

Interpretation

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Reply to the Reviews of *Natural Reason and Natural Law*

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I am honored that the three reviewers of my book, which is long and involved, took the time to read it and found it worthy of addressing in writing. I am also grateful to Timothy Burns, the editor of *Interpretation*, for giving me the opportunity to respond to their reviews.

Though I have criticized Straussians for not examining the demonstrations Thomas advances early on in part 1 of the *Summa theologiae*, which include his arguments for the will, providence, and justice of god in qq. 19–22 and which constitute the foundation of his rational theology,¹ I have been criticized in turn for not showing that these really *are* demonstrations. However, a cursory inspection of the *corpus* (the *Respondeo* or “I answer that...” section) of each of the articles in these questions will show that they are a part of a long chain of demonstrative reasoning that begins in q. 2 and extends through q. 26. In the *corpus* of a given question, Thomas will sometimes justify a premise he employs with explicit reference to an earlier question, though much more often the reader has to supply this reference himself. The *complete* justification for the conclusions of the arguments that Thomas advances in qq. 19–22 is then found not only in these questions but in the preceding questions as well. There was no way, in a book on natural law that

¹ On the distinction between Thomas's rational theology and his revealed theology, see *Natural Reason and Natural Law* (hereafter *NRNL*), 11–13.

was already quite long, that I could explicate the chain of reasoning that leads up to and includes qq. 19–22.

But I did not think that I needed to do this, for two reasons in particular. In the first place, central to my purpose in referring to Thomas's arguments in qq. 19–22 was emphasizing that the conclusions there do not logically presuppose the claims of revelation, that is, what one finds uniquely in the Bible and in the highly refined dogmatic declarations of the church, such as the Nicene Creed and the Chalcedonian Definition. Whether these conclusions are successfully demonstrated is a different question. I, for one, am convinced that they are. In any case, since Thomas's demonstrations already exist, I did not think it was incumbent on me to restate them, but only to point out where they could be found. On the other hand, I do think it is incumbent on those who, after considering these demonstrations, assert that they either presuppose the claims of revelation, or make use of unsound argumentation, to show exactly where this happens. The charge that Thomas's rational theology and his natural law teaching depend, covertly if not overtly, on the claims of revelation gives unbelievers who do not know otherwise an excuse for not engaging with this demanding part of his enormous intellectual project. The uncritical acceptance of this charge has inhibited their learning.

In the second place, though certain components of Thomas's rational theology are pertinent to his natural law teaching taken as a whole, they play no role at all in the case he makes, in *ST* I-II, q. 94 art. 2, for our natural knowledge of foundational and properly obligatory moral precepts and for their intrinsic rationality. Thomas says nothing there, nor does he need to say anything there, about God's justice or providence, or about immortality of the soul. In fact, this particular article of the *Summa theologiae* does not even presuppose that God exists.² And that means that even if God did not exist, and even if the human soul were not immortal, we would still be obligated by virtue of precepts that are constituted by our own, natural reason.³

Antonio Sosa's review is a welcome, and successful, attempt to summarize the main themes of my book and the thrust of its argument. Anyone who reads Sosa's review will get a clear idea of what my book is about. His review

² Thomas does say that we have a natural inclination to know the truth about God. But, *as far as his argument in this particular article is concerned*, the truth about God might be that he does not exist (*NRNL*, 44).

³ On the relation of reason to obligation, see *NRNL*, 74–79.

will enable readers to grasp what is most deeply at issue in the disputation between the followers of Thomas and the followers of Strauss. Beyond this praise, I have little to say of Sosa's review, except to speak briefly to his first footnote.

I brought Heidegger into the picture because his undermining of the classical concept of nature, indeed of the concept of permanence of any kind, and his depreciation of reason present powerful challenges to both the followers of Strauss and the followers of Thomas. Because Straussians do not have at their disposal a developed concept of either nature or reason, they are not able to effectively meet the challenge that Heidegger poses. However, the followers of Thomas do have a developed concept of reason. Moreover, as I show late in my book, they also have the elements of a concept of nature that is invulnerable to the criticisms of modern natural science. It only needs to be developed. The followers of Thomas, then, have the wherewithal to meet the Heideggerian challenge, whereas, as far as I can see, the followers of Strauss do not—unless, that is, they are willing to move closer to Thomas than they have moved hitherto.

Regarding John Grant's review, I shall speak to his criticisms of my book roughly in the order in which they appear in his review, focusing on the ones that I find most substantive or interesting in other ways.

Grant thinks that I should have given more attention to Strauss's essay "The Law of Reason in the *Kuzari*." If Thomas's case for natural law, as I present it in part 1 of my book, is solid, I do not need to respond to criticisms of that account obliquely made by Yehuda Halevy, who of course never read Thomas's account, having died a hundred years before it was written. Moreover, Grant and I do not read Strauss's essay the same way.⁴ Thomas appears, very briefly, in the introduction to it. He is presented there, correctly, as a proponent of the view that the *ius naturale* is a set of essentially rational rules. Strauss places Thomas in contrast to Marsilius of Padua, who rejects the view that the *ius naturale* is a set of essentially rational rules. Strauss comments: for Marsilius, "the very rationality of the *ius naturale*...prevents its being universally, or generally, accepted." So, the interesting contrast between these two thinkers turns on their different assessments of what constitutes rationality, which cannot help but inform their different assessments of what

⁴ Though maybe we do, since Grant speaks of "Halevi's apparent [!] defense of the law of reason or the natural law."

constitutes humanity. These differences are not fully explored in Strauss's essay.⁵ For after the short introduction, where more is said about Marsilius's view than about Thomas's, Strauss turns to an extended and characteristically penetrating analysis of Halevy's *Kuzari*. Marsilius appears once more in a footnote;⁶ and Thomas appears once more in a footnote as well.⁷ And that's it. Strauss does not put "Thomas in dialogue with other thinkers (e.g., Halevi and Maimonides)," as Grant says. To do that, Strauss would have to devote more than a few sentences to what he elsewhere calls, correctly, "the classic form of the natural law teaching," that is, the natural law teaching of Thomas Aquinas.⁸ The "careful reader" might say that Thomas is "silently present" throughout the essay. But, if so, he is present only as a figure whose teaching on natural law is silently repudiated, though without being either explicitly or implicitly explicated, much less definitively refuted, whether by the philosopher, or by the believer (the Jewish scholar, assuming he *is* a believer, and not another philosopher in disguise), or by Strauss himself. In the *Kuzari*, both the philosopher and the believer, however much they disagree on other matters, agree that there is no natural law as a set of genuinely obligatory rules, or precepts, that are present in the evidence and operation of natural reason. The philosopher, who does not accept revelation, does not find genuinely obligatory precepts *anywhere*; and the believer, who presumably speaks for Halevy, finds them *only in divine revelation*. All this is made amply clear, I think, in the closing pages of Strauss's essay, though it was not hard to see it coming. Grant says about Strauss's essay on the *Kuzari*, "Thomas is here treated as a thinker of the first rank engaged in a theoretical dispute with other great thinkers." I would say, on the contrary, that Thomas is not *treated* in Strauss's *Kuzari* essay at all.

Grant refers to my (qualified) endorsement of Thomas's formulation that philosophy is the handmaid of theology. The pertinent sentence, of which Grant

⁵ Strauss writes, "We would have to describe Marsilius' interpretation of the *ius naturale* as the philosophic view, and Thomas's interpretation as the view of the kalâm or, perhaps, as the theological view" (*Persecution and the Art of Writing* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952], 97–98). I would like to think that Strauss's "perhaps" reflects a slight hesitance to designate Thomas's view of the *ius naturale* as theological because he could not find anything specifically theological in Thomas's case, in *ST* I-II, q. 94 art. 2, for our natural knowledge of the primary precepts of natural law, in spite of the definition of natural law that he gives in q. 91 art. 2. (Thomas is careful not to advert to, or even mention, the definition of natural law in q. 94 art. 2. He knows what he is doing.) But what I would like to think is, alas, undercut by what Strauss says about Thomas's view of natural law in *Natural Right and History*.

⁶ *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, 136n130.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 133n124. On the passage from the *ST* that Strauss quotes here, see *NRNL*, 198–208.

⁸ Leo Strauss, "On Natural Law," in *Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy*, ed. Thomas Pangle (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 143.

quotes only a part, reads, “Philosophy, more precisely [!], the rational theology of the scholastics, is the handmaid of revealed theology because it clears the way for revealed theology.”⁹ I was not intending to make a statement there about philosophy across the board, least of all about the understanding of philosophy as a way of life, realized exemplarily by Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle.

Grant writes: “Thomas shows us reason...even correcting the apparent meaning of the Bible.” This is a problem only for biblical literalists, and Thomas was not a biblical literalist. Besides, if the meaning of a certain passage is only apparent, then correcting it is in order. Doing so is not particularly bold, and Thomas is not alone in doing it.

Grant writes, “Carey claims that Strauss’s admiration for esoteric writing...promotes ‘uncertainty and shallow thinking.’” I did not say, and I did not mean to imply, that anyone’s *admiration* for esoteric [exoteric?] writing promotes “uncertainty and shallow thinking.” I said, “When the reader is uncertain as to what the deepest thoughts of [great philosophers who write exoterically] are, he is tempted to infer that they are the same as his own deepest thoughts, which may be superficially arrived at and altogether conventional.... The art of writing practiced by the scholastics reduces such uncertainty and shallow thinking to a minimum” (133). I stand by that statement.

Grant writes, “It is difficult to see why esotericism would be necessary at all if there was nothing possibly offensive to the community in the writings of Thomas.” I give several reasons for this on pages 129–30. I gather that Grant is unimpressed by Thomas’s acerbic remarks, which I quote on page 131, concerning furtive communication of secret teachings.¹⁰

Grant writes, “Carey goes so far as to doubt that there are any contradictions in the works of Thomas that cannot be explained by the context.” What I wrote was a bit more nuanced: “It is possible that somewhere in Thomas’s gigantic oeuvre, wide-ranging and composed over the course of many years, one might find something he says in one passage quite difficult, perhaps impossible, to square with something he says in another passage. But, I suspect, attention to differences between the contexts in which the two passages occur or the times of their composition would account for the inconsistency, mitigate it, or remove the appearance of it.”¹¹

⁹ *NRNL*, 134–35 with note 24.

¹⁰ Cf. *NRNL*, 132–33.

¹¹ Grant himself seems not so sure that there are genuine contradictions in Thomas’s teaching. Consider the following three sentences from his review. “Thomas gives two different, and seemingly

Grant writes, “Thomas gives two different, and seemingly contradictory, reasons [for why God commanded the Israelites to steal from the Egyptians]. First, we are told that it was a matter of restitution for past injuries. But we are also told that God owns everything, so He can do what He will in regard to property.” It is not unusual for Thomas, in commenting on scriptural texts, to give two different interpretations of a problematic passage. In this case, either interpretation suffices to account for how God could have commanded the Israelites to steal from the Egyptians. Moreover, attending to the difference between the contexts in which the two passages occur helps out. In the first passage, Thomas is speaking specifically about theft.¹² In the second passage, he is speaking specifically about obedience.¹³ In the second passage he presents a trio of problematic commands: (1) God’s command to Abraham to slay his (presumably innocent) son, (2) his command to the Israelites to take things belonging to the Egyptians, and (3) his command to Osee to take to himself an adulteress. Since (1) and (3) cannot be easily explained in terms of restitution, as (2) can, and was so explained earlier in his book, Thomas now makes a general claim that covers all three cases, replying to the question of man’s duty of obedience to God: God can, without injustice, command something contrary to the wonted course of virtue (*contra consuetum virtutis modum*). That said, Grant is absolutely right to say that “there seems to be an issue of great significance here.” Actually, “seems” is, in this case, too weak a word. For as Grant quite reasonably asks, “If the precept of the natural law forbidding theft may be overruled by a divine command, what is the status of the natural law?” Good question! I address Thomas’s account of God’s dispensation from the precepts of natural law in general, and his command to Abraham to sacrifice Isaac in particular, in the long “Note” appended to chapter 8 of my book.¹⁴ Grant does not comment on what I say there, though it is of considerable relevance to the good question he asks.

Grant reiterates Strauss’s question about how religion as such could be a moral virtue, as it is according to Thomas, if there is a religion in which Moloch is worshiped. I think that Thomas would respond by reiterating that religion is a part of justice. As such it cannot be essentially at odds with

[!] contradictory, reasons [for why God commanded the Israelites to steal from the Egyptians].” “It would be superficial to say that these apparent [!] contradictions disprove Thomas’s natural law teaching.” “An engagement with Strauss’s larger body of work on the natural law and critics of the natural law helps us to see the ambiguities and even apparent [!] contradictions in the Thomistic account.”

¹² *ST* II-II, q. 66 art. 5 ad 1.

¹³ *ST* II-II, q. 104 art. 4 ad 2.

¹⁴ *NRNL*, 201–3. See the title of article 4 of q. 91 in *ST* I-II. Cf. *NRNL*, 35–36.

justice. A cult that requires the sacrifice of children is essentially at odds with justice, inasmuch as it requires deliberately slaying the innocent, which is forbidden by natural law. Hence such a cult is not a religion, strictly so called.¹⁵ Still, such a cult does contain the *rudiments* of religion, namely, the belief that there is something higher than man, something to which man owes his very existence, and that, accordingly, man has a duty of sacrifice to this higher being. The fact that man can go so abominably wrong in his understanding of the nature of this higher being, and hence in his understanding of what is proper to sacrifice to him, does not undercut Thomas's understanding of religion as a moral virtue. Rather, it is further evidence, which Thomas is quite clear about, that (to quote Strauss) "the *need* for divine illumination cannot be denied."¹⁶

Grant writes, "[Strauss] points to the fact that while religion is a part of the natural virtue of justice for Thomas, only reason informed by faith tells us to love and worship God. If not a contradiction, this is a puzzle requiring investigation." I investigate this puzzle in my book, and I show that it arises only out of failure to recognize the distinction between the verbs *amo* and *diligo*, as Thomas uses them.¹⁷

Grant asks, as others have asked before him, "If the natural law is a law, why is it so commonly disregarded?" Thomas's answer, in brief, is that man is capable of ignoring the testimony, even the command, of his own reason when it gets in the way of pleasure seeking, which occurs, of course, in manifold forms.

Grant writes, "we are told [by Carey] that sufficient sanction for the natural law to be a law is provided by the remorse of conscience."¹⁸ But there is a grave problem here. Thomas does not talk about the remorse of conscience in this way, and Carey does not cite any Thomistic texts discussing conscience

¹⁵ See *ST I-II*, q. 95 art. 2, co. (*corpus*); *II-II*, q. 81 art. 5 ad 3; cf. q. 85 art. 1 ad 1. The most obvious distinction between child sacrifice in the cult of Moloch, and God's commanding Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, is that, in the former case, sacrificing children (in great numbers) to Moloch was the norm, whereas, in the latter case, God's command was altogether exceptional. Again, see the long "Note" that I refer to in the text above.

¹⁶ Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), 75 (emphasis added). I realize that much more needs to be said about how Thomas, without appeal to revelation, understands religion to be a moral virtue. I presented a paper on this topic at the 48th International Congress of Medieval Studies in 2013. I plan to include material from this unpublished paper in a longer study that I am working on at present.

¹⁷ *NRNL*, 198–200.

¹⁸ Grant here has a footnote that refers to *NRNL*, 175.

or the remorse of conscience in defense of this argument on this point.” On page 175 of my book, I explicitly acknowledge that this sanction is for many not sufficient (in the sentence beginning “To be sure...”). Moreover, on this very page, to which Grant himself directs attention in a footnote, I quote a pertinent Thomistic text. It reads as follows.

Man can be punished with a threefold punishment, corresponding to the three orders to which the human will is subject. For in the first place [!] a man’s nature is subject to the order of his own [!] reason [*Primo quidem enim subditur humana natura ordini propriae rationis*]...Wherefore [the sinner] incurs a threefold punishment: one, inflicted by himself, namely the remorse of conscience [*unam quidem a seipso, quae est conscientiae remorsus*], another inflicted by man, and a third inflicted by God.¹⁹

I do not understand what Grant’s criticism is on this particular point.

Grant writes, “[Carey] does not examine the proofs Thomas gives for the immortality of the soul, and he does not even attempt to show that the God we know according to reason is a punishing God.” If Thomas demonstrates that God is just, and I think that he does demonstrate this,²⁰ it follows that God can justly punish sinners—assuming, to be sure, that they have free choice, which Thomas also argues for.²¹

Regarding immortality of the human soul, though I did not examine the demonstrations Thomas advances for it in my book, I did refer to where, in the *Summa theologiae*, the demonstrations can be found.²² The interested reader should also consider the extended treatment of the soul in book 2 of the *Summa contra gentiles*, chapters 46–89, especially chapters 49–51, 55, 65, and 79. In each of these chapters we find a series of syllogisms, the conclusions of each syllogism being announced typically with “therefore” or its equivalent. To limit ourselves to chapter 49, where Thomas argues “that an intellectual substance is not a body,” we get *eight* separate syllogisms, concluding each time with “Therefore an Intellectual Substance is not a Body,” or the equivalent, “Therefore, the Intellect is not a Body.”²³ This proposition is certainly

¹⁹ ST I-II, q. 87 art. 1, co. (emphasis added).

²⁰ I return to the question of God’s justice later in this response.

²¹ See *NRNL*, 64–68.

²² ST I, q. 75 art. 2, 5–6. These articles should be read in conjunction with the other articles of this question.

²³ By an intellectual substance, Thomas means something that is capable of an intellectual act, that is, the act of understanding. It is for this reason that he uses *substantia intellectualis* and *intellectus*

not the same as the proposition “That the human soul does not perish when the body is corrupted.” The latter proposition is not argued for until *thirty* chapters later, in chapter 79. But the conclusion of chapter 49 is a necessary presupposition of what follows, including the argument of chapter 79. Of the eight separate demonstrations of the proposition “That the Intellect is not a Body,” let us consider only one of them. It is brief, and its syllogistic *form*, which is all I am interested in arguing for here, becomes quickly evident.

Major Premise: The act of no body is self-reflexive.

Minor Premise: But the act of the intellect is self-reflexive. (When the intellect reflects on itself.)

1st Conclusion: The act of the intellect is not the act of a body.

2nd Conclusion: Therefore (*igitur*) the intellect is not a body. (Follows from 1st Conclusion by relational logic.)

If the conclusion of this little syllogism logically depends, either overtly or covertly, on any claim of revelation, I do not know how it does so.²⁴ As a syllogism it is formally valid: the conclusion follows logically from the two premises. Whether it is sound or not depends on the truth of the premises. To establish whether the premises are true would require an investigation into the peculiar intentionality of thought, of the act of understanding in particular. I cite this syllogism only to support my contention that Thomas’s argument for the immortality of the soul, toward which his argument for the intellect’s not being a body is a necessary step, is an argument that appeals to natural reason and ordinary human experience only.²⁵ A reasonable dispute about the premises of this argument will stay on that plane. It will neither ascend nor descend (however one prefers to put it) to what the believer claims has been divinely revealed.

The above syllogism illustrates the way Thomas typically argues in the books of the *Summa contra gentiles* that comprise his rational theology, in the corresponding questions of the *Summa theologiae*, and elsewhere as well. However, there is a feature of Thomas’s presentation that can be misunderstood, but should not be. In the chapter of the *Summa contra gentiles* from which I excerpted the syllogism above, after Thomas has given his eight

interchangeably.

²⁴ See *NRNL*, 3n4 for what I mean by logical dependence or reliance.

²⁵ And, to repeat, there are *seven* more syllogistic arguments in chapter 49, all leading to the same conclusion, each time introduced with “therefore” (*igitur*).

demonstrations, all logically relying on reason and ordinary experience alone, he then, and only then, turns to Sacred Scripture. But he does so only to cite a passage therein that accords with the conclusion he has *independently* arrived at in his syllogisms. Thomas's purpose is to show that the conclusion he reaches in the preceding eight syllogisms is not at odds with what the Catholic Church teaches. That is something *quite* different from deducing his conclusion from what the Catholic Church teaches. Thomas certainly does that sort of thing in his revealed theology; but he does not do it in his rational theology.

My aim here (and in my book) is hardly to restate and defend the arguments, vast in number, tight in reasoning, that Thomas advances in his rational theology,²⁶ but to illustrate, albeit with a single example,²⁷ how he argues without logical reliance on the claims of revelation.

Grant begins his concluding paragraph as follows: "Carey demonstrates that Thomas distinguishes between faith and reason in his natural law teaching. In this way he shows the unfairness of Strauss's claim in *Natural Right and History* that Thomas conflates reason and revelation." It gratifies me that, in spite of the criticisms Grant advances in his review, he recognizes that I have done at least this much.

I am grateful to Erik Dempsey for his generous praise of my book. In his review, Dempsey sometimes raises difficult questions and then proceeds to show that he knows how I and/or Thomas would answer them. This way of proceeding nicely engages the readers of his review and of my response to it. In what follows, I restrict myself to addressing those criticisms and other observations of Dempsey's that I think most need to be addressed, again, roughly in the order in which they appear in his review.

Dempsey writes, "Carey sometimes ascribes claims to 'Straussians' or others without specific attribution." As Dempsey knows, there is a plethora of attribution in my book. So I do not know whether the force of the observation here is (1) that I may have ascribed claims to Straussians that no Straussian has ever made, or (2) that I may be attributing to an entire group a questionable,

²⁶ The conspicuous exception in my book is my treatment of Thomas's argument for the existence of God in *De ente et essentia* (NRNL, 13–19). And even there I acknowledge that my treatment is only an adumbration of Thomas's argument. It is, however, sufficient to show that his argument does not logically rely on the claims of revelation. For a perspicuous analysis of the logical structure of this argument, see John Wippel, "Essence and Existence in the *De Ente*, Ch. 4," in *Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1984).

²⁷ I shall give another example later in this response.

or perhaps objectionable, claim made by only few individuals. As for (1), I am sure that I am not guilty of the charge. In addition to studying the writings of Strauss and his followers for over fifty years, I have been in conversations with a number of Straussians, off and on, for just as long.²⁸ I remember many of these conversations vividly. There was a time when most of the Straussians I knew did not want to be identified as such, or so they told me. Hence I felt no need—I did not even think it proper—to attribute what was said to me to the individual who said it.

As for (2), I do not think I am guilty of the charge. Dempsey cites two pages as examples—“(see 132, 346, etc.)”—of what he calls “sweeping characterizations.” On page 132 of my book, there are three occurrences of the word “Straussians.” In the first two occurrences (lines 1 and 14 from the top), it is quite clear that I am not speaking of all Straussians. In the third occurrence (line 17 from the top), I really do make a sweeping characterization. For there I refer to “matters that are of abiding interest to Straussians”—a formulation that is as true as it is innocuous. On page 346 of my book, the word “Straussian” does not appear at all, nor does any equivalent expression, such as “followers of Strauss.” On that page, I quote a passage from a lecture of Strauss’s, and I comment on it. If pages 132 and 146 really are examples of what Dempsey is criticizing, then I am not troubled by the criticism. However, if I have said something anywhere in my book about Straussians as a whole that is incontestably false, I would appreciate being shown, either in a reply to this response or in personal correspondence (from anyone interested), where I have done this.²⁹ In that case, if there is ever a second edition of my book, I will make the relevant corrections and/or qualifications in the text, and I will alert the reader to them in the new preface.³⁰

Dempsey quotes the definition of obligation that I find implicit in Thomas’s natural law teaching. In a footnote to it, he says, “This must include, I think, ‘reason informed by faith’ (*ST* I-II q. 104 art. 1 ad 3), since divine commandments that are not knowable to reason alone would still be obligatory.” I agree, and I make this point in my book.³¹

²⁸ See *NRNL*, 6 (lines 6–8 from the top).

²⁹ On page 271, beginning of bottom paragraph, I do make a sweeping characterization of “Strauss and his followers,” though I qualify it right away: “One can be virtually certain that they . . .” If, however, this characterization is thought to be false, I am open to correction and enlightenment.

³⁰ When Dempsey says, “Carey sometimes ascribes claims to ‘Straussians’ or others without specific attribution,” I do not know what exactly “others” he is referring to. I speak of Thomists, Kantians, and phenomenologists, and some other groups as well. If I have made sweeping characterizations of any of them that are incontestably false, I would also appreciate being shown where I have done this.

³¹ *NRNL*, 75. Regarding the text that Dempsey cites in parenthesis, see *NRNL*, 198–200.

Dempsey writes, “I am not arguing that our private good should be preferred to the common good, or even that the good should be preferred to the just.” I have no difficulty accepting what Dempsey says. I quote this passage only because I find his distinction between “the good” and “the just” interesting. Assuming that by “the good,” he means the human good, the distinction I see between them, and I think Thomas would agree, is that “the just” is a part, an absolutely essential part, of “the good” considered as a whole. I see no more tension between “the just” and “the good” than between the center of a circle and the circle itself.³² If Dempsey sees things differently—and I am by no means sure he does—I would be interested in hearing how he understands the relationship between “the just” and “the good.”

Dempsey quotes from the Proemium to Thomas’s *Commentary on the Book of Job*, and comments: “[Thomas] suggests that the arguments in it are ‘probable rather than demonstrative.’” Contrary to the impression I initially got from Dempsey’s sentence, Thomas is not saying that the arguments in his *Commentary* are probable rather than demonstrative, but, rather, that the arguments in the book of Job are probable rather than demonstrative.³³ Not surprisingly, however, Thomas’s *Commentary* does not offer demonstrative arguments for divine providence either. The demonstrative arguments for divine providence that we find in the *Summa theologiae* and in the *Summa contra gentiles* are prepared at very great length by the preceding articles, which would have been out of place in Thomas’s *Commentary*.

Though Thomas says more, at least in terms of length, about providence in his *Commentary on the Book of Job* than what he says about providence in the *Summa theologiae*, his most extended treatment of providence in the full sweep of its efficacy is in book 3 of the *Summa contra gentiles*, which is the longest book in that work.³⁴ I am not sure, but I assume that it is with

³² To stay with the inadequate, but I hope serviceable, analogy of the circle, I would say that, not justice alone, but rationality, consistency as a minimum, is the center of the circle, and this includes rationality in thinking as well as in acting. Away from the center, but still within the circle—*analogia claudicat*—are such things as life, health, and pleasure. The center is our good insofar as we are by nature rational; away from the center is our good insofar as we are by nature animals. The whole human good, the whole circle so to speak, includes both. But the center is the core and the condition of all the rest. As Thomas states the matter, “all the inclinations of whatsoever parts of human nature, for example, of the conspicuous part and the irascible part, *insofar as they are ruled by reason*, pertain to natural law” (*ST I-II*, q. 94 art. 2 ad 2, emphasis added).

³³ The relevant clause reads: “et ideo post legem datam et prophetas, in numero Hagiographorum, idest librorum per spiritum Dei sapienter ad eruditionem hominum conscriptorum, primus ponitur liber Iob, cuius tota intentio circa hoc versatur ut per probabiles rationes ostendatur res humanas divina providentia regi.”

³⁴ It is clear from the first chapter of book 4 of the *SCG* that Thomas is making a new beginning, and that this beginning, unlike what he presented and argued for in the preceding three books, is going to

reference to part 1 q. 22 of the *Summa theologiae* that Dempsey says “Thomas does argue for God’s providence on rational grounds, but he does not present those arguments as demonstrative.” I do not know whether Dempsey is saying that Thomas’s argument for God’s providence

- (1) does *not* appeal to revelation; instead it proceeds from rationally accessible premises (“rational grounds”), but it is intended as *only probable* since these premises do not suffice to generate the conclusion; or
- (2) proceeds from rationally accessible premises and is intended to be demonstrative rather than probable only, but involves a fallacious inference; or
- (3) *does* appeal to revelation for one or more of its premises; these premises rationally and nonfallaciously generate the conclusion, which, as a matter of logical necessity however, possesses no more evidence than the premises themselves.

I do not think that any of these things are true. I think that Thomas’s argument for providence was intended to be, and succeeds in being, properly demonstrative. Here is the first, and decisive, part of his argument, in the article “Whether providence is suitably attributed to God,”³⁵ with its implicitly syllogistic form made transparent, and with parenthetical “justifications” of the less evident propositions.

Major Premise: God is the creator of all the good that is in created things. (Demonstrated earlier in the *ST*.)

Minor Premise: The good of created things includes their good order toward an end.

1st Conclusion: Therefore God is the creator of the good order of created things toward an end.

Major Premise: Providence is the type of the order toward an end in things that are caused, when this type preexists in the intellect. (By definition.)

Minor Premise: The type of the order toward an end in things that are caused, when this type preexists in the intellect, includes the type of the

rely logically on the claims of revelation. Strikingly, chapter 2 of book 4 commences a treatment of the Trinity. (Chapter 1 is introductory.)

³⁵ *ST* I, q. 22 art. 1, co.

good of order toward an end in created things, when this type preexists in the intellect. (By definition: created things are things that are caused, and a good order of things is an instance of an order of things).

2nd Conclusion: Providence includes the type of the good of order toward an end in created things, when this type preexists in the intellect.

Major Premise: There is providence wherever the type of the good of order toward an end in created things exists in the intellect. (Follows from 2nd Conclusion.)

Minor Premise: The type of the good of order toward an end in created things exists in the divine intellect. (Follows from an earlier demonstration in the *ST* that God knows all things.)

3rd Conclusion: There is providence in the divine intellect.

4th Conclusion: Providence is suitably attributed to God. (Follows immediately from the 3rd Conclusion.)

This syllogistic structure could be tightened up a bit further. But doing so would be tedious and, I think, unnecessary. The structure as I have just presented it suffices for us to see that the conclusion follows from the premises. The inference is formally valid. But not for one instant am I asserting that anyone who grants its formal validity has to assent to the conclusion. For whether the conclusion is true depends on the truth of the premises, not just whether it follows from them. Thomas has already advanced arguments, I would say, properly *demonstrative* arguments, for any premise in this argument that is contestable when the argument is considered in isolation from all that precedes it. My purpose here, as with the earlier example I gave, is only to illustrate the character of Thomas's argumentation in his rational theology. He does not appeal to the claims of revelation to logically justify either his premises or his conclusions.³⁶ I do not understand Dempsey's state-

³⁶ See *NRNL*, 12–13, where I address the question of how Thomas makes use of passages from scripture in the *corpora* of the articles that occur in *ST* I, qq. 2–26. Regarding the reference to Romans in the *corpus* of I q. 21 art. 1, see *NRNL* 17n26. Thomas also refers to a passage from Romans in the *corpus* of I q. 22 art. 2, but only as an addendum to what he has previously *demonstrated* in this *corpus*. (Cf. *NRNL*, 19.) In I q. 27 art. 1, which initiates his treatment of the Trinity in the *ST*, Thomas announces a shift in argumentation, a shift from rational theology to revealed theology. He most strikingly begins that article as follows: “I answer that, Divine Scripture [!] uses, in relation to God, names pertaining to procession.” In none of the articles of qq. 2–26, and there are 149 of them, does Thomas begin his *Respondeo* this way (q. 1 is introductory). Though, as I point out in my book (161n40), Thomas does in qq. 2–26 sometimes bring the claims of revelation briefly into the picture

ment that “Thomas does argue for God’s providence on rational grounds, but he does not present those arguments as demonstrative.”

Dempsey writes, “When arguing that God is just, Thomas resolves the objection by saying that the just who suffer ‘are more greatly raised up from earthly affliction to God’ (*ST* I, q. 21 art. 4 ad 3). Especially if one includes death among the things suffered, is this not something known by revelation only?” I may well be mistaken, but I get the impression that Dempsey is thinking that the formulation “raised up...to God” relies on the claims of revelation, in particular, the resurrection of the dead. But the point Thomas is making is that *in this very life* (that is, quite apart from resurrection of the dead) the suffering of the just “raises one up to God.” It does so because it leads the just person who suffers, and those who behold his suffering, to think about God, his possibility at least, and how he regards, or would regard, the suffering of the just. The suffering of the just may lead one, finally, to *believe* in the resurrection of the dead. But then again it may not. In any case, Thomas’s reply does not logically presuppose that there actually *will be* a resurrection of the dead. That is, it does not logically presuppose “something known by revelation only.” I think that this interpretation is the only possible one in light of the passage from Gregory that Thomas quotes at the end of this reply.³⁷ I do realize, however, that I may be totally missing Dempsey’s point here. If so, I hope he will clarify it for me.

Dempsey writes, “Thomas responds to the objection that God does not providentially oversee human affairs by saying that God protects the just in a way that ensures that their final salvation will not be impeded (*ST* I, q. 22 art. 2 ad 4).” In this reply Thomas does indeed appeal to revelation. But that is only because the “objection” itself has appealed to revelation.³⁸

Dempsey writes, “Carey points to a ‘common good’ that transcends the good of any individual community, one that belongs to the ‘universe.’” Regarding God as *the* common good, he is indeed *separate* from the world: he is its origin and its end. God is the end for man in a special way, inasmuch as

(he does this in some of the articles in q. 12 and q. 23), his doing so does not compromise the demonstrative character of any of the arguments he advances about God that are pertinent to his natural law teaching in general. It has, a fortiori, no bearing at all on what he says about our knowledge of the primary precepts of natural law in particular. Consider *ST* I-II, q. 94 art. 2.

³⁷ I think that this interpretation is supported by the expression “more greatly raised up” (*magis eriguntur*). Thomas is speaking of something that can be more or less; and resurrection of the dead cannot be more or less.

³⁸ See *NRNL*, 12–13.

man, qua rational, has a natural desire to know the first cause of things as it is in itself, and not just as the ground of the world, which need not have existed at all inasmuch as—Thomas also thinks he can demonstrate—God is the *free* creator of the world, whether the world came into being at some point in the past or whether it has always existed.³⁹ Thomas argues that the world, its matter included, would not exist at any instant, past, present, or future, if God did not freely sustain it in existence throughout every instant of its existence. These arguments occur within his rational theology, not within his revealed theology. However, that man's natural desire to know the first cause as it is in itself ever has been, or ever will be, fulfilled as a matter of fact—that is indeed a matter of revealed, not rational, theology.⁴⁰ All that *rational* theology can say, and all it needs to say, is (1) that such a desire *can* be fulfilled through the unlimited power of God, which Thomas also thinks he can demonstrate,⁴¹ and (2) that if it is not fulfilled, then, in this particular case, nature is working in vain. That nature really might be working in vain in this particular case is not, in my opinion, something that natural reason can definitively rule out.

Dempsey recognizes that, according to Thomas, the common good in the fullest sense “somehow *is* God....The common good understood that way would in fact outlive any particular person or political community.” But Dempsey suspects that “God, insofar as he is the common good of everything, is not known to reason.” Dempsey does not pinpoint where, in the whole series of arguments leading to this conclusion, the reasoning breaks down. Perhaps he thinks that he does not need to do so. For he seems to think his suspicion confirmed, after a fashion, by a passage from Thomas's Proemium to his *Commentary on the Politics*. There Thomas says that the “political community [*civitas*] is superior to all the other wholes that can be known and constituted by human reason.” According to Dempsey, “this suggests that God, insofar as He is the common good of everything, is not known to reason.” I disagree. In this sentence Thomas speaks, not of “all other wholes that can be known by reason,” simply, but of “all other wholes that can be known *and constituted by* human reason.” God, as the common good of the universe, is *known* by human reason.⁴² But he is surely not *constituted* by human reason. I think that Dempsey does not give sufficient weight

³⁹ *ST I*, q. 19 art. 3 ad 5; art. 10; q. 46 art. 1, co.; art. 2, co. See *NRNL*, 13–17.

⁴⁰ See *NRNL*, 13–19.

⁴¹ See *NRNL*, 19–20.

⁴² According to Thomas, by natural reason we can know that God *exists* and that he is *the* common good. But by natural reason we cannot behold his *essence*. See, e.g., *ST I* art. 12.

to the second member of the conjunction, joined by “and” (*et*), in the sentence to which he draws our attention.⁴³

Dempsey writes, “Suppose one believes that acting contrary to one of the primary precepts of the natural law will serve the greater good—say, by making it possible for a decent political community to win a war against a cruel and oppressive one.” Thomas’s response is unequivocal: “no evil is excused because it is done with a good intention” (*nullum malum bona intentione factum excusatur*).⁴⁴

Late in his review, Dempsey writes, concerning an alternative that one would have to face if it turned out that God as the common good of the universe could not be demonstrated, hence could not be *known* to exist: “Either Thomas’s moral teaching would have to be more like Kant’s, and treat adherence to the precepts of the law as being of greater importance than the common good; or else, it would have to say that the precepts do admit of exceptions, when the good at stake is great enough.” Here Dempsey shifts from the common good in the fullest sense (the existence of which Thomas demonstrates) to the more narrow common good of the political community. It is indeed the case that adherence to the precepts of natural law may, in extreme cases, bring one into conflict with the common good of the body politic.⁴⁵ But for Thomas, adherence to the precepts of natural law could not—with one possible exception⁴⁶—bring one into conflict with the common good in the fullest sense.

⁴³ Emphasis added. Here is the whole sentence: “Et quia ea quae in usum hominis veniunt ordinantur ad hominem sicut ad finem, qui est principalior his quae sunt ad finem, ideo necesse est quod hoc totum quod est civitas sit principalius omnibus totis, quae ratione humana cognosci et constitui possunt.” Note the prior use of *constituere* in this paragraph: “ratio humana...ex lignis constituit navem et ex lignis et lapidibus domum.”

⁴⁴ *De decem praeceptis*, art. 1, co. Cf. *ST* II-II, q. 123 art. 4, co.: “It is proper [*oportet*] to hold firmly the good of reason against every evil whatsoever [including death—see the context], since no bodily good is equivalent to the *bonum rationis*.”

⁴⁵ I speak to this matter at some length in *NRNL*. See 261–74, and esp. 267–68 where I comment on a striking suggestion of Strauss’s that there might be something worse even for the political community than death or extinction. Needless to say, Strauss does not support this suggestion by appeal to divine justice, divine providence, or immortality of the soul.

⁴⁶ The exception is whether God himself could exempt one from adherence to the precepts of natural law, including the primary precepts of natural law. See *NRNL*, 201–3, pages I have already referred to more than once in this response. Needless to say, whatever answer one gives to this difficult question, it has nothing to do with the quite different question whether man can undertake a so-called prudential deviation from the strictures of the primary precepts of natural law in the interest of promoting a political, much less entirely private, good.

Most of the good questions raised in the reviews pertain to matters that Thomas thinks are demonstrable, such as the justice and providence of God and the immortality of the human soul. Let us momentarily assume, contrary to what I have maintained in my book and in the present response, that Thomas is *not* able to demonstrate these things: either the premises are false, the reasoning is fallacious, or there are covert appeals to the claims of revelation. What possible effect could this have on the case he makes for our knowledge of the primary precepts of natural law? As I spelled out in some detail in part 1, chapter 2 of my book, these precepts are, for Thomas, present in the evidence and operation of natural human reason. They are self-evident. And that means that they have greater evidence than even the existence of God, which, for Thomas, is not self-evident though it can be demonstrated.⁴⁷ Hence the primary precepts of natural law have still greater evidence than the justice and providence of God and the immortality of the human soul. If Thomas is right about this, and I attempted to show in my book that he is, then even if his claims about the latter matters depended on revelation, or even if, *per impossibile*, they could be shown to be false, the self-evidence of the primary precepts of natural law would remain. And these precepts would have full obligatory force,⁴⁸ for the reasons I advanced in my book.⁴⁹

I think that Thomas's rational theology is rigorously argued for, comprehensive in scope, and remarkably consistent. I concede, however, that it may be defective in ways I do not appreciate. But if there really are defects in his rational theology, they do not in the least undercut the altogether independent case he makes that man, by virtue of his own reason, is obligated in the very core of his being.

I look forward to the reviewers' replies to this response. As is altogether fitting, they will have the last word for the time being. If something important emerges in the replies that I have not already addressed, either in this response or in the book itself, I shall address it on another occasion.

⁴⁷ In the final stages of editing my book, I was concerned that I made this point too frequently. Now, I am concerned that I did not make it frequently, or emphatically, enough.

⁴⁸ Though the claim that the precepts of natural law derive their obligatory character from the expectation of a reward in a hereafter is not always intended as a defense of immoralism, it is nonetheless a major contribution to a defense of immoralism.

⁴⁹ *NRNL*, part 1. See esp. 41–42, 53–55, and 63–79. Dempsey speaks of Thomas's "reticence" in defining obligation. I think it more likely that he, like Plato (*ibid.*, 214–20), felt no need to define it, the very concept of obligation not yet having been called into question (as it was by Hume, thereby prompting Kant to define it). Nor did Thomas have to contend, as we do today, with incoherent definitions of obligation and convoluted attempts to explain it away. See *NRNL*, 355–60.