

An Analysis of the 95th Chapter of the first Book of the Summa
Contra Gentiles of Saint Thomas Aquinas

A Senior Studies Report

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An Analysis of the Summa Contra Gentiles Book I, chapter 95

In chapter 95, of the Summa Contra Gentiles, That God cannot will evil, St. Thomas refutes the claim that God is evil and that God wills sin. I will concentrate on the 1st, 2nd and 4th arguments of chapter 95.

St. Thomas wrote the Summa Contra Gentiles from 1259 to 1264 (Pegis, Introduction to CG, p. 17). His purpose in writing the Summa Contra Gentiles, however, remains a historical problem which lacks a definitive answer. It does seem likely that his purpose was to convince an audience, primarily consisting of Moslem theologians, of the truth of the Catholic faith (Anderson, Introduction to CG II, p. 13).

The Summa Contra Gentiles (CG). consists of four books. The first three books present what can be known of God by reason and aspire to be demonstrative. Book one concerns the study of God in (1) his substance (chpt. 10-43), and (2) His life and Operation (chpt. 44-102). The first division (God's substance) is subdivided into the existence of God (chpt. 10-13), Our knowledge of God (chpt. 14-36), and the Divine attributes (chpt. 37-43). The second division (his life and operation) is subdivided into the intelligence and knowledge of God (chpt. 44-71) and the will, love, and blessedness of God (chpt. 72-102) in which chapter 95, That God cannot will evil is situated. Book two focuses on the study of Creation, and considers three problems: creation or bringing things into existence, the distinction of things from one another, and both of these insofar as they are related to the truths of faith (Anderson, p. 13). In Book three St. Thomas considers Providence, and in three main divisions: (1) God as the end and good of all things; (2) God's general government of things; and (3) Providence and rational creatures. The last book of the Summa Contra Gentiles, on Salvation, concerns things which surpass reason: the things about God himself, which are proposed for us to believe; the things beyond reason which God has done and what follows from them; and finally the ultimate end of man, and matters related to these things.

I will use the following texts to help explain CG I, 95,

concentrating on the 1st, 2nd and 4th arguments: from the CG: CG I, 41, 87, 92, and CG III, 7; from the Summa Theologica (ST): ST I,5,3, I,49,2 and ST I-II, 75, 1; ST I-II,79,1, and the second Scholion of Thesis 17, On the Cause of Sin, from De Verbo Incarnato by Bernard Lonergan.

The first argument of CG I, 95 formally laid out is:

What a thing does in its every operation it does by its essence (premise implied in 2nd sentence).

But God's essence is his virtue (from c. 92).

Therefore, everything God does is done by his virtue.

But virtue is that by which a thing must do what it does well.

Therefore, everything God does he does well.

To will evil, however, is not doing something well (evident).

Therefore, God cannot will evil.

In CG I, chapter 92 How virtue may be held to be in God St. Thomas further explicates this first argument in CG I, chapter 95, That God cannot will evil. In the second argument of CG I, 92, St. Thomas demonstrates that God's virtue is not some habit, but is his essence. There is nothing superadded to God; that is God's essence is not mixed with anything extrinsic to itself, for his action is his being. Therefore, there is no habit in God, and so his virtue is his essence, the second premise of the first argument of CG I, 95.

St. Thomas also demonstrates how God's virtue is his essence in the fifth argument of CG I, chapter 92. A habit is a kind of

accident, and in God there is no accident. Therefore, virtue is not said to be a habit of God, but his virtue is his essence.

We find additional explanation of the first argument of CG chapter 95 in CG I, chapter 41, That God is the highest good. The first argument of chapter 41 concerns what is said essentially compared with what is said by participation. God is good essentially, that is his essence is good, and he is good by no further perfection added to its essence, as some act to potency (see CG I, 38). But other things are good by participation, meaning that they are perfected by something added to their essence, and so have their good by participation in the first cause. Also, what is said essentially is more true than what is said by participation, because what is said essentially does not refer to something else. Therefore, because God is good essentially, God is the highest good.

Another text in which St. Thomas deals with the first argument of CG I, 95, and the issue of God's essence and the impossibility of God willing evil is the first argument CG III, chapter 7, That evil is not an essence. This argument begins by defining evil as a privation in a subject of something it ought to have. Now, evil thus understood as a privation cannot be an

essence, for a privation is a negation in substance, not an essence. Evil is not a substance but is the lack of some perfection naturally - by the essence of the thing - due to a substance. Therefore, God's essence is not evil, not only because no essence is evil, but because his essence is identical with the perfection of existence itself.

The next argument of CG III, 7, also deals with argument one of CG I, 95. In this, the second argument of CG III, 7, St. Thomas considers how it is that God does everything well. He compares an agent with a thing that is made. Everything is either an agent or something made by an agent. An agent acts by means of its existence and its perfection. Nor can evil be something that is made, for the result of any process of generation is a form, a good thing. Nothing therefore is evil as a result of its essence, for an agent acts from its perfection, generating that which is good. A thing that is made is not evil because its existence is the result of the generation of good by the agent. Therefore, nothing is evil because of its essence, neither an agent (God) or any created thing. God does everything well, as the fifth premise of the first argument of CG I, 95 states, virtue is that by which a thing must do well, and because in God essence and virtue are one, God cannot

will evil.

Another place where St. Thomas explores this truth of CG I, 95, is the tenth argument of the same chapter, CG III, 7. He refers back to where he proved that every act of being proceeds from God (SG II, 15). Also St. Thomas proved that God is perfect goodness, which we have seen in CG I, 41. Everything that exists has its existence not from itself, but from the good, which is God, including evil. Evil cannot be produced by good, and therefore, it is impossible that any being just as such is evil. Also, God is the first being. As the conclusion of the first argument of CG I, 95 states, Therefore, God cannot will evil.

The second argument of CG I, 95 is:

The will never aims at evil without some error existing in the reason.

The will aims at what is apprehended (proposed to it) by reason as a good, as to its object.

This apprehension of reason is either correct or in error.

If it is correct, the will aims at what is good; only if it is not correct does it aim at what is in fact evil.

Therefore, the will aims at evil only if the reason's apprehension of

the object is in error (=the will never aims at evil without some error in the reason).

But there can be no error in the divine reason or knowledge.

Therefore, the divine will cannot aim at evil.

One text which deals with the second argument of CG, I, 95 is ST I, 5, article three, Whether goodness really differs from being? In this article, St. Thomas considers whether or not being and goodness are really different from one another; this relates to the second argument in CG I, 95, in that it defines what the good which the will aims at is. First he states that being and goodness are really the same. The essence of goodness is that it is desirable in some way. Now something is desirable to the extent that it is perfect; this is so because all desire their own perfection. A thing is perfect to the extent that it is actual. Therefore, insofar as something exists, it is perfect because existence is that which makes things actual. Thus, being and goodness are the same, but goodness has the aspect of desirability, while being does not. The reason that the divine will is always correct, that is it always aims at what is good, is that it is the ultimate good; it is goodness itself.

The divine will aims only at what is good because the divine reason is free from error. God is perfect, and thus is perfectly desirable; therefore, God desires his own perfection which he already possesses so perfectly that he cannot not will perfect goodness, himself; therefore, he cannot will evil.

St. Thomas goes into further depth of the second argument of CG I, 95 in CG I, 61, That God is the purest truth. In this chapter, he focuses on how it is that there is no error in the God's reason or knowledge. In the fourth argument of CG I, 61, he shows what infallibility is present in all intellects, and then he contrasts the divine intellect with the human intellect. In the case of first principles, intellect never errs. Human intellect, which is rational and discursive, does err at times when, by way of reasoning from first principles it arrives at conclusions. On the other hand, the Divine intellect is neither rational nor discursive. Therefore, since the only error in the intellect occurs by way of its reasoning, and the Divine intellect is not rational; there is no error or falsity in the divine reason or knowledge, which is the final premise in the second argument of CG I, 95.

St. Thomas treats in depth how it is that the human will is

related to evil in ST I-II, 75, Of the causes of sin in general. In article 1, there is an analysis of evil, which consists in a certain privation, and therefore must have A deficient cause, or an accidental efficient cause. The accidental cause of the privation of good in the act is ultimately reducible to the direct cause of the act, the human will. Sin has an accidental efficient cause of its inordinateness and a direct efficient cause insofar as it is an act. The will lacks the direction of the rule of reason and Divine law and so, while it causes the act of sin directly, the inordinateness of the act is caused indirectly, beside the intention. This is true because disorder in the act is the result of the will's lack of direction. If we compare this with the divine will, however, we see that there is no lack of direction in the divine will, and so there is no disorder in God's act. Therefore, according to the fifth premise of the second argument of CG I, 95, God does not aim at or will evil, for the will aims at evil only if the reason's apprehension of the object is in error. There is no erroneous apprehension of the object in God for there is no error in divine reason or knowledge.

Another more detailed explication of argument two of CG I, 95 is found in Summa Theologica I, 49, article 2, Whether God is

the cause of evil. In particular, the relevance that ST I, 49 has to argument two of SG I, 95, is that it expounds on how it is that God's will aims only at what is good. The basic argument is: an agent causes corruption to the extent that what he causes results in a form that depends on the corruption of other forms; the chief form which God intends is the order of the universe as a whole. But in order for this good order to be there must be a diversity of things, things which can and do fail in operation. In such a way, primarily intending and causing the good of the universe as a whole, only by accident does God cause certain corruptions, namely, the evil of natural defect and the evil of punishment. But he in no way causes the evil of sin as such which in no way contributes to the order of the universe. So God correctly aims at the good, not at evil, and in aiming at the good makes no error. This is so because, as has been indicated, God's apprehension is infallible, and so it aims at what is good, the fourth premise of the second argument of SG I, 95. We see from this that God is present in the will to the extent that the will is free from error, and is not present in the will to the extent that there is error in the will, as is stated in the third argument of CG I, 95, God cannot bear any mingling with evil.

The fourth argument of CG I, 95 is as follows:

Whatever a will wills by willing X, it wills by willing X as an end.

Whatever the divine will wills, it wills by willing itself. (c. 74).

Therefore, whatever the divine will wills, it wills by willing itself as an end.

Thus, everything the divine will wills it wills by willing an end (restatement of immediate foregoing).

If everything the divine will wills it wills by willing an end, it wills nothing by not willing an end.

But evil is willed only by not willing an end.

For the good has the nature of an end.

Therefore, the divine will cannot will evil.

Another text in the CG which explains the fourth argument of CG I, 95, is CG I, 87, That nothing can be the cause of the divine will. Specifically, this relates directly to the second premise of the fourth argument of CG I, 95. In the second argument of CG I, 87, St. Thomas tells us the cause of willing: the end. Divine willing has as its end its own goodness. Therefore, just as goodness is the act of God's will, so goodness is also the end of God's willing. Whatever the divine will wills, it will by willing itself, because in God, the

end of the will is goodness, and God is goodness itself, so that the divine will wills itself, the second premise of CG I, 95.

We find another treatment of material in CG I, 95 in ST I-II, 79, Of the External Causes of sin. This first article of ST I-II, 79 considers Whether God Is a Cause of Sin? and relates to the third premise of the fourth argument of CG I, 95. God cannot directly be the cause of sin, in another or in Himself. This is so because sin is a departure from the order which has God as its end. God draws all things to Himself; He is the end of all things. Therefore, whatever the divine will wills, it wills by willing itself as an end, because God created all things, and he created all things in such a way that all things will Himself as their end, for he made all things unto himself.

Fr. Bernard Lonergan commented on the material in the fourth argument of SG I, 95 in De Verbo Incarnato, the second Scholion of thesis 17, On the cause of sin. This relates to the fourth argument of CG I, 95, in that it helps us understand the fourth premise: everything the divine will wills it wills by willing an end. Fr. Lonergan considers how it is that God causes all things, both good and evil. Sin, insofar as it has a cause, is reducible to the first

cause, God. To the extent that sin does not have the intelligibility of a cause or the intelligibility of a thing that is caused, to such an extent sin can't be reducible to God. So to the extent that sin cannot possibly be reducible to God, to such an extent God does not will the evil of guilt directly or indirectly; he only allows it. Thus as St. Thomas states in the sixth premise of the fourth argument of SG I, 95: evil is willed only by not willing an end; God does not will evil, rather He only permits it. Intrinsically, sin is both a privation of good and a kind of irrational privation of good. God wills the end of a good but does not will the end of a sin because the end of sin cannot be reduced to God.

We also find a treatment of the sixth premise of the fourth argument of CG I, 95, in De Verbo Incarnato by Fr. Lonergan. He compares being and not being: while being is reduced to the divine goodness willing, not being is reduced to the divine goodness not willing. According to St. Thomas, that evils occur and evils do not occur are opposed contradictorily, while he wills evils to occur and he wills evils not to occur are not opposed contradictorily (ST I, 19, ad 3). In the same way, ordering and not ordering, willing and not willing, and acting and not acting are all opposed contradictorily.

However, to reduce to one ordering and to one not ordering, to reduce to one willing and one not willing, and to reduce to one acting and one not acting all are not contradictorily opposed. This is so because that which is opposed to reduction is non-reduction; where there is a lack of intelligibility, there is also, necessarily, a lack of reduction. Whatever the divine will wills cannot be evil, as the conclusion of the fourth argument of CG I, 95 states, because that God wills the good and does not will the evil is not contradictorily opposed.

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