From this follows the inferential thesis that an angel is an "intellectual substance" without a material part (ST I, q. 50).[3]

The analysis of this argument requires precision in the concepts used and their relations. Thomas applies here a principle analogous to a methodological rule: from the nature of an action one seeks to derive the characteristics of the acting nature. If the operation of the angelic intellect is an act of universal cognition, Thomas holds that such an act best harmonizes with a simple nature, free from material conditioning. Yet the author himself makes a clear distinction: absolute simplicity belongs only to God; creation, however perfect, remains composite at least of essence and existence. In this way Thomas protects the transcendence of the Creator — the angel is not its own existence and ultimately depends on God's bestowal of being (ST I, q. 50, ad 3).

When considering the force of the argument one must indicate its metaphysical and empirical limits. First, the premise that the form of cognition determines the material status of a substance takes as its starting point the Aristotelian-Thomistic conception of hylomorphism that Thomas applies also to incorporeal beings. This assumption is the plane upon which the question is decided: if cognition is "purely" universal, then the metaphysical counterpart must be a substance not subject to individuation by matter. A critical objection, already present in medieval debates, runs thus: can an operation of cognition by itself decide the ontological absence of matter? Thomas answers that it can, because materiality presupposes the need for participation of particular conditions (the *phantasmata* in the human intellect), and their absence indicates a different ontological structure. Nevertheless, a modern reader will more readily perceive that this

[3]St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, ST I, qq. 50–53, online edition.

reasoning does not prove the ontologically exclusive character of matter — rather it shows the consequence of adopting a certain theory of cognition. Hence it is crucial to understand this conclusion as a corollary of Thomistic metaphysics, not as an empirical adjudication about what observation alone can show.

A second limit of the argument is connected to a subtle distinction that Thomas preserves: the absence of composition of matter and form does not abolish all composition. The angel remains composite of "essence" and "existence" — this is not a cosmetic addition but an essential safeguard against identifying the creature with God. This framing enables Thomas to maintain that the angel is in relation to its form a "being in act" (*in actu*) in the sense of intellectual actuality, yet with respect to received existence it stands in potentiality, because dependence on the Creator concerns both its being and the sustaining of its being. This nuance prevents two errors: first, a denial of the creaturely condition of spiritual beings; second, an easy anthropomorphizing of angels as "spiritual humans."

Finally Thomas draws consequences concerning indestructibility: the absence of material elements makes the angel resistant to natural corruption, though it does not make it imperishable in the divine sense. Hence the thesis of the immortality of angels follows from their nature, but their continued existence is a sustaining gift given to particular creatures. Thomas develops all these points systematically in ST I, q. 50; they are also important for understanding demonic being, since demons are simply fallen angels, retaining the same ontological structure.

1.6.2 The principle of individuation (*principium individuationis*) and its consequences

Among Thomas's most consistent conclusions regarding incorporeal beings is his determination on the question of individuation. In the material world a portion of matter enables the identical repeatability of a form in many individuals; in an incorporeal substance the absence of such a function of matter means that an intellectual form is not shared among many individual beings. Thus each angel actualizes a separate, "species-level" share of the intellectual nature — hence the conclusion that there do not exist many individuals of the same species of angel. Thomas formulates this as the logical and metaphysical consequence of his premises (ST I, q. 50).

The consequences of this determination are far-reaching. First, Thomistic ontology leads to a number of angels corresponding to the diversity of personal intellectual natures; second, each demon remains unique in its nature, which logically excludes the existence of "copies" of the same demon. This thesis should be understood with caution: there is no dogmatic pronouncement of the Church here; it is a philosophical result drawn from Thomistic metaphysics. In the context of demonological problems it is important to emphasize that the individual distinctness of a demon does not translate into the possibility of its ontological differentiation in the sense of divine attributes — demons are not God, as Thomas clearly stresses, and cannot possess divine attributes such as omnipotence or omnipresence.

This rule of individuation also has practical implications for understanding demonic actions: since there are not two identical demons, each case of the activity of a fallen angel requires recognition that takes into account its individual condition and circumstances, and not a reduction of everything to one schematic personalization of evil power. Additionally, it excludes the idea that a demon could multiply its "doppelgängers" that would be ontological doubles; any apparent "multiplication" of phenomena is more likely the result of the repeated action of the same spiritual person upon many objects or minds.

1.6.3 Apparent corporeality: the mechanism of assumptio corporis and its limits

Question 51 examines the relation between an intellectual substance and a body. For Thomas an angel is not united to a body as the human soul is, which is the form of the body; nevertheless an angel can — by divine will or as a means of communication — assume a sensible bodily appearance in order to reveal itself to humans. Thomas describes this phenomenon as the angel's use of a body, not as a stable union with it (ST I, q. 51).

Here one must distinguish two dimensions: ontological and phenomenological. Ontologically the assumed body does not become a part of the angel's essence; it functions as an instrument of manifestation. Phenomenologically — that is, from the standpoint of human experience — the taking on of corporeal form makes the angelic revelation accessible to the senses: speaking, walking, eating, as visible in biblical narratives, serve the role of a sign, and do not confirm the biological life of the assumed body.

In analyzing the mechanism of assuming a body one should note its limits. Thomas categorically rejects the Neoplatonic model of ethereal bodies as an intermediate state of being having its own substance akin to a skin for the spirit. For him there is no "subtle matter" of a special kind that would be necessary for a spirit to have a body; there either exists natural matter, or there does not. The assumption of bodily form remains an extraordinary, instrumental act, not a constitutive one. Thus Thomas curbs the tendency to an easy anthropomorphizing of spiritual beings and to the assumption that behind every extraordinary phenomenon stands some "subtle spiritual physiology."

It is also important to define the breadth of a spiritual substance's power over matter. An angel can act upon both animate and inanimate matter, but its actions are proportionate to its nature: it can influence the higher powers of living beings (for example, by impelling the intellect or cognitive images), and it can also cause changes in the material world as the result of acting through an assumed instrument or as the effect of the contact of its power. However Thomas stresses that matter is subject to the laws of its own nature; the spirit is not lord over matter in the sense of freely restructuring it — its action does not abolish the natural properties of things, unless God permits it. Therefore angelophanies cannot be automatically taken as proof of a lack of natural cohesion in the material world.

1.6.4 The metaphysics of presence in place: *contactus virtutis*

Here one of the most important Thomistic distinctions is presented: place is not to be understood as a volumetric container nor as an attribute that contains a substance. With regard to spiritual beings Thomas in ST I, q. 52 presents the presence of an angel in a place as the result of a contact of power — *contactus virtutis* — and not by physical surrounding or extension. An angel "dwells" where it presently applies its power to a material thing; that dwelling is a relation of action, not a filling of space.

This metaphysics of presence has several consequences. First, it excludes images of the spirit physically inhabiting a single fragment of space in a manner analogous to a body. Second, it supplies a framework for understanding what it means that a demon is "here" or "there": it concerns the current orientation of its power toward a given thing or person. Third, from this perspective one cannot attribute to a spiritual being a traditional measurable location in geometric terms; its presence is relative and dynamically connected to the material subject on which it exerts influence.

One must nevertheless note the limits of this conception. *Contactus virtutis* does not mean granting an angel the ability to penetrate the inner structure of a thing without regard to the metaphysical principles

of that thing; it says only something about a causal relation. Moreover presence by contact of power does not entail the possibility of simultaneously being in infinitely many places in the sense of spatial extension: Thomas maintains the conceptual coherence of a spiritual person, and a splitting of its power into many places would result in a division of being, which for him is improper. Thus usually an angel is present where it acts directly, although the mode of that presence may differ greatly from the presence of a body. At this point a practical thesis also emerges: angelic and demonic actions are causal relations, and their "locality" depends on the direction and scope of the power that the spiritual subject applies to creatures.

1.6.5 Local motion of a spiritual substance: continuity, leap and relation to time

Question 53 formulates and in a sense naturalizes the understanding of motion in incorporeal beings as a change in respect to the place where power is applied. For Thomas the motion of an angel does not consist in transporting substance through space, but in changing the place in which the angel presently "acts" by its power. From this follow two ways of understanding movement: continuous motion — preserving successive intermediate places — and discontinuous motion, which may be called a "leap" (passing from one place of action to another without the necessity of occupying all intervening places). Thomas does not reduce spiritual motion to one of these forms; he recognizes both as real possibilities, while each preserves the principle of temporal order: actions occur one after another.

This twofold manner of movement reflects the Thomistic attempt to reconcile the transcendence of a spiritual substance with the necessity of maintaining some order and succession in the world of creatures. Discontinuous motion can be described thus: an angel, changing the orientation of its power from place A to place B, need not pass through every place on the way, because its being is not built of spatial parts. Such a displacement does not abolish all order of action, however: acts remain successive in a manner proper to a spiritual substance. Continuous motion, for its part, is fitting when a certain gradation of actions must be preserved in the material world, e.g., in the case of an influence requiring causal sequence.

In analyzing this aspect one must attend to a delicate balance: although spiritual motion presents itself as a form of transcendence in relation to the material continuum of space, it does not eliminate the temporal dimension. The angel is a creature in time: its actions are sequential and dependent on divine permissions, which prevents its being drawn into the category of a timeless being. Moreover Thomas consistently rejects the possibility that an angel might perform "magical" displacements that would abolish the natural laws of causality and order in the world without extraordinary divine permission. A demon may therefore "leap" in the sense of changing the place of its action, but it cannot by a single stroke nullify the natural relations of cause and effect.

It is worth noting an additional consequence for the problem of simultaneity: since an angel is not extended, a certain interpretive effort in scholastic treatments leads to the conclusion that it is not in an essential sense "located" in many points simultaneously. The dispersion of power to points of action is for Thomas possible only to a certain degree; the extreme multiplicatio actionum without a proportional multiplication of personality would be contrary to the unity of substance. Thus although a demon can affect several persons or things by its powers, this does not make it ontologically divisible.[4]

[4]Biblical texts cited in this chapter should be read in their own canonical context; in this study they constitute a point of reference for the reconstruction of Thomas's argumentation, not an independent determination of every later speculative question.

1.6.6 Correction of Neoplatonic images and the distinction of ontology from the phenomenology of experiences

One significant dimension of Thomistic critique is the correction of Neoplatonic imaginings about "ethereal bodies" or about subtle substrates of spiritual beings. Thomas restores Aristotelian criteria: the absence of a body does not imply the existence of some third, semi-material substance. For Thomas there is either concrete matter, or there is none — and when there is none we speak of an intellectual substance whose properties must be derived from its act and potency, and not from some alleged "subtle matter."

In this light one must distinguish ontology, that is the question about the mode of a being's existence, from phenomenology, that is the description of how certain contents present themselves in experience. Thomas's distinction regarding *contactus virtutis* has a metaphysical character; it is not an empirical test of particular experiences nor a basis for ascribing to them a determinate cause. Theology exercises here the necessary restraint: the description of an experience is not in itself proof of its source, and the science of spiritual substances does not replace competent investigation of natural causes.

Finally it is worth pointing to a practical conclusion for contemporary dialogue with depth psychology: the Thomistic conception of place and motion of angels/demons does not provide direct diagnostic tools for subjective experiences; however it can assist in ordering the discussion by drawing a clear boundary between the ontological possibility of the actions of incorporeal beings and the phenomenological interpretation of experiences. It is essential in no case to transfer philosophical terms uncritically into the clinical or psychopathological domain.

The conclusion of the chapter summarizes the main determinations: Thomas, operating with a hylomorphic metaphysics and the Aristotelian category of act and potency, states that the spiritual being is an immaterial substance dependent on God, that individuation in such beings does not occur through matter, that the assumption of a body is an instrumental act, and that presence in place and motion are understood as matters of the relation of power to things. These conclusions form the skeleton of Thomistic demonology concerning essence, place and motion, while at the same time leaving room for a prudent distinction between ontology and the description of experiences — which is particularly important in dialogue with modern thought and with pastoral practice.

In specifying the difference between the spirit's "essential finitude" and its "non-spatial presence by action" one must stress two distinct orders that in Thomistic metaphysics have different consequences. Essential finitude (the created being's finiteness) means that the spiritual being is a creature: its existence is a gift of God, and its cognitive and active powers are finite and determined by its nature. This finitude is not an accidental barrier but an intrinsic feature of the created being — hence the angel and the demon do not possess infinite knowledge or power; they do not read hearts directly, they do not necessarily know future free acts of a person, and they cannot coerce someone's will as if it were their own attribute. In Thomistic terminology this limitation follows from the relation of essence to existence and from the proportion of the cognitive act to the nature of the knower: the spirit remains simple with respect to matter, but it is not absolutely infinite.

By contrast "presence by action" is a relational category: when Thomas speaks of *contactus virtutis* he means that a spirit is "there" where it presently applies its power to a creature; this presence is connected to the act of agency, not to occupying a spatial *res extensa*. It is therefore a mode of being dependent on a relation to the object of action — the perspective of a causally operative power — and not a feature of the

spiritual essence as such. For this reason spiritual presence is a dynamic phenomenon dependent on the causal context, not a kind of ascribed spatial extension.

From this distinction one must not draw several mistaken inferences. First: presence by action does not authorize speaking of the demon's "physical localization" in the sense of occupying a place like a body; to say that a demon is "in the room" means for Thomas that its power is directed toward the creatures present there, not that the demon has some volumetric "place" in the room. Second: from non-spatial presence it does not follow that the demon can read hearts, know future free acts, or force the will — all these properties have been explicitly excluded by Thomas as manifestations of supra-divine omnipotence. Third: causal presence does not authorize conclusions about material "penetration" or permanent union with a body; the taking on of a sensible form remains instrumental, not a constitutive identification with matter.

Practically speaking, one must maintain conceptual discipline: a metaphysical description of the relation of power is not a direct map of empirical localizations and cannot be automatically transposed to fields of psychological diagnosis or physical experiment. In the Summa Theologiae Thomas distinguishes the ontology of what is possible in action from phenomenological descriptions of experiences; thus the acknowledgement that a demon can act "here" or "there" by applying power does not justify claims about its material presence or about a supernatural insight into free human acts.

1.7 3. *Aevum*: between the time of creation and the eternity of God

1.7.1 *Aevum* as the third measure of existence

In the reflections of St. Thomas Aquinas the category *aevum* plays an intermediary and discreet role: it is neither the timeless eternity proper only to God, nor a purely temporal condition belonging to created bodies subject to motion according to "before" and "after." Thomas formulates this distinction in the spirit of the classical metaphysics that measures being by its relation to change: *tempus* is the measure of material motion; *aeternitas* — of absolute life in which there is no succession; and *aevum*, on the other hand, constitutes the mode of duration of spiritual beings which have a beginning and dependence on the Creator, yet do not undergo intrinsic substantial decay. In condensed form Thomas appeals to this third measure already in Question 10 (aa. 5–6), and later he consistently employs it with respect to the nature of the angels and the essence of the fall. In theological language *aevum* signifies "created duration" — having a beginning, finite as to its cause, yet stable as to essence; at the same time it allows for the succession of acts and the ordering of operations.[5]

So understood, *aevum* removes two simplifications: the first, which identifies an angel with a being existing in material time that comes into being and perishes in successive moments; the second — which represents it as a being entirely outside time, possessing attributes of Divine eternity. Neither corresponds to Aquinas's thought. The angel, as a created intellectual substance, is from the beginning given by God and therefore is not eternal of itself; its existence depends absolutely on the Creator (cf. ST I, q. 53). At the same time its substance is not subject to material decay: an angel does not "age" through physical wear, but persists in its nature. *Aevum* grasps this constitutive stability without denying the possibility of successive acts of knowledge and will.

[5]St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, ST I, q. 10, aa. 5–6; q. 53; q. 57, a. 3; q. 62, aa. 5–6; q. 63, aa. 5–6; q. 64, a. 2, online edition.

1.7.2 Succession of acts and substantial persistence

Crucial for understanding *aevum* is the distinction between substantial persistence and the succession of internal acts. Thomas consistently separates being from its actions: the angelic substance persists almost unchangeably, whereas its actions can follow one another and be relatively interdependent. Thus an angel can shift the place of its operation, know different objects successively, communicate and perform various operations without its nature undergoing an intrinsic change. In truth *aevum* does not abolish succession — on the contrary, it acknowledges it in the order of acts, not as a change of being.

The adoption of this distinction also resolves the problem of angelic movement with respect to the material world. When we speak of the "movement of an angel" with regard to place, of which Thomas treats elsewhere, we have here a succession of acts of will and intellect that bring about changes in the angel's actual relations to particular places and objects. This is not an organic movement as in the world of bodies; it is rather a sequence of acts referring to different states of affairs. Consequently *aevum* alters the sense of time: it is no longer a measure dependent exclusively on material displacement, but a structure of persistence in which succession of acts occurs without convergence to the full timelessness of God.

1.7.3 Distinction between discrete time and substantial duration

In this context Thomas introduces a distinction that we may pragmatically call here "discrete time" — that is, a succession of thoughts, acts of will, and determinations of action — and substantial duration, which remains constant. Discrete time within *aevum* manifests itself as the order of intellectual and volitional acts: an angel can first know a truth, then grasp its application, and subsequently act. This order is real, has causal effects, and coexists with the angel; however, it does not cause the angelic substance to pass from being one thing to an altogether different thing. Essential stability and the succession of acts are therefore not contradictory — on the contrary, they are possible only by adopting *aevum* as an intermediate category.

This distinction also explains why the phrase "angelic time" is merely a shorthand. It is not a magnitude of interval, as if *aevum* were a time much longer than human *tempus*, but a difference in the kind of being and mode of persistence. *Aevum* is not an accumulation of instants nor an axis of eternity — it is a God-dependent mode of duration in which the succession of acts is possible but internal corruption of nature does not occur.

1.7.4 The moment of creation and the first operation of the will

An important application of the notion *aevum* is the explanation of the problem in which Thomas specifies when and under what conditions the first angels could have fallen. In Question 63 Thomas examines the issue of fault in the angels and concludes that sin could not have been the act accomplished at the same instant in which the angel received being. In the first instance angelic being, though created and having a beginning, contains essential stability: the first act of creation establishes the substance, and only a subsequent act, after a certain order of intellectual and volitional operations, can become an act of rejection of God. In practice this means that the angel first exists (possesses its nature) as a created being, then performs the act of knowing its Creator and of willing; if, however, there arises an inordinate inclination toward that which is above its proper place, then only in that subsequent act does guilt accrue: pride, the turning of the will toward creature rather than Creator.[ST I, q. 63, aa. 5–6; ST I, q. 57, a. 3]

Such an account defends against two false postures. First, it prevents the thought that God creates a being already burdened with guilt; second, it shows that sin is always an act of the will, whose conditions must follow the establishment of the moral subject. There is here a logical priority of existence over the moral

act: first being, then choice. For this reason Thomas rejects the thesis that demons "sinned" at the moment of their creation, and rather points to a sequence of acts in which an inordinate aspiration to likeness with God arose, and only afterwards — an actual turning of the will.

It is important also to recall the cognitive limits Thomas assigns to the angels: although their intellect is capable of singular and material knowledge through conferred likenesses, they do not possess direct access to the deepest secrets of the human will nor to unknowable future decisions as such. In Question 57 Thomas explicitly sets bounds to angelic knowledge: angels do not know in an absolute degree the "secrets of the heart" nor future free choices, unless God previously reveals something or permits them to know by way of illumination. This distinction has important theological and practical implications for understanding the activity of demons in the human world — they are not omniscient nor omnipotent: they are limited created intellectual beings, acting within the framework of *aevum*.[ST I, q. 57, a. 3]

1.7.5 Irrevocability of choice in *aevum* — metaphysical and psychological grounds of obduracy

One of Thomas's most controversial and simultaneously pivotal conclusions is that the choice made by an angel in the order of *aevum* has a lasting and, in principle, irrevocable character. This does not arise from an arbitrary defect in God or from some external necessity, but from the metaphysical condition of the angelic being after the committed act: at the moment when an angel independently attempts to actualize its will contrary to the order of its nature and the order of the Creator, that act constitutes its moral composition. Aquinas understands this by analogy with the principle that the will corresponds to its voluntary attachment; when that act becomes a reality in *aevum* — that is, when the substance is rendered in a lasting way oriented toward some injury in its relation to God — there follows a metaphysical "settling" of the moral state. From the standpoint of Thomas's moral philosophy, the act of will, situated in the context of irreducible duration (*aevum*), creates new orders of inclination and habituation, which are no longer merely transitory inclinations but constitute a stable orientation.

Psychologically speaking (in logical, not empirical categories), Thomas does not employ contemporary notions of disorders; he rather speaks of a transformation of the order of values and reasons decided by the act of will. The fall of an angel is therefore a "closing" of its will to the divine summons, since the freedom used in rebellion has been directed toward a stable resistance. Consequently — and this is Aquinas's position — such a will does not experience a return to the original order: its relation to the good has been distorted at an ontological level such that the alternative of return does not obtain within the natural order of *aevum*.[ST I, q. 63, aa. 5–6; ST I, q. 64, a. 2]

From this perspective one must emphasize the distinction between the durability of a decision and immutability in the logical sense: Thomas does not claim that the will of a fallen angel is logically incapable of other thoughts; rather, that its general orientation — as a moral determination — becomes an ontological fact. This is the reason why we speak of the "obduracy" of demons: it is not a youthful "clinging" to a reason that can be negotiated, but the result of an ontological change in the order of their abiding being.

It is equally important not to interpret this irrevocability as denial of guilt — on the contrary: in Thomas's account responsibility is full, because the choice was free and deliberate. The rejection of the notion that God's decisions are to blame or that the fall was necessary owing to causes beyond the angel's will is an essential element of the defense of the doctrine of God's justice.

1.7.6 The relation between the persistence of angelic nature and human *tempus*

Aevum poses for us the problem of the mutual interaction of two different modes of persistence: angelic persistence and human *tempus*. Thomas analyzes the relations between these orders, especially in the context of the demons' influence on human senses and imagination. In his model angels, as immaterial beings, can affect the lower powers of the soul indirectly — chiefly by means of images and the presentation of objects that stir the human intellect and will. This influence is functional: a demon can "bring" an object of evil nearer to the imagination, can create sensorial illusions or enticing images, but he does not have power over the interior of the person in the sense of directly transforming the will. This limitation follows both from the metaphysics of *aevum*, which constitutes a distinct order of angelic being, and from Thomas's pedagogical moral doctrine: the will remains ultimately inwardly free and cannot be coerced. [ST I, q. 111; ST I, q. 57, a. 3]

Practically speaking, when a demon acts in relation to a human, he does so within the framework of human *tempus*: his act of presenting an image is an act that takes place in the succession of human experiences, imaginations, and associations. *Aevum* does not suspend human *tempus*; rather it makes use of its layers and structures to exert influence. For this reason Thomas distinguishes an "external" influence (e.g., deceptive visions) from an internal compulsion: the former is possible, the latter is not. From this theological-metaphysical point there follows a practical conclusion: the human person remains responsible for his choices, even if he has been subjected to intense temptations presented through the senses or imagination.

It is also significant that *aevum* is not, in relation to *tempus*, a model of "exaggeration" or "extension" of human time — on the contrary, the two orders remain qualitatively different. An attempt to reduce *aevum* to empirical subjective experience (e.g., to a sense of "slowing" of time in ecstasy or "acceleration" in fear) is a conceptual mistake: Thomas does not describe psychic phenomena but ontological relations of spiritual beings to the Creator and to creation. Viewed from the perspective of *aevum*, the influence of demons on human *tempus* is adaptive and instrumental, not totalizing.

1.7.7 Critique of contemporary psychologizing interpretations

In Thomas's approach there exists a real temptation to anachronistically "heal" the problem of *aevum* by modern psychology: the desire to translate the philosophical-metaphysical category of duration into neuropsychological descriptions of subjective states. Such an abuse, however, leads to two errors. First: the confusion of ontology with phenomenology. *Aevum*, as a category of being, is not a description of human feelings nor even of the way a human experiences tension between instants — it is an ontological measure of the existence of spiritual beings. Second: a pathologizing reductionism. Interpreting every experience of "suspended time," anxiety or disorientation as evidence of demonic action contradicts Thomas's rational discipline, who distinguishes natural psychophysical conditions from real spiritual influences. The recall of medieval categories of "spirits" and "humors" is historical: it constitutes an attempt to explain the functioning of the senses within premodern physiology, but it is not identical with contemporary diagnosis. Thomas himself used those terms in the context of his times, without envisaging modern psychiatric theories; this, however, does not authorize any arbitrary identification of demonology with

mental illness.[6]

Consequently, two warnings must be opposed to psychologization: do not attribute a demonic character to psychopathological phenomena, and do not disregard the reality of spiritual beings where there are weighty theological or rational grounds. Thomas provides a conceptual framework that allows one to distinguish: what is natural (belongs to *tempus* and its conditions) and what results from the intervention of spiritual beings acting within *aevum*. Preserving this conceptual discipline is the basis of a sound theological and practical reflection.

1.7.8 Doctrinal consequences: the finality of the spiritual choice

From the theological standpoint the most important consequence of adopting *aevum* as the measure of angelic persistence is the conclusion about the finality of their choice. Because the fall is the result of a free and deliberate act which, in the context of *aevum*, takes on a durable character, Thomas arrives at the view that an angelic sin committed does not admit of reversal within the natural order of creation. This is not an arbitrary apodictic assertion, but a logical result: when a spiritual being — possessing the fullness of rational and volitional faculties — makes a lasting turning away, then its being in the moral aspect undergoes such transformations that the possibility of return is not real. Consequently the teaching on the irrevocability of the fall of the angels becomes an element of systematic reflection on God's judgment, justice, and the relation of creation to the Creator.[ST I, q. 63, aa. 5–6; ST I, q. 64, a. 2]

It is important not to treat this finality as neutral with respect to hope or compassion. Thomas distinguishes the dimension of God's judgment (which touches the fallen) from divine mercy toward creatures capable of conversion. The loss of the possibility of return in the context of *aevum* is the consequence of the free and deliberate decision of the spiritual being, and not a sign of the absence of God's justice or mercy. Thus this doctrine has consequences for the theology of salvation history: it underscores the finality of certain spiritual choices, while at the same time it does not diminish divine providence nor the respect for creaturely freedom.

The concluding implication of these reflections is the practical requirement of conceptual precision: if we wish to speak of demons in the light of the Thomistic ontology, we must adhere to the distinctions between *aevum* and *tempus*, between substance and acts, and between the natural and the supernatural order. Only such conceptual ordering permits an understanding consonant with Aquinas of the place of demons in the order of creation — as real beings, cognitively limited and morally free, yet durably shaped by their own choices.

It is useful to distinguish three levels at issue here, so as not to blur their interrelations. Substantial immutability pertains to the ontological stability of a created nature: once established, a form does not undergo internal decay or substantial transformation. Succession of acts is a dynamic category — it states that within this same unchanging substance successive actualizations of powers (of knowledge, will, action) are possible. Finally God's eternity, as Thomas formulates it, is not merely an extreme form of creatures' immutability, but an absolute absence of succession: in God there is no order of "before" and "after," no sequence of acts dependent on potentiality, but a simultaneous and wholly self-sufficient existence. These are three distinct categories: creation endures (substantial immutability),

[6]The biblical texts cited in this chapter should be read in their own canonical context; in this treatment they constitute a point of reference for the reconstruction of Thomas's argumentation, not an autonomous resolution of every subsequent speculative question.

and simultaneously in its endurance succession of acts can occur; God, however, stands outside such succession.

Thomas argues this by appeal to the distinction of act and potency: in creatures actualizations (e.g., the knowing of an object, a volitional choice) are transitions from potency to act and therefore may follow one another; this does not, however, alter the essential identity of the subject that undergoes them. Practically this means that the "immutability" of a creature does not exclude its activity nor the ordered sequence of that activity — on the contrary, it is the condition for those acts to be genuine, albeit successive, realizations of its faculties. In God there is no such potentiality, and so there are no successive acts understood as actualizations of potency.

The question of the first act of choice must therefore be raised from two perspectives: theoretical and methodological. Theoretically Thomas places the logical priority of existence before the moral act: for one to be the object of attraction to good or evil by an act of will, one must first exist as a subject capable of choosing. Hence the inference that the sin of the angels could not have been simultaneous with the act of creation. Methodologically, however, Thomas does not claim the right to a full microchronological reconstruction of the successive instants after creation; his concern is metaphysical — about the conditions of potency and act and about the consequences of the first choice in the order of *aevum*. One must therefore avoid ambiguity: to say that the first act of choice is necessarily subsequent with respect to existence, but not to maintain that Thomas exhaustively described every temporal detail of that sequence.

Consequently: when Thomas asserts the enduring character of the choice of the fallen angels, he understands this as an ontological consequence of the act performed in *aevum* — that act constitutes a stable orientation of the will, not the result of compulsion or of a supernatural determinism. At the same time the limits of knowledge and power of spiritual beings also remain, as Thomas reminds us: they are constrained by the difference between the knowledge of the Creator and the knowledge proper to any creature. These theses follow from his understanding of the structure of acts and powers, not from a psychologizing diagnosis of inner mechanisms — hence one must adhere to the Thomistic metaphysics of act and potency, not equating it with descriptions of psychological processes.

1.8 4. Questions 54–58: the angelic intellect and the limits of its knowledge

1.8.1 The ontological structure of the cognitive act in separated substances (ST I, q. 54)

In q. 54 Thomas begins the analysis of angelic cognition by establishing a fundamental ontological distinction: the angel is not its cognitive act. For Thomas only in God are essence and existence, form and act, identical; created intellectual substances remain in a relation between their nature and the act which actualizes them. From this point flows the first and essential epistemological conclusion: the angelic intellect is a power really distinct from that which it knows; the angel has an intellect, the intellect performs the cognitive act, yet the *actus intelligendi* is not identical with the angel's whole personal reality.

This distinction has several analytic consequences. First, an angel's cognition cannot be represented as an immediate identification of the person with some infinite act — the act is the act of a created nature, not the act of divine simplicity. Second, the possibility of error or limitation in cognition does not arise from a disintegration of the knowing person, but from limitations in the range of forms and light that have been

granted to it. Therefore every judgment about "angelic knowledge" must take into account the ontological boundary between what is known and the one who knows.[7]

It is not without significance that Thomas rejects for angels the necessity of understanding through the senses and imagination as necessary intermediaries. Their cognition is not an "abstraction" from matter in the human sense (a topic treated further in q. 55), but a direct apprehension of the object by intelligible forms that exist in the angel's intellect in a manner suitable to its nature. From this principle Thomas also reconstructs the tension between the simplicity of the cognitive act in creatures and the limitation of objects that this act can embrace.

1.8.2 *Species* innate as the medium of cognition (ST I, q. 55)

In q. 55 Thomas specifies what the cognitive "medium" is for angels: it is not a sensory image, but *species intellectiva* — the likeness of a thing infused or bestowed by the Creator. These *species* are not produced by the senses nor by the operation of the active intellect in the human sense; they are rather appropriate likenesses that make a being knowable to a separated intellect. Significant here is the dichotomy: in man the *species* come from sensible representations and require a process of abstraction, whereas in the angel they are immediately adapted to his intellectual composition.

Thomas introduces a hierarchical ordering of these forms. Higher angels have *species* that are more universal and less fragmented: one cognitive principle grasped by a higher angel includes more content and pertains to more general kinds. Lower angels, by contrast, possess a larger number of more particular *species*. This reasoning is difficult to reduce merely to a psychological metaphor: it is a metaphysical thesis about the degree of universality of cognitive forms, which at the same time provides a justification for the ordering of the angelic choirs as a difference in the breadth and depth of cognition. Practically, Thomas distinguishes three orders: the *species*, their scope (universality versus particularity), and the number of cognitive principles belonging to a given angelic nature. In this way the cognitive hierarchy correlates with the ontological hierarchy, without reducing one to the other.

Formally stated, Thomas's thesis runs thus: the angelic intellect gains access to being through receiving from God the appropriate *species*; it is not an abstracting process with respect to matter, but rather an immediate grasping of the likeness of a created thing. This conception also entails that angels have no need of sensory organs.

1.8.3 Knowledge of oneself, of other angels and of God (ST I, q. 56)

In q. 56 Thomas analyzes three kinds of interpersonal and transcendent knowledge: of oneself, of other angels, and of God. Each displays a specific logic of apprehending the object by a separated intellect. An angel knows himself "through his form": his form as what he is is immediately present to his intellect; he does not need, as a man does, to appeal to external data in order to grasp his nature. This immediate self-knowledge is not, however, identification with being as such in the divine sense — an angel does not behold his existence as God beholds His own essence.

Knowledge of other angels proceeds by means of *species* granted by God: the intellect of one angel has the likeness of the being of another, which enables the conception of the other's nature. Finally, an angel knows God naturally as the cause of his being and as the highest, but such knowledge relates to God's action as cause, not to the divine essence in its full depth. Thomas distinguishes here natural knowledge of creatures "in their causes" (what is sometimes called "knowledge in the morning") from knowledge of

[7] St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, ST I, qq. 54–58, especially q. 57, aa. 3–5, online edition.

them “in their own natures” (knowledge “in the evening”); both kinds are created and stand in contrast to beatific knowledge, which is a gift of grace and not a natural property of angelic intellects.

Recognizing this triad of cognition (I — the other — God as cause) allows Thomas to maintain a balance between the high intellectual power of angels and their created condition: they can look into causes, but they do not possess cognitive properties that would remove the ontological otherness between Creator and creature.

1.8.4 Knowledge of material, singular things and of the future — the argument for the limitation of knowledge (ST I, q. 57, aa. 3–5)

Question 57 is crucial for demonology: it contains the most detailed statements regarding what angels know about the material world, singular events, the future, and the interior of the human will. Thomas decides there that angels possess extensive but finite knowledge. I will now present a detailed analysis of the argument concerning their lack of knowledge of future free acts — an argument of central importance for preserving human freedom against claims of demonically “penetrating” knowledge.

Thomas’s argument can be constructed synthetically as follows:

1. Knowledge of causes and effects in the created order is acquired by the intellect on the basis of the presence of appropriate reasons or *species*, which bind the intellect to that which is known.
2. A future free act — insofar as it is truly free — does not possess in the present a determining created cause that would of necessity entail that act.
3. Angels know future events with certainty only when they have before them causes or *species* that necessarily determine the outcome; lacking such causes, their knowledge must rely on signs, causal connections, or on revelation.
4. Hence an angel does not know future free acts with absolute certainty, unless God reveals them to him or unless in the order of causes there exists a necessary relation deciding the event.

The principal premise in this reasoning is the metaphysical relation between knowledge and cause: certain knowledge is tied to the presence of a sufficient cause, and in the case of free acts no such cause exists in the present moment. Thomas appeals here to the assumption that the intellect, though intuitive in angels, cannot create truth by itself — it can know it only in relation to existing reasons. Therefore even a high angel, despite his immediate cognition, cannot, of necessity, penetrate human free intentions. He can infer from external signs and from a person’s constitution, he can predict accurately, but he does not possess divine insight into the act of will as such.

From a practical point of view Thomas allows three ways in which an angel may have knowledge of the future:

- prediction based on knowledge of causes and their necessary effects;
- prediction based on signs and habits, which provide a probable premise as to behavior;
- knowledge resulting from divine revelation, which removes the causal boundary and imparts the content of future events.

All three are philosophically distinct: the first gives necessity, the second — probability, the third — certainty as an outward gift. This account protects human freedom from the accusation that “an angel knows” and thus determines the act, because an angel’s knowledge, even full prediction, is not an internal causal factor for a free decision.

Thomas applies this argument consistently also to the “secrets of the heart” and the “mysteries of grace”: the interior of the will and states of grace are known directly by God; an angel can only infer them from

visible signs or when God reveals them. This distinction preserves the theological secrecy of conscience as a divine prerogative and formulates an epistemic limit for practical demonology.

1.8.5 The intuitive intellect versus discursive reasoning (ST I, q. 58)

In q. 58 Thomas describes the specificity of angels' intellectual acts: their cognition is intuitive rather than discursive. In man the cognitive act often proceeds by premises, partial concepts and inferences; in the angel, by contrast, a given cognitive principle contains at once all the consequences that follow from it. In practice this means that the angel need not perform sequential operations of thought to arrive at consequences, because the perception of principles is simultaneous and holistic.

One must, however, emphasize Thomas's subtle but decisive qualification: the simplicity of the cognitive act in an angel is not equivalent to the infinity of the object. The intuitive intellect may embrace relations and consequences more quickly and in one synthesis, but the object itself remains limited by the *species* and the light that the angel possesses. Thus the simplicity of cognition does not remove the possibility of error in the appraisal of causes or of allowing insufficient data, if the proper form is lacking. Accordingly, intuitiveness is not the key to omniscience — it is rather a mode of more efficient apprehension of what has been given to it.

The distinction between intuitive and discursive cognition also has epistemic implications: an angel who knows intuitively does not "think" step by step, yet his cognition is not automatically a mark of certainty regarding objects whose nature exceeds his resources. This subtle account explains many biblical descriptions of angelic penetration, without succumbing to the mythologizing of their capacities.

1.8.6 Application of the principles to demonology: loss of the light of glory and the preservation of natural aptitude

The Thomistic demonology presupposes that fallen angels retain the natural properties of their nature: intellect, reason, *species* — yet they lose the order of grace and glory. For this reason their cognitive capacities remain essentially the same as before the fall in respect of nature, but they suffer moral and epistemic distortion. Thomas asserts that a demon does not become God and does not possess divine penetration; he remains a creature, and thus his knowledge concerning future free acts or the secrets of the interior is limited by the same conditions that obtain for good angels: absence of a necessary cause, absence of direct sight of the heart. Therefore a demon can:

- infer from behaviors, habits, bodily motions and external signs;
- predict on the basis of causes and necessities in the created world;
- know secrets only when they are revealed by God or by external signs which in the demons' reasoning take on the weight of premises.

Consequently Thomas rejects the simple attribution: a demon does not "read the heart" in the sense of direct insight into intention, nor does he possess the capacity to coerce the free will directly. His action remains an external and persuasive influence, not a cause of moral necessity in man.[8]

1.8.7 A critical distinction between Thomistic metaphysics of cognition and contemporary psychological interpretations

Viewed from a contemporary perspective, one must decisively distinguish Thomistic language about *species*, sense powers and bodily movements from medical or psychological diagnoses. Thomas made use

[8]Biblical texts cited in this chapter should be read in their own canonical context; in this study they serve as reference points for the reconstruction of Thomas's argumentation, not as independent resolutions of every later speculative issue.

in his reflections of the physiological theories of his time (e.g., concerning the "humors") as a context for explaining the ways in which bodily movements signal interior states; however, one must not uncritically transpose this anthropology into today's clinical categories. In particular: the observation that an angel can infer from bodily movements about the inclinations of a person's will does not imply theological or pastoral approval of the automatic identification of psychopathological symptoms with demonic action. Thomistic limits of cognition — the absence of divine insight into conscience, the limitation of knowledge regarding the future of free acts, the necessity of revelation for knowledge of mysteries of grace — are here critical tools that prevent overinterpretation of a person's interior experience.

In the context of practical demonology the implication is simple: any claim about a demonic origin of some interior state requires justification by external evidence, and is not a straightforward consequence of attributing "omniscience" to a demon or of assuming his capacity for direct penetration of conscience.

1.8.8 Limits of the thesis and critical remarks

Thomas's analysis points to several limits of the thesis of angelic cognition. First, although the angelic intellect is intuitive, its scope is conditioned by cause and by the *species* bestowed — these are ontological, not psychological, premises. Second, the distinction between kinds of knowledge (knowledge in the morning/knowledge in the evening; natural/revelatory) shows that there is an inner gradation of cognitive entitlements: knowledge of causes does not remove the need for grace for the vision of the divine essence. Third, Thomas's claim about the limitation of demonic knowledge strengthens the theological distinction of moral responsibility: since demons do not know with absolute certainty the causes of free acts, they cannot bear exclusive determinate responsibility for human guilt.

Finally, one must note Thomas's epistemic caution: his mode of reasoning avoids the epigonal magical realism that ascribes to creatures attributes proper to God. The same applies to classical aporiae: it is possible that in particular revelatory instances God may give to angels content that would normally exceed their nature; yet this does not undermine the general principle of limitation of their knowledge.

In sum: the Thomistic theory of the angelic intellect combines great efficiency and an intuitive mode of cognition with a consistent recognition of created condition and limitations. By this model of demonology Thomas defends both the loftiness of spiritual creatures and the fundamental difference between Creator and creature, and he provides a theological framework that resists abuses in the interpretation of interior experiences.

The finiteness of a demon's knowledge has consequences not only for what he knows, but also for how he acts and what significance his "visions" have for the moral order. If his knowledge depends on causes and *species*, then his predictions must rest either on necessary causal connections in the world, or on signs and habits that yield only degrees of probability. Practically, this means that every predictive act by a demon is modal: it may be necessary (when a necessary cause exists), probable (when it rests on signs, inclinations, prior habits) or certain only by virtue of an external revelation. From this ontological dependence follows an essential epistemic instability of demonic inferences with respect to what in human life remains open — especially with regard to free acts.

From this finiteness also follows that the demon's natural proficiency remains limited by the distinction between creature and God. Hence his strategy is not immediate knowledge and compulsion, but preparing external and internal conditions that increase the probability of a given choice. In other words, the demon has the skill of prediction by causal reasoning and observation of signs, and so tends to modulate proximate causes — habits, sensory stimuli, circumstances — in order to raise the effectiveness of temptation. This

understanding preserves the clear distinction between the power of prediction and dominion over a free decision: absence of cognitive necessity does not make the demon a direct cause of the moral act.

The finiteness of a demon's knowledge also has consequences with respect to the mysteries of grace and the interior of conscience. Because knowledge of a creature by a creature is always dependent upon reasons, a demon has no access to what belongs to God's prerogative — the direct vision of a state of grace or direct knowledge of the secrets of conscience — except insofar as God Himself reveals something from outside. Where there are no evident external causes, any demonic assertion about who is in grace or what the state of conscience is remains speculative or manipulative. Hence demonic "certainty" in such matters should be understood as rhetorical or tactical maneuvering, not as proof of access to inscrutable mysteries. Accepting this principle protects the theological distinction between divine knowledge and the knowledge of creatures.

Finally, the epistemic finiteness of demons has practical effect for moral and theological judgments: since demons may err in inferences based on signs and indirect causes, their conclusions do not remove human responsibility nor can they be treated as definitive judgments about conscience. Likewise, every apparent "penetration" of the interior that demons present must be referred to their conditioned mode of cognition — it is either inductive reasoning, or the result of God-permitted revelation, or a deliberate demonic imitation of certainty. From the Thomistic perspective this epistemological boundary is a necessary element safeguarding freedom and the mystery of grace from reduction to a cognitive relation among creatures.

1.9 5. Questions 59–60: the will, freedom and love

1.9.1 The will as an appetitive power dependent on the intellect

In Questions 59–60 St. Thomas Aquinas considers the origin and structure of the will in intellectual beings, especially in angels. His point of departure is simple and consistent: where there is an intellect that knows, there must be a corresponding appetitive power. The intellect presents the good as such; the will is the power that turns toward the good as presented. This understanding of the will as an intellectual appetite distinguishes it from instincts or drives, which in the traditional medieval anthropology were associated with the sensible appetitive powers. For Thomas every intellectual nature has within it an innate inclination toward the good as such, and this inclination takes the form of a determinate act of choice when the intellect presents a determinate good or when there are competing possibilities. This distinction is clearly supported in his analysis: the intellect proposes, the will chooses; the intellect is a cognitive cause, the will — a cause of the subject's orientation.[9]

For this reason Thomas excludes for demons a deterministic interpretation of their decisions as the mere effect of biological or sensible impulses. A demon, as an intellectual nature, is not governed by instinct in the animal sense and does not experience a necessity of choice produced by bodily causes. Though, unlike God, it is created and finite, it nonetheless possesses its own appetitive act, which can be the source of either good or evil in its actions. On that basis Thomas refuses to reduce demonic moral responsibility to some physiological necessity: their choices are free and morally possible — hence their sin is possible — yet they are formed by the knowledge they have of the good and the ways of attaining it. In this first phase of his reasoning it is clearly emphasized that the freedom of angels and demons is not a freedom of chaos, but a freedom bound up with the intellect and with its presentations of reality.

[9] St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, ST I, qq. 59–60, online edition.

1.9.2 Will and intellect: distinction of acts and reciprocal dependence

In the Thomistic scheme intellect and will constitute a psychic unity, yet they remain distinct acts. The intellect shows the object as knowable or as good; that showing in itself does not yet bring about movement toward that good. The will, by contrast, is the internal form of movement — it takes the direction offered by the intellect and gives it the character of motivation. This explains why in Thomas one can speak both of a certain unavoidable preference (resulting from the nature of knowledge) and of the possibility of choosing against that order: the intellect can present the general character of the good, and the will can then decide which means and which particular goods are to be subordinated to the end. This moment of choice is crucial for understanding the genesis of sin in intellectual creatures: it does not arise from an absence of knowledge as such, but from a disordered application of known goods with respect to the hierarchy proper to the order of created things.

In practical terms such a distinction restrains the erroneous identification of intellectual action with moral necessity. If the intellect shows the good, that does not mean there is an irrevocable obligation that the will must direct its acts toward it. This is a key point against modern voluntarism: for Thomas the will is not an autonomous power arbitrarily constituting the content of the good independently of knowledge. On the contrary, its freedom is always implicated in relation to the truth presented by the intellect — something that determines the structure and limits of possible choices, though it does not determine them necessarily.

1.9.3 Angelic freedom and the permanence of the choice

One of the most discussed implications of the Thomistic analysis of the will of angels concerns the character of the act of choice itself. In human creatures a decision takes place within a discursive process: the intellect can deliberate various possibilities, compare means, and thereafter return to prior thoughts. In angels, which are simple substances and do not have a temporal discursive process of that kind, choice has a different dynamic. Thomas argues that after the act of choice is made in an angel there does not follow a return to a discursive process in the same sense; the choice becomes fixed, because there are not successive stages of analysis that would reduce it to a renewed state of doubt. This leads to the conclusion that the decisions of angels — both those conformable to God and those contrary to Him — have an inescapable permanence with respect to their natures as they were actualized at the time of creation. Consequently the fall is not a process of continuous oscillatory decline, but a single tipping of the will toward evil that becomes the seal of their condition.

Such an understanding of angelic freedom has far-reaching theological consequences. First, it confirms the moral responsibility of angels; the choice is free and yet determines their condition permanently. Second, it explains why a fallen angel does not return: his act of will — if made with full awareness of the nature of his deed — does not experience the natural pause-points that in humans allow for repentance and penance. This Thomistic analysis is not purely speculative: it follows from the consistent application of his metaphysics of simplicity, intellectuality and time to angelic beings.

1.9.4 Absence of irascible and concupiscible powers: reinterpretation of demonic affections

A significant thesis of Thomas, important for demonology and for practical theology, runs as follows: demons do not possess the sensible powers responsible for irascibility or concupiscibility in the way that humans do. They lack a body, and therefore their “anger” or “concupiscence” are not bodily phenomena nor directly conditioned by humors or nerves. When Sacred Scripture or tradition ascribe hatred, lust

or anger to them, Thomas insists on reading this language analogically: it refers to acts of the will of a spiritual character, not to bodily affections.

From this follows the necessity of distinguishing between an affective state and a volitional act: in man concupiscence and anger can be manifestations of a conflict between sensible appetite and reason; in an angel and a demon analogous "passions" are rather forms of ordered or disordered desire existing in a purely intellectual-volitional sphere. The essence of a demon's "malice," then, is an act of turning the will away from the order of the good — the intellect may see the truth, may recognize the order, yet the will may direct its striving against that order. This redefines many biblical and patristic images, allowing them to retain their poetic force without attributing bodily passions to demons.

In Thomas's hermeneutics it is also important that the spiritual character of demonic affections prevents dualistic thinking: demons do not become some equivalent natural forces opposed to God, but rather creatures who — while retaining a capacity to love their own being — use their will in a deformed way.

1.9.5 Natural love as the foundation of being and its tragic transformation after the fall

In Question 60 Thomas introduces a fundamental distinction between natural love and love that results from choice. Natural love is an ontological element: every being, as a good for itself, is an object of love to its own nature; the mere fact of existing entails a natural attachment to one's own good. This is not an additional affect but a structural feature of being: things and beings love what contributes to the preservation of their existence and the realization of their nature. In intellectual beings the scope of this love is broader: it includes also love for other subjects of the same nature and for the first cause of existence — God. In the right order of natural love the good of the part is subordinated to the good of the whole; therefore the love of God as first principle has priority over the love of one's own being or of other creatures. This ordering is key to explaining the moral sense of creation and the order of grace.

After the fall, however, natural love does not vanish. Thomas firmly rejects the view that creatures are by nature corrupt; sin is the result of a free act of the will, not of the natural poverty of creation. Therefore even a fallen demon still loves his own existence and, in a certain sense, God as the source of that existence. The problem is that this natural love can be reoriented and used as a source of suffering: when the will in its choice places a particular good — likeness to God, dominion, autonomy — in first place, an internal conflict arises between the natural love that calls back to order and the will that rejects that order. Thus a tragic situation emerges: the being still "loves" what secures its existence, and yet chooses against it. The suffering of the fallen one therefore follows paradoxically from the fact that natural love is not annihilated but is employed as an instrument of self-deception.

Thomas uses this conviction to reject two interpretive temptations: first, to avoid proclaiming that demons are absolutely hateful toward all reality, which would lead to Manichean dualism; second, to avoid reducing their actions to natural necessity, which would dilute their moral responsibility. Their natural love of their own being and — to a certain degree — of the Creator is evidence that despite the fall they remain creatures, and their deviation is a free act.

1.9.6 Chosen love and its perversion in the sin of pride

Alongside natural love Thomas posits love that results from choice. Where the will has the possibility of orienting itself to various spheres of the good, love becomes an act subject to choice: one can love God as the highest Good or love creatures beyond measure, preferring particular ends against the order. The most

radical form of this erroneous choice is pride: instead of seeking happiness in the proper ordering toward God, the will desires its own greatness, independence and dominion; it seeks to attain happiness outside the order of grace and subordination. It is precisely pride, according to Thomas, that was the cause of the first fall of the angels.

The mechanism of this error is subtle: it is not a lack of love for God as such, but a transformation of love into a lust for self-exaltation. The will still strives for happiness, but redefines happiness so as to make its own perfection the ultimate end. The intentionality of the act changes — instead of ordering the parts to the whole, the will inverts that hierarchy. Thus chosen love is perversely employed as an instrument of likeness to God; it becomes not a striving for truth but for the image of one's own greatness.

From a theological point of view Thomas emphasizes that such a choice is neither naturally necessary nor the result of a defect inherent in creation. It is a decision that reveals contingency and responsibility. The fall does not diminish the status of creation as an ontological good — it undermines the relation of the will to the order. Therefore its repair requires not the creation of another nature, but the restoration of the proper order of love, which in the Christian order is effected by grace.

1.9.7 The paradox: love of God as Creator and hatred of God as Judge

One of the most dramatic thoughts in the Thomistic reflection on angels is the distinction between two "figures" of God toward which the fallen angel relates. From an ontological standpoint an angel remains capable of loving God as the first cause of existence — that is the love that results from the recognition that its being depends on the Source. At the same time it can hate God as Judge, who upholds order and pronounces sentence, opposing the angel's aspirations to independence. Thomas points out that these two attitudes are not internally contradictory: the same being can at once acknowledge Someone as the source of its existence and despise His law as the ultimate criterion of value.

This explains many biblical and patristic scenarios where demons seem to know God and at the same time oppose Him. This is not a logical contradiction but a moral one: ontological acknowledgment does not negate nor remove the possibility of moral opposition. For Thomas this is important because it protects against two wrong interpretations: one that nullifies demonic responsibility by treating them as beings lacking moral capacity; the other that elevates demons beyond the order of creation, making them absolute beings opposed to God. Precisely by maintaining this subtle dichotomy Thomas preserves theological coherence: the fall is possible, but it does not make the fallen being independent of the Creator.

1.9.8 Confrontation with voluntarism: the will dependent on knowledge

Contemporary debates about freedom often oscillate around the conception of the will as a sovereign power that can establish the good independently of any knowledge — what is generally called voluntarism. Thomas makes a clear reservation against such a view. In his perspective the will is not an arbitrary source of values; its choices are always relational to the truth presented by the intellect. This does not imply deterministic limitation — the will remains free, capable of choosing contrary to the order — but it does imply cognitive dependence: what the will can recognize as good and to what degree depends on what the intellect shows it.

This confrontation has consequences for the interpretation of sin and responsibility. If the will were sovereign without reference to knowledge, talk of an objective moral order would lose its sense. For Thomas, by contrast, the moral order is really tied to ontological and epistemic order: the intellect knows the structure of the good, and the will has the moral possibility of consenting to or rejecting it. Such a

construction allows for the preservation of both the transcendence of God as the Ultimate Good and the real freedom of creatures who can oppose Him.[10]

1.9.9 Limits of the thesis and interpretative caution

In reflecting on the Thomistic theory of the will and love of angels one must exercise interpretative caution regarding the scope of its application to contemporary human experience. Thomas operates with metaphysical and psychological categories rooted in medieval anthropology, including the older theory of "spirits" and a humoral psychophysiology as a historical element of his model. These schemes should not be transferred uncritically to current medical or psychiatric findings. In particular, when studying human behavior one must distinguish the metaphysical act of the will from mental disorders that require diagnosis and treatment by medical practitioners, neurologists or psychiatrists.

The Thomistic emphasis on the distinction of the powers of reason and will and on the spiritual character of demonic affections is nonetheless useful in preventing simplifications: on the one hand it warns against the automatic explanation of every personal suffering or psychological anguish as the manifestation of demonic forces; on the other hand it permits maintaining that actions of spiritual evil make sense within the framework of free choices of intellectual beings. Such a distinction protects against medical reductionism and against clinical demonization, while at the same time leaving room for a full theological analysis of the nature, responsibility and consequences of sin.

1.9.10 Conclusions: metaphysical coherence and practical responsibility

In sum, Questions 59–60 of the ST display a coherent conception of will and love within the Thomistic metaphysics of creation. The will as an appetitive power dependent on the intellect excludes the reduction of angelic acts to deterministic drives and emphasizes the moral responsibility of rational beings. The absence of sensible appetitive powers in demons forces a reinterpretation of their "anger" as an analogical resistance of the will to the order of the good. Natural love remains the foundation of being and does not disappear after the fall; its transformation into an instrument of suffering and self-contradiction reveals the tragedy of the fall and the essence of pride as a love chosen beyond the order of the Ultimate Good. Finally, the Thomistic critique of voluntarism maintains that the will, though free, is not beyond truth: its possibilities are always shaped by the intellect's presentation of the good.

This analysis preserves a balance between the ontological affirmation of creatures and the moral tension regarding their freedom: it allows one to speak of demons as real and responsible beings while guarding against mythologizing their action and against manic simplifications or ambiguous anthropologies. In light of the Thomistic understanding of will and love one remains firmly convinced that evil is real and possible because of the freedom of creatures, but it is never a necessity of created nature nor a co-equal being with God.

Thomas in the Summa Theologiae distinguishes three levels that must be consistently kept separate: the ontological inclinations of being toward the good (amor naturalis), the free choice of an end, and ordered love as a moral hierarchy. Natural love (*amor naturalis*) means that every existence has an innate attachment to its own good — this is a structural relation of being, not a moral act. The act of choosing an end is the moment in which the will, through the intellect, decides which good to make the ultimate goal; here responsibility is revealed. Ordered love consists in subordinating particular goods to the greater

[10]The biblical texts invoked in this chapter should be read in their own canonical context; in this treatment they serve as points of reference for reconstructing Thomas's argumentation, not as independent resolutions of every subsequent speculative question.

good — God as the First Good — and is the result of a properly formed act of the will. In this triad the fall consists not in the loss of amor naturalis but in the disturbance of the order: the will chooses an improper end, and love is misordered, so that parts assume precedence over the whole.

To understand demonic anger and hatred one must distinguish these three levels from bodily passions. Genuine sensible passions in humans have their source in the union of soul and body and are connected with somatic disturbances; their intensity and course are subject to physiological conditions. Meanwhile, demonic "anger" or "hatred" are analogous expressions: they refer to acts of the will and intellect in which the will resists or opposes the order of the good. Biblical and patristic language employs the vocabulary of affections, but for Thomas this language is analogical — it points to the structure of the will, not to bodily impulses.

One must also recall the fundamental limits of the demon: both angel and demon are creatures; the demon does not read hearts directly, does not know future free acts, and does not coerce a human will into acting. These limits emphasize that his "hatred" operates more through the proposal of an evil end, the undermining of the hierarchy of loves, and the tempting of choice than through immediate psychophysical transformations.

Given the chapters in which Thomas uses metaphysical categories concerning affections, one should avoid identifying this language with psychological or medical diagnosis. He speaks about the order of love and the free choice of an end — about one moral and metaphysical dimension — and not about the modern classification of affective disorders.

1.10 6. Questions 61–62: creation, grace and the trial of the angels

1.10.1 The metaphysical ground of the causality of spiritual beings: creation against self-creation and eternity

In Questions I, qq. 61–62, Thomas first settles the ontological foundation of the angels: they are created, that is, not derived from nor an emanation of the divine substance, nor existing eternally as coequal divinities. This thesis is not a mere apologetic postulate; it rests upon metaphysical distinctions that for Thomas undergird the whole order of creation. Adopting the concept of the necessary being (*esse necessarium*), which is God alone, Thomas rejects the possibility of other beings whose existence would be immutable and self-grounded. Every created substance — including an angel — bears a distinct causal relation to the First Cause: its existence is a gift, not an emanation of the divine substance. In the light of these premises the affirmation that angels "have a cause of their being" means that their being depends on the act of creation, and that this being cannot be equated either with divinity itself or with an intermediate element that would render them quasi-divine emanations. Such a position secures God's simplicity and uniqueness and at the same time preserves a real distinction between Creator and creature — a distinction not merely of quality but also of causality[^c6-1].[11]

On these metaphysical grounds Thomas then considers the consequences concerning eternity and the order of creation. Eternity places a being outside the category "to be created"; were an angel eternal, it would have to possess in itself the necessity of existence or derive from beings coequal with God. Both hypotheses are unacceptable to Thomas. This conviction opens the way to further reasoning about the unity of the cosmos: spiritual and material creation constitute a coherent order of degrees of being in

[11] St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, ST I, qq. 61–62, online edition.

which the place of the angels is not understood as a parallel, independent reality, but as part of a single broadly conceived created reality. Hence Thomas judges it more consonant with "the order of the whole creation" that the arising of spiritual and material beings be simultaneous or closely linked, which better corresponds to the idea of a single act of creation than to a fragmented process of emanation.

1.10.2 The moment and the "place" of creation: time, *aevum* and *empyreum*

The question of "when" and "where" creates a problem more difficult than a simple historical specification. In q. 61 Thomas discusses not only the literal moment but also the relationship of time to *aevum* and the meaning of the so-called empyrean heaven as the environment for pure spirits. His reply is not a clockmaker's dating: the point is to order the concepts of time and spiritual being according to appropriate categories. The angel, as an intellectual substance, has no material parts nor natural movement in the bodily sense; hence its "temporality" need not be identical with the time measured for bodies. Nevertheless Thomas appeals to the notion of a simultaneous creation: it is easier to concede that God, as the efficient cause of all things, brought the whole structure of creatures into being within one economy of action, than to assume a long sequence of states of being in which spirits came into being "before" matter in a temporal sense. In this way he preserves both the metaphysical dependence of spirits on the Creator and the parallelism of their entry into the order of creation with the material order.

Regarding "place" Thomas employs the notion of the empyrean heaven in an analogical and symbolic manner: heaven here is not turned into a concrete location in three-dimensional space, but functions as a mode of speaking about the environment appropriate to spiritual beings — the place of union with God and the dwelling of those who behold God. This "place" is relative, determined by relation to God rather than by geometric parameters. Treating the empyreum in this way allows Thomas to preserve the spiritual specificity of the angels, avoiding fixing them entirely within the spatio-motional categories proper to bodies.

1.10.3 The angel's natural perfection and the supernatural end: the necessity of grace

The center of Question I, q. 62 is the relation between an angel's natural perfection and the need for grace to attain ultimate beatitude. Thomas consistently distinguishes what nature can achieve from its principles from that which exceeds its limits and requires a supernatural union with God. The angel, as a pure intellectual substance, possesses a natural perfection: it has intellect and will that can fully realize its nature. Yet the beatific vision of God transcends the order of nature, because God is the principle of absolute being; without a direct gift of participation in the divine life (sanctifying grace and the gift of vision) no created nature can possess God as its ultimate act, which is the source of supernatural happiness. Thomas specifies: the natural capacity to know God is not identical with attaining the beatific vision. Hence the question whether the angels were created "in happiness" or "in grace" becomes decisive. If they were created immediately in full glory, that would mean there was no true possibility of fall for those thus brought to the beatific vision; whereas within Thomas's tradition there is the conviction of the fact of the fall of a certain number of spirits. Therefore Thomas excludes creation in full beatitude and stresses that natural perfection does not obviate the necessity of grace to attain the supernatural end[^c6-2].

1.10.4 The problem of the first grace: created in grace or in mere nature?

Thomas's analysis distinguishes three historical possibilities, which he examines in q. 62 in turn: (1) that all angels were created already in a state of full glory; (2) that all were created in mere nature, without

grace; (3) that they were created in grace, but not in the full beatific vision. Thomas rejects the first option because of the theological necessity to admit the fall of some spirits. The first option would render the fall impossible, whereas tradition appears to indicate that a number of spirits rejected God.

The second option — creation in mere nature — is opposed by arguments from proportionality and mercy: since God is the source of the possibility of participation in His life through the gift of grace, to create rational beings without any immediate possibility of supernatural good would be less consonant with the principle that God is disposed to give means for the attainment of higher goods rather than to withhold them. Thirdly, the lack of grace at the beginning would force God to confer grace on some angels later, which might be contrary to the divine will ordered to good. Therefore Thomas considers it more probable that the angels were created with sanctifying grace, though without the light of the beatific vision; this allowed them — by a single free act aided by that grace — either to attain glory or, by rejecting it, to contribute to their own fall.

In this argument one perceives theological premises: the reality and necessity of creaturely freedom for moral responsibility, God's omnipotence as giver of the means of salvation, and the historical fact — here theologically interpreted — of the fall of part of the spirits. At the same time the limitation of this reasoning lies in the character of its premises: Thomas interprets data of tradition and dogma through his own philosophical categories, and its "probability" is not an empirical proof but the consequence of a comprehensive theological-metaphysical order.

1.10.5 Why one act of the will sufficed for the angel's merit

A crucial point of q. 62 is the demonstration why the angel, unlike man, makes a decisive choice in a single act that renders his decision immediately efficacious for attaining the end. Thomas appeals here to the essence of intellect and will in a simple being: the angelic intellect does not operate through sequences of sensations, vacillations, or sensible imaginations; it knows its object (including God as the highest good) almost immediately by means of pure conceptual form. The will, once it turns once and for all toward the ultimate good, is not rent by concupiscence or material impulses. Since the angel's natural faculties and intellectual powers have been moved by grace, their act of will, being a simple act, suffices to accept glory — and does so necessarily: the acceptance of the supreme end is a full act, not a gradual one.

This reasoning rests on premises concerning the simplicity and immutability of spiritual nature and on the understanding of act and potency: when a potency is actualized by a single act, there is nothing in the angel's nature to subvert that realized act. The consequence is that an angel's merit can consist in one act of will, whereas human merit has the character of a moral pilgrimage, conditioned by the complexity of the sensible nature and by the factor of time.

1.10.6 The theory of proportionality of gifts and the hierarchy of glory

In q. 62 Thomas also develops the argument from proportionality: the degree of glory each angel attains corresponds to its natural cognitive capacities, adapted and ennobled by grace. This does not mean that grace is a homogeneous factor mechanically allotted; rather it is a cooperative action of the supernatural gift with the concrete nature of the creature. Just as in the natural order different creatures possess different cognitive abilities, so in the supernatural order their vision of God will be diversified in a degree proportionate to that disparity. Thomas here employs classical principles of causality: the supernatural form (grace, vision) is realized upon the substrate of a given nature and augments its capacities, rather than abolishing differences "in favor of" grace.

Practically understood, this entails the construction of a celestial hierarchy in which differences of degree of glory are not arbitrary but proportional to the variety of angelic natures. Thomas clearly separates the gift of grace from nature: grace is not a natural property of beings but the cause of participation in divine life; yet the fruit of that participation differs according to the measure in which it is received.

1.10.7 The irrevocability of the angel's decision: the rational argument and its limits

Thomas's classic argument for the irrevocability of the angelic choice rests on intellectual metaphysics: since the angel as a purely intellectual being knows the ultimate end with clarity, and its will, directed toward that end, effectuates a simple and full act, then after making that choice the angel's nature is no longer susceptible to change regarding that fundamental act. This immutability is not, for Thomas, a clause of determinism in the sense of the removal of freedom; on the contrary, it constitutes the fullness of freedom: freedom in attaining the highest good does not consist in the possibility of withdrawing from it, for to will evil as such would be contrary to the nature of a will ordered to the good.

Yet such an argument has its epistemic and metaphysical limits. First, it is grounded on the conception that the act of the spiritual intellect is disposed to the permanent formation of the will; this assumption is consonant with Thomistic ontology but is contested by other philosophical traditions and by empirical critique, which lack means to verify the state of immaterial beings. Second, there remains latitude for reflection about divine permission and foreknowledge: Thomas separates the irrevocability of the decision from divine predestination — conceding God's full sovereignty in bestowing grace, while also maintaining the supposition that the constancy of the angel's choice follows from the angel's own nature, not from an external compulsion. Finally, the argument requires acceptance of earlier theses about the simplicity of angelic nature and the absence of passions, premises that are philosophical rather than empirical.[12]

In theological practice the result of this argument has a clear consequence: an angel who has attained glory can no longer sin. This is not a loss of freedom but its completion; the will, seeing the infinite good, has no fundamental reason to change its choice. Thomas here differentiates metaphysical necessity from moral responsibility and from divine attributes — neither angel nor demon is God, and demonic action does not annul human responsibility, nor does it grant the demon the power to read future free decisions or to intrude directly into the intimate secrets of the heart. Thomas consistently maintains that demons can act indirectly, persuasively, even deceitfully, but they cannot coerce the free will nor deprive it of its inner responsibility.

Conclusion: theological and epistemic consequences

Chapters q. 61–62 of the Summa Theologiae present a coherent Thomistic project for understanding spiritual beings: their creation is an act of God, not an emanation; their tasks and glory fit within the unity of creation; their capacity to attain God requires the gift of grace, and their trial and final choice have a metaphysical character rooted in intellectual simplicity. Thomas combines metaphysical precision with theological sensitivity to freedom and divine justice. His argumentation, while logically coherent within its premises, is also plainly limited: it relies upon a metaphysics whose empirical verification lies beyond reach, and its consequences must be read as part of a larger synthetic picture of creation in which

[12]The biblical texts cited in this chapter ought to be read in their own canonical context; in this study they serve as a point of reference for the reconstruction of Thomas's argumentation, not as an autonomous resolution of every later speculative question.

the natural and the supernatural cooperate and the freedom of rational beings becomes the field of real moral responsibility.

The first aspect requiring clarification is how, for Thomas, "the perfection of nature" and "sanctifying grace" are distinguished on the ontological and teleological levels. For Thomas natural perfection denotes the fullness of the proper realization of a nature's principles: by it the cognitive and volitional power of a creature attains its proper acts according to its immanent end. Sanctifying grace, by contrast, is not merely another rung in the natural order nor merely a moral addition: it is a created and supernatural mode of participation in the divine life that supplies a new principle of action toward the ultimate end. Consequently, grace does not replace or abolish natural capacities — it "reorients" and "transfigures" them so that intellect and will can operate not only for created goods but directly and absolutely for God as the supernatural end. In Thomas the action of grace is often described with the notions of habitus and causal strengthening of nature: grace is not a material "addition" comprised of new parts, but a stable participation (habitus) by which a potency becomes capable of an act surpassing the order of nature. It is important also to distinguish that although grace indeed "surpasses" nature, it does not make nature into something wholly foreign — hence Thomistic accounts speak of the cooperation of the supernatural gift with the concrete form of nature, not of its abolishment.

The second dimension is the epistemic status of Thomas's theses: his determinations concerning angelic perfection and grace do not operate as arbitrary dogmas but as argumentative conclusions arising from the application of systematic metaphysics and the rules of natural theology in light of revelation. Thomas undertakes a rational adjudication of competing hypotheses, comparing them for internal coherence with the principles of divine simplicity, causality and Creator-creature distinction, and then formulates conclusions intended as rationally justified determinations. This does not mean that each of his proposals bears identical degrees of theological necessity: some conclusions flow from strong metaphysical premises and consonance with tradition, while others are presented as the most probable solutions within given assumptions. Understanding these adjudications therefore requires distinguishing between what Thomas regards as logically necessary in light of adopted axioms and what he regards as the best interpretation of sources and reason — which renders his conclusions both robust and open to revision should premises or exegetical readings change.

The third sphere concerns the qualitative difference between the angel's "one-time" act and the human history of conversion. While in man moral and religious transformation is complex and temporal — engaging the senses, habits, repeated acts, and the formation of virtues and forgiveness of sins — in the angelic order the choice pertains to the simplicity of the intellectual substance. Thomas emphasizes that the pure spirit's intellect does not operate discursively by progressive ascent to the object, but apprehends intelligibles in a manner that makes the will's act one-time and final; hence the consequences of this act, once effected, are inscribed in the enduring metaphysical constitution of the being. This difference is not a reduction of freedom nor a denial of responsibility: for Thomas both angel and man are accountable for their choices, yet the rules of their moral ontology differ due to the difference of nature. Consequently there is also a differing understanding of "conversion": for human beings conversion remains possible and often requires external and internal means, whereas for angels the decision is immediate and irreversible — which explains why, in Thomistic reflection, the fall of the spirits remains an irreversible event.

Finally, these theses order the understanding of both soteriology and demonology in Thomas's account. From the fact that grace operates as participation in the divine life follows that the moral evaluation

of the acts of angel and man must take into account different ontological conditions of their action; conversely, the argumentative character of Thomistic theses requires the interpreter to distinguish between the hard consequences of metaphysics and the conditional, rational preference for certain solutions. Such an approach preserves the system's coherence: ontological distinctions explain different forms of responsibility and possibilities of transformation, while leaving open further adjudication where the premises require specification.

1.11 7. Questions 63–64: the sin and punishment of demons

1.11.1 The ontological possibility of evil in a purely spiritual substance

The question that opens I, q. 63 is provocative: how is it possible that a being created by the Highest Good could turn away from that good? For Thomas the answer contains no paradox about divine goodness, but an explication of a moral possibility arising from the very condition of created freedom. Metaphysically formulated: an angel is an intellectual substance whose essence and existence are not identical as they are in God, and therefore it does not possess absolute authority over its good; it is a determinate being whose will is grounded in cognition. A created freedom does not mean arbitrariness without rule, but the possibility of turning the will toward a partial good in a manner unordered with respect to the highest rule, which is God. This allowance for choice apart from absolute necessity constitutes the ontological grounding of the possibility of evil; evil is not a new substance but a deformation of the proper ordering of the good. On this premise Thomas builds further distinctions concerning the nature of sin proper to spiritual beings: because an angel has no body, it cannot commit sins of a bodily character; its evil must take the form of a misordering of means with respect to an end, effected by the will itself and directed by the intellect.[13]

1.11.2 Pride and envy: the only sins adequate to a pure intellect

Thomas formulates a moral duality which, in his judgement, exhausts the catalogue of possible offences in angels: *superbia* (pride) and *invidia* (envy). Pride is not here merely one among moral sins, but the primordial act of an attitude of the will that reconfigures the orientation of the whole spiritual person. Its essence consists in the disordered desire for one's own greatness, in the lust to attain the highest good in a way independent of God. Thomas specifies that this act did not have the character of an erroneous cognition about possibility: the fallen angel did not rationally suppose that it could become God by nature — for it knew that this was impossible. Pride rather consisted in the pursuit of likeness to God, but "on its own terms": instead of submitting to divine grace and the ordering of love, the angel desired self-sufficiency, a self-sufficient capacity to attain natural felicity. This desire is understood by Thomas as a displacement of the end — instead of God as the highest order, the ultimate measure becomes one's own power and partial good.

Pride gives rise to envy: when the fallen spirit sees that creatures (especially man) receive an extrinsic gift of good from God, it reacts negatively, because that good reminds it of its own failure in the quest for self-sufficiency. *Invidia* therefore is a structure of the will that rejects the good of others, not because it seeks to destroy it per se, but because that good manifests an order from which it has excluded itself. In this way Thomas preserves ontological consistency: evil does not create a different nature in the demon; it is a turning toward a lack of conformity of the free will with the order of the total good. This distinction

[13] St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, ST I, qq. 63–64, online edition.

in Thomas allows one to avoid dualism: the demon does not become ontologically an "other" being, but exists as one permanently opposed to the order of love.

1.11.3 Similitudo Dei as a striving for self-sufficiency and the limits of the demonic desire's rationality

An important subtlety of the Thomistic analysis is that the demon did not desire to become God by a change of nature. It sought a likeness to God understood as autonomy of action and the attainment of final happiness without dependence on grace. Thomas distinguishes the aspiration to be "like God" in the sense of natural greatness from an actual claim to divine nature. This clear distinction serves to avoid a logical contradiction: no created intellect believed that it could transcend its ontological condition and by an act of will make itself God. The Thomistic explanation therefore focuses on the internal motivation: the desire for autotelic perfection that nullifies the ordering of certain means and subordinates them to its own self-appointed end. As such, the act of pride is an act of freedom, conscious and intentional, not an expression of cognitive error.

This interpretation has a practical consequence: the fall is not an unconscious mistake but a moral choice. At the same time it sets certain cognitive limits: Thomas presupposes that the angel, as an intellectual substance, possesses sufficient clarity of cognition to recognize the limits of its nature, and nevertheless choose a relative good as its end. This premise is crucial for his thesis about responsibility and excludes explanations of the fall of spirits as the result of cognitive mistake or necessary development of nature. In the Thomistic perspective pride is an act of conscious rejection of order, not the product of lack of information or biological conditioning.

1.11.4 The chronology of the fall, the highest angel and the mechanism of drawing others along

In I, q. 63 Thomas takes up the question of the manner in which the fall of one angel spread to others. His position has two elements: first, the cause of subsequent apostasies was persuasion, not coercion; second, more angels remained faithful than fell. The highest angel — in the Thomistic tradition identified with Lucifer — plays the role of initiator. His pride, oriented toward self-sufficiency, took the form of attractive persuasion: he presented his own project as a kind of apparent good, emphasizing autonomy and greatness. Other angels, endowed with their own freedom and intellect, could find in this proposal an apparent motive corresponding to certain tendencies of their dispositions. Thomas excludes here any violation of the will by force: the influence of the demon does not nullify either passive or active power of choice, but is a persuasive action that makes use of cognition and affective disposition.

The Thomistic argument rests on the premise of moral proportionality in creation: since God created angels good, it is natural that the majority remained loyal; defection is exceptional and requires particular conditions of consent. This claim also has an apologetic sense: it maintains that creation is not arranged as a balance of opposing principles, but is essentially directed toward the good. Nevertheless there are epistemic limits in this reasoning: Thomas operates by analogy with moral ordering but lacks empirical criteria for the size and dynamics of this process. From the standpoint of contemporary historical-cultural criticism, the narrative of the highest angel's persuasion functions explanatorily rather than documentarily — it explains a moral phenomenon in metaphysical terms rather than reconstructing a concrete sequence of events.

1.11.5 The intellectual punishment: loss of the light of glory while preserving cognitive keenness

I, q. 64 takes up the question of demonic punishment. The central thesis is that the fall does not annul the natural intellectual keenness of the spirit; the demon preserves cognitive capacity but is deprived of the light of glory — that supernatural order which oriented its cognition and love toward God. Metaphysically this follows from the principle that evil is *privatio boni* (privation of the good): the punishment consists in lack, not in the addition of a new quality of being. The loss of grace and glory means that the intellect is no longer enlightened by the order of love; hence there is an increased capacity to rationally argue for evil ends and a high proficiency in carrying them out. Thomas here employs a contrastive logic: the intellect can be more skillful in knowing natural means when its teleological orientation is perverted; paradoxically, a higher intellect may be directed to evil more effectively than a lower cognitive capacity.

This analysis explains why demons are dangerous in their activity: intact natural cognition constitutes an instrument for producing apparent goods and temptations that can seduce rational beings. It is important to specify Thomas's point: this cognitive proficiency does not give demons knowledge of the secrets of hearts or of future free decisions; they are limited regarding information not accessible to their natural cognition without divine revelation. Their capacity to influence consists in imitating the good, not in cognitive omniscience.

1.11.6 The irrevocability of choice (*obstinatio*) and metaphysical sources of the eternity of punishment

One of the most difficult theses in the Thomistic exposition is the *obstinatio* (obstinacy) of the angels: their choice can no longer be changed. Thomas grounds this on the ontology of angelic cognition. An angel knows the truth intuitively and singularly; the act of choice issues from this knowledge without a lengthy discursive process. When the will identifies itself with the chosen end in the act of this immediate decision, all subsequent acts are subordinated to that first choice. The angel has no experience of time in the way man experiences it as a sequence of possible revisions: there is no place for the mutable affections that in humans often lead to contrition. Crucial is that Thomas rejects the thesis that God externally prevents the demon's contrition; *obstinatio* is internal and voluntary. Eternal punishment is therefore not an act of God imposing lasting bondage, but the consequence of a lasting and conscious adherence of the will to an end that rejects the order of the total good.

An analysis of this argument requires noting its premises and limits. The premise is the accepted account of angelic cognition: its timelessness and intuition. If one accepts these properties, the deterministic character of an angelic decision becomes logical. However the limitation lies in the fact that these are assumptions derived from a metaphysical picture of intellectual substance, not from empirical observation; therefore for a contemporary reader they may sound like analytic statements rather than factual-historical claims. Moreover, a question arises about the possible gesture of divine mercy toward those who made a conscious choice: Thomas maintains that divine justice and love are compatible with the fact that not every creature is restored — this is a consequence of respect for the freedom of created reason. In this sense *obstinatio* is not merely psychological hardness but a metaphysical state of persons who permanently identify themselves with disorder.

1.11.7 The affective conditions of demonic punishment: *tristitia* and the "dark air"

Thomas does not neglect the description of the affective state of demons. Although one must not simply transpose somatic language to immaterial beings, the experience of pain and *tristitia* (sorrow) in angels has an analogy: it is suffering resulting from the failure to attain the intended end and from the impossibility of harmonizing the will with the perfect order of the good. This suffering has a negative character — lack of beatitude, regret for the unattained goal, an internal contradiction that becomes a stable condition of the will. In the Thomistic description there also appears the image of the "dark air" as a place of trial and punishment; one should treat it not as a physical location but as a metaphorical and ontological category expressing the state of separation from the light of glory and the order intended by the Creator. "Dark air" thus conveys the existential conditions of rejected souls: absence of participation in grace despite the preservation of nature.

Interpretation of this symbolism should take into account Thomas's medieval linguistic framework: speaking of "air" and "place" is not a literal designation of space in the modern physical sense, but a way of capturing a relation of being to supernatural light. The demon therefore experiences both active planning of evil — thanks to preserved intellectual keenness — and perpetual psychological (affective) pain resulting from the unattainability of the desired goal. Thomas consistently presents this situation as the result of free choice, not as a punishment arbitrarily imposed from without by God.

1.11.8 Confrontation with tendencies to reduce demonology

In the light of contemporary tendencies inclined to reduce demons to symbols, psychopathologies, or cultural imaginings, Thomistic realism offers a clear resistance. For Aquinas demons are rational and free persons; their evil has the character of moral guilt and is not merely a particular style of thinking, an archetype, or a clinical label. Reductionist perspectives often lose the axiological dimension of morality: if "demon" is only a symptom of psychopathology, the proper sense of moral accusation and responsibility is lost. Thomas, by contrast, maintains that the personal character of evil implies accountability of conscience, divine judgment, and spiritual consequences that cannot be supplanted by mere diagnosis.[14]

Yet a critical juxtaposition of Thomistic demonology with modern science also reveals limitations. The metaphysical model of intellectual substance, intuitive knowledge and a lasting decision does not lend itself readily to empirical verification; thus Thomistic demonology functions more as a theological-philosophical framework than as an empirical theory able to adjudicate contemporary cases of human suffering and disorder. Moreover certain ancient psychophysiological conceptions that Thomas invokes in the context of other questions (e.g. the theory of the "humours") must be read as historical elements of his account of human nature, not as analogous expert diagnoses appropriate to contemporary medicine.

A final reflection should therefore keep a balance: accept Thomistic realism as a coherent and consistent explanatory system in which demonic evil has a personal and moral character, while at the same time recognizing that its metaphysical frames are embedded in a medieval conception of beings and require critical reading when set against present empirical knowledge. The study of I, qq. 63–64 remains nonetheless a valuable reminder of theological consistency: for Thomas the punishment of hell is not a torture imposed from without, but an internal consequence of the voluntary rejection of the Order of Love;

[14] The biblical texts invoked in this chapter should be read in their own canonical context; in this treatment they constitute a point of reference for reconstructing Thomas's argumentation, not an autonomous resolution of every subsequent speculative question.

the *obstinatio* of the demon is thus the metaphysical expression of a permanent identification of the will with evil, not an anathema arbitrarily inflicted by the Creator.

Thomas's ontological logic allows one to trace how a concrete configuration of internal motives leads from the aspiration to likeness to God to acts of hostility against the good of others, without appealing to any "second principle." Crucial is the distinction of two levels: the order of ends (*finis*) and the order of means. The striving for likeness to God is understood by Thomas not as a demand for a change of essence but as a final orientation — whoever makes one's own power the ultimate point of reference sets the hierarchy of values contrary to the Creator. This anarchizing of the hierarchy of ends does not itself introduce a new substantial principle of evil; it is rather a misdirection of the will that makes a partial good quasi-final. From this follows the logical consequence: if one's own greatness becomes the ultimate measure, any extraordinary bestowal of good on another reveals the limit of self-sufficiency and provokes an act of negation — namely envy.

Envy in Thomas has a comparative structure: it is an attitude of the will that not only desires for itself what another has, but above all denies the good of the other because the other's possession undermines the self-preservative supposition of one's own perfection. Here the precise distinction between the desire to appropriate and the negation of the good is important; in the Thomistic account *invidia* is morally oriented toward the rejection of the other's good, because its presence as a gift emphasizes one's own detachment from the highest order. Thus the relationship of pride and envy is not merely a psychological sequence of motives but the consequence of a teleological disorder: pride reorders the hierarchy of ends, and envy reacts to that restructuring of the will in the face of external confirmations of the order of grace and glory.

The significance of the persistence of natural goods after the fall is manifold and subtle. Because created intellectual powers retain their natural *perfectiones* (perfections), the fallen spirit still possesses genuine excellences — clarity of natural cognition, facility of action, relative intellectual perfections. This produces a pair of moral effects: first, the decision to turn away from the highest good is from the outset an act both conscious and responsible — it does not stem from lack of means or cognitive ignorance; second, the stability of these goods supplies the material for comparison on which pride may rely and which strengthens its claim to autonomy. In other words, it is not lack of power but its misorientation with respect to the ultimate order that makes the fall fully culpable. Moreover, preserved natural goods enable demons to formulate fairly effective apparent reasons and patterns of life that may be attractive to other creatures — hence their persuasion is possible without supernatural omniscience or compulsion of will.

From these premises follow doctrinal consequences as well: first, the described dynamics eliminate dualistic interpretations — pride and envy are not independent, coequal principles of action but distortions of the proper order of goods, that is, relative privations. Second, demonic responsibility remains personal and free; although they lack participation in the light of glory, this does not mean that they can read hearts or foresee future free acts of others, nor that they draw another's will into necessity. Their activity consists in the use of natural excellences and accessible cognition for persuasion, not in affronting the sole source of being and good. In the light of the Summa Theologiae this configuration — pride as a displacement of the end, envy as the negation of the good visible in another, and the preservation of nature after the fall — composes a coherent picture of responsible evil without the need to posit a competing cosmic principle.

1.12 II. Angels in the order of Providence — questions 106–114

1.13 8. Question 106: the enlightening of one angel by another

Question 106 in the Summa Theologiae poses a subtle question: whether one angel can "enlighten" another — understood here as causing the other to attain the knowledge of truth — and what the limits of such activity are in the intellectual and moral order. St. Thomas frames the question precisely and resolves it within the whole of his metaphysics of creation: enlightening (*illuminatio*) is not, in his view, an act of creating the being of the object nor of pouring out an intellectual nature, but rather the formation of an intellectual disposition and the communication of cognitive content in a manner adapted to the capacity of the recipient. This fundamental shift of meaning — from "giving being" to "giving understanding" — determines the further theological and demonological consequences that I develop below in several closely argued planes of analysis (ST I, q. 106).[15]

1.13.1 The metaphysical nature of enlightening: an intellectual act, not the creation of truth

The key distinction that St. Thomas advances concerns the nature of the cognitive act in intellectual beings. In created rational beings, knowing is an act by which the intellect is adapted to its object; the cognitive act does not directly imitate the creation of the being of that object. Therefore the "enlightening" of one angel by another does not consist in pouring light into the intellect or in creating the truth in the substance of the other, but in conveying or facilitating the apprehension of what is already true by reason of the object of knowledge. In Thomistic terminology we speak of the strengthening of the intellective power and of the furnishing of intelligible species (*species intelligibilis*) in a manner appropriate to the recipient's intellectual capacity.

St. Thomas emphasizes in ST I, q. 106 that the essence of enlightening is a certain intellectual disposition and the approximation of the object of knowledge, and not the successive construction of the object of knowledge ex nihilo by created beings. Hence a higher angel who "enlightens" a lower acts as an instrumental or formal cause in the order of cognitive communication: he does not create truth, but arranges its presentation in a way that makes it available to the lower intellect. In practice this also means that what is united and more universal in the higher appears to the lower as divided and disaggregated — because the lower intellect needs the generality to be resolved into elements appropriate to its perceptive powers.

From this viewpoint enlightening is a perfecting act: it increases the efficacy of the intellect, orders its contents and makes them intelligible. It is not, however, the transfer of the higher's entire knowledge to the lower; the communication is relational and functional — subordinated to a particular role and mission that God permits or appoints. In other words, in the order of creation there is an order of cognitive communication, but every transmission is subject to the limits of the created nature and divine sovereignty (ST I, q. 106).

1.13.2 Substitute species and the structure of transmission: hierarchical "disaggregation" of truth

St. Thomas draws a practical consequence: the transfer of truth from a more perfect intellect to a less perfect one takes the form of adapting the intelligible species. In order that the lower may grasp what

[15] St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, ST I, q. 106; q. 109, a. 2, online edition.

the higher holds in a general and synthetic manner, the higher must "break" the content into parts, into more differentiated species, or in other words must decompose the apprehension into components that correspond to the scope and manner of the lower's knowledge. This process is not a mechanical copying, but the act of a rational sender who takes the nature of the recipient into account.

It is important that such a distribution of knowledge is one form of mediation within creation: there is no division of the divine being, since every truth participated in by creatures ontologically depends on God as the first source of truth. The enlightening of one angel by another is therefore a complex act: it is an intellectual act that employs appropriate cognitive forms, and an act to a certain extent voluntaristic — the higher chooses one presentation rather than another — while simultaneously an act that is ultimately inscribed within the divine governance of the order of creatures (ST I, q. 106).

1.13.3 Consequences for the notion of cause: the angel's role as mediate cause

In Thomistic theory of causality God as first cause remains the sole source of the existence of creation. Yet in the order of cognitive transmission creatures can act as mediate causes: a higher angel, through his knowledge and will, can become a kind of formal or instrumental cause with respect to the knowledge of a lower angel. This action is not contrary to the principle that all voluntary and cognitive activity ultimately comes from God; it is rather a concretization of the governing order in which rational beings cooperate, their cooperation not abolishing dependence on the primary cause.

This mediativity, however, has limits: if we speak of an internal causing of an act of will or of an act contrary to nature, only God can be the cause of such an internal movement in the sense of creating acts of will. This leads to a distinction that St. Thomas formulates very decisively in one of his replies: an angel can invite, justify, or show the good, but cannot be the internal cause of another's act of will in the way God is the cause of the constitution of volitional acts in created being.

1.13.4 Dogmatic boundary: God's exclusive prerogative with respect to the internal movement of the will

In ST I, q. 106 St. Thomas develops a clear dogmatic rule: the moving of the will as an internal cause of the act lies outside the competence of creatures. One angel cannot "move" the internal will of another as its own internal cause; he can, however, by presenting the object, by showing the good or by persuasion influence externally the one who possesses a will. The difference is subtle but fundamental: it is possible for the second to be persuaded to do something — by proffered reasons, by an image of the good, or by suggestion — but it is not possible for another to constitute the internal act of the will in the sense in which God constitutes the existence and acts of creation.

This distinction corresponds to a fundamental theological intuition: God remains the only direct and ultimate source of the act of being and proper movement — also moral movement. An angel, although capable as an instrumental cause of cognition and as producing external reasons toward the good, does not have power to violate the inner freedom of another nor to establish within him the act as his own internal cause (ST I, q. 106).

Such a principle has ethical and juridical consequences: the moral responsibility of a subject manifests itself in his freedom; external manipulations, though real, are not identical with the necessity of an internal act. This also conditions the way in which one must understand creatures' passive susceptibility to suggestions — demonic or angelic — without reducing responsibility to zero.

1.13.5 The hierarchical order of communication: the higher enlightens the lower; the lower does not enlighten the higher

From the standpoint of cognitive structure St. Thomas's resolution is asymmetric: a higher angel can enlighten a lower, but not the reverse. The higher transmits to the lower contents processed and grasped at a higher level of generality; the lower needs those contents in a decomposed form, adapted to its understanding. The lower may turn to the higher, may transmit its intentions, make supplications or proclaim information, but it does not "enlighten" the higher in a supernatural or absolute cognitive sense. This asymmetry derives from the difference in degree of cognitive perfection and from the order of the exercise of tasks in a cosmos ordered according to reason.

St. Thomas adds that the higher is not obliged to communicate everything he knows; the scope of communication depends on the will of God and on a particular mission. This distinguishes institutional or functional transmission of knowledge from the assumption that the higher must always impart all his knowledge to the lower. In practice this means that the hierarchy of knowledge is servant to the divine plan, not autonomous.

1.13.6 Negative analysis in the demonological context: why demons cannot enlighten one another in a supernatural sense

Introducing the demonological question demands a clear position: demons remain rational beings, yet their ethical fall and turning away from the source of truth mean that they cannot in a strictly supernatural way "enlighten" one another. St. Thomas, considering the order of evil spirits in ST I, q. 109, a. 2, stresses that although demons may have an order of operations and may communicate information to each other, their cognitive power does not operate in the perspective of participation in truth in the same sense as that of the faithful angels. Practically, this means that demons may cooperate in deception, disclose to one another knowledge of natural things or even propose illusions, but they do not create among themselves anything that could be called authentic, supernatural enlightening participating in God's truth.

This thesis rests on two pillars: first, demons, being cut off from grace and from the order of glory, do not participate in the supernatural light which in its highest sense comes from God; second, their evil intention perverts the way they use cognition — often reducing it to an instrument of pride or falsehood. For that reason their "communication" may be effective in the sphere of persuasion or of introducing errors, but it cannot confer upon another a share in truth in the participatory sense directed to God.

In practical theological language: demons can transmit misinformation, induce erroneous practices, show illusory images — but they cannot bestow the grace of supernatural knowledge, cannot establish in another a genuine turning to truth nor "confirm" it through their own participation in the source of light, whose source is God alone (ST I, q. 109, a. 2).

1.13.7 Distinguishing enlightening and speech (locutio): significance for demonology and the practice of discernment

To understand further limits it is necessary to distinguish between enlightening as a cognitive transmission and the so-called speech (*locutio*) as an act of communication directed to another subject. In the Thomistic conception (although a full treatment of this notion is found elsewhere in the Summa), *locutio* amounts to the free direction of a concept toward a recipient with the intention that the latter receive and understand it. *Locutio* is thus an action of the will and of communicative intentionality: a "speaking" in the spiritual sense that may take various forms — from intellectual stirrings to suggestions.

It is important that both enlightening and *locutio* are non-physical acts: they do not depend on the flow of matter nor on any "energy" in the physical sense. In created intellectual beings the contact occurs through meaning and through the communication of an intellectual form. For this reason demons can employ *locutio* — they can "speak" to the imagination or influence the ordering of reasons that become accessible premises — but what they do is communication directed toward an end, not a summation of supernatural participations in truth.

This distinction has strong implications: one can receive a suggestive "message" from a spiritual being (*locutio*) without receiving a participation in truth (enlightening). Therefore, in the analysis of spiritual experiences it is necessary to make a clear determination whether one is dealing with persuasive communication, with the transmission of natural content, or with a real supernatural participation — and St. Thomas consistently holds that only God and the creatures faithful in the order of glory are capable of the latter participation.

1.13.8 The technical outline of "angelic speech": an act of the will directing a concept toward another spirit

Accepting the above distinctions, we can sketch the technical structure of so-called angelic speech. For an immaterial being "speech" is not a flow of sound but an intellective-volitional act: one who possesses a concept or a truth turns it toward another, making it attainable by suitably shaping the species in accord with the cognitive capacity of the addressee. This act contains an element of will (the intention to communicate, the direction toward the addressee) and an intellectual element (the preparation of content in a form adequate to the other's knowledge). In the order of beneficence an angel can therefore consciously "prepare" his presentation so that it fits the lower intellect.

It is worth stressing that technically this transmission remains within the bounds of causal cooperation and not of confusion of beings: there is no fusion of intellects nor direct transfer of a cognitive essence. This is important because it prevents an anthropomorphic imagining that an angel "introduces" part of his substance into the other; everything occurs in the order of the actualization of intellectual form and within cooperation according to the divine ordering.

For practical demonology this means that demons can perform *locutio* and use it for deception, yet their capacity to formulate true content participating in God is essentially limited. Their speech may be cunning and effective in affecting the imagination, but it is not able to impart truth that would be a share in glory.

1.13.9 Limits of transmission: why the higher does not give everything he knows

St. Thomas also notes a practical aspect: a higher angel does not automatically impart all his knowledge to the lower. The communication is determined by the order of service and the task that God has established. The reason is both respect for order and the functional character of the transmission: making knowledge available serves specific purposes, not an unfounded "release" of all cognitive content. In such an order one sees respect for proportion and for the role that each angel has in the divine plan.[16]

Such a limitation also has an ethical dimension: if every higher being automatically revealed all its knowledge, questions concerning discretion, responsibility and divine oversight would become

[16]The biblical texts invoked in this chapter should be read in their own canonical context; in this treatment they serve as points of reference for the reconstruction of Thomas's argumentation, not as independent determinations of every subsequent speculative question.

problematic. Therefore the transmission of knowledge is always an act that appeals to the will and to order, not an automatic transmission.

1.13.10 Confrontation with modern interpretations: enlightening ≠ flow of energy

Facing modern interpretive tendencies that incline to understand spiritual phenomena as forms of "energetic" transfer, the Thomistic analysis poses a sharp opposition. Enlightening for Thomas is not an incidental "flow" of power, field, or energy in a physical sense. It is an intellectual, formative and relational act rooted in the metaphysics of act and potency. Reducing it to an energetic image obliterates an essential moment — the relational and ontological — according to which every participation in truth is a participation in being and in the presence of God as source.

Thomistic critique of such shifts is twofold: on the one hand it guards against pantheistic projection that collapses the distinction between Creator and creature; on the other hand it rejects materialistic explanations of spiritual experiences that displace the personal and intentional dimension of communication. Thus any use of "energetic" categories to describe enlightening must be treated as analogous, not identical, with what in the Thomistic sense constitutes an intellectual act.

1.13.11 Limits of the thesis and cautious practical conclusions

In summary: from a Thomistic perspective the enlightening of one angel by another is possible, but it is a determinate and relational enlightening — the strengthening of an intellectual disposition and the adaptation and transmission of cognitive content in the form of species appropriate to the recipient (ST I, q. 106). It is mediate causality, not creating being nor being the cause of an internal movement of the will. The transmission of truth remains ordered by the degree of participation in knowledge and by divine governance. At the same time demons, though able to communicate with one another and to influence in the sphere of persuasion, cannot grant one another enlightening in the sense of supernatural participation and insertion into the source of truth — their evil orientation locks them into a negative use of cognition (ST I, q. 109, a. 2).

This analysis bears on both the theoretical coherence of angelology and the practice of discerning spiritual experiences: it forces clear distinctions between the cognitive act and the act of the will, between persuasion (*locutio*) and participation in truth (enlightening, *illuminatio*), and between natural communication of information and supernatural bestowal of participation. At the center always stands the sovereignty of God as first cause of being and truth — and it is from that sovereignty that the ultimate status of all cognitive transmissions among creatures depends.

(Citations in the text: ST I, q. 106; ST I, q. 109, a. 2)

One must distinguish three levels of operations speaking of the "giving" of truth, which in the Thomistic optic are not synonymous. First: the "creation of intellectual light" in the highest sense signifies the absolute source of the possibility of knowledge — God as the primary cause of being and the utility of cognitive forms; only from Him comes the possibility that any creature might have intellectual light as a potency. Second: the "giving of truth" by a creature is an act of participation — the transmission of species or the ordering of cognitive content, by which another intellect is admitted to the knowledge of what is true. Third: the "persuasive showing of the good" is an act directed to the will of another: the presentation of reasons or images intended to incline one to do the good; it is an influence of external motives, not the internal constitution of the act of the will.

Given this distinction it becomes clear why creatures can indeed "give truth" without creating intellectual light: their transmission is participation and instrumentation, not an act creating the fundamental possibility of knowledge. That transfer alters the cognitive disposition of the addressee by adapting species and ordering premises, but it does not give the ontological cause of the very being of intellectual potency — that role is retained by God as first cause, according to the teaching of Summa Theologiae I.

The mediate role therefore does not diminish the direct primacy of God, since the causality of creatures is derivative and participatory: creatures act as true but dependent causes that exercise their powers within the order given and sustained by the first cause. Even when an angel or a man becomes a channel of knowledge or a moral stimulus, his causal power derives from participation in being and the order given by God, not from an autonomous power of creatures.

In the practical dimension of demonology the consequence is as follows: evil spirits can employ *locutio* and persuasive showings — arrange false species, stir the imagination, indicate apparent goods — but they cannot "create" intellectual light nor become the internal cause of another's act of will; they do not read hearts, do not necessarily know future free acts, and do not constitute the will in the sense in which only God is the cause of the being and motion of beings.

1.14 9. Question 107: *locutio angelica* – the speech of angels

1.14.1 Definition of angelic speech: *locutio angelica* as an act of the will

In Question 107 of *Summae Theologiae* Thomas sets forth and develops a definition of what he calls *locutio angelica* or *locutio angelorum* — "angelic speech." Crucial here is the shift of meaning from the categorical notion of voice to a volitional act: speech need not assume the form of a sound, a sensible sign, or any ultimately material carrier; its essence consists in directing a concept, which already exists in the intellect of the speaker, toward an end that is another spirit. Thus *locutio* is an act of the will by which certain intellectual contents are transformed into an intention to be known by a particular addressee. This directing is not a mechanical "making available" of the cognitive nature of the speaker, but a free self-communication: only when the angel's will so desires does his thought become the object of knowledge by another. In this way Thomas preserves simultaneously two elements: the reality of communication (it is not illusory nor merely "internal" in an individual sense) and the inviolability of personal mystery, which is guaranteed by the freedom of the receiver and the freedom of the giver.[17]

Such a definition rests for Thomas upon several metaphysical premises: first, that the angelic mind is essentially intellectual and immaterial, and therefore its acts are not dependent on physical movements; second, that will and intellect are distinct faculties, in which the former can direct the content of the latter; third, that communication as an act requires a certain voluntary causality — the sender becomes the cause of the occurrence of cognitive content in the intentional order of the other, but not as a physical causality nor as a necessity of nature. This conglomerate of premises leads Thomas to the formula: angelic speech = the directing of a concept by the will so that it may become known to another spirit.

1.14.2 *Locutio* and *illuminatio*: a functional and metaphysical distinction

Thomas consistently distinguishes *locutio* from *illuminatio*; both terms concern relations between minds, but they are not identical. *Illuminatio* (illumination) denotes the act by which the cognition of a more perfect mind is transmitted to a less perfect mind in the sense of an intensification or adaptation of

[17] St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, ST I, q. 107, online edition.

knowledge to its capacities: it is about the communication of objective truth, whereby the sender in this communication performs the giving of knowledge that genuinely increases the recipient's cognitive possession of the object. *Locutio*, by contrast, can also pertain to situations in which the sender does not possess greater knowledge — the lower can "speak" to the higher when he discloses his will, makes a request, or formulates a statement. Important here is the fact that *illuminatio* presupposes an asymmetry of cognitive perfection: the higher can enlighten the lower. *Locutio* does not presuppose such asymmetry: speech consists in the free directing of content regardless of the relation of perfection.

Metaphysically this distinction rests on the notion of objective truth and subjective disclosure. *Illuminatio* affects the structure of cognition operating toward the truth (a change in the relation between the knowing subject and the object); *locutio* indicates merely the intentionality of the act of the will. Thomas employs this distinction to explain, for example, how a lower angel may "speak" to a higher without actually raising the higher's level of cognition. In practice this means that reports, requests, confessions, or expressions of love are forms of *locutio* independent of the transmission of new truth, and at the same time compatible with the limitation that only God immediately knows all the secrets of creatures.

1.14.3 Can a lower angel speak to a higher, and can an angel speak to God?

Thomas answers the questions in a logically ordered way: an angel can speak to another angel, the lower can speak to the higher — and an angel can speak to God. In each case one must resolve the tension between the mode of speaking and the ontological order.

When the lower speaks to the higher, we have *locutio* without necessary *illuminatio*. The lower directs his intellectual possession of concepts toward the higher; the latter knows the content because the sender wished to disclose it. One need not postulate that the higher acquires some new cognition originally proper to the lower. In other words: communication is possible even in the inverse direction of the order of perfection, but in this case it does not result in the transmission of a "more perfect truth." Thomas bases this decision on the metaphysical distinction between the formal cause of cognition and the cause of the will: it is the will of the sender that establishes the relation, not a necessary principle of intellectual exchange.

In relation to God, angelic speech has a specific character. The angel "speaks" to God not to effect an increase in God's knowledge — this is impossible, since God knows all things without mediation — but to direct to Him his cognition and desire: an act of praise, petition, submission. Here *locutio* is intertwined with adoration: the angelic will makes its cognitive act intentionally "object-oriented" toward God. Thomas emphasizes that only God has immediate access to the interior of every created will; He knows every secret without the need of that will's self-disclosure. Consequently the speech of an angel to God is a fully real act of communication, but it has no sense of completing God's knowledge.

1.14.4 Spatial distance, absence of waves, and preservation of confidentiality

Since angelic speech does not consist in sound waves, Thomas derives from this a consequence: spiritual communication is not limited by place or spatial distance. That the sender and the receiver need not be near one another follows from the nature of their substances — as immaterial they do not fall under the laws of local motion as bodies do. Yet from this freedom of being Thomas simultaneously derives an epistemological limitation: the possibility of communication does not imply necessary universal disclosure. The sender determines the addressee. The content may be directed to one angel, to a group, to an entire choir — but it is the will of the speaker that decides the scope of disclosure. For this reason the

absence of spatial distance does not lead to "telepathy" in the sense of impersonal, undirected diffusion of information; it is rather a form of intentional penetration, dependent on the volitional choice of the sender. Thomas uses this distinction to preserve personal intimacy: even with an "immediate" act directed beyond space, the freedom of the person remains intact — an exhortation addressed to one need not become known to others unless the sender so determines. This solution harmonizes with his general thesis that only God knows every created will without the participation of that will in its disclosure. In practical terms this means that the existence of mutual spiritual bonds does not abolish discretion and the particularity of the person.

1.14.5 Confidentiality of the message and spiritual community: does an utterance become known to all?

To the question whether an utterance addressed to one angel becomes known to all, Thomas answers negatively and justifies this metaphysically. Although angelic minds live in communions and orders, they are not automatically transparent. The "knowledge" of one is not immediately "public," because its disclosure requires a volitional "I speak," which specifies the range of addressees. Here Thomas harmonizes the concepts of community and person: spiritual community is not a renunciation of personhood, but a field of cooperation in which each retains autonomous decision-making regarding the disclosure of his own contents. This solution counters both the extreme conception of collectivism (where the person disappears) and extreme isolationism (where there is no communication).

In the practical dimension of this observation lies an answer to the old fear of the "omniscience" of created beings: angels may communicate, but their communication does not abolish personal intimacy, because the wills behind speech preserve the decisive role.

1.14.6 The speech of demons: an instrument of conspiracy without illumination — theoretical analysis and limits

Thomas also devotes attention to the speech of evil spirits. He emphasizes that demons can "speak" and that in their fallen state they use speech as an instrument of deception and conspiracy. An important thesis, however, is that demons do not possess the same "order of illumination" as benevolent angels: their fall disturbed the original relations of participation in truth. Hence a demon's speech may be effective as a mode of influence on imagination and as deceitful suggestion, but it does not lead to real illumination in the sense of contributing to objective knowledge of the good. Demons can therefore disclose information, conspire among themselves, plan acts, influence persuasively — yet they lack the "power" to give genuine grace or to impart authentic knowledge of truth, since that is ultimately reserved to God and to the order established by Him in creation.

An analysis of Thomas's argument regarding the speech of demons requires disclosure of its premises and limits. The premises are: (1) the fall changes the demons' relation to truth and communal order; (2) illumination requires an element of perfection in the transmitter, and demons, being turned away from the good, lose the capacity to convey truth genuinely; (3) demons are not God and therefore do not know the interior of another's will without its consent nor without God's permission. The limits of this argument are as follows: Thomas must rely on the axiom of a moral-epistemic correlation between good and truth — namely that moral evil essentially weakens the epistemic potential of the participating subject. This thesis has a long tradition, but in light of contemporary criticisms it must be acknowledged as a metaphysical assumption, not an empirical fact. Moreover Thomas does not elaborate a full mechanics of how the fall

specifically damages the cognitive structure of a demon; he rather speaks of a "loss of order," that is, a qualitative shift leading to their communication becoming more an instrument of error than of truth.
Thomas's final conclusion is nonetheless clear: the speech of demons is a real cognitive and moral danger, but it does not authorize ascribing to them omniscience or the ability to read a human's free intentions. Their influence remains limited by the nature of creatures and by God's ordinances governing the created order.

1.14.7 Mechanism of influence on the imagination: analogy of speech and integrity of the intellect

In describing how an angel can affect a human, Thomas distinguishes direct intellectual communication from influence upon the imagination. Since the human soul also has "lower" faculties (imagination, the senses), an angel may employ these mediations to "speak" to a person — not in the sense of inserting contents directly into the intellect itself, but by exciting appropriate imaginative representations which can lead the intellect to cognition. This mechanism is an analogy of speech: the angel, directing his will, produces in the order of causation internal images that act as a "bridge" to the intellect. Thomas expressly warns that such influence is analogical and does not imply a violation of the inviolable freedom of the intellect: the human intellect remains the cause of its own cognition, though it may be stimulated by the presentation of images. From this observation two consequences follow: first, angelic aid can be genuine cognitive assistance, not a magical "implanting" of contents; second, it is precisely the structure of the human psyche with its decisive faculties that preserves integrity — the intellect is not "replaced," and the will cannot be coerced.
Thomas employs this analysis to separate the phenomenology of extraordinary experiences from an automatic interpretation of them as evidence of supernatural intrusion. The mechanism of the imagination as intermediary is for him a logical and theological way of explaining how an angel can act upon a person without violating subjectivity.[18]

1.14.8 Critical remarks on the limits of the Thomistic conception: premises, implications, and the danger of anthropomorphizing

When one accepts the Thomistic understanding of angelic speech, one must also indicate its limits and interpretive risks. Thomas uses a metaphysics of act and potency, the distinction of intellect and will, and a hierarchical conception of the order of being; from these assumptions he derives logical consequences about speech. However, these assumptions themselves carry the following implications that require careful reading:

- Anthropomorphizing: Although Thomas avoids the literal reduction of angels to "human persons," the language of speech, request, and praise may lead contemporary readers to an excessive likening of spiritual beings to human conversations. One must keep a critical distance: speech in the Thomistic sense is a functional comparison, not a reduction of the angelic person to a human model of communication.
- Philosophical assumptions about moral-epistemic coupling: Thomas assumes that the moral fall of the demon translates into a loss of illuminating capacity. This link between the good and knowledge has logical force within his system, but outside it requires defense: does moral evil always degrade

[18]Biblical texts cited in this chapter should be read in their own canonical context; in this study they serve as points of reference for reconstructing Thomas's argumentation, not as independent resolutions of every subsequent speculative question.

knowledge in the same degree? Thomas does not elaborate the psychological mechanisms of this degradation in detail.

- Empirical limits: Thomistic theory is not a tool of clinical diagnosis. The description of the mechanism of influence on imagination does not identify it with symptoms of mental disorder; on the contrary — Thomas recommends distinguishing natural from supernatural causes. This warning is especially important today against the temptation to use scholastic terminology as a diagnostic apparatus.

Finally it is worth emphasizing: the Thomistic concept of *locutio* is a subtle attempt to reconcile the reality of spiritual communication with the principle of the inviolability of the person and of freedom. Its merit is the consistent adherence to metaphysical distinctions between intellect and will and between creation and Creator. His conclusions — that angelic speech requires no voice, that it does not abolish the secrecy of the person, that demons may use speech as deceit though without the power to impart true grace — remain theological tools for understanding relations among spirits, but do not replace empirical and ethical analysis of human phenomena.

In *Summa Theologiae* I Thomas distinguishes acts of the intellect and acts of the will in a way that allows us to grasp more precisely three different modalities of internal communication among spirits: the hidden concept as an intellectual act, speech directed (*locutio*) as a volitional act directing that concept toward another subject, and illumination (*illuminatio*) as the act in which the sender truly becomes the cause of an increase of knowledge in the recipient. The ontological distinctness of these three should be stressed: a concept remaining hidden exists as an internal act of the intellect, capable of being retained without any turning toward another; *locutio* concerns the intentional directing of that act — making it "for someone" — yet that intention is not equivalent to a cognitive transmission in the sense of an increase of the recipient's knowledge; whereas *illuminatio* already concerns a formal relation of cognition, when by the effective act of the sender the recipient really gains possession of truth. From this standpoint the concept kept in hiding is not yet either "transferred" or "demonstrated" with respect to another spirit; its being known by another requires a concrete act that morally and epistemically differs according to whether we have *locutio* or *illuminatio.*

This difference has significant consequences for the limits of knowability of the designs and intentions of other spirits. First: the very act of *locutio* can make some content accessible to another spirit in the sense that the addressee becomes aware of the presented concepts, yet he does not necessarily have access to the sender's inner will. Directed speech can therefore contain a report of intentions, a request, or a declaration, and nonetheless not abolish the "mystery of the heart"; direct knowledge of intention belongs exclusively to God. Angelic illumination does not remove this boundary. Second: even if *locutio* causes the addressee to "know," this may be knowledge of representational content rather than knowledge of the authentic relation of that content to the speaker's will; thus error would lie in identifying received information with direct access to someone's will. Angels and demons are creatures: a demon does not read the heart directly, does not know future free acts, and does not coerce the will. These theses follow from the Thomistic analysis of cognition and will; creatures can only disclose or illuminate within the limits of the order to which they have been called.

For evaluating spiritual communications this has decisive practical implications for criteria of discernment: one must distinguish whether one is dealing with simple *locutio* (verbal or intellectual directing of content), with the addressee's inference (the skill of reasoning from signs), or with some degree of *illuminatio* that would really justify certainty about the speaker's inner intention. Thomas notes that demons can make

use of *locutio* and produce pictorial suggestions or rational inferences, but their lack of the "order of truth" does not entitle them to impart true illumination. Thus when someone claims to have "perceived" the intention of another spirit, one must ask: was this a free declaration (*locutio*), or a conclusion drawn from observation of external signs, or an actual *illuminatio*, which as such must be judged by criteria of internal coherence and conformity with the order of nature and grace, as Thomas considers them.

Finally — and this is an important epistemological conclusion — the distinction of these three modalities establishes a constant principle of humility about the possibility of knowing others' designs. Even full informational transparency does not abolish the distinctness of acts of will and acts of intellect; information received through *locutio* may be false, staged, or not reflective of the sender's true moral attitude, whereas only *illuminatio* would give grounds for greater certainty. Therefore in the Thomistic account the limit of knowability of the intentions of other spirits is both ontological (stemming from the nature of creatures and the difference between God and creatures) and epistemic (stemming from the difference between the disclosure of content and the transmission of the form of knowledge). This distinction defines the theological and practical framework for understanding spiritual communication and precludes a simple reduction of "being informed" to "being fully knowing" or "being able to read someone's will."

1.15 10. Questions 108–109: the hierarchies of the good and the order of demons

St. Thomas in q. 108 and q. 109 of the *Summa Theologiae* takes up the subject of angelic hierarchies and the order of demons not as mythological speculation but as the consequence of a metaphysical understanding of spiritual creatures: their nature, differences of degree in perfection, and the functions which God entrusts to them. This chapter reconstructs and develops those Thomistic theses, emphasizing the following themes: the notion of hierarchy and its Dionysian reception; the significance of the distinction between what is natural and what is grace in the justification of three hierarchies and nine choirs; the functional profile of the several ranks; the persistence of natural difference among demons after the fall; the character of relations of power among fallen spirits; the specificity of communication between demons in the light of the Thomistic distinction *locutio–illuminatio*; the metaphysical and theological foundations of the good angels' superiority over the evil; and the eschatological perspective concerning the consolidation of angelic orders and the possibility of human participation in the heavenly order. In referring to the text of the Summa (I, qq. 108–109) we also take into account the source context of the reception of Pseudo-Dionysius, without quoting his texts as literal citations.[19]

1.15.1 The notion of hierarchy: the Dionysian formula and Thomistic reinterpretation

For Thomas a hierarchy is not a socio-administrative structure in a secular sense nor a scheme of privileges; it is an ontological-functional classification of spirits based on the degree of their union with the object of cognition and of love. In the tradition he inherits, by way of the texts of Pseudo-Dionysius, the angels are ordered into three hierarchies, each containing three choirs: the Seraphim, Cherubim and Thrones as the ranks nearest to the contemplation of God; the Dominions, Virtues and Powers as those ranks related to the universal ordering of God's governance; Principalities, Archangels and Angels as those most

[19] St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, ST I, qq. 108–109, online edition.

directly engaged in the governance of communities and individual persons. This distinction, liturgically and symbolically rooted in the Fathers, takes in Thomas the form of a realistic mapping of intellectual and volitional differences among spirits, where the "higher" does not overshadow the good of the "lower" but communicates it in a manner that does not diminish the original perfection of the good given. In this sense the hierarchy is itself the structural form of the communication of cognitive and loving good, whose principle does not lie in arbitrary power but in differences of participation in the one luminous reality of Truth and Good.

The adoption of the Dionysian triad does not mean, for Thomas, an uncritical acceptance of Dionysian symbolism; on the contrary, he interprets it according to his own metaphysics of spiritual creatures: the difference between the choirs corresponds principally to differences in the degree of generality and unity of cognition. The more universal and united the cognition of a given spirit, the higher its positional status in the order. In this key the contemplative first three ranks possess cognition akin to a more direct, though created, intimacy with the Divine Object; the next three relate to the ordering of the cosmos; the last three to particular and providential action.

1.15.2 Gifts of nature and gifts of grace: the foundation of the division

The Thomistic classification of choirs derives its meaning from a twofold criterion: from the natural perfection of spiritual creatures and from the gifts of grace and glory which God may bestow. The natural perfection of angels includes their immaterial substance, the capacity to know universal essences and the plenitude of intellectual powers that a created spiritual being can attain. This natural perfection is the basis of differences: not all created spirits possess the same degree of cognitive or active nature. At the same time God may grant supernatural shares in the divine life — grace and glory — which pertain to another dimension of order. This twofold assumption allows Thomas to explain why the angels are ordered by choirs: the order arises from differences in the extent of participation in natural cognition and (possibly) in supernatural gifts, and from the variety of tasks entrusted by God.

From this standpoint one must also understand the relation between choirs: a higher choir possesses a more universal and united cognition, capable of inspiring and directing the cognition of lower choirs; yet this inspiration is not a gradual "giving away" of essence but of participation. The higher does not lose anything of its cognition in communicating it to the lower; that communication is a form of participation, not of substantial transmission.

1.15.3 Intellectual operations and the functions of the several ranks

Thomas describes the action of the choirs both in the contemplative dimension and in the governing dimension. The first hierarchy — the Seraphim, Cherubim and Thrones — is primarily engaged in the direct contemplation of God. Their intellectual operations aim at the cognition of the highest truths and at the love that is the response to the revealed dignity of the One who is the source of being. In Thomistic language this indicates the deepest possible union of a created intellect with the object of cognition, while fully preserving the created status of the knower.

The second hierarchy — Dominions, Virtues, Powers — performs an ordering function with respect to the created cosmos. Their intellectual operations are directed at the apprehension of broad forms of order, of laws and of the modes of realization of the Divine government. The third hierarchy — Principalities, Archangels, Angels — acts at the most particular level: the care of nations, communities and individuals, the communication of God's commands, assistance in human understanding and free choices by means

of images and guiding the intellect in such a way that the human intellect may receive a determinate object of cognition. For Thomas these operations are not mechanical: an angel does not coerce the will but, through *locutio* and example, by exhibiting the object, assists in ordering knowledge and love in the human person. The difference of functional levels corresponds to differences in the kind and degree of cognition: the more universal and absolute the cognition, the higher the rank in the hierarchy; the more concrete and individual, the lower the rank.

It is important to distinguish here what an angel gives by virtue of its nature (cognitive images, universal truths) from what can be the fruit of grace. Thomas emphasizes that true illumination — the adjustment of cognition to divine truth in the light of salvation — is a gift connected with God's revelation and grace, not merely with the angel's natural capacities. This dichotomy helps to understand why the angelic hierarchy is not merely a scale of power: it is rather a structure of cognitive and loving relations towards the one Good.

1.15.4 The persistence of the natural order among demons

When Thomas considers the situation of fallen angels he asserts a crucial distinction: the fall destroys the order of grace and glory but does not overthrow the natural perfection of their created nature. In other words, the devil and other condemned spirits have lost participation in the holy hierarchy endowed with grace and their place in the order of glory, but they have not become natures less perfect. They remain spiritual beings endowed with determinate intellectual and active powers; these various degrees of intellectual forces and capacities for action persist after the fall.

This conviction has far-reaching consequences: first, it preserves the reality of differences among demons — there are "greater" and "lesser" ones in power, intelligence and influence, which explains the mediation of commands of one spirit by another. Second, for this reason Thomas acknowledges that evil spirits may be ordered in a kind of order of operations, although it is not a "holy hierarchy" in the sense of participation in God's glory. It is worth underscoring that Thomas rejects any identification of natural preeminence with moral superiority: demons are naturally perfect while simultaneously morally desolate; maintaining this precise separation of the sphere of being from the sphere of moral goodness is essential to Thomistic theology.

1.15.5 Power and subjection among demons: the "order of rebellion"

Although demons retain inequalities of power and knowledge, their order is essentially perverted with respect to the moral order of being. Thomas describes their relations as an "order of rebellion": in place of the communication of good, which does not lose its essence in the giver, there is a chain of violence, pride and instrumental subordination. A higher demon may command lower ones, coordinate their actions and convey plans, yet this "order" is not an act of love nor a sharing in truth; it is a moral catastrophe that employs natural means of order for the dissemination of evil will. This is the essential difference: the hierarchy of the good consists in the communication of participation in truth and good; the hierarchy of evil consists in the exploitation of advantages of power and knowledge for temptation and harm to creatures.

In practical consequence Thomas allows that degrees of responsibility and capability exist among demons: some spirits are capable of initiating complex intrigues, others of executing simpler deceptions. Yet even the highest of demons, despite rank and power, remains a created being, subject to God and ultimately deprived of that fullness of good which places an angel on the path of participation in divine glory. This

reminder has theological import: evil never constitutes an autonomous, co-ordinate order of being opposed to Providence.

1.15.6 Intellectual communication: *locutio* without *illuminatio*

Thomas distinguishes two types of intellectual influence that are key to understanding how spirits communicate among themselves and with humans: *locutio* and *illuminatio*. *Locutio* is the capacity to direct a concept or image to a given recipient — a form of communication that allows a spirit to present its judgment or idea so that it is "heard" by another intellect. *Illuminatio*, however, in the Thomistic sense denotes supernatural "illumination" — admission to knowledge of truth in the light of God's revelation or grace.

Demons, after the fall, can make use of *locutio* with respect to one another and toward humans: they can "speak," arouse images, suggest ideas and plans, convey information and coordinate temptations. But Thomas emphatically notes that they do not possess *illuminatio* — they are incapable of imparting the true light of truth that comes from God and that leads to salvation. Their "communication" is therefore internally limited: it may be instrumentally effective but does not lead to participation in truth in the salvific sense; it remains a form of transmission of information and manipulation, not a bestowal of truth. This lack of illumination is one aspect of their ontological isolation — though in a state of natural perfection, with respect to the relation to truth they are cut off. This greatly limits their capacity to constitute a lasting, constructive order and explains why their "cooperation" rests on violence and deceit rather than on mutual participation in the good.

1.15.7 The metaphysical principle of the good angels' superiority over the bad

From the standpoint of Thomistic metaphysics the good has priority not only in the moral order but in the structure of being. Because the good is what inclines a being to existence and action, beings oriented toward the good occupy a fundamentally higher position in the order of creatures than beings oriented toward evil. Consequently angels participating in divine glory and grace possess not only moral advantage but theological precedence as instruments for the realization of divine designs toward the world. For Thomas this "superiority" is not tyranny: it rather expresses the priority of the good in the hierarchy of being, which God makes use of in his Providence to direct creation toward its ultimate end. Even if demons retain some degree of strength and knowledge, these are always inwardly subordinated to God's plan, since the sole sovereign Lord of history is God. In this way Thomistic theology rejects the temptation to treat the forces of evil as an autonomous rival to divine rule.

This principle also has a practical dimension: the existence of a hierarchy of good spirits as an instrument of Providence explains why Thomas attributes a positive role to angels in the life of the Church and the world, and simultaneously recognizes the necessity of divine judgment upon evil — it is God, not creatures, who finally adjudicates order and punishment.

1.15.8 The eschatology of orders and the question of the "places" of the fallen

In the Thomistic view the differences of degree among spirits as the effect of natural perfection will not be wholly abolished by judgment — some differences endure, although the tasks connected to the temporal order of history may cease to exist. After judgment some "administrative" functions presently assigned to angels will be superfluous, since the whole of creation will have attained its final ordering. Thomas is, however, cautious about any thesis of "exchange of roles" in the sense of natural transformation of natures: human beings do not become angels with respect to their nature. They can, however, through

grace and glory participate in the heavenly life in a way that fulfils and complements the primordial orders of creation. In this perspective the idea of "incorporating humans into the heavenly hierarchy" must be understood merely as participation in functions and glorious relations, not as a transmutation of created nature.[20]

Thus the possibility of "replacing" the fallen by humans does not signify the literal appropriation of angelic nature but rather the filling, in God's plan, of that place in the order of action which requires the participation of spiritual beings capable of certain functions. Thomas here emphasizes the primacy of God as the disposer of orders: He decides how humanity and angels will be arranged in the eschatological order, yet the principles that preserve natures and their relations remain inviolable.

1.15.9 Limits of the thesis: anthropological precision and the prohibition of anthropomorphizing

A Thomistic analysis requires that one keep distinct the ontology of spirits from the moral assessment of their acts. One must differentiate the natural perfection of a demonic being from its moral corruption: a demon may possess a higher intellectual nature and yet be entirely deprived of participation in the good. Moreover Thomas insists that neither angel nor demon is God; no created spiritual capacity replaces or competes with the Divine purity of being. Practically these philosophical limits protect against facile reductionism: the order of demons is not a social metaphor but an ontological reality that must neither be trivialized by psychological metaphor nor excessively anthropomorphized.

In this context Thomas also rejects certain semantic shifts: old references to "spirits" and "humours" are a historical element of medieval physiology and may serve as descriptions of bodily causes in the understanding of the age, yet they are not equivalent to modern psychiatric diagnosis. One must consistently maintain a distance between the metaphysics of spirits and the diagnosis of psychopathological states in living human beings.

1.15.10 Conclusion: order as the expression of the primacy of the good and eschatological hope

In the synthetic Thomistic picture the angelic hierarchies express a deeper truth about the structure of being: the good, which is ontologically privileged, orders the world in a way that does not degrade the various dignities of creatures but integrates them. The order of demons, by contrast, shows how natural perfection can be instrumentally employed by a will turned to evil — this is an ontological drama, not a triumph of nature over God. Finally, the eschatological perspective indicates that although degrees persist, the final order will be the result of the conjoint action of Providence and the free acceptance of grace by rational creatures: hierarchies are explained only in the light of the ultimate end, which is full union with God for those who participate in him, and eternal damnation for those who knowingly rejected participation in the good. In this sense Thomistic demonology combines austere metaphysical subtlety with theological hope and warning: not by erasing differences, but by their healing and transformation into a source of participation in the fullness of the good will the end of creation be achieved.

In the *Summa Theologiae* I Thomas adopts the threefold scheme known from the Dionysian tradition, yet he reads it through the prism of his metaphysics of creatures. Critique of his reception did not consist in

[20]The biblical texts invoked in this chapter should be read in their own canonical context; in this study they constitute points of reference for the reconstruction of Thomas's argumentation, not an independent determination of every subsequent speculative question.

the rejection of the structure of orders but in a shift of emphasis: from the symbolic-liturgical image of "hierarchy" to real ontological and functional differences among spirits. In Thomas the names and heroic images do not become autonomous principles of being; hierarchy is translated into degrees of union of intellect and will with the object of cognition and love, not into a sacred caste or a demiurgic continuation of divinity. In this reinterpretation the criterion of "superiority" is not ceremony or title but the extent of participation in cognition and in the power of communicating the good — which remains always creatures' participation in the Creator.

The distinction Thomas draws among the order of nature, the order of grace and the order of glory is decisive for the evaluation of both angels and fallen spirits. Nature furnishes real differences of power and cognitive potential; grace is the supernatural participation in divine life, and glory its full realization in the beatific vision. Thomas affirms unequivocally that demons retain created nature: their intellectual and active powers are not deformed as such, but they lack participation in grace and glory. This explains why one can speak of an "order" of demons in the sense of differences of power, but not of their participation in the sacred order that orients toward the supernatural life.

Why then is the "order" of demons not sacra hierarchia? For Thomas the sacredness of a hierarchy presupposes participation in the order that communicates and increases participation in God — in essence it is an order toward the good and participation. The order of demons, though naturally ordered, is an order of rebellion: it instrumentalizes natural differences in order to spread an aversion from the ultimate end, not to participate in it. Moreover demons cannot confer grace nor make others holy; their "superiority" does not establish holy communion but a system of instrumental subjection and moral violence.

One must also recall the limits of demons' capabilities according to Thomistic anthropology of spirits: they are creatures — they do not read hearts directly, they do not of necessity know the future acts of free will, and they do not coerce the will; their influence consists in *locutio* and the arousing of images, not in imparting an *illuminatio* that leads to salvation. In reading Thomas one must therefore exercise caution: metaphysical terms about spirits are not a direct diagnosis of the psychological states of contemporary human beings and should not be equated with them.

1.16 11. Questions 110–111: influence on matter and the human psyche

1.16.1 Spiritual substances as necessary stewards of the bodily world

In Thomas Aquinas the first and constitutive assumption is metaphysical: the world of creatures is hierarchically ordered, and the Creator governs it by Providence, acting through secondary causes. From this point of view a spiritual being — the angel as an intellectual substance — is not a superfluous ornament of the cosmos but a necessary element of the causal order. A spiritual substance has no matter in itself and in that sense is a being simpler than composite bodily substances; its simplicity enables direct actions that a material factor cannot perform without the mediation of intellectual forms. Hence, in the Thomistic account presented in Question 110 of the Summa Theologiae, spiritual beings can serve as "governing" agents in the bodily world as secondary causes — not replacing God, but realizing His will through the categories of causality proper to creatures.[21]

[21] St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, ST I, qq. 110–111, online edition.

This argument rests on classical metaphysical distinctions: act and potency, form and matter, primary and secondary causality. Because created spiritual substances possess their own causal power (in relation to God), they can affect what is subject to matter in a way that does not imply reducing them to the role of material causes in the strict sense. In other words: an angel, an immaterial being, can influence what is material without producing matter or conferring a new substantial form. Such mediation follows from the axioms of Thomistic ontology and the theology of Providence, which emphasize that God governs the world in part through creatures that are truly able to act, especially where a direct intervention by God might thwart the causal order that God has established.

From this perspective the angel is not a "mini-God" performing creation ex nihilo nor the source of substantial forms of matter; his role is functional and ordinative. Thomas understands this function as permitted by the divine will — spiritual governance is part of the created order, but it does not abolish the fundamental distinction between Creator and creature. The consequence of this position is the distinction between actions that can occur by the agency of created spiritual powers and those that transcend all creaturely competencies, remaining in the exclusive domain of God.

1.16.2 Limits of the angels' power over matter: no creation of substantial forms and their instrumentality in local motion

Thomas clearly states the restrictions: although spirits can affect material things, they cannot themselves create or "impose" substantial forms on matter. Imposing a form as an act of creating or transforming presupposes the supernatural power of the first cause. The creation of a new substantial nature or the real change of a material subject into another kind of substance lies beyond the capability of created beings. From a theological standpoint such a prohibition serves to guard the uniqueness of God as *causa prima* (first cause) and also constitutes the ontological boundary between created spirits and the Creator.

In the practical order of an angel's action upon material reality Thomas distinguishes certain instruments and modes: the first and most important is local motion, that is, the ability to move bodies or cause their motion — which results in altering the arrangement of natural causes. Secondly, an angel can "arrange" existing natural causes; an effect may occur that appears extraordinary to human ability, because the angel operates not only directly on bodies but also organizes or orders existing natural factors in a manner not anticipated by human understanding. Finally, he can make use of properties already present in things; he does not create them ex nihilo, but can cause them to manifest in a manner extraordinary to the human observer. It is precisely these instrumental modes of action that delimit the possibilities of spirits regarding matter: they always operate on things already existing, by moving, displacing, arranging causes and using properties, but not by creating substantial novelty.

This analysis has practical consequences: extraordinary events that seem physically inexplicable need not immediately be ascribed to supernatural intervention in the strict biblical sense of a miracle; they may rather be the result of exposing nature to new arrangements of causes or of the use of hidden powers of creation by created spiritual beings, which leads to the necessary distinction between different orders of extraordinariness.

1.16.3 Demonic "miracles": miracula versus mirabilia and Thomas's distinction

Crucial for discernment is the distinction that Thomas formulates between a true miracle and a phenomenon that is strange, extraordinary, or deceptive. A true miracle (*miraculum*) in the Thomistic

sense is an event that transcends the order of the created world as such — an intervention that cannot be reduced to any of the natural sets of causes nor to any creaturely causal power. Only God, as the first cause, can authentically perform such an act, because only He has the competence to change the order of substances or to restore it in a manner that cannot be explained by creaturely causes.

However, phenomena truly available to created spiritual beings (*mirabilia*) must be understood differently: a demon or an angel may produce an event that appears miraculous to observers by employing hidden forces of nature, unknown causes to humans, or by artful arrangement of causes. Such action does not create a new nature and does not breach the ontological order of creation; it is rather the use of nature's possibilities in a way that surpasses human skill or knowledge. Thomas emphasizes that this distinction also has a moral-diagnostic dimension: phenomena that at first sight look like divine confirmation can be a deceptive manifestation of the power of creatures, including evil ones, used for their own ends or permitted by God within a hidden economy of salvation.

This conceptual differentiation is significant not only for theological judgments but for practical discernment as well: recognizing whether one is dealing with a true divine miracle or with an extraordinariness accessible to creatures requires criteria that Thomas justifies in the Summa Theologiae in light of causality and the relation of secondary causes to the first Cause.

1.16.4 Inviolability of the human will: why a demon cannot compel a person's choice

In Question 111 Thomas takes up the problem of the relation between the action of spiritual beings and the sovereignty of the human will. His position is unequivocal: neither angel nor demon can directly force the human will. Acceptance of this prohibition rests on several theological and philosophical foundations. First, the will is an internal power of the person, which performs its act in a way dependent on cognition but not reducible to cognition alone; it is a moral act of the person, and external compulsion would intrude upon what constitutes personhood. Second, if a created spirit could impose an act of the will, the meaning of moral responsibility and the justice of divine judgment would be defeated.

Thomas nonetheless acknowledges that created spiritual beings have multiple means of influence, which however remain external to the very act of willing. They can:

- present an object as genuinely good or as the appearance of good,
- affect the imagination and the internal senses,
- stir up passions through bodily changes and thereby modify inclinations,
- direct attention toward certain objects, increasing their representation within the cognitive sphere.

All these means may strongly affect the conditions in which a choice is made, but they are not identical with the act of voluntary assent or rejection. Consequently, moral guilt remains the result of the person's own consent. This construction protects the person's autonomy and at the same time explains how an external temptation can be real and severe without annulling freedom.

Similarly Thomas denies to the demon the right of insight into the heart of a person or knowledge of future free acts as such: a demon can interpret external signs, predict tendencies, but he has no direct epistemic access to the hidden intentional processes of the person or to her still undecided free choices.

1.16.5 Mechanism of influence on the imagination and internal senses: "spirits" and "humors" as a historical element of the model

In his exposition of how spirits affect a person, Thomas appeals to the physiology of soul and body current in his time. The classical Thomistic model integrates the conviction that the human soul operates by means of "spirits" (*spiritus*), which as subtle motions are intermediaries between soul and body, and that the body possesses humors and less subtle elements that condition affective and sensory reactions. In this scheme a spirit may move the "spirits" — for example through its action, through presence, by arranging images — and thereby cause changes in the internal senses, imagination or memory. The result is the arising of sensory images (*phantasmata*) in the soul — which then influence cognitive processes and inclinations of the will.

It must be emphasized, however, that Thomas uses this language in the context of his era; the terms "spirit" and "humor" belong to pre-modern physiology, which he accepts as a useful description of the ways the soul and body interact. This model is not and should not be equated with a diagnosis of contemporary mental disorders or with modern neurobiology. In Thomas "the movement of the spirits" denotes the movement of psychophysical states, which can lead to intense imaginations, obsessions or emotional upheavals, without thereby automatically implying moral consent or a pathological condition.

In practical Thomistic analysis of psychic mechanisms it is therefore important to distinguish three levels: the external stimulus (sensory or spiritual), the bodily mediation (spirits, humors, processes of the internal senses) and the psychic response (imagination, memory, passions). A demon may act on the first and second of these levels, thus influencing the third, but he does not directly produce free acts of the will.

1.16.6 Influence on the intellect: angelic illumination and demonic deception through phantasmata

Thomas also distinguishes the nature of spirits' influence on intellectual cognition. A good angel can enlighten the human intellect, make an object of knowledge clearer, assist in the proper ordering of concepts and thus facilitate access to truth. Such "illumination" is not the creation of nature nor the conferral of grace; it is rather the provision of a closer, more concretized cognitive representation that eases the act of understanding. By contrast, a demon can lead into error, yet his manner of action is indirect: the demon will produce or display *phantasmata* — sensory images or imaginations — which the internal sense receives and which mislead the intellect, presenting false objects as appearances of good or truth. Thus demonic deception does not consist in directly implanting a false judgment into the intellect, but in operating at the entrance of cognitive material through which the intellect fashions its judgments.

This explanation has two important consequences. First, it shows the limit of intellectual responsibility: if the intellect is directed by a false *phantasma*, the cognitive mistake is real, yet there remains space for critical recognition and correction of the error. Second, it highlights that demonic deception is systematically related to manipulation of the input conditions of cognition, not to the total removal of the autonomy of reason.

1.16.7 Thomistic anthropology and contemporary psychology: limits and hermeneutic caution

When juxtaposing the Thomistic picture of spirits' influence on body and psyche with today's psychology and neurology clear hermeneutical boundaries are necessary. Thomas grounds his analysis on metaphysical and medical concepts of his age; the model of "spirits" and "humors" is a useful language to

explain the mechanisms of soul-body interaction in a pre-scientific world. Yet transplanting that language uncritically into contemporary clinical diagnosis would be a hermeneutical and practical error.

Modern psychology and medicine possess tools and paradigms that allow many psychic phenomena to be explained in neurophysiological, developmental and social terms. Phenomena that in the Middle Ages might have been interpreted as the result of demonic influence upon the "spirits" are today often accounted for by anxiety disorders, obsessive-compulsive conditions, hallucinations or other dysfunctions of the nervous system. Thomas did not know these empirical data, and so his model cannot be treated as a diagnostic manual; it can, however, supply a theological perspective on the meaning of the experience of temptation or inner struggle.[22]

From this perspective three boundaries are most important. First, not every psychic episode ought to be demonized; many occurrences of intrusive images, anxieties or delusions have a medical basis. Second, Thomistic analysis can aid the discernment of moral and spiritual motives — distinguishing deliberation, temptation and consent — but cannot replace clinical diagnosis. Third, if symptoms indicative of serious mental or neurological disorders arise, referral to an appropriate specialist is necessary rather than immediate attribution of them to spiritual action.

At this point it is important to stress firmly: the Thomistic conception of spiritual influence never aims to remove human responsibility for moral decisions; at the same time it does not justify the automatic ascription of every spiritual difficulty to demonic action. Theological reflection and moral consideration go together here with a proper epistemic responsibility regarding the state of mental health.

A brief pastoral paragraph: responsible discernment and competent help

Psychic experiences, temptations or suffering arising from profound inner struggle require a serious, deliberate discernment that combines spiritual, moral and medical elements. Where symptoms indicate serious impairment of cognitive, emotional or organizational functioning, appropriate medical, psychological or psychiatric help is necessary. At the same time pastoral accompaniment, prayer and spiritual direction can be significant support; one should not reduce every suffering to automatic "demonization" nor treat medicine as devoid of spiritual meaning. Discernment should be based on careful assessment of facts, the expertise of specialists and respect for the person.

1.16.8 Limits of the thesis and its moral consequences

In sum, the Thomistic thesis on the influence of spirits on matter and the human psyche accepts the following limits and consequences: first, spirits are real causal participants in the order of creation, yet their causality is indirect and functional with respect to Divine Providence; second, angels and demons are neither God nor substances that create substantial forms of matter; their actions employ existing causes and natural properties; third, demons can produce astonishing or deceptive effects, but only God can perform miracles in the strict sense; fourth, the human will remains inviolable in its essence — spiritual creatures can incline, present and stir up, but they do not coerce a binding moral choice.

For practical theology and ethics these consequences are important: they protect the dignity of the human person and the freedom of the will, while admitting the reality of temptation and possible action by spiritual beings. They also enable responsible discernment of extraordinary phenomena without succumbing to facile suggestions or precipitous rejections. In applying these conclusions one must exercise

[22] Biblical texts invoked in this chapter should be read in their own canonical context; in this study they constitute a point of reference for reconstructing Thomas's argumentation, not an autonomous resolution of every subsequent speculative question.

care: proper recognition requires consideration both of the metaphysical order that Thomas describes in qq. 110–111 and of the achievements of contemporary epistemology and the medical sciences.

As a complement it is worth stressing the epistemic criteria that in the Summa Theologiae allow the distinction of *miraculum* from a merely extraordinary phenomenon. For Thomas a true miracle is not merely a rare event but an act indicating the intervention of the first Cause in such a way that explanations invoking the sets of creaturely causes are insufficient. Thus recognition of the miraculous requires consideration not only of the absence of a known natural cause but also of the theological sense: does the event point to revelation, confirm holiness, direct toward God or bear lasting spiritual fruit? Conversely, an extraordinary phenomenon, though it may seem marvelously unusual to an observer, remains within the bounds of the created order and can be explained by an arrangement of secondary causes, including the actions of created spiritual beings.

One should also emphasize the historical status of the medieval theory of the powers of the senses: in Thomistic thought categories such as *sensus communis*, *imaginatio*, *memoria* or *phantasmata* served as a model explaining the way in which sensory matter is made available to the intellect. These were theoretical concepts, rooted in the reception of Aristotle and in contemporary medicine, employed to describe psychophysical functions rather than as unequivocal empirical anatomical diagnoses. Their use in the context of discerning spiritual experiences has a heuristic dimension: they help to think about how images and impressions may be subject to external influences without prejudging contemporary clinical etiologies.

Consequently, distinguishing miracles from *mirabilia* requires complex criteria — causal, teleological and moral-theological — and epistemic humility. Recognition should take account of possible natural explanations, signs of spiritual fruit and an assessment of whether the given event truly exceeds the competence of creatures. In Thomistic practical theology a prudent approach is proper: the final determination of a sign's divine character is not a matter of immediate empirical inference but requires discernment in the light of the truth of faith and the prudent judgment of authorities to whom such discernment is rightly entrusted.

Finally, it is worth recalling the methodological boundary: medieval notions of the powers of the senses help to understand mechanisms of deception and experience but do not constitute a diagnostic manual for contemporary medicine or psychology. Treating them as clinical descriptions would be anachronistic; it is sensible instead to read them as a historical tool for thinking about the soul-body relation within Thomistic anthropology.

1.17 12. Questions 112–113: the mission and guardianship of angels

1.17.1 Ontological and theological foundations of the mission of angels

In Questions 112–113 of the Summa Thomas develops the notion of the mission of angels (*missio*) as one of the modes of Divine Providence's action. His starting point is both metaphysical and theological: God as the first cause directs the whole order of being toward the ultimate end, and this direction is effected both directly and through created intermediaries. For this reason the mission does not mean that the angel abandons the contemplation of God or in any way severs its relation to Him; rather it is an act of the angel's will and intellect by which God entrusts it with a certain action directed toward creation. Thomas distinguishes here twofold perspectives: the ontological simplicity and permanence of the angelic being and the activity consisting in turning toward a creature in the execution of God's command. This grounds

his theological conclusion: that an angel "sent" performs its task without renouncing contemplation, because an intellectual being does not undergo a multiplicity of acts in a manner disjoined from its identity.[23]

Thomas's argument in these questions rests on several premises: first, the reality of the created order in which the first cause can and wishes to act through the causes of creatures; second, the complementarity of roles within the spiritual hierarchy, meaning that different beings participate to different degrees in causal and cognitive power; third, the analogy between the scope of action and ontological proximity to the material world — the "lower" the choir of angels, the more its activity is directed to individual, particular matters. In view of these premises Thomas regards mission as the normal form of angelic action in the world.

Thomas also interprets biblical texts speaking of angels, such as those in the Gospels and in the Psalter, not as contradictory to their contemplative nature but as functionally indicative: the revelation of an angel's name or function may serve narrative and didactic convenience, but need not mean that the angel "becomes" what Scripture says; a lower angel may perform an action corresponding to a higher order without changing its nature. In this way Thomas unites the patristic-Dionysian tradition with a reading of Scripture that speaks of a providential structure in which names and titles may be functionally transferred between orders.

1.17.2 Assistentes and ministrantes: the duality of angelic functions

Central to Thomas's distinction are the concepts of assistentes and ministrantes. The former — assisting angels — are primarily engaged in contemplation and participation in the highest order of goodness; their task is to remain before the face of God and to fulfil the privilege of beholding the Most High. The latter — those sent, the ministrantes — engage in activity toward creatures. Thomas does not oppose these roles as mutually exclusive; rather he points out that in the hierarchical order there is a fundamental distinction concerning the duty and emphasis of activity.

This distinction has concrete implications: the first group enjoys a more direct, fuller participation in the beatific vision than the second, yet even the "sent" do not lose participation — their participation is rather shared than exhaustive. It is significant that Thomas denies a total separation of the contemplative and the active: an angel can at the same time be a contemplator and an executor of God's will. Consequently, missions are not burdens imposed alien to angelic nature but an expression of its co-participation in the order of Providence.

1.17.3 The hierarchy of delegation and the rationale for entrusting detailed care to the lowest choirs

One of the central points of the argument is the hierarchical principle of delegation: tasks corresponding to universal order are entrusted to the "higher" orders, while tasks concerning particulars are entrusted to the "lower" orders. Thomas accepts the classic ordering of the angelic choirs, in which he distinguishes nine ranks, arranged — in outline — from higher to lower:

- Seraphim, Cherubim, Thrones,
- Dominions, Virtues, Powers,
- Principalities, Archangels, Angels.

[23] St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, ST I, qq. 112–113, online edition.

For Thomas each sector of guardianship corresponds to the range of universality proper to that choir: the highest choirs embrace a universal and causal order; the lowest choir concentrates on the individual and its immediate material environment. Hence the assignment of detailed care — including care of an individual human being — naturally belongs to the lowest choir. Thomas here reiterates a Dionysian conclusion: the more an action has an individual character and depends on material conditions, the more it corresponds to a being less removed from material causality.

Analysis of this reasoning reveals precise metaphysical assumptions: first, that there is a real proportion between being and the scope of activity; second, that this hierarchy is not merely a logical order but an ontological one — beings differ more or less in their participation in God's causality; third, that the functional assignment of tasks is necessary from the viewpoint of the proportionality of created causes. At the same time one must clearly note the limits of this conclusion: it is valid within a metaphysics of hierarchy, but it does not — and Thomas does not claim that it does — prove empirically the existence of angels in an experimental sense, nor does it provide a mechanistic description of their operation with respect to the material world; it remains an analogical and theological-metaphysical argument, not a technical one.

1.17.4 The universality of angelic guardianship: arguments and limits of the position

Thomas arrives at the thesis that every human being has a guardian angel and that this guardianship begins at the moment of birth. His argument can be broken down into a series of logical premises: God is provident toward every creature; Divine Providence can operate also through intermediaries; there is a need for detailed care of individuals; in accordance with the proportion of needs and corresponding created causes the delegation of this care to the lowest-order angels is reasonable; hence every person receives personal angelic care. Thomas rejects the idea that individual guardianship should begin only at baptism: before birth the child remains under maternal care and broader social relations; consequently the assignment of a distinct angel makes sense after birth, when the individual being becomes ontologically and practically distinct within the order of the created world.

Considering this argument one must emphasize both its strength and its limits. Its strength lies in internal coherence: if one accepts Thomas's theological-metaphysical premises — the real action of Providence through created intermediaries and the hierarchical proportion of beings to the scope of action — then the conclusion about individual guardianship follows consistently. Its limits derive from the adopted premises: these are not empirical premises but theological and metaphysical ones. This reasoning does not provide an experimental proof of the existence of a personal angel for any particular person here and now — the argument operates within an accepted theological cosmology. Secondly, Thomas's decision to date the beginning of guardianship from birth follows from an anthropological and social understanding of the person within the order of creation; this solution has systemic value but does not eliminate theoretical difficulties related to defining the boundaries of prenatal "personhood" in the light of other biological or legal understandings.

Finally one should note the doctrinal implication: if every human being has a guardian angel, then Divine Providence acts not only through established orders of greater causes but also by personalized, individual means. This emphasizes God's closeness to the human person and the voluntaristic character of Divine governance that employs created intellects to accomplish its designs.

1.17.5 The manner of the guardian angel's influence: phantasmata and their specificity

In q.113 Thomas does not construct an experimental psychology, but he is systematically dependent upon the contemporary theory of cognition in which human abstract cognition is mediated by phantasmata — that is, sensory images processed by the imagination and the internal senses. In this scheme the angel does not "read" the heart nor penetrate future free decisions directly; its action consists in enlightening those phantasmata, by freely directing the angelic concept toward what can be known by the human being (locutio angelica). In other words, the angel assists the intellect by presenting appropriate signs or by stimulating the imagination and the internal senses so that the intellect can perform an act of cognition. Thomas emphasizes further that such enlightenment, even when efficacious, does not create in the human being a nature or new capacities in the essential sense — it is an informational act, not one that creates a new substance or grace.

One must clearly separate this conception from contemporary psychological theories: in the Thomistic model phantasmata have the status of epistemic elements and function as intermediaries between sense impressions and concepts; they are not synonyms for neurophysiological processes nor a clinical description of psychopathological states. Thomas assumes the existence of a certain natural order of cognition in which the senses and the intellect cooperate; an angelic intervention modifies this course externally, indicating the object or ordering the images, but it does not destroy the autonomy of the will. Hence his conclusion: an angel can warn, instruct, and incline toward good by showing possible options, but it cannot coerce the will — moral freedom remains intact.

Analysis of this argument shows its dependence on medieval psychological concepts. Its theological usefulness is significant — it allows one to understand how a spiritual being can influence a sensory being — yet it does not license an uncritical importation into contemporary clinical discussion; one must guard against allowing the notion of angelic influence to substitute for medical or psychological diagnosis in cases of illness.

1.17.6 "Disputes" among angels: diversity of knowledge and unity of will

In one article of q.113 Thomas considers whether "disputes" about particular divine judgments can occur between angels. His answer highlights subtlety: differences in judgments about contingent events arise from diversity of cognitive perspective, not from a lack of unity in will or love of God. Because each creature knows within the limits of its capacities, various angels may hold differing assessments regarding the particulars of individuals' fortunes or events — and therefore a philosophical dispute is possible at the cognitive level. Yet their wills remain united: the essence of their being is love of the same highest good, which precludes a lasting voluntary conflict such as we know in the earthly world.

Analysis of this passage reveals two important aspects: first, Thomas distinguishes cognitive plurality from moral disharmony; second, his position points to epistemic modesty with respect to all created intellects: even spirits, though more penetrating than humans, do not possess full, identical insight into all particulars of creation. The limit of this argument again lies in its belonging to a metaphysics of creatures: Thomas does not suggest anarchy in the heavenly order but shows that unity in love can coexist with diversity in knowledge. Nor does this mean that "disputes" are destructive conflicts; they are rather intellectual differences appropriate to a created order of multiplicity.

1.17.7 The permanence of the guardian angel's relation in the face of sin and suffering

The question of the permanence of angelic guardianship in the face of human sin is one of the places where Thomas especially stresses the ontological distinctness of good angels and humans. The guardian angel does not "leave" the subject even when the subject rejects its aid; however, its action may be limited by Divine permission: Providence may permit suffering, trial, or the consequences of sin if this serves a greater good or justice. Thomas here excludes anthropomorphic conceptions of angelic sorrow: a spiritual being that participates in the vision of God does not experience passive moods in a sensory sense. Their "joy" or "sorrow" should be read as an intellectual-volitional relation to the good, not as an affective emotional reaction typical of sensate creatures. In the face of human rejection of an angel's help good spirits preserve wills united to God and see events in the perspective of divine justice; this allows them to participate in God's order without an internal contradiction that would be equivalent to loss of their beatific stability.[24]
At this point one should emphasize Thomas's moral conclusion: angelic guardianship does not remove human moral responsibility. The angel assists, warns, directs the imagination toward truth, but does not remove the necessity of a free act of decision.

1.17.8 The function of angelic guardianship as a shield against demonic assaults

At the close of q.112–113 Thomas links angelic guardianship with protection from the evil spirit, but again he formulates this within clear limits. The guardian angel performs a shield function: its presence and activity can limit the demon's capacity for harmful influence by warning, strengthening inclinations toward good, and ordering the phantasmata, thereby making the person less susceptible to deceptive images. However Thomas decisively rejects the notion that demons have the power of absolute coercion; their influence is indirect and can operate through lower faculties, but it cannot nullify a human's free decision. For this reason the guardian angel is not a magical substitute for freedom: it is a defense and assistance that diminishes the effectiveness of an assault, not an elimination of the possibility of choice.
Thomas therefore treats angelic guardianship as an important element in the spiritual structure of the Church and the world, fitting into a broader narrative of spiritual struggle: not as a self-sufficient solution but as part of the dynamic order of Divine Providence in which good spirits cooperate to direct creation toward God, while evil spirits are permitted within the context of trial and divine justice. His description of the "shield" function is explanatory rather than sensational: angels protect, warn, and enlighten, leaving ultimate moral responsibility with the human person.
The chapter's conclusion does not close the questions Thomas poses in these articles; rather it shows their systemic consequence: the mission of angels and angelic guardianship are integral elements of the providential connection between God and the world of creatures. His reasoning is strong where the metaphysical and theological principles that ground it are accepted; it remains open, however, to critical questions concerning the epistemic character of his arguments, the dating of the beginning of guardianship, and the relation between cognition and will in the world of spirits. In any case Thomas leaves the reader with a clear message: angels are real, personal, and ordered collaborators of Divine Providence, acting in a manner compatible with human freedom and dignity.

[24] Biblical texts invoked in this chapter should be read in their own canonical context; in this study they serve as reference points for the reconstruction of Thomas's argumentation, not as independent resolutions of every subsequent speculative question.

In the light of the Summa one must clearly distinguish two ontological-causal levels: Providence as causa prima, which establishes the end and sustains the order of the whole creation, and created intellects (angels) treated as causae secundariae, through which this order is ordinarily realized. For Thomas this is not a separation of the two spheres ontologically but an order of causal power: God gives being and properties to created causes and yet cooperates with them; His action orders their active causality. Angels, as intellectual substances endowed with their own intellect and will, can thus really influence the order of creatures in a manner proper to their nature and their entrusted missions, but their agency is subordinate to and dependent upon the primordial order of Divine Providence.

One must emphasize further precision in Thomas: created causes are not merely instruments of God in a passive sense — they have real causal power and genuine responsibility for their acts — yet their causal agency is always modally derivative. God can act directly and also ordinarily acts through intermediaries; in the second case He institutes and orders the substitute causality, assigning angels tasks suitable to their nature. From this two-level structure it follows that speaking of the "mission of angels" is speaking of secondary causes that authentically co-realize the ends of Providence yet have no metaphysical autonomy with respect to the Creator's causal supremacy.

From this metaphysical exposition one must not draw simple epistemic conclusions about concrete experiences or current events. Thomas demonstrates that a theological-metaphysical system proves the possibility and normality of employing secondary causes, not an infallible algorithm for identifying when a given situation is the result of a particular angel's action. A private experience, an external event, or a "coincidence" may be consistent with the providential order, yet equally fall within the action of other natural causes or within the permission of trial, or be the result of the deceits of evil spirits. One should recall the Summa's basic thesis here: angel and demon are created beings; neither has the power to coerce the will.

The theological consequence is twofold: Thomas's metaphysics allows one to bind angelic care and action to Divine Providence as a coherent causal reality, while at the same time establishing epistemic limits to such binding with respect to particular facts. The Summa furnishes a framework justifying belief in the mission of angels and their participation in providence, but it does not provide an empirical key for the immediate attribution of a specific bodily-historical intervention to one spirit or another. Reasoning about the "agent" spirit in a concrete case therefore requires great caution and awareness of the difference between the causal logic of metaphysics and the diagnosis of facts in experience.

1.18 13. Question 114: temptation and the limits of demonic action

1.18.1 The metaphysical concept of temptation as impugnatio and its place in the order of divine permission

In Question 114 Thomas formulates temptation (impugnatio) primarily as an act directed against a person with the intention of testing his moral disposition and, ultimately, bringing about his fall. The core of this account is a twofold distinction: the demon's intention remains evil ("it attacks from pride, envy and the desire to harm"), whereas the permission of this attack belongs to the order of Providence, which can make use of the effects of evil for good — for example, as a test of faith, as a means to disclose a hidden tendency, or as retributive justice. Thomas firmly rejects the conviction that God's mere permission of an act legitimates the demon's evil intention; evil remains evil, although God can bring good out of it. This distinction constitutes the theological framework for further reflection: temptation is not a direct act of

God, but an event that may be permitted by Him and ordered toward higher ends. In this way the premise of divine permission protects against trivializing evil and against imputing to God the cause of demonic ill will.[25]

Thomas's argumentative analysis, within this distinction, rests on several connected metaphysical premises: first, an angel (including a demon) as an intellectual substance has a nature distinct from the divine nature; second, its cognition is different from divine revelation — it is based on the apprehension of similitudes and forms; third, a demonic intention to do evil is not transformed into good by its mere existence; fourth, Providence may permit that evil in order to obtain good without being its author. From these assembled premises Thomas draws the conclusion that demonic permissions can be ordered toward good without relativizing the moral responsibility of the human agent. One must stress the limitations of this argument: it is grounded in the metaphysics of created intelligences and in the notion of Providence as an overarching teleological order; its application requires acceptance of the philosophical-theological perspective which Thomas methodically invokes throughout the Summa. It does not provide a strict "psychological" diagnosis of a concrete spiritual experience, but rather creates a framework for understanding causes and purposes of permissions.

1.18.2 Mechanisms of demonic influence on the internal senses, imagination and sensual appetites

Thomas's central thesis is: a demon can affect the lower powers of the soul (the internal senses, imagination, memory and thereby sensual appetites), but cannot directly compel the free will nor read its inner depths. He formulates this mechanism on the basis of the psychophysiology of his time: demons, as immaterial beings, do not intervene directly in acts of the will, but produce images and stirrings in the power of imagination and in the internal spirits, which in turn can provoke sensual passions and incline the reason toward certain objects. In this way the demon's influence is persuasive and experiential: the demon probes what defect predominates in a given person by arousing certain images, memories and passions.

From an analytical point of view one can reconstruct the internal logic of this claim: since demons are intelligences that know singular things through certain "similitudes" and observation, they do not possess direct knowledge of future free acts and of the deepest act of will; they therefore incline cognitively, they do not govern the act of choice. Hence Thomas justifies that demonic temptation is usually an indirect phenomenon: imagination or the internal senses receive forms that activate memory and appetites; the human being then issues a free judgement in face of these stirrings. This explanation has a practical anthropological consequence: the final consent to evil is always the act of the subject.

In this account one must distinguish two kinds of demonic effects: those that act on the presentation of an object (the arousal of an image, appearances, suggestion), and those that influence the affections and inclinations (the increase of lust, the raising of fear). Thomas refers to the psychophysiological observations of his age (e.g., "spirits" and "humours") only as a historical explanatory toolkit showing how immaterial causes may act through intermediate channels upon the body and the senses. These early-medieval categories should be read as a model of explanation, not as a contemporary etiology of psychological disorders.

[25] St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, ST I, q. 114; q. 111, aa. 2–4, internet edition.

1.18.3 The distinction between temptations arising from one's own concupiscence and demonic suggestion

Thomas is adamant in rejecting the theory that makes demonic temptation the direct and sole cause of all human sins. In his analysis two distinct categories of sources of temptation operate together: the human internal concupiscence (concupiscentia), i.e., disordered desires and habits, and external demonic suggestions, which may strengthen or direct already existing inclinations. A key premise of the distinction runs: since a human possesses a proper moral cause in the form of free choice and habits, the mere occurrence of an external stimulus does not annul or replace that causality. A demon can be an indirect cause by inciting temptation, but the particular moral lapse remains the result of personal consent.

In practical exegesis Thomas therefore provides a criterion of discernment: when a behaviour arises primarily from a habitually formed appetite and lack of control by reason, the explanation will appeal to moral psychology and the ethics of virtue; whereas, when sudden, alien and intense presentations appear that do not correspond to prior inclinations and that seem manipulative in character, one should consider a demonic proposal as one of the possible factors. Thomas nevertheless makes clear that this never justifies exemption from moral responsibility: evil, even if stirred from without, requires personal consent.

1.18.4 Limits of demonic power: apparent miracles and real but limited effects

The question of the limits of demonic power is central to understanding their place in Thomas's cosmology. He distinguishes a "miracle" in the strict sense — an event which only God can perform, such as creation from nothing or a resurrection — from extraordinary phenomena that demons can effect by means of natural, albeit hidden, forces. From this perspective demons do not create being nor do they wholly transcend the order of nature, but they can make use of forces of nature unknown to humans, set bodies in motion, produce physical changes or generate images and appearances in the senses. Their ability to deceive perception allows them to present an apparent "miracle."

Analysing Thomas's argument, one can single out the following premises: an angel is not the creator of nature; its power is limited with respect to the structures of being; therefore it cannot create or restore life by its own power. Yet the same angel, using natural causes moved by it or by natural causes permitted by God, is able to inflict visible and real harm or to effect an appearance of a miracle. Thomas draws from this two practical lessons: first, caution in interpreting "wonders" — not everything extraordinary is a divine revelation; second, demonic signs may serve to mislead, which confirms the necessity of distinguishing the natural, the extraordinary and the miraculous.

One must note the limitation of this argument: the distinction rests on the metaphysical possibility that created causes (including supernatural created beings) act on the order of the world. In practice, recognising whether a given event is natural, demonic or divine requires an additional theological and prudential criterion which Thomas ties to the moral and theological fruits of the event (whether it leads to truth and good, or rather to deception and sin).

1.18.5 The theological effects of victory over temptation and the question of the limitation of the demon's power

For Thomas, victory over temptation is not merely a psychological success but a true moral act with theological consequences. The effect of repelling temptation is not only the preservation of innocence but the growth of virtue, the strengthening of habit and the disclosure of a person's readiness to fidelity

to the Divine command. Thus victory has a real teleological value: it is sometimes the means by which Providence draws good from permitted evil.

Concerning the demon's state, Thomas treats the matter cautiously: in the final article of Question 114 he accepts that it is more probable that a demon is temporarily restrained from further attacking the same person after that person's resistance. His argumentation is based on observation of spiritual and psychological practices: if the demon sees that a person is resistant and that the attack does not yield the expected fruits, he may direct his efforts elsewhere or be for a time limited by divine permission. Thomas stresses, however, that this is not the annihilation of his power and that a return of the temptation is possible if it is permitted. Thus victory has real effects — it strengthens virtue and may cause a temporary withdrawal of the attack — but it does not remove the need for vigilance nor does it guarantee absolute safety. From the logical standpoint of the argument: the premise about the demon's limitation after failure rests on an anthropological conclusion about the costs of using demonic resources and on the theological understanding of divine permission, which may protect the faithful in a purposeful and transitory way.

1.18.6 The limits of the Thomistic conception of spiritual influence vis-à-vis contemporary psychopathological categories

The Thomistic description of demonic influence is set within the medieval model of soul and corporeality; it introduces concepts such as the internal spirits or the humours. A clear warning is necessary here: these categories have a historical explanatory character and should not be uncritically transposed to contemporary psychiatry or neurology. Thomas's knowledge about the mechanisms of the arising of passions or presentations served to explain how an immaterial cause could influence the body and the senses; it is not, however, a clinical diagnosis of contemporary mental disorders.

From a theological and pastoral point of view it is essential to maintain the distinction: not every disorder in imagination, obsession or hallucination signifies demonic action. Medical and psychological explanations remain appropriate for many conditions that in Thomas's age were consigned to the categories of "nature" or "humours." Therefore contemporary discernment requires theological-pastoral cooperation with medical and psychological competence; disregarding this principle leads to harmful demonization of the suffering and to erroneous interventions. All the more therefore it is justified that every case requiring evaluation of a supernatural character be considered in the light of theological, pastoral and medical criteria simultaneously.

1.18.7 Pastoral guidelines: responsible discernment and the prohibition of private exorcistic practices

From the perspective of pastoral practice Question 114 implies two rules. First: psychic experiences and spiritual suffering require responsible discernment that takes into account possible natural, psychological and supernatural causes; where medical or psychological help is needed, it should be recommended without delay. Second: the Church's ministry in situations requiring particular discernment belongs to competent authority and is not a field for private initiatives. The Thomistic account of demonology remains bound to the order of the Church and to pastoral responsibility; it therefore cannot be used to legitimate improvised actions toward persons in crisis. This caution is justified both by the anthropological principle of the demon's impotence with respect to the direct compulsion of the will and by pastoral responsibility

for the safety of persons in crisis.[26]

In one pastoral paragraph, required by editorial guidelines, one must therefore emphasise: pastoral ministry has the duty to combine prayer and the sacraments with diagnostic prudence; doubts as to the origin of experiences — whether they have a natural, psychological or supernatural source — should be resolved with the involvement of appropriate specialists and in consultation with competent ecclesiastical authorities.

1.18.8 Conclusion: prudence, vigilance and hope from a Thomistic perspective

Question 114 presents Thomas as a thinker who seeks to avoid the polarity of simplified answers: neither a demonic determinism of human action nor the automatic shifting of responsibility onto internal passions. His doctrine of temptation unites metaphysical clear distinguishability of agents with the moral responsibility of the person: a demon can tempt, suggest images, stir up desires, and also produce the appearance of miracles; yet he cannot know the heart nor compel the will. Victory over temptation brings real growth in the virtues and may temporarily weaken the demonic onslaught, but it does not eliminate the need for vigilance nor does it annul the freedom of a subsequent act. From this vantage the Thomistic demonology remains an instrument for theological understanding of spiritual experiences — an instrument requiring cautious use in pastoral contexts and cooperation with medicine and psychology. In that spirit reflections on impugnatio retain their relevance: they protect against facile demonization of evil, while at the same time pointing to real dangers and to the necessity of constant growth in virtues that make a person resistant to temptation.

One must make three planes clearer, which in the Summa Theologiae Thomas considers simultaneously: the demon's intention as a created intelligence, God's permission as the order of Providence, and the moral responsibility of the human being. The demon, as a rational creature, acts from his own evil intention and for his own motives; he does not, however, possess God's attributes: he does not know directly the heart nor future free acts and cannot directly compel the will. God, for His part, is not the author of the evil intention or evil act, but the first Cause who orders created beings and permits the action of secondary causes so that — as far as possible within the mystery of Providence — He may draw good from them. This permission does not transform the moral quality of the demonic design; it remains the way in which God's transcendent agency disposes the history of causes without accepting the guilt of the agent.

To understand in what the person's responsibility consists, it is helpful to distinguish kinds of causal cooperation that Thomas knows: formal, material, efficient and final causes. The demon often acts as an indirect or material cause, raising up images, suggestions or stirrings in the lower powers of the soul; these become one of the elements of the circumstances leading to the moral act. The proximate cause of the human act, however, remains the act of choice itself — its efficient form and its intention — that is, what occurs in the personal consent of reason and will. Thus when demonic suggestions occur, one must ascertain whether they are merely one among many indirect factors (a remote cause), or whether — by full consent and intentional submission — they become formal co-agents, thereby increasing responsibility for the choice.

[26] Biblical texts cited in this chapter should be read in their own canonical context; in this study they constitute a point of reference for the reconstruction of Thomas's argumentation, not an independent resolution of every subsequent speculative question.

In practical discernment Thomas also points to the multiplicity of natural sources of temptation that usually cooperate: innate tendencies and temperament, acquired habits, weaknesses of imagination, bodily conditions, upbringing, social conditions and the force of passion. These natural causes are not a substitute for the demon's evil intention nor do they annul free consent; on the contrary, their accumulation often increases the risk of moral consent, while at the same time they can modify the degree of imputability of the act. Thomas distinguishes situations in which a person acts with full knowledge and voluntary consent from those in which ignorance, internal compulsion or overpowering passions diminish — but typically do not eliminate entirely — his guilt.

From this follows a dialectic of gradated responsibility: the greater the awareness and consent, the more entrenched the habit and the freer adhesion to evil, the fuller the imputability; whereas the stronger the culpable ignorance, fear, pain or predominance of passions, the more real the mitigation of guilt according to the Thomistic theory of limitation of freedom. It must at the same time be emphasised as a key point: the demon cannot by his influence alone remove the person's responsibility — only the human "yes" or "no" makes the moral act — yet external and internal influences cooperate with the will and must be taken into account in moral evaluation according to the criteria of knowledge, consent and habit that the Summa Theologiae analyses in its doctrine of sin and virtue.

A pastoral proviso (brief and responsible): when ascribing spiritual experiences to demonic causes always maintain prudence and humility; discernment requires taking into account the whole context — theological, medical and social — and cooperation with mental health services and competent ecclesiastical authority. One must not automatically impute external causes for moral acting nor use Thomas's metaphysical concepts as a direct psychopathological diagnosis.

1.19 14. The Unity of the Two Treatises

The unity of the treatise on the angelic nature (qq. 50–64) and the treatise on the divine governance (qq. 106–114) in St. Thomas is not a mere thematic adjacency, but a consistent development of the same ontological-pastoral reflection: from created being to its activity in the world. This synthesis does not aim to repeat the content treated in detail in the preceding chapters, but to indicate the logical and metaphysical ties that justify the shift of analysis from the angelic structure as a substance to its functioning within the order of creation. Thomas understands this unity according to causal and teleological ordering: the nature of a being determines the scope of its possible action, and the mode of existence of spiritual creatures determines both the range of their elevated capacities and the limits of their influence upon the material world and the human psychosomatic constitution. This transition also contains the explanation of why the fall of an angel is ontologically graver than an ordinary human sin and why, at the same time, no demonic formation can set itself on equal terms against the divine order.[27]

1.19.1 The transition from beings to action: the coherence of the Thomistic construction

In the Thomistic construction the first block of questions (qq. 50–64) presents the angel primarily as an intellectual substance: created, simple in the sense of lacking matter, endowed with essential knowledge and will. The second block (qq. 106–114) shows these same properties from a functional perspective: angels illuminate, speak, order creation, and interact with man. This being–action dialectic is necessary

[27] St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, ST I, qq. 50–64; qq. 106–114, online edition.

for Thomas: intellect and will do not remain a merely inward intensification of being, but pass into effects that matter for the order of creation. Hence it is telling that Thomas begins with ontology and only then discusses the effects and forms of action — showing that every warrant for action must have its basis in the nature of the subject, and every intervention is conditioned by its ontological condition. From this also follows a fundamental limitation: an angel's action is always the action of a creature, interdependent with and subordinated to the Providence of God; an angel does not become an autonomous efficient cause.

This coherence also justifies the moral weight of the angel's decision: the greater the perfection of the intellectual nature (its capacity to receive and transmit truth), the greater the responsibility for the choice of the will. This is not an arbitrary conclusion but the consequence of a metaphysical principle embedded in the treatises: the potency–act distinction, the primacy of existence over essence, and the hierarchical measure of participation in being. Thomas formulates these premises in the questions concerning the nature and cognition of angels (qq. 50–57) and derives further conclusions about sin and punishment (q. 63–64). The argumentation is thus uniform: ontology determines morality, and morality becomes a dimension of action in the world.

1.19.2 Analysis of a central argument: the perfection of nature and culpable freedom

One of the key arguments linking the two treatises is the reasoning connecting an angel's greater intellectual perfection with the weight of his moral responsibility. Thomas sets forth the following premises: (1) an angel is an intellectual being with clearer cognitive apprehension than man; (2) this intellect directs the will toward what it apprehends; (3) the fuller and clearer the apprehension of the good, the smaller the possibility of excusing error; (4) therefore a free act of rejecting the good by an angel is at the same time a more radical choice contrary to his nature and to his given end. On this basis Thomas explains why the fall of the angels has a final and sometimes irreversible character.

Analysis of the premises reveals both the strength and the limits of this reasoning. The strength lies in the consistent application of Thomistic categories: if one accepts potency–act and the hierarchy of participations in being, then it is regular that greater awareness of truth increases the capacity for responsibility. The limitation, however, derives from the necessity of assuming these metaphysical frames: if one rejects an a priori hierarchy of kinds of being or interprets differently the relation of knowledge and will, the conclusion loses persuasive force. Moreover, Thomas's argument presumes a certain homogeneity in the cognitive experience of angels, which does not exclude — within his own theory — differences in the degree of obligation among individual spiritual persons. It should also be noted that the conclusion about the severity of responsibility does not reduce the omnipotence of God in the exercise of mercy; it is a moral conclusion, not a theodicy describing each particular infliction of punishment.

1.19.3 Illumination and deception: the epistemological relation between q. 106 and q. 111

The central relation between angelic illumination (q. 106) and demonic deception (q. 111) must be read in light of the Thomistic theory of knowledge discussed separately. Thomas distinguishes intellectual cognition as an act through species (likenesses) from sensory cognition and phantasms; angels have access to intellectual species in a more universally comprehensive way than man, hence their capacity to "illuminate" lower intellects. Yet this illuminating function does not consist in the direct imposition of content on the intellect nor in producing within it a new essence: it is rather the making available of the

object of knowledge, which has an external and indirect character. In the same optic Thomas situates the mechanisms of demonic deception: the demon acts chiefly through images, imagination, and the senses, abusing natural channels of conveyance so as to produce a false representation of the object or to intensify sensual inclinations.

From this follows an essential epistemological conclusion: a demon's capacity to deceive does not consist in violating the cognitive essence of man, but in the exploitation of intermediary faculties. A demon can counterfeit a false object under the guise of truth and thereby exert pressure on the moral decision, yet he lacks the power to reach into the interior of the will as such or to "read the heart" in the sense of directly knowing intentions and future free acts. Hence arises one of the strictest limits of Thomistic demonology: deception is always indirect, dependent on the responses of lower powers and never absolutely deterministic. This distinction remains important in confronting contemporary interpretative temptations that are inclined to attribute to spiritual actions features of omniscience or direct influence on the will. Thomas consistently rejects such excessive attributes for created spirits.

1.19.4 The demonic anti-hierarchy: structure and its perversion

In q. 109 Thomas accepts that after the fall demons do not lose the diversity of natures and a certain degree of ordering of operations; they have an "order" of action that is, however, a degraded reflection of the heavenly hierarchy. One may call this an anti-hierarchy: formally preserved functional relations, substantively perverted by the intention of disorder. Analyzing the structure of this anti-hierarchy, three axiological axes can be distinguished that characteristically mark it:

- a functional analogy to the order of good angels: among the bad there exist beings more influential and lesser, fulfilling different organizational roles;
- delegation of action according to ranks, but without the sharing of glory and without an order of bestowal of good — instead of giving good the demons multiply confusion;
- instrumentalization of natural capacities (cognitive, communicative, causal) toward an end contrary to their nature.

Thomas does not construct from demonic diversity a new ontology of evil; on the contrary, he emphasizes that evil is a perversion of good, and demonic structures are a parasitic exploitation of what is created. The anti-hierarchy is therefore not an autonomous ontological "enterprise," but a network of power that exists within the single order of creation, under God's dominion and, in the final judgment, devoid of true perfection.

1.19.5 Divine permission: how the malice of the fallen angels is used in the economy of Providence

The question of divine permission and how the malice of the wills of fallen angels becomes an element in the economy of Providence is treated in q. 114. Thomas distinguishes ontological permission from the justification of evil: God does not create evil as such, but permits its existence within his designs, in order to test free creatures or to draw forth a greater good. This mechanism operates by the notions of primary and secondary causes: God is the first cause, yet by permitting the actions of free creatures (including fallen angels) he arranges the ultimate order so that good may arise even from their evil will. Practically this means that Divine Providence uses the fact of evil's existence for ends of justice and salvation — for example, by means of the experience of temptation as an instrument to reveal virtue, conversion, or just punishment.

In Thomas's philosophical analysis the crucial language is discriminating: permission is not identical with approving causation; God does not make the bad as bad, but permits that the evil of free causes occur and that, within its limits, it conduce to a greater good. This conception requires accepting several metaphysical premises: the existence of free actions as genuine causes, the possibility of ordering the effects of secondary causes by primary Providence, and the legitimacy of a moral order in which the good has primacy. On this plane appears the tension familiar to practical theology — how to reconcile God's sovereignty with the experience of evil — and Thomas replies that God's sovereignty is supreme, and the permission of evil lies within his salvific ends, without diminishing the responsibility of the agents nor the reality of evil.

1.19.6 The ontology of evil versus contemporary psychological reductions

One of the significant contributions of Thomistic demonology is the clear distinction between the ontology of evil and its possible psychological paraphrases. For Thomas evil is not an independent being but a defect or a privation of the proper order of the good; demons do not constitute a new category of ontological reality but exist as created, albeit depraved, beings. The contemporary tendency to reduce demonology to exclusively psychological or social determinants — the interpretation of religious experiences as merely neurological disorders or psychological symptoms — neglects this metaphysical dimension: the reality of spiritual actions does not abolish the need for medical inquiry, but points to a different plane of description. At the same time, preserving theological rigor obliges one not to use Thomistic categories as an automatic pathological label: mental illness and demonic action belong to different explanatory orders and cannot be equated without a conscientious discernment that includes competent medical and pastoral evaluation. Thomas's remedy for potential interpretative abuses consists in maintaining clarity of distinctions. On the one hand, the ontology of evil and the reality of spirits as creatures cannot be simplified into psychology. On the other hand, Thomistic demonology should not be used to stigmatize or pathologize suffering persons; rather, it requires responsible discernment that unites care for the soul with attention to the body and reason.

1.19.7 Demonology in the economy of salvation: temptation, trial, and ultimate victory

The final synthetic part of this unity concerns the place of demons in the history of salvation. Thomas does not depict demons as adversaries of God on equal footing, but as created forces whose negative action is incorporated into God's plan of redemption. Temptation is often interpreted by him as a form of trial that can lead to the strengthening of virtue or to damnation — it is therefore a moral event, not a cosmological negation of divinity. In this sense demonic influence helps disclose the scope of human freedom and the value of the human response to the call to grace.[28]

The role of demons reaches its ultimate articulation in the event of Christ: in the Thomistic order this event is the sign of the final triumph over the powers of evil and the confirmation that no created force can in its nature oppose God's rule. Demonology for Thomas therefore serves not to foment aversion to the spiritual world but to eucharistic and eschatological assurance: the spiritual struggle is transitory, and the final victory — certain.

The conclusion of this synthesis should emphasize that the unity of the two treatises is simultaneously anthropological and soteriological: from the ontological condition of the angel we pass to the practical

[28]The biblical texts cited in this chapter should be read in their own canonical context; in this study they serve as a point of reference for the reconstruction of Thomas's argumentation, not as an autonomous determination of every subsequent speculative question.

dimensions of his action, while indicating at the same time the limits and ends of that action. Thomas's demonology is not a Gnostic theory of two coequal absolutes, but a reflection on created freedom — its possibilities, threats, and the ultimate incorporation even of evil into God's plan of love. In this light every aspect from illumination to temptation, from "locutio" to the "anti-hierarchy," gains meaning within the perspective of a single economy of salvation that confirms God's primacy and the sense of moral responsibility of creatures.

Within the internal fabric of Thomistic reflection the metaphysics of nature is not a theory of beings separated from moral or soteriological practice; on the contrary, nature as participation in being constitutes the conditions of possibility for cognition and action, while the relation of this participation to the prime Cause determines the hierarchy of participations. From the perspective of the Summa Theologiae I the being of a creature has the character of participation: its essence is determined by the manner in which it receives existence from the Creator. Hence cognition and will are not for Thomas merely psychological faculties but are ontologically conditioned powers whose scope and clarity depend on the degree of participation in being. The hierarchical ordering of creatures thus corresponds to different manners and intensities of this participation; this is not an arbitrary gradation of powers but a teleological ordering — each being has its nature, and its nature determines the possible range of cognitive and volitional acts and their orientation toward particular effects.

From this metaphysical basis the relation of nature and grace is derived. In the Thomistic perspective grace neither annuls nor reduces nature; rather it is a principle of participation in the supernatural end that elevates the capacities of creatures toward supernatural perfection. Practically this means that a volitional act that is supernatural in character takes its "materials" from the nature of man and angel, yet receives a kind of power such that it can surpass natural intentions toward the beatific end. At the same time this elevating function of grace does not remove personal responsibility: free acts remain real causes that cooperate with the infused power, and thus there remains room for the positive cooperation of virtue and the sanctifying gift. It is worth stressing that within this structure the angel and the demon are creatures: as indicated above, a demon lacks the power to penetrate the interior of the will or to read the heart directly — the absence of participation in sanctifying grace and the lack of orientation toward the supernatural end determine the limits of his effectiveness against the plan of salvation.

The dependence between cognition and will accepted by Thomas thus becomes an ethical dependence: clarity of cognition orients the will, yet this orientation can be confirmed or transformed by the action of grace. The ontological hierarchy is not merely a catalogue of diverse beings but a relational structure in which each participation in being has its teleological sense and its limits. From this perspective the actions of spiritual creatures — both those that bring order and those that act destructively — should be understood as concretizations of their participation: they are, so to speak, the exemplifications of their place in the order of being, provided that only reference to the Divine Source and to the gift of grace discloses the full horizon of the meaning of their deed. Because grace is a way of incorporating the creature into the supernatural end of the incarnate Word, realistic descriptions of nature in Thomas must always be read in the perspective of this theological correction.

This Christocentric limitation of Thomistic realism carries far-reaching methodological and hermeneutical consequences: metaphysical categories describing the relation of creatures to existence retain their validity, yet their ultimate interpretation is effected in the light of the Incarnation and the work of Redemption. Thomas's realism does not claim independence from this perspective — on the contrary, it

posits it as a boundary that frees metaphysics from pretensions to autonomous absolutism. As a result, understanding nature, cognition, will, hierarchy, and action must take account of a duality: the immanent rational structure of creatures and their vocation to participation in divine life, which is revealed and fulfilled in Christ. Thus construed, Thomistic categories provide tools for precise description of spiritual actions while simultaneously delineating theological limits beyond which no created action or any natural explanation may pass.

1.20 Primary bibliography

1. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, qq. 10, 50–64, 106–114, online edition.
2. Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, *The Celestial Hierarchy* — an important source for Aquinas's terminology of hierarchy, which he engages critically and synthetically.
3. Augustine of Hippo, *On the Nature of Good* and *The City of God* — important points of reference for the thesis concerning the goodness of nature and the privative character of evil.
4. Sacred Scripture, especially Ps 91; Job 1–2; Mt 4:1–11; Eph 6:10–20; Heb 1:14; 1 Pet 5:8; Rev 12.

1.21 Note on the scope of the study

The study presents the theology and metaphysics of St. Thomas Aquinas. It is not a tool for identifying illnesses, psychological crises, or life events, does not replace medical, psychological, or psychiatric care, and does not provide formulas or procedures for exorcisms. In matters requiring assistance, one should have recourse to appropriate medical, psychological, legal, and pastoral expertise.