

QUESTION 61

The Production of Angels with Their Natural *Esse*

Given what has already been said about the nature of angels and about their cognition and willing, what remains to be considered is their creation or, more generally, their origin. This inquiry has three parts. First, we will consider the way in which angels were produced with their natural *esse* (question 61); second, the way in which angels were perfected in grace and glory (question 62); and, third, the way in which some of them became bad (questions 63 and 64).

On the first topic there are four questions: (1) Do angels have a cause of their *esse*? (2) Do angels exist from eternity? (3) Were angels created before corporeal creatures? (4) Were angels created in the empyrean heaven?

Article 1

Do angels have a cause of their *esse*?

It seems that angels do not have a cause of their *esse*:

Objection 1: Genesis 1 talks about the things that were created by God. But no mention of angels is made there. Therefore, angels were not created by God.

Objection 2: In *Metaphysics* 8 the Philosopher says that if a given substance is a form without matter, then it has being and oneness immediately through itself, and it does not have a cause which makes it an entity or makes it one. But as was shown above (q. 50, a. 2), angels are immaterial forms. Therefore, they do not have a cause of their *esse*.

Objection 3: Everything that is made by an agent is such that by the very fact that it is made, it receives its form from that agent. But since angels are forms, they do not receive their form from any agent. Therefore, angels do not have an agent cause.

But contrary to this: Psalm 148:2 says, "Praise Him, all you His angels." And afterwards it adds, "For He spoke, and they were made."

I respond: It is necessary to assert that angels, as well as everything else other than God, was made by God. For God alone is His own *esse*, whereas in all other things, as was shown above (q. 3, a. 4), the essence of the thing differs from its *esse*. From this it is clear that God alone is a being through His essence, whereas all other things are beings by participation. But everything that is such-and-such by participation is caused by that which is such-and-such through its essence; for instance, fire is a cause of everything that is on fire. Hence, it is necessary for angels to have been created by God.

Reply to objection 1: In *De Civitate Dei* 11 Augustine claims that the angels were not left out in the first creation of things, but that they are signified by the name 'heaven' or even by the name 'light'. Now the reason why they were either left out or signified by the names of corporeal things is that Moses was speaking to an uneducated people who were not yet able to comprehend an incorporeal nature. And if he had told them that there were certain things above every corporeal nature, this would have been for them an occasion of idolatry, which they were already prone to and which Moses wanted especially to call them back from.

Reply to objection 2: Substances that are subsistent forms do not have any formal cause of their *esse* or their oneness; nor do they have an agent cause that transforms their matter from potentiality to actuality. But they do have a cause that produces their whole substance.

Reply to objection 3: The reply to objection 3 is clear from what has just been said.

Article 2

Were the angels produced by God from eternity?

It seems that the angels were produced by God from eternity (*ab aeterno*):

Objection 1: God is a cause of an angel through His own *esse*, since He does not act through anything that is added to His essence. But His *esse* is eternal. Therefore, He produced angels from eternity.

Objection 2: Anything that exists at some times and not at others is subject to time. But as the *Liber de Causis* says, an angel is beyond time. Therefore, an angel is not such that he exists at some times and not at others; instead, he always exists.

Objection 3: Augustine proves the incorruptibility of the soul from the fact that the soul is able through its intellect to know truth. But truth is eternal in the same way that it is incorruptible. Therefore, the intellectual nature of souls and angels is not only incorruptible, but also eternal.

But contrary to this: Proverbs 8:22 says in the person of Begotten Wisdom, “The Lord possessed me in the beginning of His ways, before He made anything at the beginning.” But as has been shown (a. 1), angels were made by God. Therefore, there was a time at which angels did not exist.

I respond: God alone—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—exists from eternity. This is what the Catholic Faith firmly holds, and any contrary opinion is to be rejected as heretical. For God produced creatures in such a way that He made them from nothing (*ex nihilo*), i.e., He made them after there was nothing.

Reply to objection 1: God’s *esse* is His very act of willing. Therefore, the fact that God produced angels and other creatures through His *esse* does not rule out His having produced them by His act of will. But as was explained above (q. 19, a. 3 and q. 46, a. 1), God’s will does not produce creatures by necessity. And so He produced the things He wanted to, and He produced them when He wanted to.

Reply to objection 2: An angel is beyond that time which numbers the movement of the heavens, since an angel is above all the movements of corporeal nature. Yet an angel is not beyond that time which numbers the succession of his own *esse* after non-*esse*, or that time which numbers the succession of his own operations. This is why Augustine says in *Super Genesim ad Litteram* 8 that God moves the spiritual creature through time.

Reply to objection 3: Angels and intellective souls are incorruptible by the very fact that they have a nature through which they are capable of knowing truth. But they did not have this nature from eternity; instead, it was given to them by God when He willed to give it to them. Hence, it does not follow that the angels existed from eternity.

Article 3

Were the angels created before the corporeal world?

It seems that the angels were created before the corporeal world:

Objection 1: In *Super Epistolam ad Titum* Jerome says, “Six thousand years of our time have not yet been completed. How much time, and how many beginnings of ages, must we think there have been in which the angels—the Thrones, Dominations, and the rest of the orders—have served God?” And in *De Fide Orthodoxa* 2 Damascene says, “Some claim that the angels were born before all of creation; for instance, the theologian Gregory says, ‘God first thought of the angelic and heavenly powers, and this

thought was His work.”

Objection 2: Angelic nature lies between God’s nature and corporeal nature. But God’s nature exists from eternity, whereas corporeal nature exists from the onset of time. Therefore, angelic nature was made before the creation of time and after eternity.

Objection 3: Angelic nature is more distant from corporeal nature than one corporeal nature is from another. But one corporeal nature was made before another; this is why the beginning of Genesis describes six days of the production of things. Therefore, *a fortiori*, angelic nature was made before every corporeal nature.

But contrary to this: Genesis 1:1 says, “In the beginning God created heaven and earth.” But this would not be true if He had created something before this. Therefore, angels were not created before corporeal nature.

I respond: On this matter the holy doctors hold two opinions, but it seems that the more probable opinion is that the angels were created at the same time that corporeal creatures were. For the angels are a certain part of the universe, since they do not by themselves constitute a universe, but instead come together with corporeal creatures to constitute a single universe. This is clear from the ordering of one creature toward another, since the ordering of things toward one another is the good of the universe. But no part is perfect when separated from its whole. Therefore, it is not probable that God, “whose works are perfect” (Deuteronomy 32:4), would have created angelic creatures separately before other creatures.

However, the contrary position should not be labeled ‘erroneous’—mainly because it is the opinion of Gregory Nazianzus. For as Jerome says, Gregory’s authority in Christian doctrine is so great that, as in the case of Athanasius’s writings, no one has ever presumed to impugn his teaching.

Reply to objection 1: Jerome is here relating the position of the Greek doctors, who all agree that the angels were created before the corporeal world.

Reply to objection 2: God is not a part of the universe, but instead stands above the whole universe, containing within Himself the entire perfection of the universe in a more eminent way. Angels, by contrast, are a part of the universe. Therefore, the arguments are not parallel.

Reply to objection 3: Corporeal creatures are all one in matter, whereas angels do not share in matter with corporeal creation. Hence, once the matter of corporeal creatures has been created, all of them have in some sense been created, whereas it is not the case that once angels are created, the universe itself has been created.

Still, if one maintains the contrary position, then the words of Genesis 1:1, “In the beginning God created heaven and earth,” have to be interpreted in such a way that ‘in the beginning’ means ‘in the Son’ or, alternatively, ‘at the beginning of time’. But ‘in the beginning’ would not mean a beginning before which there was nothing, except in the sense that it was a beginning before which there was nothing in the genus of corporeal creatures.

Article 4

Were the angels created in the empyrean heaven?

It seems that the angels were not created in the empyrean heaven:

Objection 1: Angels are incorporeal substances. But an incorporeal substance does not depend on a body for its *esse* and, as a result, it does not depend on a body for its being-made (*fieri*), either. Therefore, angels were not created in a corporeal place.

Objection 2: In *Super Genesim ad Litteram* 3 Augustine says that the angels were created in the

highest part of the air. Therefore, they were not created in the empyrean heaven.

Objection 3: The empyrean heaven is said to be the highest heaven. Therefore, if the angels had been created in the empyrean heaven, then it would not have been possible for them to ascend to a higher heaven. But this is contrary to what Isaiah 14:13 (“I will ascend into heaven”) says in the person of a sinful angel.

But contrary to this: In commenting on the passage, “In the beginning God created heaven and earth,” Strabo says, “What he is here calling ‘heaven’ is not the visible firmament, but the empyreum, i.e., the fiery or intellectual heaven, which is named not from its heat but from its splendor and which was filled with angels as soon as it was made.”

I respond: As has been explained (a. 3), corporeal creatures and spiritual creatures together constitute a single universe. Hence, spiritual creatures were created in such a way that they have some ordering toward corporeal creatures and preside over the whole of corporeal creation. Thus, it was fitting for the angels to be created in the highest body in order that they might preside over the whole of corporeal nature—whether we call this the empyrean heaven or use some other name for it. Hence, in commenting on Deuteronomy 10:14 (“Behold heaven belongs to the Lord your God, and the heaven of heavens”) Isidore says that the highest heaven is the heaven of the angels.

Reply to objection 1: The angels were not created in a corporeal place in the sense that they depended on a body for their *esse* or for their being-made. For God could have created the angels before the whole of corporeal creation, as many doctors maintain He did. Rather, the angels were made in a corporeal place in order to exhibit their relation to corporeal nature and to show that they have contact with bodies by their power.

Reply to objection 2: Perhaps by ‘the highest part of the air’ Augustine means the highest part of the heavens, with which air has a certain agreement because of its subtle and diaphanous nature. Or perhaps he is talking not about all the angels, but about only those who had sinned, since, according to some authors, the ones who sinned belonged to the lower orders of angels.

However, nothing prevents one from saying that the higher angels, who have an elevated and universal power over all bodies, were created in the highest of corporeal creatures, whereas other angels, who have a more particularized power, were created among the lower bodies.

Reply to objection 3: The passage in question is talking not about any corporeal heaven, but rather about the heaven of the Holy Trinity, to which the sinful angel wanted to ascend when he willed to be in some sense equal to God. This will become clear below (q. 63, a. 3).