

Beauty, Mind, and the Universe

Alice Ramos

Although there is revived interest in the transcendentals and especially in the transcendentality of the beautiful, insufficient emphasis has been placed, in my opinion, on the role of the transcendentals in the second perfection of the universe.¹ Normally, when we read about the transcendentals, we are told that they are convertible with being: that insofar as something possesses actuality, that is, being or the first perfection, it possesses the transcendentals; and that although the transcendentals and being are really identical, they differ conceptually.

Now a recent study of the transcendentals in St. Thomas tells us that the originality of Thomas's doctrine of the transcendentals is its anthropological motif: the correlation of *anima* and being.² Being under the *ratio* of knowability and being under the *ratio* of appetibility are the formal objects of the spiritual faculties of the human soul. The *anima*, which "is in a sense all things," is thus open to all being, to all that is true and good.³ And because of this transcendental openness, man is not only *capax entis* but also *capax dei*. Thus, in addition to the anthropological motif of Thomas's doctrine, there is a theological motif and the two converge.⁴ The same study further notes that the doctrine of the transcendentals provides the meta-

¹ Among the more recent studies on the transcendentals may be cited: Jan Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy and the Transcendentals, The Case of Thomas Aquinas* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 1996). Jorge Gracia, ed. of the special issue of *Topoi* 11 (1992), devoted to "The Transcendentals in the Medieval Ages."

² Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy and the Transcendentals*, p. 430.

³ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* II, chap. 47 and III, chap. 112 (hereafter cited as *SCG*), and *De Veritate*, q. 2, a. 2. See also Josef Pieper, "The Truth of All Things," in *Living the Truth* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989).

⁴ Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy and the Transcendentals*, p. 431.

physical foundation for a theory of knowledge and a theory of human action;⁵ and that the connection between transcendentalism and morality is certainly one of the most interesting aspects of Thomas's doctrine.⁶ Now when attention is given to the difference between the transcendental and the moral good, between being good in a certain respect (*secundum quid*) and being good absolutely (*simpliciter*), the reason for the differentiation lies in the non-identity of a being's being and its activity. The absolute goodness of a thing is brought about by its activity, by its second act or perfection; only thus does a creature complete or perfect itself and thus attain to the fullness of its being.

When St. Thomas works out the fullness of being in terms of the fullness of perfection or the fullness of goodness with regard to both natural things and human actions, the relation to the end they depend upon is seen as essential. Since to know the end and the ordering of things and activities to the end pertains to intellect, intellectual creatures are necessary for the fullness of the perfection of the universe. The purpose of this paper will be first, to consider the order among the diverse things that compose the universe, which order is described as the "chief beauty in things,"⁷ and how this order is due to divine wisdom, since the divine mind does not give being in a haphazardly way, but rather gives things being with order;⁸ and second, given the differences in being of the creatures that compose the universe, of the parts that constitute the whole, which differences account for the various kinds of activity of beings, to consider the role of intellectual creatures in the second perfection of the universe and to see how the provident activity of men cooperates in giving the universe its final form and thus leads to a beautifying of being.

THE BEAUTY OF THE ORDER OF THE UNIVERSE AND ITS RELATION TO MIND

The order and intelligibility of the universe has been observed not only by medieval philosophers and theologians but also by contemporary scientists. In an article titled "So Finely Tuned a Universe," the physicist John Polkinghorne says: "When we look at the rational order and transparent beauty of the physical world, revealed through physical science, we see a

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ *SCG*, III, chap. 71.

⁸ *In De Divinis Nominibus*, chap. 7, lect. 4, n. 733 (hereafter cited as *In De Div. Nom.*).

world shot through with signs of mind. . . . [I]t is the mind of the Creator that is being discerned that way."⁹ According to Polkinghorne, the rationality of our minds and the rational order of the physical world have as their common origin "that deeper rationality which is the reason of the Creator."¹⁰ It is interesting to note that Polkinghorne should speak of the intelligible order and beauty of the universe in the same sentence. For Aquinas, the first actuality of things, their being, accounts for their intelligibility and their luminosity or radiance, the latter being a feature of the beautiful. Were it not for the radiance and intelligibility of being, things could not be known. There is, as it were, a "fit" which exists between the world and our minds. "Created things are [thus] resplendent with an intelligibility that is answered by the participated intellectual power of the created mind."¹¹ Within Aquinas's creationist framework, the beauty and intelligibility present in created beings is due to the creative mind of God, or simply, to the divine light, to the spiritual clarity of divine reason.¹²

Aquinas speaks of the divine mind as the mind of an artist; in fact, he sees the whole of nature as an artifact of the divine artistic mind. As the artist produces a determinate form in matter by reason of an idea, that is, the exemplar interiorly conceived in his mind, so also in God, whose nature is intellectual, does the likeness of His effects preexist in Him in an intelligible way. Since God is an intelligent and infinitely perfect agent, He conceives the plan of His work and there is thus in His intelligence the model or exemplar according to which He realizes His work. This exemplar, however, is nothing distinct from God: it is His very self, His essence; God knows all things by a sole form which is His very essence.¹³ The exemplar,

⁹ In *Commonweal*, 16 August 1996, p. 13. Concerning the beauty and the intelligibility of the universe, Polkinghorne notes: "Some of the most beautiful patterns thought up by the mathematicians are found actually to occur in the structure of the physical world. In other words, there is some deep-seated relationship between the reason within (the rationality of our minds—in this case mathematics) and the reason without (the rational order and structure of the physical world around us). The two fit together like a pair of gloves. That is a rather significant fact about the world, or so thought Einstein. Einstein once said: 'The only incomprehensible thing about the universe is that it is comprehensible.' Why, we should ask, are our minds so perfectly shaped to understand the deep patterns of the world around us?" (*ibid.*, p. 12). In my opinion, a reading of Aquinas's *SCG* makes comprehensible what Einstein terms "incomprehensible."

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Mark Jordan, "The Evidence of the Transcendentals and the Place of Beauty in Thomas Aquinas," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 29, no. 4 (December 1989), p. 402.

¹² See *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 36, a. 8, resp. (hereafter cited as *ST*).

¹³ *SCG* I, chap. 55.

which is one, gives rise to the multiplicity that we see in creation; it is reproduced, so to say, in partial, distinct, and multiple imitations which constitute the diversity of created beings that make up the universe. The variety of creatures in the universe is thus due to the first exemplary cause, which is none other than divine wisdom. As Aquinas puts it: "It is manifest that things made by nature receive determinate forms. This determinateness of forms must be reduced to the divine wisdom as its first principle, for divine wisdom devised the order of the universe, which order consists in a variety of things."¹⁴

Since God is the most perfect agent, He induces the form of His art, that is, His wisdom, His likeness, into created things in a perfect way as far as the effect will admit it. Simplicity and unity characterize the first cause, whereas its effects are composed and multiple. If all created things were of one degree, then God's likeness and His goodness could not be adequately represented. As we have mentioned above, an agent that acts by intellect reproduces the species of his intellect in the thing made, just as the artist by the form of his art produces his like. God made creatures as an agent by intellect. But since His intellect understands many things, it is not sufficiently reproduced in one creature only. Therefore, the divine intellect reproduces itself more perfectly if it produces creatures of varying degrees of being.¹⁵ Since no one creature could perfectly imitate divine goodness nor manifest divine wisdom, there was need for a variety of things in creation to thus better represent the divine goodness and wisdom from whence they originate. To further illustrate this point, St. Thomas compares the eminence of divine perfection present in God in a simple and unified way to a man's mental conception. Just as a man's thought is expressed adequately by various and multiple words, rather than by one spoken word only, God's perfect goodness is expressed in creatures through a plurality of things.¹⁶ The diversity of forms in things, by which they participate to a greater or lesser degree in being, thus allows for the representation of divine goodness and for the manifestation in varying degrees of the conception of the divine mind.

St. Thomas does not, however, emphasize only the variety of forms; relying on Aristotle and on Dionysius, he also points to the order and the continuity which exist among the forms, since the perfection of the universe cannot simply consist in mere diversity. Things that are too unlike one an-

¹⁴ *ST I*, q. 44, a. 3, resp.

¹⁵ *SCG II*, chap. 45.

¹⁶ *SCG III*, chap. 97.

other or too remote from one another do not tend to unite, and thus nature proceeds little by little from things that are lifeless to animal life, in a continuous, upward scale of ascent. And in this continuity of nature, what is impressive is the similarity that exists among neighboring kinds of beings: "The degrees of beings are continuous with one another according to some similitude: hence those things that are totally dissimilar follow one another in the order of things through some middle that has similitude with both of the extremes."¹⁷ This continuity is seen by St. Thomas as a contact among beings, which is brought about through the influence of the First Being on the varying levels of beings: "Orders of this kind, since they proceed from the one first principle, have a certain continuity with one another in such a way that the order of bodies touches on (*atingit*) the order of souls and the order of souls touches on the order of intellects, which touches on the divine order."¹⁸ The similarities which exist between like kinds of beings are due to the different orders of reality "touching on" one another. This contact allows something to pass from the higher order to the lower order, so that the lower has some part in what is only fully found in the higher. "Saint Thomas sees an indication of this in the fact that some animals, inferior to man, have something akin to reason, and some plants have something akin to a differentiation of sexes. Everything appears as if something 'rubbed off' on the inferior from the superior through this 'contact.'"¹⁹

For St. Thomas, the continuity in the order of the universe is due to God's wisdom, in the same way that order and diversity are due to His wisdom. Levels of beings are thus not independent of one another; they are not merely in sequence to one another, but there is a continuity and community among beings. Continuity is therefore inseparable from the very being of things, because things have being with order. If things in the universe were unconnected, without order, things would not be fittingly disposed. In the same way that disorder is not good for the individual, it is even worse for the universe as a whole. Aquinas states: "[B]eings do not wish to be badly disposed. The disposition of natural beings is such as to be the best possible. This we see in individuals, namely, that each is of the best disposition in its nature. Hence we should think that it is much more the case in the

¹⁷ *In De Causis*, lect. 31, n. 456. Cited in Oliva Blanchette, *The Perfection of the Universe According to Aquinas* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), p. 193. According to Blanchette, similitude is a notion associated with formal causality and is a norm for order. See pp. 191–202, which are on the principle of continuity.

¹⁸ *In De Causis*, lect. 19, n. 352.

¹⁹ Blanchette, *The Perfection of the Universe According to Aquinas*, p. 194.

whole universe."²⁰ The order of the universe is such that one level cannot be independent of the other, since all beings which proceed from the one first intelligent principle have a certain continuity with one another. According to Aquinas, the ordering of the parts to each other, which is what is meant by disposition, is what pertains to divine art: "[F]or things are said to be disposed in as much as they are put on different levels by God, who is like an artist arranging the different parts of his work in different ways."²¹ So, if the different degrees of being and of goodness were not present in creatures, then there would be no degrees of likeness to the first principle. And this would deprive things of their chief beauty.²²

Now harmony, another essential feature of the beautiful in addition to radiance, "is present in things by virtue of their ordering among themselves."²³ Had this order, this harmony, been missing in God's work, it would have been unbecoming and unfitting to the work of a perfect agent: "Supreme perfection should not be wanting to a work made by the supremely good workman. . . . The good of order among diverse things is better than any one of those things that are ordered taken by itself: for it is formal in respect to each, as the perfection of the whole in respect of the parts."²⁴ In attributing perfection to the whole, to the order of the universe, Aquinas once again, in my opinion, points to the best disposition of things, to their interconnectedness and continuity, and also to the beauty of the order, for perfection or integrity is also a condition of the beautiful. Without the good of order, God's work would have been impaired; it would not have been well disposed, as we said above. And so, Aquinas argues that "[t]he order of the universe . . . is the ultimate and noblest perfection in things."²⁵

It is evident that the unity of order in the universe is a unity in being, insofar as things come together due to a similitude in being; however, the unity of the universe may also be considered as "a unity of action between a diversity and a multiplicity of beings, a working together of all things toward their common final end."²⁶ One might therefore say that the order of being is for the sake of the order of activity. God produces being with

²⁰ *In XII Metaphysicorum*, lect. 12, n. 2662.

²¹ *De Veritate*, q. 5, a. 1, ad 9.

²² *SCG* III, chap. 71.

²³ *In De Div. Nom.*, chap. 4, p. 270. I am using here Vernon J. Bourke's translation of chap. 4, lect. 4–5 of the *Exposition of Dionysius on the Divine Names* found in *The Pocket Aquinas* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1960); page numbers are references to that translation.

²⁴ *SCG* II, chap. 45.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Blanchette, *The Perfection of the Universe According to Aquinas*, p. 198.

order so that beings may help each other in the order to the final end.²⁷ The continuity which exists between the parts of the universe is there for their harmonization under the Ruler of the universe. "And thus the beauty of the universe is worked out through 'one conspiracy of all things,' i.e., through concord and 'harmony,' i.e., through the necessary order and proportion."²⁸ The beauty which Aquinas is emphasizing here is not a static beauty, a mere property, so to speak, of being, but rather a dynamic understanding of beauty: a beauty of the universe that is to be realized. It is for this reason that there is in beings a diversity of activities which results from the diversity of forms. The ordering that exists among the parts, which we might call the first perfection of the universe, is for the sake of the second perfection of the universe, that is, for the ordering to the end—that end which is arrived at through activity. There is thus an initial beauty of the order of the universe, which is for an ulterior beauty. And I believe that this is confirmed by what St. Thomas says regarding the twofold ordering which is found in things, an ordering which involves the divine disposition of things and also divine providence, which is the ordering of things to their end:

First, there is that order according to which things come from their principles. Second, there is the order according to which they are directed to an end. Now, the divine disposing pertains to that order according to which things proceed from their principles; for things are said to be disposed inasmuch as they are put on different levels by God, who is like an artist arranging the different parts of his work in different ways. Consequently, disposition seems to pertain to art. Providence, however, implies the ordering which directs to an end; for this reason it differs from the divine art and disposition. For divine art is so called because of its relation to the production of things, but divine disposition is so called because of its relation to the order of what has already been produced. Providence, however, implies the ordination to an end. Now, we can gather from the end of an art product whatever exists in the thing itself. Moreover, the ordering of a thing to an end is more closely related to the end than is the ordering of its parts to each other. In fact, their ordering to an end is, in a sense, the cause of the ordering of the parts to each other. Consequently, divine providence is, in a sense, the cause of God's disposition of things, and for this reason an act of His disposition is sometimes attributed to His providence. Therefore, even if providence is not an art related to the production of things or a disposition related to the ordering of things one to another,

²⁷ *In De Div. Nom.*, chap. 7, lect. 4, n. 733.

²⁸ *Ibid.* See note 26.

it does not follow that providence does not belong to practical knowledge.²⁹

In the same way in which the disposition of things in the universe is due to the art of the divine mind, providence also belongs to knowledge. The harmony and usefulness which are found in nature at all times or at least the majority of times is not simply the result of chance, but rather is due to an intended end. When natural things which have no knowledge direct themselves to an end, they do so because divine knowledge has established an end for them and thus directs them to that end. For this reason, it has been said that every work of nature is the work of intelligence, that is, of the divine mind.³⁰ Furthermore, "[T]he world is ruled by the providence of that intellect which gave this order to nature; and we may compare the providence by which God rules the world to the domestic foresight by which a man rules his family, or to the political foresight by which a ruler governs a city or a kingdom, and directs the acts of others to a definite end."³¹ Were it not then for providence, for final causality, things in nature would not come together fittingly and well, that is, in a "good and orderly way."³² They would in addition lack the "mutual fit" which we observe in the works of nature, since they would be without the order to the end.³³

PROVIDENCE AND ORDER: THE ROLE OF INTELLECTUAL CREATURES

Providence, like causality, is found not only in God but also in creatures: there are some creatures, some parts of the universe, which through their proper activities, contribute to the order of the universe to the end. Creatures which are more like God, which participate more in His likeness and goodness, can also act for the goodness of other creatures. "Therefore the creature approaches more perfectly to God's likeness if it is not only good, but can also act for the goodness of other things, than if it were merely good in itself. . . . Now a creature would be unable to act for the goodness of another creature, unless in creatures there were plurality and inequality: because the agent is distinct from *and more noble* than the patient."³⁴ To

²⁹ *De Veritate*, q. 5, a. 1, ad 9.

³⁰ *De Veritate*, q. 5, a. 2, resp. As Aquinas puts it in the reply to the same question, since providence has to do with the direction of things to their end, "whoever denies final causality should also deny providence."

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.* See also Blanchette, *The Perfection of the Universe According to Aquinas*, p. 312.

³⁴ *SCG* II, chap. 45.

cause goodness as God does is one of the reasons why Aquinas insists that intellectual creatures are needed for the perfection of the universe. Intellectual creatures are like God in both nature and in activity. They can return to God by their very operation, by the act of the intellect and will. As Aquinas maintains: "The highest perfection of the universe requires that there should be some creatures in which the form of the divine intellect is reproduced according to an intelligible mode of being: and this means that there should be creatures of an intellectual nature."³⁵ Intellectual creatures are therefore necessary not only because in their goodness they represent the divine goodness, but because they can act in a way analogous to the way in which God acts, that is, for the goodness of others. They can, as a result, provide for others, care for them.

This is further explicated when Aquinas speaks of the relationship between order and providence and the manner through which divine providence is brought to perfection:

Suitable order is a proof of perfect providence, for order is the proper effect of providence. Now suitable order implies that nothing should be allowed to be out of order. Consequently, the perfection of divine providence requires that it should reduce the excess of certain things over others, to a suitable order. And this is done by allowing those who have less to benefit from the superabundance of others. Since then the perfection of the universe requires that some share more abundantly in the divine goodness . . . , the perfection of divine providence demands that the execution of the divine government be fulfilled by those things which have the larger share of divine goodness.³⁶

According to Aquinas, not only is order required for providence, but also the execution of order. The cognitive power is responsible for order: the greater the knowledge, the greater the capacity to order others; it is therefore proper to the wise man to order. On the other hand, the execution of order is the work of the operative power.³⁷ In executing the order, God acts by means of inferior powers, "as a universal and higher power through an inferior and particular power."³⁸ It is not unbecoming of God to execute His providence through the activities of secondary causes; on the contrary, it is in keeping with His dignity. "It belongs to the dignity of a ruler to have many ministers and various executors of his rule: because the greater the

³⁵ *SCG* II, chap. 46.

³⁶ *SCG* III, chap. 77.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.* See also *ST* I, q. 22, a. 3, resp.: "Two things belong to providence—namely, the type of the order of things foreordained towards an end; and the execution of this order, which is called government."

number of his subordinates of various degrees, the more complete and extensive is his dominion shown to be."³⁹ It is fitting therefore that the execution of divine providence be delegated to intermediary causes. And since of all creatures the highest is the intellectual, lower creatures are subject to and governed by the higher creatures, that is, by rational creatures, just as the highest creatures are subject to God and governed by Him.⁴⁰

Now rational creatures are able to execute the order of divine providence, because they share in the power of that providence: "While providence requires disposition of order which is effected by the cognitive faculty, and execution which is the work of the operative power, rational creatures have a share of both powers, whereas other creatures have only the latter."⁴¹ Intellectual creatures can therefore exercise providence for the perfection of the universe; they can contribute to the order of the universe to the end through their own intellectual and free activity. Aquinas is then saying that although things in the universe have been created in being, the universe is not closed to further perfection, and that it is precisely the intellectual creature who can best contribute to the final formation of the universe. This openness of the universe to human providence is expressed in the following: "If . . . in the production of things there are some secondary causes, their ends and their actions have to be in view of the end of the first cause, who is the final end. . . . The end of the final cause, however, is the distinction and order of the parts of the universe, which is like the ultimate form. Therefore, it is not the distinction in things and the order which is in view of the actions of the secondary causes: but rather the actions of the secondary causes are in view of constituting the order and distinction in things."⁴² As we stated before, the order of being is for the sake of the order of activity; it would seem, however, from the words just quoted of Aquinas, that a certain reversal has taken place, since Aquinas says that "the actions of the secondary causes are in view of constituting the order and the distinction in things."⁴³ The provident activity of intellectual creatures should therefore preserve and promote "the distinction and order of the parts of the universe, which is like the ultimate form."⁴⁴ If then "the ultimate form" of the universe is dependent to a certain extent on the providence exercised by intellectual creatures, we can then also say that the task of these secondary

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *SCG III*, chap. 78.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *SCG II*, chap. 42.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

causes is to beautify the universe, since form is said to be "a participation in the divine brilliance,"⁴⁵ and thus in divine beauty.

However, since man is free, he may or may not be a good provider; consequently, one might question how deficiency in human providence would bring about the final formation of the universe. Having created man free, however, God assumes, as it were, the risk of man's freedom, so that even from deficiency in human providence, he can and does bring about beauty and goodness.⁴⁶ Besides, to exclude from man the possibility of failing from goodness, would be to diminish his perfection; it would in fact be contrary to God's government if He did not allow man to act in accordance with his nature.⁴⁷ Aquinas expresses the difference between God's providence and the providence of creatures when he points to the relation between providence and the norm or end of the first provider:

[S]ince providence is concerned with directing to an end, it must take place with the end as its norm; and since the first provider is Himself the end of His providence, He has the norm of providence within Himself. Consequently, it is impossible that any of the failures in those things for which He provides should be due to Him; the failures in these things can be due only to the objects of His providence. Now, creatures to whom His providence has been communicated are not the ends of their own providence. They are directed to another end, namely, God. Hence, it is necessary that they draw the rectitude of their own providence from God's norm. Consequently, in the providence exercised by creatures failures may take place that are due, not only to the objects of their providence, but also to the providers themselves.⁴⁸

According to St. Thomas, the more a free creature adheres to the norm of the first provider, "the firmer will be the rectitude of his own providence."⁴⁹ Since the rational creature knows the reason of his action, laws were given by God to man so that he might be directed in his actions. A law is a reason or rule of action, and since the reason for an individual's action is his end, then the law guides man to his end, "even as the inferior craftsman is guided by the master-craftsman, and the soldier by the commander-in-chief."⁵⁰ And the end that God intends by His law, that is, "the chief in-

⁴⁵ *In De Div. Nom.*, chap. 4, p. 272. See note 23.

⁴⁶ *De Veritate*, q. 5, a. 5, ad 4.

⁴⁷ *SCG III*, chap. 71.

⁴⁸ *De Veritate*, q. 5, a. 5, resp.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *SCG III*, chap. 114.

tion of the divine law, is to lead men to God."⁵¹ God's governing providence thus sets before the rational creature a law or a rule to direct him to his end. Since man's end consists in adherence to God, the divine law directs man to union with God. Now man adheres to God by his intellect and his will. Although man's end is a contemplative one, he does not arrive at this end solely by his intellect. And so Aquinas states: "The adhesion of the intellect is completed by the adhesion of the will, because by his will man, as it were, rests in that which the intellect apprehends."⁵² And since the end of the law is to make men good, that is, more like God, "man is said to be good because he has a good will, whereby he brings into account whatever good is in him. Also, a will is good through willing the good, and above all the greatest good, which is the end. Therefore the more his will wills this good, so much the better is the man."⁵³

In addition, it must be said that the rational creature's proper activities are not only the apprehension or understanding of the truth by the intellect and the loving of the good by the will, but also the work of justice. In speaking of justice, Aquinas points to a twofold understanding of this virtue:

Since justice, by its nature, implies a certain rectitude of order, it may be taken in two ways:—First, inasmuch as it implies a right order in man's acts, and thus justice is placed amongst the virtues,—either as particular virtue, which directs a man's acts by regulating them in relation to his fellow-man,—or as legal justice, which directs a man's acts by regulating them in their relation to the common good of society. . . . Secondly, justice is so-called inasmuch as it implies a certain rectitude of order in the interior disposition of a man, in so far as what is highest in man is subject to God, and the inferior powers of the soul are subject to the superior, i.e., to reason. . . .⁵⁴

Now since the good of order existing in created things belongs to providence, and since justice, as was noted above, implies a certain rectitude of order, man will exercise providence well (that is, execute the order established by God, bring things to their end, by governing), if he is just. For this reason, Aquinas equates providence with the observance of justice and right order:

If [men] fail in their own providence they are called evil; but if they observe the demands of justice they are called good. . . . Now, men are

⁵¹ *SCG* III, chap. 115.

⁵² *SCG* III, chap. 116.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *ST* I-II, q. 113, a. 1, resp.

provided for in different ways according to the different ways they have of providing for themselves. For if they keep the right order in their own providence, God's providence in their regard will keep an ordering that is congruent with their human dignity; that is, nothing will happen to them that is not for their own good, and everything that happens to them will be to their own advantage. . . . However, if in their own providence men do not keep that order which is congruent with their dignity as rational creatures, but provide after the measure of brute animals, then God's providence will dispose of them according to the order that belongs to brutes, so that their good and evil acts will not be directed to their own profit but to the profit of others. . . . From this it is evident that God's providence governs the good in a higher way than it governs the evil. For, when the evil leave one order of providence, that is, by not doing the will of God, they fall into another order, an order in which the will of God is done to them.⁵⁵

In accordance with Aquinas's thought, it is evident that when man, through the power of his will, subjects his acts to the order of divine providence, he observes due order. However, when he prefers his own will to God's, "by gratifying it against the divine ordinance,"⁵⁶ he is being unjust, since he does not acknowledge his relation to the order established. In this way, he makes it necessary that God mete out justice to him, thus setting aright, as it were, the good of order.⁵⁷

It is important therefore that man be just, for it is precisely justice which rectifies man's deeds and his will. It is justice which enables man to do the good of reason, that is, to do the truth. For this reason, justice is likened to the truth; as Aquinas says: "Since the will is the rational appetite, when the rectitude of the reason which is called truth is imprinted on the will on account of its likeness to the reason, this imprint retains the name of truth; and hence it is that justice which sometimes goes by the name of truth."⁵⁸ Man is therefore just when his will realizes the good apprehended by the intellect, that is, the true good. "Among all the moral virtues it is justice

⁵⁵ *De Veritate*, q. 5, a. 7, resp.

⁵⁶ *SCG* III, chap. 140.

⁵⁷ "Since then human acts are subject to divine providence, even as natural things are: it follows that whatever evil occurs in human actions must be included in the order of some good. This is most fittingly done in the punishment of sins. For thus things that exceed in due quantity are included in the order of justice, which reduces them to equality. Now, man exceeds the mark of his quantity, when he prefers his own will to God's, by gratifying it against the divine ordinance. And this inequality is removed when against his will, man is compelled to suffer something according to the divine ordinance. Therefore, man's sins need to be punished by God; and for the same reason his good deeds will be rewarded" (*SCG* III, chap. 140).

⁵⁸ *ST* II-II, q. 58, a. 4, sed contra.

wherein the use of right reason appears chiefly . . . hence the undue use of reason appears chiefly in the vices opposed to justice."⁵⁹ Consequently, when the true human good is perverted, when order in things naturally human is disrupted, injustice reigns.⁶⁰ According to Aristotle, "Justice is the human good,"⁶¹ and to this may be added: "Justice simply means 'doing one's own work' and 'fulfilling one's own task.'"⁶²

Obviously, such a conception of justice is closely related to the secondary providence which is proper to rational creatures. When man exercises justice, both within himself, by ordering what is lowest in him to what is highest, to reason and to God, and also by ordering his relations with others, his just activity shapes the universe into its final form. When man is just by doing what he can, by fulfilling his own task, then he cooperates in and promotes divine providence. The intrinsic good, the final form or perfection, of the universe is thus brought about by the activity of rational creatures. St. Thomas affirms this of both angels and human beings: "Although the institution of nature, through which corporeal things are inclined to an end, is immediately by God, still their movement and action can be by the mediation of angels, just as the seminal ideas (*rationes seminales*) are in lower nature only from God but are helped along through the providence of the farmer so that they may come forth in act. Hence just as the farmer governs the sprouting of the field, so the administration of corporeal creation is done through angels."⁶³ Of course, we can imagine the farmer unjust, not doing his work, in the same way that we may know of politicians, professors, etc., who do not fulfill their own tasks. This is, however, the risk that God assumes in creating rational creatures; just as there is no necessity in God's creative activity, neither is there necessity in provident activity.

Thus, even though man can and does bring about disunity, falsehood, and evil when he does not adhere to the rectitude of order, it is consoling to think that the form of the universe, its order, its beauty will not be tarnished but heightened, just as a man's good will not be lessened by the evils in the world, "for his knowledge of the good is increased by comparison with evil, and through suffering evil his desire of doing good is kindled."⁶⁴ God

⁵⁹ *ST II-II*, q. 55, a. 8.

⁶⁰ Josef Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1966), p. 68.

⁶¹ *In V Ethicorum*, lect. 15, n. 1077.

⁶² Plotinus, *Enneads* I, 2, 6, quoted in Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, p. 68.

⁶³ *De Veritate*, q. 5, a. 8, ad 4.

⁶⁴ *SCG III*, chap. 71.

does not therefore entirely exclude evil, since ultimately in the wisdom of divine providence, it too has a role in the beauty of the universe:

The good of the whole is of more account than the good of the part. Therefore it belongs to a prudent governor to overlook a lack of goodness in a part, that there may be an increase of goodness in the whole: thus the builder hides the foundation of a house underground, that the whole house may stand firm. Now if evil were taken away from certain parts of the universe, the perfection of the universe would be much diminished: since its beauty results from the ordered unity of good and evil things, seeing that evil arises from the lack of good, and yet certain goods are occasioned from those very evils through the providence of the governor, even as the silent pause gives sweetness to the chant.⁶⁵

Good and evil, like the lights and shadows of a painting, like the front and back of a tapestry, will therefore contribute to the final form of the universe, to its final beauty.

⁶⁵ Ibid.