

FROM LIMITED BEING AND PERFECTION TO THE  
INFINITELY PERFECT GOD:  
A HENOMENOLOGICAL RETHINKING OF THE  
“FOURTH WAY” OF SAINT THOMAS AQUINAS  
UNDERSTOOD AS THE CORE OF ANY  
COSMOLOGICAL ARGUMENT IN FAVOR OF GOD’S  
EXISTENCE

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The fourth way of Thomas is usually regarded as the weakest and as some sort of tribute Thomas paid to Platonic thought. The presentation of the argument in Thomas’ own text is perhaps also truly the least convincing.<sup>1</sup> One could charge the great doctor with confusing the relatively best on a hierarchical scale with the absolutely best, with an unwarranted claim that “the maximum in any genus is the cause of all in that genus; as fire, which is the maximum heat, is the cause of all hot things,” which is of course false (think for example of electric heaters in which electric power that is not hot produces heat), of a confusion of essentially limited attributes (such as heat) with pure perfections, etc. We are not interested in the examination of the justification of such criticisms. For we see exactly in the fourth way the deepest of the five Thomistic arguments and the culmination of all proofs from contingency. Yet the argument needs more than all the others a return to things themselves and a fundamental rethinking that leaves behind all too literalistic and historical interpretations.<sup>2</sup>

Besides the contingency (non-necessity) of the existence of finite beings we

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<sup>1</sup> Here is the text:

The fourth way is taken from the gradation to be found in things. Among beings there are some more and some less good, true, noble and the like. But “more” and “less” are predicated of different things, according as they resemble in their different ways something which is the maximum, as a thing is said to be hotter according as it more nearly resembles that which is hottest; so that there is something which is truest, something best, something noblest and, consequently, something which is uttermost being; for those things that are greatest in truth are greatest in being, as it is written in *Metaph. ii*. Now the maximum in any genus is the cause of all in that genus; as fire, which is the maximum heat, is the cause of all hot things. Therefore there must also be something which is to all beings the cause of their being, goodness, and every other perfection; and this we call God.

<sup>2</sup> In its historical meaning and context, the fourth way has been analyzed and interpreted admirably by Cornelio Fabro, in *L'uomo e il rischio di Dio* (Roma, 1969), pp. 148-151; 226-271. Also Fabro believes this argument to be the deepest and central one of the five ways. Yet also he interprets it more according to its ultimate philosophical substance than following a literal interpretation of a philosophically speaking very unsatisfactory text.

find in them also another type of contingency and non-necessity, that of essence and nature, and, for our context more importantly still, that of value. The fourth way, as proposed here, in a very free interpretation, establishes a twofold necessary link: 1. between limitation of perfection and contingency of an essence (non-necessity of its precise limits of perfection); 2. between the limitation and contingency of nature and the contingency of existence.

### I. LIMITATION AND CONTINGENCY OF FINITE NATURES

A first and tremendous limitation of the being of all entities in the world lies already in the fact that our essence (nature: what we are) is not firmly possessed by us. We are not our nature but we have it because what we are is actualized only through our existence which in turn is not necessary. In other words, the contingency of existence discussed in the previous chapter is necessarily concomitant with a fundamental limitation of essence. Our essence insofar as it is ours, is contingent on our existence and is as contingent as our existence. It is not so as if our existence only were contingent and as if the actuality of our contingent existence were added on to already existing and non-contingent essences. No, what we are, the essence of and in our being, the reality of human nature in us – and thereby our human nature itself – is only through existence. Hence our essence is as little a possession of ours as our existence. Our existence is contingent and our essence completely shares in this contingency of existence; it is, in its actual reality, dependent on our existence. Hence it is not less contingent and non-necessary than our existence. We have it as a gift like our existence. Both are simultaneously given to us. With our coming to be and *esse* we also receive our nature, inasmuch as it is a real essence in a real being.<sup>3</sup> This metaphysical fact too is beautifully expressed in its conjunction in the quoted poem of Matthias Claudius: *ich danke Gott und freue mich..., daß ich bin, bin!, und dich, schön menschlich Antlitz! habe.*

But the contingency of essence which follows from the contingency of existence is not the only limitation and contingency of our essence. Our essence *per se* (and not only by mediation of the contingency of our existence on which it depends) is both limited and contingent. The two ideas or features of limitation and of contingency of essence are distinct from each other but necessarily related, as shall become clear.

#### A. LIMITATION OF ESSENCE PER SE

Each being in the world has some values, some positive intrinsic importance and

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<sup>3</sup> On the many meanings of essence and the difference between essences of and in real beings and pure “essences” (Wesenheiten or “essential plans”) cf. Josef Seifert, *Sein und Wesen. Philosophie und Realistische Phänomenologie/ Philosophy and Realist Phenomenology. Studien der Internationalen Akademie für Philosophie im Fürstentum Liechtenstein/Studies of the International Academy of Philosophy in the Principality Liechtenstein*, (Hrsg./Ed.), Rocco Buttiglione and Josef Seifert, Band/Vol. 3 (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 1996), ch. 1; the same author, “Essence and Existence. A New Foundation of Classical Metaphysics on the Basis of ‘Phenomenological Realism,’ and a Critical Investigation of ‘Existential Thomism’”, *Aletheia I* (1977), pp. 17-157; *I,2* (1977), pp. 371-459, ch. 1.

preciousness. Each being in the world possesses some intrinsic weight and significance which is its goodness – and it also can become, besides being good in itself, also become a good *for* other beings, especially persons.<sup>4</sup>

Yet not all beings possess being and reality, goodness, and intelligibility<sup>5</sup> in the same measure. Rather, there are both degrees in being and reality and degrees in goodness (value).

*Degrees of being (reality):* Being and reality are not simply possessed by all entities that are in the same degree. Rather, there is *to ontoos on* (the really real) in the sense of that which possesses being more fully, as we have already discussed in the chapters 8 and 9 on substance and on the person. Substance when compared with accident, person when compared with non-personal being, the good and blessed person in contrast to the evil and unhappy person, the eternal lasting being as opposed to the fleeting temporal one, are being and real far more properly than those which lack this essence. The difference is so great that the necessary and eternal being alone really IS, whereas all other beings are – when compared to this fullest possession of being – not, i.e., they are like nothing.

*Hierarchy of values (goods):* The degrees of reality and being more fully – while they also imply some ontological value – are still not identical with degrees of value and goodness. Thomas Aquinas, for example, rightly sees that, while a substance is the more properly real part of a being than its accidents, it is primarily due to the *actus superadditos*, i.e., the accidents of a being, that the being is good. Man, for example, is not called a good man primarily in virtue of his ontological value and dignity which he possesses by being a *substantia individua naturae rationalis* but in virtue of his moral goodness.<sup>6</sup> Moral goodness alone makes him a good person and surpasses in value not only all physical substances in the universe but even the dignity of the substance of the person as such. (This is of course not to deny that there is an essential unity between moral goodness and the actualization of the being of the person qua person. It is the dignity of the person himself that awakens fully only through his moral goodness.) That this is so, is best seen when one thinks of the idea of a perennially evil person (such as the devil), who becomes even evil as a whole, i.e., as Hildebrand puts it, whose ontological dignity is as it were absorbed and overshadowed by the qualitative disvalues.<sup>7</sup>

Thus we distinguish the peculiar gradation of being and reality qua reality from the gradation of value and goods as such. This is not to exclude many relations and a certain analogy between the two kinds of gradation, that of being (real) and the hierarchy of goods. The analogy consists in this: As the higher

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<sup>4</sup> On this distinction between the good (value) in itself and the objective good *for persons*, see Dietrich von Hildebrand, *Ethics*, 2nd edn (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1978), ch. 1-3, 5, 7, 8, 29.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Josef Seifert, “Die verschiedenen Bedeutungen von ‘Sein’ - Dietrich von Hildebrand als Metaphysiker und Martin Heideggers Vorwurf der Seinsvergessenheit”, in: Balduin Schwarz, hrsg., *Wahrheit, Wert und Sein. Festgabe für Dietrich von Hildebrand zum 80. Geburtstag* (Regensburg: Habel, 1970), S. 301-332.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. John Crosby, “The Idea of Value and the Reform of the Traditional Metaphysics of Bonum,” in: *Aletheia*, 1 (1977), 231-339, and the quotes from Thomas.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Dietrich von Hildebrand, *Ethics*, 2nd edn (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1978), ch. 11.

modes and degrees of being real possess a greater weight of being than the less real ones, so the higher goods, too, possess a greater weight of being. Nevertheless, the greater ontological weight of the higher goods goes in a very different direction than that of the more real beings, as shall be shown. The analogy between the two types of hierarchy (that of reality and that of value) implies also the essential contingency (non-necessity) of the limits (which can always be surpassed in principle).

The difference between the two types of gradation can also be seen from the fact that not only the more of reality does not necessarily imply a more of value but that each new degree of more in reality allows for a greater degree of disvalue (evil) as well as for value (good), with the exception of absolute being. Moreover, many evil acts and institutions (such as the KZ's of the Nazis and the crimes committed there) are far more real than the noble and highly intelligible characters of Cordelia in King Lear or Imogen in Cymbeline of Shakespeare. Thus there is no direct parallelism or connection between the two types of gradation within being.

Yet there are three important positive connections between the two kinds of hierarchy. The more fully a being possesses reality, the greater is its ontological value as such. Secondly, the more fully being and real an entity, the higher are the qualitative values<sup>8</sup> which it can realize, at least in principle. Thus, a person is, in virtue of his superior reality of autonomous self-possession in consciousness, cognition, and his freedom, capable of realizing far higher qualitative values (moral, communal, religious values) than any irrational animal is able to. Where, such as in the aesthetic sphere of the second-potency beauty,<sup>9</sup> there is a specific discrepancy between qualitative values and the ontological rank of their bearer, this principle does not apply. Thirdly, the higher the value of a being, especially and in a new sense in the moral sphere, the more it is true that such a being *ought to be realized*.

Of the two types of hierarchy we take interest chiefly in the second type of hierarchy, that of goods (values). For, as we have shown previously,<sup>10</sup> value constitutes so much the *raison d'être* and the ultimate point of view of being, that any superiority in real being is of ultimate advantage only because it coincides with, or is linked to, a superiority in value. It is this criterion of the *bonum* which underlies primarily both the fourth way of Thomas and the ontological argument. In both arguments perfection (value) and the transition from limitedly perfect beings to *id quo maius (melius, pulchrius) nihil cogitari possit* is central, albeit in an entirely different way.

Let us then consider that gradation in value. As far as the ontological value<sup>11</sup> of beings is concerned, we definitely find a gradation of ontological value between that of material things to that of living beings to that of animals to that of the person. The *dignitas humanae substantiae* cannot be compared with the mysterious and high value of a dog, a horse, or a rabbit. Even more clearly

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Dietrich von Hildebrand, *Ethics*, cit., ch. 10.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *Ästhetik*. 1. Teil. Gesammelte Werke, Band V (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1977), 492 S. (1989 übernommen vom Eos Verlag, St. Ottilien); cf. also Josef Seifert, "Beauty of Higher Forms (Second Potency) in Art and Nature" in *Annales d'Esthetiques*, vol. 21-22 (1982-83).

<sup>10</sup> Cf. above, ch. 2. (6???)

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Dietrich von Hildebrand, *ibid.*, ch. 10.

marked is the hierarchical gradation found in qualitative values. Some qualitative values rank higher than others as a class (such as moral values rank higher than aesthetic ones); some types of moral values (although they all belong together and ought to be one moral goodness, one virtue, to speak with Plato's *Meno*) rank higher than others: loving kindness or mercy is more sublime a moral value than honesty, depth of mind a higher value than sharpness of mind. (The latter is called by Hildebrand in later writings a technical value or value of perfection).<sup>12</sup> Above all, there is an enormous gradation within each type of qualitative values from the most rudimentary and limited forms of justice to more perfect justice, from some basic kindness and love to overflowing kind love, etc.

#### B. THE ESSENTIAL LIMITATION OF ALL PERFECTIONS OF VALUE AND BEING IN THE WORLD

We find that no being in the world possesses either being or value perfectly and to the utmost possibility. Rather, each and every possession of being and value in the world is limited. We have already found before that each being in the world possesses reality in a limited measure only. This becomes especially evident when we look at the temporality which implies an engulfedness of all temporal beings by non-being, by the no-longer being of the past and the not-yet-being of the future. Although the past and future are not simply nothing, we still find that temporal being is in a sense between being and nothingness. At any rate, beings which are temporal do not fully possess being and reality. The same could be seen from a consideration of the weak sense of being that is linked to the contingency of existence of worldly beings. Everything that lives in the world, in its turn, while possessing the higher being and actuality of life (compared with which the fullest being of the material world is like non-being, death), possesses life and the superior mode of being implied in it in a limited degree only. It lacks the actuality of life and modes of life of other organisms, other plants and animals. It cannot grow and temporally develop to an essentially and fundamentally greater actuality of life. The plant cannot develop into an animal, the animal not into a person (This shows that neither plants nor animals possess the full measure of life). Rather, the mode of life proper to plants and animals is itself limited by lacking the superior mode of life: conscious, rational, and spiritual life. But also when we come to the human person, who possesses these higher modes of being and life: consciousness, reflective awareness, knowledge of world, distinction between truth and falsity, free will, moral responsibility, and so forth - this higher life and the peculiar characteristics of the person, as well as the qualitative values (such as moral and intellectual ones) whose attainability goes hand in hand with this, are essentially limited. Human knowledge and consciousness are immensely limited - in spite of all their grandeur. Human freedom and goodness is always limited.

The fact that, as being, value and goodness are never possessed perfectly by any being in the world, is most evident in regard to those transcendent qualities which we have already analyzed as pure perfections and of which Plato thought

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. Dietrich von Hildebrand, *Graven Images: Substitutes for True Morality* (with Alice Jourdain) 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1976); the same author, *Moralia*. Nachgelassenes Werk. Gesammelte Werke Band V. Regensburg: Josef Habbel. 1980.

primarily when he conceived of the ideas (*eide*): justice, goodness, being, identity, etc. We included also pure perfections which Plato thought to be essentially limited, such as love.

It is clear that any being in the world admits of more being, that each human justice in the world could be surpassed by more perfect justice. Let us exemplify this in the case of justice. Human justice is already limited by the limitations of human knowledge. In the parent or judge the activity of awarding a just punishment to the one who transgressed a law is already limited by the fact that the human knowledge which is presupposed for justice is limited. The exact nature and extent of what the other has done wrong (or right) is hidden from any human observer. Human knowledge of another person's deeds is not only limited in extent and certainty but also in depth, clarity, through its unfolding in time and lack of simultaneity of grasping the transgression and passing judgment, reliance on often inexact memory, and so forth. Moreover, our knowledge of the whole other person, of the universal essence of justice, and of all beings which are related in the concrete case of punitive justice is extremely limited.

Human justice is not only hampered by these limitations (which prompted Kant to say that perfect moral justice which is required by the moral order calls for omniscience). It is also limited on the part of the will of human judges in whose decisions and deliberations all too often points enter which are foreign to the justice of the case. As being, life, and justice, so also each other pure perfection in its innerworldly realization is essentially limited. We have already discussed the difference between mixed and pure perfections, one of the most decisive metaphysical differences. Now consider that to possess any essentially limited (mixed) perfection (such as a given color, smell, the capacity to run swiftly, to be gold, to be human, etc.) necessarily excludes the simultaneous possession of other essentially limited perfections. The liquidity and purity of water cannot be possessed by gold, nor can the limpidity and clarity and freshness of water be possessed by milk or honey with their peculiar perfections of color, smell, taste, weight, etc., and vice versa. Hence there is an essential division among intrinsically limited perfections and no being can possess them simultaneously. Therefore any being which possesses them is by that very fact doubly limited – first because they do not admit of infinity themselves, and secondly because they necessarily exclude other perfections. The wealth of these perfections of lions, dogs, waterfalls, mountain-chains, snow, ice, trees, etc. is necessarily spread out in a world of immense multitude. We can speak here also of a polar opposite by which these limited perfections exclude each other, without standing in a relation of contrary, contradictory, or antithetical opposites to each other.<sup>13</sup>

Mixed perfections not only frequently exclude each other, but also higher perfections. Thus possessing the high ontological value of an a dog excludes possessing the higher one of being a person. It is quite interesting and at the same time puzzling to see that there is this wealth of perfections in beings which have high value and are admirable and yet the beings and values at stake are necessarily limited so that one might be better off not to possess these mixed perfections rather than possessing them (inasmuch as they exclude higher perfections). It seems, as long as we only consider these essentially limited

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. above, ch. 1 (5??), and Dietrich von Hildebrand, *Ethics*, cit., ch. 11.

perfections, as if the perfections of being were necessarily divorced from other perfections of being and as if there were an eternal strife between perfections of the sort the Presocratic Empedocles assumed among the gods. The mixed perfections of being seem to constitute indeed the injustice Anaximander spoke of, which requires – according to his famous quote – destruction as punishment because each being takes something out of the indistinguished unity of the *apeiron* and thereby deprives others of it.<sup>14</sup> The fact that these mixed perfections are bought at the high price of lacking other perfections leads to a certain sadness and nostalgia for an ultimate unity and identity if one contemplates the dispersion of good and value that we encounter in these mixed perfections. From this insight the Eastern and Western pan-identity philosophies may well have received their apparent plausibility.

Apart from excluding the simultaneous possession of other perfections, mixed perfections are above all limited in themselves and do not admit infinity. Thus they contain a certain mixture of perfection and lack of perfection, of being and non-being, of goodness and lack thereof. Also to be this individual member of a species goes hand in hand with a certain lack of perfection because it excludes the perfection other individuals of the same nature possess in their being.

Thus, new light can be thrown upon the overwhelming discovery of the pure perfections when we consider them from the angle of our present analyses. The injustice and separation found in all mixed perfections is not a necessary state of being. We have seen that there are pure perfections which neither involve necessarily limitations nor division but which admit of both infinity and perfect oneness and unity. In these perfections the essential limits of all mixed values and their division can be overcome in principle. Being, reality, substantiality, personhood, intelligence, free will, knowledge, wisdom, happiness, justice, purity, and countless others are pure perfections and no essential limitation is attached to them.

But while we can grasp this being rooted in their very essence, also the mentioned pure perfections are limited in the world, as we have seen above in the example of human justice. Any being of the world, due to its temporality, contingency of existence, but also due to the peculiar limits within which it possesses any perfection it has, has the intrinsically pure perfections to a limited degree only. In regard to these pure perfections which are limitedly embodied in the world of our experience, these limitations appear in an entirely new light and without the sadness which the isolated view of the mixed perfections fills us with. For neither limitation nor dividedness are found to be inherent traits of these qualities of being. Rather, their limitation is grasped against some insight into the unlimitlessness they possess in their purity. The crooked can only be known to be crooked, says Bonaventure, in light of the (idea of the) straight. In an analogous way, we can only know the limitation and finitude of all pure perfections embodied in the world if we have some intuition of what their

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. his Text:

(3) And into that from which things take their rise they pass away once more, “as is proper; for they make reparation and satisfaction to one another for their injustice according to the ordering of time,” as he says in these somewhat poetical terms. (Theophrastus *Phys. Op.* fr. 2)

infinitude would entail. This thought that all finite beings share only imperfectly in pure perfections which they embody, only in a weak analogous mode compared with what these perfections are in themselves, is certainly also the deepest inspiration for the Platonic doctrine of forms.

In regard to the pure perfections an unlimited increase of perfection is possible, unlimited higher and higher degrees in which knowledge, being, reality, justice, etc. could be embodied. While also some mixed perfections admit of infinitely many (an indefinite number of) quantitative degrees (running more and more swiftly, etc.), they lack both the potential infinitude of qualitative or value-depth and the unlimitedness of higher and higher degrees of realization of a given perfection, as we find these traits in the pure perfections only. This was beautifully expressed by Leibniz.<sup>15</sup>

Even more importantly, these pure perfections cannot be regarded fully themselves as long as they are limited. Plato brings this out most powerfully in Diotima's speech in praise of absolute beauty in the *Symposium* and Scotus refers to it when he considers that the *ratio formalis* of the pure perfections does not itself contain limitations and is in its purity and its infinity free from all deficiencies and exactly "*what it (being, goodness, wisdom, etc.) is*".

Based on these philosophical reflections developed earlier we concentrate now on the most basic facts:

1. All beings in the world are and have either intrinsically limited (mixed) perfections or possess the (potentially infinite) pure perfections in a limited

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<sup>15</sup> Der verbreitetste und bezeichnendste Begriff, den wir von Gott haben, kommt in der Formulierung, Gott sei ein unbedingt vollkommenes Wesen, zwar recht gut zum Ausdruck, aber man denkt nicht genügend über das nach, was daraus folgt; ... Man muß ferner wissen, was Vollkommenheit eigentlich ist: ein ziemlich sicheres Merkmal dafür ist dieses, daß die Formen oder Naturen, die keines höchsten Grades fähig sind, keine Vollkommenheiten sind, wie z.B. die Natur der Zahl oder der Gestalt; denn die größte aller Zahlen (oder die Zahl aller Zahlen), ebenso die größte aller Figuren, führen auf einen Widerspruch; das größte Wissen dagegen und die Allmacht enthalten keinerlei Unmöglichkeit. Folglich sind Macht und Wissen Vollkommenheiten, und insofern sie zu Gott gehören, sind sie schrankenlos... Vgl. Leibniz, Philosophische Abhandlung „Ohne Überschrift, enthaltend *Discours de Métaphysique*," *ebd.*, I, S. 427: Il faut connoître aussi ce que c'est que perfection, dont voicy une marque assés seure, sçavoir que les formes ou natures, qui ne sont pas susceptibles du dernier degré, ne sont pas des perfections, comme par exemple la nature du nombre ou de la figure. Car le nombre le plus grand de tous ou bien le nombre de tous les nombres), aussi bien que la plus grande de toutes les figures, impliquent contradiction, mais la plus grande science et la toute-puissance n'enferment point d'impossibilité. Par conséquent la puissance et la science sont des perfections, et en tant qu'elles appartiennent à Dieu, elles n'ont point de bornes.

Die Vollkommenheiten Gottes sind jene unserer Seele, aber er besitzt sie ohne Grenzen: er ist der Ozean, von dem wir nur Tropfen empfangen haben: es gibt eine gewisse Macht, etwas Erkenntnis, etwas Güte, aber diese sind ganz vollkommen in Gott ... alle Schönheit ist ein Abglanz seiner Strahlen.

Les perfections de Dieu sont celles de nos âmes, mais il les possède sans bornes: il est un Océan, dont nous n'avons reçu que des gouttes: il y a en nous quelque puissance, quelque connoissance, quelque bonté, mais elles sont toutes entières en Dieu... toute la beauté est un épanchement de ses rayons.<sup>15</sup>



degree only. (Evils are no perfections at all but share the feature of necessary essential limitation which results from their various essential and individual marks.)<sup>16</sup>

2. There is a gradation and hierarchy of being and value by which some beings and values (as well as goods) rank higher than others; and this hierarchical scale of degrees of perfections is in regard to the pure perfections potentially infinite, i.e., unlimited – but no possible and conceivable increase of pure perfections in finite beings can ever be *actually infinitely perfect*. Instead, any such degree of perfection remains infinitely distant from *actually infinite perfection*.

#### C. THE CONTINGENCY (NON-NECESSITY) OF ESSENCE AND OF THE MEASURE AND LIMITS INSEPARABLE FROM LIMITED PERFECTION

The essential limitation of mixed perfections, but also the limitations of the embodiment of all pure perfections in the world, imply necessarily both the contingency of existence and the contingency and non-necessity of essence.

By contingency, we mean here obviously more than just limitation. Both the measure of perfection and the limited nature itself in its concreteness (and limits) is contingent, i.e., non-necessary. Pascal's fragment on the limits of time and space quoted above is revealing in this much broader metaphysical sense. Just as the quantitatively imposed limits of space and time which are engulfed by an infinity of other possible limits remain mysterious and entirely unexplained by the nature which is thus limited, so it remains entirely obscure why our personhood, knowledge, intelligence, beauty, wisdom, or goodness, is precisely limited in the way it is limited rather than in any of the infinitely other possible degrees or measures and limits that can be conceived in thought. Why are we not any smaller or larger in the infinite spatial spaces that surround us? Why are we here rather than there? Why does our present not fill out with its actuality a longer island of time? Why has precisely this time of our life-span been allotted to our actual life rather than any of the other infinitely many possible times in future and past? These Pascalian questions can now be extended to all being and perfections. Why are we not more or less beautiful, intelligent, just, etc.? To have this exact, little or greater, measure of these pure perfections, while there are infinitely many degrees of more or less possible – demands some explanation. Analogously, why is there this number of individual human persons rather than less or more remains entirely obscure in its exact number. Who numbered all men, stars, and all perfections? This question about an extrinsic source of explanation of these numbers and limits imposes itself because within the limited beings and perfections we will never detect any trace of such an explanation. There is no reason within the being that is surrounded by higher and lower, above and below, right and left, why it is exactly where and within the limits within which it exists.

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. John Crosby, "The Idea of Value and the Reform of the Traditional Metaphysics of Bonum," in: *Aletheia*, 1 (1977), 231-339; see also Josef Seifert, "Zur Herkunft des Glaubens. Gründe und Hintergründe. Reflexionen über das Problem einer Theodizee angesichts der Leiden und Uebel in der Welt" in *Glaube im Unglauben der Zeit* (Augsburg: Dialogsekretariat, 1983).

But if each measure of perfection of limited beings is contingent and non-necessary nor explained in terms of the limited nature itself, then we can easily see that these contingent natures with their specific limits have been given to a certain being. Thus its own contingency, the contingency of its own limits and of its concretely existing essence in the latter's limits is co-given.

The contingency of limited perfections in the sense that they could be otherwise, that there could be more or less of them in any given case (although not within the limits of a given essentially limited nature), is also inseparable from the contingency of existence. No limited being can be necessarily existent and no necessarily existent being can be limited. All limited beings must exist contingently and all contingency of existence is found in limitedly perfect beings only. The contingency of existence is necessarily implied by contingent limits. How can these assertions be justified?

We deal here with an ultimate evident connection which can only be perceived by direct insight into an essentially necessary fact but which can nevertheless be brought to evidence by the following considerations:

1. If a being can have more or less of any perfection which it actually possesses, or if instead of its limited measure of perfection there could have been more or less limitedly perfect things, such a being can also not exist altogether. The fact that the limits of its actual being make possible a more or less full measure of these perfections for which measure there is no intrinsic sufficient reason within limited beings makes it also possible that this being has no measure of being and of perfection at all, that it is reduced to nothing, to non-existence. If limits of a being can be diminished or increased in various ways (different in mixed and pure perfections), then it is possible that this being does not exist at all and nowhere. In a passage of which Pascal's fragment on the limits of time is reminiscent, Saint Anselm expresses this point:

*Moreover, I will venture to make this assertion: without doubt, whatever at any place or at any time does not exist – even if it does exist at some place and at some time – can be conceived to exist nowhere and never, as at some place and at some time it does not exist. For what did not exist yesterday, and exists to-day, as it is understood not to have existed yesterday, so it can be apprehended by the intelligence that it never exists. And what is not here, and is elsewhere, can be conceived to be nowhere, just as it is not here. So with regard to an object of which the individual parts do not exist at the same places or times: all its parts and therefore its very whole can be conceived to exist nowhere or never...(see also the following parts of this important text).<sup>17</sup>*

What is said here of time, place, and composition of parts, can be applied to all limitations of perfections whatsoever. The possibility of being otherwise and within other limits implies necessarily the possibility of being not at all. For the possibility of the non-existence of parts of the limited degrees of perfections in a being make it entirely possible that no degree of perfection is in that being and thus also that it does not exist at all.

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<sup>17</sup> Anselm of Canterbury, Appendix in behalf of the fool, Anselm's Apologetic, chapter i; in: St. Anselm: Basic Writings, transl. by S.N. Deane, La Salle, Ill: Open Court, 1974), second ed., 5th printing, p. 155.

## II. FROM THE LIMITED PERFECTION IN THE WORLD TO AN INFINITELY GOOD GOD

### A. THE UNEXPLAINEDNESS OF LIMITED DEGREES OF PERFECTION IN TERMS OF LIMITED BEINGS PROOF OF INFINITELY GOOD GOD AS ONLY POSSIBLE ULTIMATE EXPLANATION OF BEING

If all beings limited in their perfection are necessarily contingent in their existence, they cannot explain their own being already on this account (*via 3*). Yet also in virtue of the contingency of essence itself and of limitation, each being in the world is an *ens permixtum non-enti*, as Bonaventure puts it, and is non-explanatory of itself because it cannot account in its own terms for its limits and for its being within any limits. Thus the world remains entirely unexplained in its being through itself, and the question: Why is there something rather than nothing remains unanswered by the world of limited beings.

Analogously to the steps unfolded before, we can arrive at the insight: Only the perfect and complete and pure being, only that which is unlimited and infinite in all its perfections, only Being itself in which there is no non-being, Goodness itself, in which there is no shadow of evil or limitation, only an omniscient, all-blessed, all-perfect being can contain its own explanation (not its cause) in the necessary fullness of its own being and in its own necessity of being and of being “full of what is,” as Parmenides put it.

Moreover, the being *secundum quid* of entities in the world can solely be explained by the being *simpliciter* of *id quo maius nihil cogitari possit*. The being-in-part of limitedly perfect things can only be explained by the being *totaliter*, the composite being only by the simple, the participated one only by the being *per se* and *per essentiam*. The limited perfections of finite natures include also the limits of their *esse*. Thus indeed – as combining all pure perfections of essence – God is *esse tantum*, pure actuality of existence and of being without limits. And all pure and mutually compatible perfections exist here in perfect unity of the personal divine being.

Thus we encounter here, in the limitations of the essence of finite beings, also the ultimate ground for the limited *esse* of finite beings. Analogously, we meet in the infinite divine perfection of all pure perfections the ultimate metaphysical ground of the divine *Esse* being unlimited.

This infinitely perfect being, however, can be the one that sets limits on the finite ones only because it is free. We recognize thus the divine free will of the first cause of the contingent world from four reasons:

- 1) First, because free will is a pure perfection and God must possess all pure perfections in their infinity;
- 2) Second, because non-necessary existence can derive from necessary being only by the freedom of choice in creating;
- 3) Third, because a free God alone can create free beings;
- 4) Fourth because the measure and mysteriously unexplained limits of finite being can only be explained by the free “order of Him who put us here,” to quote once again Pascal.

### B. THE FOURTH WAY ON ITS OWN FORCE ALONE IS THE ONLY PROOF OF THE EXISTENCE OF GOD AMONG THE FIVE WAYS

The fourth way has the immense advantage that only here it becomes clear that God is God, an *id quo maius nihil cogitari possit*, infinite in goodness and power, worthy of all worship and love and adoration and praise. For any imperfect God, any God whom we could judge as deficient in any manner, would not be God at all.

Thus only the fourth way, and the others in conjunction with it, (or with the ontological argument) allow us to speak truly of a proof of God's existence, rather than just of a proof of a necessary being, of an eternal being, of a first cause, of an immensely intelligent being, etc.