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CREATOR / CREATURES RELATION: "THE DISTINCTION" VS. "ONTO-THEOLOGY"

David B. Burrell, C.S.C.

Can philosophical inquiry into divinity be authentic to its subject, God, without adapting its categories to the challenges of its scriptural inspiration, be that biblical or Quranic? This essay argues that it cannot, and that the adaptation, while it can be articulated in semantic terms, must rather amount to a transformation of standard philosophical strategies. Indeed, without such a radical transformation, "philosophy of religion" will inevitably mislead us into speaking of a "god" rather than our intended object.

Let me hear and understand how "in the beginning" you "made heaven and earth" . . . [for] lo, heaven and earth exist: they cry out that they have been created, for they are subject to change and variation, [and] "before we came to be, we did not exist in such wise as to be able to make ourselves." . . . You who are good made them, for they are good; you who are made them, for they are. We know all this, thanks to you, but our knowledge compared to your knowledge is ignorance.

[Yet] how did you make heaven and earth? You did not make them as does a human artist: . . . neither in heaven or upon earth have you made heaven and earth; . . . you did not hold in your hand anything out of which to make [them]: whence would you obtain this thing not made by you, out of which you made a new thing? . . . You spoke, therefore, and these things were made, and in your Word you made them, . . . in which all things are spoken eternally. . . . In a way I see it, but how I am to express it, I do not know." (Augustine, *Confessions* Bk. 11, chaps. 3 (5)–8 (10))

These exercises of Augustine, designed to make sense of the opening verse of Genesis by canvassing the grammatical alterations needed for ordinary speech to articulate the act of creation, offer a leitmotif for this inquiry. It aims to highlight the signal difference between "philosophical theology," properly so-called, and "philosophy of religion," as customarily practiced today, by showing that "philosophical theology" displays how the analytic categories it employs must be tailored to the unique subject matter it aims to elucidate, while "philosophy of religion" simply presumes that current categories will suffice, with the result that the "god" in question



often becomes tailored to our horizons. I begin with Jean-Luc Marion, who came to discover, between writing *God without Being* (*Dieu sans l'être*, 1989) and a symposium on "onto-theology" at Toulouse in 1995, that the *being* he had wanted to disassociate from God in the earlier book was far more akin to Scotus than to Aquinas. I shall use Robert Sokolowski's "Christian distinction" (yet showing it to be operative in all Abrahamic faith traditions) to trace Marion's "conversion," showing how a coherent characterization of the creator must highlight the unique and ineffable relation between creatures and creator: a strategy which will require the richest possible account of existence. Moreover, any attempt to subsume both creator and creatures under a univocal notion of *being* (as both Richard Cross and Mary Beth Ingham recount to be Scotus's intent), far from providing the indispensable condition for coherent discourse about God, can rather easily lead one to be speaking of an idol. For creation is the key, and showing how the creator/creatures relation is *sui generis*—that is, incomparable with any relation between two things we know—will require special metaphysical resources, while failing to advert to that fact will inevitably involve "associating" the creator with creatures, the mirror-image of what Muslims deride as *shirk*: associating a creature with the creator. Moreover, failing to acknowledge the centrality of creation can also lead (in a "late capitalist" society) to misconstruing freedom so as to identify it with *choice* (dubbed "libertarian"), a move so common that philosophers can simply presume that this theoretic construction constitutes what we mean by "freedom"; whereas explicating human freedom as "created freedom" offers a healthy alternative. Finally, contrasting two such different strategies could lead readers accustomed to one approach rather than the other to miss the point of some arguments offered, for it is commonplace that one's ear for "argument" may well differ from one context to another. Yet following the thread to the end should resolve many an ambiguity.

In a symposium on "onto-theology" published in the French Dominican *Revue thomiste* (January 1995), Jean-Luc Marion testified that the (by then somewhat notorious) central thesis of his *God without Being* (*Dieu sans l'être*) had been utterly misguided, for the notion of *being* he had endeavored to excise from God had inadvertently been taken from Scotus rather than from Aquinas.¹ The outstanding difference between these two medieval philosophical theologians lies, of course, in the contrast between univocity (Scotus) and analogy (Aquinas) in treating *being*, even though medievalists remind us that the notion of *analogy* to which Scotus so vehemently objected owed far more to Henry of Ghent than to Aquinas. (Anyone who has considered Henry's characterization of *analogy* can see that Aquinas would have rejected it as well.) Indeed, in her astute synoptic presentation of John Duns Scotus, Mary Beth Ingham insists: "for Scotus, the primacy of being as a univocal concept is revealed as the necessary condition for metaphysics, for any language about God and for any science of theology." And she summarizes Scotus's reasoning to this principle as follows: "every inquiry about God proceeds, by means of a type of reduction, from ordinary human experience to a univocal concept common to the created and uncreated orders. In addition, every theological inquiry presupposes something common to God and the created order."² One could hardly find

a clearer statement of what has been characterized as “onto-theology” in the world which Marion and others inhabit. (Barry Miller’s triptych shows a similar dynamic at work in “perfect being theology.”)³ At stake is a coherent account of creation, and of the creator/creature relation in its utter uniqueness, for which I rely explicitly on Robert Sokolowski’s prescient *God of Faith and Reason*, together with my own extension of his “Christian distinction” to include Jewish and Muslim analogues.⁴

Robert Sokolowski introduces “the distinction” of God from creation as a decisively Christian achievement, “glimpsed on the margins of reason, . . . at the intersection of reason and faith” in his genial monograph, *The God of Faith and Reason*.⁵ By focusing on the key role which making distinctions plays in philosophical inquiry, and then turning the very notion of a distinction into a conceit or trope, he proceeds to identify just how unique is the relation of the creator-of-all with all that is created, something which Jewish and Muslim philosophers were also taxed to articulate.⁶ “The distinction” then becomes a way of gesturing towards what indeed distinguishes those who believe the universe to be freely created by one God from anyone else. For the God in question would be God without creating all-that-is, so much so that everything-that-is adds nothing to the perfection of being of such a One. (To use a familiar abstract descriptor, that is what “monotheism” entails; not a simple reduction of the number of gods to one.) What makes this so significant philosophically is that it forbids any ordinary brand of “onto-theology” wherein a notion of being can be stretched to include the creator as well as creation, by demanding a way of uniquely identifying the creator as the One whose essence is identical with its existence. Yet many philosophers presume that a univocal notion which captures a residual sameness between creator and creatures, is required in order to predicate terms of God. That is what Scotus promised, in conjunction with his rejection of analogical character of “being.” And while it can be argued that the account of analogy which he rejected was that of Henry of Ghent and not that of Aquinas, the legacy stands, presumably because it answers so well to a standing predilection of those philosophers who seem to find the practice of “Socratic unknowing” abhorrent.

Moreover, Josef Pieper had signaled the specific contribution of Aquinas to this discussion by noting how “creation is the hidden element in the *philosophy* of St. Thomas.”⁷ His emphasis on *philosophy* alerts us to extend our expectation that Thomas’s theology turn axially on free creation to include his philosophical work as well. Indeed, Pieper’s prescient remark shatters any simple bifurcation of “philosophy” from “theology” in Aquinas,⁸ while the tendency of contemporary “philosophers of religion” to proceed to talk about God without adverting to creation has led me to prefer identifying my work as “philosophical theology,” proposing to mark the difference precisely by attending to this unique “distinction” which Sokolowski uncovers “on the margin of reason, . . . at the intersection of reason and faith.”⁹ For unless one does, the abiding danger is that the creator will mindlessly be assimilated to creatures, which Islam rightly condemns as *shirk*, that is, so eliding the foundational creator/creature distinction as to “associate anything created with God,” which Maimonides identifies as idolatry.¹⁰ Any piece of writing which proceeds to talk about “God” without adverting to this “distinction” cannot help but speak about

an item in the universe, better called "god."¹¹ But let us see how this provocative assertion shows itself to be true.

Analogy of Being and "The Distinction"

I have long been indebted to Ralph McInerny, who showed us nearly fifty years ago that *analogy* for Aquinas (its principal proponent) was primarily a semantic strategy.¹² Not without metaphysical implications, of course, since Wittgenstein has reminded us how "essence is expressed by grammar," yet as Aquinas exploited analogous usage, notably in the treatise on "divine names," it is rooted in semantics.¹³ Moreover, more than forty years ago I was able to show, with Etienne Gilson's help, that Aquinas was not possessed of a "theory" of *analogy*, but rather had judiciously assembled examples designed to show how inherent judgment is to our analogical use of language.¹⁴ And forty years later I find I can summarize this contention quite briefly. For in fact we cannot escape using the same term (say, "order") in widely diverse contexts, while quite conscious that it will identify different descriptive arrangements, yet intending to call attention to its cogency in each context precisely by using the same term in both. To remind ourselves how pervasively analogous language is demanded of us, compare my sister's house with seven relatively small children with the desk of a colleague in charge of university finances, where each would describe things as being "in order." (To keep the academic context, we might contrast any colleague's desk with that of the financial vice-president.) One could easily essay a functional definition of both "ordered" states, of course, as "being able to find what one wants," yet the skills involved in one search might escape the other, so any definition meant to embrace diverse analogous uses will itself contain analogous terms, or in this case, practices. In this respect, analogous usage will always betray a hint of metaphor.

From this relatively mundane example, we can jump to Paul's exalted: "I live now not I but Christ lives in me" (Gal 2:20).¹⁵ Clearly "live" means something radically different in each use of it here, guaranteed to baffle anyone unacquainted with Christianity (and many who are), for in any ordinary sense my life is mine, nor can another live in me! We could formulate an apparently univocal bridging concept by identifying *life* as an interior source of motion, but notice how "motion" will be also used analogously here, as between corporeal and intentional movement—in a crisis, the best indication of my being alive would be the fluttering of my eyelids, yet Paul has much more in mind. So *life* defined as an interior source of motion will only apparently be univocal. Moreover, the semantic phenomenon noticed here can provide a criterion for analogous terms: when any attempt to define a term's use will inevitably contain a term which must also be parsed analogously—that is, resists a descriptive definition, the original term is being used analogously. (Think of Socrates' discovering that he could accept the oracle's commendation once he understood that wise persons realize they are not wise, whereas those who are two meters tall know full well they are two meters tall.). Indeed, I have argued that any evaluative or ethical term must be so construed, as Jesus' manner of confounding the Pharisees so nicely displays. To their query: "why is it that your teacher eats with tax collectors and sinners?" Jesus responds:

"I did not come to call the virtuous, but sinners" (Mt 9:11, 13). So "sinner" is transformed from a term of opprobrium to the entrance ticket for the "kingdom of God," and in the process we are reminded that it cannot be a merely descriptive term, so supplying the plot line for Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter*. And again, the bridging concept "offense against God" cannot reasonably entail a set of descriptive actions, unless one pretends to know what does or does not offend God; that is, to know God. But that simply describes bad preaching! For anyone subjected to preaching has developed a keen sense for discriminating good from bad by a criterion which could be formulated: preachers who pretend to know what they are talking about must be falsifying the message. For both testaments abound in examples pointedly showing how "God's ways are not our ways." It is to meet that arresting biblical challenge to any talk about divinity that one has recourse to the strategy of analogous uses of language, which will also be displayed, as we have seen, in mundane contexts, yet which attempts to articulate divinity push to an uncomfortable limit. Yet if our language is not so pressed, then purported discourse about God will unwittingly yet inevitably direct our reference to "god."

We have stumbled upon the celebrated "distinction" of creator from creatures, which Kathryn Tanner formulates by a dual linguistic rule:

For speaking of God as transcendent vis-à-vis the world, avoid both a simple univocal attribution of predicates to God and the world [as well as] a simple contrast of divine and non-divine predicates. In the case of univocity, God is not really transcendent at all. In the case of a simple contrast, God's transcendence is not radical enough. We can call this first rule a rule for talk of God's transcendence beyond both identity and opposition with the non-divine. The second rule is as follows: avoid in talk about God's creative agency all suggestions of limitation in scope or manner. The second rule prescribes talk of God's creative agency as immediate and universally extensive.¹⁶

She illustrates and clarifies this rule in action by invoking Aquinas's metaphysical strategies to specify "the distinction" of creator from creatures in such a way that "God's nature is to be identified with God's *esse* or act of existence [so that] God . . . is simply identical with that Act of Existence itself in virtue of which any and all determinate kinds are" (p. 60). Yet she recognizes how articulating that identity will require fracturing normal syntax, as "God's identity with what is affirmed only predicatively of finite beings now takes the doubly odd form of a substantive use of 'to be'" (p. 60), as in "to be God is to-be."¹⁷

Now it bears noting that such steps reflect a quest for metaphysical strategies answering to the faith-affirmation of free creation, for which Aquinas found Avicenna's distinction between *essence* and *existing* (*esse*) to be axial, though he had to reformulate it in terms which highlighted the act of creation.¹⁸ Yet if the source of all that is cannot be identified with one of those things, how is one to mark this "distinction?" Avicenna's use of "necessary being" relied on his distinction of essence from existing to define *necessary being* as that One whose essence is simply to-be, thereby distinguishing creator from all creatures.¹⁹ A modal scheme which defines

necessary as "existing in all possible worlds," on the other hand, not only demands that *possible world* be properly parsed, but falls short of showing how such a being must be the creator. Moreover, on Aquinas's use of modality, the One whose essence is simply to-be cannot be "a being" at all, but is One in virtue of its very ontological constitution. Indeed, this is the oneness of God which is underscored by classical Jewish and Muslim thinkers, notably Maimonides and al-Ghazali, to remind us forcibly how God's being one, which is the very essence of their respective faiths, cannot be parsed as a single individual, and so will require a metaphysical strategy akin to that of Avicenna.²⁰ So the relation between this One and all that is created cannot be likened to a relation among created things, forcing us to search for a way of articulating its uniqueness, so leading us ineluctably to "negative theology," of which there are several varieties. Moreover, since analogous uses of language in this domain always carry a hint of paradox, they will also lead us in this same direction. In a fascinating comparative inquiry, Sara Grant has tried to adapt Shankara's technical term, "non-duality" to this purpose, tracing affinities with what Aquinas says and refuses to say about this "distinction."²¹ A striking example of how intercultural perspectives can reveal lacunae endemic to our settled western mindsets.

It should be clear by now why anyone frustrated by "fracturing ordinary syntax" by affirming a substantive use of "to-be" would want to take refuge in Scotus's demand for univocity. But oddly enough, it is the very notion of *univocal* which will prove problematic, and not just for God-talk. I have tried to suggest how *analogous* usage, while it may appear problematic to philosophers, is the very stuff of evaluative discourse of any kind, which should allow us to recognize its ubiquity without needing any more of a theory about it than the criteria I have suggested: any purported definition of an analogous term will contain term(s) which cannot be parsed univocally. The demand for univocity rests on two grounds: one imaginative and easily dismissed; the other logical, so needing more careful examination. The first, regularly invoked by Bill Alston, insists that a responsible use of a term which is used in many ways will require *a priori* a univocal thread running through them all. This is the picture which Wittgenstein neutralized when he introduced his version of *analogy* as "family resemblance," by reminding us that a hemp rope can succeed in tethering a ship to a wharf when no single strand of hemp goes its entire length, even though our imagination cannot comprehend this unless we picture the rope having a steel core.²² A deft refutation of Bill Alston's apparently evident demand, since if we object to the material example we are led to see that Alston's demand also depends on imagining how meanings work!

So let us examine the logical demand, which we are told motivated Scotus's insistence on univocity between God and creatures: if *theologia* is to be a *scientia*, then it must proceed by argument, and Socrates showed us that any responsible argument demands that the key terms "stand still"; they cannot be shifting meanings midstream, as it were. Fair enough, yet Aquinas's remarks prefatory to identifying the subject of the *Summa Theologiae*, God, are designed to steer us away from making *scientia* a procrustean bed into which *theologia* must at all costs fit: "because we cannot

know what God is, but rather what He is not; we have no way of considering how God is, but rather how He is not" (1.3. Prol). Furthermore, once we realize how keenly Aquinas pursued his mission to show how *theologia* could be a *scientia*, in employing Hellenic philosophy to elucidate "sacred doctrine," we should be alert to diverse senses of *scientia*.²³ (We are reminded of prevailing differences, in practice, between "philosophy of religion" and "philosophical theology," with regard to the role played by affirmations from a faith-tradition.) What is at stake, of course, is "the distinction" of creator from creature, whereas insistence on univocity in that context would put the creator on all fours with creatures. Yet in fact, a little reflection should remind us that, outside of purely formal systems, making arguments always demands that we first specify and then negotiate for *context*. Indeed, expecting that meanings will always remain invariant in diverse contexts leads to demands that we readily excoriate as "wooden" or "excessively literal." Recall Gilson's insistence that analogy (for Aquinas) is not a conceptual matter (as Cajetan presumed it would be, as he tried to answer Scotus's demands), but always involves the judicious use of terms to negotiate diverse contexts.²⁴ What Aquinas's account does is to call attention to something which always attends our use of evaluative terms, even ones as apparently neutral as "order." Whenever the context is not artificially restricted, as in logic or pure mathematics, good arguments will always demand judgment, precisely to negotiate the ways in which the same term can shift in different contexts. That's simply "the way the world is," which could be illustrated more reconditely by noting Thomas Kuhn's set of criteria for considering replacing the current paradigm for "normal science," an illustration which could help deconstruct the apparently evident demand Scotus makes for univocity: that otherwise *theologia* would have no chance of being a *scientia*. For we have countless demands (in the history of science) for *knowing* which have succeeded in calling current paradigms into question by attending, as Aristotle says, to "the facts themselves." Thus Newtonian explanations become a special case of *explanation* in special relativity.

Yet once we call attention to context, Wittgenstein's "family resemblances" heave into view, and we may begin to wonder how we could ever secure *univocity*? In short, the shoe ends up on the other foot: it is univocal rather than analogical usage which requires explication. Indeed, short of Aristotle's "metaphysical biology," wherein species were determined to be one in their capacity to generate their own kind, and *not* to cross-fertilize, it seems chimerical and unduly artificial—that is, "wooden," to fix a criterion for univocity such that a single term must always remain invariant over diverse contexts. And if that be the case among creatures, to introduce the explicitly theological context of *creation* makes univocity ludicrous, for to propose "a univocal concept common to the created and uncreated orders" (Ingham) cannot but elide the axial "distinction" of creator from creatures, which is the lynchpin of every Abrahamic faith! Indeed, unless the purported "univocal concept" be so abstract as to prove useless, such an insistence would make the creator one with creatures, so constituting idolatry (Judaism) or *shirk* (Islam). Indeed, early Christianity struggled over four centuries to find a way of articulating the distinctiveness of Jesus without making the Christ to be another alongside God, the very definition of *shirk*;

or in Jean-Luc Marion's language and circle, without resort to strategies associated with "onto-theology," which demand that there be a univocal concept common to the created and uncreated orders. Alternatively, any philosophy of religion which intends to be operating in the Jewish, Christian, or Muslim traditions, all of which concur in presenting God as free creator of the universe, will betray the very tradition out of which it purports to be operating if it fails to find ways to articulate "the distinction" of creator from creatures in a fashion which displays its uniqueness, and so the utterly gratuitous character of the act of creation; if it fails, in other words, to ask how conventional categories will have to be altered to meet the demands of the unique creator / creature relation.

Created Freedom

Creation is the key, so that struggling to find a proper way to articulate the creator/creature relation, will mark philosophical theologians working in the Jewish, Christian, or Islamic traditions, while inattention to it will inevitably lead to idolatry, whether acknowledged or not. *Freedom* offers a telling test case as well, for inattention to the grounding context of creation has generated countless conundrums regarding divine and human freedom, as well as yielded a theory of freedom called "libertarian," which many presume fairly defines human freedom, yet which can quite misconstrue the operative context of created freedom inasmuch as it simply overlooks creation. Furthermore, proponents of "libertarian freedom," preoccupied with the polarity between "determinism" and "freedom," barely attend to the inner dynamics of freedom, content at best to dub it "a mystery."²⁵ Yet once we attempt to factor in the creator/creature relation, to ask about the freedom of (free) creatures, we are led into an alternative space which looks far more congruent with the world in which we live and act, as well as resolves many conundrums which those who espouse "libertarian freedom" had hoped to address with a purported "free will defense." A thoroughly classical alternative will expose the terms of that defense to be essentially Mu'tazalite (in a way to be explained), so effectively denying the universal scope of creation. Moreover, the very dynamics of "libertarian freedom", such as they are, also point to a non-explained explainer, which attention to creation can rectify, even if the "explanation" which creation can give will never be on all fours with ordinary explanation, so never quite fit within a procrustean view of "science."²⁶

First, attention to creation and the unique relation of creator to creatures can eliminate the tendency to structure divine and human freedom as a zero-sum game, for that very structure simply presumes that the creator is an actor along with others, as does language of "concurrency." Yet if we take as axiomatic that whenever God acts, God acts as creator; and whenever we act, we act as creatures, a fresh scenario emerges. As the "cause of being," the creator need not "fiddle" nor "intervene," which would be unseemly because it involves a crude category mistake. This grounding relation also implies that creatures need not be "prime movers" when it comes to their free acts, in order for the acts to be free. Nor does the creator's activity stand over against that of the creature, as when one creature pushes or blocks another, for the creator is not so related to creatures. So

it is not necessary, for creatures to be free, that they somehow be removed from the activity of the creator. In fact, such a proposal would be incoherent in a metaphysics of creation. Yet that was the striking claim of the early Mu'tazalite theologians in Islam, as it remains the presumption of many current philosophers of religion. What wrecks the havoc here is the hidden premise, presumed yet seldom articulated, that a free action must in fact be an act of creation. Or to put it in a misleading way, that the human agent must be a "prime mover" if the human agent is to be free.²⁷ Here the context of "determinism," together with claims of nineteenth-century science, proves to be distracting, for discourse involving "creation" and "prime mover" requires a far more robust metaphysical context.

Demanding that the creator would have somehow to "withdraw" to assure creatures' freedom (as in the cabbalist *tsimtsum* picture) imaginatively misapprehends the unique relationship we have already sketched: a "non-contrastive" sense of divine transcendence, to use Kathryn Tanner's expression. Yet that was exactly what the Mu'tazalites contended in early Islam: that in order to assure their freedom, it must be said that God created everything *except* human actions. But this contention presumed a key premise which explicitly put creature and creator in a zero-sum situation: that authentic agents must indeed be creators. Yet before long an Islamic sensibility, which accentuated "the distinction," saw how exempting the ample domain of human actions from the creator's purview and sway would seriously demean the creator. So another view began to prevail, the outlines of which are not relevant to our discussion here.²⁸ What is relevant, however, is Aquinas's deft resolution of this apparent impasse, in his insistence that while agents whose actions were caused by another would not be free (the "determinism" issue), that need not mean that free agents be the "total cause" of their actions; that is, that to act freely they would have to create.²⁹ Indeed, nothing prevents the creator from being involved in free actions since the *sui generis* relation between creator and creatures assures that the creator is not "another" in any ordinary sense. This reminder shows how a re-appraisal of human freedom is inherently linked with the metaphysical probing of the first section of the paper, and whoever finds the assertion startling might wish to consult the works noted here.³⁰

More positively, the fact that humans are created in the image of the creator reinforces Socrates' contention that human agents cannot but act for "the good," however distortedly they may perceive it. We have no choice about that; but the very indeterminacy of "the good," reflected in inherently analogous uses of "good", assures that such an inbuilt orientation can in no way determine us to a single course of action. On the contrary, that very indeterminacy opens us to countless possibilities, so providing the ground for rational choice.³¹ But this inbuilt orientation to the good also assures us that freedom involves more than choosing, as a closer look at its dynamics diverts us from deeming it to rest entirely on our initiative; it is at heart a response to the lure of "the good." (No alarm would succeed in getting us out of bed without the prospect of fruitful activity.) So while free actions cannot have an impelling cause, an inviting one does not detract from their freedom so much as it enables it. As Aristotle's "prime mover" did not push but attract, so "the good" draws

us on and empowers our choices by giving them a proper *telos*. Which also means that malicious actions are such because they (in some mysterious manner—the “surd of sin”) bypass or run counter to this orientation as we refuse to let ourselves be engaged by it. In this sense, it is primarily malicious actions which display the marks of “libertarian freedom,” yet do so by *refusing* the dynamics of the orientation to the good. So it seems odd to regard freedom so construed as paradigmatic for human free action, since, by running counter to the inbuilt orientation to “the good” by virtue of a refusal, evil actions can only be considered less than full-blown actions. Herbert Fingarette has articulated this nicely, with the internal paradoxes which beset it, in his prescient *Self-deception*, where he uses the pregnant metaphor of “refusing to ‘spell out’ our engagements” to account for the pervasive yet elusive syndrome of self-deception, which must attend evil actions.³²

Finally, to recall the thin scenario proffered for free actions by “libertarian freedom,” we must ask how the free act originates? Indeed, we have seen how the very inability to answer this question has prompted some to speak of “the mystery of freedom.” But that would be a deficient view of mystery, more akin to what my teacher, Bernard Lonergan, used to call “objective obscurity.” For like the “surd of sin,” another expression of Lonergan’s, there is no identifiable source for the initiative which “libertarian freedom” presumes and demands. As if to emphasize how much this theory of freedom lacks the robust consistency of an orientation to “the good,” one might suggest the crude metaphor of “self-goosing,” for their depiction of free actions has no way of accounting for their emergence, except that they be uncaused by another creature or systemic arrangement. For having eschewed even attempting to speak of a constitutive relation of such a unique sort as creation, and for other reasons, unable to speak of human intentional agency in any terms but purportedly “scientific” ones, no explanation for human freedom as pure initiative can be forthcoming. What has utterly escaped the proponents of “libertarian freedom,” however, is the deeply responsive character of human action, for any human *initiative* is grounded in a *response*; as “the good” names not an impulse but a lure.³³ Yet were it the case that none of this could be said without first affirming a creator, and then attempting coherently to formulate that creator’s unique relation to creatures, then the multiple incoherencies of “libertarian freedom” would offer an object lesson in the limits of paganism. But that would only compound the indictment: if univocity can easily lead to idolatry, a “libertarian” theory about freedom favors a pagan account of human action. What emerges as heartening, however, is that the twin alternatives of analogous uses of language and goal-oriented freedom seem far more descriptive of the human situation than these philosophical theories proposed to explicate it. Might that have something to say about the fruitfulness of a revelation which grounds the universe in a free creator, as well as the fruitfulness of attempts to render that asseveration coherent: that they prove to be more congruent with human experience than constructed alternatives? So “philosophical theology” not only proves to be more faithful to Jewish, Christian, and Muslim faith traditions than much “philosophy of religion,” but more attuned to the reaches of human experience as well,

thereby offering a telling illustration of the way revelation can enrich philosophical inquiry.

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NOTES

1. Jean-Luc Marion, "Saint Thomas d'Aquin et l'onto-théologie," in *Revue Thomiste* 95 (1995): pp. 31–66.

2. Mary Beth Ingham and Mechthild Dreyer, *The Philosophical Vision of John Duns Scotus* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2004), pp. 39, 45. Richard Cross ends one chapter of his *John Duns Scotus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) with a similar contention.

3. Barry Miller, *From Existence to God* (London: Routledge, 1991); *A Most Unlikely God* (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996); *The Fullness of Being* (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002).

4. See Robert Sokolowski's *God of Faith and Reason* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983 / Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1995) and my extension to the Abrahamic faiths: "The Christian Distinction Celebrated and Expanded," in *The Truthful and the Good*, ed. John Drummond and James Hart (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1996) pp. 191–206.

5. Cf. note 4, citation at p. 39.

6. See my "The Christian Distinction Celebrated and Expanded."

7. Josef Pieper, *Silence of St. Thomas* (New York: Pantheon, 1957), p. 47. There is a new edition of Pieper's book issued in 1999 by St Augustine's Press in South Bend, IN.

8. See my "Theology and Philosophy" in *Blackwell Companion to Modern Theology*, ed. Gareth Jones (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), pp. 34–46.

9. Sokolowski, p. 39.

10. *The Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. Shlomo Pines (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963) p. 1.53.

11. See my "Creation, Metaphysics, and Ethics," *Faith and Philosophy* 18 (2001): pp. 204–21.

12. Ralph McInerny, *Aquinas and Analogy* (Washington, D.C. : Catholic University of America Press, 1996).

13. *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1959) p. 371; "Aquinas on Naming God," *Theological Studies* 24 (1963): pp. 183–212.

14. *Analogy and Philosophical Language* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973).

15. More fully: "it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

16. Kathryn Tanner, *God and the Doctrine of Creation* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), p. 47.

17. See *Aquinas: God and Action* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul / Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979).

18. See Harm Goris, *Free Creatures of an Eternal God: Thomas Aquinas on God's Infallible Foreknowledge and Irresistible will* (Leuven: Peeters, 1996), pp. 289–303.

19. See Robert Adams, "Actualism and Thisness," *Synthese* 49 (1981): pp. 3–41, reprinted in his *Virtue of Faith and Other Essays* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988).

20. See my *Knowing the Unknowable God* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986).

21. See Sara Grant's Teape lectures: *Toward an Alternative Theology: Confessions of a Non-Dualist Christian* (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 1991), p. 35, new edition ed. Bradley Malkovsky (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002).

22. *Philosophical Investigations* p. 67; William Alston, *Divine Nature and Human Language* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989).

23. See Victor Preller, *Divine Science and the Science of God* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967); and Eugene Rogers, *Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth: Sacred Doctrine and Natural Knowledge of God* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995).

24. Etienne Gilson, *Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), pp. 105–07; and for Cajetan, Joshua Hochschild, "Did Aquinas Answer Cajetan's Question? Aquinas's Semantic Rules for Analogy and the Interpretation of *De Nominum Analogia*," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 77 (2003): pp. 273–88; and *The Semantics of Analogy: Cajetan's De Nominum Analogia. A study and translation* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006).

25. Peter van Inwagen, "The Mystery of Metaphysical Freedom," in *Metaphysics: the Big Questions*, ed. Peter van Inwagen and Dean W. Zimmerman (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1998); edited version in *Free Will*, ed. Robert Kane (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000).

26. See the Prologue to my *Faith and Freedom* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), "Creation and Wonder," xii–xxi.

27. Roderick Chisholm led me to this insight about contemporary conceptions of freedom when he noted, in a 1964 lecture, that libertarian freedom demands that the free agent be, as it were, an Aristotelian prime mover. The allusion to Aristotle is inaccurate, of course, since Aristotle's "prime mover" moves all there is by "being desired," so is an agent in a very special sense. What Chisholm meant, however, was that free agents would have to be themselves uncaused in their actions, and so have to initiate things *de novo*, as it were. So he was really suggesting that human persons thought to be free, in this sense, would each have to be creators in their own right. Published in *Free Will* as "Human Freedom and the Self," pp. 24–35, citation at p. 26.

28. *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993).

29. In *Summa theologiae* 1.105.4.2, Aquinas invokes the perspective of creation to remind us that creatures can have sufficient autonomy to be free without having to be total causes of their actions; see also 1.22.3: "divine providence works through intermediaries . . . , not through any impotence on [God's] part, but from the abundance of [divine] goodness imparting to creatures also the dignity of causing."

30. See D. C. Schindler, "Freedom beyond our Choosing: Augustine on the Will and its Objects," *Communio* 29 (2002): pp. 618–53; and my "Can we be Free without a Creator?" in *God, Truth, and Witness: Engaging Stanley Hauerwas*, ed. L. Gregory Jones, Reinhard Hutter, C. Rosalee Velloso Ewell (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2005), pp. 35–52.

31. See Yves Simon on this point: *Freedom of Choice*, ed. Peter Wolff (New York: Fordham University Press, 1969).

32. Herbert Fingarette, *Self-deception* (London: Routledge / New York: Humanities Press, 1969).

33. See Eleonore Stump's critical exploration in "Intellect, Will, and the Principle of Alternate Possibilities," in *Perspectives on Moral Responsibility*, ed. John Martin Fischer (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), amplified in *Thomas Aquinas: Contemporary Philosophical Perspectives*, ed. Brian Davies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 275–94; as well as her recent *Aquinas* (New York: Routledge, 2002), chap. 9: "Freedom: Action, Intellect and Will."