

## CHAPTER XV—*That God is to all things the Cause of their being*

HAVING shown (Chap VI) that God is to some things the cause of their being, we must further show that nothing out of God has being except of Him. Every attribute that attaches to anything otherwise than as constituting its essence, attaches to it through some cause, as whiteness to man.<sup>13</sup> To be in a thing independently of causation is to be there primarily and immediately, as something ordinary (*per se*) and essential. It is impossible for any one attribute, attaching to two things, to attach to each as constituting its essence. What is predicated as constituent of a thing's essence, has no extension beyond that thing: as the having three angles together equal to two right angles has no extension beyond 'triangle,' of which it is predicated, but is convertible with 'triangle.' Whatever then attaches to two things, cannot attach to them both as constituting the essence of each. It is impossible therefore for any one attribute to be predicated of two subjects without its being predicated of one or the other as something come there by the operation of some cause: either one must be the cause of the other, or some third thing must be cause of both. Now 'being' is predicated of everything that is. It is impossible therefore for there to be two things, each having being independently of any cause; but either these things must both of them have being by the operation of a cause, or one must be to the other the cause of its being. Therefore everything which in any way is, must have being from that which is uncaused; that is, from God (B. I, Chap. XV).

2. What belongs to a thing by its nature, and is not dependent on any causation from without, cannot suffer diminution or defect. For if anything essential is withdrawn from or added to nature, that nature, so increased or diminished, will give place to another. If on the other hand the nature is left entire, and something else is found to have suffered diminution, it is clear that what has been so diminished does not absolutely depend on that nature, but on some other cause, by removal of which it is diminished. Whatever property therefore attaches to a thing less in one instance than in others, does not attach to that thing in mere virtue of its nature, but from the concurrence of some other cause. The cause of all effects in a particular kind will be that whereof the kind is predicated to the utmost. Thus we see that the hottest body is the cause of heat in all hot bodies, and the brightest body the cause of brightness in all bright bodies. But God is in the highest degree 'being' (B. I, Chap. XIII). He then is the cause of all things whereof 'being' is predicated.<sup>14</sup>

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13 We do not ask, what made man a rational animal, because man must be a rational animal, if he is to be man at all. But we may well ask: What made the Englishman white and the Chinaman yellow?

14 This argument rests unfortunately on a theory of physical nature, to which there is no counterpart in *rerum natura*, the theory of the 'four elements,' a physical presentation of Plato's doctrine of Ideas. Fire was taken to be ideally hot, and the cause of all heat: air ideally cold, and the cause of all cold: water ideally humid, and cause of all humidity; earth ideally dry, and cause of all dryness. The mediaeval mind delighted in this recurrence to

3. The order of causes must answer to the order of effects, since effects are proportionate to their causes. Hence, as special effects are traced to special causes, so any common feature of those special effects must be traced to some common cause. Thus, over and above the particular causes of this or that generation, the sun is the universal cause of all generation; and the king is the universal cause of government in his kingdom, over the officials of the kingdom, and also over the officials of individual cities. But being is common to all things. There must then be over all causes some Cause to whom it belongs to give being.

4. What is by essence, is the cause of all that is by participation, as fire is the cause of all things fiery, as such. But God is being by His essence because He is pure being; while every other being is being by participation, because there can only be one being that is its own existence (B. I, Chapp. [XXII](#), [XLII](#)). God therefore is cause of being to all other beings.

5. Everything that is possible to be and not to be, has some cause: because, looked at by itself, it is indifferent either way; and thus there must be something else that determines it one way. Hence, as a process to infinity is impossible, there must be some necessary being that is cause of all things which are possible to be and not to be.<sup>15</sup>

6. God in His actuality and perfection includes the perfections of all things (B. I, Chap. [XXVIII](#)); and thus He is virtually all. He is therefore the apt producing cause of all.

This conclusion is confirmed by divine authority: for it is said: *Who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all things that are therein* ([Ps. cxlv, 6](#)). And, *All things were made by him, and without him was made nothing* ([John i, 3](#)). And *From whom are all things, by whom are all things, in (unto) whom are all things* ([Rom. xi, 16](#)).

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unity, ascribing all the particulars of a kind to some one source and cause, the perfect expression of that kind. Thus motion was traced to one *primum mobile*, political power to the Emperor, etc. The unities of nature are not so easy to discern in the light of our increased knowledge. Nature is more manifold and broken into detail than as St Thomas knew it. It is true that the sun, “warmest and brightest of beings,” is the chief cause of heat and light that make human existence on earth possible; — to the sun we owe the coal-forests, — and we may observe that the sun is thus an image of God in the universe: but this is an analogy, not an argument. St Thomas’s conclusion, so far as I see, gains no support from modern physics: but, metaphysically, it may be urged thus. — God is *ex hypothesi* the ideal Being, the fulness of Being: the name ‘God’ means no less than that. If then there be a God at all, all other being must be derived from Him.

15 Understand, ‘and yet are.’ This is the argument for the existence of God, known as the ‘argument from contingent being.’

## CHAPTER XVI—*That God has brought things into being out of nothing*

TO every effect produced by God there is either something pre-existent or not. If not, the thesis stands, that God produces some effect out of nothing pre-existent. If anything pre-exists, we either have a process to infinity, which is impossible, or we must come to something primitive, which does not presuppose anything else previous to it. Now this primitive something cannot be God Himself, for God is not the material out of which anything is made (B. I, Chap. XVI): nor can it be any other being, distinct from God and uncaused by God (Chap. XV).

3. The more universal the effect, the higher the cause: for the higher the cause, the wider its range of efficiency. Now being is more universal than motion. Therefore above any cause that acts only by moving and transmitting must be that cause which is the first principle of being; and that we have shown to be God (B. I, Chap. XIII). God therefore does not act merely by moving and transmuting; whereas every cause that can only bring things into being out of pre-existing material acts merely in that way, for a thing is made out of material by movement or some change.

4. It is not proper to the universal cause of being, as such, to act only by movement and change: for not by movement and change is being, as such, made out of not-being, as such, but 'being this' is made out of 'not being this.' But God is the universal principle of being (Chap. XV). Therefore it is not proper to Him to act only by movement or change, or to need pre-existent material to make anything.

5. Every agent has a term of action like itself, for its acts inasmuch as it is in actuality. Given then an agent in actuality by some form inherent in it, and not to the whole extent of its substance,<sup>16</sup> it will be proper to such an agent to produce its effect by causing a form in some way inherent in matter. But God is in actuality, not by anything inhering in Him, but to the whole extent of His substance (B. I, Chap. XVIII). Therefore the proper mode of divine action is to produce the whole subsistent thing, and not a mere inherent thing, as is form in matter.

10. Between actuality and potentiality such an order obtains, that, though in one and the same being, which is sometimes in potentiality sometimes in actuality, potentiality is prior in time to actuality (although actuality is prior in nature), yet, absolutely speaking,

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<sup>16</sup> That is to say, given a corporeal agent: for the schoolmen held that material forms on earth did not actuate the whole potentiality of the matter in which they inhered. So they explained the mutability of sublunary substances. Cf. Chap. XXX.

actuality must be prior to potentiality, as is clear from this, that potentiality is not reduced to actuality except by some actual being. But matter is being in potentiality.<sup>17</sup> Therefore God, first and pure actuality, must be absolutely prior to matter, and consequently cause thereof.

This truth divine Scripture confirms, saying: *In the beginning God created heaven and earth* ([Gen. i, 1](#)). For to create is nothing else than to bring a thing into being without any pre-existent material.

Hereby is confuted the error of the ancient philosophers, who supposed no cause at all for matter, since in the actions of particular agents they always saw some matter pre-existent to every action. Hence they took up the common opinion, that nothing is made out of nothing, which indeed is true of the actions of particular agents. But they had not yet arrived at a knowledge of the universal agent, the active cause of all being, whose causative action does not necessarily suppose any pre-existent material.<sup>18</sup>

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17 By 'matter' St Thomas does not mean material substances (corpora), but a sort of matrix, or mother-stuff, conceived as not yet determined by any active principle, or 'form,' and therefore in potentiality to all manner of material forms. This is called by the schoolmen *materia prima*, or primordial matter. Primordial (or formless) matter, as such, nowhere exists: that is to say, all existing matter is determined by some particular form, so as to make this or that material substance or body: but primordial matter underlies all material substances. For a first notion (I do not mean St Thomas's notion) of primordial matter, see Plato, *Timaeus*, 50, 51, 52.

18 That is to say, who works unconditionally, being Himself the Unconditioned. The "error of the ancient philosophers" was the error of Plato (*Timaeus*, 30), who certainly had arrived to some, though an imperfect, knowledge of the Universal Agent. Plato's reluctance to confess God as more than the Demiurge, — or ordering Mind of the universe, not its Creator, — came from his discerning, as he thought, the origin of evil in the existence of matter, matter being more or less an irrational product, not originated by mind, and but imperfectly controlled by mind. Monists at least will not deny the derivation of matter from mind. To them, all reality is One and of One: but they deny creation out of nothing, and consider matter a necessary and eternal outcome of the Divine Mind. On Monism St Thomas touches, Chapp. LXXIII–LXXV.