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# Aquinas on God's Relation to the World

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## Abstract

Aquinas' denial that God has a real relation with the world results in the difficulty of understanding how God creates, knows, wills, and loves the world without entering into a real relation with the world. Because of this perplexity, the contemporary philosopher William Lane Craig argues that Aquinas' doctrine is 'extraordinarily implausible.' After reviewing Aquinas' teaching in the *Summa theologiae*, I consider Craig's criticism and then attempt to defend Aquinas' teaching. In this defense, I consider Aquinas' teaching as heir to Aristotle, Lombard, and Augustine. I also look at Aquinas' teaching in relation to his discussions of the divine immutability, knowledge, will, and love.

## Keywords

Aquinas, God, Theology, Creation, Relation

Aquinas consistently teaches throughout his career that God creates, knows, and loves the world, yet, at the same time, that there is no real relation between God and the world. Taken together, these doctrines seem to contradict one another. How can God know and love that with which he has no real relation? Further, how can God create without being really related to his creation? Is not a cause really related to its effect? Does Aquinas teach that the universe is merely a divine byproduct of God of which God has no real knowledge?

In what follows, I examine Aquinas' denial of a real relation between God and the world in Aquinas' mature work, the *Summa theologiae*.[1] I then consider William Lane Craig's criticism of Aquinas

[1] Thomae de Aquino, *Summa theologiae*, 5 vols. (Ottawa: Instituti Studiorum Medievalium Ottaviensis, 1941). For an English translation, see: Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 5 vols., trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Bros., 1948).

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previously published in the *Laval théologique et philosophique*.[2] Finally, I respond to Craig's criticism in three ways. First, I observe that Aquinas' doctrine is not unique to Aquinas but derives from a received theological tradition, namely, the tradition of Augustine as mediated by Lombard. Second, I emphasize Aquinas' doctrine of the divine immutability as an important factor which informs his denial of a real relation between God and the world. Third, I consider Aquinas' doctrine of the divine knowledge, will, and love in order better to understand how God cares for the world without having a real relation to the world.

## I. Aquinas' Denial of a Real Relation between God and the World

In his response to the first negative answer to the question of *Summa theologiae* Ia q. 45 a. 3, Aquinas considers an argument which maintains that, when 'taken in an active manner,' the word 'creation' signifies the work of God, yet when 'taken in a passive manner,' the word 'creation' signifies a created entity.[3] The argument which Aquinas considers here denies that the word 'creation' taken in its active sense signifies anything 'in' God because then 'it would follow that in God there would be something temporal.'[4] On this basis, the argument contends that when the word 'creation' is taken in its passive sense,[5] the word signifies nothing positive existing 'in' a created entity.[6] What is important for the present discussion is Aquinas' response to this argument. Regarding the word 'creation' taken in its active sense, Aquinas agrees that, 'creation in its active meaning signifies the divine action, which is his essence with a relation to a creature.'[7] At the same time, Aquinas denies that this relation is something *really* 'in' God. He writes, 'the relation to a creature in God is not real, but it is according to reason only.'[8]

[2] William Lane Craig, 'Timelessness, Creation, and God's Real Relation to the World', *Laval théologique et philosophique* 56, no. 1 (2000), pp. 93–112.

[3] '*Sicut enim creatio passive accepta attribuitur creaturae, ita creatio active accepta attribuitur Creatori*.' Thomae de Aquino, *Summa theologiae*, Ia q. 45 a. 3 ob 1.

[4] '*Sed creatio active accepta non est aliquid in Creatore, quia si sic, sequeretur quod in Deo esset aliquid temporale*.' Thomae de Aquino, *Summa theologiae*, Ia q. 45 a. 3 ob 1.

[5] For further investigation into Aquinas' doctrine of the word 'creation' taken in its passive sense, see: Frederick D. Wilhelmsen, 'Creation as a Relation in Saint Thomas Aquinas', *The Modern Schoolman* 56 (1979), pp. 107–133.

[6] '*Ergo creatio passive accepta non est aliquid in creatura*.' Thomae de Aquino, *Summa theologiae*, Ia q. 45 a. 3 ob 1.

[7] '*creatio active significata significat actionem divinam, quae est eius essentia cum relatione ad creaturam*.' Thomae de Aquino, *Summa theologiae*, Ia q. 45 a. 3 ad 1.

[8] '*relatio in Deo ad creaturam non est realis, sed secundum rationem tantum*.' Thomae de Aquino, *Summa theologiae*, Ia q. 45 a. 3 ad 1.

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What does it mean for a relation to be 'according to reason only'? Aquinas treats this issue in his Trinitarian theology when considering whether there are real relations in God.[9] When explaining the nature of a relation *as such*, Aquinas states that, 'those things which are said with respect to something else signify a reference to another according to their proper *ratio*.'[10] Such a 'reference to another' may be physical, as when certain things 'are ordered to one another' in nature.[11] With respect to natural relations, Aquinas teaches that, 'it is proper for relations of this sort to be real.'[12] Alternatively, Aquinas teaches that a 'reference to another' may be 'only in the apprehension of reason comparing one thing to another, and then it is a relation of reason only, just as when reason compares man to animal as a species to a genus.'[13] As an example of a relation of reason, Aquinas considers 'sameness.' Regarding this example, he states that, 'a relation of this sort is not able to consist in anything except in a certain order which reason discovers . . . .'[14] The order of rational relations is not identical to the order of real natural relations.

In relation to this discussion, for Aquinas, creation is not a real relation between God and the world because the divine nature is not naturally or ontologically ordered to anything else. Rather, the relation of creation is something ascribed to God by human reason. As Anderson observes, such a relation is not real, but 'logical.'[15] Thus, to consider the divine essence as signified by the active meaning of the word 'creation' is, for Aquinas, a rational investigation. As he teaches in *De potentia*,

> creation is able to be taken in an active and passive manner. If it is taken in an active manner, in this way it signifies the action of God,

[9] '*utrum in Deo sint aliquae relationes reales*' Thomae de Aquino, *Summa theologiae*, Ia q. 28 a. 1.

[10] '*Ea vero quae dicuntur ad aliquid, significant secundum propriam rationem solum respectum ad aliud*.' Thomae de Aquino, *Summa theologiae*, Ia q. 28 a. 1.

[11] '*Qui quidem respectus aliquando est in ipsa natura rerum; utpote quando aliquae res secundum suam naturam ad invicem ordinatae sunt, et invicem inclinationem habent*.' Thomae de Aquino, *Summa theologiae*, Ia q. 28 a. 1.

[12] '*Et huiusmodi relationes oportet esse reales*.' Thomae de Aquino, *Summa theologiae*, Ia q. 28 a. 1.

[13] '*Aliquando vero respectus significatus per ea quae dicuntur ad aliquid, est tantum in ipsa apprehensione rationis conferentis unum alteri, et tunc est relatio rationis tantum; sicut cum comparat ratio hominem animali, ut speciem ad genus*.' Thomae de Aquino, *Summa theologiae*, Ia q. 28 a. 1.

[14] '*relatio quae importatur per hoc nomen idem, est relatio rationis tantum, si accipiatur simpliciter idem; quia huiusmodi relatio non potest consistere nisi in quodam ordine quem ratio adinvenit alicuius ad seipsum, secundum aliquas eius duas considerationes*.' Thomae de Aquino, *Summa theologiae*, Ia q. 28 a. 1 ad 2.

[15] '*Considered actively, creation designates the action of God, which is His essence, with a relation to the creature, a relation not real, of course, but logical*.' James F. Anderson, *The Cause of Being: The Philosophy of Creation in St. Thomas* (London: B. Herder, 1952), p. 38.

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> which is his essence, with a relation to a creature, which is not a real relation, but one according to reason only.[16]

Aquinas' doctrine arguably avoids two problems which arise from maintaining that creation is a real relation in God. The first problem concerns the eternity of God and arises from the observation that, if creation does signify something real in God, creation is therefore eternal just as God is eternal. The second problem concerns the temporality of creation and arises from the observation that, if creation signifies something real in God, by this fact something temporal is consequently imported into God. Both of these problems are avoided once creation is denied to be a real relation in God. Yet, while this relation is considered rationally with respect to God, according to Aquinas, the word 'creation' taken in its passive sense does indeed signify something *real* with respect to the created entity: 'the relation of a creature to God is a real relation . . . .'[17]

## II. Craig's Criticism of Aquinas

Aquinas' treatment of the first negative response to the question of *Summa theologiae* Ia q. 45 a. 3, namely, his affirmation that the word 'creation' does not signify a real relation in God, is controversial. The philosopher William Lane Craig rejects Aquinas' doctrine on this point. Craig writes: 'it seems inconceivable that God's causal relation to the world and the events/things in it could be regarded as anything other than a real relation.'[18] Craig has a strong reaction to Aquinas' denial of a real relation between God and the world, describing it as 'startling,' 'unusual,'[19] 'extraordinarily implausible,'[20] and 'quite incredible.'[21] By extension, Craig maintains that Aquinas' entire doctrine of creation as a whole is 'unusually strange'[22] and 'just not credible.'[23]

[16] '*creatio potest sumi active et passive. Si sumatur active, sic designat Dei actionem, quae est eius essentia, cum relatione ad creaturam; quae non est realis relatio, sed secundum rationem tantum*.' Thomae Aquinatis, *De potentia*, q. 3 a. 3, in *Quaestiones disputatae II*, ed. P. Bazzi, M. Calcaterra, T. S. Centi, E. Odetto, and P. M. Pession (Roma: Marietti, 1953). For an English translation, see: Aquinas, *On the Power of God*, trans. The English Dominican Fathers (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2004).

[17] '*Relatio vero creaturae ad Deum est relatio realis* . . . .' Thomae de Aquino, *Summa theologiae*, Ia q. 45 a. 3 ad 1.

[18] Craig, 'God's Real Relation', p. 94.

[19] Craig, 'God's Real Relation', p. 97.

[20] Craig, 'God's Real Relation', p. 98.

[21] Craig, 'God's Real Relation', p. 99.

[22] Craig, 'God's Real Relation', p. 109.

[23] Craig, 'God's Real Relation', p. 110.

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One concern of Craig is he believes that if Aquinas denies a real relation between God and the world, such a denial also rejects any real *causal* relation between God and the world, which is tantamount to stating that God's act of creation is not real or that there is no Creator. He writes,

> If the relation of some cause to its effect is unreal, then the cause has in particular no causal relation to its effect; that is to say, the cause is not a cause, which is self-contradictory . . . . In truth there is no real cause in such a case, only a real effect. But it seems unintelligible, if not contradictory, to say that one can have real effects without real causes. Yet this is precisely what Aquinas affirms with respect to God and the world. Words like 'First Cause' and 'Creator' are only extrinsic denominations applied to God, that is, predicates which do not correspond to any real property but which are appropriate in virtue of real properties in creatures . . . . Thomism denies that God is literally the cause of the world, though the world is the effect of God – which seems contradictory or meaningless.[24]

Craig does consider several reasons why Aquinas argues that creation is not a real relation in God.[25] These reasons are for the most part bound up, Craig maintains, with Aquinas' affirmation of the simplicity of God: 'this *prima facie* incredible position is rooted in Thomas's doctrine of divine simplicity . . . .'[26] The doctrine of the divine simplicity is, according to Craig, one of Aquinas' 'problematic notions.'[27]

For his part, Craig sees no difficulty in affirming composition in God. For example, he writes that, '*sustaining the world* ought to be regarded as a real property acquired by God at the moment of creation.'[28] God's *acquisition* of a new property indicates some kind of new composition in God. Craig contends that Aquinas' affirmation of the divine simplicity, on the other hand, requires that Aquinas reject a real relation between God and the world. Craig thus focuses his argumentation against Aquinas' affirmation of the divine simplicity. Craig's argument is that if one denies the simplicity of God, one will no longer need to reject a real relation between God and the world. He writes that, 'if God is not simple, then the ground is removed for any claim that God does not have real relations to the world, for that claim was anchored, as we saw, in the divine simplicity.'[29] One argument which Craig makes against the divine simplicity involves

[24] Craig, 'God's Real Relation', pp. 100–101.
[25] Craig, 'God's Real Relation', pp. 95–98.
[26] Craig, 'God's Real Relation', p. 95.
[27] Craig, 'God's Real Relation', p. 98.
[28] Craig, 'God's Real Relation', p. 99.
[29] Craig, 'God's Real Relation', p. 105.

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the contention that God's knowledge will change relative to different possible worlds. He writes:

> it is futile to try to allow God's consciousness to be different in various possible worlds without allowing that God is different in different possible worlds. But then God has contingent properties with which He is not identical, so that divine simplicity is destroyed. If we insist upon His simplicity, then God will have the same properties in every world with respect to willing, knowing, and loving as He does, so that the price of maintaining the divine simplicity is destroying divine freedom.[30]

This passage indicates that Craig rejects Aquinas' doctrine of the divine simplicity which he assumes to be the basis of Aquinas' denial of a real relation between God and the world.

The issue of temporality, like that of the divine simplicity, is also a component of Craig's critique. Whereas Aquinas seeks to avoid the implication that God is in any sense temporal, Craig discerns no problem with affirming some kind of temporality in God: 'even if God in creating the world does not change . . . He does acquire at the moment of creation a new relation property such as *sustaining the universe* . . . . Therefore, God must be in time, at least since the moment of creation.'[31] Neither does Craig desire to avoid affirming the mutability of God in some sense, inasmuch as Craig states in the passage considered above that a real relational property is something '*acquired* by God at the moment of creation.' Yet Craig argues that the topic of God's immutability is not relevant to the issue of affirming or denying a real relation of God to creation: 'the immutability of God's will, knowledge, and love in relation to creatures is thus wholly beside the point with respect to the question of God's real relation to the world. The issue is not intrinsic *change*, but intrinsic (counterfactual) *difference* . . . .'[32]

Craig's emphasis upon the "intrinsic difference" of God from possible world to possible world (such that different possible worlds entail different Gods) comprises a significant element of Craig's critique of Aquinas. Considering such counterfactual situations, Craig asks, 'if a world of other creatures were actual, would God's will, knowledge, and love relationships be different? If we affirm this, then God has different intrinsic properties from world to world and so real relations with the creatures willed, known, and loved by Him.'[33] For Aquinas, on the other hand, Craig states that God remains exactly the same from possible world to possible world: 'In all these worlds

[30] Craig, 'God's Real Relation', p. 104.
[31] Craig, 'God's Real Relation', p. 102.
[32] Craig, 'God's Real Relation', p. 107.
[33] Craig, 'God's Real Relation', p. 107.

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God never acts differently, He never cognizes differently, He never wills differently; He is just the simple, unrelated act of being.'[34]

As a simple act of being having no real relation to anything else, Aquinas' doctrine of God, according to Craig, offers no help for understanding the universe. On this point, Craig asserts that, 'Thomas's doctrine of creation makes it unintelligible why the universe exists rather than nothing,' since, for Aquinas, the divine nature and activity 'are perfectly similar in every possible world.'[35] In sum, Craig's ultimate evaluation of Aquinas' theology of creation is negative. He expresses his final conclusion in succinct terms: 'making the existence of the universe absurd results from Thomism, saying that God has no real relation to the world, but the world has a real relation to God.'[36]

## III. A Response to Craig

In defense of Aquinas *vis-à-vis* Craig's critique, I take up three topics. First, I consider whether Aquinas' teaching is unique when read in the context of received theological and philosophical traditions. Second, I examine the relevance of the issue of the divine immutability in relation to Aquinas' denial of a real relation between God and the world. Third, I treat the issue of how God can create, know, will, and love the world without having a real relation to the world. I do not employ Craig's method of using counterfactual examples or engage his arguments concerning possible worlds, since this approach is to a certain extent foreign to the idiom of Thomistic thought.

### *(A) Aquinas in the Context of Tradition*

My first concern involves how, if one rejects Aquinas' denial of real relation between God and the world, one also is able to avoid rejecting the authorities Aquinas utilizes in his arguments. Such a concern is important for one who recognizes that Aquinas' teaching is informed by a broader intellectual tradition. I will illustrate this concern by considering two works of Aquinas, the *Summa contra gentiles* and *De potentia*. In the *Summa contra gentiles*, one means by which Aquinas supports his denial of a real relation between God and the world is to appeal to a judgment of Aristotle regarding kinds of relations which is found in book five of the *Metaphysica*. When Aristotle parses the various meanings of the word 'relation'

[34] Craig, 'God's Real Relation', p. 109.
[35] Craig, 'God's Real Relation', p. 110.
[36] Craig, 'God's Real Relation', p. 111.

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in chapter fifteen of this book, Aquinas observes that according to the third meaning of the word, Aristotle teaches that, 'something is said to be "relative" from this alone, that something is referred to it, just as it is clear that the sensible and knowable or intelligible are said to be relative, because other things are referred to them.'[37] Aquinas observes a little later that with respect to this third meaning of relative things, 'these things are not referred to other things, but rather the other things are referred to them.'[38]

Aquinas appropriates this third meaning of 'relation' from Aristotle to argue that there is no real relation between God and created things. He also appropriates Aristotle's example of 'the knowable' as discussed just above. He writes in the *Summa contra gentiles* that God 'is compared to other entities as the knowable is compared to our knowledge . . . . The knowable is said to be relative to the knowledge, yet the relation is not in the knowable according to reality, but only in the knowledge.'[39] There is not a real relation between the knowable and the knowledge of a knower. But there is a real relation between the knowledge of the knower and the knowable. In the same way, there is not a real relation between God and the creature. But there is a real relation between the creature and God. In his use of Aristotle on this point, Aquinas' doctrine of creation is thus in continuity with the Peripatetic philosophical affirmation that there is a kind of relation which may be real when considered with regard to its *terminus ad quem*, but not real when considered with regard to its *terminus a quo*.

In *De potentia*, Aquinas makes the same argument and again appeals to Aristotle's discussion of this third meaning of the word 'relation' as found in book five of the *Metaphysica*. It is apparent also in this passage that Aquinas is teaching not only in continuity with Aristotle but also with Lombard's *Sententiarum libri quatuor*. In the *De potentia* passage, Aquinas writes,

[37] '*hoc tertio modo aliquid dicitur relative ex eo solum, quod aliquid refertur ad ipsum; sicut patet, quod sensibile et scibile vel intelligibile dicuntur relative, quia alia referuntur ad illa*.' Thomae Aquinatis, *In metaphysicam Aristotelis commentaria*, Liber V, Lectio XVII, §1026, ed. M. R. Cathala (Torino, Italy: Marietti, 1926). For an English translation, see: Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics*, trans. John P. Rowan (Notre Dame, IN: Dumb Ox Books, 1995).

[38] '*Et propter hoc non ipsamet referuntur ad alia, sed alia ad ipsa*.' Thomae Aquinatis, *In metaphysicam*, Liber V, Lectio XVII, §1027.

[39] '*Comparatur igitur Deus ad alia entia sicut scibile ad scientiam nostram . . . . Scibile autem licet ad scientiam relative dicatur, tamen relatio secundum rem in scibili non est, sed in scientia tantum . . . .*' Thomae Aquinatis, *Liber de veritate catholicae fidei contra errores infidelium seu summa contra gentiles*, 3 vols., II, Cap. XII, §914, edited by Ceslai Pera (Rome: Marietti, 1961). For an English translation, see: Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles, Book Two: Creation*, trans. James F. Anderson (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975).

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> in all things which are referred to one another in some respect, of which one depends upon another and not the converse, in the one which depends upon the other there is found a real relation, but in the other there is a relation according to reason only, as is clear from knowledge and the knowable, as the Philosopher says. A creature, moreover, is referred according to name to the Creator. The creature depends upon the Creator, yet not the converse. Thus, it is proper that the relation by which the creature is referred to the Creator be real, but in God there is a relation according to reason only. And this the Master expressly says in the first book of the *Sentences*, distinction thirty.[40]

If one considers Aquinas' final reference to 'the Master' in this passage, one realizes that Aquinas' denial of a real relation between God and the world reiterates a traditional theological judgment.

One familiar with Lombard's work might observe that he often proceeds by providing long extracts from the writings of the ancient Christian Fathers, especially Augustine. The particular passage of Lombard to which Aquinas refers his reader in *De potentia* is no exception. In distinction thirty of the first book of the *Sententiarum libri*, Lombard quotes Augustine's *De trinitate* at length regarding the meaning of the temporal names ascribed to God.[41] In chapter sixteen of book five of *De trinitate*, as quoted by Lombard, Augustine states that,

> That which God begins to be called temporally which was not said previously is clearly said in a relative manner, yet not as an accident of God as something which may have happened to him, but clearly according to an accident of that thing to which God begins to be called relative.[42]

Thus, for Augustine, when God is given a temporal name, such a name signifies no new accident inhering in God. Rather, the name signifies God insofar as there is a relation of the creature to God.

[40] '*in omnibus quae secundum respectum ad invicem referuntur, quorum unum ab altero dependet, et non e converso, in eo quod ab altero dependet, relatio realiter invenitur, in altero vero secundum rationem tantum; sicut patet in scientia et scibili, ut dicit Philosophus [in V Metaph., text 20]. Creatura autem secundum nomen refertur ad creatorem. Dependet autem creatura a creatore, et non e converso. Unde oportet quod relatio qua creatura ad creatorem refertur, sit realis; sed in Deo est relatio secundum rationem tantum. Et hoc expresse dicit Magister in I Sent. distinct. 30*.' Thomae Aquinatis, *De potentia*, q. 3 a. 3.

[41] See: Petrus Lombardus, *Sententiarum libri quatuor*, I, Distinctio XXX, in *Patrologiae cursus completus, series latina, tomus 192*, ed. J. P. Migne (Paris: J. P. Migne, 1855), 602–603. For an English translation, see: Peter Lombard, *The Sentences: Book 1, The Mystery of the Trinity*, Distinction XXX, trans. Giulio Silano (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2007), pp. 162–165.

[42] '*Quid ergo temporaliter dici incipit Deus quod antea non dicebatur, manifestum est relative dici; non tamen accidens Dei, quod aliquid ei acciderit, sed plane secundum accidens ejus ad quod dici aliquid Deus incipit relative*.' Lombardus *Sententiarum* (Migne *PL* 192.603).

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In the selection of the *Sententiarum libri* which Aquinas cites, Lombard discusses the name 'Creator' in this doctrinal context. Lombard writes, 'Augustine, in book five of *De trinitate*, chapter thirteen, says, "Creator is said relative to creature, just as a master to a slave."'[43] The name 'Creator' is a particular kind of relative temporal name.

In light of the Augustinian texts which he cites, Lombard underscores the judgment that when temporal names are applied to God which involve a relation from creatures, no change can be affirmed to have occurred on the part of God. Lombard's teaching pertains to signifying God by means of the name 'Creator.' He writes,

> From these things it is openly shown that certain things are said about God in a temporal manner relative to creatures without change on the part of the deity, but not without a change on the part of the creature, and in this way such is an accident in the creature yet not in the Creator. And the name by which a creature is said to be relative is relative to the Creator, and it signifies a relation which is in the creature itself. However, the name by which the Creator is said to be relative to the creature is indeed relative, but it signifies no relation which comes to be in the Creator.[44]

In other words, while the word 'creation' signifies a relation in God (it 'is indeed relative,' as Lombard says), that which is signified does not imply a change on the part of God. Lombard thus denies that any new relation comes to exist in God when God is named 'Creator' relative to the inception of a temporal cosmos. This conclusion is reached arguably on the basis of, first, the divine immutability, and second, belief in the ecclesial doctrine of creation as temporally *ex nihilo*.

As to be expected, Aquinas encounters Lombard's doctrine when writing the *Scriptum super libros sententiarum*. It is evident (especially in the third article which Aquinas writes for distinction thirty, where he directly addresses the issue of God named in relation to the world) that in this matter Aquinas is developing these Augustinian and Lombardian teachings with the help of Aristotle. In the *Scriptum super libros sententiarum*, Aquinas writes that, 'according to theologians and philosophers, it is commonly held to be true that relations which refer God to the creature are not in God according to reality,

[43] '*Aug., in l.5 de Trin., c. 13, ait: Creator relative dicitur ad creaturam, sicut Dominus ad servum.*' Lombardus *Sententiarum* (Migne *PL* 192.602).

[44] '*Ex his aperte ostenditur quod quaedam de Deo temporaliter dicuntur relative ad creaturas sine mutatione deitatis, sed non sine mutatione creaturae; et ita accidens est in creatura, non in Creatore; et appellatio qua creatura dicitur relative, ad Creatorem relativa est, et relationem notat quae est in ipsa creatura. Appellatio vero illa qua Creator relative dicitur ad creaturam, relativa quidem est, sed nullam notat relationem quae fit in Creatore*.' Lombardus *Sententiarum* (Migne *PL* 192.603).

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but only according to reason . . . .'[45] Aquinas' reference to 'theologians and philosophers' in this passage arguably signifies Lombard, as well as Aristotle and Augustine. One may argue, therefore, that Aquinas' rejection of a real relation between God and the world has an Augustinian foundation as well as an Aristotelian one, and certainly a Lombardian one. In this way, to disagree with Aquinas on this issue entails not only rejecting Aquinas' teaching but also breaking with the theological tradition of Augustine as mediated by Lombard. In light of the historical importance of Lombard's work, I cannot agree with Craig that Aquinas' denial of a real relation between God and the world is somehow 'unusual' or 'strange.'

## *(B) The Divine Immutability*

I turn now to Craig's dismissal of the issue of the divine immutability. I find that the topic of the divine immutability is very important for understanding Aquinas' denial of a real relation between God and the world. With respect to this topic, I will examine the *Summa contra gentiles*. There, Aquinas states that relations cannot really exist in God, neither as accidents (since there are no accidents in God) nor as the divine substance itself (since such a state of affairs would necessarily refer the divine substance to something else).[46] If the latter were true, Aquinas argues that,

> it would therefore be proper that the substance of God would be dependent upon something extrinsic. And thus he would not be 'necessary existence' through himself . . . . Relations of this sort are thus not real in God.[47]

What Aquinas is rejecting in this passage is that God is related to anything outside of God which would perfect God in some way. Further, he emphasizes that relations which are affirmed of God should be considered only rational since they are newly ascribed to God at a certain time. For example, when a new creature begins to exist, God becomes newly named 'Lord' and 'Governor' in relation

[45] '*secundum theologos et philosophos verum est communiter, quod relationes quibus Deus ad creaturam refertur, non sunt in Deo secundum rem, sed secundum rationem tantum* . . . .' Thomae Aquinatis, *Scriptum super libros sententiarum*, I, d.30 q. 1 a. 3, ed. R. P. Mandonnet (Paris: P. Lethielleux, Editoris, 1929).

[46] '*Non enim in eo esse possent sicut accidentia in subiecto: cum in ipso nullum sit accidens* . . . . *Nec etiam possent esse ipsa Dei substantia. Cum enim relativa sint 'quae secundum suum esse ad aliud quodammodo se habent,' ut Philosophus dicit in Praedicamentis, oporteret quod Dei substantia hoc ipsum quod est ad aliud diceretur*.' Thomae Aquinatis, *Summa contra gentiles*, II, Cap. XII, §913.

[47] '*Oporteret igitur quod Dei substantia ab alio extrinseco esset dependens. Et sic non esset per seipsum «necesse-esse»* . . . *Non sunt igitur huiusmodi relationes secundum rem in Deo*.' Thomae Aquinatis, *Summa contra gentiles*, II, Cap. XII, §913.

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to that created entity.[48] To these examples one might add the example of God as newly named 'Creator.' If such new relations are something real in God, then God would change when these new relations are predicated of God. If this occurs, according to Aquinas, God 'is changed either in himself or by accident.'[49]

Since God does not change, Aquinas contends that these newly accruing relations must begin to exist as rational relations only. He writes, 'they are attributed to him only according to the mode of intelligence . . . .'[50] Importantly, Aquinas teaches in this passage that while rational relations exist in human intelligence only, this does not mean that these relations are *falsely* ascribed to God. He argues that such rational relations are truly able to be attributed to God in light of how God's effects relate to God and terminate in God.[51] In sum, while Aquinas in this passage does relate his denial of a real relation between God and the world to the divine simplicity (he writes, 'it is clear also from this that the divine simplicity is not taken away if multiple relations are predicated of it'[52]), the selection also illustrates the relevance and importance of the divine immutability for understanding his teaching. As McCabe argues, there is no real relation between God and the world for Aquinas because God's act of creating adds nothing new to God nor fulfills God in any way.[53] God does not change.

### *(C) The Divine Knowledge, Will, and Love*

When Craig evaluates the assertion that, 'God knows, wills, and loves the world,' he remarks that, 'this is precisely what Aquinas's doctrine of no real relation of God to the world denies.'[54] In response, I will examine Aquinas' teachings regarding the knowledge, will, and love of God. Regarding the knowledge of God, Aquinas takes this issue up

[48] '*Relationes autem quaedam de novo dicuntur de Deo: sicut quod est Dominus aut gubernator huius rei quae de novo incipit esse*.' Thomae Aquinatis, *Summa contra gentiles*, II, Cap. XII, §916.

[49] '*Si igitur praedicaretur aliqua relatio realiter in Deo existens, sequeretur quod aliquid Deo de novo adveniret, et sic quod mutaretur vel per se vel per accidens*.' Thomae Aquinatis, *Summa contra gentiles*, II, Cap. XII, §916.

[50] '*attribuantur solum secundum intelligentiae modum . . . .*' Thomae Aquinatis, *Summa contra gentiles*, II, Cap. XIII et XIV, §919.

[51] '*Nec tamen intellectus est falsus. Ex hoc enim ipso quod intellectus noster intelligit relationes divinorum effectuum terminari in ipsum Deum, aliqua praedicat relative de ipso . . . .*' Thomae Aquinatis, *Summa contra gentiles*, II, Cap. XIII et XIV, §920.

[52] '*Patet etiam ex his quod divinae simplicitati non derogat si multae relationes de ipso dicuntur . . . .*' Thomae Aquinatis, *Summa contra gentiles*, II, Cap. XIII et XIV, §921.

[53] See: Herbert McCabe, *God Matters: Contemporary Christian Insights* (New York: Continuum, 2005), 45.

[54] Craig, 'God's Real Relation', p. 108.

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in question fourteen of the *Summa theologiae*. In article five, Aquinas asks the question 'whether God knows things other than himself.'[55] He teaches in this article that, 'it is necessary for God to know other things than himself.'[56] His argument to support this claim asserts that the power of God *qua* first cause 'extends to other things' which are not God and therefore God's knowledge must also extend to other things, since 'the existence itself of the first agent cause, namely of God, is his understanding.'[57] Aquinas restates this in a very lucid manner in a later article: 'since God is the cause of things through his own knowledge . . . the knowledge of God extends as far as his causality extends.'[58] For Aquinas, God knows that which is imperfect by means of that which is perfect, not only in a common manner, but also properly.[59] This means that God's knowledge extends even to individual material things, since God's power extends not only to form but also to matter.[60]

When Aquinas teaches that God knows the imperfect via the perfect, he means that God knows created things via God's own self. Aquinas writes that, 'the essence of God has in itself whatever the essence of any other thing has of perfection, and more still, God in himself is able to know all things by a proper knowledge.'[61] Knowing creatures via the medium of himself, God is not directly related to less perfect created entities so to be perfected thereby (as is the case, for example, when a human knower is perfected by something known). Further, according to Aquinas, God's knowing is not inferior because it is indirect. Rather, it is *more* perfect. He states that, 'God not only knows a thing as it exists in himself, but through that thing which he contains in himself, he knows things in their proper nature, and so much more perfectly does he know those things in

[55] '*Utrum Deus cognoscat alia a se*.' Thomae de Aquino, *Summa theologiae*, Ia q. 14 a. 5.

[56] '*necesse est Deum cognoscere alia a se*.' Thomae de Aquino, *Summa theologiae*, Ia q. 14 a. 5.

[57] '*Unde cum virtus divina se extendat ad alia, eo quod ipsa est prima causa effectiva omnium entium . . . necesse est quod Deus alia a se cognoscat. – Et hoc etiam evidentius fit, si adiungatur quod ipsum esse causae agentis primae, scilicet Dei, est eius intelligere*.' Thomae de Aquino, *Summa theologiae*, Ia q. 14 a. 5.

[58] '*cum Deus sit causa rerum per suam scientiam . . . intantum se extendit scientia Dei, inquantum se extendit eius causalitas*.' Thomae de Aquino, *Summa theologiae*, Ia q. 14 a. 11.

[59] '*Manifestum est autem quod per actum perfectum cognosci possunt actus imperfecti non solum in communi, sed etiam propria cognitione*.' Thomae de Aquino, *Summa theologiae*, Ia q. 14 a. 6.

[60] '*Unde, cum virtus activa Dei se extendat non solum ad formas . . . sed etiam usque ad materiam . . . necesse est quod scientia Dei usque ad singularia se extendat, quae per materiam individuantur*.' Thomae de Aquino, *Summa theologiae*, Ia q. 14 a. 11.

[61] '*Sic igitur cum essentia Dei habeat in se quidquid perfectionis habet essentia cuiuscumque rei alterius, et adhuc amplius, Deus in seipso potest omnia propria cognitione cognoscere*.' Thomae de Aquino, *Summa theologiae*, Ia q. 14 a. 6.

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their proper nature, ever how much more perfectly a thing is as it exists in him.'[62] God thus knows creatures by knowing creatures in himself. Yet there is no real relation of God to creatures *in rerum natura*.

Aquinas makes an important reference to the knowledge of God when he takes up Augustine's doctrine of the knowledge of angels in question fifty-eight of the first part of the *Summa theologiae*. In article six of question fifty-eight, Aquinas addresses the question 'whether there is morning and evening knowledge in angels.'[63] When answering the question affirmatively, Aquinas explains the difference between the two kinds of knowledge in an angel. He writes that an angel's

> knowledge of the primordial existence of things is called 'morning knowledge,' and this is according to that which things are in the Word. His knowledge, however, of the existence of a created thing according to that which consists in its proper nature is called 'evening knowledge.'[64]

The angelic knowledge thus has two alternative termini, either in God or in nature. These termini are named 'morning knowledge' and 'evening knowledge,' respectively.

In article seven of question fifty-eight, Aquinas considers the question 'whether morning and evening knowledge are one,' that is, whether the two kinds of angelic knowledge are ultimately the same.[65] To answer this question, Aquinas focuses upon angelic evening knowledge. With respect to evening knowledge, that is, the knowledge involved when angels 'know the existence of things which those things have in their proper nature,'[66] Aquinas states that, 'they know this through a twofold medium, namely, through innate species and through the *rationes* of things existing in the Word.'[67] Regarding how this is so in the latter case, Aquinas explains that,

[62] '*Deus non solum cognoscit res esse in seipso; sed per id quod in seipso continet res, cognoscit eas in propria natura; et tanto perfectius, quanto perfectius est unumquodque in ipso*.' Thomae de Aquino, *Summa theologiae*, Ia q. 14 a. 6 ad 1.

[63] '*Utrum in angelis sit cognitio matutina et vespertina*' Thomae de Aquino, *Summa theologiae*, Ia q. 58 a. 6.

[64] '*cognitio ipsius primordialis esse rerum dicitur cognitio matutina; et haec est secundum quod res sunt in Verbo. Cognitio autem ipsius esse rei creatae secundum quod in propria natura consistit, dicitur cognitio vespertina* . . . .' Thomae de Aquino, *Summa theologiae*, Ia q. 58 a. 6.

[65] '*Utrum una sit cognitio matutina et vespertina*' Thomae de Aquino, *Summa theologiae*, Ia q. 58 a. 7.

[66] '*cognitio vespertina in angelis dicatur secundum quod cognoscunt esse rerum quod habent res in propria natura*.' Thomae de Aquino, *Summa theologiae*, Ia q. 58 a. 7.

[67] '*Quod quidem per duplex medium cognoscunt, scilicet per species innatas, et per rationes rerum in Verbo existentes*.' Thomae de Aquino, *Summa theologiae*, Ia q. 58 a. 7.

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> Seeing the Word, they know not only the existence of things which things have in the Word, but also that existence which things have in their proper nature, just as God, through this, that he sees himself, knows the existence of things which things have in their proper nature.[68]

The last claim which Aquinas makes here is important for his doctrine regarding God's relation to the world. With respect to both God and angels, Aquinas states not only that the divine *ratio* is what is primarily known, but also that God and the angels are able to know the existence which a created thing has in its own proper nature via this divine *ratio*. Knowledge via a divine *ratio* grasps what is imperfect by means of what is perfect. God thus knows creatures in himself in a manner more perfect than if the divine knowledge had a real relation to creatures.

The knowledge of God is connected to the will of God. According to Aquinas, God is efficacious in what he deems to realize, insofar as the divine will is added to the act of divine knowing.[69] Regarding the will of God, Aquinas takes up this topic in question nineteen of the *Summa theologiae*. Just as God knows creatures by knowing himself, so does God will certain things by willing his own goodness. Aquinas maintains that, 'the object of the divine will is his own goodness, which is his essence.'[70] He teaches that God wills many things when willing the simple unity of his own goodness, just as the divine intellect knows many things in the simple unity of the divine essence.[71] In willing himself and his own goodness, God also wills created entities to exist and to partake of his goodness. As Aquinas says, 'he wills both himself to exist and other things to exist, yet himself as the end, and other things as ordered to that end.'[72] God wills natural goods for creatures when willing his own good. Yet here again, one cannot affirm that there is a real relation of God to creatures *in rerum natura*. The divine act of willing is primarily directed toward God's own self *qua* end, whereupon good is willed

[68] '*Non enim, vivendo Verbum, cognoscunt solum illud esse rerum quod habent in Verbo, sed illud esse quod habent in propria natura; sicut Deus per hoc quod videt se, cognoscit esse rerum quod habent in propria natura*.' Thomae de Aquino, *Summa theologiae*, Ia q. 58 a. 7.

[69] '*Deus per intellectum suum causat res, cum suum esse sit suum intelligere. Unde necesse est quod sua scientia sit causa rerum, secundum quod habet voluntatem coniunctam*.' Thomae de Aquino, *Summa theologiae*, Ia q. 14 a. 8.

[70] '*obiectum divinae voluntatis est bonitas sua, quae est eius essentia*.' Thomae de Aquino, *Summa theologiae*, Ia q. 19 a. 1 ad 3.

[71] '*sicut intelligere divinum est unum, quia multa non videt nisi in uno; ita velle divinum est unum et simplex, quia multa non vult nisi per unum, quod est bonitas sua*.' Thomae de Aquino, *Summa theologiae*, Ia q. 19 a. 2 ad 4.

[72] '*Sic igitur vult et se esse, et alia. Sed se ut finem, alia vero ut ad finem . . . .*' Thomae de Aquino, *Summa theologiae*, Ia q. 19 a. 2.

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indirectly for created entities. In this way, God wills creatures to exist, yet without standing in a real relation with them.

Regarding the divine love, Aquinas takes this topic up in question twenty of the *Summa theologiae*. His view on this matter is as clear as his doctrines regarding the divine knowledge and the divine will: 'God loves all existing things.'[73] God loves all things by willing them the good of existence, a good of which things partake due to God's act of creation.[74] In contrast to the human will which is moved by desire for some pre-existing good, Aquinas teaches that, 'the love of God infuses and creates goodness in things.'[75] That which God loves, just as that which God knows, is the perfection of the created entity as it exists in God's self. God thus loves creatures eternally just as God knows creatures eternally, although their inception in nature occurs at a certain point in time.[76] The divine love is connected to the divine knowledge: God loves creatures when knowing those creatures within himself. Yet, here again, there is no real relation of God to creatures *in rerum natura*. God loves creatures in himself in a manner more perfect than if the divine love had a real relation to creatures. Returning to Craig's assessment of the statement that 'God knows, wills, and loves the world,' namely, that, 'this is precisely what Aquinas's doctrine of no real relation of God to the world denies,'[77] the evidence of Aquinas' texts defeats Craig's claim.

## IV. Conclusion

From this discussion, it is evident that, for Aquinas, God may know, will, love, and create the world, and yet also have no real relation with the world. For Aquinas, God is perfect and stands in need of no further perfection from extrinsic entities. At the same time, the world is not a mere byproduct of God of which God is unaware. Aquinas teaches that God does know, will, and love the world, and that the divine knowing, willing, and loving occurs through God's own self. This divine medium, for Aquinas, provides a more perfect engagement of God with the world than that which a real and direct

[73] '*Deus omnia existentia amat*.' Thomae de Aquino, *Summa theologiae*, Ia q. 20 a. 2.

[74] '*intantum habeat aliquid esse, aut quodcumque bonum, inquantum est volitum a Deo. Cuilibet igitur existenti Deus vult aliquod bonum. Unde cum amare nil aliud sit quam velle bonum alicui, manifestum est quod Deus omnia quae sunt, amat*.' Thomae de Aquino, *Summa theologiae*, Ia q. 20 a. 2.

[75] '*amor Dei est infundens et creans bonitatem in rebus*.' Thomae de Aquino, *Summa theologiae*, Ia q. 20 a. 2.

[76] '*per hoc quod ab aeterno in Deo fuerunt, ab aeterno Deus cognovit res in propriis naturis, et eadem ratione amavit*.' Thomae de Aquino, *Summa theologiae*, Ia q. 20 a. 2 ad 2.

[77] Craig, 'God's Real Relation', p. 108.

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relation would afford. As such, Craig fails to be convincing that Aquinas' doctrine is 'extraordinarily implausible.'

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