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Was Thomas Aquinas a Young Earth Creationist?

In this article I will address the problem of Thomas Aquinas's understanding of the origins of the universe in the context of young Earth creationism (YEC).[1] Was Aquinas a proponent of young Earth creationism? This question breaks down into three separate, though interrelated, issues: The first is: was Aquinas a creationist? The second: did he believe in the creation of the universe within the six natural days (six 12/24-hour periods of time)? And the third: did he believe that the universe was just about five thousand years old (in his times), i.e., that from the creation week to the birth of Christ only about four thousand years elapsed? Although in the current debate all three questions come as a "package" and the proponents of YEC answer all three in the affirmative,[2] this is not a logical necessity and Aquinas might say "yes" to

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[1] By young Earth creationism I understand the idea that the universe was created in the span of six natural days (sun days, i.e., periods of about 12 hours separated by 12-hour nights) no longer than about six thousand years ago.

[2] This is how the issue is framed by John C. Whitcomb and Henry Morris in their foundational work first published in 1961, *The Genesis Flood*. According to Ronald L. Numbers, this book effectively started the YEC movement among Protestants (see his

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one but "no" to another. For this reason, I will address each of these questions separately.

QUESTION 1.
Aquinas and the origin of species

Creationism in the original meaning of the word refers to a belief in the supernatural formation of the universe by God. This implies that God not only created the universe out of nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*) but also formed it by His direct power over the time described in Genesis as six days. The most distinctive tenet of creationism in contrast to all kinds of evolutionary doctrines (whether theistic or atheistic) is that God created different species of plant and animal life separately. Creationism, therefore, in contrast to evolutionism, rejects the natural formation of species by descent from other species. Most creationists allow so-called microevolution (i.e., changes within species) but all of them reject macroevolution (or universal common descent). Hence the

comprehensive work *The Creationists*, 229 nn.). Henry Morris confirms this perspective in many of his writings including his main work *Scientific Creationism*. The same approach has been pursued by Catholic YEC proponents, such as Rev. Victor P. Warkulwiz (*The Doctrines of Genesis 1–11*). Similarly, Rev. Thomas McFadden, even though he does not put a young earth in the front of his creation message, defends the "flood geology," young earth and the six days of creation (see his basic work on the topic *Creation, Evolution, and Catholicism*, 67–69). Also, The Kolbe Center for The Study of Creation, the leading Catholic YEC organization, presents the same perspective. Robert Sungenis, associated with The Kolbe Center, goes even further by adding to the six days creation and a young earth the idea of geocentrism and geostatism (Robert A. Sungenis, Robert J. Bennett, *Galileo Was Wrong: The Scientific, Scriptural, Ecclesiastical and Patristic Evidence for Geocentrism*). Numbers recognizes that there are other positions among creationists, such as "day-age" and "gap-theory" (both would allow the old age of the universe while preserving the traditional Christian concept of creation) but their popularity largely diminished since the 1960s when so-called "scientific creationism" took sway (*The Creationists*, 10–11).

important that determines whether Aquinas was a creationist or not concerns his view on the origin of species.

In his *Summa Theologiae*, when treating the topic of the origins of the universe, Aquinas explains that there were two phases of creation.[3] The event which he calls "the first creation" (*prima creatio*) refers to the first divine calling of the entire being into existence (*creatio ex nihilo*).[4] This event is followed by the universe's formation (*opus formationis*)[5] which is further divided into two stages—the work of distinction (*opus distinctionis*) and the work of adornment (*opus ornatus*). Both stages are characterized by divine supernatural activity—at the first stage, which comprises days 1–3 of the Genesis account, God formed matter, gave it basic distinctions (such as light and darkness, water and land, etc.) and created plants (all things that are attached to the Earth). At the second stage (*opus ornatus*), which comprises days 4–6, God, as it were, adorned His previous works by adding beings that are detached and movable, especially the different species of animals.

Two things need to be highlighted when referring to Thomas's teaching on creation. First, the work of creation and formation could not have happened by natural causes:

> In the first works nature was instituted and for this reason it was necessary that those works were effected directly by the supernatural principle. But afterwards, when nature is established, it can achieve its proper effects through the natural operation.[6]

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[3] Aquinas recognizes also the typology given by Peter Lombard who spoke about three stages: *opus creationis* (which refers to the creation of matter), *opus distinctionis* (formation of matter) and *opus ornatus* (the creation of animals) *Super Sent*. lib. 2, d. 12, q. 1, pr. *Super Sent*., lib. 2, d. 15, q. 1, pr.

[4] *S.Th*. I, q. 65–72.

[5] Aquinas rarely refers to both stages under one name of formation. Two examples are found in *S.Th*. I, q. 67, a. 4, ad1 and *De potentia*, q. 4, a. 1, arg. 20.

[6] *Super Sent*. lib. 2, d. 20, q. 1, a. 1, ad 4.

> The institution of the natural things may be considered in two ways: either regarding the mode of becoming or regarding the properties following the instituted things. The mode of becoming cannot be natural, because there were no natural principles existing beforehand whose actions and passions would suffice to produce the effect naturally. So it was necessary that the first principles in nature were constituted by supernatural power (*virtus supernaturalis*). This refers to the formation of the human body from earth and the body of the woman from the rib, and so on. But the properties that follow the instituted nature do not need to be attributed to miracles, like the water that would need to be miraculously kept over the heavens.[7]

We see that Aquinas does not share the idea of theistic evolutionists that God endowed the universe with the property of "self-assembly" in the first moment of creation in such a way that the universe once created would fully develop into its current stage by the co-operation of natural secondary causes acting under divine providence. Instead, he postulates the necessity of a supernatural power acting directly upon nature in order to create and form its essential parts.

The second thing to observe is that Aquinas divides the work of creation into the first creation and the second creation (the latter consisting of distinction and adornment). In other words, he rejects the idea that all divine work of creation could be compressed to a single act of creation, not because God lacks the power to do so, but because He chose to create the universe successively in the work of the six days.[8]

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[7] *Super Sent*. lib. 2, d. 18, q. 1, a. 1, ad 5.

[8] "All things were not distinguished and adorned together, not from a want of power on God's part, as requiring time in which to work, but that due order might be observed in the instituting of the world. Hence it was fitting that different days should be assigned

The divine work of formation is further highlighted by Aquinas's explicit teaching that although God had been creating new things over the six days, He ended the creative action on the seventh day while maintaining the conservation of being and governance over creation.[9]

By the work of distinction, God established the general powers in nature that move to all species (such as cold and heat) whereas in the work of adornment God established powers that move things to determined species, such as the power that exists in the seed of lion and horse to produce lions and horses.[10]

That the species of higher animals had to be created directly by God is further explained by Aquinas in his teaching on how things begin to exist. According to Thomas, things may come to existence either by a change (be it movement, generation, mutation) or by creation. These are the two exclusive ways things begin to exist. But Thomas claims that the origin of the first hypostases in each species cannot be due to a change, therefore it must be through creation:

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to the different states of the world, as each succeeding work added to the world a fresh state of perfection" (*S.Th*. I, q. 74, a. 2, ad 4; cf. *Super Sent*. lib. 2, d. 13, q. 1).

[9] "God ceased on the seventh day from the creation of new creatures, yet He ever works by keeping and governing His creatures" (*S.Th*. III, q. 40, a. 4, ad 1). "On the seventh day God ceased from making new things, but not from the propagation of one things from other, and to this work of propagation it belongs that the first day is succeeded by other days" (*S.Th*. I, q. 74, a. 2, ad 3). From this statement it also follows that there was some kind of propagation of things in the time of creation which implies the succession of time in creation.

[10] "When it comes to the existence of the very principles, the work of creation is considered, by which the substance of the elements of the world was produced into being. But some active and passive virtues move to determined species, such as the virtue that is in the seed of a lion and a horse; some other however move to all species, such as hot, cold, and the like. Therefore, by the work of distinction, the common active and passive virtues, moving to every species, were attributed to created things. In contrast, by the work of adornment the virtues moving to determined species were imparted on things" *Super Sent*. lib. 2, d. 13, q. 1, a. 1, co.

> According to faith one cannot say that something is a cause of something else after God, except by way of movement or generation. Hence all things that do not begin by generation must have God as their immediate (direct) cause. And these are the Angels, the souls, the heavenly substances, the matter of elements and the first hypostases in every species.[11]

> All these things that come to existence through creation have God alone as their immediate cause. And these are those things that cannot come to existence neither by motion nor by generation. [...] Thirdly, owing to the necessity of a generator (parent) similar according to species to the thing generated. And for this reason first hypostases were created directly by God. This includes the first man, the first lion, and other of this kind, because man cannot be generated otherwise but from man.[12]

From these statements it is clear that for Aquinas at least the higher animals could not have started to exist otherwise than by immediate action on God's part. This is tantamount to saying that he excludes any secondary causes, whether material (generation, mutation, selection) or immaterial (angels), from the creation of species. And it is not just a matter of scriptural interpretation but rather a metaphysical principle that says that new natures (and these are, among others, distinct species or kinds of animals) cannot emerge through the cooperation of created causes but must be directly from God.[13] This principle is particularly clear in Aquinas's teaching on the origin of the human body:

> The first formation of the human body could not be by the instrumentality of any created power, but was immediately from God. [...] God,

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[11] *Super Sent*. lib. 2, d. 18, q. 2, a. 2, co.
[12] *Super Sent*. lib. 2, d. 1, q. 1, a. 4, co.
[13] See: *S.Th*. I, 47,1, co; ScG II, 39, 3.

> though He is absolutely immaterial, can alone by His own power produce matter by creation: wherefore He alone can produce a form in matter, without the aid of any preceding material form. [...] Therefore, as no pre-existing body has been formed whereby another body of the same species could be generated, the first human body was of necessity made immediately by God.[14]

This exposition of Aquinas's teachings on the origin of species identifies him as a creationist in the sense that he believed in the separate creation of species (the so-called special creation). It is also worth observing that this teaching is not just an outcome of his literal interpretation of Genesis that could be easily overturned by proposing a non-literal reading. Rather this view stems from his metaphysical principles: the emergence of species by creation rather than a change (evolution) is a metaphysical necessity because no created being has a power to form matter into new kinds of living organisms. Having established Thomas's view on "creationism," I will now move on to answer the second question concerning the timeline of creation.

QUESTION 2.
The length of the days of creation

THE TWO TRADITIONS OF INTERPRETING GENESIS

Thomas says that there are two traditions of interpreting Genesis in the Church. The first is more common and seems more congruent with Holy Scripture at first glance. Aquinas traces its origin to St. Ambrose. According to this tradition, God created the universe in a succession of

[14] *S.Th*. I, q. 91, a. 2, co.

time, over the six days. The other tradition is rooted in Augustine's idea that the universe was created all at once, in a single act, however Moses divided the works of creation into six days (stages) because the crude original recipients of the text would not be able to comprehend the one-time creation. Thomas also says that he likes the Augustinian tradition more (*plus mihi placet*), that this tradition is more rational (*rationabilior*) and more resistant to the attacks of unbelievers. However, he decides that he would defend both and moreover, that they are not very different when it comes to the mode of production of things.[15]

Even though Thomas says he prefers Augustine's view of one-time creation, he unequivocally defends the division of creation into six days. He does so by explaining that each of the days is like another divine illumination of the Angels, who got to know divine works in six such illuminations.[16] Thus according to the Augustinian tradition, the question about the length of the days of creation has no grounds, because these days do not impart any succession of time; from the human perspective they all happened at once. If this was the case with Aquinas, the only relevant question would concern the age of the universe, i.e., how much time passed since the day of creation.

It is important to notice, however, that even within the Augustinian tradition a strictly literal reading of Genesis is followed. Medieval theology distinguished four senses of Scripture: literal, typological, moral (tropological) and anagogical. The leading sense and a normative one for other senses is always the literal one. However, literal reading as applied to the Biblical books which are historical in character may have two variants: simply literal and literal historical. Ambrose's tradition of interpreting Genesis falls into the literal and historical cate-

[15] We can say that these two traditions differ regarding the timeline of creation, but they do not greatly differ when it comes to the production of things, because according to both traditions, the essential things in the universe were created directly by God. See: *S.Th*. I, q. 74, a. 2, co.

[16] *Super Sent*. lib. 2, d. 12, q. 1, a. 3; *S.Th*. I, q. 74, a. 2, co.

gory, whereas the Augustinian tradition is literal but non-historical. The historical interpretation adheres not just to the letter (the meaning of each phrase and particular words) but also to the chronological framework of the text. Therefore, the fact that Aquinas prefers Augustine's reading does not mean that he abandons the literal meaning. On the contrary, both Augustine and Aquinas stick tightly to the letter which is confirmed by the fact that Augustine wrote three literal commentaries on Genesis and Thomas relies entirely on the authority of the literal sense in his commentary on Genesis in the *Summa*.[17]

Moreover, even though Aquinas prefers Augustine's interpretation (mostly for its resistance to critique), in many other places he implies that creation, after all, happened in the succession of time. For instance, Thomas relies on the same mistaken Latin translation of Ecclesiastes (18:1) that Augustine derived his interpretation from,[18] but Thomas does not share Augustine's conclusion that everything had to be created at once. Rather if things were created all at once it was only potentially in the first creation of matter:

> God created all things together so far as regards their substance in some measure formless. But He did not create all things together, so far as regards that formation of things which lies in distinction and adornment.[19]

In another place, Thomas says that the succession of time in creation was necessary to preserve a due order in the institution of things:

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[17] When explaining the Biblical account of creation in *S.Th*. I, q. 69–72 his counter arguments (*sed contra*) consist of a merely brief statement: "In contrarium sufficit auctoritas Scripturae."

[18] The Vulgate Eccl 18:1 reads: "Qui vivit in aeternum creavit omnia simul." The Latin word "simul" stands for the Greek "koine," but the meaning of the two is somewhat different. The Vulgate version suggests that all things were created simultaneously while the Septuagint text only states that God created everything.

[19] *S.Th*. I, q. 74, a. 2, ad 2.

> It was fitting that different days should be assigned to the different states of the world, as each succeeding work added to the world a fresh state of perfection.[20]

Augustine's one-time creation is untenable owing to the overwhelming scientific evidence that things did not come to existence all at once. Interestingly, today all parties debating evolution and the age of the universe agree on this. Even contemporary young Earth creationists accept the six days as signifying consecutive natural days. There are other reasons why Augustine came up with his peculiar interpretation, but for our purpose it is enough to note that Aquinas was equally open to one-time creation as he was to the progressive creation.[21] So, the question of how he understood the length of the days from Genesis remains open and we will address it in the next section.

THE MEANING OF THE DAYS OF CREATION

There are two places in which Aquinas comes close to the answer regarding the length of creation days. On the first occasion he asks whether suitable words were used to express the work of the six days. One of the objections states that when Scripture summarizes the work

[20] *S.Th*. I, q. 74, a. 2, ad 4.

[21] One place that shows this attitude reads: "According to Augustine, the work of creation belongs to the production of formless matter, and of the formless spiritual nature, both of which are outside of time, as he himself says (Confess. xii, 12). Thus, then, the creation of either is set down before there was any day. But it may also be said, following other holy writers, that the works of distinction and adornment imply certain changes in the creature which are measurable by time; whereas the work of creation lies only in the Divine act producing the substance of beings instantaneously. For this reason, therefore, every work of distinction and adornment is said to take place "in a day," but creation took place "in the beginning" which denotes something indivisible." *S.Th*. I, q. 74, a. 1, ad 1.

of the first day it uses "day one" (*dies unus*) instead of "the first day" (*dies primus*) as it happens with the conclusion of the following days (*dies secundus*, *dies tertius*, etc.). Hence the wording would be unsuitable. In the response Thomas simply brings up the three reasons presented by St. Basil for why there is "day one" rather than "the first day" in Genesis 1:5:

> [1] The word *one* is used in the first institution of day to denote that the span of 24 hours refers to one day. Hence by the fact that it says *one* the measure of a natural day is prefigured. (*Unde per hoc quod dicitur unus, praefigitur mensura diei naturalis*).[22] [2] Another reason may be to signify that a day is completed by the return of the sun to the point from which it commenced its course. [3] And yet another, because at the completion of a week of seven days, the first day returns which is one with the eighth day.[23]

We see that Thomas does not take the first day of creation for a natural day spanning 24 hours. Rather he sees the wording of the Bible "day one" (Gen 1:5) as a prefiguration of the natural day. The following two reasons do not seem to establish "day one" as a natural day either. The second reason states that "day one" may signify that a natural day completes with the full circle of the sun's movement, however, it does not necessarily follow that the first day of creation was of

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[22] Unfortunately, some English translations introduce confusion to this fragment by putting "fixed" in place of "praefigitur." See https://www.newadvent.org/summa/1074.htm#article3 (accessed 10.09.2022). Thus, some authors, being confused by that translation and without regard for the context of this utterance, ascribe to Aquinas a young Earth view, see: https://creation.com/thomas-aquinas-young-earth-creationist (accessed 10.09.2022). Basil's text comes from his *Homilia II in Hexaemeron* (PG 29, c. 50). English translation: *Homilies on Hexaemeron* II, 8 at: https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/32012.htm (accessed 10.09.2022).

[23] *S.Th*. I, q. 74, a. 3, ad 7.

such duration. Similarly, the third reason—the postulate that "day one" signifies the circular character of the week (which returns upon itself, to "day one") does not mean that the first day of creation was the first day of such a week.

Apparently, none of the three reasons establish the length of the first day of creation because they seem to be disconnected from the actual duration of the first creation day. These reasons seem to explain how we can understand the Biblical wording ("day one") in the context of time measures that we know (days, weeks) but not necessarily how we should understand the time measure of the creation day.

The other place where Thomas comes close to establishing the duration of the first day is found in his *Commentary* on Peter Lombard's *Sentences*. The problem with this fragment is, however, that it comes from the part called "expositio textus" which, unlike most of the *Commentary*, is just Aquinas's note on the subsequent phrases derived from Lombard's work. It is difficult to establish, therefore, whether Thomas makes these statements his own or just presents Lombard's thought in a clearer and more ordered manner without granting his own authority to them.

In *Sentences*, Peter Lombard says that the word "day" in Scripture is taken in different ways. It may mean: (1) the light that enlightens the first three days or (2) the very illumination of the air, or (3) the span of 24 hours. And this is, according to Lombard, the way how it is adopted in Gen 1:5:

> This is to be distinguished as follows: evening was made first, and afterwards the morning, and so was completed one day of 24 hours, namely a natural day, which had an evening but not a morning.[24]

[24] Peter Lombard, *The Sentences*, Book II, d. 13, ch. 4 (67), transl. by Giulio Silano, Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, vol. 2, 2008, 55.

In his comments Aquinas distinguishes just two understandings of "day" in Scripture: natural and artificial:

> One way is to speak about a "natural day" which has 24 hours. And this is how it is assumed in what Gen 1:5 says: "And there was evening, and there was morning—day one." Another way is to speak about an "artificial day" that is the time in which the sun illuminates our hemisphere, and this is how it is understood in the same place [Gen 1:5], when darkness is called night and light is called day.[25]

Apparently, Thomas does not see any need to distinguish between light and illumination. Nevertheless, he repeats Lombard's conviction that Gen 1:5 speaks about a natural day of 24 hours. Then he moves on to one possible challenge to such understanding: the first day had no morning because it did not begin with dawn but with full light. Full light appears at noon, which would mean that until the morning of the next day there would be less than 24 hours and thus the first day would not have that duration which is claimed by the letter of the text. But Thomas rejects this challenge saying:

> [O]n the first day the day is said to have had no dawn, not because that light, which by its motion made the day, was not created in the east, but because darkness was not admixed to that first illumination (light) as it happens now. The dawn is now the end of the night and the beginning of the day, which did not happen then.[26]

It is not quite clear how Aquinas imagines that first day. It seems that the light was created in the east so the day would have the proper

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[25] *Super Sent*. lib. 2, d. 13, q. 1, a. 5, expos.
[26] *Super Sent*. lib. 2, d. 13, q. 1, a. 5, expos.

duration of a natural day, however, the light was not mingled with any darkness and thus the first day did not have the dawn in our understanding but rather started with a noon light. Leaving aside any attempts to connect this view with cosmological reality, we need to observe two things regarding the quoted fragments:

One is that, as mentioned before, this part of Aquinas's writing is just a repetition of Lombard's teachings and we do not really know how much of it belongs to Thomas's thought. Assuming that he actually identifies with Lombard's claim would create a lot of difficulties in staying coherent, especially in the light of what will be said later.

The other observation is that this entire fragment applies to just the first day. The entire question was raised (both by Lombard and by Aquinas) because the Bible uses the simple numeral rather than the ordinal, thus distinguishing somehow the first day from the rest of the days. So even if the first day were of 24 hours, it would not automatically follow that the rest of the days are of the same duration.

From these analyses, we gather that Thomas considered the meaning of the days of creation in two contexts only—the first concerns an understanding of the phrase "day one" from Gen 1:5 and the other concerns the phrase from Gen 2:4 stating that the entire work of creation (the six days) is actually one day. In no place, however, does he directly address the duration or the length of the individual days of creation.

Having presented the two places where Thomas approaches the issue in the most explicit way, I will now move on to presenting those utterances that are less explicit but shed even more light on his interpretation of the days of creation.

THOMAS AND THE SCRIPTURAL OBJECTIONS TO A YOUNG EARTH

There are several Biblical arguments raised against a young Earth. "Old Earth" or "day-age" creationists rightly observe that the text of Genesis itself suggests that the days of creation were not natural solar

days.[27] Here I will focus on just three such arguments and explain how Thomas would accommodate them.

The problem of the fourth day

The first problem is that the creation of the sun happens only on the fourth day, which would mean that there wasn't a way to measure the first three days and thus the entire idea of six natural days collapses. By the way, it is worth noting that as much as this objection ruins the young Earth view, it also poses a serious challenge for the old-Earth view because it implies that plants (which were created on the third day) would need to exist without the sun for millions of years.

An answer to this challenge is found in the *Summa*. Aquinas observes that light is an accident and it cannot exist without a substance that would carry that accident. In other words, in order to have light there must be a body that emits it. Hence Thomas believes that:

> The nature of light, as existing in a subject, was made on the first day; and the making of the luminaries on the fourth day does not mean that their substance was produced anew, but that they then received a form that they had not before.[28]

This answer perfectly converges with the typical answer given by old-Earth creationists. They say that the creation of the sun and other luminaries is described by the first phrase of Genesis ("In the beginning God created heaven and earth"). However, the stars and the sun were not visible from the earth because before the fourth day the earth's atmosphere was translucent rather than transparent. Some light could reach the surface of the earth allowing vegetation, but on the

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[27] Arguably the best argumentation against a young earth interpretation of Genesis has been presented by Hugh Ross in *A Matter of Days*, 63–76.

[28] *S.Th*. I, 74,1 ad 4.

fourth day God caused the atmosphere to clear up and thus allowed the heavenly bodies to be visible.[29] This interpretation is additionally strengthened by two factors: the Hebrew text employs the verb "to be" rather than "make" or "create" to describe the appearance of the sun and moon in the sky. This suggests that they were placed there on the fourth day rather than produced. Secondly, Genesis presents the placement of the luminaries in the sky in a typically functional way which again suggests their becoming visible rather than creation:

> Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years.[30]

It seems therefore justified to say what old-Earth creationists believe, that the fourth day does not describe the very creation of bodies emitting light, but rather the change of their state, namely, that they become visible from earth. Aquinas, in turn, says that the substance of these bodies was not created anew on the fourth day, but that then they received a new form. To become visible is a new accidental form (*forma passiva*), thus Aquinas's explanation perfectly fits the old-Earth explanation. Nevertheless, his explanation does not remove the difficulty that the problem presents to the young Earth. On the contrary, since the Bible itself attributes the role of measuring days to the sun only on the fourth day, it implies that the previous days were not solar, i.e., natural days. Whether Aquinas thought about this difficulty cannot be known with certainty; however, his consistent reluctance to associate the creation days with natural days might be partially explained by this problem.

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[29] Ross, *A Matter of Days*, 70–71.

[30] Gen 1:14.

All six days are one day

The second problem is derived from Gen 2:4 which states that the six creation days were actually one day of creation.[31] If this were so there would not be any grounds to consider the six days as 24-hour periods of time because the Bible itself suggests (in the very Genesis account) that the day of creation is to be understood as a moment in time or simply a time of the special divine creative activity rather than a natural day.[32]

This fact does not escape Thomas's attention and so he sets off to defend the distinction of the six days. The argument to the contrary (that all days are one) is derived from Gen 2:4–5. Thomas observes that this passage mentions the creation of heaven, earth and plants which account just for the first and the third day. However, if the first and the third day are one, by the same reason (*pari ratione*) all other days should be included. Therefore, all creation days would be one.[33] But Thomas disagrees with this argument and replies that on the day when God created heaven and earth, He also created all plants not actually but merely potentially. The same could be extended to other things created after the first day.[34]

We see, therefore, that for Aquinas Gen 2:4 refers directly to the first day of creation in which all things were created in their causes. Hence there is no challenge to understanding the day of creation either way (as a natural day or a period of time) as long as it is recognized that on the first day, God created matter with the capacity to be later formed into plants and animals. Aquinas's interpretation renders Gen 2:4 irrelevant to the debate over the nature of the days of creation.

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[31] Gen 2:4 reads: "These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created, in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens."

[32] Ross, *A Matter of Days*, 67.

[33] *S.Th*. I, q. 74, a. 2, arg. 1.

[34] *S.Th*. I, q. 74, a. 2, ad 1.

The seventh day is not finished

The Bible teaches that God rested on the seventh day, which did not have the evening nor the morning. But this implies that the seventh day lasts until now, which is much longer than a natural day. Therefore, the young Earth perspective is prone to the charge of inconsistency, because it attributes to the six days a definite and very short duration while the seventh day is indefinite and lasts at least thousands of years.[35] Aquinas also understands the seventh day as lasting until now, because on the seventh day the universe is to achieve its completeness in terms of operation of the created things:

> The completion of the universe as to the completeness of its parts belongs to the sixth day, but its completion as regards their operation, to the seventh.[36]

It follows that if this contemporary argument against the young Earth from the seventh day has any merit, it would be equally valid for Aquinas. Even though Aquinas does not address this issue, his reluctance to explicitly call a day of creation a 24-hour period of time may partially stem from this otherwise obvious scriptural difficulty.

The sixth day is too short

Another problem that Aquinas does not bring up, but he could be aware of, is the fact that the sixth day of creation, if it were a natural day, would be too short to house all the events. We read that on the sixth day God created animals, then He prepared a garden in which He

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[35] Cf. Ross, A Matter of Days, 73–75.

[36] *S.Th*. I, q. 73, a. 1, ad 2. In another place, Aquinas explains: "It may also be said, with the other writers, that the world entered on the seventh day upon a new state, in that nothing new was to be added to it, and that therefore the seventh day is mentioned after the six, from its being devoted to cessation from work" (*S.Th*. I, q. 74, a. 1, ad 5).

placed the man He had created, then God brought to Adam all animals to give them names, Adam did not find a suitable help, Adam fell asleep, and Eve was created. Adam's reaction upon seeing Eve ("This is now the bone of my bones,"[37]) seems to describe a moment of fulfillment after longer anticipation. Assuming that none of these events would happen during a night, only twelve hours remain. Surely, it is not impossible for God to compress all these events into such a short time. For example, all animals could be presented to Adam in an intellectual vision simultaneously, but we do not find any indication of that in the text. Moreover, the entire character of the second account (which focuses on the sixth day) is such that it indicates a natural flow of time spanning days, weeks, and perhaps even months.

Again, this kind of natural reading of the text that implies the sixth day to be a period of time rather than a solar day, is a possible explanation for why Aquinas would not insist on the day of creation to be a 24-hour period of time.

THE METAPHYSICAL ARGUMENT

Besides the scriptural issues described above, there is also at least one problem of a philosophical character. Thomas defends the principle that

> in the works of nature creation does not enter, but is presupposed to the work of nature.[38]

This means that whatever can come about by natural means is not produced supernaturally, by way of creation;[39] and the contrary as well: whatever cannot be produced by nature must be created.[40]

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[37] Gen 2:23

[38] *S.Th.* I,45,8, co.

[39] "The work of creation is distinct from the work of government and that of propagation. Now that which is done by the action of nature belongs to the works of gov-

Now, if the creation events were compressed to six natural days, plants being created on the third day could not spring from the earth on the same day, nor could they reach their mature form by the sixth day when the Garden of Eden is already inhabited by Adam. The proponents of the natural sun days of creation propose therefore that plants were created in the fully grown form.[41]

But this is untenable in the light of Aquinas's principle that creation is not admixed to the works of nature because plants can grow naturally from seeds planted in the ground if only water and sunshine are delivered. Since nature can produce plants from seeds, they would be created in the form of seeds but not in the mature form. This does not contradict Aquinas's saying that higher animals had to be created in the form of the first pair (see the first section) because a human, a lion, a horse (etc.) embryo requires a parent of the same species to be planted and delivered. This is why at least some animals (higher animals) had to begin their existence with a couple of adults. Thus the metaphysical principle stating that creation is not mingled with the works of nature does not exclude the separate creation of species, but it does conflict with the creation events lasting just a few 12/24 hour days.

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ernment and propagation. Therefore creation is not mingled with the work of nature" (*De potentia*, q. 3, 8, s.c. 1). "That which is to be acquired in the thing generated is found to be actually in the natural generator, and each one acts inasmuch as it is in act. [...] From this principle that the composite and not the form is made the Philosopher (*Metaph*. VII, 8) proves that forms result from natural agents" (*De potentia*, q. 3, 8, co.).

[40] Thomas lists four things of this kind: matter of the elements, angels, souls and first parents in each species. Cf. *Super Sent*. lib. 2, d. 18, q. 2, a. 2, co.

[41] This way of interpreting Genesis was advanced in the 19th century by Philip Gosse in his book *Omphalos*. Today's YEC proponents still maintain that God created things looking old. Whitcomb and Morris make this claim in *The Genesis Flood*, 238, 344–345. Whitcomb confirmed his position once again in 2006 (Impact #395, iii). Henry Morris makes the same claim in his *Scientific Creationism*, 267.

QUESTION 3.
The age of the universe

Having presented Aquinas's views on the length of the days of creation, we can now move on to the last question, that is, the length of universe's existence. As anyone can imagine, there is not much in Thomas's writing on this topic, and we would definitely not find there the modern scientific concept of deep time. However, we do not find in Aquinas the concept called Creation Week Pattern (CWP) either. According to CWP, God's final judgment would occur exactly six thousand years after creation and the new creation would begin after the seven thousandth year had passed. As some authors indicated, this idea does not have Biblical roots, rather it originates in Jewish apocalyptic literature but then reappears in the writings of several ancient Christian scholars, among them such prominent figures as Irenaeus, Hippolytus, Origen, Cyprian and Augustine.[42] The fact that Aquinas recognizes this view as an "opinion of ancient doctors" but he does not make any use of it clearly indicates that he does not share the view that the universe would be consumed within six thousand years.[43]

There is one more place in which we may find the answer. Thomas says that in Aristotle's time, the movement of the "fixed stars" was unknown, but Ptolemy proposed that they move from west to east according to the zodiac, one degree every hundred years, so that their total cycle would be concluded in thirty-six thousand years.[44] Aquinas notices that based on this observation some speculated that the end of the world should happen when the heavens return to the place where

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[42] John Millam, *The Genesis Genealogies*, 27–29.

[43] Cf. *De potentia*, q. 3, a. 18, arg. 7 and ad 7. *Catena in Lc*., cap. 9, l.6.

[44] *In De caelo*, lib. 2, l.17, n. 7.

they were created, otherwise the movement of heavens would be incomplete. Thomas, however, responds that:

> This reason seems unsuitable, because if there were any movement (revolution) in the sky which does not finish sooner than after 36 thousand years it would follow that the universe would have to last that long, which does not seem probable (*quod non videtur probabile*).[45]

Another reason why this solution does not seem probable to Thomas is that if astronomers could establish probable positions in which celestial bodies were created, they could calculate a certain number of years when they would return to the similar positions and thus the time when the world ends would be known, which cannot be the case.[46]

From this passage we gather that Thomas does not have any specified view on the age of the universe—he simply does not think it would last as long as thirty-six thousand years. If he, however, believed in the Creation Week Pattern (CWP) for human history, or four thousand years of history from the beginning to the birth of Christ, this would be the place to mention it. We do not find any such suggestion which leads us to the conclusion that for Thomas the universe should last probably no less than six and no more than thirty-six thousand years before its consummation. He does not present this as a doctrine or a teaching of authority but merely as a subjective preference that has no scriptural or scientific justification.

We also take another important lesson from this passage: Aquinas recognizes the Ptolemian modification of Aristotle's view on the movements of heavens and he follows the premises of those who

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[45] *Super Sent*. lib. 4, d. 48, q. 2, a. 2, ad 8.

[46] *Super Sent*. lib. 4, d. 48, q. 2, a. 2, ad 8.

accepted Ptolemy rather than Aristotle. This indicates that he considers the age of the universe a matter of scientific observation (cosmology) rather than belief, or Biblical interpretation, and he also acknowledges that progress in natural knowledge can modify our views on the cosmos and its history.

BIBLICAL GENEALOGIES

As with the duration of the creation days and the age of the universe, there are some things that Aquinas may have been aware of that made him reluctant to postulate the CWP or four thousand years from the creation of the universe to Christ. If we take the Old Testament genealogies as complete records that do not leave out any generations,s ome bizarre conclusions follow. For example, Adam would need to be still around at the time of Lamech, the father of Noah. Noah would be still around when Abram turned 50 years old (which would be very strange that there would not be any mention in Genesis of Abram being born in the days of Noah, or something of this kind). Methuselah would have died in the year of the deluge, however, in the Septuagint's account, he would have outlived the deluge for a few decades without embarking on the Ark. Aquinas could have been aware of these strange coincidences that necessarily emerge when one takes the genealogies as being complete. Consequently, he would have suspected that the genealogies may be incomplete and therefore he would have found improbable the idea of the four thousand years of history from the beginning to Christ.

Conclusions

In the beginning, I postulated that although the three issues connected with YEC are interrelated, the position on the creation of species does not logically necessitate a position on the timeline of creative events. Now we can conclude that Aquinas believes that animals (especially

the so-called higher animals) had to be created independently and directly beginning with the first genitors in each species. This teaching for Aquinas is a matter of faith (*secundum fidem*) but it also finds a deeper metaphysical justification in his system. In this sense, we can say Aquinas is a creationist.

However, when it comes to the following two questions, the answer is not as certain. Regarding the length of creation days, it seems that Thomas would allow three options: all of them being one moment (Augustine's interpretation), at least some of them being natural 24-hour days (for instance, the first day) or all of them being different periods of time of unspecified duration. He explicitly calls the days of creation a "prefiguration of natural days" and "different (subsequent) states of the world." Even though we cannot settle the issue, some other and even more important conclusions may be drawn with certainty: regardless of how Thomas understands the days of creation, he does not see this issue as a matter of faith, biblical revelation, or metaphysics. In other words, contrary to what most of today's "young Earthers" claim, for Aquinas different interpretations are perfectly acceptable, none of the three is heretical and, moreover, there isn't any metaphysical or biblical necessity to accept one specific interpretation.

When it comes to the duration of the universe, based on the fragmentary insights that can be found in Aquinas, we may conclude that he does not imagine a universe as old as billions of years; however, he does not accept the Creation Week Pattern either. For him the length of the natural history of the universe is rather unknown, with the indication that it would never reach as many as thirty-six thousand years. Again, Aquinas's conviction is not based on any scriptural or metaphysical foundation. He does not see it as a matter of faith and therefore we can postulate that he would be open to modifying his view according to scientific evidence.

Most of all, unlike YEC proponents, Thomas never connects the belief in "special creation" (i.e., *opus formationis*) with the age of the

universe. Thus even though Aquinas's teaching might be squared (with some difficulties)with a young Earth framework, a more appropriate designation would be a creationist with an open-ended view on the timeline of the creative events. Given the fact that he never derives his view on the age of the universe from the Bible while allowing it to be informed by (ancient) astronomers, it is more probable that in today's context, he would follow the scientific evidence which would make him a proponent of some form of an old Earth creationism.

Was Thomas Aquinas a Young Earth Creationist?

SUMMARY

This article concerns the question of whether St. Thomas Aquinas can be considered a young Earth creationist. This question breaks down to three different though interrelated issues: Aquinas's view on the origin of species, his position on the length of the six days of creation (whether they were natural days or other periods of time) and his views on the age of the earth. Each of the topics is addressed separately in the subsequent sections. The article attempts to establish Thomas's views by his explicit statements as well as what he implies in some fragments. The conclusion presents Aquinas as a creationist with an open-ended view of the timescale of the creative events and the age of the universe.

Keywords: Evolution, theistic evolution, Thomism, creation, creationism, Aquinas

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