

I. FROM CREATION TO PROVIDENCE

1. The Aims of the Book

This book is the third in a series of three volumes. In 1997 and 1999, Oxford's Clarendon Press published my books *The Metaphysics of Theism* and *The Metaphysics of Creation*, which are related, respectively, to Books I and II of Thomas Aquinas's *Summa contra gentiles* (SCG) as this book is to Book III.¹

"Aquinas's Natural Theology"—a subtitle these three volumes share—identifies what I take to have been developed and presented in SCG I–III.² The subtitle may also suggest that this series of volumes is intended primarily as a project in philosophical scholarship, presenting a historical account and critical exposition of Aquinas's thirteenth-century achievement.³ It's certainly true that one reason I've had for undertaking this study is my conviction that Aquinas's systematic natural theology is a philosophically interesting historical subject that has been generally neglected, misunderstood, or simply unrecognized for what it is. And so my plan for these three volumes does include trying to present, explain, and evaluate the treatments of several essential topics in each of the three parts of his natural theology. I hope these books will, in that way, make a contribution to medieval philosophical scholarship.⁴

But other considerations have also motivated me, considerations that make Aquinas's natural theology philosophically important, I think, as well as interesting. They have led me to approach it not merely as the monumental achievement it already was when Aquinas completed it in 1265, but also as the classic version of an ambitious theory that invites extrapolation and sometimes needs correcting in its details.⁵ Viewed in that way, this natural theology is a continuing enterprise for which Aquinas's work has provided rich material developed in promising patterns. So in this book, as in *The Metaphysics of Theism* (TMOT) and *The Metaphysics of Creation* (TMOC), I mean also to engage in that enterprise in ways that will, I hope, encourage the critical cooperation of others in pursuing the development of a wide-ranging natural theology along the lines Aquinas drew.

2. Aquinas's Natural Theology

In my view a great deal—not all—of theology's traditional subject matter is really continuous with philosophy's subject matter and ought to be integrated with it in practice. Most philosophers who lived before the twentieth century would share that view, and no substantive developments in the last hundred years should have obscured it. In the first three quarters of the twentieth century it surely was obscured, but we have recently been witnessing a development in which that view is no longer so hard to find among philosophers. As late-twentieth-century theologians have been moving away from their traditional, doctrinal subject matter, philosophers have been moving in.⁶ And natural theology, a branch of philosophy, interests me especially because it provides the traditional and still central means of integrating (some of) theology with philosophy.

I presented my conception of natural theology in detail in TMOT's introduction and first chapter; I don't think that the details need rehearsing here. But for a concise, general account of natural theology's nature and status, independent of any particular concern with Aquinas's work, I couldn't do better than to offer William Alston's view of the discipline in this passage from his *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience*.

Natural theology is the enterprise of providing support for religious beliefs by starting from premises that neither are nor presuppose any religious beliefs. We begin from the mere existence of the world, or the teleological order of the world, or the concept of God, and we try to show that when we think through the implications of our starting point we are led to recognize the existence of a being that possesses attributes sufficient to identify Him as God. Once we get that foothold we may seek to show that a being could not have the initial attributes without also possessing certain others; in this manner we try to go as far as we can in building up a picture of God without relying on any supposed experience of God or communication from God, or on any religious authority. (p. 289)

The view Alston takes in this passage is broad by comparison with the more familiar notion of natural theology, which limits it to attempts to argue for (or against) the existence of God.⁷ His view could serve well as a sketch of Aquinas's undertaking in SCG I, which Aquinas describes as covering "matters associated with God considered in himself" (I.9.57)⁸—that is, the subject matter of what might fairly be called classical natural theology: the existence of something whose inferred nature constitutes a *prima facie* basis for identifying it as God, and the further aspects of God's nature that can be inferred in working out the implications of that starting point.

But an even broader view of natural theology is called for if it is to include the topics Aquinas goes on to develop in SCG II and III—a view

almost as broad as the one Alston takes up soon after presenting the one we've been considering:

This characterization of natural theology [—the one quoted above—] sticks closely to the classically recognized “arguments for the existence of God,” but it need not be construed that narrowly. It also includes attempts to show that we can attain the best understanding of this or that area of our experience or sphere of concern—morality, human life, society, human wickedness, science, art, mathematics, or whatever—if we look at it from the standpoint of a theistic . . . metaphysics. (p. 289)

The idea of a natural theology that goes far beyond arguments for God's existence is one Alston shares with Aquinas, as can be seen in detail in SCG II and III. I think it's quite likely that Aquinas believes, too, that the explanatory capacity of natural theology is in theory universal—as Alston suggests with his “or whatever.” But the idea Aquinas puts into practice in SCG is less broad than the one Alston outlines here. Aquinas does take up some of the broad topics Alston lists, and a few more besides. But he expressly excludes the concerns of natural science from the scope of the project he's engaging in, and he shows no unmistakable signs of having thought about including art or mathematics.⁹ Still, Alston's implied characterization of natural theology as theistic metaphysics is very like what Aquinas seems to have had in mind generally—as the titles of my books are meant to suggest, and as I think their contents show.

In TMOT, I dealt only with the topics of SCG's Book I, “matters associated with God considered in himself.” In TMOC, I dealt with the topics of Book II, which Aquinas describes as “the emergence of created things from him.” In this third and last volume, I deal with the topics of Book III, “the ordering and directing of created things toward him as their goal” (I.9.57). As even Aquinas's short descriptions of the three parts of his natural theology may suggest, it's intended to integrate a great many topics that would ordinarily be treated separately, and differently, in other branches of philosophy—branches recognizable not only in the Aristotelian philosophy he knew best, but also in the philosophy of the late twentieth century—including, for example, metaphysics, philosophy of mind, epistemology, and ethics.¹⁰ Integrating all those topics by means of natural theology involves developing within this particular branch of philosophy some of the subject matter specifically associated with theology as it developed outside philosophy in the three great monotheisms, in the form of “revealed” or “dogmatic” theology, based on scriptural exegesis. That, of course, is what makes this branch of philosophy natural *theology*: investigating, by means of analysis and argument, at least the existence and nature of God and, in the fuller development characteristic of Aquinas's project, the

relation of everything else—but especially of human nature and behavior—to God considered as reality’s primary source and ultimate goal.

But developing parts of that subject matter within philosophy of course requires forgoing appeals to any putative revelation or religious experience as evidence for the truth of propositions, and taking for granted only those few naturally evident considerations that traditionally constitute data acceptable for philosophy generally.¹¹ That’s what makes it *natural* theology.

Aquinas’s natural theology does, however, make a restricted, philosophically tolerable use of propositions he considers to have been divinely revealed. Often at the end of a chapter in Book I, II, or III, after having argued for some proposition in several different ways, each of which scrupulously omits any reference to revelation, he will cite Scripture by way of showing that what has just been established by unaided reason agrees with what he takes to be revealed truth.¹² (For example, in I.20, after having presented ten arguments to show that God is not in any way corporeal, he observes that “divine authority concurs with this demonstrated truth,” citing three biblical passages, including John 4:24: “God is a spirit . . .” [I.20.188].) On those occasions he certainly does not take himself to be introducing a revealed text in order to remove doubts about natural theology’s results; they are, after all, the results of “natural reason, to which *everybody* is *compelled* to assent” (I.2.11). “Divine authority” is not invoked as *support* for propositions occurring as premises or conclusions in the logical structure of SCG I–III.¹³

Scripture’s systematic contribution to Aquinas’s natural theology should be thought of as primarily an aid to navigation, showing him his destinations and practicable routes to them in a rational progression. From any one of the propositions previously argued for in the systematic development of his natural theology, unaided reason could, in theory, validly derive infinitely many further propositions. But Aquinas’s systematic natural theology, like the presentation of any well-defined subject matter in a series of connected arguments, is more expository than exploratory.¹⁴ It is designed to show, primarily, that reason *unsupported* by revelation could have come up with many—not all—of just those propositions that constitute the established subject matter of what he takes to be revealed theology. But that design requires that reason be *guided* by what he takes to be revelation. Whatever may be said of natural theology generally, Aquinas’s version of it certainly is, as Alston puts it, “the enterprise of providing support *for religious beliefs* by starting from premises that neither are nor presuppose any religious beliefs.”¹⁵ So Aquinas needs Scripture in these circumstances as providing the chart that guides his choice of propositions to argue for as well as a list of specifications that can be consulted to see, first, that it is indeed one and the same “truth that faith professes and reason investigates” (I.9.55) and, second, “*how* the demonstrative truth is in harmony with the faith of the Christian religion” (I.2.12). But his distinctive, primary aim in the first three books of SCG is the systematic development of that demonstrative

truth, *up to* the point at which the theism being argued for begins relying on propositions that are initially accessible to reason only via revelation and becomes *distinctively* Christian.

As I see it, then, SCG I–III is Aquinas’s most unified, systematic contribution to the project of arriving at a thoroughly rational confirmation of perfect-being theism generally, of showing the extent to which what had been revealed might have been discovered, the extent to which “the invisible things of God from the creation of the world” might be “clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made” (Rom. 1:20). As such it is addressed to every open-minded, reasoning person.¹⁶

3. Book III in Relation to Books I and II

It is a natural consequence of the systematic continuity of Books I–III that Aquinas’s introductions to the books get shorter as he goes along. At the very beginning of SCG, he uses nine chapters to provide an introduction to the project generally as well as to the specific topics of Book I: matters associated directly with God considered in himself. When, in Book II, he moves beyond those topics to a consideration of God’s externally manifested (or *transeunt*) activity, his introduction to the new material occupies the book’s first five chapters. Partly as a consequence of the fact that those two earlier introductions both help to prepare the ground for Book III’s elaborate investigation of God as the primary governor of creation and its ultimate goal, he needs only Chapter 1 for his specific introduction to Book III.

In introducing Book II, Aquinas makes a point of emphasizing the continuity between it and Book I. Of course, even a casual reader could readily appreciate the general relevance of Book II’s new study of God’s creation to Book I’s just-completed study of God; but Aquinas insists on the indispensability of Book II’s contribution to the *continuing* study of *God*. In Aquinas’s view of the first two books of SCG, it’s not as if in Book I he had developed a rational investigation of God, and then in Book II he shifted his focus in order to investigate creation in that same way. Instead, Book II’s natural-theological study of God’s creation, as Aquinas conceives of it, is a further study of God considered *in his products*, intended to enhance and extend the results of the initial study of God considered *in himself*. That strong continuity is just what should have been expected from Aquinas’s initial statement of his plan for SCG I–III:

So, for us, intending to pursue by way of reason those things *about God* that human reason can investigate, the first consideration is of matters associated with *God considered in himself*; second, of the emergence of created things *from him*; third, of the ordering and directing of created things *toward him* as their goal. (I.9.57)

And so creation and providence, the specific topics of Books II and III respectively, are included among the things *about God* that unaided human reason can investigate.

That single, fixed, primary focus of all three parts of this investigation is what Aquinas's general conception of theology, whether natural or revealed, would also lead us to expect: "the discussion carried on in this science is *about God*, for it is called '*theo-logia*', which means the same as 'discourse about God.' Therefore, *God* is the subject of this science" (*Summa theologiae* [ST] Ia.1.7, sc).¹⁷ And in the first chapter of Book II, Aquinas describes the task for Books II and III combined, founded on Book I's accomplishments, as "the filled-out (*completam*) consideration of divine truth"—that is, the truth *about God* (II.1.856).¹⁸

Exclusive concern with God or the truth about God might seem too narrow for the broad conception of natural theology I've attributed to Aquinas and adopted myself, a conception I've described as a sort of Grandest Unified Theory, with the capacity of being ultimately explanatory of absolutely everything.¹⁹ But that misgiving should be dispelled when we find out what Aquinas thinks is included in the truth about God. Theology, he says, has as its "main aim . . . to transmit a cognition of God, and not only as he is in himself, but also as he is the source of [all] things, and their goal—especially of the rational creature" (ST Ia.2, intro.). And so the subject matter of theology is the truth about *everything*, with two provisos. First, it is about God *and* about everything other than God, but *only* as everything other than God relates to God as its source and its goal. Second, it is about everything other than God as related to God in those ways, but *especially* about human beings, for reasons that aren't hard to supply in general.²⁰ Theology is about God considered in himself and considered in the fundamentally explanatory source-and-goal relationships—primarily the relationships of efficient and final causation—to everything else, especially to the rational creature. It is in this way that the business of theology is the single ultimate explanation of everything, the Grandest Unified Theory, and it is for this reason that Aquinas describes its practitioner as one "whom all the other arts diligently serve" (IaIIae.7.2, ad 3).²¹ And, he insists, universal scope is just what one should expect in a rational investigation of the truth about God:

All things are considered in theology (*sacra doctrina*²²) under the concept of God, either because they *are* God, or because they have an ordered relationship *to* God as to their source and goal. It follows from this that the subject of this science is really God. (Ia.1.7c)

This is the case even though the intended explanatory scope of the fully developed science is universal, as it can be only because its primary subject is God, the absolutely perfect being, the absolutely first principle, the universal primary governor, and the universal ultimate goal.

I hope that my already published studies of Aquinas's Books I and II have helped to clarify what's meant by his characterizations of God as absolutely perfect and as the necessarily existent ultimate source of all other being. My aim in this book is to acquire a critical understanding of his argued claims that God governs all of creation and (less perspicuously) that God himself is (somehow) what all of creation is divinely directed toward.

4. Aquinas's Derivation of Book III's Subject Matter

Aquinas prefaces all three books of his natural theology in SCG with passages from Scripture that serve as mottoes for the three parts of his continuous project. He must have selected them with great care. Coupled with his analyses of them, those biblical passages really do illuminate his planned philosophical investigations. He prefaces Book III with an intricate combination of three passages from two of the Psalms: "The Lord is a great God and a great King above all gods" [Ps. 94/95:3]. "For the Lord will not cast off his people" [Ps. 93/94:14]. "For in his hand are all the ends of the earth, and the heights of the mountains are his. For the sea is his and he made it, and his hands formed the dry land" [Ps. 94/95:4–5] (III.1.1891). The use of the traditional divine titles 'Lord' and 'King' in the first of these passages clearly introduces sovereignty or governance, one of the two divine roles included in the specific subject matter of Book III. And the immediate continuation of Psalm 94/95 in the third passage suggests that being the universal sovereign is a *consequence* of being the universal creator.²³ But neither of those selections from Psalm 94/95 provides any hint of God's role as the ultimate goal of the existence of every created thing, the other principal topic of Book III. Aquinas clearly intends to supply such a hint with his interpolation of the first half of Psalm 93/94:14 as the second of these passages.²⁴ But, even generously interpreted, the passage is applicable to God only as the ultimate goal (somehow), of *human* existence. And while it's fair to grant that this may count as the most important aspect of God's role as the universal ultimate goal, it is also likely to seem a good deal less in need of explanation than the notion of a divine goal for non-human, non-cognitive, non-living nature as well. As we shall see, Aquinas does begin to clarify even that broader, more difficult notion in the body of this introductory chapter, but not until he has sketched a derivation of the subject matter of Book III from the topics of the two preceding books.

He starts the sketch with simple summaries of the accomplishments of Books I and II:

That there is one that is first among beings, possessing the full perfection of all being, which we call God, has been shown in earlier parts [of this work, particularly in Book I]. Out of the abundance of his perfection God imparts being to all existing things, so that he is fully proven

[in Book II] to be not only the first among beings, but also the source of all of them. (1.1862)

What is said about creation in this second sentence is, on the face of it, compatible with either a necessitarian or a non-necessitarian account of God's creating some world or other.²⁵ However, it's immediately apparent that in Aquinas's view the logical transition from creation to providence depends not just on God's being the source of all beings but, more precisely, on Aquinas's own non-necessitarian account of *the way* in which God is so:

Now he bestows being on other things *not by the necessity of [his] nature but rather in accordance with the decision of his will* (as is clear from things said earlier [in II.23]).²⁶ And so it follows that he is Lord (*Dominus*) of the things he has made, since we are in control (*dominamur*) of the things that are subject to our will. (1.1862)

The inference Aquinas carries out in these two sentences is intended to show that the mode of God's creating entails his Lordship, his governance of creation. One of his two premises is unimpeachable: we are in control of the things that are subject to our will. As for the other premise, I've registered my misgivings about the non-necessitarianism he expresses in it, but I'll grant it here for the sake of questioning this argument's validity.²⁷ Since Aquinas makes our sort of control of or dominion over things a part of his argument, it's relevant to point out that we, too, sometimes make things, bring things into being, not by the necessity of our nature but in accordance with the free decision of our will. But while the making of those things is within our control, the things once made are very often not entirely, or even at all, subject to our will or within our control. The building of a house is very largely subject to the builder's will; the house once built is seldom if ever within the builder's control to anything like that same extent. The sentences we write are subject to our will while we're composing them; but they begin to slip out of our control as soon as they're written down where they can be read and interpreted by others. And so it really *does not* follow from the premises Aquinas supplies here that God is Lord of the things he has made. Nothing in these premises taken together guarantees that created things remain within the creator's control once they are in being.

However, Aquinas goes on at once to strengthen his case in a further argument:

But God has *perfect* control over things produced by him, because he needs the help of no external agent or of any foundation of matter in order to produce them; for he is the universal producer of the totality of being. (1862)

Aquinas's explanation of perfect control here alludes to his earlier account of creation as *doubly* universal production: God as the primary producer of *every* other being, producing each of them in complete independence of *any* sort of pre-existent stuff—God as the creator of absolutely everything out of absolutely nothing.²⁸ And, of course, none of our producing is like that. We always do need the help of external agents and the foundation of matter in order to produce anything. Still, it's not clear that even doubly universal production confers on the producer *perfect* control over all the producer's products.

The issue here isn't merely logical. Aquinas, after all, has already argued for the freedom of created wills, a doctrine that will be even more obviously essential to his work throughout Book III.²⁹ And if his observation that "*we* are in control of the things that are subject to our will" means what it needs to mean in order to serve as one of his premises, then nothing outside us, no external agent, should be in control of our wills. How could Aquinas assimilate God's Lordship to our dominion over the things that are subject to our wills if he thought that our wills themselves were externally controlled, even by God himself?³⁰

The impression of theological causal determinism in this passage is strengthened in the remainder of Aquinas's introduction to Book III, as we'll see; but it's a misleading impression. It will obviously be crucial for Aquinas to establish a place for genuine human freedom within divinely governed creation, and it will turn out that he also needs the concept of chance in his account of the divinely governed activities of creatures.³¹ But, in this opening stage of his introduction to providence, Aquinas, intent on establishing a logical connection between creation and providence, isn't yet addressing those issues.

5. The Directedness of Things

In his introductory chapter, Aquinas offers one more argument in support of God's universal, perfect control of creation; but in the course of this last argument to that effect we can begin to see an opening for a measure of divinely ordered independence on the part of creatures.

Now of things that are produced by means of an agent's will, each is directed toward a certain end by the agent, since the proper object of a will is something that is good, and an end.³² It's for that reason that things that proceed from a will are necessarily directed toward some end.³³(1.1863)

While these observations about agency and will are general, God is the only agent at issue here; thus, this argument, too, is apparently headed in the direction of theological determinism. But the very next sentence contains

the first faint sign of creaturely autonomy in the ordering of nature: “However, each thing achieves [its] ultimate end through its own action, which must be directed toward the end by the one who gave things the principles through which they act” (1.1863). Even creatures that have free wills of their own must get their active principles—their natural faculties for action—and their ultimate ends from their creator; that’s part of what it is to be a creature. Nonetheless, “each thing *achieves* [its] ultimate end through *its own* action,” through its own use of its natural faculties for action, even though that use “must be *directed toward* the end” by God.

The degree of autonomy that is being ascribed to creatures in that sentence depends on the way in which and the degree to which their own action is thought to be necessarily directed by their creator-governor. Aquinas turns his attention to those issues after drawing this conclusion to his argument:

Therefore, it is necessary that God, who is universally perfect in himself, and who by his power imparts being to all beings, be the governor of all beings—himself directed by none [of them], of course. Nor is there anything that is exempt from his governance (*regimine*), just as there is nothing that does not acquire [its] being from him. Therefore, as he is perfect in being and in causing, so is he also perfect in governing. (1.1864)

Although this conclusion tends to reinforce the impression of theological determinism, the glimmer of creaturely autonomy in the argument just before it reaches its conclusion suggests that we might bear in mind the possibility of distinguishing between the (absolutely universal) extent of God’s power over creatures and the (perhaps restricted) degree to which he exercises it. More promisingly, we can suppose what will turn out to be very nearly what Aquinas is going to maintain: that the God-given natures of some creatures entail an irreducible degree of autonomy in their activities.

But even at this stage of Aquinas’s introduction to providence we can gather from the argument we’ve been examining that God’s governance consists in providing for each created thing at least (a) its ultimate end—that is, whatever is best for its nature; (b) the principles or faculties that equip it to act in ways that tend toward that end; and (c) some direction on its way toward its ultimate end. God’s providing (a) and (b) is naturally associated with his creating; only (c) is specifically associated with God’s governing of creation, one of the two principal topics of Book III. But since (a) and (b) are presented here as also concerned with the ultimate end or goal of created existence—the other principal topic of Book III—they, too, are now tied into the new subject matter.

The fact that creating a thing involves (a) building into it a natural tendency toward its ultimate end means that created existence itself entails

a specifying limitation on possibilities. To be a created thing is to be some kind of thing; and to be one kind of thing rather than another is to have one set of specifying potentialities rather than another; and for a thing to achieve its foreordained specific perfection, its ultimate end, is for it to actualize fully its specifying potentialities. But those nested limitations on possibilities are simply a consequence of the distinguishing of created things into species and are not to be confused with theological determinism of a sort that would exclude creaturely autonomy.³⁴ Moreover, (b) God's providing of appropriate principles of action along with other specifying potentialities of created things is all that enables any of them to achieve anything "through its own action." This prerequisite of autonomy certainly can't in itself be considered a curtailment of autonomy. It is, as we've expected, only (c) God's directing of created things on their way to their specifically ultimate goals that could bring with it the kind of theological determinism that would be incompatible with human freedom.

In the remainder of his introductory chapter Aquinas takes a first step toward dispelling the impression of theological determinism by explaining that the universal divine governance has to be manifested differently in its application to different natures. He develops an analysis of the different manifestations of divine governance based on an exhaustive classification of just three very broadly distinguished kinds of created things:

The effect of this governance, of course appears in various ways in connection with various things, in accordance with the difference of their natures. Some things are produced by God in such a way that, having intellect, they bear his likeness and represent his image. For that reason they are not only directed; instead, they also direct themselves toward their requisite (*debitum*) end in accordance with their own actions. (1.1865)

Along with all other created things, intellectual creatures such as human beings are subject to, dependent on, divine direction.³⁵ But simply in virtue of their intellectivity, the respect in which they most resemble God, "they also direct themselves . . . in accordance with their own actions." This autonomy of human beings, entailed by their intellectivity, isn't absolute, of course. The one requisite end toward which we all naturally direct ourselves, however it is to be identified, is an essential aspect of our nature. But our intellects' conceptions of that end are largely up to us, and they can and do vary widely. And there is further room for autonomy in the fact that even those of us who share a conception of the ultimate goal of human existence can and do choose very different means of achieving it.³⁶

Among alternative conceptions of the goal and alternative routes toward it, some are likely to be mistaken; and autonomy of course involves responsibility for mistakes. And so, even in this preliminary survey, Aquinas points ahead to the critical importance of rationality (or its manifestation

in morality) for human beings' self-directed progress toward the goal divinely predetermined for them:

If they submit (*subdantur*) to divine governance in their own directing [of themselves], they are enabled to achieve the ultimate end on the basis of divine governance. But if they proceed otherwise (*secus*) in their own directing [of themselves], they are held back. (1.1865a)

Since Aquinas has just picked out intellectual creatures as distinguished by their degree of autonomy, their submission to divine governance couldn't possibly amount to an abdication of their essential freedom and responsibility in any degree but must, instead, be their freely chosen actualizing of the specifying potentiality that is intellectivity, their approximating more nearly the divine likeness they bear. He is, as I say, pointing ahead and not yet arguing for these claims; but even this preliminary announcement is enough to show us why morality will have to be among the subjects investigated in Book III.

Having provided a sketch of the complicated way divine governance is manifested in connection with intellectual creatures, Aquinas turns to what should be a much simpler introductory account of the directedness of nonintellectual things. "However, other things, lacking intellect, do not direct themselves toward their end, but are directed by another" (1865*b*). The other-directedness of such things is typically not ad hoc (like the archer's directing of the arrow) but is manifested rather in biological, chemical, and physical tendencies built into them by their creator. That much is true of all of them. But Aquinas's account of them is especially simple as regards the heavenly bodies, those nonintellectual things that he, following Aristotle, mistakenly believed to be incorruptible:

Some of those [nonintellectual] things, being incorruptible, cannot undergo any defect in natural being; and so neither can they in any way deviate from the directedness toward the end that has been preestablished for them. Instead, they are unfailingly subject to the governance of the primary governor. Of this sort are the heavenly bodies, the movements of which always go on uniformly.³⁷ (1865*b*)

The outmoded astrophysics that characterizes this passage leaves it almost valueless as a contribution to this preview. But it does contain one incidental hint of important developments to come when it suggests that not only any defect in a thing's natural being but also any deviation in its movement or activity from the directedness that has been preestablished for it would count as a sort of corruption of it.

That broader sense of corruption underlies Aquinas's elaborate analysis of various kinds of badness in III.4–15, and it makes one more appearance here in his introductory chapter in a slightly more developed form, in

his preliminary account of the manifestation of divine governance over nonintellective things that are also corruptible.³⁸ “However, other things, [lacking intellect and] being corruptible, *can* undergo a defect of natural being. It is, nonetheless, made up for by the advance of something else. For when one of them is corrupted, another is generated” (1.1865*c*). Although Aquinas’s concern so far is with corruption only in the sense of a defect of natural being, his account of it is immediately complicated by his introducing a theory of universal compensation for corruption in that sense—as if he’s anticipating a need to defend God’s governance of nature against an accusation of wholesale failure, a very broad version of the problem of evil, one that would arise even if the world contained no instances of suffering, human or otherwise, but was simply characterized by familiar sorts of natural change and decay. In any case, the corruption/generation theory of “natural being” adumbrated here and developed in the early chapters of Book III (as we shall see) is, I think, defensible and will play an essential role in Aquinas’s analysis of the varieties of badness.

But he couples this theory at once with a corruption/generation theory of “proper actions” that will prove to be more problematic. He begins with a claim that needs no special evidence, observing as regards all nonintellective and corruptible things that “in their proper actions they do [sometimes] fall away from the natural order” (1.1865*c*). But, without offering any supporting argument here, he immediately adds the claim that

that defect [also] is compensated for through some good arising from it. From this it is apparent that not even those things that *seem* to deviate from the ordering of the primary governance evade the primary governor’s power. For as these corruptible bodies were established by God himself, so are they perfectly subject to God’s power.³⁹ (1865*c*)

What Aquinas means by this part of his corruption/generation theory and how he means to support it remain to be seen. But at this preliminary stage of our investigation, a wait-and-see attitude seems appropriate, if perhaps a little generous.

6. Aquinas’s Plan for Book III

The single chapter in which Aquinas introduces Book III concludes, as might be expected, with his outline of the book’s 162 remaining chapters. But he sets the stage for the outline by reminding us, again, that he conceives of all three parts of his natural theology as contributions to perfect-being theology, to the study of God.

Therefore, since in the first Book we dealt with the perfection of the divine nature, while in the second Book we dealt with the perfection of

his power in so far as he is the producer and Lord of all things, in this third Book we have still to deal with his perfect authority or majesty (*dignitate*) in so far as he is the end and governor of all things.⁴⁰ (1.1867a)

The chapters of Book III, then, must cover both those aspects of divine providence: God as the ultimate goal of all created existence, and God's variously directing all things toward the goal that is (somehow) himself.

Therefore, we will have to proceed in the following order, so as to deal, first, with God himself in so far as he is the *end* of all things [chaps. 2–63]; second, with his *universal* governance, in so far as he governs *every* created thing [chaps. 64–110]; and, third, with his *special* governance, in so far as he governs creatures that have *intellect* [chaps. 111–163]. (1.1867b)

We will, of course, find subdivisions within those three broad topics as we go along. For now, it will be enough to provide a preliminary sketch of the subdivisions in the first of them. In III.2–15, Aquinas begins the development by focusing on the concept of an end or goal, which he analyzes as necessarily involving goodness, a result that seems to lead him to examine the apparent prevalence of various sorts of badness in the goals and developments of created things. In III.16–24 he undertakes to explain just how God himself is to be considered the ultimate goal of things in general. In III.25–37, he argues for the central importance of human beings' intellectual cognition of God in their achieving the ultimate goal of human existence, and in III.38–47, he explores various conditions that he argues must apply to human cognition in those special circumstances. Finally, in III.48–63, he concludes his development of the first of those three grand topics by trying to show just how an intellectual cognition of God is the principal ingredient in ultimate human happiness.

II. AGENTS, ACTIONS, AND ENDS

1. Thoroughgoing Teleology

Aquinas concludes his introductory chapter by announcing that his first task in Book III, a task to which he devotes sixty-two chapters, is to investigate "God himself in so far as he is the end of all things" (1.1867b). That compressed description of a very big topic is likely to arouse some misgivings. Why should we think that absolutely all things do have ends or goals? Even if we're given good reasons to think that they do, why should we think that all those ends or goals converge in a single end for all things? And even