

Causality and Grace  
Introduction to a Philosophical Understanding  
of the Non-Contradiction Operative in  
Cooperative Grace

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# 1 Human Freedom and God's Sovereignty

Official Christian teaching acknowledges the existence of both human freedom and God's absolute sovereignty. Hence, to explain the possibility of a co-operative relation between both these realities and thus explain the possibility of "co-operative" grace<sup>1</sup> presents our thinking and understanding with difficulties that are not inconsiderable. How can one think about the freedom of the human will when it is considered in conjunction with the reality of God's absolute will? How can one think about a co-operation between contingent and absolute reality? Here, our object is to elicit a preliminary philosophical understanding with respect to this question which asks about the possibility of co-operation between these two distinct realities.<sup>2</sup>

## 1.1 The Problem

A first difficulty consists in the fact that, although in our philosophical understanding we can discover the existence of an absolute reality (as ground and the ultimate goal of the created world), at the same time, we discover that we can know nothing about the inner<sup>3</sup> essence of this reality and therefore nothing about how contingent and absolute reality fully relate to each other. In the so-called proofs for the existence of God<sup>4</sup>, Aquinas asks about pertinent conditions of possibility with respect to what is given. For example, what causes account for the fact of movement or motion? But, as we begin to try and find an answer for this question, searching for an answer either leads to an end, an end as a first or primary cause which grounds a subsequent series of conditions, or it misses it. On the other hand, if, in principle, we exclude the possibility of coming to any kind of certain knowledge, or if we allow our series of explanations to go on *ad infinitum* so that one never reaches a last end and ground, then all explanations will lose their relevance in a vagueness and ambiguity which can be arbitrarily replaced by some other form of ambiguity or vagueness. Intelligent conversation and action becomes impossible if it is not possible to come to a set of basic foundations. Hence, if we assume, as a starting-point, that our thinking and doing is in principle something that is really and truly meaningful<sup>5</sup>, then our thinking should be able to postulate and then later affirm that an unconditioned exists as a basis for what is conditioned. However, how can we postulate such a basis or

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<sup>1</sup>[7] p. 103: "Actual grace is cooperative grace (*gratia cooperans*) insofar as its effect, the salutary act, is caused by both God and the will."

<sup>2</sup>[4] "Quote.."

<sup>3</sup>Here, I ascribe the possibly tautological attribute "inner" to essence—depending on how wide or narrow the term essence is used—because, from the context of our reality, we can ascribe attributes to the ultimate unconditioned although these attributes remain as "outer" attributes.

<sup>4</sup>[1] 1a q3.a3. (cf. also: *Contra Gentiles*, lib.1 cap. 10-13 u. 15) In this article I refer to the proofs in the S.th.

<sup>5</sup>A denial of this premiss would be a contradiction between the performance of denial and its statement.

foundation if we are not able to say anything with respect to the "inner" essence or meaning of this fundament.<sup>6</sup> At the conclusion of Aquinas's five ways<sup>7</sup> or proofs for the existence of God in the *Summa Theologiae*, no identity is postulated between the cause which is shown by argument to be unconditioned and God but only a reference which says that "This is what we call God." Thomas knows that, in providing proofs for the existence of an unconditioned reality, nothing is said about the inner essence of this reality. If, with respect then to our desire for philosophical understanding, God's inner essence remains unrevealed or unknown, then the relation between conditioned and unconditioned reality remains one-sided. Hence, if God's inner essence is beyond our understanding, it follows that only a one-sided relation exists in the relation which exists between a conditioned and an unconditioned reality. The whole of reality that is known by us is related to a last or ultimate ground, but this ground in se lacks a relation that is recognizable with respect to ourselves. When Aristotle was concluding that a friendship between God and a human being is not possible, he was not expressing some kind of ancient impiety but, rather, an insight which acknowledges that it is impossible for us to have a friend whose thoughts and intentions are quite hidden from us. What is absolute and what is contingent lack a common measure<sup>8</sup> that would account for the possibility of a double-sided relation. It is only in the order of revelation that a transcendent God is able to reveal himself as a God who wants to communicate himself in love to man. But, if this were so, why then would we try to reflect in a philosophical way about how there can be some kind of co-operation between God and man? Would it not be sufficient simply to retain and to affirm the truths of revelation as these have been given to us?

Now, the rationality upon which philosophy is based is not able to ground itself in an absolutely sufficient way since, to do this, requires a reference that goes beyond or which transcends itself. However, if human rationality shies away from accepting this reference, it will destroy its own inner dynamism and, as a result, rationality will not be able to develop itself according to the liniments of its nature. It will tend toward a form of self-interpretation which will try to legitimate the value of denying any reference to the meaning and existence of transcendence. But, if rationality opens itself up to this transcendent reference, it will achieve, in the order of revelation and in the light of faith, a new quality so that it will not be so easy to draw a clear line between them. In the teaching on grace, for example, one finds here a striking example of how philosophy and theology interrelate with each other. By reasonably clarifying what the term nature means and by adverting to the difference between what is natural and

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<sup>6</sup> A denial of this premiss would be a contradiction between the performance of denial and its statement.

<sup>7</sup> As to determining the relation between philosophy and theology, it is often stated that theology depends on philosophy but rarely is it said that there is an inner relation of philosophy to theology. A culture formed by a decline or an obscuration of faith, as a consequence, experiences a crisis of philosophy even though it belongs to the nature of philosophy that it should determine itself in a rational way.

<sup>8</sup>[1] 1a q.13.a7

what is supernatural, one can then understand how one can move from a notion of grace that was to be understood only in terms of justifying grace toward a notion which can also speak about sanctifying grace<sup>9</sup>. Sanctifying grace, however, cannot be as easily traced back to biblical sources as is otherwise the case with justifying grace and so this fact explains why, even today, theology is not unambiguous in its teachings with respect to the meaning of sanctifying grace. Rationality, in its openness toward transcendence, leads us toward a deeper understanding of the cosmos and of our human reality as it exists within this cosmos; and we will more clearly grasp what it means for us that our existence is something which is dependent. The meaning of "dependence" will come to acquire a precision and sharpness which, before, it had not had.

## 1.2 Philosophical Principles

The fact that a last or ultimate ground exists for all of reality may be plausible with respect to our commonsense understanding of things as well as a statement which avers that nothing can be said about the essence of this reality. In dealing with this troublesome contrariety, it is only by means of our philosophical principles that we will be able to understand why we must distinguish between the existence and the essence of what is given. On the basis of this distinction, it will be possible to find a principle by which we can understand in a new way what kind of relation exists between an unconditioned cause and its conditioned effect. With respect to the following considerations, we should keep in mind the fact that philosophical principles can cause difficulties for our thinking if one tries to rely too much on the role of our imaginations. Like a mathematician who, in thinking about relations, transcends his imagination in concluding that a geometrical point is without extension, in a similar way, in thinking about relations with respect to philosophical principles, we should be able to reach conclusions which transcend our powers of imagination although, in the last analysis, thinking is always connected to imagination in some way. However, basic philosophical elements (which can lead to complex statements through conclusions) are not as abstract as they appear to be to the degree and insofar as they exist as explications of what we perform or do in the activities of our minds. Hence, metaphysics can be understood as an explication of the conditions of possibility which account for the activities of our minds, an explication which speaks about how these conditions relate to one another and what conclusions can be drawn from them.

### 1.2.1 The Performance of Questioning according to E. Coreth

In every question that we ask<sup>10</sup>, in a context which is constituted by the mere asking of a question that is posed, we can recognize a strange structure which

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<sup>9</sup>[7] Chapter 3, The Thirteenth-Century Breakthrough.

<sup>10</sup>In these considerations I refer to [3]. As to E. Coreth, cf. [4], Chapter 13. Metaphysics as Horizon.

refers to what is being asked about. We recognize a structure that is composed by what we already vaguely know and by what we also do not know. In a question, for example, which asks "What kind of bird is this?", we have both a knowledge of the genus "bird" and lack of knowledge about the particular species of this bird. Now, as we attend to the nature of our questioning, we notice that it is not restricted to questions about birds nor is it restricted to questions about only one particular kind of object. It is not restricted to questions that occur only in a particular field since we can ask questions about anything. Always, in the very performance of questioning, what is revealed is both a knowledge of something—a knowledge about what is being asked about—,otherwise we would not be able to ask questions, and a lack of knowledge or a non-knowledge about something—otherwise we would not need to pose any questions. This knowledge about what is questionable is fundamentally a knowledge that something is or exists. Without knowing that something is, questioning would not be possible. With respect to this knowledge of an Is, we can also express what we mean by means of a noun and therefore say, in traditional terms, that, in questioning, we perform, enjoy, or experience a pre-knowledge of being. However, this term, when used as a noun, should not mislead us in our imagination in a way which would imply that this vague knowledge of being is to be understood as if it were the knowing of an object. Instead, what we are referring to here is a condition of possibility which allows us to say that something can be recognized as an object. A pure image, as it exists in a dream, should not be regarded as an object. At this point, it lacks this kind of status. For us, on the other hand, a dream is not yet an object unless we act to place it within the horizon of being through an awareness which now acknowledges that the impression made by a dream is or exists as an impression.

If, in principle, everything were not potentially questionable, then the field of questioning would be restricted. But, questioning is not restricted. We can ask questions about the limits of questioning without ever reaching an end. Because of the fact that, in our questioning, on the one hand, we truly anticipate being while, on the other hand, we can never achieve it, the dynamism of questioning emerges—a dynamism where a vague knowledge of everything wants to achieve or realize itself. This strange knowledge of being always remains as a kind of non-knowledge. If it were an actual knowledge without non-knowledge, we would know everything and so, as a result, questioning would be superfluous.

This strange knowledge which, at the same time, is a kind of non-knowledge, can be specified in another, additional way. It can be recognized as an unconditioned. Questioning is only possible if something has been recognized as an unconditioned. In this or that way, questioning is always a question that seeks to identify a condition. It was Aristotle to whom we owe the insight that a what-question is, in reality, always a why-question.<sup>11</sup> A why-question asks about conditions with respect to something. For example, if we ask "what is a

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<sup>11</sup>[4] p134: "Aristotle set himself the task of finding out just what one means when one asks, 'What is it?' His conclusion was that 'What?' means 'Why?' Thus when one asks, 'What is an eclipse?' one really means, 'Why is the moon or sun darkened in this strange manner?'"

lunar eclipse?", we want to know why the moon is darkened in the way that it is darkened. Only within the horizon of an unconditioned is it possible for us to know that something is conditioned. In a similar way where, for instance, we can only distinguish a part from a whole or realize that something is relative from the viewpoint of something that is not relative, we can ask about the conditions of something only if we have grasped something which is itself an unconditioned. Only in our pre-knowledge of being does everything come which is to be known as a conditioned. This being, however, is something that we do not grasp fully (in its abundance, so to speak)—otherwise the asking of any question would then be superfluous. It is only grasped as a condition of possibility for questioning. This being, which exists as the pre-knowledge of our questioning, can be referred to as a virtually unconditioned. It is unconditioned because it is the reason or pre-condition of every question where each question must always ask about conditions; and it is virtual, because it is not given as actual knowledge but as a kind of knowledge which wants to be achieved—by searching for an answer to a question.

### **1.2.2 The Performance of answering according to Coreth and Lonergan**

In reflecting on the performance of answering questions, we can see an unconditioned of another kind. In the answer to a question—for example, the answer "this is a sparrow" in response to a question asking "what kind of bird is this?"—we can recognize three elements. An intelligible unity—the sparrow -, a This, and an Is. The Is is the carrier of the connection linking the intelligible unity with the This.

The question of content is always a question about Why or What in reference to a This. The answer to a question always refers an intelligible unity to a This<sup>2</sup>. Here, we can recognize what traditionally is called "form" and "potency." The intelligible unity is called form; the This to which the form is reverred is called potency. Now, what about the third element of the answer: the Is?

Let us again turn to the performance of questioning and answering a question. We are urged to acknowledge the presence of intelligible unities in the material of a This. By recognizing a form in a potency, a new question arises since the answer which is given by saying "this is a sparrow" leads to a new question as one now asks "is it really a sparrow?" And, if we are sure in our answer when we say that "indeed, it is a sparrow!", then (as we will soon hear), form and potency receive a new quality which transcends the meaning of form and potency. However, when can we be sure of our answer? This is not an easy question to ask although a schematic answer exists in our being able to say that we can be sure if we can be certain that the conditions of our answer have been fulfilled. And so, if we attend to our question about the reality of a sparrow, on the level of every day life, such conditions for making a true affirmation could be that one is familiar with the profile of a sparrow, clear visibility, etc. Thus, the

answer "this is a sparrow" can answer both a what-question and an is-question. In the first case, the point or object of one's answer is a form "this is a sparrow" and in the second, the point or object is a certainty which avers "it is a sparrow!" This setting or context of an Is, which expresses a certainty with respect to the fulfillment or not-fulfillment of conditions for an answer is traditionally called act. More precisely, it is an act of knowing, an *actus cognoscendi*.

But when do we know that all conditions for an answer have been fulfilled? If common sense is reliable in its answering by saying that "this is a sparrow!", an ornithologist might ask "could this bird belong to another species and so not be a sparrow after all?" And so, in moving to answer this question, we would now have to distinguish between different kinds of conditions and indicate that it is one thing to grasp all the conditions which exist with regard to a suitable answer in natural science and another to grasp all the conditions which exist in mathematics or logic, or in ethics and morals, or in philosophy or in theology. By reflecting on ourselves, we can find that, indeed, one kind of certainty exists: we are certain that we are engaged in the acts of questioning and thinking. We can be sure in our answer with regard to a question which asks "is it I who am asking or thinking?" because the known performance of asking questions and thinking about possible answers provides a certain and self-evident ground for an answer that responds to the question that is now being asked about the performance which occurs in questioning and thinking.

It is perhaps now not without point to pose this question in a slightly different way, and as we do so, we find that, again, we are confronted with many new conditions that have to be met before we can have an experience of certainty with respect to what we know. And so we ask: "why am I here and why am I asking about the certainty of the performance of my questioning?" As is obvious, this why-question has the same grammatical structure as the question which had asked "why is this a lunar eclipse" although the first question differs from the second in a qualitative way. The first question above asks for an explanation about the darkness with respect to the moon. The existence of the moon, however, or the existence of darkness is not put into question. The first question, as it is posed, remains within the field of form. But, the second asks for an explanation about the coming-into-being of an event. It asks about the ground of the Is, the existence of an event, or the existence of a thing. Here, what is at stake is the intelligible unity of the Is. As we will soon see, the form of the Is is not without a significant degree of philosophical relevance.

Hence, we have to distinguish between questions which remain within the range or scope of form and those which refer to the coming-into-being of a form as an act or thing. While the various sciences which exist ask about intelligible patterns within their respective fields of research, the existence of what they study is, however, taken for granted. A special case by way of exception exists in modern physics which asks about the origin of the world's existence, the existence of the universe. However, we will see that the different sciences with their different methods are not really able to understand the nature of the coming-into-being of a thing.

The difference between both questions becomes clear when we understand that a question which asks if a form is to be assigned to a This can move to an answer that is certain although this is not the case with respect to a question which asks about the coming-into-being of a thing, the coming-into-being of an event, or the coming-into-being of an act. In asking for reasons that explain the existence of a thing or the existence of an event, a series of reasons can be indeed postulated. In asking for reasons that account for the existence of a sparrow in a garden, for example, one can speak about a sufficient supply of food, an appropriate environment, and so on. However, in speaking about the meaning or intelligibility of existence, a series of intelligible grounds cannot reveal a meaning which satisfactorily answers this question. The search for an answer to a question about existence admittedly guides us from one intelligible unity to another—from one form to another form—but, from the level of form or within the context of form, no intelligible "bridge" exists which leads one to the givenness or the factuality of a form's existence.

### 1.3 History and Philosophy

The step which takes form and then transcends it toward an understanding of the problem of existence relates to the interwovenness which joins philosophy and theology. In addition, its employment shows that thinking is always performed within an historical context or framework. This is true even for the most abstract form of metaphysics since every metaphysics is bound to its historic horizon within which it is articulated. We know that St. Thomas surpassed his master, Aristotle, with respect to the understanding of act (the meaning of act). Thomas knew<sup>12</sup> that an analysis of form cannot prove the coming-into-being of the universe whether one tries to use an *a posteriori* proof or an *a priori* proof. However, Thomas thought within the horizon of the Christian narrative of creation which said that the universe is not eternal but is created. And so, in a radical way, he was confronted by the problem of existence. Only the will of an absolutely unconditioned reality can cause the coming-into-being of the universe. However, as Aquinas argued, no philosophy can say anything about the content of the creators's will. The will is only revealed when the creator wants to communicate himself to his creatures. The experience of revelation—that the transcendent God directs himself to the human world, that he worries about human beings, and that, as its climax, he has taken on human nature in Jesus—this appears to be contradictory from the viewpoint of a purely philosophical mind. Have we not—on a higher level of our spiral movement—again come to the question which asks about the meaning of philosophical reflection with respect to the truths of religious belief?

In our investigations so far, we have discovered distinct meanings for potency, form, and act by reflecting on the performance of ourselves engaged in acts of thinking and questioning. While, at this point, we would begin to address a

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<sup>12</sup>[6] p. 284



difficult question which asks about why there exists an isomorphy between the principles of our thinking and the principles of the created world, we restrict ourselves to following considerations.

For both Aristotle and Thomas, a kind of isomorphy exists between thinking and reality as a matter of course. However, Parmenides's insight which postulates an identity between thinking and being has become a problem in modern thought—especially as a consequence of Kant's philosophy.

Thinking comes to be separated and to exist in a world of its own, by itself. On the one hand, one world which exists by itself refers to reality as this reality is experienced and, on the other hand, another reality or world exists within the world of the sciences where, within a certain range, scientists are able to make predictions. However, as we become alienated from the principle which avers that a kind of isomorphism exists between thinking and being, we are faced by a problem about how we might join or fit together the different ranges of reality that cannot be simply denied: the world of thinking, the world of experience, and the world of sciences. Either we construct a "bridge" between the different realms of reality, or we have to deny one or more ranges of being. The problem of a bridge which needs to be constructed, or the problems which ensue if one denies that different layers of reality exist accordingly manifest themselves in different ways in the articulation which belongs to different philosophies. For example, an empiricist who reduces reality to the realm of data which can be experienced ignores insights that cannot be directly derived from the data of experience; and, on the other hand, an idealist who separates himself from sense to live in a world inhabited by thought and speculation is confronted with a problem which asks about how one might build a bridge with regard to the world of the sciences and the givens of experience—realities that are difficult to ignore.

According to our understanding (in the understanding that we have of our understanding), the process of understanding which, in the end, leads to a virtually unconditioned, is a process which consists of different layers: data (signifying potency), intelligible unities within the data (signifying form), and a degree of certainty (signifying act) with respect to the fulfillment of conditions which pertain to an "is it really so?" question. This three-step procedure is carried out by the intellectual dynamism present in a human being and expressed by a desire to know that wants to give our pre-knowledge of a perfection which is achieved through an actual knowing or knowledge of being. This pre-knowledge exists already as an objectivity: an objectivity in potency<sup>13</sup> (objectivity being understood in a context which avers that an inner relation exists between knowing to being). This relation is always given implicitly in every pre-knowledge of being and it is performed or assumed in the activities constitutive of our intellectual dynamism. And the answer to a specific question—depending on the

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<sup>13</sup>[4] p. 125: "This brings us to the epistemological theorem, namely, that knowledge in the proper sense is knowledge of reality or, more fully, that knowledge is intrinsically objective, that objectivity is the intrinsic relation of knowing to being, and that being and reality are identical."

degree of fulfillment which exists with respect to the conditions relevant to a possible answer—is actual knowledge even though we are never able to achieve or to reach being in all its fullness. However, even a virtually unconditioned possesses the structure and form of a true unconditioned. When our knowing achieves a degree of certainty (for example, one cogwheel in a mechanical clock drives another) then, with this kind of virtually unconditioned, one has achieved objective reality even if one is unable to have an insight into the whole of the clockwork. This objectivity *in actu* (in act) is reality. And this reality participates in being (even if the participation is on a small scale in dealing with a minor subject). And our knowledge of this being drives us or moves us toward a knowledge of being that has yet to be known. In such an understanding, neither the problem of a bridge nor the necessity of denying one or more spheres of reality is needed in order to explain a kind of correlation which exists between knowing and being.

As a consequence of our insight which realizes that act (act in the triple potency—form—act) lacks intelligibility beyond an intelligibility that acknowledges a kind of certainty, a certainty which allows us to move into actual objectivity, it is not surprising that, in the history of philosophy, a lack of understanding here or a false interpretation of the meaning of act very frequently causes the problem of a bridge or a bias which denies that different realms of being exist. For an example, let us turn to Descartes.

At a period of crisis, when a foundation for the existence of any kind of certainty had become dubious, Descartes discovered a certainty when reflecting on the performance of his thinking. His starting point was the question "is it I who is asking or thinking or doubting?" And, in answering this question by saying "yes, It is I!" for him it was most obvious and certain that his answer was indubitably correct since the affirmation of a negation would simply affirm the question that he is asking because it is a thinking I (despite how this I could be interpreted) who would be performing a negation. This insight of Descartes was correct. But, it is with respect to a wrong or false understanding of the act that we part company with his analysis. If Descartes had had the insight that the answer "it is I who am performing the act of doubting and thinking" is certain because, in his answer, he has grasped a certainty that is grounded in the fulfillment of certain conditions, he would not have been led into a form of rationalism which sought to find a certainty (as a certainty grounding a certainty) in God's ideas.

For us, a certainty suffices which knows about its conditions even if we know that this certainty is just the starting point for a series of additional questions and answers. Now, analogous to the experience of certainty with respect to an "I" that is performing the act of thinking, a certainty also exists with respect to an absolutely unconditioned. The virtually unconditioned, which we came to know in our reflections on the performance of asking and answering questions, only exists if an absolutely unconditioned can be postulated as a reality. In reflecting upon the performance of asking questions (asking questions as a distinct act), we could identify a kind of knowing of everything which we have identified

as a pre-knowledge of being. We could see that this knowledge exists as a virtually unconditioned. It is only by means of a knowledge of something which is unconditioned that we can pose questions about what is conditioned. Although our pre-knowledge of being is a kind of non-knowledge (because we never know being actually), it is a knowledge of an unconditionedness without which the performance of asking questions is not possible. This fact which refers to the existence of an unconditionedness points beyond our subjectivity because, in our conditionedness, we cannot be the ground of the unconditionedness that is revealed to us in the act of questioning. An unconditioned that is not unconditioned *in actu* would be conditioned and it would require another unconditioned as its cause. Only an absolutely unconditioned can be the ultimate ground of a conditioned.

In our analysis of an answer (the nature of an answer) we could see that an answer is objective if it knows, and to the degree that it knows, about the fulfillment of relevant conditions that are elicited by trying to find an answer that responds to the asking of a particular question. Now, as we have already noticed, with respect to the fulfillment of conditions, a question that asks about the form of something is to be distinguished from a question that asks about the existence of something. The question that asks about the coming-into-being of a form reveals a chain or series of forms that never achieves or reaches an end because a form cannot explain the cause of its own coming-into-being, its coming-into-existence. An unconditioned form can only exist if the form in question is not again conditioned by a question that asks about its own existence, its coming into being. The chain or series of forms only achieves or reaches an end if there exists a first being that is both existence and form in identity. At this point, we can move from the act as *actus cognoscendi* to the *act as actus essendi*. In the triple of potency–form–act, the form indicates what is intelligible. The act has no (formal) content that would be added additionally to the form; it would only add a certainty that stems from the fulfillment of conditions that the asking of a question reveals. The form’s content—as we have seen—does not explain the question of the form’s existence. Something that exists, however, exists as the precondition which accounts for the fact that a question about form can be asked. A form exists or relates to existence as potency relates to actuality. Only from an actually existing being can a question be asked with regard to a form. A last or final form which would be an unconditioned and which would not be identical with existence would only exist as a potentiality. In an absolutely unconditioned, form and existence must be both identical<sup>14</sup>.

Here we would have achieved what Thomas referred as an *actus purus* [pure act]: an unconditioned that, through its nature, is *in actu* [in act]—actus per essentiam [act through essence]. The act that is performed by us when we reach

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<sup>14</sup>[1, q.3a4.r] "Secondly, existence is that which makes every form or nature actual; for goodness and humanity are spoken of as actual, only because they are spoken of as existing. Therefore existence must be compared to essence, if the latter is a distinct reality, as actuality to potentiality. Therefore, since in God there is no potentiality, as shown above (Article [1]), it follows that in Him essence does not differ from existence."

an answer (on being certain about the fulfillment of certain, relevant conditions), does not create any kind of new<sup>15</sup> being; this act acknowledges something which exists in being, where therefore participates in being. Only through the insight which acknowledges that the act by which the process of knowing is completed is a setting of a form in being can we understand the reasons why, in this act, something receives the "baptizme" of objective reality.

We have already seen that, in the last analysis, all questioning aims at being and that no answer exists that is able to fulfill our striving for the knowable. Every insight that we achieve in the process of knowing is open to other things in terms of what can be questioned and known. Under this aspect, every insight exists in potency with regard to being. In an answer that knows about its conditions and the fulfillments of its conditions (in the philosophical terminology of Thomas and Lonergan, such an answer being called a judgment), the Is does not only assign<sup>16</sup> a What (a form) to a This (a potency) but also, it posits or establishes a form in being—and this being exists as a being through participation—*ens per participationem* [a being through participation]. We are driven on in our inquiry by a dynamism that aims at being in general although our achievement only occurs in a step by step kind of way as forms are confirmed through affirmations that are given in judgment—and we are never able to have an insight into the mystery of where form and existence come together as a unity in difference.

#### 1.4 The Difficulty of Accepting an Absolutly Undonditioned

Are we satisfied with our conclusions as we move from a virtually unconditioned to an absolutely unconditioned? In the proofs for God's existence in the *Summa* (which we have mentioned), we are surprised by the fact on how quickly Thomas, in his conclusions, moves from the order of effects and causes to an absolutely first cause. Similarly, Lonergan surprises us also when he quickly moves from an intelligibility that is conditioned to an unconditioned intelligibility. And so, we ask if the last or final unconditioned that we achieve in our conclusions can be regarded as the ground of all our thinking and of all of reality? Is this not very unsatisfying?

We can be helped when we can show why we can be unsatisfied with such conclusions. We know, for instance, that, in every act of thinking, we ascribe a "What" to a "This." Thomas, in his well-known question 84<sup>17</sup>, speaks of a turning of the intellect toward the material of the intellect; he speaks of a *conversio ad phantasma*. Without *phantasma* (which, in a broad sense, refers to the "This" in the question "What is this?"), our intellect lacks something in

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<sup>15</sup>Only God' act creates new being.

<sup>16</sup>In this sense, Kant gives an interpretation of the copula.

<sup>17</sup>[1] q.84.a.7 "I answer that, in the present state of life in which the soul is united to a passible body, it is impossible for our intellect to understand anything actually, except by turning to the phantasms."

which he can find intelligible structures. Then, by engaging in inferences, we can achieve a certain independence and so be able to distance ourselves from our experience of sensuous intuition—let us remember, for instance, the geometrical point mentioned above that has no extension—but the price paid for this independence is that those insights of ours which are derived from inferences lack the "flesh" and "color" of direct intuition. With every degree of abstraction from our sensuous intuition, our thinking becomes "emptier" and more "colorless." Since we are unable to have an intuition which directly refers to an absolutely unconditioned, our conclusion about such an unconditioned appears to be powerless and it seems to have nothing to do with reality.

In inferring an absolutely unconditioned, the absence of data in a sensuous intuition can be compensated for, however, to a certain degree in two ways. First, one can come to more familiar understanding of philosophical principles. For a person who is not familiar with algebra, a simple mathematical equation is a very abstract thing. But, as one grows in familiarity with mathematics, equations gain in "color" and "flesh." Then, secondly, one can try to give one's life certain foundations through insights that follow as one considers and thinks about the meaning of an absolutely unconditioned. If we try to ground our actions on an ordering that is directed to a last, ultimate end which refers to what is absolutely unconditioned, we can begin to experience an ordering power in the effects which accrue to us in our experience of life as certain effects follow from the foundation which we have come to consider and know<sup>18</sup>. We can begin to read the classical authors, Plato and Aristotle, and advert to the fact that their context was a deep cultural crisis in Greece and that much of their philosophy was informed by a desire for a new order of the soul: an order whose guiding principle was an adaptation and an orientation directed toward transcendent reality (the "Where-upon-which" of our spiritual dynamism)<sup>19</sup>.

## 1.5 Thomas on the Anselmian proof for God's existence

Let us examine what we have said from another perspective. In the second question of the Summa,<sup>1</sup> Thomas deals with the Anselmian proof for God's existence. According to Anselm, the fact of God's existence follows as a matter of course if one understands the meaning of the term God in the right way. For Anselm, utmost meaning—a meaning which is above and beyond that which nothing greater can be thought—implies the fact of God's existence. In contrast to Anselm, with the guidance of Coreth and Lonergan, we have, as our starting point, not a meaning or a term which expresses a concept, but an analysis of

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<sup>18</sup>[4]: "There is one standard, one criterion, one absolute, and that is true judgment. Insofar as one's private real world does not meet that standard, it is some dubious product of animal faith and human error. On the other hand, insofar as one's private real world is submitted constantly and sedulously to the corrections made by true judgment,<sup>1</sup> necessarily it is brought into conformity with the universe of being."

<sup>19</sup>[8].

performance: the performance of an act. By our questioning about the conditions of possibility for the performance of acts (our asking and thinking etc.), we are directed to conclude to the existence of an absolutely unconditioned. The validation of an absolutely unconditioned is again done by our referring to an act's performance in so far as we can show that all our acting and asking and thinking is contradictory in itself unless we accept and defer to the existence of an absolutely unconditioned. In responding to the Anselmian problem, Thomas distinguishes between two orders: an order *per se* [by itself]—the order of the world from a divine perspective—and an order *quoad nos* [according to us]: the world's order from the viewpoint of a purely human perspective. Thomas shows that the What of God<sup>20</sup> (the form) does imply God's existence—but only from a perspective which belongs to God. Given the order which we operate from, we can only infer the existence of an absolutely unconditioned from a viewpoint that is grounded in our analysis of the conditions of possibility as these conditions pertain to our acts within the given world. The form of the absolutely unconditioned being is hidden from us.

By clarifying the difference between form and act and by realizing that we are led to conclude to the existence of an absolutely unconditioned which has to be understood as an identity of form and act, we have uncovered all the elements which will allow us to understand how the relation of cause to effect can be understood in a new way. We shall see how helpful this understanding will be for us in correcting our commonsense knowledge of cause and effect and in helping us understand how the relation between Creator and creature can be understood in a new light.

## 1.6 Cause and Effect in Everyday Life

In our commonsense understanding of things, when we push a ball and make it roll, we take it for granted in believing that we have caused the movement of the ball. When we are sitting by the bank of a river in the sun's light, we know that the sun is causing the warmth which we experience. We might articulate this experience by postulating that beams emanating from the sun affect the tissue of our skin and so, by causing the micro-particles in the tissue in our skin to vibrate, produce warmth which is transferred to the warmth-sensors of our nerves. Because of solar energy processes, energy flows out from the sun: energy which, in the form of waves, reaches an object and, in reaching it, causes or effects something in it. Conversely, the object is affected by an influx of

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<sup>20</sup>[1]q.2.a.1.r. "A proposition is self-evident because the predicate is included in the essence of the subject, as 'Man is an animal,' for animal is contained in the essence of man. If, therefore the essence of the predicate and subject be known to all, the proposition will be self-evident to all; [...] Therefore I say that this proposition, 'God exists,' of itself is self-evident, for the predicate is the same as the subject, because God is His own existence as will be hereafter shown (Q[3], A[4]). Now because we do not know the essence of God, the proposition is not self-evident to us; but needs to be demonstrated by things that are more known to us, though less known in their nature—namely, by effects."

energy whose source lies beyond the range of the object. The active part here is played by the sun; the passive part, by the human being who is sitting by the bank of a river enjoying the warmth of the sunbeams which come from the sun.

### 1.6.1 Actus motus est in mobili

With the idea of a relation between cause and effect, we encounter difficulties when we try to apply it to the relation between the conditioned and unconditioned. Let us take, for example, a series of movements with movement to be understood as every kind of change, be it a change of place, a change of quality, quantity, etc. If we proceed from our premise that a chain of conditions must depend on a first cause if our thinking and acting is not to be meaningless, we must assume the existence of a first mover that initiates the chain of movements and carries it through. Now, if this first mover moves by performing a movement—as we do, for instance, when we perform a movement by pushing a ball—the mover ceases to be the first mover since we would have to ask for reasons that account for the movement of this mover. A mover can only be a first mover when, as the cause of a movement, it remains unmoved in itself. Hence, Aristotle refers to this mover as the unmoved mover<sup>21</sup>. If this mover were to move by remaining unmoved, the movement must exist only on the side of what is moved. This conclusion however—which jar with our commonsense understanding of causality and which goes beyond it—is precisely the conclusion that Aristotle achieved in his analysis. And in Thomas's commentary to the third book of Aristotle's *Physics* we can find the classic expression *actus motus est in mobili*<sup>22</sup>—the act of movement is in the moved. Hence, movement is performed in what is moved. With this insight thus, in a certain way, the direction of causality seems to be reversed. In our commonsense understanding of things, the sun is unequivocally the active cause of warmth or movement when we conceive of warmth as a kind of movement. Now, however, it is said that movement only occurs in what is moved. Nevertheless, this reversal exists only in a certain way because the unmoved mover is the first mover of all movement even if the movement only occurs in what is moved.

For us, in our example of the sun, the order of the cause and effect relation is such that we gaily move from the warmth which we experience to the sun as the source of heat energy, and we proceed by means of a "bridge": by means of sunbeams which mediate the energy of the sun and which refer to an object that passively absorbs the waves and transforms them into warmth, etc. But, by an insight into the relation between the conditioned and the unconditioned, we came to understand that changes or movements occur only in what is conditioned (the first mover cannot be a first mover if it can be moved again). In light of this insight, thus, the cause and effect order or sequence appears to be something that is different. As in the example above, we experience changes in us, or we

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<sup>21</sup>Cf. *Met.* XII.

<sup>22</sup>[2]. "Manifestum est enim quod actus cuiuslibet est in eo cuius est actus: et sic manifestum est quod actus motus est in mobili, cum sit actus mobilis, causatus tamen in eo a movente."

recognize changes in an object, and these changes lead us to pose questions about the conditions of possibility that can account for these changes. As we have shown above, the relation between the conditioned and the unconditioned is no longer to be understood as something that occurs by means of a kind of middle part but, most importantly, it is to be understood as the total dependence of a contingent reality on an absolute unconditioned where the reality of an effect is completely found in the realm of contingent reality. The middle part or principle of mediation is replaced by absolute dependence.

If a middle part of some kind were to exist as some kind of intermediary reality between the conditioned and the unconditioned (a middle part which would have to exist in a proportional relation with both the cause and the effect), then a common measure of some kind would have to be presupposed, a common measure as regards both contingent and transcendent reality. The absence of any kind of middle part that would connect these two realities—given the commonsense notion of reality that we spontaneously employ as a criterion of understanding and judgment—would appear initially to weaken the connection between cause and effect. Contingent reality would appear to be "cut off" or disconnected from transcendent reality. But, in the last analysis, in two distinct ways, the notion or postulation of such a middle part would weaken or derogate from the fullness of being, the fullness of being which belongs to transcendent reality and the fullness of being which belongs to contingent reality. On the one hand, it would be impossible to equate transcendent reality with transcendent power because it would not really be transcendent in causing an effect. And, on the other hand, contingent reality would not be fully real because it would require some kind of influx from a transcendent reality which is being conceived of as if it were an instance of contingent reality. However, an adequate understanding of the metaphysical dependence of a conditioned on an unconditioned leaves, on the one side, both realities in their distinct realms and, on the other side, at the same time, it is able to move them closer together as we will see in our next step of our considerations and reflections.

### 1.6.2 The Metaphysical Principle of Causality

Up to now, with the example of movement and change, we have only been able to deal with a special case of the relation between efficient cause and effect. The radical dependence of the conditioned on the unconditioned becomes clearer, however, when we turn to the general principle of causality. As we have seen as we have moved from the act of knowing to the act of being in Aquinas, Thomas came to the first unconditioned, the first unconditioned, as *actus purus* (pure act). Hence, we cannot be surprised at how Thomas, with regard to the act of being, formulates the general principle of causality in the following terms: "[...] from the fact that a thing has being by participation, it follows that it is caused ..." <sup>23</sup>. Thomas understands the dependence which is at the root of

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<sup>23</sup>[1] q.44.a.1.ad1. "[...] because from the fact that a thing has being by participation, it follows that it is caused. Hence such a being cannot be without being caused, just as man cannot be



all dependences. And, we have already seen that it is precisely the fact of existence which makes our thinking attentive to an absolutely unconditioned and which takes the problem of existence toward an insight which acknowledges an absolutely unconditioned which is act and form together in identity—*actus purus*. No contingent form is able to ground its own existence. Every existent being, however many reasons may be offered to explain it on the level of form, carries within itself the mystery of its dependence on an absolute ground without blurring the difference between transcendent and contingent reality. Here, we can manifestly see how radically dependent is the existence of a contingent being on its Creator.

The metaphysical principle of causality formulated by Thomas creates the framework for understanding that God's will to act on us or God's cooperation with us does not contradict or negate the reality of our free will. If we understand God's action on us in terms of everyday causality (using a commonsense notion of causality), then God's will comes to us from "outside" by means of some kind of middle part or point of mediation. In such a situation, with respect to the commands of God's will, they would not be operative in the depths of our freedom since, in the last analysis, they would be conceived on the basis of an analogy to how the sun functions as an efficient cause.<sup>24</sup> However, in a metaphysical understanding, God in his will does not act on us from "outside." Instead, he totally effects his will on us within our reality. God's will to act on us empowers us to be free so that we can experience as God's will what emerges in the depths of our freedom. In our reflections about the first mover and what it means to be a first mover, we have seen that, although the first mover is the cause of movement, the act of movement is performed on the side of what is moved. God carries and guides the universe: even "the very hairs of your head are all numbered." (Mt 10:30) God directs our will within its innermost depths without using a middle part which is imagined and pictured in our commonsense notion of causality because it is to God's will that created reality possesses a created sovereignty which is properly ascribed to it. And, this sovereignty possesses its independence precisely because it totally depends on the unconditioned.

## 1.7 Concluding Considerations

This correction of our commonsense understanding of the relation between cause and effect helps us to accept, by faith, the mystery of a cooperation between God and a human being without our being forced by our philosophical understanding to discover a contradiction in this kind of cooperation. In the light of faith, our reason will discover a radical dependence of contingent reality on transcendent reality and so be able to put questions about how it is thinkable that—within

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without having the faculty of laughing."

<sup>24</sup>[4] p. 57, Chapter 3, On God and Secondary Causes: "Either the influx is or it is not really distinct from what it produces. If it is, there is an infinite series. If it is not, then influx is just another name for the effect."

the context of the metaphysical principle of causality—God carries and guides the universe and human beings precisely because He wants his creation to exist within its own terms of reference as a distinct order of reality.

These questions were meant to unfold themselves in a number of different directions. In order to understand God as the Lord of the universe, one must clarify the difference between the meaning belonging to the classical laws of nature and the meaning of probability and how they both interact. Every classical law of nature is based on an ocean of probabilities. Through the interwovenness which connects law with probability, God can guide the universe without violating the inherent laws of any created reality.<sup>25</sup> In order to understand how God can be understood as the Lord of human history, it would then follow that it would be important to come to a critical understanding of how intellect and will function as the basic capabilities of our human spirit or soul, and also show that it was a historical event which opened transcendence for us so that the logos incarnate became the measure of transcendence and history for us. Further it would be of great importance to show that human freedom is not unlimited. Our will is not free with regard to choosing its last goal, its final end. In its ultimate depths, our will is directed towards God even if its fulfillment is only possible in a supernatural way. In the last analysis, all these questions aim at the only true mediator between transcendent and contingent reality: Jesus Christ, who is the mediator because he is unmixed and unseparated; he is true God and true man.

At the end, a few remarks merit mention. Given what has been noted in our considerations, we should not be surprised to note that the wish to retain a middle part perceived as a contingent reality which mediates a relation between God and the created world was a basic reason for an incorrect understanding on the efficacy of grace. A very intricate history of errors in the teaching about grace is connected with the two names of Bañez und Molina.<sup>26</sup> The adherents of one and those of the other did not recognize the fact that, despite differences in their perception of things, they both possessed something in common at the root of their misconceptions: belief in a middle part which was conceived in terms of a commonsense notion of causality that was applied to how the relations God and ourselves should be understood.

The universal metaphysical principle of causality reveals something about the deep mystery of existence. While it is impossible for us to penetrate this mystery and so reach the intelligible pattern or meaning of existence itself, we can grasp the radicalism of the dependence of contingent reality on transcendent reality without resolving one reality into the other. It also becomes somewhat obvious that thinking and being continuously fall apart in a culture which has lost its sense of the mystery of existence.

A last remark concludes with a question: *Actus motus est in mobili*—what does it mean, for our spirituality, for our inner striving to find what God would want us to do with our lives?

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<sup>25</sup>Cf. [5]

<sup>26</sup>[7] Chapter 6, The Molinist and Bannezian System.

### 1.7.1 Suggested Literature

What can be read at least in one week

- B. Lonergan, Collection, S. 57, Chapter 3, On God and Secondary Causes

- Thomas: The five ways of the proof for the existence of God:  
S.th.I.q.3.a.3 and. Contra Gentiles, lib. 1 cap. 10-13 and 1.5

The problem of the Anselmian proof for God's existence:  
S.th. I.q.2.a.1.

The relation between the contingent and the unconditioned:  
S.th.I.q.13.a.7.

The conversio ad phantasmata:  
S.th.q.84.a.7

The unmoved mover:  
Aristotle, Met.XII Comprehensive Reading

- M. Stebbins, The Divine Initiative

## References

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- [2] Thomas Aquinas. *Commentary On Aristotle's Physics (Dumb Ox Books' Aristotelian Commentary Series)*. Dumb Ox Books, 1999.
- [3] Emerich Coreth. *Metaphysik. Eine Methodisch-Systematische Grundlegung*. Tyrolia Vlg., Innsbruck, 3 edition, 1980.
- [4] Bernard J. F. Lonergan. *Collected Works of Bernard J. F. Lonergan: Collection*, volume 4. University of Toronto Press, 1994.
- [5] Bernard J. F. Lonergan. *Grace and Freedom - Vol 1*. University of Toronto Press, 2000.
- [6] A. D. (Gilbert) Sertillanges. *Der heilige Thomas von Aquin*. Jakob Hegner, Köln, Olten, 2 edition, 1954.
- [7] J. Michael. Stebbins. *The Divine Initiative*. University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1995.
- [8] Eric Voegelin and Dante L. Germino. *Order and History: Plato and Aristotle (Collected Works of Eric Voegelin)*. University of Missouri Press, 2000.