

QUESTION 44

The Procession of Creatures from God, and the First Cause of All Beings

Now that we have considered the divine persons, we will next consider the procession of creatures from God. This treatment will be divided into three parts. We will deal, first, with the production of creatures (questions 43-47); second, with the different kinds of creatures (questions 47-102); and, third, with the conservation and governance of creatures (questions 103-119).

As for the production of creatures, there are three things to consider, viz., (a) what the first cause of beings is (question 44), (b) the way in which creatures proceed from the first cause (question 45), and (c) the principle of duration for things (question 46).

On the first topic there are four questions: (1) Is God an efficient cause of all things? (2) Is primary matter created by God, or is it instead a coordinate principle on equal footing with Him (*principium ex aequo coordinatum ei*)? (3) Is God the exemplary cause of things, or are there other exemplars besides Him? (4) Is God a final cause of things?

Article 1

Is it necessary for every being to be created by God?

It seems that it is not necessary for every being (*ens*) to be created by God.

Objection 1: Nothing prevents a being from existing without that which does not belong to its definition (*ratio*), e.g., a man without whiteness. But the relation of what is caused to its cause does not seem to belong to the definition of *being*, since some beings can be understood without it. Therefore, they can exist without that relation. Therefore, nothing prevents it from being the case that some beings are not created by God.

Objection 2: It is in order to exist that a thing needs an efficient cause. Therefore, that which is not able not to exist does not need an efficient cause. But no necessary being is able not to exist. Therefore, since there are many necessary beings among the things that exist, it seems that not all beings are from God.

Objection 3: Anything that has a cause is such that there can be a demonstration with respect to it through that cause. But as is clear from the Philosopher in *Metaphysics* 3, no demonstrations about mathematical entities are made through agent causes. Therefore, not all beings are from God as an agent cause.

But contrary to this: Romans 11:36 says: “For of Him, and by Him, and in Him are all things.”

I respond: One must affirm that anything which exists in any way at all is from God.

For any feature that is found in a thing through participation must be caused in that thing by something which has the feature through its essence; for instance, iron is made red-hot by fire. But it was shown above (q. 3, a. 4) that God is *esse* itself subsisting *per se*. Again, it was shown (q. 7, a. 1) that there can be only one subsistent *esse*—just as if whiteness were subsistent, then there could be only one such whiteness, since whitenesses are multiplied because of the things that receive them. Therefore, it follows that all things other than God are not their own *esse*, but instead participate in *esse*.

Hence, it must be the case that all things which are diversified through diverse participations in *esse*—so that they exist in more and less perfect ways—are caused by a single first being, which itself exists in an absolutely perfect way. This is why Plato claimed that oneness must be posited prior to any multitude. And according to Aristotle in *Metaphysics* 2, that which is maximally a being and maximally true is a cause of every entity and of every true thing, just as that which is maximally hot is a cause of all hotness.

Reply to objection 1: Even though its relation to its cause does not enter into the definition of a being that is caused, this relation nonetheless follows from those things that do belong to its definition. For from the fact that something is a being through participation it follows that it is caused by another. Hence, a being of this sort cannot exist without being caused, just as a man cannot exist without being capable of laughing. On the other hand, *being caused* does not belong to the definition of *being* absolutely speaking, and this is why there is a being that is not caused.

Reply to objection 2: As *Physics* 8 explains, some have been moved by this objection to claim that whatever is necessary does not have a cause. But this is obviously false in the demonstrative sciences, in which necessary principles are causes of necessary conclusions. That is why Aristotle says in *Metaphysics* 5 that some necessary things have a cause of their necessity. Thus, the reason why an agent cause is required is not just that the effect is able not to exist, but rather that the effect would not exist if the cause did not exist. And this conditional is true regardless of whether its antecedent and consequent are possible or impossible.

Reply to objection 3: Mathematical entities are taken as abstract with respect to reason, even though they are not abstract with respect to their *esse*. And each thing has an agent cause insofar as it has *esse*. Thus, even though mathematical entities have an agent cause, still, they do not come under the mathematician's consideration with respect to the relation that they have to their agent cause. And this is why in the mathematical sciences nothing is demonstrated through an agent cause.

Article 2

Is primary matter created by God?

It seems that primary matter is not created by God:

Objection 1: As *Physics* 1 says, everything that comes to exist is composed of a subject plus something else. But there is no subject of primary matter. Therefore, primary matter cannot be made by God.

Objection 2: Action and passion are opposed to one another. But just as the first active principle is God, so the first passive principle is matter. Therefore, God and primary matter are two principles that are opposed to one another, and neither of them is from the other.

Objection 3: Every agent effects what is similar to itself, and so since every agent acts insofar as it is actual, it follows that everything that is made is in some sense actual. But primary matter, as such, exists only in potentiality. Therefore, it is contrary to the nature of primary matter that it should be made.

But contrary to this: In *Confessiones* 12 Augustine says, "You have made one sort of thing close to Yourself [viz., angels], and another close to nothingness [viz., primary matter]."

I respond: Little by little and, as it were, step by step, the ancient philosophers came to a realization of the truth. Being rather immature, so to speak, at the beginning, they believed that the only beings were sensible bodies, and those among them who posited motion in those bodies considered such motion only with respect to certain accidents, e.g., density and rarity, or combining and separating. And taking it for granted that the very substance of the bodies was uncreated, they ascribed to these accidental transmutations causes such as love or strife or intelligence or something of the sort.

Proceeding further, however, they made a reasoned distinction between substantial form and matter, which they thought of as uncreated, and they saw that there are transformations among bodies with respect to their essential forms. And to these transformations they ascribed more general causes such as the elliptic circle (Aristotle) or the ideas (Plato).

Notice, however, that it is to a determinate species that matter is contracted by form, and in the same way a substance of a given species is contracted to a determinate mode of being by an accident that accrues to it, in the way that *man* is contracted by *white*. In both of these ways, then, they subjected *being* (*ens*) to a more particularized consideration, viz., insofar as it is *this-being* (*hoc ens*) and insofar as it is *such-being* (*tale ens*). And in accord with this they ascribed particular agent causes to things.

And some of them elevated themselves to the further point of considering *being* insofar as it is *being*, and these philosophers considered the causes of things not only insofar as the things are *these-beings* or *such-beings*, but insofar as the things are *beings*. Therefore, that which is a cause of things insofar as they are *beings* must be a cause of things not just insofar as they are *such-beings* through their accidental forms, or just insofar as they are *these-beings* through their substantial forms; rather, it must be a cause of things with respect to *everything* that pertains to their *esse* in any way at all. And it is for this reason that one must claim that even primary matter is created by the universal cause of beings.

Reply to objection 1: In *Physics* 1 the Philosopher is talking about particularized coming-to-be, which goes from one form to another form, be it accidental or substantial. Here, however, we are talking about things with respect to their emanation from the universal principle of being. And not even matter is excluded from this latter sort of emanation, despite the fact that it is excluded from the first sort of making.

Reply to objection 2: A passion is the effect of an action. Hence, it stands to reason that the first passive principle should be an effect of the first active principle. For everything that is imperfect is caused by something perfect. Therefore, as Aristotle puts it in *Metaphysics* 12, the first principle must be absolutely perfect.

Reply to objection 3: This objection does not prove that matter is not created; rather, it proves that matter is not created without form. For even though each created thing is actual, it is nonetheless not *pure* actuality. Hence, even that which lies on the side of potentiality must be created if the whole that involves its *esse* is created.

Article 3

Is the exemplar cause of creatures something other than God?

It seems that the exemplar cause [of creatures] is something other than God (*praeter Deum*):

Objection 1: A copy bears a likeness to its exemplar. But creatures are hardly at all like God. Therefore, God is not their exemplar cause.

Objection 2: As has already been explained (a. 1), each thing that exists through participation is traced back to something that exists *per se*; for instance, what is red-hot is traced back to fire. But whatever exists among sensible things exists only through participation in some species. This is clear from the fact that there is no sensible thing in which one finds only what pertains to the nature of the species; instead, there are individuating principles joined to the principles of the species. Therefore, one must claim that the species themselves exist *per se*, e.g., *man per se* and *horse per se*, etc. And these are called exemplars. Therefore, certain things outside of God (*extra Deum*) are exemplars.

Objection 3: Definitions and scientific knowledge are about the species themselves and not about the species as they exist in particulars, since there is no definition or scientific knowledge with respect to particulars. Therefore, some beings are such that they are beings—more specifically, species—without existing in singular things, and these are called exemplars. Therefore, we reach the same conclusion as

above.

Objection 4: This same point seems to be made by Dionysius, *De Divinis Nominibus*, chap. 5, where he says: “*Esse* itself *per se* is prior to that which is *life per se* and to that which is *wisdom per se*.

But contrary to this: An exemplar is the same as an idea. But according to Augustine in 83 *Quaestiones*, ideas “are the principal forms contained in God’s understanding.” Therefore, the exemplars of things do not exist outside of God.

I respond: God is the first exemplar cause of all things. To see this clearly, notice that the reason why an exemplar is required for the production of a thing is in order that the effect might receive a determinate form. For a craftsman produces a determinate form in matter by reason of the exemplar to which he looks—regardless of whether it is an exemplar that he sees exteriorly or an exemplar that is conceived interiorly by the mind.

Now it is clear that the things that come to exist naturally receive determinate forms. But the determinateness of the forms has to be traced back to God’s wisdom as a first principle which devised the universal order that consists in the differences among things. And so one should say that within God’s wisdom there are concepts (*rationes*) of all things, which we called ideas (*ideae*) above (q.15, a. 1), i.e., exemplary forms existing in God’s mind. Even though these ideas are multiplied in relation to the things, they are in reality nothing other than God’s essence insofar as a likeness of His essence can be participated in by diverse things in diverse ways. So, then, God Himself is the first exemplar of all things.

Among created things, one thing can be called an exemplar of another to the extent that it bears a likeness to that other either with respect to the same species or with respect to an analogy based on some type of imitation.

Reply to objection 1: Even though creatures do not reach the point of being like God with respect to His nature by a likeness of species—in the way that a generated man is like the man who generates him—nonetheless, they do reach the point of being a likeness of God by representing a conception which is understood by God, in the way that the house which exists in matter is like the house which exists in the mind of the craftsman.

Reply to objection 2: It is part of the nature of a man that he should exist in matter, and so there cannot be a man without matter. Therefore, even though *this* man exists by participating in the species, this cannot be traced back to anything in the same species that exists *per se*. Rather, it is traced back to a higher species (*ad speciem superexcedentem*) such as a separated substance. And the same line of reasoning holds for other sensible things.

Reply to objection 3: Even though all definition and scientific knowledge is only about beings, the things need not have the same mode in being that the intellect has in understanding them. For by virtue of the agent intellect we abstract universal likenesses from particular conditions, but the universals do not have to subsist over and above the particulars as exemplars of those particulars.

Reply to objection 4: As Dionysius puts it in *De Divinis Nominibus*, chap. 11, ‘*life per se*’ and ‘*wisdom per se*’ sometimes name God and sometimes name powers that are given to things themselves, but they do not name subsistent entities, as the ancients had posited.

Article 4

Is God a final cause of all things?

It seems that God is not a final cause of all things:

Objection 1: To act for the sake of an end seems to belong to something that stands in need of that end. But God does not stand in need of anything. Therefore, it does not belong to Him to act for the sake of an end.

Objection 2: As *Physics 2* says, the end of the act of generating, the form of the thing generated, and the agent of the act of generating do not all coincide in numerically the same thing, because the end of the act of generating is the form of the thing generated. But God is the first agent of all things. Therefore, He is not a final cause of all things.

Objection 3: All things desire their own end. But not all things desire God, since not all things have a cognition of Him. Therefore, God is not an end of all things.

Objection 4: The final cause is the first of causes. Therefore, if God is both an agent cause and a final cause, it follows that there is something prior and something posterior in Him. But this is impossible.

But contrary to this: Proverbs 16:4 says: “The Lord has made all things for Himself.”

I respond: Every agent acts for the sake of an end; otherwise, it would only be by chance that one thing rather than another follows from the agent’s action. Now the agent’s end is the same as the end of the patient *qua* patient, though in a different way. For what the agent has a tendency to give (*intendit imprimere*) is the same as what the patient has a tendency to receive (*tendit recipere*).

Now there are certain things which act and are acted upon at the same time. These are imperfect agents, and in acting they also intend to acquire something. By contrast, the first agent, who is just an agent [and not a patient], does not act for the sake of acquiring any end; instead, He intends only to communicate His own perfection, which is His goodness. And each creature intends to acquire its own perfection, which is a likeness of God’s perfection and goodness. It is in this sense, then, that God’s goodness is an end of all things.

Reply to objection 1: It is only an imperfect agent, which is apt both to act and to be acted upon, that acts for the sake of what it needs. But this does not hold true of God. And the reason why God alone is maximally generous is that He does not act for the sake of His own advantage, but instead acts just for the sake of His own goodness.

Reply to objection 2: The form of the generated thing is the end of the act of generating only insofar as it is a likeness of the form of the generating thing, which intends to communicate its own likeness. Otherwise, the form of the thing generated would be more noble than the thing that generates, since the end is more noble than those things that are ordered to the end.

Reply to objection 3: Each thing desires God as an end by desiring any sort of good whatsoever, regardless of whether it does this by means of an intellectual desire or by means of a sentient desire or by means of a natural desire not involving cognition. For nothing has the nature of the good and the desirable except insofar as it participates in a likeness of God.

Reply to objection 4: Since God is an efficient cause, an exemplar cause, and a final cause of all things, and since primary matter is from Him, it follows that the first principle of all things is in reality just one in number. However, nothing prevents us from considering in Him many aspects, some of which come before others in our understanding.