PRIDE AS A CAUSE OF ERROR

This paper is about pride as a cause of error. Sometimes Thomas calls this cause one of the two roots of error and sometimes he calls it the mother of error and both titles indicate the fundamental and universal importance of pride as a cause of error.

In his commentary on the *First Epistle to Timothy*, Thomas speaks of the root of error as twofold:

> Radix autem erroris est duplex, scilicet superbiae affectus, et defectus intellectus.
>
> The root of error is twofold, to wit the affection of pride and the defect of the understanding[1]

And in the beginning of the *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Thomas teaches us that pride or presumption[2] is the mother of error:

> praesumptio...est mater erroris
>
> presumption is the mother of error[3]

These titles for this cause of error touch, as we have said, upon the universal importance of this cause of error. Indeed, Thomas sometimes speaks directly of this universal causation of pride:

> omnis error ex superbia causatur
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> every error is caused from pride[4]

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[1] *Super I Ad Timotheum*, VI, Lectio I, n. 238

[2] Thomas Aquinas, *De Malo*, Q. 8, Art. 3, Ad 1: "praesumptio...maxime videtur ad superbiam pertinere" "presumption most of all seems to pertain to pride"

[3] *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Liber I, Capitulum 5

But how is pride a cause of error? Thomas in one of the fundamental texts we have considered, his commentary on St. Paul's *First Epistle to Timothy*, says that pride is the root or cause of error in two ways:

> Dicitur autem superbia radix errorum dupliciter.
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> Primo quia superbi volunt se intromittere de his ad quae non attingunt, et ideo necesse est, quod errent et deficiant. Is. XVI, v. 6: *Superbia eius et arrogantia eius, et indignatio eius plus quam fortitudo eius etc.*
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> Item quia nolunt intellectum alteri subiicere; sed innituntur suae prudentiae, et ideo nolunt obedire scripturae sacrae. Contra hoc dicitur Prov. III, 5: *Ne innitaris prudentiae tuae*. Prov. XI, 2: *Ubi humilitas, ibi sapientia*.
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> Pride is said to be the root of error in two ways.
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> First because the proud wish to go among those things to which they do not attain, and therefore it is necessary that they err and fail. *Isaias* XVI, v. 6: "His pride and his arrogance and his indignation are more than his strength etc"
>
> Also because they do not will to subject their understanding to another, but they rest upon their own prudence, and therefore they do not will to obey sacred scripture. Against this it is said in *Proverbs*, III, 5: "Do not rely upon your own prudence. *Proverbs*, XI, 2: "Where humility, there wisdom."[5]

Thomas speaks more fully of this second way in which pride is a cause of error in the *Summa Theologiae:*

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[4] *Super Ioannem*, IV, Lectio II, n. 601

[5] *Super I Ad Timotheum* VI, Lectio I, n. 238

> Superbus enim neque Deo suum intellectum subiicit...Neque etiam ab hominibus addiscere dignantur.
>
> The proud neither subjects his understanding to God, nor does he condescend to learn from men.[6]

Since by our will we can apply our reason or not apply it, pride is a cause of error in the first way by applying our reason and in the second way by not applying our reason. When we apply our reason to judge something beyond our ability to judge or before we are able to judge it or before we are able to judge it well, we fail and fall into error. And when we do *not* apply it to the words of those wiser than us, we are not held back from, or recalled from, errors.

Shakespeare also seems to touch upon these two ways in which pride can be a cause of error in *Richard II* (Act I, Sc.1) where the king describes the proud Mowbray and Bolingbroke thus:

> High-stomach'd are they both, and full of ire,
> In rage deaf as the sea, hasty as fire.[7]

Mowbray and Bolingbroke are both proud or "High-stomach'd" and therefore full of anger for the proud are easily moved to anger. And this makes them "deaf as the sea" and "hasty as fire". Shakespeare often speaks metaphorically of the person who does not hear others whom he should, as deaf. Thus pride makes one unteachable. And haste, of course makes waste. There are many things we are not able to do in haste. Hence, Friar Laurence says to Romeo: "Wisely and slow: they stumble that run fast." The proud man then is deaf to those he should listen to and attempts to do those things that are above his powers or in a way that they are above his powers.

We must consider more fully how pride is a cause of error in these two ways by looking more at what pride is and at the kinds of cause that error can have.

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[6] *Summa Theologiae,* Secunda Secundae, Q. 162, Art. 3, Ad 1
[7] *Richard II*, Act I, Sc.1

Pride is defined by Thomas in the *Summa Theologiae* as the disordered desire of one's own excellence.[8] Since Thomas considers humility and pride there with the virtues that resemble temperance and intemperance, we can also say that pride is an immoderate desire of one's own excellence. Pride is an excessive desire of one's own excellence, an unmeasured desire of one's own excellence. Augustine has a similar definition in the *City of God* (14, 13, 1):

> Quid est autem superbia nisi perversae celsitudinis appetitus? Perversa enim est celsitudo, deserto eo, cui debet animus inhaerere, principio, sibi quodammodo fieri atque esse principium. Hoc fit, cum sibi nimis placet...Unde superbi secundum Scripturas sanctas alio nomine appellantur sibi placentes (*2 Petr.*, 2, 10)
>
> What is pride except the desire of a perverse height? That height is perverse when the soul, deserting the beginning to which it should adhere, becomes and is for itself the beginning. This comes to be when the soul pleases itself too much...Whence the proud by another name in Scripture are called those pleasing themselves (2 *Peter*., 2, 10)

Augustine later in the *City of God* goes on to speak of pride as *amor sui* in the bad sense which would be a disordered or excessive love of oneself.

Although the excessive desire or love of one's own excellence of which Thomas and Augustine speak is clearly connected with the excessive and disordered love of oneself, yet they are not the same love. They are not, in fact, even the same kind of love even though both are involved in pride. In the *Summa Theologiae*, when speaking about love, Thomas distinguishes two kinds of love which are there called the love of friendship and the love of concupiscence.[9] This way of naming them could possibly be misleading to someone since the love of friendship can be had for oneself as well as for a friend and the love of concupiscence can be had for what is good for another as well as for oneself. The distinction is this: As Thomas explains there, following Aristotle, to love someone is to wish good to them. Hence, one is said to have the love of friendship for the one to whom one wishes well whether that one be

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[8] *Summa Theologiae*, Secunda Secundae, q. 162, a. 2

[9] *Summa Theologiae,* Prima Secundae, Q, 26, Art. 4

a friend or oneself. And one is said to have the love of concupiscence for the good which one wishes to oneself or to another.

Further, the love of friendship is the cause of the love of wanting. It is because I love my children that I want good things for them. And it is because I love myself that I want good things for myself. Hence, it is because one has an excessive or disordered love of oneself that one has an excessive or disordered love and desire of one's own excellence.

Now both of these kinds of love which we have distinguished are involved in pride and they are both involved in pride as a cause of error. But each love has a role to play in making pride a cause of error. Let us first look at the role of the love of concupiscence or the love of wanting in pride and then at the role of the love of friendship or the love of wishing well in pride.

The love of concupiscence or wanting in pride is the disordered or excessive love of one's own excellence. Now man excels the other animals by his knowledge and knowledge is also one of the most important ways that one man excels another. Knowledge is thus one of the most suitable matters for pride. And it is interesting to note as regards the two excellences most proper to man, knowledge and moral virtue, that men get less angry if you call them wicked than if you call them stupid.

It is not too difficult to see then how the disordered or excessive love and desire of one's own excellence is a cause of error. If one seeks the excellence of knowing or judging something which is above one's ability to know or judge, one can easily fall into error. But since pride is nothing other than the excessive desire of one's own excellence, it does cause us to try to know or judge something above our power to judge or know. The desire is excessive precisely because it makes us pursue something above our powers. One clearly has an excessive desire for one's own excellence when one seeks an excellence in that which is impossible for oneself or in a way in which it is impossible for oneself.

But the other love in pride, the love of friendship or wishing well, also has an important role to play in causing us to err. The love of friendship in pride is the excessive or disordered love of oneself. This love is a cause of error not only in that it is a cause of the excessive desire for one's own excellence, but also in the sense that it is a cause of a false estimate of one's powers. If one loves himself too much, one is apt to think one has more ability than one does.

Shakespeare has a good sonnet on this sinful self-love. The first two quatrains of *Sonnet 62:*

> Sin of self-love possesseth all mine eye
> And all my soul and all my every part;
> And for this sin there is no remedy,
> It is so grounded inward in my heart.
>
> Methinks no face so gracious is as mine,
> No shape so true, no truth of such account;
> And for myself mine own worth do define,
> As I all other in all worths surmount.

Thomas has a very good word in speaking of the proud not knowing themselves. In his commentary on the *Second Epistle to Timothy* of St. Paul, he says:

> Superbi enim inflantur in agendis, quia non metiuntur vires suas, et ideo deficunt.
>
> The proud are blown up in deeds because they do not measure their powers, and therefore they fail.[10]

The word *measure* is well chosen here. The proud cannot measure their powers or get a correct measure of their powers. Aristotle speaks in the same way in a more general context in the *Rhetoric*.[11] There he says that it is wrong to twist the jury by emotions before they judge. It is like, he says, warping the ruler before one measures. The passions make things seem either better or worse than they are. If I am angry with the man on trial, his crime and guilt will seem worse. If I pity or love him, he will seem better than he is. Pride, being a kind of love or desire, makes us seem better than we are, more capable than we are. Hence, Thomas' noteworthy phrase that the proud do not measure their powers.

We have said that pride is a cause of error not only in applying our reason to judge something above our ability to judge, but also applying it to judge

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[10] *In II Ad Timotheum*, III, Lectio I, n. 101
[11] BK. I, Ch. 1

something in a way that we are not able to judge it. There are some things which reason is simply unable to judge, but many other things that it can judge only in some way. This should be unfolded.

If reason tries to judge in reasoned out knowledge before it knows the road to follow, it can easily wander into error. The common road of reasoned out knowledge is learned in logic and the private road of each reasoned out knowledge should be learned in the beginning of that reasoned out knowledge. And both of these roads involve a knowledge of the way of judging. Part of logic, especially the part contained in the *Prior and Posterior Analytics*, is called the *scientia iudicandi* in the Latin tradition because it contains the common way of judging in reasoned out knowledge. But part of the private road of each reasoned out knowledge is the way of judging in that reasoned out knowledge. And the ways of judging in geometry and in natural philosophy and in wisdom or first philosophy are all different. Hence, the man who applies his reason to judging before he knows logic or the private road of the reasoned out knowledge where this judgment should be made is not able to judge well. If he does this out of pride (there can also be other causes of his doing this), he is using his reason to judge something before he is able or well able to do so. And in this way, pride can cause his reason to err.

And since judgment is the separation of the true from the false by some beginning in our knowledge, the man who has not acquired well the beginnings of the things about which he is trying to judge can err in his judgment. As Aristotle says in the first book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, one must in reasoned out knowledge carefully distinguish the beginnings from what are not beginnings and the beginnings from each other. If a man out of pride tries to judge things before he has a firm grasp of their beginnings, he can easily err in trying to judge them.

Moreover, if the man who considers both sides of a question dialectically is better able to judge, just like the jury which has heard both sides, the man who tries to judge before dialectic may not be able to judge so well. And if out of pride, he thinks he does not need to consider the matter dialectically before trying to judge, he may make a mistake in his judgment. Moreover, the man who has not seen the difficulty before is not so well able to judge when the answer has been found.

And men often try to know the particular distinctly and judge things there before they have a distinct knowledge of the general. And in this way and

others in which they are too hasty, men often fail in their judgment. Hence, Friar Laurence's advice: Wisely and slow: they stumble that run fast. We often warn people about "jumping" to conclusions for errors are easily made in this way.

But pride is a cause of error not only insofar as it leads us to apply our mind to judging a matter which is above our ability to judge or before we are able to judge it, but also, as we have heard from Thomas, insofar as it makes us unwilling to subject our reason to learning from those wiser than us. Here we must consider how pride leads us to refuse to subject our reason to those wiser than us and how this is a cause of error.

Pride as we have seen is a disordered or excessive love and desire of one's own excellence and also an excessive love of oneself. Hesiod, the great Greek poet, in a passage quoted by Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, has distinguished in order three kinds of men in regard to any kind of knowledge. In Thomas' commentary there:

> ...audiat sententiam Hesiodi poetae. Qui dixit quod ille est optimus, qui scilicet potest per seipsum intelligere. Et ille etiam est bonus, qui recipit quae ab alio dicuntur. Ille autem qui neque per seipsum potest intelligere, neque alium audiens potest in animo reponere, est inutilis quantum ad acquisitionem scientiae.
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> Let him hear the saying of Hesiod who says that he is best who is able to understand by himself. But he is also good who receives what is said by another. But he who neither understands by himself, nor hearing another places it in his soul, is useless as far as the acquiring of knowledge.[12]

The best man is the one who discovers the truth by himself. Next is the man who can learn it from the man who discovered it. And last is the man who can neither discover it by himself, nor learn it from another. Although we can all perhaps discover some little truth by ourselves, there are very few men who can discover a great truth by themselves. Most of us are at best in the second

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[12] *In I Ethicorum*, Lectio IV, n. 54

group. And if you talk about many great truths, perhaps all of us are in the second or third group.

The proud man then in his excessive desire for excellence seeks the excellence of not needing a teacher. He is seeking the excellence of the great minds and perhaps more - for even the greatest minds learned many things from those who came before them. And because he cannot measure his powers but exaggerates them, as we have seen before, the proud man thinks himself capable of this excellence of not needing a teacher. Moreover, the proud man is apt to envy others who have some excellence and this envy prevents them from being teachable. And the proud are given to anger which also gets in the way of learning from or with others.

And why does not submitting your mind to the words of those wiser than oneself lead to error. Thomas gives a succinct explanation of this when commenting on Aristotle's critique of the early Greeks for not having explained the cause of error in man when they did try to explain the cause of knowledge. For error is more common than knowledge in man and the other animals. Thomas writes as follows:

> deceptio videtur esse magis propria animalibus quam cognitio secundum conditionem suae naturae. Videmus enim quod homines ex seipsis decipi possunt et errare. Ad hoc autem quod veritatem cognoscant, oportet quod ab aliis doceantur. Et iterum pluri tempore anima est in deceptione quam in cognitione veritatis; quia ad cognitionem veritatis vix pervenitur post studium longi temporis.
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> Deception seems more proper to animals than knowledge according to the condition of their nature. For we see that men of themselves are able to be deceived and to err. But in order to know the truth, it is necessary that they be taught by others. And also the soul is a longer time in deception than in the knowledge of the truth because it is hard to arrive at a knowledge of the truth even after studying a long time.[13]

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[13] *In III De Anima*, Lectio IV, n. 624

Every teacher, for example, has experience of how easily students make mistakes on their own. Every time, for example, that I teach the formal syllogism and put some valid and invalid forms on the board, many students will think the invalid forms valid (and sometimes the valid invalid).

Discretion is, of course, necessary in deciding whom to take as a teacher and on what and to what extent. As Thomas explains in his consideration of the good student in the *De Commendatione S. Scripturae,*[14] not only is humility required in the student, but also *rectitudo sensus*. The good student needs discernment about whom to believe. The classic treatment of how to select a teacher is found in Plato's work, the *Protagoras*.

We are first apt to believe someone because of their fame or position. But even here, we should see the difference between fame in one's own time and fame over the ages. In Samuel Johnson's circle, it was commonly said that it takes at least a hundred years to tell if a poet is worth reading. If he is still being read a hundred years after his death, this is *prima facie* evidence that there may be something by him worth reading. Plato and Aristotle are still being read over two thousand years after their death.

But as we listen to or read the famous, a second and stronger criterion comes to light. Does the famous one know how to proceed? When Socrates and Protagoras begin to converse, we see that Protagoras prefers to give a speech rather than to proceed by the short questions and answers that Socrates prefers. We begin to judge that Socrates knows more how to proceed to find the truth than does Protagoras. Although their will is less able to be known than how the famous proceed, we can also begin to discern that Protagoras wants to win more than to know the truth.

And when we see Protagoras beginning to contradict himself, we have perhaps the strongest criterion for hesitating to take him as our teacher.

One could also consider how these two ways pride is a cause of error are connected with the species of pride distinguished by Gregory the Great and Thomas Aquinas. Three kinds of pride can be distinguished (although one of

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[14] III, n. 1214

these could be subdivided into two). These kinds of pride are distinguished especially by their effects. One kind of pride is boastfulness whereby a person thinks that they are better than they are or that they have an excellence which they do not have. Another kind or form of pride is that whereby what we do have, but from another, we think to have from our own effort (or merits). The third kind of pride is where we think that we excel all others even though they may have the same excellence as us or even more so. The first kind of pride seems more a cause of our attempting to judge something beyond our ability or in the way it is beyond our ability. But the second and third kinds of pride seem to have a special opposition to learning from those from whom we should learn. For if we want to have the excellence of knowing something from ourselves or we want to be above everyone else, we can hardly learn from another who would thus be above us in what we learn from them.

Having considered how pride is a cause of error, we can now ask the more precise question: what kind of cause of error is pride?

Before we can understand in particular what kind of cause pride is of error, we must first understand in general the kind of cause which error can have. For we understand the general before the particular.

Error is something bad. And it is the universal and constant teaching of Thomas that the bad can have only an accidental cause. This teaching is based especially on two truths. The first of these is that no agent ever intends the bad as such but always the good or, at least, what seems to be good. The second is that every agent acts insofar as it is in act and makes what is like itself. But it is the lack of act in a subject which is able to have and should have that act which is bad. We cannot expand upon these reasons here. But we shall take this teaching as the beginning of our investigation of the kind of cause that pride is of error.

Since error is something bad and the bad can have only an accidental cause, every cause of error is an accidental cause. Hence, this is also true of the roots of error which Thomas calls the desire of pride and the defect of understanding.

But there are many kinds of accidental cause and we must find the ways that fit pride and the defect of the understanding.

Thomas has given the division of accidental cause in more than one place. One important place where he does this in his commentary on the fifth book of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* when he is explaining the various divisions of cause which Aristotle makes there:

> Sciendum autem est, quod aliquid potest dici causa per accidens alterius dupliciter, Uno modo ex parte causae; quia scilicet illud quod accidit causae dicitur causa per accidens, sicut si album dicatur causa domus. Alio modo ex parte effectus; ut scilicet aliquid dicatur causa per accidens alicuius, quod accidit ei quod est effectus per se.
>
> It should be known that something can be called an accidental cause of another in two ways. In one way, on the side of the cause; because what happens to the cause is said to be an accidental cause, as if the white is said to be the cause of the house. In another way, on the side of the effect; as something is said to be the accidental cause of what happens to the effect as such.[15]

An example of the second is when a man is digging in the ground to plant a tree and he finds a treasure. His digging in the ground to plant a tree is said to be an accidental cause of what happens rarely - the finding of the treasure. The finding of the treasure is something which happens to his per se and intended effect, a hole in the ground for a tree.

Are the two roots of error, the defect of the understanding and the affection of pride, accidental causes by reason of what happens to the cause or what happens to the effect? I would suggest at this point that the defect of understanding is an accidental cause of error in the first way, that is, on the side of what happens to the cause; and pride is an accidental cause more in the second way, that is, on the side of what happens to the effect. Let us consider

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[15] *In V Metaphysicorum*, Lectio III, n. 789

both of these separately, and first the defect of the understanding. We have seen already in the text from Thomas' commentary on the *First Epistle to Timothy*, that Thomas speaks of the root of error as twofold, one on the side of desire and the other on the side of the understanding:

> Radix autem erroris est duplex, scilicet superbiae affectus, et defectus intellectus.
>
> The root of error is twofold, to wit the affection of pride and the defect of the understanding.[16]

The connection between error and the *defectus intellectus* is immediately more clear than between error and the *superbiae affectus*. As Thomas points out in the *De Malo:*

> falsa opinio est quaedam defectiva operatio intellectus, sicut partus monstruosus est quaedam defectiva operatio naturae: Unde Philosophus dicit in *VI Ethic*. quod malum intellectus est falsum.
>
> Defectiva autem operatio semper procedit ex defectu alicuius principii, sicut ex aliquo defectu seminis procedit monstruositas partus, ut dicitur in *II Physic*. Unde necesse est quod omnis falsa aestimatio procedat ex defectu alicuius principii cognoscendi; sicut in nobis falsa opinio accidit plerumque ex indebita ratiocinatione.
>
> A false opinion is a defective operation of the understanding, as a monstrous offspring is a defective operation of nature. Whence the Philosopher says in the sixth book of the *Ethics* that the false is the bad of the understanding.
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> A defective operation however always proceeds from the defect of some beginning, as from the defect of the seed proceeds the monstrous offspring, as is said

[16] *Super I Ad Timotheum*, VI, Lectio I, n. 238

> in the second book of the *Physics*. Whence it is necessary that every false estimate proceed from the defect of some beginning of knowing; as in us false opinion happens often from unsuitable reasoning.[17]

The word *defectus* is also used by Thomas in his major proemium to logic when talking about the defectus intellectus here, *indebita ratiocinatio:*

> Tertius vero rationis processus est, in quo ratio a vero deficit propter alicuius principii defectum; quod in ratiocinando erat observandum.
>
> The third proceeding of reason is that in which reason falls away from the true because of the defect of some beginning which should have been observed in the reasoning.[18]

This defect in the cause is a per accidens cause of the effect, even though it might seem to be per se to some (even the wise are deceived by the per accidens!) Thomas explains this in the *Summa Contra Gentiles:*

> Ex defectu causae sequitur defectus in effectu. Defectus autem in causa est aliquid malum. Non tamen potest esse causa per se: quia res non est causa per hoc quod est deficiens, sed per hoc quod est ens; si enim tota deficeret, nullius esset causa. Malum igitur est alicuius causa non per se, sed per accidens.
>
> From the defect of the cause follows a defect in the effect. But the defect in the cause is something bad. It is not however able to be a cause as such because a thing is not a cause through being deficient, but through this that it is a being; for if the whole was deficient, it would be the cause of nothing. The bad

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[17] *De Malo*, q. 16, Art. 6, c.
[18] *In I Posteriorum Analyticorum*, Proemium, n. 5

> therefore is the cause of something, not as such, but by happening.[19]

But is this an accidental cause *ex parte causae* or *ex parte effectus*? It seems to be *ex parte causae* for the defect of the cause is something that happens to the cause. Yet this kind of accidental cause *ex parte causae* differs from the kind which Thomas uses to exemplify accidental cause *ex parte causae*. The example again in Thomas" commentary on the *Metaphysics:*

> Sciendum autem est, quod aliquid potest dici causa per accidens alterius dupliciter.
>
> Uno modo ex parte causae; quia scilicet illud quod accidit causae dicitur causa per accidens, sicut si album dicatur causa domus.
>
> Alio modo ex parte effectus...
>
> It should be known that something can be called an accidental cause of another in two ways.
>
> In one way because that which happens to the cause is said to be an accidental cause, as if the white is said to be a cause of the house.
>
> In another way, on the side of the effect.[20]

And in the *De Malo:*

> causa per accidens dicitur aliquid alicuius dupliciter.
>
> Uno modo ex parte causae, sicut causa domus per se est aedificator cui accidit esse musicum; et sic musicum, quod accidit causae per se, dicitur per accidens causa domus.

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[19] *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Liber II, Caput XIV
[20] *In V Metaphysicorum*, Lectio III, n. 789

> Alio modo ex parte effectus...
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> Something is said to be the accidental cause of another in two ways.
>
> In one way on the side of the cause; just as the cause as such of the house is the builder to whom it happens to be musical; and thus the musical, which happens to the cause as such, is said to be the accidental cause of the house.
>
> In another way, on the side of the effect.[21]

The kind of accidental cause *ex parte causae* which Thomas usually exemplifies does nothing for the achievement of the effect. Thomas uses the same example in the writing on the *Sentences:*

> Est enim quaedam causa per accidens quae nihil operatur ad effectum, sicut musica aedificatoris ad domum.
>
> There is an accidental cause which does nothing towards the effect, as the musical art of the builder, to the house.[22]

But the defect of the cause could seem to some to be a per se cause of the effect. The reason for this is that the defect in the cause is always followed by some defect in the effect. But it is not always so that musicians build houses. But some accidental things are more accidental than others. In the *De Malo*, Thomas says:

> Est ergo duplex modus quo malum causatur ex bono. Uno modo bonum est causa mali in quantum est deficiens; alio modo in quantum est per accidens.

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[21] *De Malo*, q. 1, art. 3, ad 14
[22] *In I I Sent.*, Dist. XLVI, Q. I, Art. II, Ad 3

> There are two ways in which the bad is caused by the good. In one way the good is the cause of the bad insofar as it is defective; in another way, by accident.[23]

But when Thomas says that *Superbiae affectus* is the other root of error, he does not use the word *defectus*. This makes me think that he does not think of pride as being an accidental cause on the side of the cause (*ex parte causae*) but in the side of the effect (*ex parte effectus*). But I am not sure about this.

Although there is a defect of will in pride and a defect in pride itself (for pride is a disordered or immoderate desire of one's own excellence), and this defect will of course enter into our understanding of the way in which pride is an accidental cause of error in reason, yet the defect in error cannot be understood to proceed immediately from the defect in pride or the will as it does from the defect in the understanding. The reason for saying this is that error or false opinion is a defective operation of the understanding or reason, as Thomas says in the *De Malo*.[24] Hence, we must understand the way in which pride is an accidental cause of error in another way than the defect of the understanding. The other way is the accidental cause *ex parte effectus*. We must examine then the division of accidental cause *ex parte effectus* or on the side of the effect.

Thomas Aquinas has given the division of accidental cause in his commentary on the fifth book of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* when he is explaining the various divisions of causes which Aristotle makes there. As quoted before:

> Sciendum autem est, quod aliquid potest dici causa per accidens alterius dupliciter, Uno modo ex parte causae; quia scilicet illud quod acccidit causae dicitur causa per accidens, sicut si album dicatur causa domus. Alio modo ex parte effectus; ut scilicet aliquid dicatur causa per accidens alicuius, quod accidit ei quod est effectus per se.

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[23] *De Malo,* Q. I, Art. 3, c.
[24] *De Malo*, q. 16, art 6, c. (quoted above).

> It should be known that something can be called an accidental cause of another in two ways. In one way, on the side of the cause; because what happens to the cause is said to be an accidental cause, as if the white is said to be the cause of the house. In another way, on the side of the effect; as something is said to be the accidental cause of what happens to the effect as such. [25]

He does not subdivide the first way, but immediately he subdivides the second way:

> Quod quidem potest esse tripliciter.
>
> Uno modo, quia habet necessarium ordinem ad effectum, sicut remotio impedimenti habet ordinem necessarium ad effectum. Unde removens prohibens dicitur movere per accidens; sive illud accidens sit contrarium, sicut cholera prohibet frigiditatem, unde scamonaea dicitur infrigidare per accidens, non quia causet frigiditatem sed quia tollit impedimentum frigiditatis, quod est ei contrarium, scilicet choleram: sive etiam si non sit contrarium, sicut columna impedit motum lapidis, unde removens columnam dicitur per accidens movere lapidem super positum.
>
> Alio modo, quando accidens habet ordinem ad effectum, non tamen necessarium, nec ut in pluribus, sed ut in paucioribus, sicut inventio thesauri ad fossionem in terra. Et hoc modo fortuna et casus dicuntur causae per accidens.
>
> Tertio, quando nullum ordinem habent, nisi forte secundum existimationem; sicut si aliquis dicatur se esse causam terraemotus, quia eo intrante domum accidit terraemotus.

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[25] *In V Metaphysicorum*, Lectio III, n. 789

> This can be in three ways.
>
> In one way, because it has a necessary order to the effect, as the removal of the impediment has a necessary order to the effect. Whence the one removing what prevents is said to move by accident; whether that accident is contrary, as cholera prevents coldness, whence the scamonaea is said to cool by accident, not because it causes coldness, but because it takes away the impediment of coldness, which is contrary to it, namely the cholera; or also if it is not contrary, as the column impedes the motion of the stone - whence the one removing the column is said by accident to move the stone placed upon it.
>
> In another way, when the accident has an order to the effect, not however necessary, nor for the most part, but rarely, as the finding of a treasure to digging in the earth. And in this way, fortune and chance are said to be accidental causes.
>
> Thirdly, when they have no order, except by estimation; as if someone is said to be the cause of the earthquake because the earthquake happened when he entered the house.[26]

I do not think that this division is complete for it leaves out a very important kind of accidental cause. Leaving aside the third way which is not too important for the philosopher although it is very important for the politician who sometimes wants to get credit for the good things that happen to the country during his administration even though he may not be responsible for them. (The same can be said for bad things that happen although here he would not like to be thought responsible.) We find another text of Thomas in his commentary on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard, the standard text in theology in the High Middle Ages, where he distinguishes another kind of accidental cause against the *causa removens prohibens:*

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[26] ibid., n. 789

malum non habet causam nisi per accidens dupliciter.

Primo modo, scilicet secundum quod agens per accidens dicitur respectu ejus quod accidit praeter intentionem agentis, quia omne agens agit propter finem, et intendit bonum quod est finis, et nulla privatio est intenta, sed sequitur ex forma inducta cui adjungitur: ignis enim non intendit a materia privare formam aeris, sed inducere formam propriam; sed inducendo formam propriam, privat formam aeris; similiter peccator intendit dulcedinem, quae est bonum alicujus partis ejus, scilicet concupiscibilis, et non intendit privationem gratiae.

Secundo, sicut dicitur agens per accidens, removens prohibens: prohibens enim privationem est forma vel res aliqua. Unde qui removet illam rem, dicitur causare privationem; sicut qui extinguit candelam, vel exportat a domo, dicitur causare tenebras.

The bad does not have an accidental cause except in two ways.

In the first way, as the agent is said to be accidental with respect to what happens outside the intention of the agent because every agent acts for an end and intends the good which is an end. And no lack is intended, but it follows from the form induced to which it is joined; for fire doe not intend to deprive matter of the form of air, but to induce its own form; but in inducing its own form, it causes a lack of the form of air. Likewise, the sinner intends sweetness which is a good of one of his parts, his concupiscible appetite, and he does not intend the loss of grace.

In the second way, as the one removing what prevents is said to be an agent by accident; what prevents a lack is a form or some thing, Whence who removes that thing is said to cause the lack; as the one who

> extinguishes the candle or carries it from the house, is said to cause the darkness.[27]

This fourth kind of accidental cause on the side of what happens to the effect is like chance or luck in that it is outside intention, but differs in that what results happens always or for the most part. If a man always pursues what is agreeable to his senses and avoids what is disagreeable to them, he is intending sense-pleasure and the avoidance of sense-pain. But it is not by luck or chance that he often does something unreasonable or often fails to do what is reasonable.

Which, if any, of these four kinds of accidental cause on the side of the effect can apply to pride as the root and mother of error? Since pride seems to be a rather universal, if not the most universal, cause of error, it would not seem to be a cause of error by luck or chance. And a fortiori it is not a cause in estimation only. For as the old proverb says, "pride goes before a fall", which seems to indicate that there is some order between the two unlike the accidental cause in estimation only. It remains to be seen then whether pride is an accidental cause in either of the two remaining ways. I think that it is an accidental cause in both of the remaining ways and that these two ways correspond to the two ways we saw before that pride is a cause of error.

We have seen before that by pride a man applies his mind to something he is unable to judge and hence falls into error. But by pride, we do not desire the mistake or error that happens when we apply our mind to judging something we are unable to judge. What we are desiring by pride is the excellence of knowing and judging those things. But to the pursuit of such excellence is joined always or for the most part the making of a mistake or error.

In this way, pride is a cause of error in somewhat the same way that luck or chance is said to be a cause. Digging in the ground to plant a tree might result in the finding of a buried treasure, but this was not intended by the man digging. In that way, his digging in the ground to plant a tree is the accidental cause of the finding of a treasure. Likewise, in applying his mind to judging a matter which is above his ability to judge, the proud man is not intending to make a mistake, but to acquire or have a certain excellence. But in pursuing this excellence, he falls into error since the matter is above his ability to judge.

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[27] *Scriptum super Lib. II Sententiarum*, Dist. I, Q. I, Art. 1, Ad 2

Yet there is also a very important difference between the kind of accidental cause which pride is and luck or chance is. For luck or chance is a cause of what happens rarely as a result of an action done for an end. One does not usually find a treasure when digging in the ground to plant a tree. (In New England, however, one always or usually finds a rock.) But when one applies his mind to judging a matter one is unable to judge, one always or for the most part falls into error.

Hence pride here resembles the accidental causes of what is not intended, but yet connected for the most part or always with what is intended. The bank robber intends to get money ('That's where the money is."), not the injustice of taking what is not his. But to getting money by holding up a bank is always connected the injustice of taking what does not belong to you.

In discussing this kind of accidental cause, Thomas sometimes uses the example of someone who drinks wine because he has a sweet tooth and the wine is sweet. Such a person does not intend to get drunk but to enjoy the sweetness of the wine. But if he gets drunk always or for the most part when trying to satisfy his sweet tooth, it is not by chance or luck that he gets drunk even though this is outside his intention. Likewise, the desire for the excellence of knowing something you are unable to judge is the accidental cause of your falling into error which happens always or for the most part in the pursuit of such excellence even though the error is not intended by you.

This is one way then in which pride is an accidental cause of error. Pride is here a universal cause, not insofar as it makes us have a false estimate about ourselves since this is true about every disordered passion or act of the will (that they incline us to have a false estimate about their objects). If I am too much afraid, for example, the object of my fear will seem more dangerous or difficult to avoid than it is. But insofar as pride gives us a false estimate about ourselves and, in particular, about our ability to judge things, it makes us seek an excellence in knowing things which we are in fact unable to judge well. And in this way it becomes a universal cause of error and not just about myself.

We must turn now to the other way in which pride is a cause of error which is by making us refuse to submit our mind to the words of those wiser than ourselves. Since the bad and consequently error can only have an accidental cause, what kind of accidental cause of error is pride here?

Pride here seems to be the accidental cause called in Latin *removens prohibens*. The classic example of this kind of cause is the man who removes the pillar from below a stone and, hence, is said to be the cause of the stone falling to the ground. Such a man has removed what prevents the stone from falling to the ground.

We have seen before that it is the office of the wise man not only to teach truth, but also to exclude errors opposed to the truth. The wise man by his words (if we hear or read them carefully, frequently and with respect) prevents us from making, or remaining in, many errors. The wise man does this in two ways. First he points out and refutes many individual errors. And second he teaches us the causes of error as Aristotle has done, for example, in his book *On Sophistical Refutations*. (The book *On Sophistical Refutations* is about the common fallacies in reasoning about general questions.)

When then because of pride we do not submit our mind to the words of those wiser than ourselves, we fall into many errors and remain in many errors because of the defect of our own understanding. Reading (carefully, frequently and reverently) the words of those wiser than ourselves would prevent us from making many of these errors or would call us back from many of them. But pride removes what in these cases would prevent us from falling into many errors or remaining in them. Hence, pride is here a *causa removens prohibens* of error. It is an accidental cause of error by removing what would prevent our falling into or remaining in error - namely, a suitable application to the words of those wiser than ourselves.

Pride then is an accidental cause of error in two ways or according to two kinds of accidental cause. It now remains to see why Thomas calls pride as a cause of error, the mother and the root of error. Let us consider the word mother first and then the word *root*.

The word *mother* is perhaps a proportional metaphor. Our pride is to our errors like a mother to her children. Now a mother is to her children in three ways: first, she conceives and gives birth to them; second, she nourishes them after they have been born; and third, she loves them very much, naturally even more than the father does. We can assume that Thomas knows that a mother conceives and gives birth to her children and nourishes them after they are born. And in many places he speaks of the strength of a mother's love. Two

texts on the last point from Thomas' commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics.* Here is the first:

> Matres enim quarum est vehemens amicitia ad filios
>
> Mothers whose friendship to their sons is very strong[28]

And the second:

> Et hanc rationem confirmat per exemplum matrum, quae magis amant filios quam patres. tum quia magis laborant circa eorum generationem portando et pariendo eos, quam patres. tum etiam quia matres magis possunt scire quod sint earum filii quam patres.
>
> And he confirms this reason by the example of mothers who love their sons more than the fathers do, both because they labor more about their generation by carrying and giving birth to them than did the fathers as well as because the mothers are more able than are the fathers to know that they are their sons.[29]

Pride then can be called the mother of error by likeness to these three ways in which a mother is to her children. First, pride is a common cause of many errors as a mother conceives and gives birth to many children. The likeness here is not in the particular kind of cause. Second, as a mother naturally nourishes her new born, so too pride makes us nourish and keeps alive our false opinions after we have given birth to them. Pride not only makes us fall into error, but it also makes us adhere to our false opinions and try to support them. It is a commonplace that thinkers often pay more attention to what confirms their opinion than to what seems to contradict it. In this way they seem to feed or nourish their false opinions. Perhaps the most important likeness of pride to the mother is the way in which pride makes us attached to our opinions as much as a mother is attached to her own children. Now this is, of course, good in a

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[28] *In VIII Ethicorum*, Lectio VIII, n. 1647
[29] *In IX Ethicorum*, Lectio VII, n. 1854

mother, but it is the end of the pursuit of truth when one adheres to his own opinions because they are his own.

Why is pride suitably called the root of error? We do have an explanation of *root* as a metaphor applied to Christ by Thomas in his work on Isaiah:

> Nota...super illo verbo: radix de terra, quia Christus est radix primo propter absconsionem, Eccli., I, 6: *Radix sapientiae cui revelata est*. Secundo, propter nutrimenti ministrationem, Jerem., XVII, 8: *Erit tanquam lignum quod ad humorem mittit radices*. Tertio, propter totius arboris sustentationem. Rom. XI, 18: *Non tu radicem portas.*
>
> Note upon those words a root from the earth, that Christ is a root first on account of being hidden. Eccli., I, 6 "To whom has the root of wisdom been revealed?" Second, on account of giving nourishment, Jerem., XVII, 8: "He will be a tree that sends down roots to the moisture." Third, on account of supporting the whole tree. Rom. XI, 18: "You do not carry the root."[30]

It is a common-place of the spiritual life that spiritual sins are more hidden than sensual sins. And this is especially true of pride. Hence pride is suitably called the root of error because of this first likeness. Like the hidden root of a tree, it is hidden. Pride is a hidden cause of error. The second likeness noted by Thomas in a root, "Propter nutrimenti ministrationem", is common to this metaphor and the mother metaphor. We have already noted that pride not only gives rise to errors but makes us nourish them once we have made them. The third likeness is "propter totius arboris sustentationem." Pride sustains or supports the whole tree of error. Shakespeare in the Sonnet we quoted earlier sees something of this likeness when he said in the first quatrain:

> Sin of self-love possesseth all mine eye
> And all my soul and all my every part;
> And for this sin there is no remedy,
> It is so grounded inward in my heart.

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[30] *In Isaiam,* super Caput LIII

Pride is well described by Shakespeare as "grounded inward" in the heart. This is why we use the word *stubborn* in speaking of the proud. The word *stubborn* is derived from the Old English word *stubb* meaning a tree stump. As everyone knows who tries to remove a tree from his property, the tree-stump is the hardest part to remove, the most stubborn part of the tree. Likewise, pride is the most difficult part of the tree of error to remove.

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