J. DECORTE

THOMAS AQUINAS AND HENRY OF GHENT ON GOD'S RELATION TO THE WORLD *

The common medieval thesis that the relation of the world to God is a real one while God's relation to the world is only a logical one, is often criticized by adherents of neoclassical theism, and more in particular by process-thinkers. They usually understand the classic position as committed to a monolithic Unmoved Mover (so without any motion), to a massive Pure Act (so without any potency, i.e. change). And since — in their interpretation of the medieval debate — *a*'s real relation to *b* entails *a*'s dependence on *b* and hence *a*'s being moved by *b*, a real relation from God to the world is unacceptable to the medievals because it would entail God's being moved or changed by the world [1]. The medieval position is in its turn unacceptable to process-thinkers, and this *on religious grounds:* a God Who

---

* I express my gratitude to G.A. Wilson for his judicious comments on an earlier draught of this paper.

1 Cf. Charles HARTSHORNE, *The Divine Relativity: A Social Conception of God*, New Haven/London, Yale U.P., 1948 (1967[3]), p. 6-9; Id., *Creative Synthesis and Philosophic Method*, London, SCM, 1970, ch. 10-11, p. 205-244 (Hartshorne's philosophy of relation and in particular as applied to our problem), and esp. p. 221, 229-237; Id., *Aquinas to Whitehead: Seven Centuries of Metaphysics of Religion* (*The Aquinas Lecture*, 1976), Milwaukee, Marquette University Publications, 1976, p. 2-12, 32-35, 45 (on E. Gilson: see p. 4, 42, 44, 49); Burton Z. COOPER, *The Idea of God. A Whiteheadian Critique of St. Thomas Aquinas' Concept of God*, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, 1974, p. 1-5, 7, 35-44, 75-77, 109-113; Schubert OGDEN, *The Reality of God and Other Essays*, Harper & Row, New York - London, 1963 (1977 paperback), p. 46-50; and many others.

is not *really* touched or moved or affected by what happens to His creatures, does not deserve the name "Father" [2].

Undoubtedly process-thinkers have a point here: it is true that medieval thinkers generally reject any reality in God's relation to the world. But process-thinkers usually quote Thomas Aquinas to back up their thesis. They seem to be unaware of the fact that Thomas is only at the beginning of the medieval debate over relations, which will truly ignite only after his death. Thomas' position, therefore, is certainly not to be identified with 'the medieval position' — as we hope to show.

The aim of the present contribution, then, is to qualify the usually stern rejection of the classic position by process-thinkers [3] at least in a twofold respect: 1° that medievals deny reality to God's relation to the world is true, but their *reasons* for doing so are complicated: introducing change in God is certainly not the only, nor probably the most important reason for this denial (as will appear in Thomas' case); 2° the *religious grounds* on which process-thinkers are basing their criticism of the classic position are certainly not absent in the speculations of the medievals: only, medievals seem to address them in a different way (as will appear in the case of Henry of Ghent).

In a first part, we shall try to briefly sketch Thomas' position with a few comments, in order to bring forward at least three (to us fundamental) differences with the position adopted by Henry of Ghent. In the second part, we shall try to account for this obvious disagreement, from the wider scope of Henry's metaphysics.

1. THE DISAGREEMENT BETWEEN THOMAS AND HENRY

In this first part we want to set Henry (1.3) over against Thomas (1.2), after a few preliminary remarks regarding Aristotle are made (1.1):

---

[2] Cf. Ch. HARTSHORNE, *Creative Synthesis* ..., p. 221: "a gigantic if unintentional betrayal of religion"; B.Z. COOPER, *The Idea* ..., p. 19:"... its failure to be adequate to the Biblical picture of God"; S. OGDEN, *The Reality* ..., p. 49: "The difficulty with the old theism's demythologizing [the term Father] is that it does not really *interpret* the scriptural myths, but rather *eliminates* them".

[3] Cf. Ch. HARTSHORNE, *Creative Synthesis* ..., p. 221: "... simple-minded sheer denial of interaction... Traditional theism had a falsely simple asymmetry and no proper symmetry".

1.1. Aristotelian assumptions

At least two Aristotelian presuppositions dominate the debate, determine its confinements and render it puzzling to the modern thinker.

First of all, (real) relation is an accident. This implies that it can only be or exist as inhering in something else, i.e. in its subject. Moreover, as we also read in Avicenna, perhaps two different accidents can inhere in one subject; but "in no way may you think that one accident is in two subjects" [4].

Accordingly, (real) relation, say of colour similarity between two white objects *a* and *b*, is discussed in terms of two subjects (or terms or extremes) *a* and *b*, in which inhere two different whitenesses (W_a in *a* and W_b in *b*), which are the fundaments for the reciprocal relations of colour + similarity. Medievals conceived colour similarity between *a* and *b* as something real, i.e. the relation is not a logical entity, a connection only made up by the mind for which there is no extramental ground in reality. As something real, such a relation is an accident, i.e. it is not hovering somehow between two things but it is inhering in those things. And as an accident it cannot be one single accident inhering in both *a* and *b*, i.e. as a symmetrical relation R would inhere in *a* and *b*, as a double-placed/two-posited predicate in a present-day logical description of relations (*a*R*b*). The mutual real relation, therefore, must be described as consisting of two separate relations going in opposite direction: *a*R*b* - *a*R'*b* + *b*R"*a*; whereby R' stands for W_a enabling *a*'s being related to *b* (*terminus* of the relation) and R" stands for W_b making possible *b*'s inversely being related to *a*. A real mutual relation of colour similarity is to be analyzed into a relation based on the whiteness of *a* connecting *a* with *b* and into another relation simultaneously going in the opposite direction, based this time on the whiteness of *b* connecting *b* with *a*.

The second presupposition is Aristotle's (at least to the modern interpreter) somewhat strange classification of real relations [5]. He divides relations into three categories. Relatives of a numerical nature constitute the first class (double-half, treble-third), but Aristotle includes in this class also all kinds of relations based on number, such as unity or plurality of substance(s) (identity), qualitative similarity and quantitative equality. The second class consists of causal relations (what heats — what is heated; what can cut — what can be cut); whereas relations of the first class are

---

[4] AVICENNA, *Liber de philosophia prima sive scientia divina*, ed. Simone VAN RIET (*Avicenna Latinus*), Leuven - Leiden, Leuven U.P. - E.J. Brill, 1977, t. III, c. 10: "Igitur nullo modo putes quod unum accidens sit in duobus subiectis" (vol. I, p. 177, 93).

[5] ARISTOTLES, *Metaph.* Delta (V), c. 15 (1020b25-1021b11).

based on substances, qualities and quantities, causal relations have the accidents of action and passion and active and passive potencies as their foundations. The third class comprises relations involving the measure and the measured (the known/measure - the knower/the measured). There are thus, according to Aristotle, three types of (real) relations: numerical, causal and psychological ones.

The third class is called 'psychological' because medievals usually take relations of the first and second class to be mutual, while considering those of the third class to be non-mutual. A real relation R is mutual if and only if, in R = R' + R", both R' (or *a*R'*b*) and R" (or *b*R"*a*) are mutual; i.e., in the case of colour similarity, if there is in *a* a *real* whiteness connecting *a* with *b*, and if there is in *b* another *real* whiteness connecting *b* with *a*. A real relation R is non-mutual, however, if and only if, in R = R' + R", either R' is real and R" is logical, or vice versa.

In the nature of the white object there is something real (the quality whiteness) that is an essential part of that nature (being white is essential to a white object) and that naturally relates it to any other similar being, in such a way that the relation could not come about if the nature were changed (if it were a black object, it could no longer be related in similarity to other white objects). Similarly there is a real presence of active and passive potencies in the nature of things related by causal relations. The third class, however, is different. For although there is something real in the nature of the knower (the presence of an object known that 'measures' the knower) without which the knower neither would nor could be a knowing subject, this does not hold for the object known. Of course, for the object known *as known* it is essential that it be present in the knower. But there is nothing present and real in the nature of any object which automatically and naturally relates it to a knower, in such a way that if that nature were changed the relation could no longer be brought about. If, for instance, the nature of a possible object of knowledge, say a circle, were changed into a square, the square could still be related to the same knower and in fact as well as the circle. For there is nothing in the *nature* of an object known that naturally relates it to a knower in the way whiteness in the nature of a white thing relates it to other white things. In other words, if the object known is related to the knower, this is only because the knower is related to the object known; the relation of the object known to the knower depends, not on any real element in the nature of the object known, but solely and uniquely on the relation of the knower to the object known. In technical terms there is a real foundation in *a* for *a*R'*b*, but no real fundament in *b* for *b*R"*a*; therefore although *a*R'*b* is real, *b*R"*a* is only rational and *a*R*b* is consequently a non-mutual real relation. For a real

relation depends for its existence on a real-extra-mental foundation in some subject, whereas a rational or logical relation depends for its existence on the activity of some mind.

1.2. Thomas Aquinas

Now, for St. Thomas Aquinas — who is more faithful to the Aristotelian classifications than Henry of Ghent, as we shall see — the relation between God and the world is an instantiation of a 'psychological' relation, and in fact the large majority of medieval thinkers agree with him on this point, including Henry of Ghent. As we said before, however, the point is to understand *why* they so unanimously describe the relation of the world to God as real and God's relations to the world as logical.

St. Thomas deals with the problem of God's relation to the world in the wider context of divine names [6]. He has to cope there with the problem of temporal divine names. Indeed, some divine names name God's relation to His creatures, and more in particular the religiously most relevant ones: Creator, Lord, Father, etc. These are true names, based on true relations. But whereas God is eternal, creation is not, nor are the relations between both, nor are consequently the relations based on those names. So how can those temporal names be truly predicated of an eternal God while they can only be predicated on a temporal ground and in a temporal sense [7]?

As always St. Thomas is concerned about clarity of distinction and concept. His answer to the aforementioned question consists in clearly distinguishing real and rational or logical relations. The minimal criteria for having a real relation are the following: a relation *aRb* is real if and only if (1) *a* and *b* are two different extramental things, and (2) there is in *a* as well as in *b* a real foundation for the relation (*ordo vel habitudo*) to the other term [8]. Only 'numerical' and 'causal' relations meet these conditions. Logical relations occur when (1) both *a* and *b* are logical, i.e. intra-mental entities (*entia rationis*), or (2) if *a* and/or *b* are extra-mental entities but without any

---

[6] Cf. THOM. AQ., *Summa theologiae*, Ia, q. 13 (ed. Leon. IV, p. 139-165).

[7] Cf. *ibid.*, art. 7, argument pro (ed. Leon. IV, p. 152b), in spite of the six arguments against Thomas' thesis ascribing an 'eternal' meaning to those 'temporal' names (ed. Leon. IV, p. 152a-b).

[8] *Ibid.*, sol.: "Quaedam vero relationes sunt quantum ad utrumque extremum res naturae, quando scilicet est habitudo inter aliqua duo secundum aliquid realiter conveniens utrique" (ed. Leon., IV, p. 153a); cf. also Mark G. HENNINGER, *Aquinas on the Ontological Status of Relations*, in *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 25, n. 4, 1987, p. 494; Id., *Relations. Medieval Theories 1250-1325*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1989, p. 7.

real foundation in either *a* or *b* for a relation [9]. Aquinas gives three examples of the former case: the relation of the self being identical with the self (*a* = *a*), of any being with non-being (*non ens*), and of one concept with another (genus - species, *animal* - *homo*). 'Psychological' relations furnish examples of the latter case, at least for one of their parts.

For 'psychological' relations indeed constitute a kind of intermediary category of relations, consisting of a real and a logical relation [10]: *a*R*b* is a real and non-mutual relation if *a*R*b* is analyzed as *a*R'*b* (real) + *b*R"*a* (logical). Aquinas gives the examples of perception and perceptible (*sensus* - *sensibile*), knowledge and knowable (*scientia* - *scibile*), and of a man and a column to his left or right. We explained those examples above in 1.1: there is nothing in the nature of a column making it the left rather than the right column, for this relation (left/right column) uniquely and solely depends on the position of the man and is changed from the moment that the position is changed [11].

Now, since this is the type of relation obtaining between God and world, i.e. woRgo - woR'go (real) + goR"wo (logical), it is of the utmost importance to understand why precisely goR"wo cannot be real and woRgo mutual. "This happens whenever the two extremes are not of the *same* order" [12]. Now this is obvious in the relation God-world. "Since God is altogether outside the order of creatures, since they are ordered to Him but not He to them, it is clear that being related to God is a reality in creatures; in God, however, there is no real relation to creatures, but only a rational one, insofar as creatures are <really> related to Him" [13]. St. Thomas is adding an important

---

9 THOM. AQ., *ibid.*: "Quandoque enim ex utraque parte est res rationis tantum, quando scilicet ordo vel habitudo non potest esse inter aliqua nisi secundum apprehensionem rationis tantum" (ed. Leon., IV, p. 152b-153a); cf. also M.G. HENNINGER, *ibid.*

10 THOM. AQ., *ibid.*: "Quandoque vero relatio in uno extremorum est res naturae et in altero est res rationis tantum" (ed. Leon., IV, p. 153a).

11 *Ibid.*: "Unde Philosophus dicit in V° Metaphysicorum quod <res ipsae> non dicuntur relative eo quod ipsa referantur ad alia, sed quia alia referuntur ad ipsa. Et similiter dextrum non dicitur de columna, nisi in quantum ponitur animali ad dexteram. Unde huiusmodi relatio non est realiter in columna, sed in animali" (ed. Leon., IV, p. 153a).

12 *Ibid.*, "Hoc contingit quandocumque duo extrema non sunt *unius* ordinis" (ed. Leon. IV, p. 153a; italics mine); Id., *op. cit.*, Ia, q. 28, art. 1, sol.: "Cum autem aliquid procedit a principio *eiusdem* naturae, necesse est quod ambo, scilicet procedens et id a quo procedit, in *eodem* ordine conveniant; et sic oportet quod habeant reales respectus ad invicem" (ed. Leon., IV, p. 318b; italics mine).

13 Id., *op. cit.*, q. 13, art. 7, sol.: "Cum igitur Deus sit extra totum ordinem creaturae, et omnes creaturae ordinentur ad ipsum, et non e converso, manifestum est quod creaturae realiter referuntur ad ipsum Deum; sed in Deo non est aliqua realis relatio eius ad creaturas, sed

condition here: if *aRb* is to be a mutual relation, R' is *aR'b* and R" in *b*R"*a* must be of the same type; i.e., if the foundations are to belong to the same order, *a* and *b* must be natures belonging to the same genus. A few examples may help us clarify what Aquinas has in mind.

Suppose someone falls in love with a statue or a picture of another human being; this relation of love can never be mutual, for a *real* relation of love, which is a mutual relation of love, requires two individuals each capable of freely giving their affection to the other. Now this is something a statue or picture can never do, for this is excluded by its very (diversity of) nature. The picture or statue is outside the order of a loving subject. Suppose one's spouse has fallen into a coma; the real relation of mutual exchange of love is at least temporarily impossible. Likewise there can never be a mutual relation between knower and object known, for that would require an immaterial conscious activity on the part of a material unconscious object.

It is important to see that for *aRb* to be mutual it is not even sufficient that *b*R"*a* is also real. In case of the statue I have fallen in love with I may be in love with the statue (*aR'b:* real) because I have sculptured it (*b*R"*a:* real, for *b* really depends for its existence on *a*). However, since R' and R" (love — being made by) are not of the same type, *aRb* is still non-mutual. It can only be mutual if R' and R" belong to the same order, and this can only be so if there is no generic difference of nature. Only numerical and causal relations meet these conditions.

What is the difference, then, between a causal relation, e.g. fire - iron, and the relation of causal dependence God - world? The decisive difference here is that the different natures united as the extremes of causal dependence in the former case do not, and in the latter case do, differ generically. Between cause and effect there is a community of nature such that the nature of the cause possesses the active capacity to produce the causal action and the nature of the effect possesses the passive capacity to receive the causal action; and since the causal action is a transient one, the effect is gradually formally assimilated to the cause. So, when fire heats iron and the iron becomes red hot, it takes over the active capacity of fire and becomes almost identical with it in setting fire to other combustible mate-

---

secundum rationem tantum, in quantum creaturae referuntur ad ipsum" (ed. Leon., IV, p. 153a); Id. *op. cit.*, q. 28, art. 1, ad 3^{m}: "Cum creatura procedat a Deo in diversitate naturae, Deus est extra ordinem totius creaturae nec ex eius natura est eius habitudo ad creaturas. Non enim producit creaturas ex necessitate suae naturae, sed per intellectum et voluntatem... Et ideo in Deo non est realis relatio ad creaturas. Sed in creaturis est realis relatio ad Deum, quia creaturae continentur sub ordine divino et in earum natura est quod dependeant a Deo" (ed. Leon., IV, p. 319a-b).

rials. Likewise, if the object known happens to be another person, this can engender a real and mutual relation between two persons knowing one another as objects known that are at the same time knowing subjects; but only under the exceptional condition that the object known is identical in nature with the knower, i.e. is itself another knower.

Positing a real and mutual relation between God and man of world therefore presupposes a denial of the fundamental diversity of nature there is between God on the one hand and man or creation on the other hand. God is *extra genus esse creati*[14], and medievals want to maintain that ontological difference, or the radical transcendence of the divine, I think on *religious* grounds and out of a *religious* awe: all creatures ultimately depend on a transcendent Creator. Positing a mutual relation is denying the assymetry in relation and dissimilarity in nature between God and creation. It would eventually entail, not only that God becomes man, but also that man becomes God, and so that the two become equal in nature. A mutual relation is only conceivable between a humanized (or anthropomorphized) God and a divinized man.

Of course, medievals always repeat that man has been created in the image of God, and that man's final aim, i.e. his happiness, lies in becoming one with God. But usually they intend this (re)union to take place between soul or spirit (which is of divine origin and the divine element in humans) and God. Exceptionally someone like Eckhart is defending the thesis that all creatures are material expressions of the inner Word or Logos, which is Christ — but he cannot do so without falling into the 'trap' of pantheism.

So, then, it would seem that at least for Thomas Aquinas God's real relation to the world would endanger His transcendence by affecting His perfection [15]; God's immutability is an indirect consequence rather than the direct cause of this perfection or transcendence. Immutability, impassivity, aseity, immateriality are not the reasons why Thomas rejects the real relation, as some seem to be thinking [16], but at most one of the effects of that rejection. Immutability does not play any significant role in the argument, for it only once appears in Thomas, and only as short reply to a single objection [17]. This seems to hold also for Henry [18].

---

[14] Id., *Quaest. disp. de potentia Dei*, q. 7, art. 10, sol. (ed. Marietti, II, p. 64b).

[15] Cf. Id., *Summa theol.*, Ia, q. 28, art. 2, arg. 3 et ad 3[m] (ed. Leon., IV, p. 321a, 322a-b).

[16] Cf. S.M. OGDEN, *The Reality* ..., p. 48-49.

[17] Cf. THOM. AQ., *Summa contra Gent.*, II, c. 12 (ed. Leon., XIII, p. 291a-b); M.G. HENNINGER, *Relations*..., p. 32, n. 54.

[18] HENRICI DE GANDAVO, *Quodlibet IX*, q. 1, arg. 1: "Sed in Deo ad creaturam nulla est relatio secundum rem, sed secundum rationem tantum, quia aliter esset mutabilis aut

Moreover, even a neo-classical theism is committed to affirming God's transcendence to the world. Although Hartshorne affirms *dual* transcendence of God[19], he still affirms God's *transcendence;* although a relative nature is joined to God's absolute nature (and therefore God is at least in some respects mutable), this dipolar God remains transcendent to the dipolar creature. Hartshorne significantly calls his metaphysics a panentheism and not a pantheism. This is not the place to further elaborate the point, but I think one might argue that, on the basis of this diversity of nature, even Hartshorne's panentheism does not fully meet all the strict conditions for a real relation.

Of course, even if this were the case one might still argue that Hartshorne's panentheism better expresses the religious aspirations and expectations of modern humanity than Thomas' classical theism. One could take this to be, then, a sheer difference of cultural sensitivity. But I think one need not replace the logical relation for a real one in order to safeguard the religious significance of some of the divine names. One might argue as follows. Although a mother *really* loves her child and the child *really* loves its mother, the parental love is so different in kind from the childish love that a mutual love relation is excluded. In fact, the child by nature cannot give a parental love to its mother. So, then, there is a relation of love between the two and it is a *real* one, but it is also an *asymmetrical* and therefore a *non-mutual* one. Positing this, I think, does not decrease the religious value of divine names: God is a real father, *precisely* because the love with which He loves us is different in nature from the with which we love Him. Otherwise God would be equal to us and we would be equal to Him. Henry of Ghent may help us in further clarifying this point.

1.3. Henry of Ghent

Henry of Ghent disagrees with Thomas' description of God's relation to the world on at least three points: (1) the name 'Lord' is not a temporal name,

---

mutatus, cum de non domino factus est dominus, aut e converso si cessante omni creatura ab esse de domino factus esset non dominus" (ed. R. MACKEN, in Henrici de Gandavo Opera Omnia, vol. XIII, Leuven U.P., 1983, p. 3, 10-14). In his answer to the first argument (p. 6,63-18,81) Henry mentions mutability explicitly (p. 16-18) as the consequence of imperfection and limitation (p. 17,58-18,70).

[19] Cf. Ch. HARTSHORNE, *Creative Synthesis...*, ch. 11 and 13, p. 227-243 and 26274; Id., *Aquinas to Whitehead...*, p. 17-22, and *especially* p. 24-27, proving that the distinction of capitals and small letters in NC/nc (standing for the relation between God and world as process-thinkers view it: there is necessity (N/n) *and* contingency (Cc) in God (NC) as well as in creatures (nc)) is far from idle.

but a new name for an old respect existing in God from eternity; (2) God's relation to the world is logical, but not in the way the column's relation to the man is logical; (3) God's relation to the world is not caused by the world's relation to God, but rather the inverse is the case [20], in a sense to be further determined.

Let us elucidate these statements by first introducing Henry's classification of rational relations. In a rational relation the activity of the intellect can cause the relation either in both extremes (as in $a = a$, or in genus - species), or only in one of the extremes, which is ordered to another extreme in which a real relation inheres. In the latter case, there can be no ground at all in the extreme for its being ordered to that other extreme in which the real relation inheres, as in case of the spectator and the left or right column; or there can be some ground (*habilitas*) for its being directed toward (*habitudo*) that other extreme by an operation of the intellect — and this again in a twofold way. Either the real relation in the other extreme is first and is somehow the cause of the logical relation, as in case of the measure and the measured ('psychological' relation, Aristotle's third class); or the logical relation is first by nature and as if it were the cause of the real relation corresponding to it, as in case of God's eternal relations to the creatures [21].

Without repeating the technicalities of Henry's distinctions it is clear that he distinguishes at least between two types of logical relations on the basis of the presence or absence of a certain *habilitas* in the extreme for being connected (*habitudo*) with the other extreme by an operation of the intellect (a distinction which Thomas did not make); and that, furthermore, Henry adds a third subtype of logical relation, logically and naturally prior to its corresponding real relation (a subclass that is empty to Thomas and completely unknown to Aristotle). In accepting that there are eternal relations in God to the world that are ontologically and logically prior to the corresponding real relations of the world to God (3), Henry intimates that there is something in the very nature of God (*habilitas*) whereby He is essentially and eternally related to a possible world and to a possibly actual world in spite of His remaining outside the order of creation (2), in such a way that new names for these eternal relations become envisageable as temporal real relations of creatures to God come about or disappear (1). In other words — and this is the point we wish to highlight here — God is in no

---

[20] The third difference is certainly the most important one, as can be seen from the title of *Quodl. IX*, q. 1: "Utrum omnis relatio inter Deum et creaturam sit quia ipsa creatura refertur ad Deum, et non e converso".

[21] Cf. HENR. DE GAND., *Quodl. IV*, q. 1, ad 1^{m} (ed. R. Macken, p. 6,72-7,07).

way indifferent to creation: *being related to the world is constitutive of God's own essence insofar as its external activity is concerned.*

The basis of Henry's argument is Augustinian, and this should not surprise us because his whole metaphysics is largely Augustinian, or Augustino-Avicennian. But, Thomas Aquinas had also based his argument for temporal names on Augustine [22]. So Henry has to show where Thomas' interpretation of Augustine went awry. Henry's argument runs as follows.

Augustine is certainly right in maintaining that every essence that is said to be relative is also something on its own and to itself (*ad se*); a master could not be a master nor a slave a slave if both were not men in the first place. Similarly, a creature cannot be related to God (real dependence) if it is not something on and to itself in the first place. But a creature is something to itself, not by itself (*a se ipsa*) but only by something else (*ab altero*) from which it received its essence as well as its existence [23]. This implies that there is an *ordo naturae*, i.e. an order of ontological and natural priority and posteriority between God and creature. This order is established by the divine essence to itself [24], and is therefore a logical relation. Nevertheless it remains true that this (divine) logical relation of God's intellect to a possible and a possibly actual world is the ground and cause (*ratio causandi*) for any temporal real relation of the world to God, rather than that the latter would cause the former [25].

So, as the divine will from all eternity complies with the divine thinking and with the ideal reasons (*rationes ideales*) contained in the divine intellect, there is an *ordo habitudinalis* in God towards creating and God can be called creative (*creativus*) and the creature creatable (*creabilis*). As the divine will further decides from eternity and freely chooses among the possible essences which ones are going to be created, there is an *ordo actualis* in God towards future creating and God can be called 'going to create' (*creaturus*) and the creature 'going to be created' (*creanda*). As God actually causes the being of existence in things, He can be called Creator (*creator*) and the thing creature (*creatura*). In God, however, there is but one eternal relation (*respectus*), because His (act of) willing is eternal. The temporal creature, on the other hand, springs forth anew and thus causes new names for one and the same old determination of the divine will [26]. And this is exactly

---

[22] THOM. AQ., *Summa theol.*, Ia, q. 13, art. 7, arg. co.: "dicit Augustinus quod haec relativa appellatio 'Dominus' Deo convenit ex tempore" (ed. Leon., IV, p. 152b).

[23] Henry quotes here *I Cor.* IV,7: "Quid habes quod non accepisti?" (ed. R. Macken, p. 5,39).

[24] This point is further elaborated in *Quodl. IX*, q. 2.

[25] Cf. HENR. DE GAND., *Quodl. IX*, q. 1, sol. (ed. R. Macken, p. 4,30-6,57).

[26] Cf. *ibid.*, ad 1[m] (ed. R. Macken, p. 8,14-9,47).

how Augustine is to be interpreted: he is not talking about a temporal or a new relation, but about a relative and temporal name (*appellatio relativa ex tempore*) — of an old eternal relation, Henry intimates [27].

2. THE CAUSE OF THE DISAGREEMENT

In his answer to the second argument, stating that God's relation to the world is one of measure — measured in which God is related to the world only because the world is related to Him [28], Henry takes a step, possibly inspired by St. Thomas but also moving away from him in a decisive way. St. Thomas remarks, when commenting on the three sorts of relations in *Metaph.* V, c. 15, that this division is far from being at random — of course, since nothing is the result of coincidence to the sound scholar of Aristotle.

> "These senses are explained as follows: since a real relation consists in the bearing of one thing upon another, there must be as many relations of this kind as there are ways in which one thing can bear upon another. Now one thing bears upon another either in being, inasmuch as the being of one thing depends on another, and then we have the third sense; or according to active or passive power, inasmuch as one thing receives something from another or confers it upon the other, and then we have the second sense: or according as the quantity of one thing can be measured by another, and then we have the first sense" [29].

Henry agrees with Thomas in that there are as many sorts of relations as there are modes of being ordered towards something else. But he

---

[27] Cf. *ibid.* (ed. R. Macken, p. 10,59-14,65).

[28] Cf. *ibid.* (ed. R. Macken, p. 3,15-4,18; 18,82-86; 19,87-24,22).

[29] THOM. AQ., *In XII libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis expositio*, V, l. 17: "Ratio autem istorum modorum haec est. Cum enim relatio, quae est in rebus, consistat in ordine quodam unius rei ad aliam, oportet tot modis huiusmodi relationes esse, quot modis contingit unam rem ad aliam ordinari. Ordinatur autem una res ad aliam vel secundum esse, prout esse unius rei dependet ab alia, et sic est tertius modus; vel secundum virtutem activam et passivam, secundum quod una res ab alia recipit vel alteri confert aliquid, et sic est secundus modus; vel secundum quod quantitas unius rei potest mensurari per aliam, et sic est primus modus" (ed. M.-R. Cathala, Marietti, n. 1004, p. 266a-b); translation: St. THOMAS AQUINAS, *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, trsl. by John P. Rowan (*Library of Living Catholic Thought*), Chicago, Henry Regnery Company, 1961, vol. I, p. 384a.

disagrees with him on two points: in the description of the type of ordering [30] and in the description of the relation God - world [31].

First of all, since *ordo* between two beings implies a certain *dependentia*, or a relation of cause and effect, Henry interpretes the three sorts of relation as three sorts of causality. He takes relation based on quantity or quality as a proportionality between forms of things, hence as a relation between formal cause and effect. He connects active and passive power with efficient causality. He interpretes the measure — measured relation as a relation final cause — that which strives for the goal, because measure is one, perfect and complete, and that which contains within itself the patterns (*rationes*) of perfection and completion of all the rest [32].

Second, since according to Thomas God's relation to the world is an application of the relation of commensuration, the following should apply to God's relation to the world:

> "Hence they [in this specific case God] are not said to be relative because of something which pertains to them, such as quality, quantity, action or undergoing, as was the case in the foregoing relations, but only because of the action of other things, although these are not terminated in them (...). To see and to understand and actions of this kind ... remain in the things acting and do not pass over into those which are acted upon. Hence what is visible or what is knowable is not acted upon by being known or seen. And on this account these are not referred to other things but others to them. The same is true in all other cases in which something is said to be relative because something else is related to it, as right and left in the case of pillar" [33].

---

30 HENR. DE GAND., *Quodl. IX*, q. 1, ad. 2[m]: "Secundum Philosophum, V° Metaphysicae, cap° de relatione, tres sunt modi secundum triplex genus causae formalis, efficientis et finalis, ad quos omnes relationes habent reduci, et illae quae sunt secundum rem et illae quae sunt secundum rationem, sed Philosophus proponit eos in relationibus realibus" (ed. R. Macken, p. 18-87-19,92). Thus, all logical *and* all real relations should be reduced to one of these three kinds, although Aristotle deals with this threefold division under the heading 'real relations' only.

31 *Ibid.*: "Dicendum quod Deus non solum refertur ad creaturas secundum rationem commensurationis, sed etiam secundum rationem proportionis et secundum rationem actionis" (ed. R. Macken, p. 18,84-86).

32 Cf. *ibid.* (ed. R. Macken, p. 19,93-20,31).

33 THOM. AQ., *In Metaph.*, V, l. 17: "Unde non dicitur relative propter aliquid quod sit ex eorum parte, quod sit qualitas vel quantitas vel actio vel passio, sicut in praemissis relationibus accidebat; sed solum propter actiones aliorum, quae tamen in ipsa non

Henry is profoundly dissatisfied with such a description of the divine nature, in which no trace at all could be found of a possible or actual creation, to which the existence or non-existence of a creation makes no difference at all. For this picture, he substitutes a complex network of (logical) relations within the divine nature, to which the real relation of creatures to God is only corresponding.

Thus Henry divides the relation of proportion according to form (1) into a participation of form that is equal on both sides (1a), and a participation of form in which one form takes precedence over the other form; the latter can be the case in three ways: precedence in terms of intensity (1b: more/less white), of imitation (1c: exemplar/exemplatum) and of production (1d: producens/productum). This brings the number of modes of relations to six: 1a, 1b, 1c, 1d (numerical), 2 (causal), 3 (psychological). Within the divinity only 1a, 1c and 1d obtain. In the relation between God and world we find 1c and 1d (which is identical with 2 as far as the production of the being of existence is concerned) and 3; whereby 1c and 3 regard the essence, 1d/2 the existence of the creature [34].

Aristotle posited an eternal world and the so-called separated substances. He thought of them as necessarily existing (*necesse esse*) but not as necessarily caused by another (*necesse esse ab alio*). That is why he was not able to conceive of "any real relation of the others to the first unless in terms of the measure — measured relation only" [35]. Henry seems to be thinking that this is a very serious shortcoming of Aristotelian metaphysics. The Aristotelian metaphysics of relation is too poor to adequately describe

---

terminantur (...). Videre et intelligere et huiusmodi actiones ... manent in agentibus et non transeunt in res passas; unde visibile et intelligibile non patitur aliquid ex hoc quod intelligitur vel videtur. Et propter hoc non ipsamet referuntur ad alia, sed alia ad ipsa. Et simile est in omnibus aliis, in quibus relative aliquid dicitur propter relationem alterius ad ipsum, sicut dextrum et sinistrum in columna" (ed. Marietti, n. 1027, p. 269a); trsl., vol. II, p. 388a-b.

34 Cf. HENR. DE GAND., *ibid.* (ed. R. Macken, p. 20,32-22,74).

35 *Ibid.*: "Et ideo Philosophus ponendo mundum aeternum et illa quae sub Deo subsistunt secundum speciem in unico individuo, non esse ab alio productive vel formaliter, sed esse ex se formaliter, quaedam necesse esse, licet secundum formam inferioris gradus, nullam posuit relationem realem aliorum ad primum nisi forte secundum rationem mensurati tantummodo. Unde, si qui adhuc nituntur dicere quod nulla est relatio inter Deum et creaturam nisi secundum rationem mensurae, negant inter ipsos aliquem respectum secundum rationem causae efficientis et formalis exemplaris, et per consequens negant Deum se habere ad creaturas in triplici genere causae, quia non est genus causae in aliquo secundum quod non habetur habitudo et relatio inter ipsum et causatum" (ed. R. Macken, p. 22,75-86).

the complex relations between God and creature. Immediately after introducing the three modes of relation (numerical, causal, psychological) Henry remarks that Aristotle deals with them only in terms of real relations [36]. At least one of the types of the traditionally real numerical relation, i.e. 1c or the relation based on the proportionality of form between exemplar and exemplatum, can also be logical [37]. Furthermore, Henry's division of relations is more complex than Aristotle's. And finally he describes the relation God - world as threefold: 1c as the relation of the essence to its exemplary formal cause (formal), 3 as the relation of the essence in terms of quantity and degree of essence, i.e. as measured by its perfect ideal (final), and 1d or 2 as the relation of the existence to the divine will, source of the extramental existence of all beings; 1c is presupposed by 3, and 1c and 3 are presupposed by 2 [38].

In fact, I think, this brings us to core of Henry's criticism of Aristotle as well as to the heart of his own metaphysical system. Aristotle calls relation the weakest being of all categories (*ens debilissimum*) [39]. The first and proper and most adequate meaning of being is *esse per se*, the mode of being of substance [40]. Aristotle's metaphysics is a *metaphysics of substance*.

To Aristotle, beings are substances, composed of matter and form. Anything the being is or does is explained in terms of form (or act) and its self-realization, the actualization of its potentialities. The question of the cause of the form is answered by Aristotle by pointing to another being of the

---

36 Cf. *supra*, n. 30.

37 *Ibid.*: "Et sic ex parte intellectus secundum rationes ideales Deus habet relationem ad creaturas secundum primum modum relationis, sed secundum rationem tantum, quemadmodum in Deo idea est aliquid secundum rationem tantum" (ed. R. Macken, p. 23,95--98). One might wonder how a numerical relation can be not-real. In answering this question one has to take account of Henry's level of intentional reality. On the one hand divine ideas are objects of thought of the divine mind (logical relation). On the other hand divine thinking is creative and productive of the basic patterns of things; as objects of metaphysics these essences do possess a reality or an objectivity *sui generis* (a kind of real relation). The definition cannot help us much, since precisely in the case of God the operation of His intellect and will *are* His nature: *ibid.*: "Relatio vero secundum rem sive realis est (...) quae in re fundata est, et hoc praecise ex necessitate naturae ipsius super quam fundatur, absque omni consideratione aut opere intellectus vel voluntate circa ipsam ut iam praeexistentem" (ed. R. Macken, p. 14,70-73).

38 Cf. *ibid.* (ed. R. Macken, p. 23,95-24,22).

39 Cf. *ibid.*, q. 3 (ed. R. Macken, p. 46,20); Id., *Quaest. ordin.*, art. 32, q. 5 (ed. R. Macken, *Opera omnia,* vol. 27, p. 79.

40 Cf. *ibid.* (ed. R. Macken, p. 77,63-65).

same species, from which the former has received its form. Of course, eventually one must arrive at a First Unmoved Mover, for it is impossible to proceed infinitely. But all accounts largely remain *ontic* and *immanent* to the being as such. Insofar as a being is what it is, it contains in its nature, neither in its essence nor in its existence, no direct reference at all to a transcending ontological ground.

To the christian theologian, however, beings — and particularly humans — have been created in the image of God. Beings are not substances, they are first and foremost *creatures*. St. Bonaventure had interpreted the (platonic) form, i.e. the essence of the creature, as a sign of similitude with the divine nature (exemplarism). St. Thomas had interpreted the (Aristotelian - Thomistic) form, i.e. the act of being or existence of the creature, as an *analogon* of God. To Henry, God is not only a spiritual substance (as identity of essence and existence) but also dynamic activity. Or better: in being the form He is the latter, and vice versa. This is clear from God's inner self-constitution as three divine persons within one and the same divine nature. God is *substance* (divine nature) *and at the same time* (trinity of) *relations* (Father, Son, Holy Spirit). In being the former He is the latter and vice versa; and yet this does not introduce any duality in God. Substance and relations are one.

If the creature is truly an *imago Dei* it must be thought of as something self-subsistent (*aliquid ad se*), *and* at the same time as something connected with something else (*aliquid ad se ab alio*). And it must be thought in such a way that its subsistence is its relatedness and its relatedness its subsistence. That is why Henry attempts to think the (subsistence of the) creature, i.e. its existence as well as its essence, as the relations connecting it with its ontological ground. Those relations give subsistence to the creature: its being of essence as well as its being of existence. This is how Henry interpretes the saying: "form gives being" (*forma dat esse*).

The Aristotelian category 'relation' receives a considerable re-working in Henry's metaphysical thinking. *Respectus* or *relationes* do not supersede substance; rather they constitute its essence. And so, when defining all categories including substance in terms of their *res* (or nature) and their *ratio* or mode of being, Henry describes the *res* of a substance as a nature having its being from something else (*res quae habet esse ab alio = possibile = ens participatum*) and its *ratio* as the subsisting mode of being (*subsistere*) which is at the same time a participated being (*esse ab alio, esse participatum*). For a creature, being is being ordered, being ordered is being caused, and being caused is being related. Aristotle did say that "all things are ordered

together" [41], but as a pagan he failed and had to fail to draw the conclusion from this statement. Simplicius is the first to highlight the indispensable function of the category relation when one has to think the order in the universe [42]; and Henry elaborates the consequences of this thesis [43]. A metaphysical description of beings as creatures describes them as subsisting relations or related substances. *Respectus* and *relatio*, therefore, are key-notions for any truly christian metaphysics. To Henry, such a metaphysics must describe beings as creatures, i.e. as substances constituted by relations to their ontological ground.

---

41 Cf. ARIST., *Metaph.*, XII, c. 10 (1075a16).

42 Cf. SIMPLICIUS, *Commentaire sur les Catégories d'Aristote.* Traduction de Guillaume de Moerbeke. Edition critique par A. Pattin et W. Stuyven (*Corpus latinum commentariorum in Aristotelem graecorum*, V, 1-2), Paris-Louvain, Nauwelaerts, 1971, vol. I, c. 7; cf. Concetta LUNA, *La relation chez Simplicius*, p. 128-131.

43 Cf. HENR. DE GAND., *Quodl. IX*, q. 3 (ed. R. Macken, p. 48,44-49,69).