

SECTION II: EXAMINING GOD AND HIS ATTRIBUTES

It is St. Thomas himself who acknowledges that “almost all of philosophical consideration is directed towards the knowledge of God.”¹ For Aquinas as well as Maimonides, the idea of being has got a lot to do with the nature of God and His relation to the world and that is why the most privileged place to begin this enquiry is by examining the nature of God and the attributes of God. A lot of work has been done in this respect,² and we shall follow the eminent tradition of scholars who have contributed in this area, while trying to channel our interests towards the doctrine of providence and evil. We do not have any major interest in explicitly engaging in proving the existence of God; the issue that occupies a very important part in the grand works of our authors.³ They both believe in the existence and the uniqueness of a transcendent God. Our major concern here in this early section borders on knowing the nature and the attributes of this unique God and how human language presents what is knowable about God. This is a major area where Aquinas engages in some fruitful dialogue with Maimonides, the fruit of which will be seen in the new philosophical direction Aquinas’s interpretation will take him. With the ‘Torah speaking in the language of the sons of man,’⁴ the task seems complicated. This is because of the anthropomorphic nature of human language and references of the Scriptures on which our authors would base their inquiry. Anthropomorphism is replete with corporeality and whatever is corporeal is extended and is divisible. God cannot be understood as corporeal otherwise He would no longer be God—unique and absolutely simple. Aristotelian philosophy gives the concept of God as an uncaused cause and as thought thinking itself. Thus, terms which seem to

¹ SCG I, 4, 3: “Cum fere totius philosophiae consideratio ad Dei cognitionem ordinetur.” (Exceptionally, this is translation is ours).

² The bibliography is simply enormous but we shall try to indicate the ones that seem very close to our topic of inquiry. Gilson, E., “Maimonide et la Philosophie de l’Exode,” in Jacob I. Dienstag, ed. *Studies in Maimonides and St. Thomas Aquinas*, (New York: Ktav Publishing House, Inc., 1975), pp 279-281; Harry A. Wolfson, “St. Thomas on Divine Attributes,” Ibid., pp 1-28; Seymour Feldman, “A Scholastic Misinterpretation of Maimonides’ Doctrine of Divine Attributes,” *ibid.*, pp 58-74; Harry A. Wolfson, “Crescas on the Problem of Divine Attributes,” in *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, Vol. 7, 1, (1916), pp 1-44; Isaac Franck, “Maimonides and Aquinas on Man’s Knowledge of God: A Twentieth Century Perspective,” in Joseph A. Buijs, ed. *Maimonides: A Collection of Critical Essays*, (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), pp 284-305; David B. Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God: Ibn-Sina, Maimonides, Aquinas*, (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986), Avital Wohlman, *Thomas d’Aquin et Maimonide: un dialogue exemplaire*, (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1988), pp 105-164; Humbrecht, Thierry-Dominique, *Théologie Négative et Noms Divins chez saintThomas d’Aquin*, (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 2005).

³ *Dux Neutorum*, lib.II, cap.II, fol.40-41; Cf *Guide* II, 1, pp 243-252. Maimonides presupposes what he has established here—the existence of God, in the discussion of divine attributes in book I, ch. 50-70. For Aquinas, Cf SCG I, ch. 12-14. ST 1, q.2, a.3.

⁴ Ibid. lib.I, cap.XXVI, fol.10: “locuta est lex hominum idiomate.” Cf *Guide* I, 26, p 56.

imply corporeality in God must be reinterpreted. Does God know the things He has created, and does He know them individually? If He does, how is that knowledge to be expressed since particular things are apprehended by the senses and God lacks senses? Does knowledge constitute an ontological addition to the essence of God and thus, a nuisance to God's absolute simplicity? As the creator of the world, does there exist a kind of relation between God and things outside of Him? Could what is incorporeal exist in a relation of whatever kind with what is corporeal and contingent? These and many more are some of the questions that help reshape Maimonides's and Aquinas's thinking and dialogue on the nature and the attributes of God, and more still, on the Scriptural description of a good, merciful and just Father who shows abundant love and providential care to His well-behaved children while meting out punishment to the misbehaving ones. The terms 'good,' 'merciful,' and 'just,' definitely would be empty terms when applied to God whose essence we cannot even know. If He exists in an irreducibly pure, non-relational, changeless essence,⁵ how can He be directly involved in a governmental, caring context in relation to mankind and how does He not intervene to save man from evil? This idea of providence is anthropomorphic in nature and implies corporeality in God. Is providence part of what Maimonides describes as God's actions and thus divested of attributing corporeality in God? How would Maimonides and Aquinas tackle this problem of language about God such that language respects true beliefs about God while still maintaining the absolute simplicity of God?

Avicenna, among others, will play a major role in helping us understand the issues at stake since he was a major reference source for our two medieval authors. Our method will be to present first, the ideas of Maimonides and then, to show how Aquinas appreciates, disagrees with and interpretes him. This method would not stop us from seeing what is original in our authors and their various contributions in this field.

⁵Ibid. lib.I, cap.XI, fol.7: "Sedebit dominus in aeternum, et iterum, sedet super coelos: quoniam non cadit in ipsum aliqua species mutationis: neque secundum substantiam neque alio modo, neque mutatur eius compositio ad aliud extra se: quia non est comparatio inter ipsum: et aliud extra ipsum propter quod mutetur in ipsa comparatione: sicut patebit ex sequentibus, et in hoc completur ipsius sedere sine omni mutatione." Cf *Guide* I, 11, pp 37-38.

1.0 Maimonides on the Nature of God

What is it that can be known of God? Maimonides takes his point of departure from the biblical encounter between Moses and God: “And they shall say to me, ‘What is His name? What shall I say unto them?’”(Exod. 3:13)⁶ This is a question that enquires about the very essence of God. Maimonides defends vividly the absolute simplicity of God and a suggestion of anything that gives rise to the fantasies that God possesses attributes must be rejected. The very suggestion that He possesses attributes presumes that His essence is known. But God being the totally other, cannot be known in His essential nature. The only thing that can be known about God is that *He is* but not *what He is*. Whatever comes close to showing the quiddity of God, must be a name indicative of that essence, and must not be derivative.⁷ The idea of essence that Maimonides has is taken from Aristotle according to whom “the essence of each thing is what it is said to be *propter se*, i.e. in virtue of itself.”⁸ God alone knows Himself, and that is why He explains Himself to Moses as ‘I am that I am.’⁹ (Exod. 3:14). This solemn affirmation of the nature of God signifies according to Maimonides, existence. Properly said:

This makes it clear that He is existent not through existence. This notion may be summarized and interpreted in the following way: the existent that is the existent, or the necessarily existent. This is what demonstration necessarily leads to: namely, to the view that there is a necessarily existent thing that has never been, or ever will be, nonexistent.¹⁰

That is the unique and simple being whose existence is necessary. Maimonides in that interpretation notes the transcendence of God, an existent that is beyond the measures of time, an existence that is neither past nor present nor even future, but simply an existence that subsists in

⁶*Dux Neutorum*, lib.I, cap.LXII, fol.25:”Dicent ad me quod est nomen eius: quid respondebo eis:” Cf *Guide* I, 63, p 153. It is worth noting that according to Pines, Maimonides is perhaps the first person among the Jewish exegetes to make of this *Exodus* passage, a proper metaphysical interpretation. Cf S. Pines, “Dieu et l’être selon Maïmonide. Exégèse d’Exode 3, 14 et doctrine connexe,” in *Celui qui est: Interprétations Juives et Chrétiens d’Exode 3-14*. Ed. par Alain de Libera et Emilie Zum Brunn, (Paris : Cerf, 1986), p 16.

⁷*Ibid.* lib.I, cap.LX, fol.24: “Et hoc est illud nomen quod significat eius substantiam tantummodo, non quod sit decisum ab opere.” Cf *Guide* I, 61, p 148f.

⁸ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* VII, 4, 1029b13-15.

⁹*Dux Neutorum*, lib.I, cap.LXII, fol.25: « hoc quod dixit Sum qui sum. » Cf *Guide* I, 63, p 154.

¹⁰*Ibid.*: “et eius expositio est : quia est non in essentia, et hoc est deputatio ipsius rationis: scilicet ens qui est ens: ac si diceret necesse esse. Hoc autem est ad quod credendum inducit probatio de necessitate quod est necesse esse : quod non deficit nec deficiet sicut ostendemus probatione. » Cf *Guide* I, 63, p 155.

itself, an eternity of existence.¹¹ In an earlier chapter of the *Dux Neutrorum*, Maimonides underlines that God's existence is identical with His essence and His true reality, and His essence is His existence.¹² This insistence is necessary because of the understanding that Maimonides has of existence when it comes to things that are caused. He clearly mentions that in caused things, existence is an accident superadded to the quiddity of what exists.¹³ If we are not mistaking, to exist in Maimonides's view, means to be caused. Thus, there is a clear distinction between God the Necessary Existent whose essence is His existence and other things that have their existence as caused by God. As the necessarily existent, He is the cause of existence in other things.¹⁴ In other things, existence is considered in the language of Maimonides, an accident since it is caused to be on the essence of what exists. However, Aquinas will transform this Maimonidean accident into an ontological principle of being.

The difference that Maimonides tries to establish between God as necessarily existent, and other things as receiving existence as accident, has been well established by Avicenna long before Maimonides. In his *Metaphysics of Shifā*, Avicenna writes:

Et toutes les choses autres que le nécessairement existant ont des quiddités et ces quiddités sont celles qui en elles-mêmes sont possiblement existantes. L'existence ne leur survient que de l'extérieur.¹⁵

The importance of this Avicennian insight would deeply influence Maimonides's thought on the issue of attributes predicated of God. He believes as we shall see later, that positive attributes should never be applied to God at the risk of introducing multiplicity in God. There is an

¹¹ Ibid. fol.26: "Similiter nomen duarum literarum quod est sumptum a nomine quatuor literarum, est de ratione firmitudinis essentiae: et saday est decusum a day: quod est sufficientia." Cf *Guide* I, 63, p 155: "The name *Yah* refers similarly to the notion of the eternity of existence..."

¹² Ibid. lib.I, cap.LVI, fol.21: "Quod autem non habet causam sui esse, istud est Creator solus. Et haec ratio propter quam dicitur de ipso quod est necesse esse, quia sua inventio in esse, est sua substantia, et sua veritas." Cf *Guide* I, 57, p 132. This has every mark of Avicenna as we shall see soon.

¹³ Ibid: "nec est substantia cui acciderit esse: quia tunc sua inventio esset res addita super illam essentiam; sed est necesse esse semper cui nihil accidit;" Cf *Guide* I, 57, p 132.

¹⁴ Cf. Alexander Altmann, "Essence and Existence in Maimonides," in *Maimonides: A Collection of Critical Essays*, edited by Joseph A. Buijs, (Notre Dame, Indiana: university of Notre Dame Press, 1988) pp 148-165.

¹⁵ Avicenna, *La métaphysique du Shifā*, VIII, 4, (347, 5-10), livres VI-X, introduction, traduction et notes par Georges C. Anawati, (Paris : Vrin, 1985) p 88. The order of citation is book, chapter and line references which appear in bracket. And we intend to follow this translation.

ongoing debate as to the how and the precise nature of Avicenna's influence on Maimonides.¹⁶ This is heightened by the fact that, in the letter he wrote to Samuel Ibn Tibbon, the authorized translator of the *Guide* into Hebrew, Maimonides never explicitly acknowledged Avicenna in his major work *Dux Neutrorum—The Guide of the Perplexed*, and even described Avicenna's work as having the potency to "give rise to objections and are not as good as those of Abu Nasr [al-Farabi], Abu Bakr al-Saigh [Ibn Bajja] was also a great philosopher, and all his writings are of a high standard."¹⁷ However, scholars are agreed that the distinction between necessary and possible existence is a trademark of Avicenna's metaphysics, for whom, God is the necessary existent. In one of his most quoted passages, Avicenna notes that the First has no quiddity other than its [to be] (*al-anniyya*): "Le Premier n'a pas de quiddité autre que *al-anniyya* (être)." ¹⁸ The major difference between them is on the very nature of God Himself.¹⁹ Avicenna thinks that God has no essence perhaps because of his thinking of existence as "superadded to" the nature. Thus, to forestall this idea of accident, David Burrell thinks that Avicenna "must ward off a conception of necessary existence as something *attributed* to the necessary existent."²⁰ This explains the Avicennian statement that 'there is no other quiddity for the necessary existent than the fact that it is necessarily existent.

Il n'y a donc pas d'autre quiddité pour le nécessairement existant que le fait qu'il est nécessairement existant. Et c'est cela l'être.²¹

¹⁶ The major points of influence concern the distinction between essence and existence; the distinction between necessary and contingent (or possible) beings; the doctrine of the human intellect in its conjunction with the Active Intellect; the theory of emanation and some aspects of the theory of prophecy. Some works of great interest known to us include Idit Dobbs-Weinstein, "Maimonides' Reticence Toward Ibn Sīnā," in Jules L. Janssens and Daniel De Smet (eds.), *Avicenna and His Heritage*, (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2002) pp 281-296; Herbert A. Davidson, "Maimonides, Aristotle, and Avicenna," in Régis Morelon and Ahmad Hasnawi (eds.), *De Zénon d'Elée à Poincaré. Recueil d'études en hommage à Roshdi Rashed*, (Louvain, Paris: Peeters, 2004) pp 719-734; Mauro Zonta, "Maimonides' Knowledge of Avicenna: Some Tentative Conclusions About a Debated Question," in Georges Tamer, ed., *The Trias of Maimonides*, (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2005) pp 211-222.

¹⁷ Cf. Shlomo Pines, "Translator's Introduction: The Philosophical Sources of the Guide of the Perplexed," in Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, p lx.

¹⁸ Avicenne, *La métaphysique du Shifā*, VIII, 4, (344, 10), p.86. The translator observes in the annex that 'anniyya' and existence are often considered as synonyms in Avicenna. Cf. Ibid, p 218.

¹⁹ Wohlman also touches on this as the major difference between Avicenna and Maimonides: "Mais la divergence la plus importante concerne la nature de Dieu même. Alors que, pour sauver la transcendance de Dieu, Avicenne croyait devoir affirmer que Dieu n'a pas d'essence, Maïmonide pense que, si l'être de Dieu est nécessaire, il existe mais non pas son existence. » Cf Wohlman, Avital, *Thomas d'Aquin et Maïmonide : un dialogue exemplaire*, p 115.

²⁰ Burrell, David B., *Knowing the Unknowable God: Ibn-Sinā, Maimonides, Aquinas*, (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press) 1986, p 26.

²¹ Avicenne, *La métaphysique du Shifā*, VIII, 4, (346, 13), p 87.

The presentation of existence as an accident is a major mistake made by Avicenna and for this he has been heavily criticized by Averroes;²² but somehow along the line, this idea of existence as “accident” indirectly made its mark on Maimonides. This even reinforces Maimonides’s conviction that no positive attributes should be predicated of God. Existence, life, knowledge, and power should all be considered as various notions coming from the unique essence of God in whom there is no multiplicity. Hence:

His existence is necessary always; it is not something that may attain Him. Consequently He exists, but not through an existence other than His essence; and similarly He lives, but not through life; He is powerful, but not through power; He knows but not through knowledge. For all these attributes refer back to one notion in which there is no idea of multiplicity, as will be made clear.²³

This conviction of the necessary existence of God is given to Maimonides from his interpretation of the *Exodus* encounter between God and Moses. The ‘*Sum qui Sum—I AM THAT I AM*’ is the subsistent existence. This is the unique, absolutely simple and incorporeal God. That is God’s true reality and the only thing that can be known, in a human way of speaking, of God. As Maimonides says, “we are only able to apprehend the fact that He is and cannot apprehend His quiddity.”²⁴ Credit must be given to both Avicenna and Maimonides for discovering that the distinction between essence and existence in things other than God helps safeguard the transcendence and the uniqueness of God. But the effect of Avicenna’s “existence” as “accident” remains in Maimonides. As criticized by Gilson:

Fidèle à l’enseignement d’Avicenne, il ne semble pas avoir dépassé la notion d’êtres créés dont l’existence serait une sorte d’appendice accidentel qui s’ajouterait à l’essence pour la réaliser.²⁵

²² Averroes, *Tahafut al-Tahafut*, translated by Simon van der Bergh, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954), Fifth Discussion, 300-305, pp 178-180; Seventh Discussion, 367-373, pp 221-224; Eighth Discussion, 395-400, pp 238-241.

²³ *Dux Neutrorum*, lib.I, cap.LVI, fol.21: “Sed est necesse esse semper cui nihil accidit, et iccirco est non in essentia: et vius non in vita, et potens non in potentia, et sapiens non in sapientia. Et haec omnia in idem redundant : quia non est in eo multitudo, sicut explanabitur.” Cf *Guide* I, 57, p 132.

²⁴ Ibid. lib.I, cap.LVII, fol.22 : « sicut probabimus : et non appraehendimus nisi essentiam eius non quidditatem ipsius. » Cf *Guide* I, 58, p 135.

²⁵ Gilson, Etienne, « Maïmonide et la Philosophie de l’Exode, » in *Stuides in Maimonides and St. Thomas Aquinas*, p 281.

In Thomas Aquinas, this discovery will be taken to a different level that neither Avicenna nor Maimonides ever imagined. Aquinas goes back to that *Exodus* encounter and interprets existence as the *actus essendi* (the act of being), the primary ontological constituent of an existing thing, that to which essence must be related as potency to act. This discovery would permeate all of Aquinas's metaphysical reflection on creation, providence and evil, and act as a catalyst taking Aquinas's interpretation of Maimonides to a whole new different discovery.

1.1 On the Attributes of God

Maimonides's philosophical training has alerted him of the problem inherent in the Scriptures which, by speaking in the language of men, predicate a lot of attributes or qualities, of God. And Maimonides knows that these attributes are fraught with the inherent danger of introducing ontological multiplicity into the absolutely simple, unique and transcendent God of his faith. How do we talk meaningfully about a subject as different from us as is God? Perhaps, that explains to a great extent, Maimonides's major interest in discussing the lexicographical and exegetical aspects of the problem of attributes and the problem of language about God found in the Scriptures. On a practical basis, that the Scriptures describe God as possessing of power, knowledge and will is important in the sense that, it squares with Him as omnipotent and able to decide on what He is to do and not to do. This perfectly fits in with the scriptural image of a provident God who intervenes in human affairs. But this is the language Maimonides challenges as it transposes unto God our human categories of speech and ways of understanding. In view of this, Maimonides envisages a different manner of approach and a different way of talking about God. As he clearly states:

The terms "knowledge," "power," "will," and "life," as applied to Him, may He be exalted, and to all those possessing knowledge, power, will and life, are purely equivocal, so that their meaning when they are predicated of Him is in no way like their meaning in other applications.²⁶

²⁶Ibid. lib.I, cap.LV, fol.21: "Similiter etiam sapiens, potens, vius, et volens non dicitur de eo: sed de omni alio cui conveniunt nisi aequivoce pure: quia inter ipsum et alia nulla est similitudo aliquo modo. » Cf *Guide* I, 56, p 131.

Maimonides shows his liking for equivocation in language concerning God and other things but he would later talk about interpreting those “essential attributes” negatively or as attributes of action. Would such interpretations then be the alternatives to equivocal predication? These we shall discover as we progress. Maimonides retrospectively joins the debate on attributes that seemed to have its origins in the Christian doctrine of the Trinity; this became an issue among the Jews and among his Arabic predecessors, following those in the Kalam, on what should be the proper understanding of divine attributes seen in the Koran and in the Scriptures.²⁷ It is the proper understanding of these attributes that had been the point of conflict between the Mutazilites and the Asharites. While the Mutazilites argue for the identity of deity and attributes, calling the attributes nothing more than different names of God, the Asharites argue that the attributes of God are distinct from God’s essence, with the implication that there is ontological multiplicity in God.²⁸ According to Wolfson, this problem “which is primarily and chiefly religious,”²⁹ has a twofold aspect, “an ontological and a semantic aspect. A third aspect, a logical one, was introduced later by those who are called philosophers as distinguished from those known as *Mutakallimun*.”³⁰ It is ontological when it considers whether terms like “living,” “knowing,” “powerful,” “imply the existence in God of life and knowledge and power as real incorporeal beings, which though inseparable from the essence of God, are distinct from it,” and it is semantic when it questions “the meaning of terms predicated of God in comparison with the meaning of the same terms predicated of other beings.”³¹ It is these aspects of ontology, semantics and logic that eventually shape the whole discussion of divine attributes even to our day. Very early in its development, the Asharites a part of whose teaching is adopted by Al-Ghazali, insist that the divine attributes are distinct from the divine essence. In his criticism of the philosophers’ view, Al-Ghazali observes that:

The Divine attributes are in the Divine essence, and that the Divine essence does not depend on any thing else ... Finally, if reason admits the idea of an eternal being which is

²⁷ For a richer history of this problem, consult Wolfson, Harry Austryn, *The Philosophy of the Kalam*, (Cambridge (Massachusetts): Harvard University Press, 1976) pp 112-132.

²⁸ Averroes, *Ibid.* Fifth Discussion, 295, p 175; Leaman, O., *Moses Maimonides*, (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 1997) pp 22-23.

²⁹ Wolfson, Harry A., “Philosophical Implications of the Problem of Divine Attributes in the Kalam,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol.79, 2, 1959, p 79.

³⁰ *Ibid.* p 73. The whole discussion runs from pages 73-80.

³¹ *Ibid.* p 73.

uncaused, it will also admit the idea of an eternal possessor of attributes whose attributes and essence are both uncaused.³²

This is the problem in its ontological aspect demanding for a clarification in the language used to describe God. What sort of relation would exist between the divine attributes and the divine essence? If the attributes are subsisting in the essence, there is then a subject—accident relationship whereby the accidents depend on the subject. This becomes a logical problem which in its clarity makes God a possessor of accidents and thus composed and is a body. If the attributes are uncaused and thus exist distinctly though inseparably from the essence of God, there is ontological multiplicity in God. When the Koran describes God as possessing of ‘life,’ ‘knowledge,’ and ‘power,’ attributes that are described as essential, Al-Ghazali takes them seriously and even understands them as they would apply to human beings. This is the representation that Averroes makes of Al-Ghazali’s understanding. God, according to Al-Ghazali, can be a real agent only when like us, although in a greater extent, He knows His world, and He has the power and the will to intervene and bring about certain changes in the world. When an agent acts, he knows and wills his act. But philosophers think that God’s knowing and willing and acting is to be understood metaphorically. Al-Ghazali, as quoted by Averroes, remarks:

The agent must be willing, choosing, and knowing what he wills to be the agent of what he wills, but according to them God does not will, He has no attribute whatever, and what proceeds from Him proceeds by the compulsion of necessity.³³

Al-Ghazali attacks the philosophers for taking the words applied to God metaphorically, and not in its real sense. Beyond the mere problem of nature and attributes of God, Al-Ghazali’s contention touches also the problem of meaning ‘with a stress upon univocity’.³⁴ Averroes responds to Al-Ghazali by attacking Al-Ghazali’s attack against the philosophers. This is reflected in the title of his work: *Tahafut al-tahafut* (The Incoherence of the Incoherence). In it, Averroes dismisses the simple literal understanding of Al-Ghazali that human language gives a

³² Al-Ghazali’s *Tahafut Al-Falasifah*, (Incoherence of the Philosophers), translated into English by Sabih Ahmad Kamali, (Lahore: Pakistan Philosophical Congress, 1963) Disputation VI, p 112.

³³ Cf Averroes’ *Tahafut Al-Tahafut (The Incoherence of the Incoherence)*, Third Discussion, 147, p 87.

³⁴ Leaman, O., *Moses Maimonides*, p 20.

perfect representation of the nature of God. Averroes tries to show that “the philosophers ... only affirm that he does not will in the way that man wills.”³⁵ In his response, Averroes says:

There is no difference between one who says that God wills with a will which does not resemble the human will, and one who says that God knows through a knowledge which does not resemble human knowledge; in the same way as the quality of His knowledge cannot be conceived, so the quality of His will cannot be conceived.³⁶

Averroes however, does not think that the attributes that are described as essential, bring about any ontological multiplicity in God. He argues that they only explain the meaning of the subject in which they are found, that some attributes like intelligence, do so positively while others must be explained negatively and as actions.³⁷

It is of the nature of essential attributes not to multiply the substratum which actually supports them; they are a plurality only in the sense that the thing defined becomes a plurality through the parts of the definitions, that is, they are only a subjective plurality in the mind according to the philosophers, not an actual plurality outside the soul.³⁸

Avicenna’s discussion of attributes is hinged on his identification of God as the Necessary Existent whose simplicity is such that it admits of no plurality of whatever nature. In Avicenna’s identification of God as the necessary existent, Maimonides more than ever, sees the need to banish from God, any positive predication of attributes. There are so many reasons why Maimonides is convinced of this approach. The Avicennian conception of necessary existence implies two things: the total negation of all forms of causation and the unavoidable inclusion of absolute simplicity.³⁹ The radical implication of simplicity is that “God is indivisible even conceptually” and this renders absurd the very idea of divine attributes.⁴⁰ In the thinking of Avicenna, absolute simplicity, as the major fact known about God, excludes five possible kinds of plurality: (i) Actual plurality as that of physical objects; (ii) conceptual plurality as that of

³⁵ Averroes, *Ibid*, Third Discussion, 160, p 95.

³⁶ *Ibid*. Third Discussion, 149, p 88.

³⁷ *Ibid*. Sixth Discussion, 315, p 188.

³⁸ *Ibid*. Fifth Discussion, 300, p 178.

³⁹ Wolfson, Harry A., “Crescas on the Problem of Divine Attributes,” in *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, vol. 7, 1, 1916, p 8.

⁴⁰ Goodman, Lenn E., “God and the Good Life: Maimonides’ Virtue Ethics and the Idea of Perfection,” in *The Trials of Maimonides*, p 125.

matter and form; (iii) plurality through attributes implied in knowledge, power, and will; (iv) rational plurality from the composition of genus and species; and (v) plurality of essence and existence.⁴¹ Hence, attributes cannot be applied to the divine with any positive signification. The only thing that Avicenna concedes is that attributes be interpreted as actions or as negations in meaning.

As Maimonides follows the same logical reasoning of Avicenna, he argues that, “attribute is not the essence of the thing of which it is predicated, but is a certain mode of the essence and hence an accident.”⁴² Like Avicenna, Maimonides is convinced that attributes introduce an ontological plurality in the divine essence, and is even a logical contradiction to say that something is absolutely simple and yet possesses attributes. Belief should correspond to the reality of what is represented. In one of his numerous criticisms of the belief in real attributes addressed to thinkers and to religious beliefs alike, Maimonides has this to say:

If, however, someone believes that He is one, but possesses a certain number of essential attributes, he says in his words that He is one, but believes Him in his thought to be many. This resembles what the Christians say: namely, that He is one but also three, and that the three are one. Similar to this is the assertion of him who says that He is one but possesses many attributes and that He and His attributes are one, while he denies at the same time His being corporeal and believes in absolute simplicity; as if what we aimed at and investigated were what we should say and not what we should believe.⁴³

Christians believe the Trinity to be an inexplicable mystery. The mystery of the Trinity talks of persons but not of attributes. Maimonides’s criticism is not that it is polytheistic but that it is logically contradictory to say that something is one and yet three. This is the whole problem of ontological plurality in the very essence of the divine and Maimonides thinks that attributes are

⁴¹ Averroes, *Ibid.* Fifth Discussion, 296-297, p.175f; Aristotle, *Metaphysics* V, 25, 1023b10-25.

⁴² *Dux Neutorum*, lib.I, cap.L, fol.18: “quod dispositio est res adiuncta substantiae et est accidens.” Cf *Guide* I, 51, p 112.

⁴³ *Ibid.* lib.I, cap.XLIX, fol.18: “Quicunque vero credit quod creator est unus, et habet multas dispositiones, ore dicit quod est unus: sed corde credit quod est multiplex: sicut est etiam verbum dicentis, quod est unus, sed habet multas dispositiones : sed ipse et suae dispositiones sunt unum cum elongatione corporeitatis ab eo, et credulitate quod est simplex vere. Sicut si nostra intentio et inquisitio essent ad custodiendum dictum oris, non fidem cordis. » Cf *Guide* I, 50, p 110. The very mention of the name ‘christian’ is missing in the Latin text.

not the essence of the deity “but rather notions superadded to the essence.”⁴⁴ It opposes the notion of absolute simplicity. Whoever believes in the predication of positive attributes to God has abolished his belief in the existence of the deity without being aware of it.⁴⁵ He only believes in the figments of his imagination that cannot, in any respect, be existent.⁴⁶ Hence, to say that God has attributes is like conceiving an impossibility which has no existence like an animal with one leg and three wings. Hence, God has neither essential attributes nor even accidental attributes.

Maimonides acknowledges that it is human language that easily leads to error and we cannot represent the idea of divinity “except through a certain looseness of expression.”⁴⁷ That is why he says ‘lives but not through life,’ ‘powerful but not through power,’ ‘knows but not through knowledge.’ He signals again his liking for equivocation in the language that concerns God and other beings. At best, where we take the attribute to be the essence of the thing of which it is predicated, Maimonides notes that it would be either a tautology in the sense that it would identify itself—as if you were saying that man is man—or it would merely signify an explanation of a term and nothing else.⁴⁸ As when we say, man is essentially a rational animal where rational and animal are only explaining the term that is man but nevertheless introduce composition. This is because, animal and rational belong to genus and species respectively, and make man a composite being.⁴⁹ There are two major attributes that Maimonides considers: positive (affirmative) and negative attributes.⁵⁰ In his exposition, there are five kinds of positive attributes that may be predicated of God, and from these, Maimonides accepts only one: the attributes of action and rejects the others. Aristotle had originally given four predicables:

⁴⁴Ibid. lib.I, cap.LVIII, fol.24: “Et istae agnominationes sunt secundum opinionem illius, qui putat quod non sunt substantia Creatoris: sed sunt res additae super substantiam.” Cf *Guide* I, 60, p 145.

⁴⁵Ibid: “sed dico quod abstulit esse Creatoris de corde suo: nec tamen ipse sentit.” Cf *Guide* I, 60, p 145.

⁴⁶Ibid: “hoc non est in rerum natura: sed est cogitatio vana.” Cf *Guide* I, 60, p 146.

⁴⁷Ibid. lib.I, cap.LVI, fol.21: “quoniam latitudo expositionis multum coangustatur in quolibet idiomate, adeo quod non ascendit in cor nostrum ratio expositionis nisi per contrarium.” Cf *Guide* I, 57, p 133.

⁴⁸Ibid. lib.I, cap.L, fol.18: “Sed si dicatur quod ratio huius attributionis est tantummodo expositio nominis, sicut si diceret, quod res quae dicitur homo ipsa est composita ex animalitate et rationalitate. » Cf *Guide* I, 51, p 113.

⁴⁹ Ibid: “Homo est animal rationale: quia hoc est substantia hominis et unitas eius: et non est ibi tertium in ratione praeter animal et rationale: et hoc est homo de quo dicitur animal et rationale.” Cf *Guide* I, 51, p 113.

⁵⁰ Maimonides, *Maimonides’ Treatise on Logic*, translated from the Arabic original into English by Israel Efros, (New York: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1938) p.35 “Every proposition either affirms something of something, e.g., ‘Zayd is wise’, ‘Zayd stands’, or negates something of something, e.g., ‘Zayd is not wise’, ‘Zayd does not stand’. That proposition which affirms something of something, we call an affirmative proposition; that which negates something of something, we call a negative proposition.”

‘definition,’ ‘property,’ ‘genus,’ and ‘accident.’⁵¹ These four became five in number by porphyry’s addition of ‘specific difference.’⁵² We shall soon realize why Maimonides accepts the attributes of action at the expense of the other attributes. The remaining four are what he calls: definitions, part of definition, quality, and relation.⁵³ These four would revolve around two things: the essential and the accidental features of a thing.

1.1.1 The Positive or Affirmative Attributes of God

As we shall know very soon, Maimonides laid the foundation of his discussions in his *Treatise on the Art of Logic*.⁵⁴ Most of his discussions in that treatise spring into life in his *magna opus*, the *Guide of the Perplexed*. The proper understanding of the logic behind his treatment of the attributes in the *Guide* makes a mastery of his *Treatise on the Art of Logic* indispensable. In that treatise, he defines an affirmative proposition as “that proposition which affirms something of something. It may affirm the predicate of the entire subject, e.g., ‘Every man is an animal’; or it may affirm the predicate of a part of the subject, e.g., ‘Some men write.’⁵⁵ Since God’s essence cannot be known, it will not be a surprise to see Maimonides reject unequivocally, all forms of affirmative attributes applied to God though he would make an exception as we shall shortly find out. This is because affirmative attributes, in their bid to affirm something positively in God, would tend to “indicate a part of the thing the knowledge of which is sought, that part being either a part of its substance or one of its accidents.”⁵⁶ If God would admit of parts, that means He is composed and not simple. Parts would also entail a relation of similarity between something and the other. Composition and similarity militate against the absolute simplicity and

⁵¹ Aristotle, *Topics* I, 4, 101b15-25; translated by W.A. Pickard-Cambridge, *Ibid.*, p 190.

⁵² Cf. Wolfson, Harry A., “Crescas on the Problem of Divine Attributes,” in *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, vol. 7, 1, 1916, p 6.

⁵³ *Dux Neutrorum*, lib.I, cap.LI, fol.18—19 Cf *Guide* I, 52, pp 114-119.

⁵⁴ It is universally accepted that the *Treatise on Logic* is a genuine work of Maimonides. But one scholar among others, who has called that assumption to serious question, is Herbert Davidson. In his words, “the *Treatise* contains nothing of a Jewish character and nothing indicating the slightest link to Maimonides. The sole evidence of his authorship is the presence of his name in most of the manuscripts.” Cf Davidson, Herbert A, *Moses Maimonides: The Man and His Works*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), p 314.

⁵⁵ Maimonides’ *Treatise on the Art of Logic*, p 35.

⁵⁶ *Dux Neutrorum*, lib.I, cap.LVII, fol.22: “quia attributiones licet non sint determinatae: significant tamen aliquid de universitate rei cuius cognito quaeritur: vel aliqua de substantia ipsius: vel aliquod accidens de accidentibus ipsius.” Cf *Guide* I, 58, p 135.

transcendence of God. In what follows, Maimonides examines five types of affirmative attributes out of which, one can only be fittingly applied to God.

1.1.1.1 The Attribute of Definition:

According to Aristotle, definitions depend on analysis. They assign a genus and difference by grouping things and distinguishing them from the others. But the simplicity of God makes Him unique and “indivisible even conceptually.” For Maimonides, “when we explain a species by referring to its genus and difference, we call it a definition.”⁵⁷ It is the function of the attribute of definition to ‘indicate the essence and true reality of a thing.’⁵⁸ What is to be defined must be caused. But God’s essence is unknowable and uncaused, how can it be defined? Definitions refer to causes but God has no causes prior to Him. What is definable is what has got parts and “as the formula is to the thing, so is the part of the formula to the part of the thing.”⁵⁹ Definition introduces composition and contingency in God. But God is none of these.

For He, may He be exalted, has no causes anterior to Him that are the cause of His existence and by which, in consequence, He is defined. For this reason, it is well known among all people engaged in speculation, who understand what they say, that God cannot be defined.⁶⁰

1.1.1.2 Part of Definition:

Part of definition or what Goodman calls ‘properties’⁶¹ cannot be predicated of God either. The reasoning behind this is that properties are elements in a definition and signify “an inseparable

⁵⁷ Maimonides’ *Treatise on Logic*, p 53.

⁵⁸ *Dux Neutrorum*, lib.I, cap.LI, fol.18: “Primo per viam termini, seu definitionis sicut cum dicitur, homo est animal rationale. Et haec attributio seu nominatio demonstrat quiditatem rei et veritatem eius: et iam diximus quod haec est expositio nominis tantum. » Cf *Guide* I, 52, p 114 “The first group is characterized by having its definition predicated of it—as when it is predicated of man that he is a rational living being.”

⁵⁹ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* VII, 10, 1034b20-25.

⁶⁰ *Dux Neutrorum*, lib.I, cap.LI, fol.18: “Quoniam creator non habet causas priores, quae sunt causae essentiae ipsius, quibus definiatur seu terminetur. Ideoque scitum est ab omnibus qui considerant veritatem: quia creator non habet terminum seu definitionem. » Cf *Guide* I, 52, p 115.

⁶¹ Goodman, Lenn E, “God and the Good Life: Maimonides’ Virtue Ethics and the Idea of Perfection,” p 129.

connection” with what they are predicated. This, as an attribute, measures another thing in respect of quantity.⁶² Maimonides gives the example of man who is defined as a rational being. As already seen, animal and rational, belong to genus and species respectively. By the fact of calling man a rational being, makes him a being composed of rationality. This demands that reason must be part of every being in whom humanity resides. Such an attribute should not be predicated of God “for if He has a part of an essence, His essence must be composite.”⁶³ But God’s essence is not composite otherwise He would be caused by something other than Him. Essences are what make a thing what it is. Under the anonymous influence of Avicenna, Maimonides appreciates the distinction between essence and existence in composite beings, the distinction he readily applies to a great effect in his treatment of the nature of God and his relation to creatures.⁶⁴ Essence and existence composition makes a contingent being.

1.1.1.3 The Attribute of Quality:

Quality is the next group of predicates that Maimonides rejects. They are attributes that neither constitute nor perfect the essence of a thing. Thus when predicated of a thing, quality acts as an addition to the essence of a thing and further underlines the compositeness of the thing on which it is added. God is not a composite being and cannot be predicated of accidental attributes.

Thus, if an attribute belonging to this group would subsist in Him, may He be exalted, He would be a substratum of accidents. This is sufficient to show how far from His true reality and essence this is, I mean the supposition that He is endowed with quality.⁶⁵

The attribute of quality acts as an accident upon a thing and thus, describes a thing in non-essential terms. Other terms that fall under this attribute are quantities, dispositions, habits and the like. They have nothing to do with the essence of a thing and thus cannot constitute a thing.

⁶² Aristotle, *Metaphysics* VII, 10, 1035a1-5.

⁶³ *Dux Neutrorum*, lib.I, cap.LI, fol.18: “quoniam si ipse fuerit pars substantiae, erit eius substantia composita.” Cf *Guide* I, 52, p 115.

⁶⁴ Cf Alexander Altmann, “Essence and Existence in Maimonides,” pp 148-165.

⁶⁵ *Dux Neutrorum*, lib.I, cap.LI, fol.18: “Quod si talis attributio conveniat creatori, locus est accidentibus: vel satis apparet ex hoc elongatio eius unitatis et substantiae si habuerit qualitatem. » Cf *Guide* I, 52, p 115.

1.1.1.4 The Attribute of Relation:

The attribute of relation has been a hot bed of contention between scholars. Relation establishes a common link between one thing and the other. It does establish not *what* a thing is but *how* it compares to other things.⁶⁶ This common link could be that of similarity and dissimilarity, or that of dependency and necessity or that of priority and posteriority between the two related terms. This type of relation of similarity, and of priority and posteriority exists between for example, a father and a son. In that example, the term ‘father’ has a meaning only with reference to some other object ‘son.’⁶⁷ There is a form of mutual dependency between the related terms. Neo-Platonists have argued for the relation between God and the world such that the world necessarily exists on the existence of a necessary God. Even Aristotle’s argument for the eternity of the world, logically presumes this relation of dependency and necessity in which the non-existence of one member, would entail that of the other such that, the world would not exist unless God exists.⁶⁸ This is actually the major contention of Maimonides in denying the attribute of relation to God. That’s why he clearly defines the question:

The subject of investigation and speculation is therefore the question whether there is between Him, may He be exalted, and any of the substances created by Him a true relation of some kind so that this relation be predicated of Him.⁶⁹

Maimonides considers three modes of relation: temporal, spatial and reciprocal.⁷⁰ Harry Wolfson mentions a fourth that he calls ‘comparative’ relation.⁷¹ Relation as an attribute does not necessarily constitute multiplicity or change in the essence of the thing of which it is predicated and would thus, appear permissible when predicated of God. But Maimonides thinks that with greater “exactness in speculation,” the inappropriateness of predicating this attribute of God

⁶⁶ Buijs, Joseph A., “A Maimonidean Critique of Thomistic Analogy,” *Journal of History of Philosophy*, vol. 41, no. 4, 2003, p 454.

⁶⁷ Maimonides’ *Treatise on Logic*, p 56.

⁶⁸ *Dux Neutorum*, lib.I, cap.LXVIII, fol.27: “Dicunt enim quod si dixerimus quod Creator est causa, sequitur ut causatum sit: et hoc inducit antiquitatem mundi: et quod mundus est creatus necessario.” Cf. *Guide* I, 69, p 167.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* lib.I, cap.LI, fol.19: “Locus autem inquisitionis et considerationis est ad sciendum si est aliqua comparatio vera inter creatorem et aliquam de substantiis creatis: ut ex ea denominetur creator.” Cf *Guide* I. 52, p 117.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*: “cum dicitur Pater alicuius vel socius, vel quod fuit in tali tempore, vel in tali loco.” Cf *Guide* I, 52, p 117 “For instance, it is related to a time or to a place or to another individual, as for instance when you predicate of Zayd that he is the father of a certain individual or the partner of a certain individual or an inhabitant of a certain place or one who was at a certain time.”

⁷¹ Wolfson, Harry A., “Crescas on the Problem of Divine Attributes,” in *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, vol. 7, 1, (1916) p 14.

would be clearly seen. On the grounds of incorporeality, God cannot have any temporal or spatial relations with anything outside of Himself. Time is an accident of motion which in its turn is a property attached to bodies. God is not a body and this nullifies the relation of time predicated of Him. The same argument nullifies a spatial relation in Him. Can there then be any relation of reciprocity between God and His creation? Maimonides argues that no such relation could exist between a necessary being and a contingent being. The terms of relation do not simply exist. Maimonides appeals to the logic of Aristotle to clarify his position. Relation according to Aristotle can be established only between two things under the same species, and none can be established between things in the same genus. Green cannot be compared to red though they both fall under the same genus of colour.

How then could there subsist a relation between Him ... and any of the things created by Him, given the immense difference between them with regard to the reality of their existence, than which there is no greater difference?⁷²

If a relation were to subsist between God and His creation, it would necessarily follow that the accident of relation must be attached to God. By this, Maimonides rejects any form of analogy between God and His creation. Later, we shall see how Aquinas rejects this Maimonidean position and insists on the importance of analogy as a proper tool for expressing God-creature relationship. Thus, the first four attributes are nullified by Maimonides. Before examining the attribute of action and what makes it an acceptable form of attribute that can be predicated of God, we recapitulate the major reasons why Maimonides found the other four attributes inadmissible in God. The first two attributes of definition and parts of definition, assume to indicate the essence of a thing while the third attribute of quality attempts introducing accidents into God. Whichever way you look at it, it is not acceptable to Maimonides when they are predicated of God. To indicate the essence of a thing is to reveal it as caused and composed. God cannot be reduced to a mere corporeal being. To introduce accidents into God is also to make God a composite being. The attribute of relation introduces an element of similarity, and things are said to be similar when they have something either essential or accidental common to them. Thus Maimonides rejects the four affirmative attributes because they introduce in God:

⁷²*Dux Neutorum*, lib.I, cap.LI, fol.19: "Quod cum ita sit, quomodo erit comparatio inter creatorem et aliquam creaturam, cum tanta sit differentia inter ipsum et creaturas in veritate essentiae, qua non potest esse maior?" Cf *Guide* I. 52, p 118.

corporeality, affections, potentiality and similarity.⁷³ The first three attributes introduce composition in God and the attribute of relation introduces similarity between God and His creatures. But composition and similarity are two terms that militate against the absolute simplicity of God. This for Maimonides is not negotiable.

He, who believes in this doctrine, was not led to it by intellectual speculation; he merely followed the external sense of the texts of the Scriptures. This is also the case with regard to the attributes.⁷⁴

Does then the attribute of action respect the absolute simplicity of God?

1.1.1.5 The Attribute of Actions:

Actions are the only attributes that Maimonides allows to be predicated of God. Before Maimonides, all his Jewish, Christian and Moslem predecessors included actions under the relation of ‘agent and patient.’⁷⁵ Avicenna considers actions to be relations and as such permissible attributes of God.⁷⁶ Such relation as that of father to son not only expresses similarity but also introduces causality.⁷⁷ Maimonides broke away from that tradition and posits action in its right as a positive attribute that can be predicated of God. Beneath the facial presentation of action as the fifth attribute, lies a properly thought out logical argumentation of the very meaning and significance of this attribute predicated of God. In the observation of Wolfson, “particularly

⁷³Ibid. lib.I, cap.LIIII, fol.21: “Quatuor autem ista sunt haec. Primum quod inducit corporeitatem. Secundum ex quo sequitur ut sit operatus et mutabilis. Tertium quod inducit privationem: ac si esset aliquid in eo in potentia et postea in actu. Quartum quod inducit assimilationem eius ad creata sua, et hoc est totum de utilitatibus communibus quae proveniunt ex scientia naturali in sapientiam divinam.” Cf *Guide* I, 55, p 128.

⁷⁴Ibid. lib.I, cap.LII, fol.19: “Non enim credentem corporeitatem induxit ad hoc consideratio intelligibilis: sed plana scripturae et eadem est in dispositionibus et nominationibus.” Cf *Guide* I, 53, p 119.

⁷⁵ Wolfson, Harry A, “The Aristotelian Predicables and Maimonides’ Division of Attributes,” in I. Twersky and G. Williams, eds., *Studies in the History of Philosophy and Religion*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1977) pp 186-187.

⁷⁶ Averroes, *Ibid*, Fifth Discussion, paragraph 306. Cf Wolfson, Harry A, “Avicenna, Algazali and Averroes on Divine Attributes,” in *Studies in the History of Philosophy of Religion*, vol I, pp 143-169. Note especially two types of divine predicates: i, “those which show what belongs to Him in virtue of himself (or in virtue of his essence), and not in virtue of His being related to some other thing;” ii, “those which show what belongs to Him by His relation to some other thing outside himself.” Now by the second type of predicates, the relational, he means actions...” pp 150-151.

⁷⁷ Feldman argues that this distinction between action and relation was at the heart of the scholastics’ misinterpretation or failure to appreciate Maimonides’ theory of attributes. Cf., Seymour Feldman, “A Scholastic Misinterpretation of Maimonides’ Doctrine of Divine Attributes,” in Jacob I. Dienstag, ed., *Studies in Maimonides and St. Thomas Aquinas*, (New York: Ktav Publishing House, Inc., 1975) pp 58-59.

new is his treatment of attributes as a problem of logical judgment.”⁷⁸ It is in this logical sense that we are going to pursue our understanding of action as an attribute. Following Aristotle and the early Arabic philosophers, Maimonides treats action as a second adjacent and not a third adjacent proposition.⁷⁹ In his *Treatise on the Art of Logic*, Maimonides presents the logical explanation this way:

Every proposition whose predicate is a verb, or a verb accompanied by other words, we call binary, be it in the affirmative or in the negative; e.g. ‘Zayd stood,’ ‘Zayd killed Abu-Bekr,’ ‘Zayd did not stand,’ or ‘He did not kill Abu-Bekr.’ All those propositions we call binary because, they require no third element to connect the predicate with the subject. But when the predicate of the proposition is a noun, we call it a trinary proposition. Thus, when we say ‘Zayd-standing,’ the expression does not indicate the connection of the predicate of this proposition with its subject as to tense ... We must therefore have a third expression which will connect the predicate with the subject; e.g., ‘Zayd is now standing,’ ‘Zayd was standing,’ or ‘Zayd will be standing’; though it is immaterial whether this expression is or is not explicitly stated. Hence we call it trinary.⁸⁰

Maimonides distinguishes clearly between action as a quality, and action as an attribute. By action as a quality, Maimonides does mean the existence of:

The habitus of an art that belongs to him who is described—as when you say a carpenter or a smith—inasmuch as this belongs to the species of quality.⁸¹

Action as a quality is always expressed in a proposition of the trinary type, as e.g., “A is a carpenter,” “A is a smith.” By the simple reason that this kind of proposition implies the presence of a habit or disposition or natural power in the subject to which the action is

⁷⁸ Wolfson, Harry A., “The Aristotelian Predicables and Maimonides’ Division of Attributes,” p 161.

⁷⁹ The full logical implication of divine attributes as Maimonides appropriates it from Aristotle is exposed by Harry A. Wolfson “The Aristotelian Predicables and Maimonides’ Division of Attributes,” pp 161-194. ‘He talks of logical proposition of the second adjacent and that of the third adjacent. When the predicate is connected with its subject by the copula ‘is,’ it is a proposition of the third adjacent. Example is “A is standing,” “A was standing,” “A will be standing.” And when the predicate and the copula are combined into one word which Aristotle refers to as ‘a verb,’ it is the proposition of a second adjacent.’ Example is “A stood,” “A killed.” This proposition of the second adjacent is how Maimonides understands the attribute of action. pp 188 -191.

⁸⁰ Maimonides’ *Treatise on Logic*, p 37.

⁸¹ *Dux Neutrorum*, lib.I, cap.LI, fol.19: “sicut si dicere, Carpenterius faber ferrarius, quoniam ista sunt de uno genere qualitatis.” Cf *Guide I*, 52, p 118.

attributed,⁸² it cannot logically be attributed to God since it tries to designate the essence of the subject and indicate the inherence of the predicate or the quality in the subject. It signifies a continuous, descriptive action and thus an imperfection. On the contrary, action as an attribute is to be understood as a binary proposition where the predicate is a verb and the action attributed to the subject is taken as discrete or immediate and perfective without any implication of the existence of habit or disposition of natural power. ‘Action as an attribute designates the products or effects of an essence. It does not say what the subject is, but what it did or may do.’⁸³ By making references to habit and disposition, Maimonides distinguishes between human agency and divine agency. Habits, dispositions introduce complexity and mutability in humans, whereas their absence in God is the evidence that ‘actions are a reflection of His absolute simplicity and essence.’⁸⁴ For example Zayd carpentered this door; Zayd built that wall or wove that garment. The attribute of action in the sense explained by Maimonides, is remote from the essence of the thing of which it is predicated and adds nothing to that essence. It describes “the action that he who is described has performed.”⁸⁵ Because of this, it is permitted that this kind be predicated of God. The diverse actions of Zayd do not come from different notions subsisting within the same essence of Zayd. They are diverse actions carried out by one and the same Zayd. Maimonides notes that “there need not be a diversity in the notions subsisting in an agent because of the diversity of his various actions.”⁸⁶ In a natural agent deprived of will, we could still see a diversity of actions proceeding from it. Fire has it in its nature to burn, to cook, to blacken, to bleach, to harden and to melt. All these diverse actions proceed from one quality of fire, namely heat. They do not describe what fire is but what fire does. They do not come from multiple qualities existing in fire, one by which it burns, another by which it darkens and yet, another by which it melts. The same could be said even of an agent that exercises will and more still, of He who is above every attributive qualification. The diverse actions do not introduce multiplicity in the essence of the agent. Maimonides gives another example with the human rational faculty. It

⁸² Maimonides’ *Treatise on Logic*, p. 37 ‘The copulas in a trinary proposition, e.g. ‘was,’ ‘is,’ ‘will be,’ ‘became,’ ‘existed,’ and their derivatives indicate the inherence of the predicate in the subject at a particular time.’

⁸³ Buijs, Joseph A, “Attributes of Action in Maimonides,” in *Vivarium* 27, 2, 1989, p 94.

⁸⁴ Leaman, O, *Moses Maimonides*, p 27.

⁸⁵ *Dux Neutorum*, lib.I, cap.LI, fol.19: “Sed intention mea est de opera operato: sicut si diceres, Iacob qui fecit istam portam, vel illam turrim...quae sunt remota a substantia nominati.” Cf *Guide* I, 52, p 118. The action described is ontologically different from the subject of the action.

⁸⁶ *Dux Neutorum*, lib.I, cap.LII, fol.19: “In variatione autem operum operatorum non variantur modi operatorum.” Cf *Guide* I, 53, p 120.

is through the same rational faculty that man acquires the sciences and the arts, sews, carpenters, weaves, builds, knows and governs the city. “Those very different actions, however, proceed from one simple faculty in which no multiplicity is posited.”⁸⁷ It is not inadmissible therefore, that the attribute of action, should be predicated of God from whose simple essence diverse actions could proceed.

Every attribute that is found in the books of the deity, may He be exalted, is therefore an attribute of His action and not an attribute of His essence, or it is indicative of absolute perfection.⁸⁸

Maimonides argues that we ascribe to God the attribute from which His action proceeds and even apply the name deriving from such action to God. For example, God is said to be *merciful* (attribute) and *pities* (the name) His children, just *like a father is said to be merciful and pities his own son*. Maimonides points out however, that it is not that God is affected nor does he have compassion but:

An action similar to that which proceeds from a father in respect to his child and is attached to compassion, pity, and an absolute passion proceeds from Him, may He be exalted, in reference to His holy ones, not because of a passion or a change.⁸⁹

The numerous emotions attributed to God in the Scriptures, especially the thirteen characteristics in *Exodus* 34: 6-7, describe the attributes of God’s actions and not His qualities.⁹⁰ Thus, attribute of action, unlike every other attribute predicated of God, respects and upholds the absolute simplicity and the unity of God. Life, knowledge, power, and will should not be considered as diverse notions or attributes in God. These should be understood as actions which “proceed from one simple essence in which no multiplicity is posited and to which no notion is superadded.”⁹¹

⁸⁷Ibid: “omnia ista opera tam diversa sequuntur ex una potentia simplici: in qua non est multitudo.” Cf *Guide* I, 53, p 121.

⁸⁸ Ibid: “Ideoque omnes nominationes quae inveniuntur in libris attributae creatori, nominabunt opera, non substantia ipsius. Vel ponuntur ad significandum perfectionem definitam.” Cf *Guide* I, 53, p 121.

⁸⁹Ibid. lib.I, cap.LIII, fol.20: “sed sicut opus quod provenit a patre super filium: quod est magnae pietatis et gratiae ab anima operata vere: sic provenit a creatore in amicos et dilectos ipsius, non quod ipse sit operatus vel mutabilis.” Cf *Guide* I, 54, p 125.

⁹⁰ Ibid. fol.21: “Et dixerunt sapientes: Sicut ille est graciosus, sic et tu eris graciosus: sicut ille pius, sic et tu. Ratio autem est quod istae dispositiones quae attribuuntur ei, sunt dispositiones operum suorum, non quod ipse sit qualitibus subiectus. » Cf *Guide* I, 54, p 128.

⁹¹Ibid. lib.I, cap.LI, fol.19: “proveniant ab una substantia simplici in qua nulla est multitudo: nec aliquid additum super ipsam.” Cf *Guide* I, 53, p. 121. Later, he would argue that these attributes are predicated purely equivocally of

These so-called ‘divine attributes’ are in fact divine actions in the world. They give us knowledge about the world and nothing about the divine essence. When the Scriptures describe the ways and the characteristics of God, they should be understood as God’s actions in reference to the world. Positive attributes as exposed by Maimonides, pretend to show what can neither be shown nor be known, that is, the essence of God. They introduce a “that” to the “what” of God. They indicate part of an object that is sought, “that part being either a part of its substance or one of its accidents.”⁹² For this reason, positive attributes are proscribed since in their attempts to make known the unknowable essence of God, they introduce composition and similarity in the otherwise absolutely simple, unique and transcendent God. The only exception is the attribute of action. How do negative attributes help us talk about God?

1.1.2 The Negative Attributes of God

Negative attributes or attributes of negation do not give us knowledge in any respect whatever of the essence the knowledge of which is sought.⁹³ When it comes to God, the only thing that we know is that He is and cannot know what His quiddity is. Negative attributes conduct the mind to that which must be believed of God. The more negations are assembled of a thing, the more indirect knowledge one has of it. That is the thinking Maimonides takes into his description of negative attribution which he earlier defines as “that which negates something of something”⁹⁴ He gives us a parable of a series of men who by a series of negations, succeed in arriving at an approximate meaning of the word ‘ship.’ The first ascertains that ship is not an accidental quality. The second thinks that it is not a mineral, while the third ascertains that it is not a living being. For the fourth and the fifth men, it is neither a plant nor a body respectively. The sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth and tenth determine successively that the shape of a ship is not flat,

God and other things “so that their meaning when they are predicated of Him is in no way like their meaning in other applications.” Cf *Guide* I, 56, p 131. He would also reinterpret these attributes negatively.

⁹²Ibid, lib.I, cap.LVII, fol.22: “quia attributiones licet non sint determinatae: significant tamen aliquid de universitate rei cuius cognitio quaeritur: vel aliqua de substantia ipsius: vel aliquod accidens de accidentibus ipsius. » Cf *Guide* I, 58, p 135.

⁹³Ibid: “Negationes vero non significant de substantia quaesita quid sit aliquo modo: nisi per viam accidentis: sicut ostendimus in exemplo.” Cf *Guide* I, 58, p 135.

⁹⁴ Maimonides’ *Treatise on Logic*, p 35.

spherical, conical, circular and square, and that it is not all solid.⁹⁵ These men approximately arrived at the knowledge of what a ship is and the last man specially, attained equality with one who has represented the ship by means of affirmative attributes as being of hollow, oblong and elongated body of pieces of timber fitted together.⁹⁶ In the same way, negative attributes make one come nearer to the cognition and apprehension of God.⁹⁷ It purifies our concept of God by the continuous denial of all that is corporeal about Him. For Maimonides then, attribution by negation “consists in our negating with reference to God some notion of which it has been learnt by means of demonstration that it cannot possibly be ascribed to God.”⁹⁸ Thus, when we say that He exists, we mean that His nonexistence is impossible; that He is living means that He is not dead; that He is eternal means that there is no cause that has brought Him into existence; that He is perfect means that there is no imperfection in Him. That God is necessary existence in the identity of His essence means that other existents flow from Him not by necessity but by His own ordered will. Because of this, we say that he is “powerful and knowing and willing.” The goal of ascribing these attributes to Him is to signify “that He is neither powerless nor ignorant nor inattentive nor negligent.” Each of these attributes means something different when ascribed to God:

That He is not powerless is to signify that His existence suffices for bringing into existence of things other than He... that He is not ignorant is to signify that he apprehends—that is, living ... that He is not inattentive or negligent is to signify that all the existing things ... proceed ... according to a certain order and governance ... as all the things are generated that a willing being governs by means of purpose and will.⁹⁹

⁹⁵*Dux Neutrorum*, lib.I, cap.LVIII, fol.23: “Cogitavi animo quod quidam homo scit in veritate quod navis est in mundo inuenta, sed non vidit eam: et ignorat cui conveniat hoc nomen: utrum sit substantia an accidens. Postea probatum est. Alii quod non est accidens. Alii vero quod non est de genere metallorum. Alii autem quod non est res viva. Alii vero quod non est planta quae terrae adhaereat. Alii autem quod non est corpus viuum coniunctione naturali. Alii vero quod non est figurae latae sicut ostium. Alii vero quod non est cauata. Alii autem quod non est rotunda, vel quadrata : alii quod non est alterius figurae. Ecce iam scis quod ille ultimus scit formam navis sicut est per supradictas negationes. » Cf *Guide* I, 60, p 143.

⁹⁶ Ibid. « Et qui opinatur quod est corpus ligneum, concavum, longum, compactum ex multis lignis, est aequalis ei qui scit navem per nomina attributiva. » Cf *Guide* I, 60, p 143-44.

⁹⁷ Ibid. « Sic ergo negationes applicabunt te cognitioni Creatoris. » Cf *Guide* I, 60, p 144.

⁹⁸Ibid. lib.I, cap.LVIII, fol.22: “erit conclusio ipsius scientiae totius prohibere et remove illud de quo scitur per probationem quod vanitas est ipsum attribuere Creatori.” Cf *Guide* I, 59, p 138.

⁹⁹Ibid. lib.I, cap.LVII, fol.22: “Quod autem dicimus, quia non est piger: hoc est, quia sua essentia sufficiens est ut faciat alia esse extra ipsum, quod autem dicimus, quia non est stultus: hoc est quia est appraehensor idest viuus: quia omnis appraehensor est viuus. Et quod diximus, quia non est impetuusus: hoc est creata ordinantur et reguntur:

The production of things by God is according to God's will and order. They do not exist in a haphazard and random fashion but according to governance. No other being is like God and that explains why 'He is one' means 'there is no multiplicity in Him.' Negative attribution safeguards the uniqueness and absolute simplicity of God.

Life, power, knowledge and will are traditionally considered as essential attributes that are identical with the being of God. Maimonides considers them as divine actions and has a warning for all those who understand them literally as divine attributes. He says that we must understand that these notions are not ascribed to God and to us the same way. In what follows, we shall examine the various ways by which things can be predicated of God.

According to Maimonides, in his treatment of this issue in the *Art of Logic*, words in all languages are divided into three classes: "distinct," "synonymous," and "homonyms,"¹⁰⁰ (equivocal). When different words have different meanings, they are called distinct. When several words have the same meaning, they are synonymous; and when one word has several meanings, it is a homonym, that is, an equivocal. The homonyms are further divided into six classes: absolute homonyms, univocals, amphibolous, general-particular, metaphorical and extended terms. But it is only the first three that are relevant in Maimonides's discussion of modes by which things can be predicated of God. He defines an absolutely equivocal term as:

One applied to two things, between which there is nothing in common to account for their common name, like the name '*ain* signifying an eye and a spring of water, and like the name *keleb* (dog) applied to the star and to the animal.¹⁰¹

Equivocal terms have nothing in common either in essential or in non essential properties. They have "in common only the name and nothing else."¹⁰² Does this difference in meaning qualify terms applied to God and other beings, to be understood in purely equivocal manner? Perhaps, Maimonides will clarify this later in the discussion.

neque sunt creata casu: sed quicquid voluit Creator in eis facere, est cum intentione et voluntate recta. » Cf *Guide* I, 58, p 136.

¹⁰⁰ Maimonides' *Treatise on Logic*, p 59.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² *Dux Neutrorum*, lib.I, cap.LV, fol.21: "ut sciatur quod inter istas dispositiones quae attribuuntur ei, et inter alias dispositiones quae apud nos sunt, nulla est participatio nisi in nomine tantum quod si ita est : » Cf *Guide* I, 56, p 131.

A term is used univocally when there is something which constitutes the essence of two or more things, and that term refers to each one of these things that share in that constitutive essence; e.g., the term ‘animal,’ which is applied to man, horse, scorpion, and fish, because life which is nourishability is found in each one of these species and constitutes its essence.¹⁰³

Things that share the same essence or are “comprised in the same definition” are understood univocally.¹⁰⁴ We recall that it is the function of the attribute of definition to ‘indicate the essence and true reality of a thing.’¹⁰⁵ That means that the attributes by which a thing is defined constitute its essence. Animal is used of both man and horse because animal life is part of both man and horse and enter into the constitution of their essence. Does God share the same essence with other beings as for terms to be predicated of both univocally? Maimonides disagrees since God’s essential attributes of “knowledge,” “power,” “will,” and “life,” (according to those who consider that there are essential attributes), “must not be like the attributes of other beings and must not be comprised in the same definition, just as His essence... is necessarily not like other essences.”¹⁰⁶ Univocal predication cannot apply to both God and other beings. Maimonides argues that such terms cannot even be understood comparatively in the sense that in God they are more perfect, greater, more permanent, or more durable than in human beings. To make them comparative terms would be to place both God and human beings in the same definition. But this is not possible since God and human beings do not exist either under the same definition of essence or existence and thus the impossibility of comparing knowledge in God with knowledge in man. Can they be predicated amphibolously of both God and human beings? Maimonides tells us that an amphibolous term is:

A term applied to two or more objects because of something which they have in common but which does not constitute the essence of each one of them. An example of this is the

¹⁰³ Maimonides’ *Treatise on Logic*, p 59.

¹⁰⁴ *Dux Neutorum*, lib.I, cap.LV, fol.21: “et quod non coniungat eas eadem diffinitio.” Cf *Guide* I, 56, p 131.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. lib.I, cap.LI, fol.18: “Et haec attributio seu nominatio demonstrat quiditatem rei et veritatem eius.” Cf *Guide* I, 52, p 114: “The first group is characterized by having its definition predicated of it—as when it is predicated of man that he is a rational living being.”

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. lib.I, cap.LV, fol.21: “sicut sequitur quod eius substantia non est similis aliis substantiis: sic etiam necesse est quod eius dispositiones, quas ipsi credunt, nullis aliis assimilentur dispositionibus: et quod non coniungat eas eadem diffinitio. » Cf *Guide* I, 56, p 131.

name 'man' given to Reuben, the rational animal, to a certain man who is dead, and to an image of man carved in wood or painted.¹⁰⁷

The major characteristic of an amphibolous term is the non-essential property that qualifies it. E.g., is the name 'man' given to various objects, animate and inanimate, that share the figure and the outline of a man.; but the figure and outline do not constitute the meaning or the essence of man. The figure and the outline are mere accidental features of man. An amphibolous term in effect, takes something of univocal in the sense that it is applied to objects that have something in common; and it takes something of purely equivocal in the sense that the essence of one is different from that of the other. It is the same explanation that Maimonides gives in the *Guide*.¹⁰⁸ The conclusion is that God does not have accidental attributes and cannot thus have any relation of similarity with other beings. Hence, amphibolous predication does not and cannot apply to God and creatures since there is no basis for such a predication. All "men engaged in speculation" hold this truth. The logical conclusion of this exposition is that since God shares with other beings neither in essential nor in accidental (non-essential) qualities, terms are to be predicated of both God and creatures in a purely equivocal way. Maimonides states it clearly:

Similarly the terms "knowledge," "power," "will," and "life," as applied to Him, may He be exalted, and to all those possessing knowledge, power, will, and life, are purely equivocal, so that their meaning when they are predicated of Him is in no way like their meaning in other applications.¹⁰⁹

This equivocation is because the divine essence is neither constituted by essential attributes which could have allowed for a univocal predication nor qualified by accidental attributes on the basis of which there could have been amphibolous predication.¹¹⁰ Maimonides calls the denial of essential attributes to God a primary intelligible since an attribute is a certain mode of the

¹⁰⁷ Maimonides' *Treatise on Logic*, p 60.

¹⁰⁸ *Dux Neutorum*, lib.I, cap.LV, fol.21: "Nec putes quod illa nomina ambigua: vel per transsumptionem dicta quia nomina quae sic dicuntur conveniunt in duobus inter quae est similitudo aliquo modo: et illud in quo conveniunt est accidens, et non intrat in substantiam alicuius istorum." Cf *Guide* I, 56, p 131.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid: "Similiter etiam sapiens, potens, viuus, et volens non dicitur de eo: sed de omni alio cui conveniunt nisi aequivoce pure : quia inter ipsum et alia nulla est similitudo aliquo modo. » Cf *Guide* I, 56, p 131.

¹¹⁰ Ibid. lib.I, cap.LVII, fol.22: "Et idcirco non conuenit ei agnominatio attributiva: quia non habet essentiam quae exigat terminum quidditatis: nisi agnominatio significat illam: quod si ita est, nulla agnominatio conuenit ei aliquo modo. » Cf *Guide* I, 58, p 135: "For He has no "That" outside of His "What," and hence an attribute cannot be indicative of one of the two;"

essence and hence an accident.¹¹¹ If attributes were to be the essence of a thing, we have already seen that it would be logically tautologous as if you were to say that the essence of man is man. But, if attributes were to be the explanation of a term, e.g., ‘man is a rational living being’ where ‘rational being’ is the essence and the true reality of man, Maimonides thinks that it is possible to predicate such an attribute to God.¹¹² Thus when ‘life,’ ‘will,’ ‘power,’ are attributed to God, they do not indicate ‘What’ the essence of God is, but, they indicate what God is not.

Accordingly we say of Him, because of these notions, that He is powerful and knowing and willing. The intention in ascribing these attributes to Him is to signify that He is neither powerless nor ignorant nor inattentive nor negligent.¹¹³

Refusing any form of positive attribution to the essence of God, Maimonides insists that such attributes in relation to God must signify negatively as in ‘the negation of the privation’ of the attributes in question or be understood as actions.¹¹⁴ Privations being of different kinds, Maimonides specifies the kind of privation he means by adding: “one sometimes denies with reference to a thing something that cannot fittingly exist in it. Thus we say of a wall that it is not endowed with sight.”¹¹⁵ What does he mean by this?

This brings us to the teaching of Aristotle on privations that we came across in our discussion of evil as privation of the good that a subject should normally possess. Privation is considered as nonbeing not in the sense of absolute non existence but in the sense of a lack of what should be in a determined subject.¹¹⁶ For example is the attribute of sight. We say the dragon does not see and we can also say that stones do not see. They are both privations but in a different sense. The

¹¹¹Ibid. lib.I, cap.L, fol.18: “dispositio est res adiuncta substantiae, et est accidens.” Cf *Guide* I, 51, p 112.

¹¹² Ibid: “hoc est homo de quo dicitur animal et rationale. Sed si dicatur quod ratio huius attributionis est tantummodo expositio nominis. » Cf *Guide* I, 51, p 113.

¹¹³ Ibid. lib.I, cap.LVII, fol.22: “Et propter istas rationes dicimus de eo: quia est potens, et sapiens, et volens. Nostra vero intentio est in istis agnominibus quod non est piger, nec insipiens, nec impetuosus sine ratione. » Cf *Guide* I, 58, p 136.

¹¹⁴Ibid: “Iam patet igitur quod agnominatio attributa creatori: vel sumitur ab opere: vel erit eius ratio impossibilitas suae privationis, si fuerit intentio in illa appraehensio suae substantiae non operis. » Cf *Guide* I, 58, p 136. Maimonides would interpret these notions either as attributes of action that we have seen above, or in this case, as negative attributes of God. As Maimonides says in a later chapter of *Guide* I, “in God ..., there is nothing belonging to the same species as the attributes that are regarded by us as perfections, but that all these attributes are deficiencies with regard to God.” Cf. *Guide* I, 59, p 143.

¹¹⁵Ibid: “Ista vero nomina negativa non consueverunt attribui creatori: nisi secundum modum secundum quem removetur aliquid ab alio: quod non est aptum ut inveniatur in ipso: sicut dicitur quod paries non videt.” Cf *Guide* I, 58, p 136.

¹¹⁶ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* V, 22, 1022b20-1023a5.

lack of sight does not mean the same thing for the two species. In the case of dragon, sight belongs properly to it and to a class of beings that are called dragons. It is privation when dragon is lacking sight. On the other hand, in the case of stone, it does not belong to it to have sight and is called a ‘negation of the privation of the attribute in question.’ Thus in Maimonides’s application, God is not the sort of thing that has or fails to have any predicate that we might apply to Him. By the application of negations of privation to Him, Maimonides reiterates his rejection of any positive attribution to God. But a critical overlook at the doctrine of negation adopted by Maimonides, would suggest that the God whose image Maimonides projects in his doctrine, is one devoid of any meaning and for whom there exists no form of personal relationship with creation.

Another alternative is to interpret such attributes as actions of God. We have seen that there are two types of propositions: trinary and binary propositions. In trinary propositions e.g., ‘God is willing,’ or ‘God is living,’ there is the inherence of the predicate in the subject¹¹⁷. This inherence of the predicate introduces ontological multiplicity in the subject and this is against the absolute simplicity of God. To predicate attributes like “life,” “power,” “will,” and “knowledge,” of the essence of God is to introduce plurality in the divine essence. If, on the other hand, these attributes are understood in the form of binary propositions whose predicates are verbs or verbs accompanied by other words, there wouldn’t be any form of inherence of the predicate in the subject and thus, no risk of introducing ontological plurality in the subject. For example, ‘Zayd built this door,’ ‘Zayd wove this garment.’ “The predicate is remote from the essence of the thing of which it is predicated.”¹¹⁸ The action described is ontologically different from the subject of the action. The actions performed may be diverse, but they all come from one essence in which there is no multiplicity. Hence on this issue, Maimonides’s position quoted earlier on remains applicable:

¹¹⁷ Maimonides’ *Treatise on Logic*, p 37.

¹¹⁸ *Dux Neutrorum*, lib.I, cap.LI, fol.19: “Sicut di diceres, Iacob qui fecit istam portam, vel illa turrim, vel texuit pannum istum, et similia istis quae sunt remota a substantia nominati.” Cf *Guide I*, 52, p 119.

Every attribute that is found in the books of the deity, may He be exalted, is therefore an attribute of His action and not an attribute of His essence, or it is indicative of absolute perfection.¹¹⁹

Would such interpretations then be the alternative to equivocal predication? It doesn't seem to us that Maimonides sees them as alternatives. Rather, Maimonides would see the interpretation of the attributes as actions or as negations, as the logical culmination of equivocal predication which does not admit of any form of either essential or non-essential (accidental) properties between God and creatures. God is ontologically unique and there is nothing that can be said of Him. Ultimately, Maimonides maintains that the only response to divine predication is "silence with regard to You is praise."¹²⁰ The radical implications of this linguistic analysis cannot be ignored. We shall still examine this in the latter part of our research.

Finally, why would Maimonides hold on to the two attributes—action and negation as worthy of being predicated of God? The response has been given in our discussions above. What purpose does the dual interpretation serve? The negative attribution as said above, serves a theological function of finding the right language that expresses the true reality about God.¹²¹ As for the attributes of action, Maimonides seems to suggest that they serve a political purpose.¹²² This strengthens the logic that divine providence should be considered as an attribute of action in the sense that it comes from the essence of God without revealing what that essence is. Does Maimonides treat providence as belonging to political philosophy? Leo Strauss is of that conviction since Maimonides, in his *Dux Neutorum*, does not treat of divine providence and omniscience in a context that may properly be called theological.¹²³

¹¹⁹Ibid. lib.I, cap.LII, fol.19: "Ideoque omnes nominationes quae inveniuntur in libris attributae creatori, nominabunt opera, non substantiam ipsius." Cf *Guide I*, 53, p 121.

¹²⁰Ibid. Lib.I, cap.LVIII, fol.22: "tibi silentium laus, id est tacere laus tibi." Cf *Guide I*, 59, p 139.

¹²¹Ibid. lib.I, cap.LVII, fol.22: "Verum negativae affirmationes sunt necessariae intellectui, in quibus laborat ut per eas demonstret quod oportet credi de Creatore, ex parte quarum non accidit ei multitudo aliquo modo: et significant intellectui finem eius quod homo potest apprehendere de Creatore." Cf *Guide I*, 58, p 135. "As for the negative attributes, they are those that must be believed with regard to Him, may He be exalted, for no notion of multiplicity can attach to Him in any respect on account of them; and moreover, they conduct the mind towards the utmost reach that man may attain in the apprehension of Him, may He be exalted."

¹²²Ibid. lib.I, cap.LV, fol.20: "Et non addidit amplius: et quod sunt necessariae in regimine civitatis." Cf *Guide I*, 54, pp 127-128. Joseph Buijs observes that "attributes of action serve a practical function, the imitation of God within human lives." Cf. "Attributes of Action in Maimonides," p 101.

¹²³ Strauss, Leo, *Maimonide*, (Paris: PUF, 1988) pp 183-195.

2.0 Aquinas on the Nature of God

The basic assumption that Aquinas takes into his discussion of God is that one cannot know what a thing is unless it is determined that it actually exists.¹²⁴ Any discussion of the essence of God must first have to determine that God exists, that is, that He belongs to the order of being. Aquinas's *modus operandi* in his *Summa Theologiae*, takes this basic assumption into account. The discussion about the existence of God and what God is like constitutes what is called 'the treatise on the Divine Nature.' These two questions perhaps form the central questions of philosophical theology. This treatise on *the Divine Nature* takes up the first thirteen questions of the *prima pars* of the *Summa Theologiae*. As it is very well known, Thomas developed some philosophical arguments aimed at proving the existence of God. Best among them are the famous *quinque viae*—the *Five Ways* of his *Summa Theologiae*¹²⁵ and their demonstrations given in their minutest details in his *Summa Contra Gentiles*.¹²⁶ It is not our interest to examine the Thomistic arguments for the existence of God, but suffice it to note that the common base of all the arguments is the reasoning from our knowledge of creatures, as effects, to the knowledge of God as their cause. We are presupposing that Thomas succeeds in arguing for the existence of God from the sensible experience, that is, from effect to cause. Our focus will be on the second question: What God is (not).

In the early part of his discussion, Thomas Aquinas tries to discern how the divine reality is to be understood. Can God really be understood or defined in His essence? Can that reality which is hidden and transcendent be known by the corporeal nature of a human type? We try first to make sense of what, in Aquinas's view, is the meaning of the name 'God.' Does 'God' mean a name of a certain nature?¹²⁷ That question forms the object of discussion for Thomas Aquinas in the cited question of his *Summa*. Following John Damascene in examining the etymology of the word, Thomas reasons that it was coined to designate the being who exercises universal providence:

¹²⁴ S.T 1, q.2, a.2, ad.2: "Quia ad probandum aliquid esse necesse est accipere pro medio quid significet nomen, non autem quod quid est, quia quaestio quid est, sequitur ad quaestionem an est.

¹²⁵ S.T 1, q.2, a.3. For an examination of all of Aquinas's arguments for the existence of God, see, F. Van Steenberghen, *Le problème de l'existence de Dieu dans les écrits de saint Thomas d'Aquin*, (Louvain-la-Neuve: Editions de l'Institut Supérieur de Philosophie) 1980; John F. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, (Washington, D.C : The Catholic University of America Press) 2000, pp 442-500.

¹²⁶ SCG I, 13 and 15. Aquinas pays much attention to the arguments advanced by Aristotle in most of the demonstrations. In fact, some argue that Aquinas's arguments remain on the level of the physical and did not move to the metaphysical.

¹²⁷ ST 1, q.13, a.8: 'Utrum hoc nomen Deus sit nomen naturae.'

“everyone who uses the word ‘God’ has in mind one who cares for all things.”¹²⁸ It was John Damascene who observes that the Greek words *theos*, could be taken from various verbs as from *theein*, to mean: to take care of and to cherish all things; or from *aithein*, which means to burn or from *theasthai*, which means to consider all things.¹²⁹ The etymology, whichever it is, imposes on the name ‘God’ the meaning of ‘providential activity.’¹³⁰ That which exercises providence must be imbued with power and goodness such that no other possesses or surpasses it. Based on this progressive evolution of the idea, God tends to signify a transcendent principle and source of all things. Taking into consideration this transcendence and the providential operation of God, Thomas Aquinas elevates the word ‘God’ to signify “the divine nature.”¹³¹

The question which logically comes to man’s mind is: can the divine nature be known and how? Time and again Aquinas stresses the truth that human nature cannot actually grasp the divine nature or explain in its essence, what God is but can know what God is not. However, the search for the nature of God starts from what man can know. And even though the divine nature cannot in essence be known, man tries to give by his *modus intelligendi* and his *modus significandi*, a human discourse about God. This human way of expression is equivalent to Maimonides’s famous statement concerning the Scriptures: “The Torah speaketh in the language of the sons of man.”¹³² Because of our human way of understanding and signifying what we understand, there is a real danger that we posit in God, the conceptual categories of our knowledge of God. To foresee this inadequacy of the human understanding and the human language to talk about God, Maimonides would even suggest that silence is the most appropriate attitude to adopt. He quotes with approval the words of King David: “Silence is praise to Thee, which interpreted signifies: silence with regard to You is praise. This is a most perfectly put phrase regarding this matter.”¹³³ This is an issue that Thomas Aquinas himself confronted. That the divine nature cannot be

¹²⁸ ST 1, q.13, a.8: « Omnes enim loquentes de Deo hoc intendunt: nominare Deum, quod habet providentiam universalem de rebus. »

¹²⁹ ST 1, q.13, a.8, obj.1: “Quod Deus dicitur a theein, quod est currere, et fovere universa; vel a aethein, id est ardere... vel a theasthai, quod est considerare, omnia. »

¹³⁰ ST 1, q.13, a.8, ad.1: “Quod omnia quae posuit Damascenus, pertinent ad providentiam, a qua imponitur hoc nomen Deus ad significandum.”

¹³¹ ST 1, q.13, a.8: “Ex hac autem operatione hoc nomen, Deus, assumptum, impositum est ad significandum divinam naturam”

¹³² *Dux Neutorum*, lib.I, cap.XXVI, fol.10: « hoc est quod dixerunt: locuta est lex hominum idiomate : » Cf *Guide I*, 26, p 56.

¹³³ *Ibid.* lib.I, cap.LVIII, fol.23: “tibi silentium laus, id est tacere laus tibi. Istud autem est verbum dulce in ratione illa.” And later he adds “Tacere melius est ut abundet super appraehensione scientiarum: sicut praeceptum est perfectis, Dicite in cordibus vestries super cubilibus vestries: et tacete semper.” Cf *Guide I*, 59, p 139 & 140.

essentially known and understood does not mean, according to Aquinas, that there is no truth in our thinking and signifying of God. We can know a thing without necessarily implying that it is according to how it is known or how it is spoken of. We know God from creatures and try to express that knowledge in a way appropriate to the material creatures, complete subsistent beings that we ordinarily know. Because of this human *modus significandi*, the words which express complete subsistent beings signify concretely and imply a metaphysical composition, while words which signify only the form, perfection, signify abstractly. Terms which signify abstractly as in ‘whiteness’ or ‘goodness’ signify something as simple. While concrete terms cannot be applied to God for the fear of introducing a metaphysical composition in the divine essence, abstract terms can neither since they do not signify what actually subsists in itself.¹³⁴ Aquinas’s solution is to argue that in referring to God, we have to distinguish between the mode of signification (*modus significandi*) of the words used, and the reality that is signified by those words (*res significata*).

Therefore as to the names applied to God-viz, the perfections which they signify such as goodness, life, and the like, and their mode of signification. As regards what is signified by these names, they belong properly to God, and more properly than they belong to creatures, and are applied primarily to Him. But as regards their mode of signification, they do not properly and strictly apply to God; for their mode of signification applies to creatures.¹³⁵

Maimonides does not make this distinction and that perhaps may explain his insistence that every attribute of God must be understood negatively to divest it of the imperfections accruing from the human language. This is the basic loophole that Aquinas capitalizes on in his reading and interpretation of the attributes given by Maimonides in his *Dux Neutorum*. But for Aquinas, we must deny the mode of signification of the word or the name and affirm the reality that is signified by the word or the name. The same applies to our human way of understanding (*modus*

¹³⁴ ST 1, q.13, a.3, ad.3: “Dicendum quod ista nomina quae proprie dicuntur de Deo important conditiones corporales, non in ipso significato nominis, sed quantum ad modum significandi. Ea vero quae metaphorice de Deo dicuntur, important conditionem corporalem in ipso suo significato.”

¹³⁵ ST 1, q.13, a.3: “In nominibus igitur quae Deo attribuimus, est duo considerare, scilicet, perfectiones ipsas significatas, ut bonitatem, vitam, et huiusmodi; et modum significandi. Quantum igitur ad id quod significant huiusmodi nomina, proprie competunt Deo, et magis proprie quam ipsis creaturis, et per prius dicuntur de eo. Quantum vero ad modum significandi, non proprie dicuntur de Deo, habent enim modum significandi qui creaturis competit. »

intelligendi) which is quite different from the material reality that is understood. For example, that our intellects understand non-materially, the material things inferior to them, does not mean that the material things exist non-materially. It only underlines that we have a non-material way of understanding things.

Likewise, when it understands simple things above itself, it understands them according to its own mode, which is in a composite manner; yet not so as to understand them to be composite things. And thus our intellect is not false in forming composition in its ideas concerning God.¹³⁶

Thus four things must be kept in mind in our quest for the divine essence and how human language expresses that knowledge of the divine essence: (i) the mode of God's being (*modus essendi*), (ii) the mode of human understanding (*modus intelligendi*), (iii) the mode of signification of human language (*modus significandi*) and (iv) the reality that is signified by human language (*res significata*).¹³⁷ The proper discussion and understanding of the essence or the nature of God would provide the basis on which His attributes are demonstrated. Aquinas follows the same structural and logical lines of Maimonides but arrives at somehow different results. The intellect can be said to know what a thing is, when it defines that thing and conceives some form which corresponds to the thing in every respect.¹³⁸ But the divine nature does not fall under the genus and species category and thus cannot positively be defined in its essence or be analyzed in its constitution. Because of this, what God is remains unknown to us in this life, and the highest knowledge we can have of God is that He is and that He is above all that we can know of Him. There is still another aspect to this issue of knowing the divine essence.

In question 12 of the *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas exclusively discusses the problem of our knowledge of God's essence in this life and even in the life to come. Two major articles of this question will retain much of our attention. We shall even return in details to examine these articles in the latter part of our research. In those articles Aquinas specifically treats and

¹³⁶ ST 1, q.13, a.12, ad.3: "Et similiter cum intelligit simplicia quae sunt supra se intelligit ea secundum modum suum, scilicet composite, non tamen ita quod intelligat ea esse composite. Et sic intellectus noster non est falsus formans compositionem de Deo."

¹³⁷ Cf Aquinas, *The Treatise on the Divine Nature: Summa Theologiae 1, 1-13*, translated with commentary by Brian J. Shanley, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2006) pp 326-327.

¹³⁸ De ver, q.2, a.1, ad.9: "dicendum, quod tunc intellectus dicitur scire de aliquo quid est, quando definit ipsum, id est quando concipit aliquam formam de ipsa re quae per omnia ipsi rei respondet. »

differentiates the ability of the created intellect to see God and to comprehend God. In the very first article, Aquinas asks whether any created intellect can see God's essence.¹³⁹ He rejects the view of those who hold that no created intellect can ever see the essence of God. This rejection is based on the Aristotelian inspired logic that man's highest happiness consists in his highest operation, the intellectual operation. 'By faith, the ultimate perfection of a rational creature must be the principle of its being'¹⁴⁰ and since God is the principle of a rational creature's being, its ultimate perfection is in God Himself. Even the way of reason rejects that no created intellect can see the divine essence. The innate desire in a created intellect to know the cause whenever the effect is seen means that, the natural desire would be futile if the rational intellect could not reach the first cause of all things.¹⁴¹ Hence both on the grounds of reason and faith, Aquinas concludes that the blessed do see the essence of God.¹⁴² In this material life however, Aquinas clearly maintains the impossibility of a created intellect to see the essence of God. This is because knowledge happens according to the mode of the nature of the knower. Since humans in this life, have existence in bodily matter, they know only those things that have forms in matter or that can be known through things of this kind. The essence of God cannot be known or seen through the natures of material things.¹⁴³ Hence it is impossible for a living human to see the essence of God. But the problem is whether the created intellect comprehends or understands the divine essence?

Aquinas gives a clear distinction between seeing God's essence and comprehending God's essence. Comprehension is spoken of in two ways: a proper sense and a broader sense. To comprehend in a proper sense means to know something perfectly, and a thing is known perfectly when it is known as fully as it is knowable. In the act of knowing, there is an intimate union between the knower, the known and knowledge itself. But God being an infinite essence, can never be properly known by any created intellect or anything else either in this life or even in

¹³⁹ ST 1, q.12, a.1 Note: « ... si nunquam essentiam Dei videre potest intellectus creatus, vel nunquam beatitudinem obtinebit, vel in alio eius beatitudo consistet quam in Deo. Quod est alienum a fide Similiter etiam est praeter rationem.» Cf SCG III, 52-54.

¹⁴⁰ ST 1, q.12, a.1 : « enim ultima hominis beatitudo in altissima eius operatione consistat:»

¹⁴¹ ST 1, q.12, a.1: « Inest enim homini naturale desiderium cognoscendi causam, cum intuetur effectum...Si igitur intellectus rationalis creaturae pertingere non possit ad primam causam rerum, remanebit inane desiderium naturale. »

¹⁴² ST 1, q.12, a.1: "Unde simpliciter concedendum est quod beati Dei essentiam videant. »

¹⁴³ ST 1, q.12, a.11: 'Manifestum est autem quod per naturas rerum materialium divina essentia cognosci non potest.'

the next.¹⁴⁴ In a broader sense however, comprehension can be understood as contrasted with seeking. For whoever attains something is said to comprehend it when it is attained and in this sense, the blessed because they have attained a blessed life, are said to comprehend the divine essence.¹⁴⁵ Thus, Aquinas concludes that no created intellect can ever know the essence of God in a proper way of knowing it intimately. Does Aquinas not imply that the divine essence may be known imperfectly?

Aquinas however suggests *contre* Maimonides that human mind can alternatively comprehend the essence of God indirectly and negatively. He mentions three ways: *per modum eminentiae, et causalitatis et negationis*—by the way of eminence, by the way of causality, and by the way of negation;¹⁴⁶ we could also add by way of analogy.¹⁴⁷ It must be noted that these three ways were first discussed by Pseudo-Dionysius and that Aquinas must have borrowed the logical lines of his argument on the knowability of the divine essence from Pseudo-Dionysius.¹⁴⁸ The latter first observed that we cannot know God in His nature since it is beyond the reach of the human mind. But he accepts that the cause can be known through the effects. In one of his works the *Divine Names*, Pseudo-Dionysius writes:

We therefore approach that which is beyond all as far as our capacities allow us and we pass by way of the denial and the transcendence of all things and by way of the cause of all things. God is therefore known in all things and as distinct from all things.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁴ ST 1, q.12, a.7.ad.1: “Comprehensio dicitur dupliciter: uno modo stricte et proprie, secundum quod aliquid includitur in comprehendente. Et sic nullo modo Deus comprehenditur, nec intellectu nec aliquo alio; quia cum sit infinitus, nullo finito includi potest, ut aliquid finitum eum infinite capiat, sicut ipse infinite est.” Cf SCG III, 55, 2: “Impossibile est igitur quod intellectus creatus per lumen praedictum videat divinam substantiam ita perfecte sicut perfecte est visibilis. Omne autem quod comprehenditur ab aliquo cognoscente, cognoscitur ab eo ita perfecte sicut cognoscibile est...Impossibile est igitur quod intellectus creatus divinam substantiam comprehendat.”

¹⁴⁵ ST 1, q.12, a.7, ad.1: “Alio modo *comprehensio* largius sumitur, secundum quod *comprehensio insecutioni* opponitur: qui enim attignit aliquem quando iam tenet ipsum comprehendere eum dicitur. Et sic Deus comprehenditur a beatis, secundum illud Cant. III, *tenui eum, nec dimittam*; »

¹⁴⁶ ST 1, q.13, a.8, ad.2 : “Sed ex effectibus divinis divinam naturam non possumus cognoscere secundum quod in se est, ut sciamus de ea quid est, sed per modum eminentiae, et causalitatis, et negationis, ut supra dictum est. »

¹⁴⁷ ST 1, q.13, a.5: “Dicendum est igitur quod huiusmodi nomina dicuntur de Deo et creaturis secundum analogiam, idest proportionem. »

¹⁴⁸ The three ways may have actually been conceived by Dionysius as two major ways: the way of denial and transcendence, and the way of causality. It is Albert the Great before Aquinas, who perhaps splits them into three distinctive ways.

¹⁴⁹ Pseudo-Dionysius, the *Divine Names*7, 3, 869D-872A, in *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, translated by Colm Luibheid, (New York: Paulist Press, 1987) p 108.

Aquinas acknowledges that though these ways can tell us that God is, they cannot give us the quidditative knowledge of God, that is, ‘what He is.’¹⁵⁰ The various texts of Aquinas do not give a consistent arrangement of the three ways. In certain texts, the way of negation comes first, in certain others it is the way of eminence and yet in some others, it is the way of causality.¹⁵¹ Depending on the text you consult, the three ways occur in different orders. It is on this note that Wohlman observes the liberty with which Aquinas uses the three ways without hesitating to change their order according to his needs and convenience. She singles out Aquinas’s preference for the way of causality once it is about proving the existence of God. In her words, she writes:

Il lui arrive ainsi de placer en premier lieu la voie de causalité, lorsqu’il s’agit par exemple de démontrer l’existence de Dieu ou d’établir que cette démonstration est indispensable à la connaissance des perfections divines.¹⁵²

Humbrecht acknowledges that the three ways are conceived and designed to conduct the mind to a knowledge of the divine nature but we must not rush into finding the progressive evolution or contradiction of the ways in order to justify our arrangement of the ways. The material organisation of the three ways as in the text just seen does not shed enough light as to the why of the arrangement. He proposes three conditions:

L’articulation interne des voies à la manière de Thomas; la comparaison de cette architecture avec celle de Denys ; le contexte des reprises des troies voies, lorsqu’il est significatif.¹⁵³

¹⁵⁰ Cf Wippel, John F., “Quidditative Knowledge of God” in his book: *Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas*, (Washington, D.C: Catholic University of America Press, 1984) pp 215-241.

¹⁵¹ In the question 13, article 8 of the ST, it is arranged thus: eminence, causality and negation. In question 12, article 12 of the same ST, it occurs in the following order: causality, negation and eminence. In the *De divinis nominibus* c.7, 3, Thomas mentions them as follows: negation, eminence, and causality. Etienne Gilson, an eminent interpreter of Thomas goes first by negation. Cf., Gilson, E., *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, translated by L.K. Shook, (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1956) pp 96-129; Harry Wolfson mentions them in the following order: negation, causality, eminence, equivocation and analogy. Cf., Wolfson, H.A., “St. Thomas on Divine Attributes,” in Jacob I. Dienstag, ed. *Studies in Maimonides and St. Thomas Aquinas*, (New York: KTAV Publishing House, Inc., 1975) pp 1-28. The most comprehensive study of this different orderings of the three ways in Aquinas, is done by Ebwank, M.B, “Diverse Orderings of Dionysius’s Triplex Via by St. Thomas Aquinas,” *Mediaeval Studies* 52, (1990), pp 82-109.

¹⁵² Wohlman, Avital, *Thomas d’Aquin et Maimonide: un dialogue exemplaire*, p 139.

¹⁵³ Humbrecht, Thierry-Dominique, *Théologie négative et noms divins chez saint Thomas d’Aquin*, (Paris : Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 2005) p 298. «It depends on three things: the internal articulation of the ways in the manner of Thomas; the comparison of this system with that of Dionysius; the context, when it is significant, of the development of the three ways.” Translation is ours.

The importance of these three ways, Humbrecht continues, illustrates the necessity of reading Aquinas as complete text instead of extracting him within the context of isolated quotations even under the pretext of making comparisons.¹⁵⁴ What is surprising to us is that Humbrecht neglects the conditions he has enumerated only to acknowledge that Aquinas not only makes a frequent use of these three Dionysian ways, but that he uses them in a haphazard manner without any significance. His choice depends on what he wants to develop. What is not in doubt, however, according to Humbrecht, is the primacy of the way of eminence and the influence it exercises on the way of causality and negation.¹⁵⁵ Is this choice of Humbrecht guided by the conditions he has enumerated?

Our treatment of these ways will follow the logical arrangement that is very evident in Aquinas's examination of the question of God. Aquinas establishes that before knowing what a thing is (*quid sit*), we have first to establish that it exists (*an sit*). And the most evident method of establishing whether a thing exists is by the way of the senses. In his proofs for the existence of God, Aquinas argues from the effects we see to the affirmation of the unseen God as the ultimate cause of the effects that we see. The arrangement of the *Summa Theologiae* follows that reasoning. In question 2 of the *prima pars* (*an Deus sit*), Aquinas presents the *quinque viae* arguing for the existence of God as the First Cause of the changing and contingent reality. In questions 3-11, Aquinas examines the ways in which God does not exist, that is, the *quomodo non sit*. All that characterizes the effect must be negated of God. Finally he affirms, as we shall show, that the cause possesses all the perfections of the effects in an eminent way.¹⁵⁶ It is true that Aquinas has enumerated these ways; it is also true that he has not developed a full discussion of these ways in any significant way, as would be expected of him. This is what we intend to do as we examine how the divine nature can, in opposition to Maimonides, be known albeit imperfectly, through created effects. Convinced of the internal consistency of Aquinas's treatment of the nature of God in the *Prima Pars*, we shall proceed in the following order: causality, negation and eminence.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid. p 298.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid. p 779 : «Ce qui n'est jamais mis en doute ni même ambivalent dans l'expression est la primauté de l'éminence, et l'attraction que celle-ci exerce sur la causalité et sur la négation. »

¹⁵⁶ That is the logical arrangement that animates Velde's treatment of God. Cf. Rudi te Velde, *Aquinas on God: The 'Divine Science' of the Summa Theologiae*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006) pp 72-77. We shall borrow some lines of his development in the section that follows.

2.1 Via Causalitatis:

It is already established above that a created human intellect cannot comprehend the quiddity of God. But that assertion does not mean that we cannot have an imperfect knowledge of God. It is Aquinas's logical conviction that we can arrive at the knowledge of God indirectly and negatively. The first of such indirect means is by going through the effects to the cause of the effects. In one of the clearest passages where Aquinas underlines the importance of knowing something of God through the effects, we note:

But our mind cannot be led by sense so far as to see the essence of God; because the sensible effects of God do not equal the power of God as their cause. Hence from the knowledge of sensible things the whole power of God cannot be known; nor therefore can His essence be seen. But because they are His effects and depend on their cause, we can be led from them so far as to know of God "whether He exists," and to know of Him what must necessarily belong to Him, as the first cause of all things, exceeding all things caused by Him.

Hence we know that His relationship with creatures so far as to be the cause of them all; also that creatures differ from Him, inasmuch as He is not in any way part of what is caused by Him; and that creatures are not removed from Him by reason of any defect on His part, but because He superexceeds them all.¹⁵⁷

The last paragraph of the passage above shows the order: causality, negation and eminence. It underlines that causality is the base on which the way of negation and the way of eminence find their true reference to God. From the sensible things as effects, we get the knowledge that the cause is quite different and *not one* of the effects; and the knowledge that the qualities which exist in the effects find their full and *eminent* expression in the cause. It follows that God differs

¹⁵⁷ ST 1, q.12, a.12: "Ex sensibilibus autem non potest usque ad hoc intellectus noster pertingere quod divinam essentiam videat; quia creaturae sensibiles sunt effectus Dei virtutem causae non adaequantes. Unde ex sensibilibus cognitione non potest tota Dei virtus cognosci, et per consequens nec ejus essentia videri. Sed quia sunt effectus a causa dependentes, ex eis in hoc perducere possumus ut cognoscamus de Deo an est, et ut cognoscamus de ipso ea quae necesse est ei convenire, secundum quod est prima omnium causa excedens omnia sua causata. Unde cognoscimus de ipso habitudinem ipsius ad creaturas, quod scilicet omnium est causa; et differentiam creaturarum ab ipso, quod scilicet ipse non est aliquid eorum quae ab eo causantur; et quod haec non remouentur ab eo propter ejus defectum, sed quia superexcedit. »

from the effects, not by reason of a lack in Him, but by the fact that He transcends all His effects in perfection.

The *via causalitatis* examines how other things are related to God by *representing* Him,¹⁵⁸ and lead to a knowledge, albeit imperfect, of God. The emphasis on how *other things represent God* is to show that the relation involved here is of a non-reciprocal type. It is a non-reciprocal dependent relationship as the creature depends on God and not vice versa. It is the creature that represents God inasmuch as it possesses some perfection—*perfectionem aliquam habet*. The *via causalitatis* is Aquinas's own interpretation of the attribute of relation in Maimonides. It is not surprising that Aquinas would soon confront Maimonides on this issue of relation whether reciprocal or non-reciprocal that Maimonides vehemently rejects of God.

Every agent acts inasmuch as it is in act and consequently produces its like. This is the principle on which the *via causalitatis* is based—“*omne agens agit simile sibi*,” ‘every agent produces something of its kind.’ The form of the effect produced must be found in some measure in the agent but according to another mode and another way. An example is the sun. By acting according as it is in act, the sun causes heat among sublunary bodies. The heat generated by the sun bears some likeness to the active power of the sun and because of this heat, the sun is said to be hot though not in the same way. “And so the sun is said to be somewhat like those things in which it produces its effects as an efficient cause. Yet the sun is also unlike all these things in so far as such effects do not possess heat and the like in the same way as they are found in the sun. So, too, God gave things all their perfections and thereby is both like and unlike all of them.”¹⁵⁹ Because the likeness that is found in the effects belongs to God as the cause absolutely, the effects are said to have what belongs to God and consequently, are rightly said to be related to God. They are unlike God inasmuch as they fall short of their cause and not because of any deficiency on His part but because He transcends the effects. They are unlike God inasmuch as they do not have the same mode of being as the members of the same genus or the same species. Te Velde nicely puts it thus:

¹⁵⁸ ST 1, q.13, a.2: «Unde quaelibet creatura intantum eum repraesentat, et est ei similis, inquantum perfectionem aliquam habet, non tamen ita quod repraesentet eum sicut aliquid eiusdem speciei vel generis, sed sicut excellens principium, a cuius forma effectus deficiunt...»

¹⁵⁹ SCG I, 29, 2 : «et sic sol omnibus illis similis aliquantulum dicitur, in quibus suos effectus efficaciter inducit, a quibus tamen rursus omnibus dissimilis est, in quantum huiusmodi effectus non eodem modo possident calorem huiusmodi quo in sole invenitur. Ita etiam et Deus omnes perfectiones rebus tribuit, ac per hoc cum omnibus similitudinem habet et dissimilitudinem simul.»

The fact that the likeness has an imperfect and diminished character does not mean that God did not succeed in expressing himself adequately in the effect, so that the negativity inherent in the likeness is not as such intended. The relation between God and his ‘likeness’ is such that God is in the effect—not as He is in himself (identity of essence and esse), but as distinguished from himself (non-identity of essence and esse)—and precisely as such it is constituted in a likeness of God. Hence the knowledge through the effect is by no means merely approximative as if the relationship of likeness falls short in its intelligibility.¹⁶⁰

Thus the effect contains something of God that makes it dependent on God. It is on the basis of this dependent relation of creatures to God that Aquinas defends, against Maimonides, the way of analogy through which human language can express positively what it knows of God.

Aquinas maintains that because our intellect takes its knowledge from created things, it is informed by the likenesses or the ideas of the perfections it finds in creatures as effects, namely of wisdom, power, goodness, and so forth.¹⁶¹ Granted these are terms that tell us something about God, they cannot be interpreted as God’s causal acts or as causally relative terms in the sense that to say ‘God is good’ would mean ‘God is the cause of goodness in things.’ The sentence should mean that ‘good’ preexists in the source of all things in a transcendent way. If such terms could be interpreted causally, then there is no reason why every other word could not be predicated of God. We could as well say that ‘God is a body’ or that ‘God is a rock’ since God is the cause of both body and rock. Such assumption would gradually dissimulate the difference between proper and metaphorical predication, the difference that is found not in their mode of signification but rather in the very meaning of the terms involved. While metaphorical terms imply materiality, terms or names said properly of God do not.¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰ Te Velde, Rudi, *Aquinas on God: The ‘Divine Science’ of the Summa Theologiae*, p 77.

¹⁶¹ De pot q.7, a.5: “Intellectus autem noster cum a rebus creatis cognitionem accipiat, informatur similitudinibus perfectionum in creaturis inventarum, sicut sapientiae, virtutis, bonitatis et huiusmodi. »

¹⁶² ST 1, q.13, a.3, ad.3: “Ad tertium dicendum quod ista nomina quae proprie dicuntur de Deo, important conditiones corporales non in ipso significato nominis, sed quantum ad modum significandi; ea vero quae metaphorice de Deo dicuntur, important conditionem corporalem in ipso suo significato.”

2.2 Via Negationis:

One of the major influences of Maimonides on Thomas Aquinas is the negative way of knowing or of naming God. Because God is a mystery that transcends our language and our knowledge, and cannot in essence be comprehended by any created intellect, Aquinas following Maimonides accepts that the proper way of naming Him is by the negation of all things. Does that mean that nothing can be positively known of God? The way of negation as understood by Aquinas would be found, in the course of our discussion, to be quite different from the exclusive and absolute negation that Maimonides advocates.

The divine substance surpasses every form that our intellect reaches. Thus we are unable to apprehend it by knowing *what it is*. Yet we are able to have some knowledge of it by knowing *what it is not*.¹⁶³

The first impression that comes to mind on reading this Aquinas's insistence, that we can have some knowledge of what God is by knowing *what He is not*, is that of agnosticism, that is, the position that there is nothing that can be known positively of God. This negative approach tends to give no room for any kind of similarity between God and creatures. But this approach, when properly understood, will be found to be constructed on the relationship of causality. According to Aquinas, every negation is verified by a prior affirmation such that, the negation by which God is distinguished from creatures must be based on a prior affirmation of God as cause. Thus, the way of negation by Aquinas, leaves a progressive opening towards a transcendent perfection that is God.

Moreover the idea of negation is always based on an affirmation: ... wherefore unless the human mind knew something positively about God, it would be unable to deny anything about him. And it would know nothing if nothing that it affirmed about God were positively verified about him.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶³ SCG I, 14, 2: "Nam divina substantia omnem formam quam intellectus noster attingit, sua immensitate excedit: et sic ipsam apprehendere non possumus cognoscendo quid est. Sed aliqualem eius habemus notitiam cognoscendo *quid non est*."

¹⁶⁴ De pot q.7, a.5 "...intellectus negationis semper fundatur in aliqua affirmation: quod ex hoc patet quia omnis negativa per affirmativam probatur ; unde nisi intellectus humanus aliquid de Deo affirmative cognosceret, nihil de Deo posset negare. »

That God is the cause on which all things depend for their being presupposes the negative statement that He is *not one* of the things caused by Him. The crucial question is to determine in what sense knowing what God is not, constitutes real knowledge. It constitutes real knowledge in the sense that it equips us with a logical grammar in our thinking and talking about God. This is what Burrell describes as a “project of mapping out the grammar appropriate *in divinis*.”¹⁶⁵ In other words, it is a way of logic developed to handle the discourse that is appropriate to God. In its indirect and reflexive fashion, this negative approach conveys to us, something of the nature of God. It permeates the whole of Aquinas’s thinking about God and necessitates in a positive way, a redefinition of all terms that we can attribute to God.

Just like Maimonides, Aquinas reasons that the more things we deny of God, the closer we approach knowing Him. This is because we approach a thing to the degree we can differentiate it from other things. God as first cause must transcend all the features of the world characterized by metaphysical limitation and cannot be one of the things caused by Him. This denial gives us a substantial knowledge of the intelligibility of God expressed from the perspectives of His effects. If effects are material and composed, the way of negation logically leads us to the knowledge that God as the cause is neither material nor is He composed. According to Te Velde, “the negative moment reflects thereby the way the cause negates itself, its essence, in a determined manner in its likeness of the effect.”¹⁶⁶ The effectiveness of the negative way will become evident in the treatment of divine attributes. Perhaps as noted by Wohlman, the *via negationis* is, in conjunction with the *via eminentiae*, the definitive condition and the unique means by which the human intellect could reach to the unknowable divine essence.¹⁶⁷ Aquinas then goes on to discuss a series of “ways in which God does not exist.”

2.3 Via Eminentiae:

By the way of eminence, Thomas wishes to distinguish God from the things He has caused by the mere fact that He unites in Himself, all the perfections of the effects in a higher and more

¹⁶⁵ Burrell, David B., *Aquinas: God and Action*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul ltd, 1979) p 17.

¹⁶⁶ Te Velde, Rudi, *Aquinas on God*, p 77.

¹⁶⁷ Wohlman, Avital, *Thomas d’Aquin et Maïmonide : un dialogue exemplaire*, p 140. « Accouplée à la *via eminentiae*, la *via negationis* est en définitive la condition et l’unique moyen proposé à l’intellect humain pour parvenir à une certaine perception de ce que les Pères grecs appelaient le « nuage de l’inconnaissance. »

excellent fashion. By the way of eminence, Thomas tries to render human language as fit as possible to the reality that is God, by denying of God any sort of numerical relation to similar predicates applied to creatures. Our treatment of this *via* will be influenced by an excellent discussion made of it by Harry Austryn Wolfson.¹⁶⁸

Let us reach back to Dionysius for whom the eminential attributes of God are expressed by the addition of the prefix “super” before the attribute in question, such as “super-good,” “super-living,” “super-God,” “super-substantial,” and “super-wise.” Dionysius is led to this because he recognizes the human mind’s inability to reach the Transcendent God who surpasses all discourse and all knowledge.

How can we enter upon this undertaking if the Godhead is superior to being and is unspeakable and unnameable? I said ... that one can neither discuss nor understand the One, the Superunkowable, the Transcendent, Goodness itself... Hence, with regard to the supra-essential being of God—transcendent Goodness transcendently there—no lover of the truth which is above all truth will seek to praise it as word or power or mind or life or being.¹⁶⁹

What counts in the thinking of Dionysius is not just the addition of the prefix “super,” but the fact that it is understood in an eminent sense. The *via eminentiae* permits to have a right conception of God expressed in appropriate terms.

Aquinas sharpens the *via eminentiae* by appealing to the significance of the *modus essendi* of God. The mode of God’s being is eternal since He is unchangeable. “Eternity therefore principally belongs to God, who is utterly unchangeable...God, however, is His own invariable existence, and so is identical with His own eternity just as He is identical with His own nature.”¹⁷⁰ Because the mode of God’s being is according to God’s nature, whatever may be found in Him must be according to the mode of that nature in which it is found.¹⁷¹ This is the famous Thomistic principle: whatever is received in another is received according to the mode of

¹⁶⁸ Wolfson, Harry A, “St. Thomas on Divine Attributes,” in *Studies in Maimonides and St. Thomas Aquinas*, pp 10-13.

¹⁶⁹ Pseudo-Dionysius, *Divine Names* 1, 5, 593BC.

¹⁷⁰ ST 1, q.10, a.2 : “Unde cum Deus sit maxime immutabilis sibi maxime competit esse aeternum...Deus autem est suum esse uniforme, unde sicut est sua essentia ita est sua aeternitas. »

¹⁷¹ For a detailed discussion of this principle, refer to John F. Wippel, “Thomas Aquinas and the Axiom “What is Received is Received According to the Mode of the Receiver,”” pp 279-289.

the receiver—*quodcumque enim recipitur in altero secundum modum recipientis recipitur*.¹⁷² Aquinas relies heavily on this principle to sharpen his discussion of the *via eminentiae*. Because ‘knowledge,’ ‘power,’ ‘goodness,’ ‘wisdom,’ are strictly speaking, not attributes that are found in God as they are found in man, there cannot in any way exist a sort of numerical relation between such attributes predicated of God, and creatures. They exist in God by excellence. The knowledge, the power, the wisdom of God being infinite according to God’s nature, cannot have any numerical relation to the finite knowledge, the finite power or the finite wisdom of any creature. These “attributes” must exist in God according to the mode of God’s being and in creatures according to the mode of creatures’ being. It is this distinction between the two modes of being that assures the elimination of the limits and imperfections inherent in the human mode of being and signifying. Aquinas makes this point clearly:

That which is in something is in it according to the mode of that in which it is present.¹⁷³

We come back to what we have earlier noted as the basis of the *via eminentiae*: the negation of all forms of finitude by way of God’s *modus essendi* and the negation of all numerical relations by our way of *modus significandi*. As summarily put by Wolfson:

Thus predicates which St. Thomas interprets in the excellent or eminent sense mean predicates which are applied to God in an infinite sense and have no numerical relation to similar predicates applied to creatures.¹⁷⁴

Earlier in our discussion, we examined the distinction between the *res significata*, and the *modus significandi*. The *res significata*, that is the perfection signified for example goodness, is the same for both God and creature. But the *modus significandi*, that is, the mode of signifying and possessing this goodness is not the same for both God and creature. In the creature, the mode of possessing this goodness is finite, limited and imperfect. To render this perfection fitting to God, the human language must divest itself of its limitation and imperfections. That is what Aquinas tends to do with the *via eminentiae*. As he expresses it in the earlier commentary on the *Sentences of Peter Lombard*, “everything said of God must be understood eminently (*per*

¹⁷² Aquinas, *De anima* II, lect. 24.

¹⁷³ ST 1, q.14, a.5: “nam omne quod est in altero, est in eo secundum modum ejus in quo est.”

¹⁷⁴ Wolfson, Harry A, « St. Thomas on Divine Attributes, » in *Studies in Maimonides and St. Thomas Aquinas*, p 12.

eminentiam), by removing from it every imperfection.”¹⁷⁵ This eminence can be adequately represented by the use of superlative adjectives, some of which we have already seen in Dionysius, like ‘most perfect,’ ‘most beautiful,’ ‘infinite,’ ‘super substance,’ ‘*esse perfectissimum*,’ ‘*maxime esse in actu*,’ etc.

3.0 Aquinas on Divine Attributes

The basic assumption in his treatment of divine attributes is that “one must not only have a right conception of God but one must also express that right conception of God in appropriate terms, and appropriate terms are those which would not lead the unwary into any kind of misapprehension.”¹⁷⁶ It is the same fear of leading the simple minded believer in God astray, that conditioned both Maimonides’s and Aquinas’s choice of the *via negationis*, as a sure but indirect way of getting to know God. “The way of negation,” according to Dionysius, “appears to be more suitable to the realm of the divine.”¹⁷⁷ On Aquinas’s account, God, can really and truly be said to have “attributes” though not in the sense of external qualities added to His essence. Aquinas may be echoing the conviction of Pseudo-Dionysius for whom it seems absurd to deny that the “attributes of God refer in all their truth and meaning to the complete Deity.”¹⁷⁸ In God, there is no internal or external distinction between His essence and existence or any of such. Apart from Dionysius, Maimonides is another authority that Aquinas closely follows in his discussion of the divine attributes. He follows Maimonides closely in readapting some of the latter’s teaching and in some cases disagreeing with him. They both agree that attributes normally refer to properties or features of a thing that are metaphysically distinct from its nature, such that their presence is necessary for the complete ontological existence and intelligibility of the thing. But in God, there are no really distinct attributes. Our use and Aquinas’s use of the term “divine attributes” must not be understood as if God is like any other substance with distinguishable features. God is the cause of all such substances and is related to them all as a

¹⁷⁵ In I Sent. d. 35, q.1, a.1 ad 5m: “Ea quae dicuntur de Deo, semper intelligenda sunt per eminentiam, ablato omni eo quod imperfectionis esse potest.”

¹⁷⁶ Wolfson, H. A., “St. Thomas on Divine Attributes” in *Studies in the History of Philosophy and Religion*, vol. 2, edited by Isadore Twersky and George H. Williams, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977) p 509.

¹⁷⁷ Pseudo-Dionysius, the *Celestial Hierarchy* 2, 3, 141A-141B.

¹⁷⁸ Pseudo-Dionysius, the *Divine Names* 2, 1, 637C.

cause is related to its effect. On the contrary, we should understand “divine attributes” according to the general definition by Garrigou-Lagrange, as:

Une perfection absolument simple, qui existe nécessairement et formellement en Dieu, et qui selon notre mode imparfait de connaître, se déduit de ce que nous concevons comme le constitutive de l’essence divine.¹⁷⁹

The attributes must be seen as referring to the unique simple divine substance by way of diverse conceptions in the intellect. The inadequacy inherent in human language is expressed by that definition, and it is that inadequacy which explains Aquinas’s insistence on differentiating between the *modus significandi*, the *ratio* and the *res significata*.¹⁸⁰ This is the reasoning that animates Aquinas’s discussion of the divine attributes. In what follows, we shall examine principally Aquinas’s discussion of divine attributes. But because, this discussion never took place in isolation, we shall be making references to various authorities, principally Maimonides, on whose ideas Aquinas bases his interpretation. The problem that this raises is, knowing exactly which of the numerous Aquinas’s text to choose from and which to leave aside. Another problem is that most of his discussions of the divine attributes are scattered in different texts composed under different circumstances to respond to different needs. In the observation of Feldman,

When we turn to Thomas Aquinas we encounter several difficulties, textual and philosophical; for the various passages where Thomas discusses Maimonides’ theory of attributes are not internally consistent, or at least not entirely similar. Each text therefore deserves separate treatment.¹⁸¹

Most scholars are of the opinion that Aquinas’s discussion of various important issues progressed or evolved as he matured in his thoughts and that his later works are of much greater value than his earlier works. These scholars place much emphasis on the chronology of

¹⁷⁹ Garrigou-Lagrange, R., *Dieu, son existence et sa nature*, p.370 « an absolutely simple perfection which exists necessarily and formally in God and which according to our imperfect way of knowledge is deduced from what we conceive to be constitutive of divine essence.” Translation is ours.

¹⁸⁰ Rocca, Gregory, “The Distinction between Res Significata and Modus Significandi in Aquinas’s Theological Epistemology,” in *Thomist: a Speculative Quarterly Review*, 55:2 (1991) pp 173-197; *Speaking the Incomprehensible God*, (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2004) pp 334-352.

¹⁸¹ Feldman, S, “A Scholastic Misinterpretation of Maimonides’ Doctrine of Divine Attributes,” *Journal of Jewish Studies*, 19, (1968), p 32.

Aquinas's works. The perfect representative of this approach is Harry Wolfson.¹⁸² He tries to explain the different versions of Aquinas's interpretation of Maimonides's discussion of divine attributes based on chronology. According to Wolfson, Aquinas ascribes to Maimonides and Avicenna both negative and causative interpretations of attributes in his earlier work *Commentary on the Sentences* (1254-1256) 1Sent. d.2, q.1, a.3, ad.3; In the *De Potentia* (q.7, a.5) written between 1265-1267, Aquinas mentions only Maimonides as most probably holding the two interpretations of the attributes; In the *Summa Theologiae* 1, q.13, written between 1266-1268, he ascribes only the negative interpretation to Maimonides and never mentions him as holding a causative interpretation of the divine attributes.¹⁸³ This 'seeming contradiction' is highlighted by Wolfson to press home the evolution in Aquinas's ideas from his youthful to his adult age. Wolfson's reading has influenced the younger generation of scholars that have followed his interpretation.¹⁸⁴ Thus instead of actually examining the texts of the *Commentary on the Sentences*, they are increasingly dismissed as 'youthful work' of Thomas Aquinas, as if 'youthful' approximates to 'less accurate.' It is on this note that Stubbens makes the following remark concerning Aquinas's interpretation of the attributes as discussed by Maimonides.

A causal interpretation of divine predicates is attributed to Maimonides in the *Commentary on the Sentences* (1Sent. d.2, q.1, a.3). There, Aquinas reports Maimonides as saying God is said to be good because he produces goodness in his creatures... If an argument from silence could be made, we would conclude that Aquinas recognized his mistakes since in his later works Aquinas did not attribute this view to Maimonides, to the best of my knowledge.¹⁸⁵

On the other side of the debate are those who do not accept the logic that the earlier the work, the less accurate it would seem to be. With particular reference to the *Commentary on the Sentences*, Chenu has this to say:

¹⁸² Wolfson, H. A., "St. Thomas on Divine Attributes," *Studies in Maimonides and St. Thomas Aquinas*, pp 1-28.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.* p 28.

¹⁸⁴ Cf Wippel, J.F, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2000) fn.81, pp 523-524; Feldman, S, *Op. Cit.*, pp 23-39.

¹⁸⁵ Stubbens, N. A., «Naming God: Moses Maimonides and Thomas Aquinas, » *The Thomist*, 54, (1990) p 233.

On s'apercevra vite que, dès son premier grand œuvre saint Thomas a établi ses positions de base, et que règnent déjà ses intuitions maîtresses.”¹⁸⁶

The *Commentary on the Sentences* is very important not only for the detailed discussion of the question of the divine attributes, but also for the discussion of man's knowledge of God. In support of the contrary argument of chronology, J.P. Torrell notes the preeminent importance of Aquinas's earlier works in understanding his positions better than his later works. Note his observation:

Pour autant que j'aie pu m'en rendre compte, il n'y a pas d'évolution sensible en passant d'une œuvre à l'autre, mais il arrive que les œuvres antérieures soient plus explicites que les œuvres plus tardives, de sorte qu'elles sont aussi plus éclairantes pour un premier contact. Cela se vérifie particulièrement pour sa théorie générale de la connaissance de Dieu.¹⁸⁷

What has become clear to us in the course of this research is the importance of *1Sent. d.2, q.1, a.3*, on the issue of divine attributes. In that article, Aquinas discusses at length not only Maimonides's position but makes a consistent statement as if answering to a particular need. A new twist, which has heightened the importance of the article, is the discovery that the article in question, did not exist in the original text of the *Commentary on the Sentences*, but was added around 1265-1266.¹⁸⁸ This makes it contemporary to the *De Potentia* and to the first parts of the *Summa Theologiae* and thus changes the texture of the debate. The question would no longer be whether it is a work of the youthful age of Aquinas, but why did Aquinas write it lately and let it be inserted almost a decade after the *Commentary on the Sentences* had been published? Let us note the judicious remark of Lemaigre on this very important question:

¹⁸⁶ Chenu, M.D, *Introduction à l'étude de saint Thomas d'Aquin*, (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1950) p 234.

¹⁸⁷ Torrell, J.P., “La vision de Dieu per essentiam selon Saint Thomas d'Aquin,” *Micrologus* 5, (1997) p 49.

¹⁸⁸ Of great importance are the following works: Dondaine, A., “Saint Thomas a-t-il disputé à Rome la question des “Attributs Divins”?” (*1Sent.*, dist. 2, qu.1, art.3), *Bulletin Thomiste* 3, (Avril-Juin 1933) Notes et Communications, pp 171-182 ; « Saint Thomas et la dispute des Attributs Divins (*1 Sent.*, d.2, a.3) Authenticité et Origine », *Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum* VIII, (1938), pp 253-262 ; Lemaigre, B. E., « Perfection de Dieu et Multiplicité des Attributs Divins. Pourquoi S. Thomas a-t-il inséré la dispute des Attributs Divins (*1 Sent.*, d.2, q.1, a.3) dans son Commentaire des Sentences ? » *Revue des Sciences Philosophiques et Théologiques* 50, (1966) pp 198-227 ; Rubio, Mercedes, *Aquinas and Maimonides on the Possibility of the Knowledge of God : An Examination of the Quaestio de Attributis*, (Dordrecht : Springer, 2006). Our understanding of the *1 Sent.*, d.2, q.1, a.3 has been greatly helped by the translation and discussion of the text by Rubio in his book named above. All the English quotation of this text is from Rubio's translation unless where stated.

Etudier la doctrine de S. Thomas d'Aquin sur le fondement de la multiplicité des attributs divins suppose aujourd'hui que l'on tienne compte de l'histoire. Le P. A. Dondaine a montré, en effet, ... qu'un des éléments les plus importants de l'enseignement du Docteur angélique sur ce point (1 Sent., d.2, q.1, a.3) ne pouvait être considéré comme une œuvre de jeunesse, mais bien davantage comme une dispute exceptionnelle, fruit de sa maturité (1265-1267) ... nous pensons qu'à l'origine de cette décision se trouvent des motifs doctrinaux.¹⁸⁹

While not getting into the whole historical question of this document, it suffices to note the principal reason or reasons that motivated Aquinas to undertake on such an important work¹⁹⁰ and ask that it be inserted in its precise place a decade after the original has been published. From the sources available to us, Aquinas was trying to respond to some contentious theological points raised by Peter of Tarantasia's (later Pope Innocent V) *Commentary on the Sentences*, a response Aquinas undertook to make at the request of John of Vercell, the Master General of the Order of Preachers.¹⁹¹ The contentious theological issues border on the distinction of the divine attributes.

Pierre est le premier à instituer une question spéciale sur le fondement de la distinction des attributs divins.¹⁹²

According to Rubio, the accusations against Peter of Tarantasia about the divine attributes "suggest that he was teaching real multiplicity in the divine essence."¹⁹³ This is not a teaching Aquinas could leave unattended to since it attacks the foundation of the Christian faith and the Christian teaching on God. It is within the context of this response to Tarantasia's contentious discussions, that Aquinas properly reviews the positions of Avicenna, Dionysius, St. Anselm and notably Maimonides. The discussions he holds in this article of the *Commentary on the Sentences* should be consistent with other works of the same period such as *De Potentia* and the *Prima pars* of the *Summa Theologiae*. And where little differences abound, they should be

¹⁸⁹ Lemaigre, B. E., "Perfection de Dieu et Multiplicité des Attributs Divins," p 198.

¹⁹⁰ Cf Dondaine, A., "Saint Thomas et la dispute des attributs divins, » p 254-255, «il s'agit d'une pièce de première importance, où l'auteur détermine le sujet avec un souci extraordinaire de n'abandonner aucune parcelle de vérité, » une dispute «de très haute tenue spéculative, tout à fait dans sa manière. »

¹⁹¹ Lemaigre, B. E., « Perfection de Dieu et Multiplicité des Attributs Divins, » p 198.

¹⁹² Dondaine, A., "Saint Thomas et la Dispute des Attributs Divins (1 Sent., d.2, a.3),» p 260.

¹⁹³ Rubio, Mercedes, *Aquinas and Maimonides on the Possibility of the Knowledge of God*, p 23.

viewed as complimentary.¹⁹⁴ So what does St. Thomas Aquinas teach on the question of the divine attributes?

The very formulation of the *quaestio* leaves no one in doubt as to the seriousness of the issue at stake. Aquinas titles it: ‘*Utrum pluralitas rationum, quibus attributa differunt, sit tantum in intellectu, vel etiam in Deo,*’ that is, ‘whether the multiplicity of *rationes*, by which attributes differ, is only in the intellect or also in God.’¹⁹⁵ By way of response, Aquinas notes that the divine attributes like wisdom, goodness, life and the like, are absolutely one in God, but differ according to their *ratio*. This *ratio* is not just on the part of the intellect but also (*sed ex proprietate ipsius rei*) on the part of the reality itself. Does the *ratio* exist in God or does the reality signified by the *ratio* exist outside of the mind?

Before delving into a full examination of this *ratio*, we must acknowledge the immense difficulties in trying to read correctly what Aquinas means by *ratio*. On the facial level, we could take it to mean an idea, or reason or ‘type’ or an ‘intelligible nature’ in the mind. When we consult the *prima pars* of the *Summa Theologiae*, a work written almost the same time as the article three of our discussion, of the *Commentary on the Sentences*, we find that *ratio* may not properly be interpreted as idea but rather vice versa. In other cases, it does not seem as if Aquinas takes *ratio* as *ideae*. In one significant text, Aquinas says that “*ideae sunt rationes in mente divina existentes.*”¹⁹⁶ Continuing, he notes that ‘God possesses the “intelligible natures” or “types” proper to all the things he knows. Therefore, God has an Idea of all the things He knows.’¹⁹⁷ Since God has an idea of all the things He knows, it means that the *ratio* of all things exist in Him.¹⁹⁸ Now, what interests us is the distinction Aquinas makes of ideas, in the mind of God. Relying on the authority of Plato, Aquinas distinguishes two functions of ideas in the mind of God: as principles of the knowledge of things; and of the generation of things.¹⁹⁹ As the

¹⁹⁴ Ibid. p 27.

¹⁹⁵ 1 Sent., d.2, q.1, a.3.

¹⁹⁶ ST 1, q.15, a.3: According to the translation of the Fathers of the English Dominican Province, vol I, Prima Pars, q.1-64, (NovAntiqua: California, 2008), the text reads: “ideas are *types* existing in the divine mind.” According to the translation of Thomas Gornall, vol.4, Knowledge in God (1a. 14-18), (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), the text reads as follows: “Ideas are *intelligible natures* existing in the divine mind.” Emphasis is ours just to highlight the contested word ‘*ratio*.’

¹⁹⁷ ST 1, q.15, a.3: “Sed omnium quae cognoscit, Deus habet proprias rationes. Ergo omnium quae cognoscit habet Ideam.”

¹⁹⁸ ST 1, q.15, a.2: “Sic igitur oportet quod in mente divina sint propriae rationes omnium rerum.”

¹⁹⁹ ST 1, q.15, a.3: “cum ideae a Platone ponerentur principia cognitionis rerum et generationis ipsarum, ad utrumque se habet idea, prout in mente divina ponitur.”

principium factionis rerum, that is the principle of the generation of things, an idea may be called “exemplar,” and belongs to practical knowledge. As a principle of knowledge, an idea is properly called *ratio*—‘type,’ ‘intelligible nature,’ and belongs to speculative knowledge.²⁰⁰ As exemplar, it is related to all the things made by God at some time; whereas as a *principium cognoscitivum*, it has relation to all the things known by God, things that may never be actualized in time, and things that He knows according to their proper intelligible nature (*ratio*), as known by Him in a speculative manner.²⁰¹ This is a neat distinction that will help us in our understanding of the divine attributes and the various aspects of the problem—ontological, semantic, and epistemic as we embark in an exercise in speculation.

The issues to be addressed are so sensitive and properly formulated that Aquinas warns that it is on the proper understanding of these questions that all which has been said in this first book of the *Sentences* depend.²⁰² Aquinas proposes to examine four questions: (i) what this *ratio* is according to which we say that attributes differ? (ii) In which sense *ratio* is said to be or not to be in something; (iii) whether these diverse *rationes* of the attributes are in God or not; (iv) whether the multiplicity of the *rationes* is only from the part of our intellect or is in some way from the part of the thing (*ex parte rei*).²⁰³ In the discussion that follows, Aquinas shows his mastery of the texts of his contemporaries which he reconciles with his own ideas and offers what would seem to him, to be the correct interpretation of the sensitive issues at stake. Let us not dwell on the contrary arguments based on the transcendence and simplicity of God that would reject any suggestion of the existence of attributes in God. We start with the response Aquinas has given to these objections by formulating the four principal questions above, on the basis of which a proper understanding of the whole of Book I depends. What is the cause of real diversity among divine attributes? Aquinas answers that the cause of real diversity among divine attributes is

²⁰⁰ ST 1, q.15, a.3: “Et secundum quod est principium factionis rerum, *exemplar* dici potest, et ad practicam cognitionem pertinet. Secundum quod principium cognoscitivum est, proprie dicitur *ratio*; et potest etiam ad scientiam speculativam pertinere. »

²⁰¹ ST 1, q.15, a.3: “Secundum ergo quod exemplar est, secundum hoc se habet ad omnia quae a Deo fiunt secundum aliquod tempus. Secundum vero quod principium cognoscitivum est, se habet ad omnia quae cognoscuntur a Deo, etiam si nullo tempore fiant; et ad omnia quae a Deo cognoscuntur secundum propriam rationem, et secundum quod cognoscuntur ab ipso per modum speculationis.”

²⁰² 1 Sent, d.2, q.1, a.3, resp: “Ad cuius rei evidentiam, ut diligenter explicetur, quia ex hoc pendet fere totus intellectus eorum quae in I libro dicuntur, quatuor oportet videre.”

²⁰³ 1 Sent, d.2, q.1, a.3 resp : “Primo quid sit ratio secundum quam dicimus attributa ratione differe. Secundo quomodo dicatur aliqua ratio in aliqua re esse vel non esse. Tertio utrum istae rationes diversae attributorum sint in Deo vel non. Quarto utrum pluralitas istarum rationum sit tantum ex parte intellectus nostri vel aliquo modo ex parte rei.”

ratio. What is this *ratio*? It is here as in the *Summa Theologiae* nothing else than what the intellect understands from the meaning of a name.²⁰⁴ This is not a complete explanation since *ratio*, as observed by the philosopher, could also refer to what is defined by a name. An example is man, in which the concept of man refers to the reality of man as apprehended by the intellect.²⁰⁵ But there are notions that do not have a definition like the genera, e.g., quality, quantity and the like, though the *ratio* of quality is what is meant by the name ‘quality.’ These notions come by intuitive apprehension and their meaning is expressed only by their names.²⁰⁶ The *ratio* is the concept’s intention of a real thing (*intentionem hujus conceptionis*) and does not necessarily apply to something definable.²⁰⁷ And this means that *ratio* could refer to a nature that is beyond a finite apprehension, akin to God and the divine perfections. Example is ‘divine wisdom’ which is not something outside of the mind but a reality that is apprehended by what is signified by the name ‘wisdom.’ On this basis, Aquinas calls *ratio* a “second attribution term,” the notion of the intention in the intellect that refers to a real thing.²⁰⁸ It could be, as noted by Lemaigre, the intellectual mode according to which this reality is present to the mind.

La *ratio* ne peut donc être un nom de chose (*nomen rei*), mais seulement un nom de seconde intention. Elle ne désigne pas la réalité visée et signifiée, mais seulement ce que l’esprit peut en exprimer dans cette visée même, le mode intelligible selon lequel cette réalité est présente à l’esprit.²⁰⁹

Aquinas then turns his attention to the second question: the sense in which *ratio* is said to be or not to be in something. Considering that *ratio* is not like concept which refers to a finite definable thing outside the mind, Aquinas’s goal is to establish the relation that *ratio* has got with realities outside of the mind. We have seen that the *ratio* does not refer directly to a reality outside the mind just as a name or a concept does, but that it can be said to be in the real thing

²⁰⁴ I Sent, d.2, q.1, a.3, resp: “quantum ad primum pertinent, sciendum est, quod ratio, prout hic sumitur, nihil aliud est quam id quod apprehendit intellectus de significatione alicujus nominis” Cf ST 1, q.13, a.4 « Ratio enim quam significat nomen, est conceptio intellectus de re significata per nomen. »

²⁰⁵ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* IV, 2, 1003b20-1004a5.

²⁰⁶ I Sent, d.2, q.1, a.3, resp: “Sed quaedam dicuntur habere rationem sic dictam, quae non definiuntur, sicut quantitas et qualitas et hujusmodi, quae non definiuntur, quia sunt genera generalissima. Et tamen ratio qualitatis est id quod significatur nomine qualitatis ; et hoc est illud ex quo qualitas habet quod sit qualitatis. »

²⁰⁷ Rubio, Mercedes, *Aquinas and Maimonides on the Possibility of the Knowledge of God*, p 48.

²⁰⁸ I Sent, d.2, q.1, a.3, resp: «Nec tamen hoc nomen ratio significat ipsam conceptionem, quia hoc significatur per nomen sapientiae vel per aliud nomen rei; sed significat intentionem hujus conceptionis, sicut et hoc nomen difinitio, et alia nomina secundae impositionis.»

²⁰⁹ Lemaigre, B.M., “Perfection de Dieu et Multiplicité des Attributs Divins,” p 217.

inasmuch as there is something outside the mind which corresponds to the conception of the mind, like what is signified to the sign.²¹⁰ There are three ways according to Aquinas, by which the conception of the intellect can relate to the reality outside of the mind. The first way is when what the intellect apprehends corresponds to the thing existing outside of the mind, as in the apprehension of the name ‘man.’ Here, the conception of the intellect has an immediate foundation in reality, as the conception of man corresponds to the reality that is man.²¹¹ The second way is when what is signified by the name has no likeness to what exists outside of the mind, but results from the manner of understanding the reality existing outside the mind.²¹² Example is the name ‘genus’ which does not correspond to anything outside the mind, but comes by the fact that the intellect apprehends ‘animal’ in many species and attributes to it the intention of genus (*attribuit ei intentionem generis*). In cases like this, the proximate foundation of the intention is not in the real thing but in the intellect, whereas the remote foundation is the thing itself (*proximum fundamentum non sit in re sed in intellectu, tamen remotum fundamentum est res ipsa*). Thus, the conceptions of the intellect are not false, but they are of second intentions. The third way is when what is signified by the name corresponds neither to the reality outside the mind nor results from a certain manner of understanding reality. Example is the notion of ‘chimera’ which has neither a proximate nor a remote foundation in reality. It is the notion of a non existing thing. This form of intellection is false.²¹³ Thus, as to whether the *ratio* is said to be or not to be in something, Aquinas gives this concise answer:

²¹⁰1 Sent, d.2, q.1, a.3, resp : “sed dicitur esse in re, inquantum in re extra animam est aliquid quod respondet concetioni animae, sicut significatum signo.»

²¹¹1 Sent, d.2, q.1, a.3, resp : “Aliquando enim hoc quod intellectus concipit, est similitudo rei existentis extra animam, sicut hoc quod concipitur de hoc nomine homo; et talis conceptio intellectus habet fundamentum in re immediate, inquantum res ipsa, ex sua conformitate ad intellectum, facit quod intellectus sit versus, et quod nomen significans illum intellectum, proprie de re dicatur. »

²¹²1 Sent, d.2, q.1, a.3, resp : “Aliquando autem hoc quod significat nomen non est similitudo rei existentis extra animam, sed est aliquid quod consequitur ex modo intelligendi rem quae est extra animam. »

²¹³1 Sent, d.2, q.1, a.3, resp : “Aliquando vero id quod significatur per nomen, non habet fundamentum in re, neque proximum neque remotum, sicut conceptio chimera: quia neque est similitudo alicujus rei extra animam, neque consequitur ex modo intelligendi rem aliquam naturae : et ideo ista conceptio est falsa. »

The *ratio* is said to be in the real thing inasmuch as the name's meaning, of which it happens to be the *ratio*, is in the real thing; and this is properly the case when the intellect's conception is the thing's likeness.²¹⁴

It is this conception of the *ratio* that would form the metaphysical basis of the likeness (*similitudo*) that Aquinas would hold exists between creatures and God, a likeness that would be highlighted by the doctrine of analogy. It is also on the basis of this *ratio* that Aquinas would reject that names be said of God and creatures equivocally. For example, 'God's wisdom' and 'creature's wisdom' would be equivocal were each one of the kinds of wisdom to have a different *ratio*. But it is only one single *ratio* of wisdom that is attributed to both God and creatures. That's why it is the basis of analogical relationship.

The third question considers whether the diverse *rationes* of attributes are in God or not? In response to this question, we would expect Aquinas to answer in the affirmative if the concepts formed by our intellects from the names of the attributes, are the likenesses of God. Aquinas brings into the debate four authorities who, according to him, have different but non-contradictory opinions. Rabbi Moses and Avicenna share the same opinion as against Dionysius and St. Anselm who have a different opinion. As we have earlier seen, Avicenna's conception of God as the Necessary Existent who does not admit of any sort of composition is adopted by Maimonides. Aquinas reports them as holding that 'the reality that is God is a subsistent being and that nothing else is in God but being (*nec aliquid aliud nisi esse, in Deo est*). Therefore, they say that He is being without an essence.'²¹⁵ Just to exclude any form of positive attribution to God, explains why God is denied of essence. Absolute simplicity as understood by Avicenna and Maimonides, denies all forms of plurality including that of essence and being. And Maimonides specifically would reject this form of plurality when 'essence' is considered as an attribute added to God.²¹⁶ From his two principal predecessors Avicenna and Maimonides, Aquinas defines the problem of God: *quod est esse sine essentia*-that He is being without essence. This definition of

²¹⁴1Sent, d.2, q.1, a.3, resp : "Scilicet quod ratio dicitur esse in re, in quantum significatum nominis, cui accedit esse rationem, est in re: et hoc contingit proprie, quando conceptio intellectus est similitudo rei." The translation is from Rubio, M, *Aquinas and Maimonides on the Possibility of the Knowledge of God*, p. 257, n.18.

²¹⁵1Sent, d.2, q.1, a.3, resp : "Quidam enim dicunt, ut Avicenna [Lib. De intelligent, I] et Rabbi Moyses [Lib. I, 57-58], quod res illa quae Deus est, est quoddam esse subsistens, nec aliquid aliud nisi esse, in Deo est: unde dicunt, quod est esse sine essentia. » This accusation is rather truer of Avicenna than Maimonides.

²¹⁶ *Dux Neutorum*, lib.I, cap.LVI, fol.21 : « nec est substantia cui acciderit esse:quia tunc sua inventio esset res addita super illam essentiam, sed est necesse esse semper sui nihil accedit, et iccirco est non in essentia : » Cf *Guide* I, 57, p 132.

God is perhaps, what in the observation of Humbrecht, motivated Aquinas in talking about the unity and identity of being and essence in God, and even of essence which is “nothing other than His being.”²¹⁷ This move not only safeguards essence but dissipates the conception of a composition in God. Aquinas calls God the *ipsum esse subsistens*. Apart from this association with Avicenna, it must be said that Maimonides does teach the identity of essence and being in God who is defined as He whose essence is His being.²¹⁸ Aquinas’s definition of God as *ipsum esse subsistens* must have been positively influenced by Maimonides. These are the initial discoveries Aquinas makes as he goes about developing his discussion on the nature of God.

On the issue of whether *rationes* exist in God or not, Avicenna and Maimonides in the interpretation of Aquinas hold that there are two ways by which names of created perfections can be attributed to God: either by way of negation or by way of causality.²¹⁹ Negation works in two ways: either by removing a lack or the opposite defect (*ad removendum privationem seu defectum oppositum*) as when we say that God is wise in order to signify that He does not lack wisdom; or secondly, according to which something is a consequence of negation. For example, the notion of ‘one’ results from the fact that it is not divided.²²⁰ It follows also that He who is immaterial is intelligent. Hence, all these names according to them are provided more for removing than for attributing something to God.²²¹ Maimonides’s appeal to the way of negation is only to assure that attributes are never understood positively and that privations are also negated of God. All is geared towards positing God as absolutely simple and perfect. When God is said to be powerful, knowing and willing, Maimonides takes them to mean that He is neither powerless, nor ignorant, nor negligent.²²² This particular way of thinking God is impeccable for St. Thomas Aquinas. This correctness of thought would explain why Aquinas takes a

²¹⁷ Humbrecht, T.D, *Théologie Négative et Noms Divins*, p 197.

²¹⁸ *Dux Neutorum*, lib.I, cap.LVI, fol.21 : « Et haec est ratio propter quam dicitur in ipso quod est necesse esse, quia sua inuentio in esse, est sua substantia et sua veritas. » Cf *Guide I*, 57, p 132.

²¹⁹ 1 Sent, d.2, q.1, a.3, resp : “Omnia autem alia quae Deo attribuuntur, verificantur de Deo dupliciter, secundum eos: vel per modum negationis, vel per modum causalitatis.” Cf *Dux Neutorum*, lib.I, cap.LVII, fol.22 : « Scias quod enunciatio de Creatore per verba negativa est vera, in quam non cadit dubitatio : nec est in ea diminutio in veritate Creatoris ullo modo. » *Guide I*, 58, p 134.

²²⁰ *Dux Neutorum*, lib.I, cap.LVII, fol.22: “dicimus quod est unus: quod est ut removeatur ab ipso multitudo.”

²²¹ 1 Sent, d.2, q.1, a.3, resp: “Unde, secundum eos, omnia ista nomina potius sunt inventa ad removendum, quam ad ponendum aliquid in Deo.” Cf *Dux Neutorum*, lib.I, cap.LVII, fol.22: “Ista vero nomina negativa non consueverunt attribui creatori: nisi secundum modum secundum quem removetur aliquid ab alio.” Cf *Guide I*, 58, p 136.

²²² *Dux Neutorum*, lib.I, cap.LVII, fol.22: “Et propter istas rationes dicimus de eo: quia est potens, et sapiens, et volens. Nostra vero intentio est in istis agnominationibus quod non est piger, nec insipiens, nec impetuosus sine ratione. » Cf *Guide I*, 58, p 136.

conciliatory stand between the opinion of Avicenna/Maimonides and that of Dionysius/St. Anselm as we shall soon see.

Causality also works in two ways: either inasmuch as He produces these in creatures, God is said to be good because He inculcates goodness in creatures, and so on; or inasmuch as He acts in the way that creatures act. Aquinas mentions Avicenna and Maimonides as holding to this causal interpretation of attributes. For example we say that God is merciful or is pious when He causes mercifulness and piousness in creatures or is angry when He acts like creatures who behave in such ways when producing particular effects.²²³ It would seem to us that what Avicenna/Maimonides are saying is that we predicate of God created attributes because we think they are effects caused by God.

We must stop to remark that there seems to be a little misreading, by Aquinas, of what Maimonides really holds. In the *Dux Neutorum*, Maimonides talks rather of actional attributes rather than causal attributes. He mentions actions attached to compassion, pity, and passion (anger) as proceeding from God.²²⁴ And perhaps, it is these actional attributes that Aquinas interprets as causal attributes and puts them on Maimonides and Avicenna while citing the texts of *Dux Neutorum*. This is a misreading that Feldman has pointed out in his examination of the divine attributes.²²⁵ Causality for Aquinas is a relation but we know that relation is one of those attributes totally rejected by Maimonides.²²⁶ To show, against Aquinas, that causality as a relation is not accepted between God and creatures, Maimonides brings in immediately the

²²³1 Sent, d.2, q.1, a.3, resp : “Quidam enim dicunt, ut Avicenna et Rabbi Moyses...Omnia autem alia quae Deo attribuuntur, verificantur de Deo dupliciter, secundum eos...Item per modum causalitatis dupliciter: vel inquantum producit ista in creaturis, ut dicatur Deus bonus, quia bonitatem creaturis influit et sic de aliis; vel inquantum ad modum creaturae se habet, ut dicatur Deus volens vel pius, inquantum se habet ad modum volentis vel pii in modo producendi effectum, sicut dicitur iratus, quia ad modum irati se habet.” Cf *Dux Neutorum*, lib.I, cap.LIII, fol.20: “Et propter hoc creator dicitur misericors, sicut dictum est: quomodo miseretur pater filiorum et iterum. Miserebor vestri, sicut pater miseretur filiorum non quod creator sit factus et misericors: sed sicut opus quod provenit a patre super filium: quod est magnae pietatis et gratiae ab anima operata vere.” *Guide I*, 54, p 125.

²²⁴*Dux Neutorum*, lib.I, cap.LIII, fol.20: “Iam patet quod dispositiones et viae sunt opera quae proveniunt a creatore in hunc mundum.” Cf *Guide I*, 54, p 125.

²²⁵Feldman, S, “A Scholastic Misinterpretation of Maimonides’ Doctrine of Divine Attributes,” *Journal of Jewish Studies*, vol. 19, 1968, pp. 29-39. Cf especially page 34.

²²⁶*Dux Neutorum*, lib.I, cap.LI, fol.19: “Quod cum ita sit, quomodo erit comparatio inter creatorem et aliquam creaturam, cum tanta sit differentia inter ipsum et creaturas in veritate essentiae, qua non potest esse maior?” Cf *Guide I*, 52, p 118.

question of equivocality to dispel any basis for a cause-effect similarity.²²⁷ Aquinas makes a good representation of this idea when he notes that Avicenna/Maimonides take all names predicated of God and creatures to be predicated equivocally. The fact that creatures are good, wise, and powerful and the like, does not justify that there is similarity between creatures and God.²²⁸ Created goodness, or created wisdom have nothing in common with the divine goodness or divine wisdom. Absolute simplicity and perfection, exclude any likeness between the transcendent being and creatures. He is the totally other and nothing can be related to Him. The consequence of this is that the *rationes* of the attributes are not and cannot be in God since He is absolutely simple. It is the same objection that Aquinas would again reconsider in the *De potentia* when he notes that because the divine essence is supremely one, he cannot be the root and foundation of multitude.²²⁹ ‘Since they are not in God, there is no likeness between the names of these created attributes and God. However, these *rationes* are found only in the intellect and not in the reality that is God. And the intellect conceives them from the consideration of creatures or by negation or by causality.’²³⁰ Thus, according to Avicenna/Maimonides, the *rationes* are never in God, it is only the intellect that projects them into God.

After seeing the Avicenna/Maimonides side of the debate, Aquinas examines the opinion of Dionysius/St. Anselm. The latter hold that all the perfections that are found in creatures exist really and preeminently in God. It would not be out of place to see Aquinas building on this point in the *Prima Pars* where he holds that as a principle of knowledge, *ratio* exists in the divine mind.²³¹ The point of difference is the *modus essendi* of creatures and of God. Because the mode of being of creatures is imperfect, the perfections exist in them in diverse and multiple

²²⁷ Ibid. lib.I, cap.LV, fol.21: “Similiter etiam sapiens, potens, viuus, et volens non dicitur de eo: sed de omni alio cui conveniunt nisi aequivoce pure: quia inter ipsum et alia nulla est similitudo aliquo modo. » Cf *Guide* I, 56, p 131.

²²⁸ 1 Sent, d.2, q.1, a.3, resp: “Et secundum hanc opinionem sequitur quod omnia nomina quae dicuntur de Deo et creaturis, dicantur aequivoce, et quod nulla similitudo sit creaturae ad creatorem ex hoc quod creatura est bona vel sapiens vel huiusmodi aliquid; et hoc expresse dicit Rabbi Moyses.”

²²⁹ De pot q.7, a.6, obj.6 : “Illud quod est maxime unum non potest esse radix et fundamentum multitudinis. Sed divina essentia est maxime una. Ergo rationes praedictorum nominum non possunt in divina substantia fundari vel radicari.”

²³⁰ 1 Sent, d.2, q.1, a.3, resp: “Unde sequitur quod rationes istorum nominum non sunt in Deo, quasi fundamentum proximum habeant in ipso, sed remotum ... Et sic, secundum hanc opinionem, rationes horum attributorum sunt tantum in intellectu, et non in re, quae Deus est; et intellectus eas adinvenit ex consideratione creaturarum vel per negationem vel per causalitatem, ut dictum est.”

²³¹ ST 1, q.15, a.2: “Sic igitur oportet quod in mente divina sint propriae rationes omnium rerum.”

fashions. Because in God, His *modus essendi* is simple, these perfections exist as one and eminently.

And this eminence is noted in regard to three things: in regard to universality because all perfections, which are not assembled in any one creature, are united in God. In regard to plenitude because wisdom exists in Him with no defect at all, and the same with the other attributes, and this does not happen in creatures. And in regard to unity because that which is diverse in creatures, is one in God. And because He contains everything in this unity that is why He causes everything, knows everything, and everything resembles Him by analogy according to this unity.²³²

As explained by Dionysius/St. Anselm, perfections exist in God excellently by way of universality, by way of plenitude and by way of unity. That is what it means to be a perfect being, which is lacking nothing either in itself or by its power over others. That is why it is said that God knows, and causes all things by the simple nature of His being. Thus, the conceptions that our intellect apprehends from the names of these attributes are real likenesses of the reality which is God, even though they are deficient and fall short of the plenitude that is God's. And because of this, "these *rationes* are not only in the intellect because they have their proximate foundation in the reality which is God. And the consequence is that whatever is implied by having wisdom, as an example of such, can be rightly and properly said of God."²³³ The universal nature of the perfections points to God as their ultimate source. As the universal cause, there should be an ontological relation between God and creatures as His effects. That is the position of Dionysius/St. Anselm. Where does St. Thomas Aquinas fit into this debate? And what is his very own stand in this debate?

Aquinas initially neither criticizes nor rejects any of the two opinions. He takes a reconciliatory role in order to reformulate what is best out of the two opinions. Their answers are correct and

²³² 1 Sent, d.2, q.1, a.3, resp: "Et haec eminentia attenditur quantum ad tria: scilicet quantum ad universalitatem, quia in Deo sunt omnes perfectiones adunatae, quae non congregantur in aliqua una creatura. Item quantum ad plenitudinem, quia est ibi sapientia sine omni defectu, et similiter de aliis attributis : quod non est in creaturis. Item quantum ad unitatem; quae enim in creaturis diversa sunt, in Deo sunt unum. Et quia in illo uno habet omnia, ideo secundum illud unum causat omnia, cognoscit omnia et omnia sibi per analogiam simulantur." Cf Rubio, M, *Op. Cit*, p 259.

²³³ 1 Sent, d.2, q.1, a.3, resp: "Unde huiusmodi rationes non sunt tantum in intellectu, quia habent proximum fundamentum in re quae Deus est. Et ex hoc contingit quod quidquid sequitur ad sapientiam, in quantum huiusmodi, recte et proprie convenit Deo." Cf. Rubio, M, *Op. Cit.*, p 259.

complimentary and would seem different when looked at superficially. They both consider their opinions from different positions. While Avicenna/Maimonides argue from the accidental nature of created things themselves, Dionysius/St. Anselm on the other hand, argue from the perfections that the created things represent. Every created perfection, according to Avicenna/Maimonides, exists accidentally and its existence is not identical to its essence. This lack of identity already brings to the fore, its composite and therefore, limited nature. Because God is simple and perfect, created perfections cannot properly be attributed to God. Wisdom, essence and the like are incorrectly attributed to God since they are notions that are apprehended as partial aspects of the created reality. This explains the assertion about God we saw earlier—*Deus est esse sine essentia*—that He is being without essence. It is a reference to the composite nature of other beings that are not God.²³⁴ So things that are composite like attributes must not be predicated of God and they are not to be found in God. In a very simple language, Avicenna/Maimonides think that the *rationes* are not in God. Their presence in God would only introduce ontological multiplicity in God and this is against His absolute simplicity. This is the basis on which Maimonides presents equivocality as the solution to the problem of language about God.

Dionysius/St. Anselm consider the modes of perfections taken separately in themselves, from which names are given to the things in creation. God is perfect and whatever perfection exists in the created order comes from Him. Later Aquinas would introduce the distinction between the *res significata*—the perfection in its pure state and the *modus significandi*—the mode in which this perfection is signified in the created order. As regards to the *modus significandi*, there is an imperfection that does not befit God, even though the *res significata* befits God. The result of the Dionysius/St. Anselm opinion is that the *rationes* exist in God as in their foundation and that these names should be attributed to God positively.²³⁵ The two opinions for Aquinas differ in their point of departure but are actually complimentary and correct opinions. Avicenna/Maimonides refuses every form of positive attribution of created perfections to God. In His absolute simplicity, God is perfect. Dionysius/St. Anselm say that God as the source of all

²³⁴1 Sent, d.2, q.1, a.3, resp : “Quia primi consideraverunt ipsas res creatas, quibus imponuntur nomina attributorum, sicut quod hoc nomen sapientia imponitur cuidam qualitati, et hoc nomen essentia cuidam rei quae non subsisti : et haec longe a Deo sunt : et ideo dixerunt, quod Deus est esse sine essentia, et quod non est in eo sapientia secundum se. »

²³⁵1 Sent, d.2, q.1, a.3, resp : “Alii vero consideraverunt modos perfectionis, ex quibus dicta nomina sumuntur: et, quia Deus secundum unum simplex esse omnibus modis perfectus est, qui importantur per huiusmodi nomina, ideo dixerunt, quod ista nomina positive Deo convenient.”

the created perfections contain these perfections in the simplicity and unity of His being. They do not attribute to God something like an accident which is not subsisting.²³⁶ In this question of the attributes, Aquinas is only representing the opinions of these authorities without taking pains to explain in full, how these perfections are in God. It is however in the *Summa Contra Gentiles* that He reveals God as *ipsum esse purum actum*, or as *ipsum esse subsistens* having the plenitude of perfections in His being. Things are shown to be more or less perfect according as they approach more or less to the measure of their genus and that is why white is the measure among all colors. “Now the measure of all beings cannot be other than God, Who is His own being. No perfection, consequently, that is appropriate to this or that thing is lacking to Him otherwise, He would not be the common measure of all things.”²³⁷ Finally, as for whether the *rationes* of the names of the attributes are in God, Thomas answers in the affirmative that:

The attributes’ *rationes* are truly in God, because the name’s *ratio* is more on the part of that from which the name is taken than on the part of that to which it is given.²³⁸

That means that the real foundation of what the *ratio* means is the divine being as it is the only reality that gives credibility to the content of each name.²³⁹ This is the conviction that Aquinas takes into his *Quaestiones Disputatae de Potentia Dei* where he elaborates on the nature of affirmative divine attributes. He calls them affirmative divine attributes because the *ratio* of the names (the *ratio nominis*) of these attributes, have their foundation in the reality that is God.²⁴⁰ The existence of these perfections in creation is only deficient because they cannot measure to their *rationes* existing in God, but they can explain why natural reasoning through the things seen in creation lead to the knowledge of the divine nature. Hence, it is the *ratio* as noted by Humbrecht, which brings together creatures and God.

²³⁶ 1 Sent, d.2, q.1, a.3, resp : “Sic ergo patet quod quaelibet harum opinionum non negat hoc quod alia dicit: quia nec primi dicunt aliquem modum perfectionis Deo deesse, nec secundi qualitatem, aut res non subsistentes in Deo ponunt.”

²³⁷ SCG I, 29, 8 : «Id autem quod est mensura omnium entium non potest esse aliud quam Deus, qui est suum esse. Ipsi igitur nulla deest perfectionum quae aliquibus rebus conveniant : alias non esset omnium communis mensura. »

²³⁸ 1 Sent, d.2, q.1, a.3, resp : “Sic ergo patet tertium, scilicet quod rationes attributorum sunt vere in Deo, quia ratio nominis magis se tenet ex parte ejus a quo imponitur nomen, quam ex parte ejus cui imponitur.” Cf. Rubio, M, Op. Cit., p. 260, no 26.

²³⁹ Rubio, M, *Aquinas and Maimonides on the Possibility of the Knowledge of God*, p 53.

²⁴⁰ De pot q.7, a.6: «Et sic omnes rationes sunt quidem in intellectu nostro sicut in subjecto: sed in Deo sunt ut in radice verificante has conceptiones.”

Cette conclusion conciliatrice intrigue par la raison finale, la tension de la *ratio*, dont la dissymétrie d'imposition signale néanmoins la réussite: elle embrasse les créatures et Dieu.²⁴¹

In the *De potentia*, and in the *Prima pars* of the *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas no longer plays a reconciliatory role, but now examines fully and criticizes some of the Maimonidean doctrines he considers risky to the faith and to proper reasoning. He more and more borrows from the doctrines of Dionysius. We see some of these criticisms in our examination of analogy.

Regarding the fourth question that is, whether the plurality of these *rationes* is only on the part of our intellect, or also in some way on the part of the reality which is God, Aquinas explains that both our intellect and God has got a share in explaining the reason for this plurality. In the first instance, Aquinas talks about the inaccessibility of the divine transcendence to a created intellect. Because of this, created intellect conceives of the divine reality by means of a multiplicity of notions giving access to the same reality. This is also the reasoning that animates Aquinas's teaching in the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, where he argues that since we cannot know God naturally except by the means of His effects, 'the names by which we signify His perfection must be diverse, just as the perfections belonging to things are found to be diverse. If we were otherwise, able to understand the divine essence as it is itself, we would express it by only one name.'²⁴² This is what also explains the plurality of things in creation, where the plenitude of divine perfection cannot be represented by only one species of creature but a multiplicity pointing to the same divine being. The created nature of our intellect makes it incapable to apprehend divine perfection in one simple conception, and that necessitates the acquisition of diverse names of Him to signify the diverse *rationes*.²⁴³ Thus, two things must be understood clearly: that the multiplicity of our concepts is founded first in God whose plenitude of perfection makes our conceptions befit Him. The real plurality is not in God Himself, but, in our intellect as the subject, who unable to give a single name to the divine reality understands this

²⁴¹ Humbrecht, T.D., *Théologie Négative et Noms Divins chez saint Thomas d'Aquin*, p 199.

²⁴² SCG I, 31, 4: "Quia enim eum non possumus cognoscere naturaliter nisi ex effectibus deveniendo in ipsum, oportet quod nomina quibus perfectionem ipsius significamus, diversa sint, sicut et perfectiones in rebus inveniuntur diversae. Si autem ipsam essentiam prout est possemus intelligere et ei nomen proprium adaptare, uno nomine tantum eam exprimeremus.»

²⁴³ 1 Sent, d.2, q.1, a.3, resp: "Unde, cum Deus secundum unam et eandem rem sit omnibus modis perfectus, una conceptione non potest integre perfectionem ejus apprehendere, et per consequens nec nominare; et ideo oportet quod diversas conceptiones de eo habeat, quae sunt diversae rationes, et quod diversa nomina imponat significantia rationes illas.»

divine reality in multiple and diverse fashions.²⁴⁴ The very fact of God's simplicity does not mean that the names assigned to God are synonyms. It rather means that the names signify the plenitude of God's being in different ways as signified by their *rationes*.²⁴⁵ Because the *ratio* of wisdom is quite different from the *ratio* of goodness and all other perfections apprehended in the created world, the names are not synonymous. In God, these perfections are one in the essence of God's being, but in creation they are apprehended differently and in diverse fashions. It is the same reasoning that Aquinas holds in the *Summa Theologiae*:

The perfect unity of God requires that what are manifold and divided in others should exist in Him simply and unitedly. Thus it comes about that He is one in reality, and yet multiple in idea, because our intellect apprehends Him in a manifold manner, as things represent Him.²⁴⁶

As to the Maimonidean fear that attributes introduce multiplicity in God, Aquinas clearly answers that the multiplicity of these attributes is not predicated of God as if He were really multiple, but that His simple perfection, corresponds to what these attributes say of Him, and therefore, they can positively be attributed to God.²⁴⁷ Concerning the status of the *ratio*, Aquinas clarifies that it must not be understood as if it has its own separate ontological existence, rather, *ratio* exists in the intellect as in its subject and in certain reality as what gives credence or foundation to this truth in the intellect. For example, it is the actual man that proves the foundation and correspondence for the *ratio* of man in the intellect as in its subject. In the same way, 'the *ratio* of divine goodness exists in the intellect as in its subject, and in God as in what

²⁴⁴ 1 Sent, d.2, q.1, a.3, resp : "Quod autem Deus excedat intellectum nostrum, est ex parte ipsius Dei, propter plenitudinem perfectionis ejus, et ex parte intellectus nostri, qui deficienter se habet ad eam comprehendendam. Unde patet quod pluralitas istarum rationum non tantum est ex parte intellectus nostri, sed etiam ex parte ipsius Dei, inquantum sua perfectio superat unamquamque conceptionem nostri intellectus. Et ideo pluralitati istarum rationum respondet aliquid in re quae Deus est : non quidem pluralitas rei, sed plena perfectio, ex qua contingit ut omnes istae conceptiones ei aptentur.»

²⁴⁵ 1 Sent, d.2, q.1, a.3, resp : "Unde nomina illa non sunt synonyma, inquantum significant rationes diversas."

²⁴⁶ ST 1, q.13, a.4, ad.3: "dicendum quod hoc ipsum ad perfectam Dei unitatem pertinent, quod ea quae sunt multipliciter et divisim in aliis, in ipso sunt simpliciter et unite. Et ex hoc contingit quod est unus re et plures secundum rationem, quia intellectus noster ita multipliciter apprehendit eum, sicut res multipliciter ipsum repraesentant."

²⁴⁷ 1 Sent., d.2, q.1, a.3, ad.3 : "Dicendum, quod multiplicitas ista attributorum nullo modo ponitur in Deo quasi ipse secundum rem sit multiplex; sed tamen ipse secundum suam simplicem perfectionem, multitudini istorum, attributorum correspondet, ut vere de Deo dicantur."

corresponds by certain likeness to this *ratio*, causing it to be true.²⁴⁸ It is this metaphysical likeness that gives truth to the *ratio* in that, it establishes a correspondence between the conception signified by the *ratio* and the known object in reality. Hence, nothing in this discussion opposes the absolute simplicity of God.

The merit of that thorough examination of the question of attributes in the *Commentary on the Sentences*, and the exchange of ideas with so many influential authorities—Avicenna, Maimonides, Dionysius and St. Anselm—leads Aquinas to a division of the divine attributes into three: affirmative, negative and eminent (transcendent) types.

First affirmatively: for instance, *God is wise*: since we must needs say this of God because in Him there is a likeness to the wisdom that derives from Him.—Nevertheless seeing that wisdom in God is not such as that which we understand and name, it can be truly denied, so that we may say: *God is not wise*.—Again, since wisdom is not denied of God as though he were lacking in wisdom, but because in him it transcends the wisdom we indicate and name, we ought to say that *God is super-wise*. Accordingly Dionysius explains perfectly by these three ways of ascribing wisdom to God, how these expressions are to be applied to God.²⁴⁹

Thus, the three forms of divine attributes expressed thematically by Aquinas are (1) God is wise—affirmative attribute. (2) God is not wise—negative attribute. (3) God is super-wise—eminent attributes or what may also be called relative attributes of God.²⁵⁰ The original interpretation of Aquinas is in the fact of his insistence that we deny something like wisdom of

²⁴⁸ 1 Sent., d.2, q.1, a.3, ad.4 : “Dicendum, quod sicut ratio hominis non dicitur esse in homine quasi res quaedam in ipso, sed est sicut in subject in intellectu, et est in homine sicut in eo quod praestat fulcimentum veritati ipsius; ita etiam ratio bonitatis divinae est in intellectu sicut in subject, in Deo autem sicut in eo quod correspondet per quamdam similitudinem isti rationi, faciens ejus veritatem.» cf. Rubio, M, *Op. Cit.*, p 264.

²⁴⁹ De pot q.7, a.5, ad.2 : “Et ideo, secundum doctrinam Dionysii, tripliciter ista de Deo dicuntur. Primo quidem affirmative, ut dicamus, Deus est sapiens; quod quidem de eo oportet dicere propter hoc quod est in eo similitudo sapientiae ab ipso fluens: quia tamen non est in Deo sapientia qualem nos intelligimus et nominamus, potest vere negari, ut dicatur, Deus non est sapiens. Rursum quia sapientia non negatur de Deo quia ipse deficiat a sapientia, sed quia supereminens est in ipso quam dicatur aut intelligatur, ideo oportet dicere quod Deus sit supersapiens. Et sic per istum triplicem modum loquendi secundum quem dicitur Deus sapiens, perfecte Dionysius dat intelligere qualiter ista Deo attribuantur.” Cf. the *Divine Names* 2, 4, 641A “...the assertion of all things, the denial of all things, that which is beyond every assertion and denial.”; the *Mystical Theology* 1, 2, 1000B: “Since it is the Cause of all beings, we should posit and ascribe to it all the affirmations we make in regard to beings, and more appropriately, we should negate all these affirmations, since it surpasses all being.”

²⁵⁰ McInerny, Ralph, *Being and Predication: Thomistic Interpretations*, (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1986) p 272.

God, not in the sense that wisdom is lacking in God, but in the sense that its existence in God has no equal to what our *modus significandi* can represent. Thanks to the *Dux Neutrorum* of Maimonides, St. Thomas Aquinas arrives at a triple classification of the divine attributes that permits a clear language about God and a perfect response to Maimonides.

3.1 Affirmative Divine Attributes

It is Aquinas's reasoning that certain 'names' may be predicated of God substantially and not simply by removing from God what is not worthy of Him. Names that signify pure perfections without any inherent reference to created limitations, or without requiring matter to complete their meaning, are predicated of God in an affirmative way. Such are words like "good," "wise," and the like. For Aquinas then we must hold that:

These names signify the divine substance and are predicated substantially of God, although they fall short of a full representation of Him.²⁵¹

These attributes reveal something of the divine essence in a positive way. Let it be noted immediately that Maimonides completely rejects affirmative attributes for the sole reason that they "indicate a part of the thing the knowledge of which is sought, that part being either a part of its substance or one of its accidents."²⁵² This form of attribution implies, according to Maimonides, a deficiency in God.²⁵³ It is the subject of discussion in article 2 question 13 of the *prima pars* of the *Summa Theologiae*. For example, 'God is wise' is an affirmative attribute of God, likewise other attributes like "good," "knowledge," "living." The total denial of affirmative attributes may mean the total denial of the objective value of language and the destruction of faith, since believers in God as Aquinas points out, know that 'God is good' and mean it when they say it.²⁵⁴ This is because the *ratio* of 'divine goodness' which exists in the intellect as in its

²⁵¹ ST 1, q.13, a.2: "Et ideo aliter dicendum est, quod huiusmodi quidem nomina significant substantiam divinam, et praedicantur de Deo substantialiter, sed deficiunt a representatione ipsius."

²⁵² *Dux Neutrorum*, lib.I, cap.LVII, fol.22: "quia attributiones licet non sint determinatae: significant tamen aliquid de universitate rei cuius cognitio quaeritur: vel aliqua de substantia ipsius: vel aliquod accidens de accidentibus ipsius. » Cf *Guide* I, 58, p 135.

²⁵³ Ibid. lib.I, cap.LVII, fol.22: « Sed enunciatio de ipso per verba affirmativa partim est in aequivocatione: partim est in imperfectione sicut exposuimus. » Cf *Guide* I, 58, p 134.

²⁵⁴ ST 1, q.13, a.2: "Aliud enim intendunt dicere, cum dicunt Deum viventem, quam quod sit causa vitae nostrae, vel quod differat a corporibus inanimatis."

subject, has its real foundation in God as to what it corresponds by a certain likeness. We approximate to this divine goodness by the goodness we see in creation. It is like that for all divine attributes.

These different aspects (*rationes*) are founded on the divine essence not as their subject but as on the source of truth, or as on that which is represented by all of them: and this is not in conflict with God's simplicity.²⁵⁵

What Aquinas would guard against in this type of attribution is the human connotation that goes with it. That 'Peter is good,' means that Peter performs an act that is laudable, where 'good' is something distinct from his essence as Peter. That 'God is good,' does not refer to the same human way of signifying a good person. On the contrary, 'God is good' refers to the essence that is God, and not an additional act in God. Affirmative attributes add a logical legitimacy to the doctrine of analogy and furthermore sets Aquinas at odds with Maimonides.

Thus when we say that a man is wise, we signify his wisdom as something distinct from the other things about him—his essence, for example, his powers or his existence. But when we use this word about God we do not intend to signify something distinct from his essence, power or existence. ...what it signifies in God is not confined by the meaning of our word but goes beyond it.²⁵⁶

The *res significata*—that is, the perfection that is signified by 'goodness' or 'wisdom' belongs absolutely to God and it is neither a part of God's substance nor one of its accidents as Maimonides would argue. But the mode of signifying it usually connotes what is material since our knowledge of 'goodness' is taken from what is sensory and corporeal. Because of this, even though such affirmative attributes signify the essence of God substantially, Aquinas acknowledges that they do it in a limited and imperfect way. This denial in God of the *modus significandi* is the proper function of the *via negationis*.

²⁵⁵ De pot q.7, a.6, ad.6: «Istae rationes non fundantur in divina essentia sicut in subjecto, sed sicut in causa veritatis, vel sicut in repraesentato per omnes; quod eius simplicitati non derogat.»

²⁵⁶ ST 1, q.13, a.5: 'puta, cum hoc nomen, sapiens, de homine dicitur, significamus aliquam perfectionem distinctam ab essentia hominis, et a potentia, et ab esse ipsius, et ab omnibus huiusmodi; sed cum hoc nomen de Deo dicimus, non intendimus significare aliquid distinctum ab essentia, vel potentia, vel esse ipsius...non autem cum dicitur de Deo; sed relinquit rem significatam ut incomprehensam, et excedentem nominis significationem.'

3.2 Negative Divine Attributes

We say ‘negative divine attributes,’ because they are those attributes which by denying of God things which are inappropriate, lead us to the purity of God’s essence. *Negation here should not be understood in the sense of a deprivation.* When God is described as “invisible,” it does not mean that He is deprived of light or that He has a defect. On the contrary, it means that the human sense of ‘visibility’, our *modus significandi* must be negated of God who in actual fact, transcends all light and is the source of light. Pseudo-Dionysius, from whom Aquinas borrowed a lot, likens this way of negation to the sculptors who, in their bid to reveal the hidden beauty of their art, begin by “clearing aside” (*aphaeresis*—otherwise rendered ‘denial’), every obstacle to the pure view of the hidden image.²⁵⁷ According to Aquinas:

The ways in which God does not exist will become apparent if we rule out from Him everything inappropriate, such as compositeness, change and the like. Let us inquire then first, about God’s simpleness, thus ruling out compositeness.²⁵⁸

3.2.1 God’s Simplicity (*de Dei simplicitate*)

Mentioning simplicity²⁵⁹ as the very first attribute of God alerts us to Aquinas’s desire to safeguard God’s transcendence as first cause from every other thing. The sure way to proceed is by removing from God whatever does not befit Him as first cause and pure act, things like composition and motion which are characteristics that mark out concrete material being. A composite being is ontologically derived and thus dependent on a cause. Some of the compositions found in a composite being and which should be denied of God are those of a metaphysical type like the composition of form and matter; the composition of the subsisting individual and its essence; the composition of essence and existence; of genus and difference; and the composition of substance and accident.²⁶⁰ These conform to a large extent, to Avicenna’s

²⁵⁷ Pseudo-Dionysius, *Mystical Theology* 2, 1025B, in *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, translated by Colm Luibheid, (New York: Paulist Press, 1987) p 138.

²⁵⁸ ST 1, q.3, introduction: “Potest autem ostendi de Deo quomodo non sit, removendo ab ea quae ei non convenient, utpote compositionem, motum, et alia huiusmodi. Primo ergo inquiretur de simplicitate ipsius, per quam remouentur ab eo compositio. »

²⁵⁹ It is to be noted that this order of the divine attributes, differs from the order Aquinas gave in his *Summa Contra Gentiles* I, 15-43. There, the order is as follows: immutability, eternity, simplicity, perfection, divine naming, goodness, unity, and infinity. No reason is given by Aquinas for the change in arrangement. It goes again to point the flexibility with which Aquinas discusses the divine attributes and indeed, theological problems.

²⁶⁰ These types of composition constitute the objects of discussion for articles 2—6 of the question 3, ST 1.

discussion on the simplicity of God.²⁶¹ The anthropomorphic images in the Bible, which represent God as corporeal, must have prompted Aquinas to mention simplicity as the very first negative divine attribute.

In its wake, simplicity denies that God is a body since, among other things, a body is extended and infinitely divisible. Whatever is extended and divisible exist in potentiality. But in God, there is no potentiality and God cannot be a body since He is pure act.²⁶² If God is not a body, it follows that there is no metaphysical composition of matter and form in Him, since such is found only in a composite material being. Beyond the level of matter and form, there is a different form of composition, that of essence and *esse* which is found in all created effects including non material substances. Every substance receives its being (*esse*) according to its specific mode of being, such that the *esse* is related to it—the substance or essence—as actuality is related to potentiality.²⁶³ It is this reception of *esse*, according to the measure of its essence, which makes a thing particular and determinate, and thus defines its ontological status as a creature. But this composition and distinction are not found in God since He is *ipsum esse per se subsistens*. The simplicity implied here is thus not that arrived at by the mere abstraction of a part from its whole, but that of a being that subsists in itself. Simplicity excludes that there be a difference between essence and existence in God. To forestall the ambiguity that the attribute of simplicity may lead to, Aquinas adds:

And because whatever is simple in material things is imperfect and a part of something else, we shall discuss (2) his perfection; (3) his infinity; (4) his immutability; (5) his unity.²⁶⁴

The other attributes, except the attribute of perfection, enumerated by Aquinas still move by the way of negation to the knowledge of God. They are all negative divine attributes based on the

²⁶¹ According to Avicenna, to say that God is absolutely simple means a total denial of all forms of composition or plurality actual or conceptual. And that includes the plurality of physical objects, the conceptual plurality as that of matter and form; plurality through attributes implied in knowledge, power and will; rational plurality from the composition of genus and difference; and the plurality of essence and existence. Cf. Averroes, *Tahafut Al-tahafut*, Fifth discussion, 296-297, p 175f.

²⁶² ST 1, q.3, a.1: «Impossibile est igitur quod in Deo sit aliquid in potentia. Omne autem corpus est in potentia, quia continuum in quantum hujusmodi divisibile est. Impossibile est igitur Deum esse corpus.»

²⁶³ ST 1, q.3, a.4: « Oportet igitur quod ipsum esse comparetur ad essentiam quae est aliud ab ipso sicut actus ad potentiam.»

²⁶⁴ ST 1, q.3, introduction : « Et quia simplicia in rebus corporalibus sunt imperfecta et partes, secundo inquiretur de perfectione ipsius, tertio de infinitate ejus, quarto de immutabilitate, quinto de unitate. »

two major attributes of simplicity and perfection. Finiteness is the hallmark of limitedness and this should be denied of the cause of all things and that is why God is said to be outside the bounds of limit, He is Infinite since there is no matter/form composition in Him by which He can be limited and determined.²⁶⁵ He is limited neither spatially nor by essence, and thus is also said to be ubiquitous or omnipresent (q.8). It is a secondary attribute that follows upon infinity. Whatever is mutable is divisible and extended. God must be outside of changeable and extendable things. He is pure act and thus is called Immutable. Because God is unchangeable, He is enduringly present. This immutability gives rise to the secondary attribute of eternity (q.10). Unity denies of God all multiplicity. God is distinguished from all things that are ontologically composed and thus dependent on God for their existence. According to Te Velde, “all three of them (infinity, immutability and unity) express in their meaning, each in their own way, the double movement of *remotio* and *excessus*.”²⁶⁶ In Him is found the unity of all the perfections that exist diversely in composed things, in a higher and eminent manner. Perfection as the other major attribute will be discussed under the *via eminentiae*.

3.3 Eminential or Transcendent Divine Attributes

The perfections found in creatures have their pre-eminent presence in God as the source and cause of creaturely perfections. This type of attribution finds its original discussion in Dionysius’ text—the *Divine Names*. According to that text:

It is that as Cause of all and as transcending all, he is rightly nameless and yet has the names of everything that is. ... For the unnamed goodness is not just the cause of cohesion or life or perfection so that it is from this or that providential gesture that it earns a name, but it actually contains everything beforehand within itself—and this in an

²⁶⁵ ST 1, q.7, a.1 : «Materia autem perficitur per formam per quam finitur, et ideo infinitum secundum quod attribuitur materiae habet rationem imperfecti, est enim quasi materia non habens formam.”

²⁶⁶ Te Velde, R, *Aquinas on God*, p 82.

uncomplicated and boundless manner—and it is thus by virtue of the unlimited goodness of its single all-creative Providence.²⁶⁷

It is true that Aquinas accepts the distinct modes according to which these perfections exist in God and in creatures. “What pre-exists in God in a simple and unified way is divided amongst creatures as many and varied perfections.”²⁶⁸ By the fact of the varied material existence in creatures, of the perfections that exist in a unified and simple way in God, there is already a recognition of creature-creator relation existing between them since from the creature, something can be known of the Creator.

And so whatever is said both of God and creature is said in virtue of the order that creatures have to God as to their source and cause, in which all the perfections of things pre-exist transcendentally.²⁶⁹

The perfections that exist in creatures are imperfectly relative to the perfection that exists in God in a unified and excellent manner. Thus, when God is called ‘super good,’ super wise,’ and others like that, it is not due to a multiplicity or deficiency or diversity in His nature, but because it is from the various perfections of creatures that we attribute such names to God, the Cause and Source of all perfections. It is pertinent to remark that when it comes to naming, it is the reverse of the order of reality. The names that are given primarily to creatures apply to God secondarily, but as the source of all perfection, the reality that is signified by the name is realized by priority in God according to His mode of being.²⁷⁰ The *Commentary on the Sentences* has shown that these *rationes* of the attributes have their real foundation in God. However, what these perfections signify in creatures falls short of what they signify in God whose *modus essendi* is quite different from the *modus essendi* of creatures. Aquinas notes that ‘such names are spoken of God not only causally, but moreover essentially. When God is called good, or wise, it is signified not only that He is the cause of wisdom or goodness, but that these pre-exist in Him

²⁶⁷ Pseudo-Dionysius, the *Divine Names* 1, 7, 596C-597A, p 56.

²⁶⁸ ST 1, q.13, a.4 “Quae quidem perfectiones in Deo praeexistunt unite et simpliciter, in creaturis vero recipiuntur divise et multipliciter.”

²⁶⁹ ST 1, q.13, a.5 “Et sic quidquid dicitur de Deo et creaturis, dicitur secundum quod est aliquis ordo creaturae ad Deum ut ad principium et causam, in qua praeexistunt excellenter omnes rerum perfectiones.”

²⁷⁰ SCG I, 34, 6: «Sicut igitur, quia ex rebus aliis in Dei cognitionem pervenimus, res nominum de Deo et rebus aliis dictorum per prius est in Deo secundum suum modum, sed ratio nominis per posterius. Unde et nominari dicitur a suis causatis.”

more eminently.’²⁷¹ It could also be a way in which human language tries to surpass its limits and signify as perfectly as possible, the transcendent reality that is God. The way of eminence combines in its attribution, both the affirmative and the negative ways. Such terms as “good,” “wise,” “being” “power,” and the like can neither totally be explained as ‘causal relation’ nor can they be totally applied negatively to God. Our earlier discussions of the *via causalitatis* and the *via negationis* had already shed light on this problem. What is the most appropriate ways then, of interpreting such terms? We agree with Wolfson that “the answer given by St. Thomas is that they are to be interpreted in two senses: first, in an eminent sense; second, in an analogical sense.”²⁷² By way of eminence, we negate of God, the mode of signifying that is typically human, in order to affirm the perfection in its most excellent state. Aquinas articulates the order by affirmation, then negation and then affirmation by supereminence:

Since it is possible to find in God every perfection of creatures, but in another and more eminent way, whatever names unqualifiedly designate a perfection without defect are predicated of God and of other things: for example, goodness, wisdom, being and the like ... But the names that express such perfections along with the mode of supereminence ... are said of God alone. Such names are *the highest good, the first being*, and the like.²⁷³

By analogy, we express how two things can be related to one of them as an effect is related to its principle and source. The intentional ordering of names to that reality beyond human comprehension is made possible by the causal primacy of God in relation to creatures. And thus, causal dependence of creatures upon God is the foundation for the analogy of names. Before giving an analogical interpretation of divine attributes, let us first discuss perfection as it corresponds particularly to the *via eminentiae*, according to which all the perfections found in creatures exist in God most eminently.

²⁷¹ ST 1, q.13, a.6 : “cum enim dicitur, *Deus est bonus*, vel *sapiens*, non solum significatur quod ipse sit causa sapientiae vel bonitatis, sed quod haec in eo eminentius praeexistunt. »

²⁷² Wolfson, Harry A, “St. Thomas on Divine Attributes,” p 10.

²⁷³ SCG I, 30, 2: “Quia enim omnem perfectionem creaturae est in Deo invenire sed per alium modum eminentiorem, quaecumque nomina absolute perfectionem absque defectu designant, de Deo praedicantur et de aliis rebus: sicut est *bonitas, sapientia, esse* et alia hujusmodi ... Quae vero hujusmodi perfectiones expriment cum supereminentiae modo quo Deo convenient, de solo Deo dicuntur: sicut *summum bonum, primus ens*, et alia hujusmodi.”

3.3.1 God's Perfection

God is both utterly simple and most perfect. Perfection bespeaks of something complete and without any lack. Aristotle lists three senses of the term: (1) that outside which it is not possible to find any, even one, of its parts; (2) that which in respect of excellence and goodness cannot be excelled in its kind; (3) the things which have attained their end, this being good, are called complete; for things are complete in virtue of having attained their end.²⁷⁴ Aquinas began his treatment of this attribute by rebuking the early Socratics who did not attribute perfection to the first principle of all things—matter, since it is in potency and therefore imperfect. When a distinction is made between the first material principle and the first efficient principle, it is shown that God as agent is rather in actuality and acts as an efficient cause. Because God is the first efficient cause and pure actuality, Aquinas concludes that God is the most perfect being. The more a thing is actual, the more perfect it is.

Thus the first origin of all activity will be the most actual, and therefore the most perfect of all things. For things are called perfect when they have achieved actuality, the perfect thing being that in which nothing required for by the thing's particular mode of perfection fails to exist.²⁷⁵

That definition given by Aquinas mirrors the three-fold senses of perfection given by Aristotle. Nothing is lacking in God. As the cause of all things, whatever perfection is found in the effect, must be found in the cause of that effect. This can happen in two ways: either according to the same nature where the agent is univocal, for example, as when a human being generates another human, or in a more eminent way where the cause is equivocal, for example, as a likeness of all that is generated by the power of the sun is found in the sun itself.²⁷⁶ It is logically true that an effect pre-exists in the power of the acting cause, but it does not follow that this effect must exist

²⁷⁴ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* V, 16, 1022a1-25.

²⁷⁵ ST I, q.4, a.1: "Unde primum principium activum oportet maxime esse in actu, et per consequens maxime perfectum. Secundum hoc enim dicitur aliquid esse perfectum quod est actu, nam perfectum dicitur cui nihil deest secundum modum suae perfectionis."

²⁷⁶ ST I, q.4, a.2: "Dicendum quod in Deo sunt perfectiones omnium rerum, unde et dicitur universaliter perfectus, quia non deest ei aliqua nobilitas quae inveniatur in aliquo genere, ut dicit Commentator ... Primo quidem, per hoc quod quidquid perfectionis est in effectu oportet inveniri in causa effectiva, vel secundum eandem rationem si sit agens univocum (ut homo generat hominem), vel eminentiori modo si sit agens aequivocum (sicut in sole est similitudo eorum quae generantur per virtutem solis)."

in the cause in an imperfect mode since the effect is less perfect than the cause. For an effect to exist imperfectly in a perfect cause goes contrary to the distinction that Aquinas has already made between the *modus essendi* of each thing. If, the *modus essendi* of a cause is perfect, that which exists in it must exist in a perfect mode. As he says: “Every excellence in any given thing belongs to it according to its being.”²⁷⁷ This respects the axiom that ‘whatever is received in something is received in accord with the mode of that which receives it.’ In the same way, Aquinas would argue that whatever exists in another exists according to the mode of that in which it exists.

Since God then is the primary operative cause of all things, the perfections of everything must pre-exist in Him in a higher manner.²⁷⁸

The existence in the effect, though in a limited or participated manner, of the perfection that is found in the cause, is a proof that the effect resembles the cause; and that the cause is not like the effect since it surpasses the effect in the transcendence of its being. God is perfect in an eminent way. God is the cause of all things by universality, by plenitude and has all things in the unity of His simple nature.

4.0 On Analogical Interpretation of Divine Attributes

In response to Maimonides’s radical rejection of any language that establishes a likeness between God and creatures, Aquinas insists that there is an order that exists between God and creatures and that certain words may be required to articulate that order. Aquinas mentions the perfections that accrue to creatures from their source as when we say a man is wise, we signify his wisdom as caused and as something distinct from his power, or his existence, and his essence. The same word used of God expresses the totality of perfection and does not signify something distinct from God’s essence, power or existence. ‘Wisdom’ applied to God thus signifies something that goes beyond the mere word that human language uses. Thus, in order to

²⁷⁷ SCG I, 28, 2: “Omnis enim nobilitas cuiuscumque rei est sibi secundum suum esse.”

²⁷⁸ ST I, q.4, a.2: “Cum ergo Deus sit prima causa effectiva rerum oportet omnium rerum perfectiones praeexistere in Deo secundum eminentiorem modum.”

better express the sort of relation that exists between God and creatures, and in order to better give logical meaning to the words that human language uses, Aquinas reexamines or reconsiders the three various terms of predication that are also found in Maimonides: univocal, equivocal and analogical.²⁷⁹ As our discussion will prove, Aquinas rejects both univocal and equivocal interpretations of the divine attributes and insists against Maimonides, that divine attributes are correctly interpreted analogically.

Words are used of God and creatures in an analogical way, that is in accordance with a certain order between them ... In this way some words are used neither univocally nor purely equivocally of God and creatures, but analogically, for we cannot speak of God at all except in the language we use of creatures, and so whatever is said both of God and creatures is said in virtue of the order that creatures have to God as their source and cause in which all perfections of things pre-exist transcendentally.²⁸⁰

4.1 Univocal Predication

In its Aristotelian usage, ‘things are said to be named ‘univocally’ which have both the name and the definition answering to the name in common.’²⁸¹ That means that a term used univocally refers to the same things in the same sense without any difference at all. For instance, a man and an ox are both referred to as ‘animal’ where not only the term but also the signification of the term is the same for them. What they share in common—animality—is essential to both. This is an univocal predication. In univocal predication, there is identity of both name and nature, and hence from the point of view of the signification by the name, the subjects of univocal predication are equal. Univocal predication presupposes that things be either of the same genus, species, difference, accident or property. But Aquinas refuses that anything be predicated of God and creatures univocally. This is because an effect cannot receive in exactly the same manner a

²⁷⁹ Maimonides’ *Treatise on Logic*, p 59; *Dux Neutrorum*, lib.I, cap.LV, fol.21. Cf *Guide I*, 56, pp 130-131.

²⁸⁰ ST 1, q.13, a.5: “Dicendum est igitur quod hujusmodi nomina dicuntur de Deo et creaturis secundum analogiam, idest, proportionem ... Et hoc modo aliqua dicuntur de Deo et creaturis analogice, et non aequivoce pure neque pure univoce. Non enim possumus nominare Deum nisi ex creaturis, ut supra dictum est. Et sic quidquid dicitur de Deo et creaturis, dicitur secundum quod est aliquis ordo creaturae ad Deum ut ad principium et causam, in qua praeexistunt excellenter omnes rerum perfectiones.»

²⁸¹ *Categories* 1, 1a 6-12.

form through which the agent acts.²⁸² In one of his later works *De potentia*, Aquinas notes as follows:

Again it is clear that although the form in the agent and the form in the effect have a common *ratio*, the fact that they have different modes of existence precludes their univocal predication.²⁸³

Though a material house and a house in the mind of the builder may be of the same type, nevertheless, house cannot be univocally predicated of both since they do not share the same form. Whereas in the builder's mind it has an immaterial existence, the form of the material house has its being in reality. In divine attribution, the same thing is applicable. For example, God and creatures are both said to be 'good.' But 'goodness' would not be attributed of God and creatures univocally, since the mode of being of God is immaterial and simple while in creatures, it is material and diverse.²⁸⁴ Nothing can be predicated of God as a genus or a difference since God goes beyond such definitions. Thus, nothing can be attributed of God and creatures univocally. God is His essence and all perfections belong to Him essentially. Regardless of the proximity by imitation of things to God, a point can never be reached where perfection would belong to things in the same way that it belongs to God unless creatures cease from being creatures which is impossible. Aquinas has been consistent on this throughout his writings.²⁸⁵

4.2 Equivocal Predication

Things are said to be named equivocally when they have the same name but with totally different meanings. For instance, "bank" is a name that can apply both to a river as depicting an elevated mass of earth bordering a river and controlling the overflow of the river; and to an institution that

²⁸² SCG I, 32, 2: "Nam effectus qui non recipit formam secundum speciem similem ei per quam agens agit, nomen ab illa forma sumptum secundum univocam praedicationem recipere non potest."

²⁸³ De pot q.7, a.7: "Item patet quod, etsi una sit ratio formae existentis in agente et in effectu, diversus tamen modus existendi impedit univocam praedicationem; »

²⁸⁴ De pot q.7, a.7: "Dato ergo per impossibile quod eiusdem rationis sit bonitas in Deo et creatura, non tamen bonum univoce de Deo praedicaretur; cum quod in Deo est immaterialiter et simpliciter, in creatura sit materialiter et multipliciter. »

²⁸⁵ Cf *Compendium Theologiae*, lib.1, cap.27: "Univoce namque dici non possunt, cum definitio eius quod de creatura dicitur, non sit definitio eius quod dicitur de Deo: oportet autem univoce dictorum eandem definitionem esse—They cannot be predicated univocally because the definition of what is said of a creature is not a definition of what is said of God. Things predicated univocally must have the same definition."

safeguards and transacts money. In the two cases, the only thing they share in common is the name ‘bank,’ which means something totally other for them. And the only way to explain this convergence of two quite different meanings in the same term is by pure coincidence. There is no reference of meaning of one to the other. Among the medievals, it is described as *aequivocum a casu*—equivocal by chance. According to Aquinas:

In equivocals by chance, there is no order or reference of one to another, but it is entirely accidental that one name is applied to diverse things: the application of the name to one of them does not signify that it has an order to the other.²⁸⁶

This form of predication cannot obtain between God and creatures where Aquinas maintains there is the order of cause and effect. The only resemblance that occurs in equivocation is nominal and nothing more. No likeness that exists between God and creatures can be explained equivocally, and Aquinas regrets this impossibility of going from one of the terms to the knowledge of another “for knowledge of things does not depend on words, but on the meaning of names.”²⁸⁷ The height of Aquinas’s frustration with equivocal predication is reached when Aquinas calls equivocation an impediment to proper reasoning. This follows from Maimonides’s insistence that terms applied to God and creatures are purely equivocal.²⁸⁸ In response, Aquinas replies:

Equivocation in a name impedes the process of reasoning. If then, nothing was said of God and creatures except in a purely equivocal way, no reasoning proceeding from creatures to God could take place.²⁸⁹

Part of Aquinas’s enterprise in the *Summa Contra Gentiles* is to show that from the things seen, we can by proper reasoning, arrive at their transcendent cause. It is his conviction that sensible things retain within themselves some sort of trace of a likeness to God no matter how

²⁸⁶ SCG I, 33, 2: “nam in his quae sunt a casu aequivoca, nullus ordo aut respectus attenditur unius ad alterum, sed omnino per accidens est quod unum nomen diversis rebus attribuitur: non enim nomen impositum uni, signat ipsum habere ordinem ad alterum.”

²⁸⁷ SCG I, 33, 4: “nam cognitio rerum non dependet ex vocibus, sed ex nominum ratione.”

²⁸⁸ *Dux Neutrorum*, lib.I, cap.LV, fol.21: “Similiter etiam sapiens, potens, viuus, et volens non dicitur de eo: sed de omni alio cui conveniunt nisi aequivoce pure: quia inter ipsum et alia nulla est similitudo aliquo modo.” Cf *Guide I*, 56, p 131.

²⁸⁹ SCG I, 33, 5: “Aequivocatio nominis processum argumentationis impedit. Si igitur nihil diceretur de Deo, et creaturis, nisi pure aequivoce, nulla argumentatio fieri posset procedendo de creaturis ad Deum.”

imperfect.²⁹⁰ It is through this sort of reference, between sensible things, that a demonstrable proof of the existence of God came about. This likeness can not properly be expressed by a univocal way since predications of a univocal type reduce all things predicated of one term to sameness and close off the possibility of one of the terms being the term of reference. It kills off the reference *secundum prius et posterius* that would be expected between God and creatures. Equivocation closes off too the possibility of knowing another from one of the things in a predication. Knowledge is killed by equivocation.

Again, since all our knowledge of God is taken from creatures, if the agreement were purely nominal, we should know nothing about God except empty expressions to which nothing corresponds in reality. Moreover, it would follow that all the proofs advanced about God by philosophers are sophisms.²⁹¹

If we cannot understand something from a name about a particular being, that name is useless. That is the position of Aquinas. The meanings of names are known to us solely to the extent that they are said of creatures. “God is good,” means something because we know what creaturely goodness is like. Equivocal interpretation of attributes closes off this form of reasoning. Hence, Aquinas turns to a different mode of predication that neither reduces all the terms in a predication to sameness of name and nature, nor makes the terms in a predication totally different in meaning one from the other. This kind of predication that expresses something of univocal and something of equivocal is called by Aquinas, the predication by analogy.

4.3 Analogical Predication

The proper way a metaphysician or a theologian can speak of God without falling into pure equivocation or mere sophism is by analogy. This is by relying on the relation binding each

²⁹⁰ SCG I, 8, 1: “quod res quidem sensibiles, ex quibus humana ratio cognitionis principium sumit, aliquale vestigium in se divinae imitationis retinent ... ita tamen imperfectum quod ad declarandam ipsius Dei substantiam omnino insufficiens invenitur.”

²⁹¹ De pot q.7, a.7: “Item, cum omnis cognitio nostra de Deo ex creaturis sumatur, si non erit convenientia nisi in nomine tantum, nihil de Deo sciremus nisi nomina tantum vana, quibus res non subesset. Sequeretur etiam quod omnes demonstrationes a philosophis datae de Deo, essent sophisticæ; »

effect to its cause, the only link through which we can make an accurate ascent from creature to creator.²⁹² Analogy creates a reference in meaning from one term to another.

This way of using words lies somewhere between pure equivocation and simple univocity, for the word is neither used in the same sense, as with univocal usage, nor in totally different senses, as with equivocation. The several senses of a word used analogically signify different relations to some one thing, as ‘health’ in a complexion means a symptom of health in a man, and in a diet means a cause of that health.²⁹³

In the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, we find a similar definition of analogy when Aquinas describes it as a relation “according to an order or reference to something one.”²⁹⁴ This is in perfect fidelity to Aristotle from whom this is derived. In his *Metaphysics*, Aristotle writes: “For not only in the case of things which have one common notion does the investigation belong to one science, but also in the case of things which are related to one common nature; for even these in a sense have one common notion.”²⁹⁵ Thus, with this definition of analogy as ‘a relation or reference to something one,’ that is found neither in univocal nor in equivocal predications, Aquinas comes to a proper metaphysical language of expressing the relation that exists between God and creatures. This relation of reference ‘*ad unum*’ is according to degrees or proportion to the *primary analogate*, that which is at the center of the analogy and which gives its focal meaning.²⁹⁶ From this primary analogate, the relationships fan out. According to Bernard Montagnes,

²⁹² Gilson, E, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, p 106.

²⁹³ ST I, q.13, a.5: “Et iste modus communitatis medius est inter puram aequivocationem et simplicem univocationem. Neque enim in iis quae analogice dicuntur est una ratio, sicut est in univocis, nec totaliter diversa, sicut in aequivocis; sed nomen quod sic multipliciter dicitur significant diversas proportionales ad aliquid unum; sicut sanum de urina dictum significant signum sanitatis animalis, de medicina vero dictum significant causam ejusdem sanitatis.”

²⁹⁴ SCG I, 34, 1: “analogice hoc est secundum ordinem vel respectum ad aliquid unum.”

²⁹⁵ *Metaphysics* IV, 2, 1003b10-15. In so many other passages in Aristotelian texts, there are indications that he gave various senses of the word analogy from where the medievals and Aquinas all took a leaf. To see the ‘four’ senses of the term “analogical” according to Aquinas, in their historical derivation and meaning from Aristotle, consult the masterly work of Harry Austryn Wolfson, “St. Thomas on Divine Attributes,” *Studies in Maimonides and St. Thomas Aquinas*, pp 18-28.

²⁹⁶ Blanchette, Oliva, *Philosophy of Being*, (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2003) p 123.

Pris séparément, les analogués se définissent chacun pour leur propre compte, indépendamment les uns des autres; envisagés du point de vue de l'unité analogique, ils se définissent par le premier.²⁹⁷

The role of the primary analogate in the observation of both Montagnes and Blanchette, is not exclusive since other analogates, the secondary analogates, also play very important roles in extending the meaning of the term. The classical example of an analogous term given by Aquinas but taken from Aristotle is 'health.' Originally, 'health' refers to 'a proper disposition for the well-being of an organism.'²⁹⁸ But 'health' can be predicated of other things that are not organisms such as medicine, diet, urine, and complexion. It is analogy that makes this reference of one to something other possible.

4.3.1 Analogy as Interpreted by Cardinal Cajetan (1469-1534)

Before coming to final thoughts of Aquinas on the question of analogy, let us briefly examine the interpretation of an eminent Thomist, Cardinal Cajetan. His interpretation of analogy in St. Thomas Aquinas is based on the earlier *Commentary on the Sentences*. It is to be seen that based on this earlier text, Cardinal Cajetan, had given an interpretation, that continues to influence even today, all interest in the question of analogy in the thomistic texts. Unfortunately, the evidence of Aquinas's text shows a profound misreading of his thoughts by Cajetan. In his famous work, "*De Nominum Analogia*,"²⁹⁹ Cajetan gives a three-fold division of analogy: the analogy of inequality, the analogy of attribution and the analogy of proportionality.³⁰⁰ This three-fold division of

²⁹⁷ Montagnes, B, *La Doctrine de l'Analogie de l'Etre d'après saint Thomas d'Aquin*, (Louvain: Publications Universitaires, 1963) p 63.

²⁹⁸ Blanchette, Oliva, *Philosophy of Being*, p 125.

²⁹⁹ Thomas De Vio Cardinalis Caietanus: *Scripta Philosophica*, 3, *De Nominum Analogia*, ed. P. N. Zammit, (1934). Where necessary, we take our quotations from the *De Nominum Analogia*. We are responsible for all the English reading we make of this Latin text. Our citation of this text is in the following order: chapter (caput), and paragraph (represented by n as number of the paragraph).

³⁰⁰ *De Nominum Analogia*, caput 1, n.3: "Ad tres ergo modos analogiae omnia analogia reducuntur: scilicet ad analogiam inaequalitatis, et analogiam attributionis, et analogiam proportionalitatis. Quamvis secundum veram vocabuli proprietatem et usum Aristotelis, ultimus modus tantum analogiam constituat, primus autem alienus ab analogia omnino sit." Cf McInerney, Ralph M., *The Logic of Analogy*, (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1961) p 3.

analogy is based on the first book of the *Sentences*.³⁰¹ He identifies the analogy *secundum esse et non secundum intentionem* with the analogy of inequality; the analogy *secundum intentionem tantum et non secundum esse* with that of attribution, and the analogy *secundum intentionem et secundum esse* with that of proportionality.³⁰² There are no other passages in the whole of Aquinas's texts where these divisions are repeated as Aquinas would normally do. Yet, Cardinal Cajetan bases all his interpretation of Aquinas's analogical predication solely on this text without paying attention to the major concern of Aquinas in that text, that is, enquiring "whether all things are true by the uncreated truth."³⁰³

4.3.1.1 The analogy of inequality does not belong to what Cajetan takes to be truly analogy. However, in this *analogia secundum inaequalitatem* by which the name is common, the *ratio* to which this name refers is identical in all although it is participated unequally.³⁰⁴ In Aquinas's text to which Cajetan refers, it is called analogy *secundum esse et non secundum intentionem*. The example given by Aquinas and repeated by Cajetan is "body" which is common to both corporeal and incorporeal beings.³⁰⁵ But Aquinas makes it clear that this term "body," is considered either univocally of all bodies by logicians or equivocally by philosophers but never analogically. Cajetan also recognizes that this is foreign to all that is analogy.³⁰⁶

4.3.1.2 The analogy of attribution is otherwise called the analogy of proportion. In the thomistic text, it is the analogy *according to intention alone and not according to being*. Cajetan

³⁰¹ 1 Sent., d.19, q.5, a.2, ad.1: "quod aliquid dicitur secundum analogiam tripliciter: vel secundum intentionem tantum, et non secundum esse;...Vel secundum esse et non secundum intentionem ; ...Vel secundum intentionem et secundum esse ; »

³⁰² Cf Montagnes, Bernard, *The Doctrine of the Analogy of Being according to Thomas Aquinas*, translated into English by E.M. Macierowski, (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2004) pp 126-127.

³⁰³ 1 Sent., d.19, q.5, a.2 : « Utrum omnia sint vera veritate increate. » Cf Ralph M. McInerney, *The Logic of Analogy*, p 96.

³⁰⁴ *De Nominum Analogia*, n.4: "Analogia secundum inaequalitatem vocantur quorum nomen est commune, et ratio secundum illud nomen est omnino eadem, inaequaliter tamen participata. Et loquimur de inaequalitate perfectionis : ut *corpus* nomen commune est corporibus inferioribus et superioribus, et ratio omnium corporum (in quantum corpora sunt) eadem est."

³⁰⁵ 1 Sent., d.19, q.5, a.2, ad.1: "Unde logicus, qui considerat intentiones tantum, dicit, hoc nomen corpus de omnibus corporibus univoce praedicari: sed esse hujus naturae non est ejusdem rationis in corporibus corruptibilibus et incorruptibilibus. »

³⁰⁶ *De Nominum Analogia*, caput 1, n.3: "primus autem alienus ab analogia omnino sit."

calls analogy an attribution when concepts having a common name are the same with respect to the *ratio* but differ with respect to their relation to this *ratio*.³⁰⁷ The example given is that of “health.” It is a name common to medicine, urine and animal. With respect to the meaning of “health,” they are all said to be “healthy” where medicine is a cause of health; urine is a sign, and animal is a subject of health. But these concepts having a common name “health” differ with respect to their respective relations to the term “health” where medicine produces it, animal possesses it and urine shows the sign of health. The only thing that remains the same is the name “health” whereas every other relation to “health” is different. In every analogy of attribution, Cajetan holds that there must be a primary analogate which has the analogous concept “*formaliter*”, that is, as a real intrinsic property.³⁰⁸ In the examples above, it is only ‘animal’ that has “health” as an intrinsic property, whereas others, ‘medicine and urine’ only bear an extrinsic relation to health as its cause or sign.³⁰⁹ As a result, Cajetan also dismisses this analogy on the grounds that “a formal perfection is intrinsic to only one analogate and that this perfection is predicated of other analogates only by way of extrinsic denomination.”³¹⁰ It is not surprising to find that Cajetan interpretes Aquinas as dividing the analogy of attribution into two types: *analogia duorum ad tertium* and *analogia unius ad alterum*.³¹¹ For McNerny, this ill-advised move “is the beginning of the difficulty.”³¹² As we shall find out, these are the two correct forms of analogical predication firmly established and proved by Thomas Aquinas.

4.3.1.3 The analogy of proportionality: This is otherwise referred to as analogy *secundum intentionem et secundum esse* in the text of Aquinas. According to Cajetan’s interpretation, “things of which the name is common, and the meaning of that name is proportionally the same,

³⁰⁷Ibid. caput 2, n.8: “Analogia autem secundum attributionem sunt, quorum nomen commune est, ratio autem secundum illud nomen est eadem secundum terminum, et diversa secundum habitudines ad illum: ut *sanum* commune nomen est medicinae, urinae et animali; ratio omnium in quantum sana sunt, ad unum terminum (sanitatem scilicet), diversas dicit habitudines. »

³⁰⁸ Lyttkens, Hampus, *The Analogy Between God and the World*, (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells Boktryckeri AB, 1952) p 207.

³⁰⁹ *De Nominum Analogia*, caput 2, n.10: “ita quod primum analogatorum tantum est tale formaliter, caetera autem denominantur talia extrinsece.”

³¹⁰ Masiello, Ralph J, “The Analogy of Proportion according to the Metaphysics of St. Thomas,” in *Modern Schoolman* 35, (1957-58) p 93.

³¹¹ *De Nominum Analogia*, caput 2, n.17: “Dividitur autem a sancto Thoma analogia haec in analogiam *duorum ad tertium*, ut urinae et medicinae ad animal sanum; et in analogiam *unius ad alterum*, ut urinae vel medicinae ad animal sanum.”

³¹² McNerny, Ralph, *The Logic of Analogy*, p 14.

are said to be analogous according to proportionality.”³¹³ It is the only intrinsic analogy. This analogy is either metaphorical “when that common name has one absolute formal meaning which is saved in one of the analogates and is said of the other by metaphor.”³¹⁴ Or “it is truly made proper, when that common name is said of both analogates without metaphor.”³¹⁵

Our first observation is the fact that in the texts of the 1 Sent., d.19, q.5, a.2, ad.1 interpreted by Cajetan, Aquinas does not employ any of the names—inequality, attribution and proportionality—used by Cajetan. In the said analogy of proportionality, there is nothing in the text of Aquinas to indicate of this proportionality. The example of substance and accident in relation to being given by Aquinas should have alerted Cajetan of the causal-dependent inclination of this analogy. In other words, it is the being of substance that explains the being of accident. Perhaps, not yet in its final formative stages, Aquinas calls this the analogy according to being and according to intention. What seems to us unavoidable is that the Cajetan’s so called analogy of attribution and proportionality are mutilated versions of the two main types of analogy given by Aquinas: *analogia multorum ad unum* and *analogia unius ad alterum*.³¹⁶ In the former, health is the classical example of the term to which various analogates like man, medicine, urine and food refer. This is the type of analogy that Aquinas would describe as extrinsic because it does not enter into the order of being. As to *analogia unius ad alterum*, substance and accident are the analogates that relate to each other in a prior-posterior type of causal-dependent relationship. Aquinas would liken this to the predication that exists between God and creatures. Hence, according to McNerny, “Cajetan’s interpretation must be set aside in its totality and the texts of Thomas read afresh if we are to discover his authentic teaching.”³¹⁷ It is to the texts of Aquinas himself that we must now turn.

³¹³ *De Nominum Analogia*, caput 3, n.23: “Analogia secundum proportionalitatem dici, quorum nomen est commune, et ratio secundum illud nomen est proportionaliter eadem.”

³¹⁴ Ibid. caput 3, n.25: “*Metaphorice* quidem, quando nomen illud commune absolute unam habet rationem formalem, quae in uno analogatorum slavatur, et per metaphoram de alio dicitur.”

³¹⁵ Ibid. caput 3, n.26: “*Proprie* vero fit, quando nomen illud commune in utroque analogatorum absque metpahoris dicitur.”

³¹⁶ McNerny makes the same observation while trying to reconcile the text of the *De veritate* q.2, a.11 and the other texts of Aquinas on analogy. He specifically brings what seems to be analogy of proportion and of proportionality under the analogy *unius ad alterum*. For details cf *Aquinas and Analogy*, pp 112-114.

³¹⁷ McNerny, Ralph M., *Aquinas and Analogy*, p 17.

4.3.2 Analogy as Seen in the Texts of Aquinas:

We shall discover that in his major works, such as the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, the *Quaestiones Disputatae de Potentia Dei* and the *Summa Theologiae*, all Aquinas's treatments clearly indicate two types of analogical predication. The historical derivation of the four senses of analogy by Aquinas, derivations which he made from Aristotle, has been taken care of by Harry Wolfson in the work we have cited.³¹⁸ Unfortunately, the hesitations of Aquinas on the correct sense of analogy are played out in his earliest discussion of the analogical interpretation of divine attributes as found in the *De Veritate*.³¹⁹ Wolfson tells how Aquinas ignorantly employs *proportio* and *proportionalitas* from the Latin translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics*,³²⁰ in which Aristotle's statement: "for proportion is equality of ratios," is rendered "*proportionalitas enim aequalitas est proportionis*." In the strictest sense of the term according to Wolfson, it is only *proportionalitas* that represents the Aristotelian usage of *analogia*; whereas *proportio* represents what Aristotle calls "ratio."³²¹ Eventually this is what follows:

St. Thomas, however, not knowing what the underlying Greek terms here were, took the term *analogia* to include also *proportio*. The reason why he thought that *analogia* includes here *proportio* is that the term *proportio*, as we have seen, is the most common translation of the Greek *analogia* in the Latin translations of the works of Aristotle used by St. Thomas... In fact, St. Thomas explicitly says *secundum analogiam, idest proportionem*,³²² thus identifying "analogy" with "proportion."³²³

³¹⁸ Wolfson, H.A., "St. Thomas on Divine Attributes," p 694. The four senses of the term analogy derived from Aristotle are; "*first*, a term applied to two things because one is the image of the other, as "man" is applied to a real man and to his picture; *second*, a term applied to two things because the relation of one of these things to a third thing is like the relation of the second of these two things to a fourth thing, as "good" is applied to intellect and to sight because intellect is to mind as sight to eye; *third*, a term applied to several things because they are all related in various ways to one thing, as the term "healthy" is applied to diet, medicine, urine and animal, or the term "medical" is applied to physician, student, drug, and scalpel, because they are all related to one thing, to "health" or to the "art of medicine"; *fourth*, a term applied to two things because one of the things is the subject in which and through which the other exists, as the term "being" is applied to "substance" "and "accident."

³¹⁹ De veritate q.2, a.11: "sed secundum analogiam, quod nihil est dictu quam secundum proportionem. Convenientia autem secundum proportionem potest esse dupliciter : et secundum haec duo attenditur analogiae communitas... Prima ergo convenientia est proportionis, secunda autem proportionalitatis;"

³²⁰ Eth. Nic. V, 3, 1131a31.

³²¹ Wolfson, H.A., "St. Thomas on Divine Attributes," p 695.

³²² ST 1, q.13, a.5: "Dicendum est igitur quod huiusmodi nomina dicuntur de Deo et creaturis secundum analogiam, idest proportionem."

³²³ Wolfson, H.A., "St. Thomas on Divine Attributes," p 695.

Consequently, Aquinas would reject every other sense of analogy and settle with the two that mostly express *proportio* and gradually makes less use of the others. From the enumerations given by Wolfson, these two belong to the third and fourth senses where the example of the earlier is “health” and the latter is “substance and accident in relation to being.” It is going to be shown how he chooses one of them as a fitting interpretation of the divine attributes.

In the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, composed around 1260, Aquinas distinguishes between two types of analogy according to an order or reference to something one. (i) In one way, according as many things have reference to something one. Example is health. We say an animal is healthy as the subject of health, medicine is healthy as its cause, food is healthy as preserver of health, and urine is healthy as its sign. (ii) In another way, the analogy can obtain as the order or reference of two things is, not to something else but, to one of them.³²⁴ The example he gives here is that of being that is said of substance and accident as an accident has reference to substance and not as they both have reference to a third thing. For a proper interpretation of divine attributes, Aquinas chooses the second type of analogy, that is, the analogy according to the order or reference of two things to one of them, the primary analogate. Why this choice we shall see by examining these two types of analogy.

4.3.2.1 Analogy of an order of many things to one (Multorum ad unum)

This is the first type of analogy by an order or reference of many things to something one. This type obtains by the fact that a number of things are relevantly related to something that precedes them, something that is one. In the example of health that Aquinas presents, health stands as the primary analogate to which other things namely animal, medicine, food, and urine are referred to as one. They play their part as secondary analogates in extending the meaning of the relation found among them. Seen from the point of view of analogical unity, the secondary analogates are defined by the primary which gives the relations that fan out from it a focal meaning. Health is a

³²⁴ SCG I, 34, 2-3: «Quod quidem dupliciter contingit : uno modo, secundum quod multa habent respectum ad aliquod unum, sicut secundum respectum ad unam sanitatem animal dicitur sanum, ut ejus subjectum, medicina, ut ejus effectivum, cibus, et ejus conservativum, urina, ut ejus signum ; alio modo, secundum quod duorum attenditur ordo vel respectus, non ad aliquid alterum, sed ad unum ipsorum, sicut ens de substantia et accidente dicitur, secundum quod accidens ad substantiam respectum habet, non quod substantia et accidens ad aliquod tertium referentur. »

term primarily referred to a living organism as its subject. But by way of analogy, health is predicable of other things such as medicine as the efficient cause of health, food as that which preserves health, and urine as a sign of health. This analogy of health, according to Montagnes, does not apply to the order of being because “it is manifestly extrinsic and does not include of any formal intrinsic participation since health, in the end, can belong only to a living organism.”³²⁵ The relation of causality, of participation and of dependence cannot be analogically interpreted by this first mode of analogy otherwise the creaturely possession of being or any other perfection would be only an extrinsic designation.³²⁶ This type of analogy is based on accidental quality that cannot ontologically constitute a thing. That is why the classical example is ‘health.’ And neither would names between God and creatures be interpreted according to this first mode of analogy, since it also implies that something would precede God.³²⁷ The names between God and creatures would later be interpreted by an analogy of being which expresses an intrinsic and ontological dependence of creatures on God who Himself is the Pure Act of Being. The primary analogate in this analogy of many things to one, which is health, precedes all the entities that share in it. God-creature relationship cannot be represented this way less God would be subjected to something which is prior to Him. This is impossible. Hence Montagnes concludes by quoting Aquinas:

L’analogie de la santé ne s’applique pas à l’ordre de l’être parce qu’elle est extrinsèque, elle est comme dit S. Thomas, *secundum intentionem tantum et non secundum esse*, tandis que l’analogie de l’être est une analogie intrinsèque, *secundum intentionem et secundum esse*.³²⁸

In that example of health as predicated of medicine and animal, Aquinas wishes also to emphasize the order of the analogates in reality and in knowledge. Just as health in medicine is the cause of health in the animal, it is just to say that in the order of reality, the health in

³²⁵ Montagnes, B, *La Doctrine de l’Analogie d’après saint Thomas d’Aquin*, p 60 : « En effet, cette dernière est manifestement extrinsèque, elle ne comporte aucune participation formelle intrinsèque, puisque la santé, en définitive, ne peut appartenir qu’à un vivant. »

³²⁶ Montagnes, B, *La Doctrine de l’Analogie d’après saint Thomas d’Aquin*, p 61.

³²⁷ SCG I, 34, 4: “Hujusmodi igitur nomina de Deo et rebus aliis non dicuntur analogice secundum primum modum; oporteret enim aliquid Deo ponere prius, sed modo secundo.”

³²⁸ Montagnes, B, *La Doctrine de l’Analogie d’après saint Thomas d’Aquin*, p 61: « The analogy of health does not apply to the order of being because it is extrinsic, it is as St. Thomas says, according to the order of intention, and not according to the order of being, whereas, the analogy of being is an intrinsic analogy, according to the intention and according to being.”

medicine is prior to the health in the animal since it is the former that causes the later. But in the order of knowledge or according to the meaning of the name, we know this healing power of medicine through its effect, that is, a healthy animal. Thus, according to the order of knowledge, priority goes to the animal since it is by being healthy, that we come to the meaning of the concept ‘health.’ Through the effect ‘healthy,’ we come to the cause of health in this case medicine. In the final analysis, even though this analogy does not apply to the level of being, Aquinas underlines the order of an intrinsic likeness that it can generate when taken to the level of being.

Because we come to a knowledge of God from other things, the reality in the names said of God and other things belongs by priority in God according to His mode of being, but the meaning of the name belongs to God by posteriority. And so He is said to be named from His effects.³²⁹

By way of extension, let it be noted two things that are very clear from this analysis and that are very important in the whole doctrine of analogy as applied to God and creatures. The names signified—the *res significata*—apply by priority to God since it is from Him that they are derived, while at the order of knowledge, following their way of signification—their *modus significandi*—they are named first in creatures—since we know firstly created or sensible things.³³⁰

4.3.2.2 Analogy of the order of two things to one of them (unius ad alterum)

This type of analogy is described differently in the various texts of Aquinas as we shall soon see. In some it is described as a “reference of two things to one of them” and in others, it is a “reference of one thing to another.” But the basic character is the reference *ad alterum*. In this reference of two things not to something else but to one of them, Aquinas gives an example of

³²⁹ SCG I, 34, 6: “Sic igitur quia ex rebus aliis in Dei cognitionem pervenimus, res nominum de Deo et rebus aliis dictorum per prius est in Deo secundum suum modum, sed ratio nominis per posterius: unde et nominari dicitur a suis causatis.”

³³⁰ An extended discussion of this distinction is found in Gregory Rocca, “The Distinction between *Res Significata* and *Modus Significandi* in Aquinas’s Theological Epistemology,” *The Thomist* 55 (1991), pp 173-197; *Speaking the Incomprehensible God*, (Washington, D.C: The Catholic University of America Press, 2004) pp 334-352; E. J. Ashworth, “Signification and Modes of Signifying in Thirteenth Century Logic: A Preface to Aquinas on Analogy,” *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 1, (1991), pp 39-67.

substance and accident. Being is said of substance and accident according as an accident has reference to a substance, and not according to substance and accident are referred to a third thing.³³¹ Substance is defined by Aquinas as that ‘thing to which it belongs to be not in a subject.’³³² It is that which has a quiddity or essence to which it belongs to be not in another. The ‘being’ of substance is here identified as substance itself and not as a third thing. But for accidents, they cannot exist in themselves since “the being of an accident is by inherence.”³³³ Accidents inhere in a substance in order to have being.

Aquinas likens the predication of being to substance and accident to the predication of names to God and creatures. In both predications, there is both a relation of dependence and diversity. It is not substance that depends on the accident but rather, it is the accident that depends on the substance in order to be.³³⁴ Substance is the subject and hence the cause in which and through which the accident exists. The basis of this type of analogy is something that is essential as *being*. It makes a thing an ontological entity. When Aquinas elevates it from the predicamental level of substance and accident, to the transcendental level of God and creatures, it is only to bring out the importance of this analogy and how much it expresses the dependent nature of creatures who receive their *being* from God.

The full implication of this will be seen later in the work where we shall discuss creation. But suffice it to know that among all effects, the most proper effect of God is *ipsum esse* or *to be itself*.³³⁵ God is His own existence—*ipsum esse subsistens*—and all beings come from Him. In God, *esse* subsists without limit and is communicated, by virtue of divine causality, in a limited fashion to other things each according to its own mode or nature. To express or properly explain this communication of being, Aquinas comes up with the language of participation according to which “whatever is participated is determined to the mode of that which participates and is thus possessed in a partial way and not according to every mode of perfection.”³³⁶ What is

³³¹ SCG I, 34, 3: “alio modo, secundum quod duorum attenditur ordo vel respectus, non ad aliquid alterum, sed ad unum ipsorum, sicut ens de substantia et accidente dicitur, secundum quod accidens ad substantiam respectum habet, non quod substantia et accidens ad aliquod tertium referantur.”

³³² SCG I, 25, 10: “quod substantia sit res *cui conveniat esse non in subiecto*.”

³³³ SCG IV, 62, 12: “Nec possunt per se subsistere: cum *accidentis esse sit inesse*,” *Metaphysics* V, 7, 1017a19.

³³⁴ SCG I, 23, 7: “Substantia non dependet ab accidente: quamvis accidens dependeat a substantia.”

³³⁵ ST I, q.45, a.5: “Inter omnes autem effectus universalissimum est ipsum esse. Unde oportet quod sit proprius effectus primae et universalissimae causae, quae est Deus. »

³³⁶ SCG I, 32, 6: « nam omne quod participatur determinatur ad modum participati, et sic partialiter habetur, et non secundum omnem perfectionis modum. »

participated, that is *ipsum esse*, is intrinsically and formally ontological to the participant such that without it, the participant does not exist.

To participate, according to Aquinas, means generally to take ‘a part,’ that is, to receive in a particular way, what belongs infinitely to another.³³⁷ It belongs to God to possess being by essence because He is the Pure Act of Being Himself. There is no composition of any sort in Him for His essence is His existence. Whatever else does not possess being by nature, partakes of it. Partaking of it means as Blanchette explains, “having in its own finite standing what the pure Act of being has in its own infinite way ... It also allows for the Infinite to be more intimate to the finite than the finite itself, though without confusion or mixture between the two ...”³³⁸ It is on the basis of ‘this part’ that all forms of univocity and equivocity are excluded; univocity because the *esse* does not belong to God and creature equally, and equivocity because *esse* means the same thing to both God and creature though different in each other’s mode. This is why an ontological likeness exists between God and creatures and this likeness is expressed by analogy of reference of two things to one of them. St. Thomas Aquinas expresses this in the following way:

Although between God and the creature there cannot be a generic or specific likeness, there can nevertheless be a certain likeness of analogy, as between potentiality and act, substance and accident ... In another way it is true in that creatures are somewhat likened to the very nature of God, forasmuch as they derive their being from the first being, their goodness from the sovereign good, and so on.³³⁹

On the basis of that *esse*-being, there is an ontological likeness between God and creatures based not on an accidental quality like health, but on something that is essential. This kind of analogy is normally described as being “according to prior and posterior” and is illustrated as a relation of

³³⁷ Aquinas, *Expositio libri Boetii De ebdomadibus*, Lect. 2: « Est autem participare quasi partem capere; et ideo quando aliquid particulariter recipit id quod ad alterum pertinet, universaliter dicitur participare illud; » Some excellent works on the Thomistic notion of participation include: Geiger, L.B., *La participation dans la philosophie de S. Thomas d'Aquin*, (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1942) ; Fabro, C., *Participation et Causalité selon S. Thomas d'Aquin*, (Louvain : Publications Universitaires de Louvain, 1961).

³³⁸ Blanchette, O, *Philosophy of Being*, p 532.

³³⁹ De pot q.3, a.4, ad.9 : «Quamvis inter Deum et creaturam non possit esse similitudo generis vel speciei, potest tamen esse similitudo quaedam analogiae, sicut inter potentiam et actum, et substantiam et accidens...Alio modo secundum quod res creatae ipsi naturae divinae quodammodo simulantur, prout a primo ente alia sunt entia, et a bono bona, et sic de aliis. »

cause and effect with the classic example of being in substance and accident. The order of the cause is prior to that of the effect since the later depends on the former. The likeness that is also found in the effect exists in its perfection in the cause, and only relatively in the effect. That is why the cause is said to be prior. In the relation between God and creatures, we see a greater ontological dependence of creatures on God.

Now, nothing is predicated of God and creatures as though they were in the same order, but, rather, according to priority and posteriority. For all things are predicated of God essentially.³⁴⁰

In the observation of Cornelio Fabro, this analogy by reference to something one possesses a double plan of reference: the predicamental plan where you get the substance and accident analogy; and the transcendental plan where you get the analogy between God and creatures.³⁴¹ But regardless of whether it is predicamental or transcendental, there is a unity by reference to one that is from the relation of causality and of participation which binds the accidents to the substance and the creatures to God. This unity applies to the analogates *per prius et posterius*.

In the *De Potentia Dei* written around 1265-1268, Aquinas also mentions the two types of analogy. The first is “when one thing is predicated of two with respect to a third.”³⁴² Here he mentions the example of being as predicated of quantity and quality with respect to substance. In clarity, Aquinas is saying that “quantity” and “quality” are both related to a third thing, substance which is primarily called being. Hence, when ‘being’ is predicated of “quantity and quality,” it is only in reference to substance the real being in which they exist. Substance is prior to the two things which are both related to it. The second type is “when a thing is predicated of two by reason of a relationship between these two.”³⁴³ An example is being as predicated of substance and quantity, that is to say, substance and accident. These are the same manner of examples we saw above in the *Summa Contra Gentiles* and faithful to the logic that animates that thinking,

³⁴⁰ SCG I, 32, 7 : «Nihil autem de Deo et rebus aliis praedicatur eodem ordine, sed secundum et posterius, cum de Deo omnia praedicentur essentialiter »

³⁴¹ Fabro, C., *Participation et Causalité selon S. Thomas d'Aquin*, p 512.

³⁴² De pot q.7, a.7 : « Huius autem praedicationis duplex est modus. Unus quo aliquid praedicatur de duobus per respectum ad aliquod tertium, sicut ens de qualitate et quantitate per respectum ad substantiam. »

³⁴³ De pot q.7, a.7 : « Alius modo est quo aliquid praedicatur de duobus *per respectum unius ad alterum*, sicut ens de substantia et quantitate. » The last phrase could better read: “by respect of one to the other. »

Aquinas again prefers the second type here in application to God and disapproves of the first which would posit something prior to God.³⁴⁴

There is not much difference in the *Summa Theologiae* (1265-1272) on his discussion of analogy here and the other major works in our citations. The first sense of analogy is described as that in which “many things have a proportion to one.”³⁴⁵ The example here is “health” as said of medicine and urine insofar as they both have an order and proportion to one thing “health,” since “medicine” is the cause of health and “urine” is the sign of health. The second sense is described as that in which “one thing is proportional to another,”³⁴⁶ as health is said of medicine and animal where medicine is the cause of health in the animal. Like in the other examples we have seen in the earlier works, Aquinas again approves of the second sense as a proper analogical interpretation of divine names as it implies and permits a relation of cause to effect just like substance is to accident, and is properly described *secundum prius et posterius*. In Aquinas as in Aristotle, the term ‘prior,’ is applied to a thing which in some sense is the cause of the existence of another thing.³⁴⁷

The simple lesson Aquinas brings out and a reply he gives to Maimonides is that words “can signify what God is although they do it imperfectly.” This signification also excludes imputing plurality in God, what Maimonides carefully guards against. When God is called good, or wise, as Aquinas has repeated many times, it is signified not only that He is the cause of wisdom or goodness, but that these pre-exist in Him more eminently. Thus when we say that a man is wise, we signify his wisdom as something caused and therefore distinct from his essence and his power and his existence. The perfection signified by the terms, belong absolutely to God in the unity of His essence. But the mode in which they exist in creatures is imperfect and limited as the nature of creatures permit. This representation and explanation are what an analogical interpretation of the divine attributes provides. Finally, we cannot but agree with the analysis of

³⁴⁴ De pot q.7, a.7 : « Et ideo cum Deo nihil sit prius, sed ipse sit prior creatura, competit in divina praedicatione secundus modus analogiae, et non primus. »

³⁴⁵ ST I, q.13, a.5 : “Dicendum est igitur quod huiusmodi nomina dicuntur de Deo et creaturis secundum analogiam, idest, proportionem. Quod quidem dupliciter contingit in nominibus : vel quia multa habent proportionem ad unum, sicut sanum dicitur de medicina et urina in quantum utrumque habet ordinem et proportionem ad sanitatem animalis ; cuius hoc quidem signum est, illud vero causa. »

³⁴⁶ ST I, q.13, a.5 : “Ex eo quod unum habet proportionem ad alterum, sicut sanum dicitur de medicina et animali, in quantum medicina est causa sanitatis, quae est in animali.”

³⁴⁷ Categories 12, 14b, 10-13: “For in those things, the being of each of which implies that of the other, that which is in any way the cause may reasonably be said to be by nature ‘prior’ to the effect.”

Wohlman for whom the analogical interpretation is based on two major things that have been the characteristics of our treatment of the divine nature: the first is the distinction between the ‘*res significata*’ and the ‘*modus significandi*’; the second is the doctrine of the three ways exposed by Dionysius: *via causalitatis, negationis et eminentiae*. “En ces deux éléments la théorie de l’analogie trouve son fondement et sa justification»³⁴⁸ The consistency that is very evident in all this is that God’s otherness and transcendence have been respected.

4.4 Aquinas versus Maimonides: The Areas of Contention and Interpretation

Aquinas’s discussion and dispute with Maimonides on the issue of God and His attributes, turn around three major aspects: the semantic aspect which tries to determine the proper meaning and signification of words or language used about God; the second is epistemological dealing with the limits of human understanding; and the third is ontological as it tries to delimit the implications of absolute simplicity.³⁴⁹ It is Aquinas’s conviction that our words point to the reality they signify though the mode of signifying such reality is different. His predecessor Maimonides makes no room for such since our words signify something totally different from the reality that is the divine. Our words can only signify by way of pure equivocation such that there is no confusion as to the total unknowability of God. Human intelligence as Maimonides argues has objects of apprehension that it is within its power and according to its nature to apprehend. There are also in that which exists, the existents and matters which human intelligence can not apprehend in any way or through any cause.³⁵⁰ “The gates of their apprehension are shut before it.”³⁵¹ Aquinas accepts the limitation of the human intelligence, but on the contrary, thinks that there are gates through which the human intelligence can have some credible knowledge albeit, imperfect of the divine realities. That is their main epistemological contention. The doctrine of absolute simplicity excludes any form of description of God that would imply a real ontological plurality in the divine essence or suggest that God’s essence is

³⁴⁸ Wohlman, Avital, *Thomas d’Aquin et Maïmonide*, p138 « In those two elements, the theory of analogy finds its foundation and justification. »

³⁴⁹ Cf Faur, Jose, *Homo Mysticus: A Guide to Maimonides’ Guide for the Perplexed*, Syracuse, (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1998) p 20.

³⁵⁰ *Dux Neutrorum*, lib.I, cap.XXX, fol.11: « Scias quod sunt intelligibilia multae quae intellectus humanus poterit apprehendere natura sua per se. Sunt etiam multa in mundo quae nullo modo sunt in natura eius ut acquirat ea:» Cf *Guide I*, 31, p 65.

³⁵¹ Ibid: « quia portae inquisitionis eorum sunt ei clausae. » Cf *Guide I*, 31, p 65.

composite or ontologically dependent on something else. While Maimonides denies the existence of attributes in the divine, Aquinas argues that attributes positively signify the divine essence without implying ontological dependence or introducing ontological multiplicity. Any of the alternatives destroys not only the absolute simplicity of God but brings to question His ‘status’ as the unique necessary existence. He employs certain tools that Maimonides denied and perhaps never had: the *ratio* which has its proximate foundation in God; the *res significata* which expresses perfection itself; and the *modus significandi*—the manner in which a thing is signified. These are technical tools with which Aquinas navigates his way through the highly speculative field of God and His attributes and brings a much needed interpretive clarity to the thoughts of Maimonides.

The earlier points of dispute between Aquinas and Maimonides occur on the issues of positive attribution and negation. Certain adjectival predicates example “good,” “powerful,” “wise,” “living,” when applied to God, must, according to Maimonides, be understood negatively to mean that He is neither evil, nor ignorant nor dead.³⁵² As represented by Aquinas:

Hence they assert that when we say that God lives, we mean that God is not like an inanimate thing, and the same in like manner applies to other names. And this was taught by Rabbi Moses.³⁵³

There are two major Maimonidean concerns that Aquinas would address: that names like good, or wise, do not tell us anything positive about God and that they cannot lead us to the knowledge of the nature of God. It is important to note that Aquinas does not deny the importance of using the way of negation to arrive at a clearer knowledge of God. Aquinas criticizes Maimonides’s heavy reliance on the use of negation on the grounds that it diminishes and even denies the ontological relation between God as the Universal Cause and creatures as His effects.³⁵⁴ His other contention is that certain things said of God or certain names attributed to God are to be understood positively and affirmatively of meaning what they intend to say, otherwise, it may

³⁵²Ibid. lib.I, cap.LVII, fol.22 : « Et propter istas rationes dicimus de eo : quia est potens, et sapiens, et volens. Nostra vero intentio est in istis agnominibus quod non est piger, nec insipiens, nec impetuosus sine ratione. » Cf *Guide* I, 58, p 136.

³⁵³ ST 1, q.13, a.2 : “Unde dicunt quod, cum dicimus Deum esse viventem, significamus quod Deus non hoc modo est sicut res inanimatae ; et similiter accipiendum est in aliis ; et hoc posuit Rabbi Moyses, in lib qui dicitur *doctor dubiorum*. »

³⁵⁴ Rubio, M, *Aquinas and Maimonides on the Possibility of the Knowledge of God*, p 81.

be—*contra intentionem loquentium de Deo*—that is, contrary to the intention of those who speak of God.

For in saying that God lives, they assuredly mean more than to say that He is the cause of our life, or that He differs from inanimate bodies.³⁵⁵

Aquinas would argue for another alternative. The way of negation and causality do not suffice to explain how names or perfections attributed to God signify the divine essence. Aquinas criticizes them because they are lacking the third aspect of his *triplex via*, the *via eminentiae*. These perfections should be understood to exist preeminently and most eminently in God as the source from whom they are now caused in creatures. But since the effects lead us to an imperfect knowledge of God, the perfections or names such as “good,” “wise,” “living,” seen in the effects, when attributed to God, positively signify the divine essence though imperfectly. They signify imperfectly what God possesses in Himself in most eminent way. This is the problem of language failing to signify most adequately a reality beyond the expressions of the human language. Aquinas tries to meet those two noticeable Maimonidean concerns: that there are attributes or names which tell us something positive about the nature of God and that these attributes or names lead to the nature of God indirectly. For example, the word ‘good’ applied to creatures differs in meaning when applied to God. In creatures, ‘good’ means a definition of the subject, an addition to the nature of the subject. This is exactly what Maimonides denies since such an attribute seems to be not only an addition to the nature of God but also an extension of creaturely imperfection to God. It would look as if there is a distinction between God and what makes God good. But Aquinas has a different view. On the contrary, when the word ‘good’ is applied to God, it becomes the name of the perfection—the *res significata*—preexisting in God. It does neither bring about an ontological multiplicity in the very essence of God nor introduce an ontological difference between the divine essence and the perfections accruing from the same divine essence. Such attributes express humanly in an imperfect way, what God is eminently. Aquinas brings a clarification:

³⁵⁵ ST 1, q.13, a.2: “Tertio, quia hoc est contra intentionem loquentium de Deo. Aliud enim intendunt dicere cum dicunt Deum viventem quam quod sit causa vitae nostrae vel quod differat a corporibus inanimatis. »

So when we say, “God is good,” the meaning is not, “God is the cause of goodness,” or “God is not evil”; but the meaning is, “Whatever good we attribute to creatures, pre-exist in God,” and in a more excellent and higher way. Hence it does not follow that God is good, because He causes goodness; but rather, on the contrary, He causes goodness in things because He is good; according to what Augustine says (*De Doctr. Christi.* i, 32), “Because He is good, we are.”³⁵⁶

Another alternative that Aquinas offers to the negative interpretation of the attributes or names seen above, is by way of analogy. This way could be Aquinas’s definitive interpretive response to Maimonides. We have earlier discussed this in detail above. Causality helps us explain the limitations and the inadequacy that are found in the effects. Aquinas maintains that every effect ontologically falls short of what is typical of the power of its cause. What exists simply and unified in the cause, exists diversely and differently in the effect. For example the simple and unified power of the sun produces many different kinds of effects. Maimonides acknowledges as much in the example he gives of fire which burns, melts, hardens, cooks, bleaches and blackens. “He who knows the nature of fire,” says Maimonides “knows that it performs all these actions by virtue of one active quality, namely, heat.”³⁵⁷ What distinguishes him from Aquinas is the fact that these perfections are unlike in Aquinas, considered as actions of God. But for Aquinas, the perfections which in creatures are plural pre-exist in God as one and in a higher way. It is not just that they preexist in God as one, but that they, by way of human language, belong to the essence of what it means to be God. They also mean that God is a cause of such perfections.

Since they are reduced to God as their first cause, it follows that they are said of God essentially, and thus it follows that they signify his essence.³⁵⁸

³⁵⁶ ST 1, q.13, a.2 : “Cum igitur dicitur *Deus est bonus*, non est sensus, *Deus est causa bonitatis*, vel *Deus non est malus*, sed est sensus, *Id quod bonitatem dicimus in creaturis praexistit in Deo*, et hoc quidem secundum modum altiorem. Unde ex hoc non sequitur quod Deo competat esse bonum inquantum causat bonitatem, sed potius e converso, quia est bonus, bonitatem rebus diffundit, secundum illud Augustini, de Doctr. Christi., *Inquantum bonus est, sumus*.” It must be noted that Thomas in his ST does not attribute the theory of causality to Maimonides. Thomas responds to Maimonides’s negative interpretation and to ‘others,’ perhaps some scholastics who wrongly attributed this idea of causality to Maimonides.

³⁵⁷ *Dux Neutrorum*, lib.I, cap.LII, fol.19: “Qui vero scit naturam ignis credit quod per unam qualitatem activam scilicet calorem, operatur praedicta omnia.” Cf *Guide* I, 53, p 120.

³⁵⁸ De Pot q.7, a.5, s.c.3: “Ergo cum reducantur in Deum sicut in causam primam, oportet quod de Deo dicantur essentialiter; et ita sequitur quod significant eius substantiam.”

On the contrary, in creatures, the perfections are distinct from the essence of the creatures and exist in the creatures according to the mode of the creatures, that is, in limited, diverse and imperfect ways. That ‘man is wise’ means that ‘wisdom’ is a perfection acquired by him and as such, it does not belong to his essence. Wisdom here is signified in man as an accidental quality without which he could not grasp the proper order of things. That is the difference between the way ‘God is wise’ and that ‘man is wise’—the same perfection—because the same *ratio*—is signified but in different ways—*modi significandi*. Thus ‘wisdom’ for both God and creature, can neither properly be used univocally nor purely equivocally. It is true that ‘wisdom’ cannot be used univocally between God and creatures for they do not share the same essence and neither can it be used equivocally between God and creatures, for if this were so as Aquinas notes, we could never argue from statements about creatures to statements about God—any such argument would be invalidated by the Fallacy of Equivocation.³⁵⁹ There must be some form of likeness between creatures and God as to their source and cause, the likeness that establishes a form of predication that is analogical. Aquinas definitely must be addressing his disagreement on the issue of equivocation to Maimonides who denies any form of likeness a creature might have to God. In one of such texts, Maimonides writes:

“Similarly the terms “knowledge,” “power,” “will,” and “life,” as applied to Him, may He be exalted, and to all those possessing knowledge, power, will, and life, are purely equivocal, so that their meaning when they are predicated of Him is in no way like their meaning in other applications. Do not deem that they are used amphibolously. For when terms are used amphibolously they are predicated of two things between which there is a likeness in respect to some notion, which notion is an accident attached to both of them and not a constituent element of the essence of each one of them.”³⁶⁰

Aquinas definitely disagrees with Maimonides on this issue because there is a common ground between God and creatures when the term ‘wise’ or any of such is predicated of them both. The

³⁵⁹ ST I, q.13, a.5: “Sed nec etiam pure aequivoce ut aliqui dixerunt. Quia secundum hoc ex creaturis nihil posset cognosci de Deo, nec demonstrari, sed semper incideret fallacia equivocationis.”

³⁶⁰ *Dux Neutrorum*, lib.I, cap.LV, fol.21: “Similiter etiam sapiens, potens, vius, et volens non dicitur de eo: sed de omni alio cui conveniunt nisi aequivoce pure : quia inter ipsum et alia nulla est similitudo aliquo modo. Nec putes quod illa nomina sint ambigua : vel per transsumptionem dicta : quia nomina quae sic dicuntur conveniunt in duobus inter quae est similitudo aliquo modo et illud in quo conveniunt est accidens, et non intrat in substantiam alicuius istorum. » Cf *Guide I*, 56, p 131.

term ‘wisdom’ signifies the same perfection but is applied differently in both God and creatures. It is on the basis of this likeness that certain terms can be and are used analogously.

Others, however, took a different view, and held that nothing is predicated of God and a creature by analogy but by pure equivocation. This is the opinion of Rabbi Moses, as appears from his writings. This opinion, however, is false...³⁶¹

Analogy gives a logical dimension and epistemological support to the affirmative and the eminent attributes of God. As long as creatures derive their being from God by divine causality, they are always ontologically related to God and dependent on Him as an effect is dependent on its cause. In God who is His own being, being exists without limitation and is the fullness of perfection. In creatures, because of their *modus essendi*, being is received limitedly as the nature of creatures permit. As Aquinas says, “God is being by His own essence because He is the very act of being. Every other being, however, is a being by participation. For that being which is its own act of being can be one only... God, therefore, is the cause of being to all other things.”³⁶² Essence is to the act of being (*esse*) what potency is to act. Just as the potency receives and limits act, so the essence receives and limits the act of being. This is the composition that makes finite beings.

Faced with this theory of analogy as seen here and fully explained in our earlier treatment, Maimonides’s criticism that analogy should not apply to both God and creatures, is overtaken.³⁶³ If analogy requires that things be related on the basis of an accident as animal, medicine, urine, food are related on the basis of health, Maimonides’s rejection of analogy is correct since God is

³⁶¹ De Pot q.7, a.7 : « Quidam autem aliter dixerunt, quod de Deo et creatura nihil praedicatur analogice, sed aequivoce pure. Et huius opinionis est Rabbi Moyses, ut ex suis dictis patet. Ista autem opinio non potest esse vera... »

³⁶² SCG II, 15, 5 : « Deus autem est ens per essentiam suam, quia est ipsum esse ; omne autem aliquid ens est ens per participationem, quia ens quod sit suum esse non potest esse nisi unum, ut in primo estensum est. Deus igitur est causa essendi omnibus aliis. »

³⁶³ Attention must be paid to an article by Joseph Buijs, “Maimonidean Critique of Thomistic Analogy,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 41, (2003), pp 449-470. That critique is based on Maimonides’s definition of analogy as « a likeness in respect to some notion, which notion is an accident attached to both of them, and not a constituent element of the essence of each one of them.” Buijs reduces Aquinas’s discussion of analogy to a simple “relation by way of priority and posteriority” and said it can be shown “to satisfy Maimonides’s criterion of accidental similarity.” Buijs cites Aquinas’s example of the relationship “between a human individual and a human image ... to illustrate a likeness that is purportedly at the root of analogical predication by way of priority and posteriority.” p 464. Finally, Buijs concludes that “the general objection of Maimonides to analogical predication of God and creatures is that a requisite ontological relation is lacking.” p 469. How can this critique stand when Aquinas makes it abundantly clear that creatures receive *esse* from God and are thus constituted ontologically? What other ontological relation does Buij’s Maimonides need for an analogical predication?

not made up of accidents and cannot be related to creatures on the basis of such. If analogy requires that things be related essentially such that the “form” from one of the analogates enters into the composition of one of them while respecting its *modus essendi*, then Aquinas’s rejection of univocation and of pure equivocation as found in Maimonides, is valid. In the words of Aquinas:

Now, to say that being is not a univocal predicate argues nothing against this conclusion. For being is not predicated of beings equivocally but analogically, and thus, a reduction to one must be made.³⁶⁴

Whether it is by participation or by causality, analogy by a reference to one is the logical tool that permits a proper metaphysical language about God and creatures. It is on the basis of this analogy that the principle *omne agens agit sibi simile* (an agent produces its like) makes sense, and thus Aquinas could confidently proclaim that ‘effects bear within themselves in their own way, the likeness of their causes though effects do not always reach to the full likeness of their causes.’³⁶⁵ In a later passage, Aquinas notes: “For that is called like something which possesses a quality or form of that thing ... thus, the creature has what belongs to God and is rightly said to be like God.”³⁶⁶ God is the unique reason for the multiplicity that is found in creation. As Wohlman notes:

Par la théorie de l’analogie, Thomas propose au problème des attributs divins une réponse radicalement différente de celle de Maïmonide puisqu’elle rend possible un discours sur Dieu que Maïmonide refuse.³⁶⁷

There is a great sense of contradiction in Maimonides’s rejection of any likeness between God and creatures. This “rejecting Maimonides” will find it hard to confront the “comparing Maimonides” who accepts a form of ‘analogical’ “likeness” between God and creatures that are

³⁶⁴ SCG II, 15, 2 : « Si autem dicatur quod *ens* non est praedicatum univocum, nihil minus praedicta conclusio sequitur. Non enim de multis aequivoce dicitur, sed per analogiam : et sic oportet fieri reductionem in unum. »

³⁶⁵ SCG I, 8, 1: «Habent enim effectus suarum causarum suo modo, similitudinem, cum agens agat sibi simile: non tamen effectus ad perfectam agentis similitudinem semper pertingit. »

³⁶⁶ SCG I, 29, 5: “Simile enim alicui dicitur, quod ejus possidet qualitatem vel formam. Quia igitur id quod in Deo perfecte est, in rebus aliis per quandam deficientem participationem invenitur illud secundum quod similitudo attenditur, Dei quidem simpliciter est, non autem creaturae. Et sic creatura habet quod Dei est : unde et Deo recte similis dicitur. »

³⁶⁷ Wohlman, Avital, *Thomas d’Aquin et Maïmonide : un dialogue exemplaire*, p 132.

said to be made “in the image of God and in His likeness.”³⁶⁸ Maimonides interprets “image” as “the specific form, which is the intellectual apprehension,”³⁶⁹ and then he says that, “it is on account of this intellectual apprehension that it is said of man: *In the image of God created He him.*”³⁷⁰ This specific form that is the *proprium* of man is not found according to Maimonides, in anything that exists under the sphere of the moon and does not admit of the use of the senses or any parts of the body. By calling it a ‘form,’ that is “the notion in which a thing is constituted as a substance and becomes what it is,”³⁷¹ Maimonides assumes correctly that it is immaterial, and even “likened unto the apprehension of the deity, which does not require an instrument, although in reality it is not like the latter apprehension.”³⁷² There is already a clear likeness and distinct difference between the ‘form’ that is found in man and in God. This likeness is seen in the fact of intellectual apprehension by which man is approximated to the image of God. The difference is that in reality, man’s apprehension is not like the divine apprehension. Aquinas would bring in the language of *prius et posterius* to show that this apprehension is prior in God by nature, and posterior in man because it is received and thus, already short of the fullness that is in God as the cause. It is very interesting to note that all the Arabic predecessors of Maimonides like Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes, even before Aquinas, spoke the analogical language of ‘*per prius et posterius*’ under the term of ‘amphiboly.’³⁷³ The form of an effect, as Aquinas reasons must be present in some way in its cause. To confirm this ‘form’ that enters into the composition of the substance that is man, and as a result of which there exists a relation of likeness between God and man, Maimonides observes that:

³⁶⁸ *Dux Neutorum*, lib.I, cap.1, fol.5: « Faciamus hominem ad imaginem et similitudinem nostra. » Cf *Guide* I, 1, p 21.

³⁶⁹ Ibid: “forma spiritualis quae est apprehensio intelligibilis.” Cf *Guide* I, 1, p 22.

³⁷⁰ Ibid: “Et cum dixit, Faciamus hominem in nostro celem quod est nostra imago hoc est dicere, forma spiritualis quae est apprehensio intelligibilis non fabricatio seu compositio neque formae corporales. » Cf *Guide* I, 1, p 22.

³⁷¹ Ibid: “Nomen autem quod est celem, convenit formae naturali quae est perfectio rei et essentia: sicut est in homine intellectus humanus.” Cf *Guide* I, 1, p 22.

³⁷² Ibid: “Similitudo etiam similiter animalium quam vidit Ezechiel, et in eo quod separatus est, hoc in modo multum mirabili cui non est similis in omnibus creatis sub sphaera lunae et haec est apprehensio intelligibilis quae non indiget aliquo membro vel sensu, assimilavit ipsum creatori qui non est corpus.” Cf *Guide* I, 1, p 23.

³⁷³ Wolfson, H. A., “Avicenna, Algazali, and Averroes on Divine Attributes,” *Studies in the History of Philosophy and Religion*, vol 1, pp 143-169.

It was because of this something, I mean because of the divine intellect conjoined with man, that it is said of the latter that he is in the image of God and in His likeness...³⁷⁴

Univocal likeness does not and cannot fit here between God and creatures because the 'form' is not exactly the same thing between them and is not received in exactly the same mode. Neither can this likeness be expressed by pure equivocation because there is something more than the name, which is common between God and creatures. That is exactly the interpretation that Aquinas is making by accepting an analogical likeness between God and creatures. It is the kind of likeness that is neither specific nor generic but only analogical in the way the act of being (*esse*) is common to all things.³⁷⁵ Perhaps, this reading may be what some interpreters of Maimonides may be trying to achieve with the help of Aquinas by suggesting "a secret doctrine of analogy" to Maimonides³⁷⁶ or by seeing "a logic of analogy" in the *Guide*.³⁷⁷

Does any form of relation exist between God and creatures? Maimonides calls relation an accidental quality that cannot exist in God. No relation of whatever nature can exist between the two since God and creatures do not belong to the same order.³⁷⁸ Aquinas accepts they do not belong to the same order, but thinks on the contrary, that some forms of relation could be seen to exist between God and creatures. Representing the view of Maimonides, Aquinas writes as follows:

In this matter Rabbi Moses erred in many ways, for he wished to prove that there is no relation between God and the creature, because seeing that God is not a body he has no

³⁷⁴ *Dux Neutorum*, lib.I, cap.1, fol.5: "tamen dicitur de homine secundum hunc modum, sed secundum intellectum spirituales qui est coniunctus in eo et ideo dicitur quod est ad imaginem et similitudinem: non quod creator habeat corpus in quo sit figura." Cf *Guide* I, 1, p 23.

³⁷⁵ ST I, q.4, a.3, ad.3: "Quod non dicitur esse similitudo creaturae ad Deum propter communicantiam in forma secundum eandem rationem generis et specie, sed secundum analogiam tantum; prout scilicet Deus est ens per essentiam, et alia per participationem."

³⁷⁶ Seeskin, Kenneth, "The Positive Contribution of Negative Theology," in *Jewish Philosophy in a Secular Age*, Albany: The State University of New York Press, 1990, p 45.

³⁷⁷ Lahey, Stephen E., "Maimonides and Analogy," in *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 67, 1993, p 226.

³⁷⁸ *Dux Neutorum*, lib.I, cap.LI, fol.19: "Quod cum ita sit, quomodo erit comparatio inter creatorem et aliquam creaturam, cum tanta sit differentia inter ipsum et creaturas in veritate essentiae, qua non potest esse maior?" Cf *Guide* I, 52, p 118.

relation to time or place. Thus he considered only the relation which results from quantity and not that which arises from action and passion.³⁷⁹

For Aquinas, the foundation on which Maimonides bases his concept of relation is erroneous. Relation does not only mean accidental properties like quantity and quality that reside in the subject nor is it limited only to corporeal objects. Relation means more than that. In the language of Boethius, relation as Aquinas quotes him, “signifies something not as adhering to a subject but as passing from it to something else.”³⁸⁰ If an action does not imply composition with an agent, likewise production of an effect by a cause does not imply a composition between them. It is Maimonides who argues and correctly so, that actions of God are ontologically distinct from His essence and thus, they constitute no sort of plurality in the divine essence. Actions such as ‘merciful’ or ‘just’ are said of God not because God changes nor because such exist in Him, but because God brings about such visible effects in the world which are very similar to the effects that issue from human actions.³⁸¹ If Maimonides accepts there is divine agency in bringing about such effects that are very similar to human effects in the world, it is logical to assume there is a relation of similarity between the actions brought about by divine agency and the actions brought about by human agency. On Maimonides’s own terms, contrary to his denials, predicates of action qualify to be predicated analogously between God and creatures and thus, it permits a relation between God and creatures.³⁸² This relation does neither introduce ontological plurality in God nor destroy in any way the absolute simplicity of God. Aquinas notes on the contrary that the more simple a thing is, the greater the number of its concomitant relations “since its power is so much the less limited and consequently its causality so much the more extended.”³⁸³ On the basis of this causality then, Aquinas reasons that two types of relations must logically exist between God and creatures: a relation of origin as exists between a principle and the things

³⁷⁹ De pot q.7, a 10 : «In hoc autem deficit multipliciter Rabbi, qui voluit probare quod non esset relatio inter Deum et creaturam, quia cum Deus non sit corpus, non habet relationem ad tempus nec ad locum. Consideravit enim solam relationem quae consequitur quantitatem, non eam quae consequitur actionem et passionem.”

³⁸⁰ De Pot. Q.7, a.8 : «Dicendum quod relatio in hoc differt a quantitate et qualitate: quia quantitas et qualitas sunt quaedam accidentia in subiecto remanentia; relatio autem non significat, ut Boetius dicit, ut in subiecto manens, sed ut in transitu quodam ad aliud.”

³⁸¹ *Dux Neutorum*, lib.I, cap.LIII, fol.20: “neque ratio huius dicti exigit quod in creatore sint naturae, vel dispositiones, vel mores: sed quod faciat opera similia illis quae proveniunt ex moribus seu dispositionibus nostri de potentiis. » Cf *Guide* I, 54, p 124.

³⁸² Cf. Buijs, Joseph A., « A Maimonidean Critique of Thomistic Analogy, » p 461.

³⁸³ De pot q.7, a.8 : «Ex hoc autem apparet quod non est contra rationem simplicitatis alicuius multitudo relationum quae est inter ipsum et alia; immo quanto simplicius est tanto concomitantur ipsum plures relationes. Quanto enim aliquid est simplicius, tanto virtus (eius) est minus limitata, unde ad plura se extendit sua causalitas.”

which proceed from it; and a relation of distinction seeing that an effect must necessarily be distinct from its cause.³⁸⁴ This distinction diminishes but never denies the likeness that exists between the cause and its effect. The reason is that the form by which there is a likeness between the cause and the effect, exists first and eminently in the cause before it is in the effect, and that explains why the effect is said to be like the cause and not vice versa.³⁸⁵ Aquinas says it another way by acknowledging that relations can as well exist between things that do not belong to the same order (*non sunt unius ordinis*) as between creatures and God, and animate/inanimate things. For example is the pillar that is said to be at the right side because it is at somebody's right hand side. The relation is real (*res naturae*) in one of the things, and only rational (*res rationis*) in the other. The relation of *being on the right of* is real in the man but not real in the pillar.³⁸⁶ We say the pillar has changed from my right to my left because I have turned around, and not because there is a change in the pillar. It is the same relation that exists between the knower and the object of knowledge. The latter cannot know itself and is logically independent of the order of knowledge, but the former, that is the knower is logically dependent on the object of knowledge. There is no mutual dependency between the two. The relation is real in the knower but not in the known or the object of knowledge. In the same way creatures are said to be related to God because the relation is real in creatures but not in God. It is creaturely manner of signifying that tends to imply temporal sequence and change in God, not that these exist in God. This type of relation is one directional and non-reciprocal. This form of relation even finds its place in Aristotle who acknowledges that certain things are said to be relative "because their very essence includes in its nature a reference to something else, not because something else involves a reference to it."³⁸⁷

Maimonides rejects causal relation because of the mutual dependency that logically should exist between the correlatives. For Wolfson, "causal relation means a proposition consisting of three

³⁸⁴ De pot q.7, a.8 : «Oportet autem intelligi aliquam relationem inter principium et ea quae a principio sunt, non solum quidem relationem originis, secundum quod principiata oriuntur a principio, sed etiam relationem diversitatis: quia oportet effectum a causa distingui, cum nihil sit causa sui ipsius.»

³⁸⁵ De pot q.7, a.7, ad.3c : «homo enim non dicitur similis suae imagini, sed e contrario, propter hoc quod forma illa secundum quam attenditur similitudo, per prius est in homine quam in imagine. Et ideo Deum creaturis similem non dicimus, sed e contrario.»

³⁸⁶ ST 1, q.13, a.7 : "Quandoque vero relatio in uno extremorum est res naturae et in altero est res rationis tantum: et hoc contingit quandocumque duo extrema non sunt unius ordinis ... Et similiter *dextrum* non dicitur de columna, nisi inquantum ponitur animali ad dexteram. Unde huiusmodi relatio non est realiter in columna, sed in animali. »

³⁸⁷ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* V, 15, 1021a25-30.

terms, subject, copula, and predicate, illustrated by...the proposition; A is the father of B.”³⁸⁸ Each term in the relation is called a correlative because, according to Maimonides, “it fails to convey its meaning to the mind unless related and compared to something else.”³⁸⁹ Among the examples he gives include: long and short, above and below, half and double, before and after, different and similar, lover and enemy, father and child, master and slave. They are correlatives and exist in a kind of mutual dependency on one another. ‘Before and after’ are generally accepted ways of discussing causality among the Arabic predecessors of Maimonides. Alfarabi, Avicenna and Averroes all accepted that some common terms are predicated of God “in a prior manner” and of other beings “in a posterior manner.”³⁹⁰ Avicenna goes as far as saying that certain terms are predicated of God and other things below Him “in an ambiguous sense,” that is to say, “according to priority and posteriority.”³⁹¹ ‘Ambiguous’ or ‘amphibolous’ came to be translated in Latin as ‘*analogia*’ and has since under the influence of St. Thomas Aquinas, been represented as analogical.³⁹² The resemblance between Aquinas’s theory of analogy and those of the Arabic predecessors mentioned here, are never in doubt. They like Aquinas think analogy to be relational. Given his knowledge of especially Aristotle and Alfarabi who both had a real sense of analogical relation, it is very doubtful Maimonides had not been aware of this non-reciprocal relation that depends on, and is real in, one of the *relata* and not on the other. Whatever may be the case, Wolfson authoritatively remarks that Maimonides “was the first, and the only one, who knowingly set out to interpret divine attributes in what himself describes as “in a purely equivocal sense.””³⁹³ The success or failure of this choice is dependent on the interpretation. Gersonides, a contemporary of Maimonides and a fellow Jew, disapproved of Maimonides’s use and acceptance of “pure equivocation” as the only predication that could apply between creatures and God. This is because, as we have said all along, pure equivocation renders all inferences from creatures to God fallacious. To avoid this and many other semantic problems endangered by Maimonides’s theory of predication, Gersonides proposes that terms that apply both to God

³⁸⁸ Wolfson, H.A., « St. Thomas on Divine Attributes, » in *Studies in Maimonides and St. Thomas Aquinas*,” p 10.

³⁸⁹ Maimonides’ *Treatise on Logic*, p 56.

³⁹⁰ Wolfson, H. A., «Avicenna, Algazali, and Averroes on Divine Attributes, » p 153, 166.

³⁹¹ Ibid. pp 153-155.

³⁹² Cf. Wolfson, H. A., «The Amphibolous terms in Aristotle, Arabic Philosophy and Maimonides » in *Studies in the History of Philosophy and Religion*, 2, pp 455-477.

³⁹³ Wolfson, H. A., “St. Thomas on Divine Attributes,” *Studies in the History of Philosophy and Religion*, vol 2, p 514.

and creatures are “equivocal in the sense of prior and posterior predication.”³⁹⁴ By so doing, Gersonides safeguards God’s ontological purity and priority while maintaining an “analogous intermediate category that avoids the problematic consequences of univocality and equivocality for terms that apply both to God and creatures.”³⁹⁵ This means that priority is given to one of the terms of the predication as cause and to the other as the effect. For example, “knowledge” is predicated of God primarily as the cause because His knowledge is identical to His essence. Knowledge in God is perfect. But in creatures, knowledge is predicated secondarily or posteriorly because knowledge comes to creatures from the exterior. Thus what is at stake is not “a shared property” (for which Maimonides opted for “absolute equivocation,”) but “a shared relationship.” As noted by Samuelson:

The adjective in this case describes two entirely different states of affairs; however, the relationship between the two is perfectly intelligible. The intelligibility has to do with how the two subjects to whom the single adjective is applied are related rather than how they share a common property.³⁹⁶

This type of equivocation is called the *pros hen* equivocal. The sense is that in a shared relationship, one of the predicates may be causative and primary (*pros* in Greek) and the other is secondary and derivative (*hen* in Greek). As opposed to the “pure equivocation,” Gersonides proposes that all comparisons involving God and creatures should be understood *pros hen* equivocally.³⁹⁷ It is a different type of equivocal enumerated by Aristotle who in his *Physics* notes that:

In the case of equivocal terms, sometimes the different senses in which they are used are far removed from one another, while sometimes there is a certain likeness between them,

³⁹⁴ Gersonides, *The Wars of the Lord*, vol. 2, translated by Seymour Feldman, (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1987) pp 107-115.

³⁹⁵ Stern, Josef, “Meaning and Language,” in Steven Nadler and T.M. Rudavsky, eds, *The Cambridge History of Jewish Philosophy*, p 261.

³⁹⁶ Samuelson, Norbert M, « Reasoning and Demonstration” in Steven Nadler and T. M. Rudavsky, eds., *The Cambridge History of Jewish Philosophy*, p 206.

³⁹⁷ *Ibid.* p 206.

and sometimes again they are nearly related either generically or analogically, with the result that they seem not to be equivocal though they really are.³⁹⁸

Another major point of disagreement between Aquinas and Maimonides, where the former tries a different interpretation of the latter, is on the import of divine attributes and what they signify. Aquinas holds that positive attributes signify the divine essence though imperfectly. As early as the *De Veritate*, Aquinas correctly thinks that the attributes ‘power, knowledge, life’ and the like, when attributed to God signify “something which is in Him. They do not differ as regards the reality which is signified, but only in our manner of understanding them.”³⁹⁹ Aquinas also, as much as Maimonides disagrees with those who, because of the lowliness of their intellectual powers, regard these attributes to be in God “like some sort of disposition added to His essence.”⁴⁰⁰ Maimonides is vehemently opposed to the application of positive attributes to God because they are the figments of our imagination and as such they refer “to absolute nonexistence.”⁴⁰¹ To believe that God possesses positive attributes is equal to plain idolatry, “one has abolished his belief in the existence of the deity without being aware of it.”⁴⁰² In the nicest of language, Maimonides explains that they should be understood as “attributes referring to actions proceeding from Him.”⁴⁰³ If interpreted as attributes of actions, those positive attributes would no longer signify the divine essence as some contend, but would rather signify actions coming from Him by “means of His essence and not, as we have made clear, by means of a superadded notion.”⁴⁰⁴ Thus when the Scriptures describe God as ‘wise,’ ‘good,’ ‘merciful,’ ‘just’,

³⁹⁸ Aristotle, *Physics* VII, 4, 249a20-25. It is the very last sense of equivocal (analogically) that has come to be described as ‘*pros hen* equivocal.’ For further details, consult Joseph Owens, *The Doctrine of Being in Aristotelian Metaphysics: A Study in the Greek Background of Medieval Thought*, (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of of Mediaeval Studies, 1951) pp 264-275; Harry A. Wolfson, “St. Thomas on Divine Attributes,” pp 14-18.

³⁹⁹ *De ver* q.2, a.1: « Et ideo aliter dicendum est, quod scientia Deo attributa, significat aliquid quod in Deo est, et similiter vita et essentia et cetera huiusmodi; nec differunt quantum ad rem significatam, sed solum quantum ad modum intelligendi. »

⁴⁰⁰ *De ver* q.2, a.1: « Quidam enim suo intellectu modum creatae scientiae transcendere non valentes, crediderunt quod scientia sit in Deo quasi aliqua dispositio addita essentiae eius, sicut et in nobis est; quod est omnino erroneum et absurdum. Hoc enim posito, Deus summe simplex non esset; esset enim in eo compositio substantiae et accidentis : » Cf. *Dux Neutorum*, lib.I, cap.LV, fol.21 : « non est credendum quod aliqua sint addita super substantiam, ipsius secundum similitudinem dispositionum additarum super substantiam nostram: quia comitantur in nomine. » Cf *Guide* I, 56, p 131.

⁴⁰¹ *Dux Neutorum*, lib.I, cap.LVIII, fol.23: “Cum ergo dixerimus quod ista substantia quae nominatur Creator, est substantia in qua sunt res additae multae, et enarratur per illas, nos attribuimus hoc nomen non enti et privationi. Vide igitur quantum periculum est in attribuendo agnominationes Creatori. » Cf *Guide* I, 60, p 147.

⁴⁰² Ibid. fol.24: “sed dico quod abstulit esse Creatoris de corde suo: nec tamen ipse sentit.” Cf *Guide* I, 60, p 145.

⁴⁰³ Ibid: “agnominationes operum quae proveniunt ab ipsius virtute.” Cf *Guide* I, 60, p.147.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid. lib, I, cap.LI, fol.19: “Omnia enim opera creatoris variabilia, omnia in quam sunt in sua substantia non in modo additionis, sicut praediximus.” Cf *Guide* I, 52, p 119.

‘powerful,’ and ‘living,’ Maimonides contends that God does not possess moral qualities but “that He performs actions resembling the actions that in us proceed from moral qualities.”⁴⁰⁵ Hence, when we say that “God is wise,” it only means that His actions resemble those of a wise man, according to what wisdom means for us. It does not signify that in the divine essence, there is wisdom or that the divine essence itself is wisdom. The only exceptional ground on which they could be ascribed to God’s essence is that they be understood in a purely equivocal manner “so that their meaning when they are predicated of Him is in no way like their meaning in other applications.”⁴⁰⁶ That is what St. Thomas Aquinas does not accept. In what seems most probably a misreading of Maimonides’s attribute of action, as scholars have shown and as we shall try to explain, Aquinas represents his disagreement in this long quotation as follows:

I answer that some have maintained, and Rabbi Moses most emphatically, that these terms when predicted of God do not signify the divine essence. He says in effect that these expressions are to be taken in reference to God in two ways. First, as indicating a likeness of effect: and that God is said to be *wise*, not that wisdom is something in him, but because in his effects he acts like a wise man... Secondly, by way of negation: so that when we say God lives we do not mean that life is something in Him, but that God has not that mode of existence which is in things inanimate... In either case however, this explanation is apparently insufficient and objectionable.”⁴⁰⁷

There are two objections to be considered here. But the first objection which considers attributes in the language of Aquinas, as mere “*similitudinem effectus*—likeness of effects,” would merit more consideration. The second bordering on negation has earlier been taken care of. If attributes are mere “likeness of effects,” then Maimonides would apparently not have recognized the difference between a true statement and a metaphorical statement. This is because Aquinas

⁴⁰⁵Ibid. lib.I, cap.LIII, fol.20: “sed quod faciat opera similia illis quae proveniunt ex moribus seu dispositionibus nostri de potentiis. » Cf *Guide* I, 54, p 124.

⁴⁰⁶Ibid. lib.I, cap.LV, fol.21: “quia inter ipsum et alia nulla est similitudo aliquo modo.” Cf *Guide* I, 56, p 131.

⁴⁰⁷De pot q.7, a.5: «Dicendum quod: quidam posuerunt, quod ista nomina dicta de Deo, non significant divinam substantiam, quod maxime expresse dicit Rabbi Moyses. Dicit autem, huiusmodi nomina de Deo dupliciter esse intelligenda: uno modo per similitudinem effectus, ut dicatur Deus sapiens non quia sapientia aliquid sit in ipso, sed quia ad modum sapientis in suis effectibus operatur, ordinando scilicet unumquodque ad debitum finem; et similiter dicitur vivens in quantum ad modum viventis operatur, quasi ex se ipso agens. Alio modo per modum negationis; ut per hoc quod dicimus Deum esse viventem, non significemus vitam in eo aliquid esse, sed removeamus a Deo illum modum essendi quo res inanimatae existunt. Similiter cum dicimus Deum intelligentem, non intelligimus significare intellectum aliquid in ipso esse, sed removemus a Deo illum modum essendi quo bruta existunt; et sic de aliis. Uterque autem modus videtur esse insufficiens et inconveniens. »

observes, according to Maimonides's explanation, "there would be no difference in saying *God is wise*, or *God is angry* or *God is a fire*."⁴⁰⁸ God is said to be angry because He acts like an angry man by punishing and He is said to be fire because He acts alike when He purges or cleanses as fire does. God is not subject to passions and cannot thus be likened to things acting in similar ways. Certain perfections like living, wise, good etc. must be affirmed of God because they belong primarily to God and signify immaterially while others must be rejected. Things that signify corporeality must be excluded from God unless they are only used metaphorically through some likeness. Aquinas makes appeal to his logic of distinction between the *res significata*—the very perfection signified and the *modus significandi*—the mode of signifying.⁴⁰⁹ Words whose mode of signifying enters into their very meaning must not be attributed to God unless only metaphorically. Thus words like 'anger,' 'fire,' 'lion,' have their being and signification in a merely material condition. That is why they cannot be attributed to God. Perhaps, Maimonides did not see this subtle difference and labeled attributes in the reading of Aquinas as mere "*similitudinem effectus*." The closest that Maimonides comes to recognizing the difference between a perfection that is signified and its mode of signification is to take them in a purely equivocal sense.⁴¹⁰ As such, knowledge, power, will, good and like perfections when applied to God mean something totally different from their applications in creatures. And this for St. Thomas Aquinas is not acceptable since pure equivocation totally impedes knowledge and fails to accommodate the difference between perfection and how it is signified. But did Maimonides describe actions as "*similitudinem effectus*?" Let us look at one of the precise passages that bring out the sense that Aquinas perhaps, is referring to:

The meaning here is not that He possesses moral qualities, but that he performs actions resembling the actions that in us proceed from moral qualities.

⁴⁰⁸ De pot q.7, a.5 : « quia secundum expositionem nulla differentia esset inter hoc quod dicitur, Deus est sapiens et Deus est iratus, vel Deus ignis est. »

⁴⁰⁹ ST 1, q.13, a.3 : "In nominibus igitur quae Deo attribuimus, est duo considerare, scilicet perfectiones ipsas significatas, ut bonitatem, vitam, et huiusmodi, et modum significandi."

⁴¹⁰ *Dux Neutorum*, lib.I, cap.LV, fol.21: "Hoc igitur intelligere debet qui crediderit quod substantiales dispositiones sunt quae conveniunt creatori. Sicut si dixeris quod ipse est ens vivus, potens, sapiens, et volens: quoniam ista non attribuuntur nobis et ipsi eodem modo. » And again : « quod ens non dicitur de Creatore et de eo quod est extra ipsum, nisi aequivoce vere. » Cf *Guide I*, 56, p.130 & 131.

*Neque ratio huius dicti exigit quod in creatore sint naturae, vel dispositiones, vel mores: sed quod faciat opera similia illi quae proveniunt ex moribus seu dispositionibus nostri de potentiis.*⁴¹¹

It does seem to us that either Aquinas permitted himself some “looseness of language” or he misinterpreted Maimonides. Whatever be the case, Maimonides’s theory of action as attributes must be properly represented.⁴¹² When Maimonides interprets divine attributes as attributes of action, he takes action to be a binary proposition which consists of the subject and the verb. For example, ‘Zayd built this house, or ‘Zayd carpentered this door.’ The verb ‘built’ or ‘carpentered’ explains an action done by the subject and doesn’t say anything about the nature of the subject. It shows an effect that is ontologically different from the subject. Thus the sentence, ‘God is good,’ should be read as ‘God does good’ in the sense that it is an action done by God.⁴¹³ For example, God did this that is considered to be good. In this way, what is known is the action but not God, the subject of the action, who anyway cannot be known in His essence. The absolute simplicity of God is preserved. Likewise, all the attributes that are mentioned in the Scriptures like ‘merciful,’ ‘powerful,’ ‘living,’ ‘knowing’ and the like, are to be understood as actions proceeding from the unique essence of God. Because they are similar to things that human beings do, Maimonides emphasizes that they are not qualities in God but that “He performs actions resembling the actions that in us proceed from moral qualities.”⁴¹⁴ Perhaps, it is this manner of expression that led Aquinas into describing Maimonides’s attributes of action as mere “likeness of effects.” On the contrary, ‘God is good’ must not be understood as ‘God is the cause of goodness in things,’ as this manner is causal relation which introduces dependency and a habitus in God. The Maimonidean logic of the attribute of actions, denies the ontology of divine causality, where Aquinas teaches that every cause leaves something of itself in the effect. If an action cannot tell us anything about the subject of the action, there is no knowledge that can be obtained from one thing to the other, and the epistemological basis of even knowing the reality of God is destroyed. This is the logic on which Maimonides bases his equivocation as the linguistic solution to the problem of human language about God. Aquinas on the contrary, has

⁴¹¹ Ibid. lib.I, cap.LIII, fol.20: Cf *Guide I*, 54, p 124.

⁴¹² It would be of great help to refer to the passage above where we fully treated Maimonides’s attribute of action.

⁴¹³ Wolfson, H.A., « St. Thomas on Divine Attributes, » in *Studies in Maimonides and St. Thomas Aquinas*, p10.

⁴¹⁴ *Dux Neutrorum*, lib.I, cap.LIII, fol.20: “quod faciat opera similia illis quae proveniunt ex moribus seu dispositionibus nostri de potentiis. » Cf *Guide I*, 54, p 124.

provided alternatives in causality as the metaphysical basis on which ontological dependency of creatures is understood and in analogy as the best tool of explaining this relationship of likeness that exists between creatures and God.

4.5 Evaluation and Conclusion

It is very evident that Maimonides and Aquinas hold a doctrine of the unknowability of God's essence, perhaps, Maimonides holding a more austere form, than Aquinas, of what has come to be called 'negative theology.' The term 'negative theology,' designates all that cannot be said of God.⁴¹⁵ As a philosophical or theological discussion about God, theology is not in itself negative and has no kind that is called specifically 'negative.' Rather, negation is a modality of theological knowledge, and it is only but a way.⁴¹⁶ When negative theology is at its extreme, it is impossible to positively name God in an intelligible language and one cannot know anything about God. It becomes in effect "a signature for a theology without God."⁴¹⁷ The only thing it knows of God is what He is not. Negative theology can also exist in a moderate form and according to Humbrecht, its question is that of respectively articulating and extending what can be affirmed and what must be denied of God.⁴¹⁸ It could claim the possibility of predicating some attributes of God and of having some special knowledge of God that is possible for man to have.

Negative theology can have so many aspects ranging from the aspects of epistemology, the aspects of semantics and to the aspects of metaphysics. In its epistemic aspect, it questions whether man can know God and whether God is knowable; in its semantic aspect, it considers the language and concepts we use to talk about God; and in its metaphysical aspect, it denies

⁴¹⁵ Humbrecht, Thierry-Dominique, *Théologie négative et noms divins chez saint Thomas d'Aquin*, p9.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid., p 778.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid., p 9 : "Elle peut aller jusqu'à prendre acte d'une impossibilité d'atteindre quelque Dieu que ce soit: la négation est alors la signature d'une théologie sans Dieu."

⁴¹⁸ Ibid. "La question est celle de l'articulation et de l'extension respective de ce qui peut être affirmé et de ce qui doit être nié. Les perfections attribuées à Dieu (comme l'être, la bonté, et la sagesse, etc.) atteignent-elles celui-ci en vérité, ou bien d'une union mystique dans l'ineffable ? »

God the same ontological standing with beings.⁴¹⁹ When these issues are not properly separated, there is the tendency to lump Maimonides's and Aquinas's thoughts into the same basket. This is the stand certain scholars have taken not only when it comes to negative theology but also the subtle questions of attributes, analogy and knowledge of God.

One of the scholars who we think have tried grouping Maimonides and Aquinas into the same class of negative theology is Isaac Franck.⁴²⁰ He bases what he calls "some of the elements of a radical negative theology" on the fact that "while we do know *that God is*, on the other hand, *what God is*, i.e., God's *nature* or *essence*, in the words of St. Thomas Aquinas, "remains absolutely unknown" (*penitus manet ignotum*).⁴²¹ And then he goes on to put this teaching firmly on both Maimonides and Aquinas in the following words:

With some significant deviations or modifications, the doctrine outlined here of the utter unknowability of God is derived from Rabbi Moses ben Maimon ... more widely known as Moses Maimonides and from Saint Thomas Aquinas, who was thoroughly familiar with Maimonides' major philosophical work, the *Guide of the Perplexed*, and was clearly influenced by it.⁴²²

Franck a little bit later in the same article makes "some significant deviations or modifications" and comes up finally with his own full version of radical negative theology. He combines 'some of the elements' of radical negative theology of Maimonides and Aquinas, with some other elements he himself considers necessary and gives us the full version of radical negative theology that he defends. He however, acknowledges his hesitancy in attributing this final radical version of negative theology to Maimonides and Aquinas "for fear of projecting on them the extreme view espoused in this (Franck's) paper."⁴²³ He presents his full radical negative theology as follows:

⁴¹⁹ Cf Buijs, Joseph A, "The Negative Theology of Maimonides and Aquinas," *The Review of Metaphysics* 41 (1988), pp 723-738. He examines Franck's doctrine of radical negative theology against those of Maimonides and Aquinas. Our inspiration is taken from this well written article.

⁴²⁰ Franck, Isaac, "Maimonides and Aquinas on Man's Knowledge of God: A Twentieth-Century Perspective," *Maimonides: A Collection of Critical Essays* edited by Joseph A. Buijs, (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988) pp 284-305.

⁴²¹ Ibid. p 285. He was also referring to Anton C. Pegis, "Penitus manet Ignotum," in *Medieval Studies* 27, (1965), pp 212-226.

⁴²² Ibid. p 285.

⁴²³ Ibid. p 286.

The doctrine that no affirmative or *positive attributes of any kind* are predicable of God, that God is completely unknown and unknowable, that we can meaningfully say about God only *what he is not* (to speak of Him in *negative attributes*); the doctrine that man's highest knowledge of God is to know that we are *unable to know Him*.⁴²⁴

We are now presented with two different versions of radical negative theology, one in its mitigated form, which Franck attributes to Maimonides and Aquinas; and the second in its complete form we suppose Franck takes as his own. Let us analyze these forms of negative theology against the teachings of Maimonides and Aquinas and find out whether both Maimonides and Aquinas hold any of them or not. Let us call the first MRNT i.e., Mitigated Radical Negative Theology and the second CRNT i.e. Complete Radical Negative Theology.

MRNT: The total unknowability of God's essence.

CRNT: No positive attributes are predicated of God; God is unknown and unknowable; we can only speak of God in negative language; and the only thing man can know is that we are unable to know God.

1. **MRNT:** This is the version of negative theology that has as its principal tenet, the total unknowability of God's essence. Franck attributes this mitigated radical negative theology to both Maimonides and Aquinas. Among the different aspects of negative theology we gave above, we notice that this MRNT centers only on the epistemic aspect, that is, the issue of whether man can know God and whether God is knowable in His essence. The real issue of this radical negative theology is not whether man can know God. Both Maimonides and Aquinas have never doubted man's ability to know that God is. We shall centre our inquiry on whether God is knowable in His essence. This is what we understand to be Franck's mitigated radical negative theology since it claims that man can never acquire the knowledge of the divine essence.

Neither Maimonides nor Aquinas doubts that man can know God, that is, that God exists. There various demonstrations of the cosmological arguments, do establish that God exists as the necessary existent without a cause of any kind.

⁴²⁴Ibid. p 285-286.

After this we shall say that it follows necessarily that the existence of everything that is necessary of existence with respect to its own essence can have no cause...It is He who is the deity, may His name be sublime.⁴²⁵

This necessary existent is neither subject to generation and corruption, nor is it a body or a force in a body. It is absolutely simple and absolutely perfect. Maimonides adds that concerning the existence of the necessary existence, God, “there can be no doubt, no refutation and no dispute, except on the part of one who is ignorant of the method of demonstration.”⁴²⁶ This is an indubitable fact on the part of Maimonides that God is and that we can know that He exists. This confirmation is not a part of negative theology because there is nothing to deny in this affirmation: God is. But is God knowable in His essence? Does MRNT qualify Maimonides’s thought?

To know a thing, it must be divided into a definition, parts of a definition, qualities including quantities, habits and dispositions, relations and actions.⁴²⁷ These are the various predicates we have examined earlier in this section. These predicates except actions indicate what a thing is in its essence or in its accident. If a thing’s essence is known, Maimonides argues that it must be composed of these various predicates which enable us to analyze it into parts. Because God is not composed, because He is absolutely simple and perfect, Maimonides argues that:

We are only able to apprehend the fact that He is and cannot apprehend His quiddity.”⁴²⁸

Thus, God is absolutely unknowable in His essence. Actions do not indicate the essence of the subject, but the effects (actions) coming from the subject. Hence, if we compare MRNT to Maimonides’s teaching, the result is positive. That means that Maimonides actually holds this mitigated form of radical negative theology where God in His essence is absolutely unknowable. According to the criteria of MRNT, Maimonides is truly a mitigated radical negative theologian. How does this apply to St. Thomas Aquinas?

⁴²⁵ *Dux Neutorum*, lib.II, cap.II, fol.40: “Post hoc dicimus quod omne necesse esse in nostra probatione suae substantiae sequitur omnibus modis ut non habeat causam sui esse...Et idcirco nec est corpus nec potentia in corpore qui est Creator benedictus.” Cf *Guide* II, 1, p 248.

⁴²⁶ Ibid: “Haec autem est demonstratio quae non habet repulsam vel contradicentem: nisi apud illum qui ignorat viam demonstrationis. » Cf *Guide* II, 1, p 248.

⁴²⁷ Ibid. lib.I, cap. LI, fol.18-19. Cf *Guide* I, 52, pp114-119.

⁴²⁸ Ibid. lib.I, cap.LVII, fol.22: “dicemus semper probatum esse: quod creator necesse est esse...non appraehendimus nisi essentiam eius non quidditatem ipsius.” Cf *Guide* I, 58, p 135.

Like Maimonides, Aquinas adapts the cosmological arguments organized by Aristotle to arrive at the invisible God through the visible things of creation. From motion, efficient cause, possible and necessary being, degrees of perfection in being, to the order in the universe, Aquinas arrives at the First Being God who is eternal, uncaused, necessary existent, perfect and all knowing.⁴²⁹ Aquinas notes there is twofold truth concerning God.

Some truths about God exceed all the ability of the human reason. Such is the truth that God is triune. But there are some truths which the natural reason also is able to reach. Such are that God exists, that He is one and the like.⁴³⁰

Thus neither God's existence nor man's ability to know that God exists is in doubt for St. Thomas Aquinas. But is it true according to Aquinas that God's essence is totally unknowable and cannot be known as MRNT claims? This inquiry has featured in our introductory discussion of the nature of God. In a kind of summary, we remind ourselves that Aquinas has two types of comprehension or knowledge: a proper and a broader knowledge of the divine essence. To know properly is to have the full knowledge of a thing as well as it can be known. God is an infinite essence and cannot be known in this way by a created mind.⁴³¹ When something is known broadly, it means according to Aquinas that it is known imperfectly or indirectly, that is, not totally perfect as it should be known.⁴³² This is due to the fact that the mode of knowing does not measure up to the object that is known.⁴³³ Having said this, Aquinas then mentions three indirect ways through which we know of God from creatures 'as their cause, by way of excellence and negation.'⁴³⁴ They are also indirect ways according to which the multiple perfections in creation point to the divine essence in which these perfections exist in an excellent manner.⁴³⁵ Since these diverse perfections are reduced to God as to their cause, it follows that we deny of God their

⁴²⁹ SCG I, 13-15.

⁴³⁰ SCG I, 3, 2: "Est autem in his, quae de Deo confitemur, duplex veritatis modus. Quaedam namque vera sunt de Deo, quae omnem facultatem humanae rationis excedunt, ut Deum esse trinum et unum. Quaedam vero sunt, ad quae etiam ratio naturalis pertingere potest, sicut est Deus esse, Deus esse unum, et alia hujusmodi ; quae etiam philosophi demonstrative de Deo probaverunt, ducti naturalis lumine rationis. »

⁴³¹ ST I, q.12, a.7: "Nullus autem intellectus creatus potest Deum infinite cognoscere"

⁴³² ST I, q.12, a.7, ad 2: "sed tota non ita perfecte cognoscitur sicut cognoscibilis est"

⁴³³ ST I, q.12, a.7, ad.3: "Ad tertium dicendum quod *totaliter* dicit modum objecti, non quidem ita quod totus modus objecti non cadat sub cognitione, sed quia modus objecti non est modus cognoscentis."

⁴³⁴ ST I, q.13, a.1: « Deus ... cognoscitur a nobis ex creaturis secundum habitudinem principii, et per modum excellentiae et remotionis. »

⁴³⁵ ST I, q.13, a.8, ad.2 : "Sed ex effectibus divinis divinam naturam non possumus cognoscere secundum quod in se est, ut sciamus de ea quid est, sed per modum eminentiae, et causalitatis, et negationis, ut supra dictum est. »

creaturely mode of signifying and affirm that they are said of God eminently and essentially. Hence, these perfections when used of God do signify the divine essence, albeit defectively and imperfectly.⁴³⁶ Our analysis shows then that Aquinas does not fit into the bill of MRNT as Franck presumes. Because of this we could as well conclude that Aquinas does not teach any mitigated radical negative theology that Franck puts on him. We examine the complete radical negative theology.

2. **CRNT**: No positive attributes are predicated of God; God is unknown and unknowable; we can only speak of God in negative language; and the only thing man can know is that we are unable to know God.

The Complete Radical Negative Theology propounded by Franck, encompasses both epistemic and semantic aspects, and makes the following points:

CRNT1: no positive attributes are predicated of God because God is unknown and unknowable. (God's essence)

CRNT2: we can only speak of God in negative language because we are unable to know God.

Maimonides avidly rejects all forms of positive attribution to God because according to him, positive attributes constitute ontological plurality in the divine essence. God's absolute simplicity does not accept of any accidents to be added on it. Because God's essence cannot be known and is unknowable, Maimonides rejects all positive attribution since they try to identify the unknowable divine essence. Attributes of action, on the other hand, are exceptionally affirmed positively of God since as explained earlier, they only tell us about the effects or the actions done by God. They do not tell us anything about the identity of God and neither do they constitute any ontological plurality in the divine essence. Thus in relation to CRNT1, Maimonides does not qualify as a complete radical negative theologian since he accepts some form of positive attribution to the divine essence.

CRNT2 insists on the utter negativity of our language because we are unable to know the divine essence. Maimonides according to this interpretation would hold that we cannot speak positively

⁴³⁶ De pot q.7, a.5; ST I, q.13, a.2: "Sic igitur praedicta nomina divinam substantiam significant, imperfecte tamen, sicut et creaturae imperfecte eam repraesentant."

about God's essence except to say what He is not. Since God's essence is totally unknown in itself, we are left with the descriptive knowledge and negative language of what God is not. "I shall make it clear to you that we have no way of describing Him unless it be through negations and not otherwise."⁴³⁷ To describe Him positively would be to attach multiplicity to Him. Maimonides thus notes that instead of saying that 'He is powerful and knowing and willing,' we would say that "He is neither powerless nor ignorant nor inattentive nor negligent."⁴³⁸ The logic is that of negation of the privation of the attribute in question, where to say that 'God is not ignorant' would signify that ignorance can never be found in God's nature. This negative way of talking excludes God from a certain class of beings or properties. This by extension establishes God as the totally other and outside of the realm of beings. No similarity and no form of relation would exist between Him and created things because there is absolutely no grounds for such. It does not provide any means for a positive language about God's essence. Thus, in relation to CRNT2, Maimonides's thought is completely radical negative theology though less extreme to that propounded by Franck. It is less extreme to Franck's because he allows at least some form of positive attribution, that of action, to God.

In relation to St. Thomas Aquinas, neither CRNT1 nor CRNT2 applies because, contrary to the former, the affirmative attributes of perfection like 'knowledge, good, wise, living,' and the like, are predicated of God; and contrary to the latter, we can talk positively though imperfectly, about what God is. Hence, St. Thomas Aquinas's thought does not fit into the jacket of radical negative theology in whatever form it may appear.

In comparison with Aquinas, it could be said that Maimonides's version of negative theology is more radical and more austere. It is more austere because his version of negative theology, totally denies even a relation of analogy that could exist between creatures and God, or better, between the effects of God in the world and the effects of human actions in the world. This position he holds staunchly notwithstanding the fact that his immediate Arabic predecessor like Alfarabi, who Maimonides holds in high esteem after Aristotle, gives room for both negative theology and an analogical relation between attributes predicated of God and creatures. This

⁴³⁷ *Dux Neutrorum*, lib.I, cap.LVII, fol.22: "postea vero explanabo tibi qualiter non habemus viam ad enarrandum ipsum: nisi per negativam solummodo." Cf *Guide I*, 58, p134.

⁴³⁸ Ibid: "Nostra vero intentio est in istis agnominibus quod non est piger, nec insipiens, nec impetuosus." Cf *Guide I*, 58, p 136.

form of knowing God has not gone without attracting much questions and criticisms. Aquinas's version is not an acute form of negative theology because the only thing it denies of God is the creaturely mode of understanding or signifying perfections or attributes in God. In other words, St. Thomas Aquinas holds at the same time, a form of positive theology whereby we can actually know something of the divine essence even though imperfectly, and a negative theology whereby the creaturely manner of applying this of God is denied.

Where does the charge of agnosticism stand in all this? Agnosticism is a position that holds the unknowability of God or that God cannot be known. There are some strings of agnosticism in the philosophical strands of both Maimonides and Aquinas. This could partially be explained by their common Neoplatonic heritage in Plotinus, Proclus, and Dionysius, and Arabic Neo-Platonists.⁴³⁹ As our numerous citations have shown, Aquinas is directly indebted to Dionysius whom he quotes profusely and whose lines of negative theology he closely follows. However, it must be stated clearly that St. Thomas Aquinas slightly escapes the charge of agnosticism. This is because of the distinction he makes between a comprehensive knowledge of the divine essence and the imperfect knowledge of the same essence. According to him, a created intelligence cannot have a comprehensive quidditative knowledge of God in this life because its mode of knowing does not measure up to the object of knowledge, that is, the quiddity of God. Only God can have a quidditative knowledge of His essence. On the hand, and this proviso is what slightly exonerates Aquinas of this agnostic charge, a created intelligence can arrive at a quidditative knowledge of God in an imperfect way through the triplex via of eminence, of causality and of negation. It is imperfect but true knowledge of God's essence, though it does not measure up to the full essence of God. Maimonides on the contrary, seems to fall victim to this charge of agnosticism. He has never doubted whether God exists or whether man has got the ability to know that He exists. The only thing Maimonides contends and for which he has been labeled agnostic is his denial of the knowability of God's essence. Because God is the transcendent other and has nothing that could suggest of any similarity with the created order, Maimonides holds that His quiddity is totally unknowable.

⁴³⁹ Cf. Alfred Ivry, "Neoplatonic Currents in Maimonides' Thought," in *Perspectives on Maimonides*, edited by Joel L. Kraemer, 1991, pp 1115-140; R.T. Wallis, *Neo-Platonism*, (London, 1972).

If agnosticism is fundamentally a problem of epistemology because it denies that nothing can be known of a certain thing, atheism is fundamentally a problem of ontology since it denies the existence of the Supreme Being. God is conceived as the First Being, that being whose existence is not caused. Atheism denies this truth that God exists. When this doctrine makes its entrance into the philosophic field of negative theology, there is a serious cause for concern. That negative theology leads to atheism is the accusation that Alexander Broadie seems to make of Maimonides's thought.⁴⁴⁰ Broadie begins by noting that Maimonides is driven by the fear that the scriptural descriptions of God tend to lead the masses into having anthropomorphic images of God. To avoid anthropomorphism, Maimonides goes by the way of negation such that, all that is corporeal in reality and in thought, must be denied of God. He gives an example of existence. Since it has got a creaturely mode such that "the multitude cannot at first conceive of any existence save that of a body alone; thus that which is neither a body nor existent in a body does not exist in their opinion,"⁴⁴¹ it is more accurate to deny existence of God than to affirm it. This is with the intention of denying creaturely form of existence to God. Broadie correctly notes that what Maimonides denies is the creaturely way of existence. God exists in His own unique way that we are not able to explain. What is surprising is the point that Broadie makes some lines later. According to him:

We might argue that the affirmative way leads to anthropomorphism and the negative way to atheism, and that these two ways are undesirable extremes in relation to a middle way which has the virtue of each extreme while lacking the vices of each.⁴⁴²

The middle way he refers to is Aquinas's analogy.⁴⁴³ What interests us however, is that Broadie could doubly imply that negative theology leads to atheism and that Maimonides's negative theology is a way to atheism. The two things must be separated. We could accord to Broadie that negative theology in its extreme form leads to atheism. This has actually been a subject of discussion recently in the work of Claude Bruaire.⁴⁴⁴ If atheism denies the existence of God, then

⁴⁴⁰ Broadie, Alexander, "Maimonides and Aquinas on the Names of God," *Religious Studies* 23, 1987, pp 157-170.

⁴⁴¹ *Dux Neutorum*, lib.I, cap.XXVI, fol.10: "quoniam gentes initio imaginationis non inveniunt existentiam nisi rei corporeae: et quicquid non est corpus vel in corpore, secundum sensum eorum nihil est." Cf *Guide* I, 26, p 56; Cf Broadie, p 160.

⁴⁴² Broadie, Alexander, *Ibid*, p 161.

⁴⁴³ *Ibid*, p 166.

⁴⁴⁴ Bruaire, Claude, *Le Droit de Dieu*, (Paris: Editions Aubier Montaigne, 1974). In a particular passage, Bruaire says : « Il faut donc prendre acte de la théologie négative, lui donner son exact statut, à distance des sentiments

it has no relation with the negative theology, propounded either by Maimonides or by St. Thomas Aquinas, which has as its principal tenet the negation of all things corporeal, both in reality and in thought, of God. In its extreme form, it denies that the essence of God can be known and that no positive language can ever be used in the discourse about God. Negative theology whether it is by Maimonides or by Aquinas maintains a consistent doctrine: we can know *that* God is but we cannot know *what* He is.

fidéistes, qui recouvrent d'une gangue sensible, de déchets religieux, l'absolu inaltérable, signe du *Rien* : la théologie négative est négation de toute théologie. Sa vérité est l'athéisme. » p 21.