

# Discussion on Creation

By Kevin O'Shea

## CREATION : THE CONTRIBUTION OF SAINT THOMAS

### Introduction :

Creation is a mystery of relationship. It is the unique relationship between the Arche, or Principle, or Source of everything, and – literally – everything else. The relationship must be termed (in French) more ‘originaire’ than ‘original’, in the sense that, while it is indeed unique, it is the active origin of – everything. To grasp this relationship requires a special kind of reflection, from *within* that relationship (there is no where else to be, and there is a very special kind of regard that takes place when that datum is intellectually and *interiorly* assimilated). It is a case of learning that realities as we seem to know them are not just what they at first seem to be, that they are always the fruit of the active presence of an Actually-Relating-Source. It is a case of realising that the finite is the form of the presencing of the Infinite as Active.

If there is *no difference* between the Creator and the creature, then the creature literally has no being of its own, and the Creator has no effectively active will of the Creator’s own. If there is *just ‘difference’* between the Creator and the creature, then, from our point of view, two perceptions can be made. The Creator can seem to have Being of the Creator’s own, but a Being that is not that of a Principle actively Principiating anything. The creature can seem to take on the contours of a kind of ‘being’ that is disconnected from the Active Being and Principiating of the Creator. Creation demands that we retain ‘the distinction’, but it also demands that we re-examine the ‘closeness’ between the two.

This study is an attempt to thematise the special quality of being as created, and of Creator-Being as creating. It is an attempt to articulate the relationship between the two, which, quite simply, is ‘creation’.

Contemporary philosophy often speaks of the novelty of an ‘event’, with emphasis on the discontinuity, the surprise, the historical contingency and novelty in it. Indeed, it would want to highlight the radical character of this novelty, the pure ‘survenance’ of it all, as an ‘emergence’. There is something of this in the act of creation, and yet there is something different as well: there is an infusion of Being into being that does not seem discontinuous, since created being is the pure presence of Uncreated, and Creating, Being. There is also a risk, in thinking of creation as an event, of locating it at some point in time, and leaving it there. Creation is there at every actual point of time: it belongs the very being of things, not just to their temporal commencement.

There are metaphysical, and religious, systems that present the Creator as far off, and transcendent, and ‘producing’ (and then leaving behind) a world incapable of ultimate communion with Being. The purpose of this study is to approach the Creator as infinitely Close, and as Causative of Infinite Communion in a finite horizon of creatureliness.

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There are only **three religious traditions** that have focussed on the mystery of Creation. They all stem from the faith of Abraham. Outside the Judeo, Christian, and Islamic traditions, no civilisation has really known the concept of creation. [Not even the great metaphysicians of India have really known it.]

The three traditions are dependent on the **Hebrew Bible**. It has had a vital role to play in the formation and development of the very concept of Creation.

There is only **one philosophical tradition** that has grasped the centrality of Creation. It comes from Greece. It is only Greek thinkers who have refused both monism and pluralism, who have worked towards that special worldview that they called ‘participation’ and that we now call Creation. All ancient philosophy engaged this question of the one and the many. Monism reduced the many to the one: there could be no difference. Pluralism reduced the one to the many: there could only be difference. The greatest of the Greek philosophers attempted a third way, and, if they did not arrive at the notion of Creation, they pointed the way for others to do so. They were looking for **unity in difference**. [Not even Plato, in the *Timaeus*, arrived at a real vision of it.]

The real issue can be summed up in a radical problem that remained unsolved in the **Metaphysics of Aristotle**. In the middle ages, the metaphysics of Aristotle was available in translation (by William of Moerbeke), together with commentaries of Islamic thinkers. Discussion arose around the meaning of ‘pure act’ in *Metaphysics* lambda. Plato had focussed on the realm of ideas when responding to the question, what truly exists? For Aristotle, it was rather present reality. The real problem is the relationship between existing individuals and their intelligible natures. Until it was resolved, there was little possibility of conceiving how the realities we know came to be, and so of grasping both being and creation. Being remained a concept with a certain vagueness, even for Plato and Aristotle, and the concrete character of being remained undisclosed. Creation is understood as the primordial bond between the Infinite and the concrete reality of the finite: it too remains a concept shrouded in obscurity until there is clarity about concrete, real being.

The problem passed into the continuing and dominant **Christian tradition of Neo-Platonism**. It is present in Plotinus (205-270), in his pupil Porphyry (232-305), in Proclus (410-485), and in two works now recognised as authored within that tradition, the ‘*Theologia Aristotelis*’ and the ‘*Liber de Causis*’. They tried to address the problem in terms of a better concept of ‘**being**’.

Unfortunately, many students have been exposed to teaching about ‘being’ which appears abstract, dull, and not in touch with reality. They have not seen the historical context in which the idea of it emerged, nor have they seen its philosophical and religious depth. At best some of them have at special moments of reflection felt in touch with the wonder of being as some kind of ‘intensive act’, without being able to say exactly what it was.

**I shall try to show that historically, the emergence of the concept of ‘being’ was influenced by, and in a real sense depended on, the religious concept of ‘creation’. In turn, the idea of creation was enriched and clarified, immensely, by a more authentic notion of being. But the influence is both ways, not just from being (philosophy) to creation (theology), or exclusively vice-versa. If Aquinas, and his predecessors in this work, had not been believers in the tradition, would they have arrived at the magnificent metaphysical vision to which they came? And if they had not been the metaphysicians they were, would they have found such light and peace from their faith in creation? We shall investigate a real case in which philosophy and theology intertwine.**

In fact, the further history of the problem, after the time of Aquinas, (for example, in thinkers like Eckhart and Scotus), is in many ways the history of the progressive loss of a creative dialectic between these two movements of the human spirit. But let us return to the time before St. Thomas.

The philosophy school of Athens (with its Aristotelian tradition) was closed by the Emperor Justinian in 520. The works of Aristotle were not studied, and largely lost to the dominant Christian, Western European tradition, which became increasingly Neo-Platonist.

The Neo-Platonist tradition in the early middle ages in fact did much less than we will see in St. Thomas. It looked at the meaning of being from the dominant – but very limited - perspective of **logic**, not metaphysics. These authors came up with categories, and considered being to be the most indeterminate and ample and inclusive of all categories, but still one of the categories. This neither resolved the problem that came from Aristotle, nor helped much in working towards an idea of creation. It was not really a good grasp of ‘being’.

The **religious** character of their minds liked this Neo-Platonist development. They instinctively slipped from a look at being in terms of simply formal, or logical predication, to a look at it in terms of some kind of “causal” influence, without specifying what that really was – just ‘sensing’ it in a religious way. Perhaps this is the genius, and the weakness, of the religious mind. But where did being come from, and how did it so come? These questions were not really resolved.

The innate sense of this tradition tried to answer the question through a meditation on ‘**goodness**’. Pseudo-Dionysius (6<sup>th</sup> c.) said that that Good was self-diffusive, and self-communicative: participation was in effect communication of goodness from the Good as its Source. He meant some kind of causal participation. He did not spell out the character of this causality.

Some philosophers tried to **contain Aristotle within the dominant (religious) NeoPlatonism**. In fidelity to these thinkers, Boethius (480 - 524) saw that every created thing presupposes something prior to it, from which it receives the character of goodness, by participation in the goodness of the First Good. All that it is, is in virtue of its relation to that Good. Boethius called God ‘Ipsum Esse’ (existence itself), and named God as ‘Source’ of the very being (ipsum esse in another sense) of all else. This, as we know, is the language that later becomes classic. It is the language of the Hebrew Scriptures. But he did not clarify exactly what ‘esse’ meant, and what was the difference between that of God and that of all else. He did not clarify what being meant, or what creation was, and he did not resolve the Aristotelian issue of the relation between the existing individual and its intelligible nature. But he did show that the three issues were connected, and thus demanded the full involvement of metaphysics.

In general, it could be said that the prevailing model or paradigm was that of ‘**participation**’. The participation of all in one source, is more than logical, more than ‘religious’, and more even than what ‘efficient causality’ might suggest. It was a true sharing, intimately, of the finite in the Infinite, and of the Infinite to the finite. But how? This was not clear. Perhaps it is evidence that we are all involved in the participation, and can only ponder it from the inside, as it were. There are no neutral observers of the participation process, who can describe it ‘objectively’. Perhaps all our pondering is only a sense of a Presence constituting and redefining what we call presence among ourselves. We ‘know’ we are distinct from, and must be distinct from this Presence, which transcends us, but we know too that we can never be separate from it, without losing our very ‘being’: it is infinitely close.

But it was not in the christian tradition that these issues received significant development. It came rather from the **Islamic and Jewish traditions**. These traditions picked up the thought, and the metaphysical writings of Aristotle, in translation, in Spain quite early, but especially in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> century.

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In the **Islamic** tradition, the principle of the origination of everything from One God encountered a difficulty: did God so create only nature, but not what humans do, or was God responsible for everything absolutely, even the evil actions that humans do. **Jewish** tradition met the same problem: the Torah claimed God as the Origin, but it also advocated human freedom in action, in the use of practical reason. These questions are not fully resolved, at least, in either of these traditions. They are really obstacles to a focus on the core of the issue, which is metaphysical rather than ethical.

A larger question, then, engages both these traditions, together. What are they going to do, as religious engagements (depending on Koran and Torah) with the guiding image of Greek philosophy, that developed in Christian NeoPlatonism, namely, that of the **'emanation'** of everything (at least, of everything good) from God? In principle, they rejected this image of the philosophers, and advocated **'creation'** as opposed to 'emanation'. [It is true that in the Islamic tradition, some, who were – for that reason among others – known as 'philosophers', remained emanationists.] This advocacy of creation came from their rootedness in the tradition of Torah and Quran. It is basically a preference for a language inherited in a faith tradition and considered sacred, but not analysed – fully at least - in its metaphysical potential.

The Islamic thinkers had the acumen to realise that Aristotle's question had to be addressed: there were two issues about reality – what constitutes a concretely-real, actually existing individual, and what makes it the kind of thing it is. They had to work above all on the first one, and then on its relationship with the second one.

It was **Al-Farabi** (?870 - ?950) who had first broken ground here. He knew of the distinction between the First Being, and all that derives from it, while being distinct from it. He said that the peculiarity of the First Being was that it had no essence (or particular nature) apart from its existing, whereas the peculiarity of all else lies in the fact that it owes its existence, and has it, from something other than itself. He thought of this primacy of the First Being as being more than simply logical priority, but he did not really know how to express that 'more', or how to say what 'existing' really meant. He was working on a clarification of the terms 'essence' and 'being', and on their connection.

It was **Ibn Sina** (born 980 at Cordoba – died 1037 at Morocco) who did much more than this.<sup>1</sup> He began by pondering the difference between necessary being and possible beings. He called the First Being necessary, in the sense that it was actual, and had to be actual. He called it 'Sheer Being'. In Aristotelian style, he meant that it was actuality without potentiality of any kind. That was why it was One, as both Torah and Quran had said. He then needed to say how other beings existed, differently from this First Being. He worked on a way of characterising their essences so that their different existence can be explained. He saw in them a new mode of composition, between 'essence' and some other factor that causes them to be. The word for 'essence' was mahiyya (or haqiqah); the word for the 'other factor' (that we call 'existing') was huwiyya or anniyya. He never accurately identified this other factor. He called it an 'accident' in the sense of the latin verb 'accidere' – this factor came to the essence, and was not part of the essence. But it was clear (especially to St. Thomas later) that it could not be an accident in the sense of the Aristotelian categories. It was another thing, at the roots of the reality, that made it actual, while not being part of its 'essence': it embraces the whole actuality of the being. It was of another order than that of 'essence', an order which in many ways was more important than that of 'essence', since it addressed the issue of the concrete actuality of that 'essence'. It was this other 'kind of thing' that lay primordially in the First Being. From the First Being, it came to the others, in a logico-aesthetic way, not an ontologico-kinetic way. He reached in this way a new notion, and a radical one, of contingency, unknown to Aristotle, in the sense that the entire finite universe might not ever have existed at all: it had to be given this factor that allowed it actually, to be at all. He got close, but he did not arrive either at 'existing' or 'Creation' or 'concrete actuality'.

In the **Jewish** tradition, it is the figure of **Moses ben Maimon, or Maimonides** (1135 – 1204) that stands apart. His 'Guide of the Perplexed' was written in Judeo-Arabic, and translated first into

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<sup>1</sup> It is said that he read Aristotle 40 times before understanding him: then, when he did, he gave large amounts of money to the poor!

Hebrew (1204) and then into Latin (in the 1220's). [He is interpreted by Levi ben Gershon, or Gersonides, in the 14<sup>th</sup> c.] He addresses three related questions.

First, the **possible eternity of the universe**. He rather courageously spoke of three opinions on the matter, and the first was the 'opinion' of believers in the Torah (no eternal universe), while the second was that of Plato (perhaps there was an eternal 'matter'), and the third the opinion of Aristotle. His courage consisted in calling the position of the Torah an 'opinion' and not an absolute of religious faith. Maimonides thought that despite other interpretations of Aristotle, the Stagyrate had in fact proposed a satisfactory demonstration of the possible eternity of the universe. In this he was wrong in his reading of Aristotle, and did not realise how much his reading was coloured by earlier interpretations given by al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, Proclus and Plotinus. But the point he stressed was that it did not matter: the origin of it all was '**beyond our ken**'. He is a chief source of 'apophatic' thinking in the christian middle ages.

Secondly, the difficulty of **naming God**. He knew that there was a long standing debate in Islamic thinking about the attribution of various qualities to God, 'without saying how they could be in God'. The prevailing view was that they were 'merely said' about God, as a religious language, used faithfully, but not examined. Once again, they did not tell us anything real about God. Maimonides wanted to remain true to the Hebrew Bible and especially the Psalms, while largely remaining in sympathy with the above view. He admitted attributes of divine action, but not of divine reality. As far as the divine reality went, they remained purely equivocal, and in effect denied more than they asserted. It was all '**beyond our ken**', in a real agnosticism. He was trying, and not succeeding, in his attempt to reconcile critical philosophy with the language of his religious tradition. For him, there was juxtaposition, rather than dialectic, between them.

Thirdly, **God's knowledge of singular existents, and the range of Providence**. The real issue of course was the attempt to reconcile God's universal rule with true human freedom: we are again with the ethical question that seems to haunt these traditions. Maimonides thought that God had the knowledge of everything, not after the manner of an observer, but after the manner of an artificer regarding what he himself has made, looking at it after he has made it. But he conceded that this knowledge was about them 'as universals', (i.e. the sort of thing he knew how to make), not 'as individuals', so that there was an arena especially in the free creature that was neither controlled nor known by God. Providence was consequent on God's overflowing regard for everything, and had to be larger as the creature concerned was more intelligent (and free) (and more 'unknown' by God?) – this is a kind of elitist theory of providence. [It is almost the exact opposite of Aquinas' later, and metaphysically universalist, vision of these mysteries.] How things happened, and how God was involved in their happening, and knew them, remained '**beyond our ken**'. We could note that the old problem of Aristotle's metaphysics – concrete reality – was not solved.

As a result, Maimonides raised vital questions, but did not resolve them well enough to let him get to a true concept of either being or creation or concrete actuality. But once again, like Ibn Sina, he had focussed on the real agenda.

It was only the **Christian tradition**, especially through Aquinas, that succeeded in this matter. But it did so with a tremendous debt to the thought of both Islam and Israel, that had gone before. Aquinas himself entered into the work already begun by medieval doctors. They had focussed on the question of the beginning of the universe.

Increasingly, in both Islamic and Jewish traditions, '**emanation**' (as the Greeks spoke of it) was understood as 'necessary emanation', and '**creation**' (as demanded by the Abrahamic tradition) was equated with the act of a free Creator. As a result, 'free creation' was increasingly located at a

determined point in time (in the ‘commencement’ of the universe), and the idea of an eternally created universe was increasingly rejected.

This was done in the name of faith, in the biblical revelation.

This focus on the freedom of the Creator, together with the influence of the eternity of the Creator on our time, deserves attention. It is the **gateway to a personalist grasp of God as Self-Giving**, dear to the Christian patristic tradition, especially in the East, and also **to the very idea of being**, as we shall see.

The general discussion of creation (not emanation) as free-and-temporal took the form of a **dialogue with Aristotle**, who was thought to be unclear about the temporal commencement of the universe. This engaged Christian thinkers in Paris and Oxford, especially. Some of them thought Aristotle had envisaged an eternal creation and was wrong; others thought he had wrongly been interpreted as thinking that. Some of them made their Christian case on the basis of scripture; others added that philosophy as such could not arrive at the true notion of creation, which is an ‘opus miraculi’. Philosophy could insist on a universal dependency on God, but could not arrive truly at the idea of ‘creation in time’. They did not want to make creatures as ‘long in duration’ as God....

Through all this, an insight begins to emerge, even if it does so slowly. Philip the Chancellor and Alexander of Hales thought of the **ontological dependency** of the creature on God, rather than of its finite duration. William of Auxerre saw the act of creating, not as a physical act, but as an **intentional** act – a case of God thinking and loving the cosmos into being. These are creative and intuitive concepts, and do not have the development, or metaphysical context they will receive later from Aquinas. But it is these concepts that Aquinas will very much take to himself.

The young Aquinas entered into the discussion. As a christian, believing the scriptures as then interpreted, he thought that the idea of an eternal creation was false and indeed heretical. But he thought that creation in time was not demonstrable by reason: it could only be believed in faith. But the nuances he developed here allowed him to go much further.

His work, **De Aeternitate Mundi**, written in Paris when he was hardly 30,<sup>2</sup> is quite innovative. It distinguishes between eternity and everlasting duration. Eternity belongs properly to God alone, and is a qualitative, not a quantitative thing. Nothing then can be ‘co-eternal’ with God. Something that is not God could none the less have always existed – which is not the same as ‘being eternal’. In comparison with God’s eternity, it does not matter then whether the universe is created at a point in time, or has always existed (as created). The issue is the ontological dependency of everything finite on the Infinite. God’s act of creating is then instantaneous, and creates time (no matter of how long a duration) as well as space. To say that God creates ex nihilo is a manner of speaking to suggest this total dependency on another order, the order of eternal and infinite being. Creation then is not change, except in an extended metaphorical sense.

Aquinas then understood ‘creation’ as prescinding from any temporal moment: it was the origination – in the entirety of its being - of each and every thing from the Primal and Perfect Being. This origination was always actual. Creation then was a metaphysical, not a cosmological term. Creation was the gift of being to a world different from its principle. He thought that this notion of Creation could be demonstrated by reason (although, as he learnt from interpreters, the best of the Greek philosophers had not actually made that demonstration).

But the whole question took him into deeper territory. When Aquinas looked at this question of time and eternity, he moved through it to a grasp of **being itself**, both in the finite world, and in God.

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<sup>2</sup> Older sources say that this is later, 127-1272.

Time is a measure or index of change, and motion. Time thus belongs to things that change, that is, to things that are not fully at-one with their own reality, that are not fully self-possessed, or present to themselves, or self-containing. God is not like that, and this is one aspect of the 'eternity' of God. To say this is to use the 'via negativa' inherited from Denys and Maimonides. The very inchoative idea of 'being' as 'reality' implies some kind of ontological unity, or at-one-ness, or identity of the being with itself. It immediately suggests that finite beings are not quite like that, or at least not perfectly so: they are not their own being. God is different: God is perfectly God's own reality, and that is why God is Source of all else.

God then is connatural with Being, Presence, Now, 'Tota Simul', that is, with Eternity: and all else is connatural with change, presence, now, and motion, that is, with temporality and historicity.

God (in these aspects of God) embraces, contains, and includes every value that all-else can be. No event of time can be without God's Eternal Actuality; and no 'being' can be without the Act of God's Eternal Being. It is nearly impossible to say how this is, but it is impossible to be without it. The simple statement of 'dependency' on God does not fully put words on it. There is a closeness as well, the closeness of Transcendence, entering into the Act of transcending us and so making us be. The various traditions of language (emanation, creation, Self-giving) express some aspects of it, but not all of it.

The mystery is not fully grasped in any language.

In another early work, **De Ente et Essentia**, (dated, prior to 1256), Aquinas boldly declared that being (*esse*), far from being an accident, was not even a category in the Aristotelian sense, and that it was related to essence as act to potency. This already took the discussion much further than Ibn Sina and Maimonides. This allowed him to think that creation was the **gift of being** (*esse*) from God, and that all being (*esse*) is received from the Creative Act of God. In effect, he means that being is a relationship to the Creator as the Transcendent Agent who is the origin of all existence. Being in the creature is the expression of the activity whereby God makes something be without changing something else into it. Creation is always, and continually, a fresh start, that ensures the radical and permanent newness of each creature. This is here a movement in the mind of Aquinas that includes (dialectically) both the influence of the faith tradition about creation, and the achievement of the metaphysical tradition about being. Both are in a creative interplay.

This modifies the notion of 'contingency'. **Ibn-Sina** had pondered that reality, and realised that everything finite was contingent, or destined to disappear, and interpreted its 'being', or 'esse', as a (temporary) accident of its essence. [This implies that creation is not just *ex nihilo*, as a radical novelty, but that its effect is in *nihilum*, or destined to disappear from all real existence.] Aquinas disagreed: he realised that being was far from being an accident, and that it rather constituted the basic actuality of anything. He held for a true ontological optimism about the adequacy, the consistency, and the density of created being, and thought that created being ought to rejoice in all of this and so give glory to the Creator. The glory of the creature is its 'being' – and this is not an accident!

If some created beings in fact did disappear it was not due to a defect in their existence: it is was due to the fact that by nature they were not everlasting.

It is in the strength of this insight that Aquinas had to adapt the participation model he inherited from the Greek (Neo-Platonist) tradition, and in particular from **Boethius and Pseudo-Dionysius**. He thought that a thing is perfect in so far as it is in act; that act is the proper 'ratio' of a being – that actuality is what makes anything good or desirable; and that all actual beings 'participate' in the Actuality of the First Being. He identified the supreme 'act' of any being with its 'existing' or 'being'. He thus was in a position to balance the idea of participation, and the idea of each being as valid in itself. He knew that this demanded some kind of causal participation of being from Being. He was able in this way to adapt the 'emanation' tradition: creation for him is emanation in the sense

that the Source gives rise to a similitude of the Source, which, distinct from the Source, is always in contact with and made actual by the Source. This opens the door to degrees of similitude and to order in the created universe. For Aquinas, participation thus enriched becomes creation, in the domain of being itself. It could be said that participation and creation are here in the same dialectical interplay we have suggested between being and creation: the one does not hold up, for Aquinas, without the other.

For Aquinas, the providence of God is itself an act by which the Creator enables the creature to have the wherewithal to realise its own destiny, corresponding to its to its ontological make-up. For him, the creature, because it is created, will not be left to its own devices, and is not as such destined to disappear....

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There are three **approaches to these matters which differ from that of Aquinas**. We can learn the contrasts. They are those of Pseudo-Dionysius, of Eckhart, and of some contemporary postmodernists.

From **Pseudo-Dionysius** Aquinas became aware of three approaches to God, or Being. The first is kataphatic: God has made a creative gift to all creation, and thus, through creation as God's image and likeness, we can come to some positive knowledge of God. The second is apophatic, and it has two senses or stages. The first of these occurs when we deny any ability to name God, since God is so distinct from everything created. The second occurs when we realise that God is beyond both our affirmations and our denials, indeed beyond the whole process of distinction itself. This is not meant to suggest an experience beyond language, but a critique of all language about God. When you put these different meanings together, you understand that creation is iconic in relation to God: you do not know God, but you remain in the presence of the Unknown. The sources of this position of Denys are NeoPlatonist, but they are also present in the Christian liturgical enactment of the biblical story: at least if it is allowed that that story came to him with a NeoPlatonist colouring and interpretation.<sup>3</sup>

Brian Davies has looked at this issue in **Aquinas**. He acknowledges that a number of interpreters of Aquinas, such as David Burrell, present his position as 'dreadfully austere', and biased towards the *via negativa*. Broadie sees a striking similarity between Aquinas and Maimonides (I wonder if this is largely the respect both have for the use of language within the traditions in which they work). Davies himself sees Aquinas in the Sentences as trying to reconcile Maimonides with Denys and Anselm, and calls his approach highly modest, but optimistic. Davies' own sympathy seems to be with others who see a more positive approach to God in Aquinas, such as Peter Geach, who speaks of true affirmative predications of God. John Wippel has investigated the texts of Aquinas in chronological order, and found a real undercurrent of positivity in his claims about God, within general language that, like the tradition, uses the *via negativa*. I wonder if by the time he wrote the *Summa*, Aquinas had not become more positive still, largely due to his work on the trinitarian processions in terms of understanding and love.

It could be suggested (from Alain de Libera and E.H.Weber) that Albert the Great had largely thought in the negative tradition. His theology depends largely on the principle of exemplar

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<sup>3</sup> There is a beauty in the use of narrative, especially christian narrative taken from scripture and enacted in liturgy. I believe none the less that we need to be cautious of a certain unfounded rhetoric in the use of it. It is possible for such narrative to be aesthetic, without having a base in either metaphysics or history. It can be a mythos, incapable of engagement with critical thought. I do not think Aquinas has seen it like this, and I do not think he prioritises the narrative of incarnation over the metaphysical reflection on all reality. For the alternative position, cf. Barth, Frei, Lindbeck, MacIntyre..

causality, and in his use of it to present God, he felt that he was making creatures too like God. He used the negative path as a corrective to this. The young Aquinas copied the statements of his teacher. As time went on, however, perhaps through the influence of texts of John Damascene, he moved in the direction of asserting that we can speak of God properly, and even, when we use the definition 'Ipsum Esse', propriissime. It seems to me that later still in his life, after the crisis of 1270, when his personal philosophy of intellection was fully formed, he became even more positive. Then he says intellection as an expressive act of expansive self-presencing. He saw the highest instantiation of being as active intelligencing in this way. He saw God as the supremely Intelligencing-Being.

Just after the time of Aquinas, **Eckhart** tried to lead an unlettered public into the scientific summits of theology, largely by deprofessionalising the language of theology, and translating it into the language of preaching. To do this he translated the theology of Denys (or the tradition of Denys) into German. He thus tried to convey a sense of the oneness of God, 'empty' of all else than God. This happens through a 'break-through' experience in which God is perceived as divesting God of GodSelf. God wants man to free himself from any other kind of God so that God too can be free from any other 'kind' of God. We have to let God 'unbecome'. This is the silent simplicity of God. God then gives himself without reserve, and cannot give himself in any other way. This occurs in the ground of our soul. We live so to say in an 'ad-Verb-ial' state, towards this given Word of this God. Faith is a spiritual ascent by 'unknowing', a demanding kind of 'letting go'. The result is a oneness beyond intelligence, something like the way God is: to be by grace what God is by nature. It is more than a simple resemblance: it is a certain identity by nature. It is all beyond the scientific words, and yet can be grasped by the 'theologia vetulae'.

At the same time, Eckhart is a true theologian. His interest, as McGinn says, is "the mysterious conjunction of virtual, principial existence and formal, particular existence...(it) is grasped through his dialectic of distinction and indistinction". This dialectic is a paradoxically new logic: all such mystical systems eventually fall back on something like it. For him, creation in God is a 'bullitio' (inner boiling) that becomes an 'ebullitio' (boiling over). It is a descent of Absolute Unity into creatures that are 'nothing': Unity descends into number(s). It must be said that he has not grasped Aquinas here: he tends to use, and depend on, the metaphor of actio-passio for creation, and not to understand the pure relation of dependency that Aquinas speaks of.

This is mystical rather than theological. But it seems to achieve its mystical character largely by playing with the paradoxes (and more) that come from the denial of appropriate distinctions. It is more monastic (Cistercian?) than scholastic. It has had a large influence on spiritual traditions, especially Rhenish/Flemish ones, and Carmelite ones (St. John of the Cross).

**Aquinas** does not move in this direction. He is too fascinated by the intrinsic and real positivity of the creature, and thus of the Creator: he does not need to proceed by way of denial. His metaphysics is a marvellous affirmation of all that truly is! He would never, like Eckhart, deny the adequacy of the concept of God and the adequacy of the concept of the creature, to effect some kind of unsayable union of both. The union, for Aquinas, is affirmative of what is in both, indeed it is the union of the Being of the Creator actively with the created being of the creature. Again, the analogy of participated/created being with participating/Creating Being holds.

This whole vision has largely been lost in the **later history of philosophy (and theology)**. It has been lost because increasingly the primary attribute of God has been taken to be omnipotence, in an arbitrary sense: God can do anything God wants to do. This has (wrongly) been equated with the freedom of God. It came through the thought of Scotus, the nominalism of Ockham, the renaissance humanism of Petrarch and Pico, the reform thinking of Luther, the further philosophies of the Enlightenment, in Bacon, Macchiavelli, Hobbes, and eventually Descartes. It has been a

characteristic of ‘modernity’. It is impossible to retain the participation/creation synthesis of Aquinas in this mental horizon. In its place, scholasticism developed a notion of being that was not nearly as rich as that of Aquinas.

It is **Heidegger** who has raised the most fundamental questions about this construct. Heidegger criticised the prevailing theology and philosophy of being, calling it ‘ontotheology’. Heidegger insisted that the ontological difference between Being and beings was not open to investigation: beings fail to represent Being, in fact they hide it, and even suppress it.

In recent years a number of authors have tried to **return to the teaching of Denys**. I believe they have done so to avoid the problem that comes from Heidegger. Some authors, in France especially, have tried to accept the critique, and abandon being, while still remaining in the ‘catholic’ tradition of theology and philosophy. They have done so by appealing to Denys, and even to Aquinas, interpreting him as dependent on Denys and largely agreeing with him. [Notable here is Jean-Luc Marion.] [In England John Milbank seems to agree with the Heideggerean critique, and to opt for the ‘catholic’ tradition by appeal to Augustine. He sees the inescapable mystery of Being in the sheer contingency of the finite creation.]

There has been a similar **appeal to Eckhart** in recent times, largely by the same authors.

I do not think this is a good interpretation of **Aquinas**, or of being. To go no further than the iconic character of creation – in the sense just outlined – is to do away with the true character of creation, and of being. Aquinas is acutely aware of the richness of creation beyond this. Through that richness, there is a very positive, indeed kataphatic, access to God: we do know some of the real values that are present in God, especially those of knowledge and love. What we do not know and cannot know (without being God ourselves) is the exact manner in which they are found in God. To this extent Aquinas does not move away from a real apophatism. But he retains a real dialectic between that apophatic position and his own kataphatic one, based on the real richness of being in the finite case. For him this is the virtue of analogy. The Dionysian position would ultimately lead either to agnosticism or to a strange combination of (mystical) univocity – there is only divine Being - and (perceptual) equivocality – there is only a kind of ‘ens commune’ for God and all else. Aquinas would have none of that. For him, beings as beings are too real and actual, and creation as creation means so much more than that. Against Maimonides, Aquinas does not think these things are totally beyond our ken. He seems to me to claim that he is in agreement with Denys, benignly interpreting Denys to match his own metaphysical conviction.

This is not far from the mood, if not the position, of some authors who wish to enter into a **positive negotiation with postmodernism**. In effect I think they are looking for a kind of ethics that is not founded on a metaphysics. They suggest – again after Heidegger – that all ‘logos’ fails at the heart of Dasein, and that – after Levinas – we must ethically live up to the consequences. But they do not wish to abandon the (‘catholic’) language tradition here, even if they want a kind of foundationless and traditionless community – after Deleuze. They have erected a general epistemological apophatism – after Derrida – in an endless deferral of the question of being if not its practical denial, and they use this position as a critique of all else. They are then left – if they wish to remain somewhat in the tradition – with the need to erect a new kind of ‘faith’ (since metaphysics won’t work) in a new kind of Ultimacy. It is like a decision to have an Ultimacy where none can be reached, a decision to have it without valid intellectual grounds for the decision. [The strange thing here is that the ‘blind self’ is the only source of this decision. since there is no warrant for it anywhere else.] The ultimacy is a kind of ‘necessary given’ if you want to deny all and paradoxically retain your background. It is a kind of surprising ‘flow on’ from the past (history of metaphysics) into the present (end of metaphysics): a sort of link between affirmation and contradiction. It is not a ‘flux’ beneath appearances, even as a Hegel or a Whitehead would want it, and it does not go anywhere. It is not true Infinity. It is not even a ‘coherent’ claim on equivocality –

if there could be one! And it is very far from the mind of Aquinas.... It has neither creation nor being in any real sense. It is a (fruitless) attempt to put nihilism closer to the christian vision than metaphysics (or humanism or liberalism for that matter).

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Let us return to the time of **Aquinas**, and pursue his thought further.

Aquinas here had advanced the discussion with Ibn Sina. However, it was not the commentary of Ibn Sina, but that of **Ibn Rushd**, (1126 – 1198) that most influenced medieval thinking here. He was known at the time as ‘the’ Commentator on ‘the’ Philosopher, namely, Aristotle. His writings were available in translation in Paris at the time of Aquinas. Siger of Brabant, in the faculty of Arts of the University of Paris, had picked up and developed his thinking. He then advocated both the eternity of the world, and the unicity of the intellectus agens. {This ‘agent intellect’ is the active light that illumines the mind, and so moves it to its own act of understanding.} In effect, this teaching is an act of adoration of God: there is an encompassment or engulfment or swallowing up of our minds in the Mind of God, and of our being in the Being of God. These views were condemned by the bishop of Paris in 1270. **Aquinas** taught in Paris, from 1269-1272. We have already noted his positions on the first of the two questions: he thought that in principle, the world could be eternal, but in fact, it was not, on the evidence of the scriptures. On the second question, he upheld the distinction between our personal agent intellect and that of God. At the same time, in doing so, he upheld also their profound interconnectedness. This oriented him to look at the meaning of creation, in God, as an intentional act in our regard, effective because of the inherent dynamism of divine knowing.

It has recently been suggested that certain Augustinians in Paris, particularly in the Franciscan school of theology, were also influenced by Ibn Rushd, and even some Dominicans. The influence went as far as Oxford. What they picked up from him was a stress on the vast difference between the act of being in the creature, as lacking unity, and the Act of Being in the Creator, which was the true Unity of all else. **Aquinas** would not have this: he thought in terms of a metaphysical continuity between the pure act of Being, which secures God’s unity, and the act of being of each creature, that gathers to itself all the varied perfections of the creature. This is why he advocated the unicity of substantial form.

In doing all this, Aquinas was picking up the insight of his predecessors (especially William of Auxerre, on the **intentionality** of creation), and of Maimonides (especially his idea that God knows us after the manner of an **artificer**). But he took these insights much further than his sources had dreamt. As far as I can see, he did so ‘on his own’, preferring to delve into the mystery rather than argue current issues with his peers.

Aquinas realised that being was not just facticity or happenstance: it was mystery, and as such was the fruit of not just of intellectual intention but also and much more of the fullness to which such intention leads, namely, love. God then ‘knows/loves’ us into being. This ‘knowing/loving’ is not simple referential knowing, as if God picked us out from a prior check-list; it is the **joyful, energetic euphoric act** of ‘seeing us into loved-being’. There are two images of this. One, that of the **artist** (rather than artificer), not looking at his/her work after it is done, but in the act of performative utterance: the artist on stage creates in the act of speaking. The other image is that of the **lover**, in actual communicative relationship with the beloved.

But the real key to this development is the awareness in Aquinas that being and ‘knowing/loving’ are much more than incidentally related. The higher the level of being, the more that being is one with its own act of ‘knowing/loving’. There is a bond between the Creator, as knowing and loving the creature into existence, and the creature so created. It is understood best in the creation of intelligent and loving beings (persons): then, the very being that ‘emanates’ into them from God is a direct

reflection or extension of the divine Knower/Lover, and is known and loved by God as such. This is why the 'motive' for creation is the liberality of God, understood in the sense of God wanting some kind of being that can mystically – or as the divine mind wants to see it – be regarded as identified with God. A divine kind of inter- personal relation is the intention of creation! Unlike Eckhart, Aquinas finds this appreciation of the creature on its real and intrinsic constitution by the act of creation. He understands this act of creation, in God, as an outreach of the liberality of God.

As a result of the creative act, intentionally understood, the human creature has a natural desire for God the Creator. It is not just an elicited desire, but an innate one. It is not an obediential potency, but a necessary aspiration for what it can only actually have as gift. In this sense, as a result of creation, the human creature is basically 'religious', even if the consciousness of this 'religiousness' comes only to some humans, in some traditions, and especially in the Christian tradition.<sup>4</sup>

The whole drift of Aquinas' thought about creation sees it as a gift of grace and love. It is not a deliverance from a negative condition, like the great philosophies of India. The vocation of the human is not to the experience of the coincidence of itself with something Absolutely Immanent to itself, in an undifferentiated way (see Sankhya and Vedanta). It is to participation in the life of Transcendent Persons, who are distinct but not separate from it, a call to enter into their life in such a way that all differentiations are confirmed. It is the implication of God's descent into us, rather than of our progression into the self.

The real fruit of this reflection is in the **Prima Pars of the Summa Theologiae**.

Aquinas has placed his treatment of creation in the Summa Theologiae, immediately after his discussion of the divine missions. That is, he has placed it in the context of the relational-persons which come from the divine processions of Verbum and Amor. These processions are intelligible to us in terms of God's unique way of 'knowing and loving'. He has thus integrated his refined use of 'intentionality' to unfold what creation means, into his perception of the mystery of the Trinitarian Persons sent to us.

In this horizon, he is less concerned with employing the categories of Aristotelian causality, than in meditating on the implications of his vision for the traditional 'participation schema' of the universe, interpreted by him in existential-creational terms. Creation is then an existential 'emanation' from a truly universal principle of being, that is, it is the fruit of the activity of the Divine Mind, in its Wisdom, and in its Exemplary Ideas. The created universe is a likeness or representation of exactly that. And creation is a prolongation or extension of the divine processions themselves... The creative act infuses and creates into us, not just goodness, or even being in a finite sense, but also and especially the relational-persons of the Word and Love.

He insists that God does not act in this way to attain an end, but to share, that is, to communicate, that is, to extend God's own Beatitude. The act of creation is through and through 'divinely intentional'. Liberality in this sense belongs to the act of creation because of its divine intentionality.

Creation is not mutation, and has no physical or material analogue. It is not conceived primarily in terms of any particular moment in a trajectory of duration. It is not limited to the 'commencement' of things. It is rather, at all moments, an inherent factor in their existential 'origination'.

The creature as such has a real relation 'ut ad principium sui esse'. Likewise, the Creator as such is in a real state of relatedness towards the creature. In God, this means that the entirety of God (God's Esse as such) is divinely related into the entirety of the creature. It means that the creature as

<sup>4</sup> De Lubac is right here. Cf. Y.Floucat,

such is a relatedness to this Acting God: 'creatio passive sumpta est creatura'. [If there is a real dissymmetry in the relationship between the Creator and the creature, it does not exclude, indeed it actually demands, an equally real reciprocity.] This is why no instrumental causality is conceivable within the act of creation; only infinite power, bestowed in an act of infinite love, makes creation possible.

Only subsistent beings, that is, in simple terms, persons, are properly said to be created: everything else in the universe is rather 'concreated'. The 'relation' between Creator and creature is interpersonal.

St.Thomas then returns to his governing horizon, that of the divine missions of the divine persons of Verbum and Amor. The creative act is indeed 'common' to the three divine persons, and belongs undividedly to all of them, but to each 'secundum rationem suae processionis'. In this sense the processions are the very 'rationes' of creation. The power to create belongs to each of the divine persons in a way characterised by the personal properties of each one. To be created is to be in a personal relation with each of these persons in communion.

This is why the creature is much more than a 'vestige' of the divinity, indeed it is a 'similitude' of the divine persons, in intimate and unique contact with each of them together. I think this 'similitude' means more than 'likeness': it includes an overture to the notion of mystical identification of person to divine Persons, and inclusion in their life.

The major manoeuvre which Aquinas made is the resolute option for a theory of creation, and of participation as founded in creation, rather than for an open theory of participation, without reference to creation. By this is meant the switch in register that he has made from participation considered in the horizon of goodness, to participation considered in the horizon of being. An 'open theory' of participation can indeed illustrate the participation of goodness, but the word 'creation', in its metaphysical meaning, is needed to unfold the unique participation that occurs when being itself (esse) is participated.

In pondering the traditional datum that this creation is ex nihilo,<sup>5</sup> Aquinas has made a profound distinction between motion and creation. The creative act is not and cannot as such be a mutation of anything. It is the origination - but not from any prior principles - of the entire being of what it is that originates. It is not incorrect to call it a 'pure' origination.

The underlying reason for which Aquinas can sustain the uniqueness of this non-mutational creative act, is that he conceives creation along the lines of intentionality, and not physically effective movement. It is only a divinely intentional act that can, in ontological reality, give rise to the entire being of what arises. God as Creator literally intends it into its whole being. It is in this intentionality that the uniqueness of the act resides, that is, in the order of vision and love.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. G.May, *Creation ex nihilo. The doctrine of 'creation out of nothing' in early christian thought*, Edinburgh, T.And T. Clark, 1994. Cf. J.Fantino, *L'origine de la doctrine de la creation ex nihilo*, *Revue des sciences philosophiques et theologiques*, 1996, 589-602.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. K.O'Shea, *Person in Cosmos, metaphors of meaning from physics, philosophy and theology*, Wyndham Hall Press, Bristol, Indiana, 1995. In a remarkable article, *What Cannot be Said in St.Thomas' Essence-Existence Doctrine*, *New Scholasticism*, 1974, 19-39. W.Norris Clarke had already approached this position. "What I propose is that the ultimate root and explanation of the unity of any participated perfection, and in particular of participated existence (where the problem becomes most acute), lies in the creative intentional act of its source, precisely as intentional (using "intentional" here in its technical Thomistic sense of the intentionality of the act of consciousness.)" Cf. pp.32-35, and the reference in n.8 therein to A.Hayen, who earlier (1939 and 1946) had made a similar suggestion. In a

The intentionality of the creative act is such that it cannot be determined to any single actuality, but ranges freely and indeed unlimitedly with restriction as it unfolds ontologically the full realm of its own unlimited intelligence and volition.

But how is it that by so 'intending' God can intend a being into being? and what kind of being is it so 'intended into'? It is here that the insights of recent Thomists<sup>7</sup> are precious. They have realised that the supreme instantiation of being itself is personal being, and that being, when it is most truly and fully being, is personal. It would follow then that when the Creator intends a being into being, the Creator does so by intending a person into personal being. Now personal being in act is relational being, in the mutuality and reciprocity of dialogue and communion with other persons that do not lose their otherness by being personal near that new being. E.H. Weber and other French scholars of Aquinas have recently shown us that the primary orientation of the human person is to personal relationship with divine Personhood. The Creator, then, precisely and formally in the Creator's divinely Personal being, (which in faith we confess to be triune), personally intends a person into personal being, so that the Creator and that person can enjoy the reality of a truly interpersonal dialogue and communion. It is the intensity of the Creator's personal desire for such communion that enables the divine intentionality to be literally creative.<sup>8</sup> Any comparisons with metaphors drawn from the purely physical order (of motion) can only be inadequate before this inherently personal mystery. It is not 'things' that are created, but persons, for the sake of personal life and love with a personally alive and lovingly creative and divinely personal Being.

God does not intentionally and divinely desire the experience of superiority vis-a-vis a dependent person-creature. Although such a relationship can and must be sustained on general metaphysical principles, it must be radically modified when we realise that the fruit of creation is indeed a person. It is an offence against the fullness of interpersonal communion to desire a superiority and subordination rather than a sharing in personal equality. Mutuality and reciprocity demand that, of their very notion. But the created person is indeed finite, and the Creator infinite. How then can the Creator 'overcome' that infinite distance which seems to preclude the equality of personal communion? It is here that we touch the heart of creation in God, and see the value, for ourselves, of understanding it in the light of the meaning of personhood. It is of the nature of divine love (that is intentionality) that it treat the person that is the fruit of that love as just as much person as the divinely personal Creator. This is something of a rhetorical fiction, but it is much more than that. It is by acting in this way that God calls, draws, invites the created person into something more than 'participation' in the normal sense of the word in the divine being and personhood. There is similitude here, but there is a presence which is much more than a similitude.

The 'vocation' of the new being is to stand 'equal' (in the order of mystical intentionality) with the divine being. The necessarily infinite difference between them in the ontological order, is not an

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personal communication, Clarke notes that "St.Thomas says clearly that the oneness of participated esse exists as one only in the mind (originally therefore in the mind of God, as intention). For only an intention can include both one and many at once, as it intends participation -- unless one is a Platonist, which St.Thomas resolutely refuses to be." (1997)

<sup>7</sup> Cf. W.Norris Clarke, op.cit., n.1.

<sup>8</sup> The kind of being that God "intends into" in creating, must be personal being, because that is the most perfect level of being, or realisation of being. The reason is that the only adequate ultimate goal of creation must be personal. God does not have to create a person first and immediately: rather God 'first and immediately' creates the historically and evolutionarily necessary contexts for the unfolding of the person, who is the ultimate aim of every aspect of the entire creation.

insurpassable obstacle to this kind of interpersonality, but functions as its very foundation and makes it possible, since it itself is there only as the fruit of the divine desire for much more than it ontologically defines.<sup>9</sup>

It is here that we see the life of the 'spirit' as truly transcending that of 'matter', since it shares in (rather than simply participates) the Transcendence of Divine Personhood in its own active Divine Personal Intentionality.

## 2. An intentional interpretation of creation [Hayen, Clarke, Burrell]

Several commentators have emphasised this intentional character of the creative act, as the key to the meaning of participation.

A.Hayen said:

“Il est vrai de dire que l’action creatrice de Dieu est presente dans la creature, mais...il est plus vrai encore que la *presence* de cette action *est la creature*”. Intentionalite de l’etre et Metaphysique de la participation, Revue Neoscholastique de Philosophie, 1939, p.408.

L.-B.Geiger wrote:

“La veritable signification de la participation serait donc cela qui nous apparaitrait, si nous avions la vue de ;Etre Premier en sa plenitude.....Faute de cette vue nous devons nous contenter de saisir le reflect de la participation veritable dans l’unite mysterieuse de l’etre.” La participation dans la philosophie de S.Thomas d’Aquin, Paris, 1942, p.366.

N.Balthasar reflected:

“(Dieu est...) autrement autre que l’etre autre”.....et “plus moi que moi-meme je ne le suis, puisque’il me donne d’etre moi”. [La Methode en Metaphysique, Louvain, 1943.]

Aquinas himself put it exactly:

“Deus est magis bonum quam aliquid aliud, et est proprium magis alicui quam aliquid aliud; quia est magis intimum animae quam etiam ipsa sibi...” [3a, 29, 1. 3 sed contra 2]

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<sup>9</sup> This is the root of the problem of the language needed to express the mystery of the person. R.Kearney has written : "Continental thinkers are often extremely difficult to understand. Part of this difficulty is, I believe, inherent in the very nature of the ontological and epistemological questionings in which these thinkers are engaged... A one-dimensional language can only deal with a one-dimensional reality, whereas it is a critical task of philosophy to interrogate other, hitherto undisclosed, dimensions of existence." R.Kearney, *States of Mind, dialogues with contemporary thinkers*, New York University Press, 1995,152. It is because of this that many diverse languages have arisen in philosophy and theology. There is a language in which the themes outlined in the text here are regarded merely as poetry, while a hard and clear approach is taken to finite ontological realities. There is a language in which any claim to a statement of the being of the person is relinquished, in favour of a description of a dialectical process in which it ceaselessly becomes what it has not been. There is a language in which its option to be what it would like to be is left to itself, irrespective of its constitution in being by the creative act. None of these languages fits the mood of this study. It rather seeks to delve into the full meaning of creation, and of its agent and term, in order to work amply with the being that they confer and unfold.

W.N.Clarke explains:

“...the ultimate root and explanation of the unity of any participated perfection, and in particular of participated existence (where the problem becomes most acute), lies in the creative *intentional act* of its source, precisely as *intentional* (using “intentional” here in its technical Thomistic sense of the intentionality of an act of consciousness). By this I mean the conscious intentional act of thinking-willing of its intelligent cause, by which the latter efficaciously wills to share its own perfection, one in its source, with many participants; and I mean this act conjoined with its inseparable ontological complement, the effective execution or outcome of this act in the real world, which we recognise as participation-accomplished.

“The only kind of reality in the universe- and of course it is not properly a thing but a unique kind of act – which has the peculiar property of joining together in the unity of a single act both one and many, singular and universal, is an intentional act, which either intends actively to share a one with many, or *post factum* recognises such a sharing when executed. (The latter, of course, is our case, as receptive knowers and reconstituters of a world already in existence, although the human artist and artisan imitates the former constitutive role of intentionality analogously in the case of artefacts. But the former, the creative act, is primary, since without it there would be nothing for us to recognise or reconstitute.) For such an act intends all three together: 1) the one source with its perfection as model or exemplar; 2) the many as recipients or participants; and 3) the actual sharing of the one perfection of the source with the many, diversely in each. Such an efficacious act of intentionality, or willing-to-share, of willed self-communication, is the only possible ground, both of being and of intelligibility, for the one-many unity of participation as an accomplished existential fact.

“The existential being of the source and its creative act remain, of course, outside of this accomplished participation in the many. But the unity of its intention, precisely *as intention* to-share-a-one-with-many, somehow carries over into each of the participants, and is incarnated there under the sign of ontological similarity, waiting to be picked up and formally reconstituted in its original unity by a mind capable of recognising the sign for what it points to. Without rooting such a one-many synthesis in the original creative intentional act, objective ontological participation could indeed be recognised by us as a fact. But it would remain opaque and lacking full intelligibility: like seeing only half a painting, with the other half veiled. The power of intentional consciousness, the conscious and efficacious act of willing to share one’s own riches with others, is thus the ultimate reason and ground, of both intelligibility and being, for the universe precisely as *universe*, as one world, as a unified order of reality.

“Real participation is thus, in the last analysis, an indivisible two-poled dynamic whole: the one-many unity of the creative intentional act, on the one side, and the ontological reflection of this intention in the real similarity of things to each other and their source, on the other, apt to be recognised and reconstituted by a receptive mind after the fact. The entire situation can only, or perhaps best, be expressed in objective participation language – so far we have found nothing better short of nominalism – as long as one understands what this language is trying to signify. But it is still true, that, literally speaking, considered purely on its ontological side independent of the constitutive intention at its source, there *is* no such thing as participated existence (or any other participated perfection) as either real or one in itself in things. Although participation language may be the best we can do, there is still a limit to what this or any language form can say. At the heart of real participation lies something which cannot properly be said, although it can be recognised in a single synthetic intellectual insight as to “what’s going on” in the world.

“It may be objected, of course, that the above “solution” only pushes the mystery back one step further into that of the special character of the intentional act itself, with its unique ability to

transcend and synthesise between one and many, singular and universal. Quite true. But at least we have tracked down the mystery to its ultimate root; and this root is a considerably more luminous mystery, because in an analogous way immediate and accessible to us in our life of consciousness, where we are constantly “doing the participation thing” in our own way, both passively and actively. And is it not as it should be, that the truly ultimate mystery of the universe, that which illumines all else, should turn out to be the mystery of self-communicating love? There *is* no further explanation possible for anything, if “God *is* Love”, as St.John says.” [What Cannot be said in St.Thomas’ Essence-Existence Doctrine, The New Scholasticism, 1974, pp.33-34.]

David Burrell sees the beginning of this ‘intentionality’ understanding of creation in the medieval rejection of the ‘necessary emanation’ schema (that came to the medieval doctors from Plotinus). In the tradition of both al-Ghazali and Maimonides, he says that

“Aquinas gave the ‘necessary emanation’ scheme its coup de grace by declaring it utterly redundant in the face of a free creator, an intentional cause of being”. {Freedom and Creation in the Abrahamic Traditions, International Philosophical Quarterly, June 2000}

The drift of this paper is to show that a different kind of ‘emanation’ might be included in the intentional understanding of creation, one which does not fall back into the ‘necessary’ perception of it.

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## Discovering Depth: the creative act as intentional.

### 1. What is being?

There has, as I see it, in fact been an excessive essentialism in much (even traditional Thomistic) metaphysics.<sup>10</sup> I think it is rooted in assumptions taken from the fundamental instinct of Aristotle as a philosopher, assumptions which I shall - later on - try to show can be questioned in the light of the thinking of Aquinas in the maturity of his own thought. There is in Aristotle, and in this vein that continues in much thomistic interpretation, a primary bias in favour of the concrete, actual, finite existing thing: it functions (well) as an advocacy for 'realism'. One result of it is the giving of an instinctive (if not yet theoretical) primacy to existence - a healthy result for metaphysics. Another result of it is that existence is understood as something that happens to essences, so that the act of actual being (actus essendi) is implicitly at least seen primarily and dominantly as the act of the essence (actus essentiae) - a result which I see increasingly as not so healthy for metaphysics. Existence is taken to be the 'first act' of a subject that exists by exercising this act, and that subject is thus regarded as an 'existing essence'. It follows that esse, or the act of existing, is the act most primordial to an essence, and therefore is a perfection, indeed the fundamental perfection of the essence, but it is a perfection of a different kind than the perfections associated with the makeup of essences in themselves. It is not a form, or a superessence, but it is the primordial act exercised by the essence, an act that makes the essence to be an actual, in the sense that it exercises all its potential action. It gives, and is, an actuality that does not come under any intelligible appreciation of the meaning of essence as such, but it is act and perfection in so far as it is 'of' the essence, and 'by' the essence.

One (perhaps unintended) consequence of these options is that esse is not in itself a specific perfection of the essential type, and so not in itself - and consequently for us as well - a principle of intelligibility. Esse is not then in itself understandable. This is an interesting transposition: I have mentioned above the basic Thomasian conviction, that the ultimate mode in which Being is limited to particular and finite being, remains inaccessible to us because it is not in itself intelligible. This non-intelligibility seems to be transposed, illegitimately I think, to the non-intelligibility (equated with the non-essentiality) of act of existence itself...

Esse, understood in these terms, can then only be approached by way of an unusual analogy. The chosen analogy, and the preferred language term, is that of 'act': it is once again an extrapolation of the paradigm of act and potency from Aristotle. It must be said that here the use of the term 'act' is highly analogous: we simply do not know how the idea of 'act', which we primarily possess from observation of 'action' in our world, applies to the existential arena. Some of the more astute presentations of the matter appeal to the idea of a 'spiritual act', and indeed to the spiritual act of knowing intellectually, and within that terrain, to the act of judgment which says that something actually 'is'. It is not, to my mind, stated sufficiently that the positive value of these analogies holds good only within the overall 'non-understanding' of how any of them apply to the case in point, namely, to the uniqueness and non-essentialness of the act of existence. It could even be wondered if the entire construct does not rest to some extent at least on some kind of act of faith in the reality of the really existent thing that seems to present itself to us. If there is any truth in this, we must admit that this is not Aristotle, let alone Aquinas. They would not have rested their case on any form of 'faith'.

This type of interpretation has then erected a model of the 'order' of things, from a synthetic comparison of the essences which exercise and/or delimit the act of existence. It has then equated 'intelligibility' with this 'order of essences', and seen in it the 'design' of the eternal mind in 'creating' the universe. It has in effect seen in these essences all the perfection of finite reality. It has then looked on

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<sup>10</sup> For a recent historical outline of the varieties of this kind of thinking in the thomist tradition, cf. G.Prouvost, Thomas d'Aquin et les thomismes, Cerf, Paris, 1996.

the actual 'facticity' (that is, on the simple fact that they happen to occur) of these essences and virtually equated it with their act of 'existence'. This facticity clearly does not come under the heading of the 'order of essences' that it wishes to highlight. The result is that this facticity appears to be a contingent, 'accidental', and thus 'chance' phenomenon. It is then largely 'forgotten' or at least left in arrears, in favour of an investigation into essences. There is then an obfuscation of the mystery of existence=being, in favour of 'chance' = 'facticity' = 'quasi-accidental actuality', which is distinct from 'essence' = 'meaning' = 'order or design', and which thus highlights the existential fragility of finite reality. The result is really too much order (of a certain essentialist kind) and too much chance (of a certain random-happening kind) at the same time : too much order (of essences) and too much chance (wrongly equated with facticity = actuality = existence).

I suspect that a good deal of this mentality affects the usual, or 'classic' presentation of the theory of causes (if not, the conception of metaphysics as well) in some thomist traditions. Many of them derive from the treatise of John of St.Thomas (Jean Poinsot), to which recourse has usually been made by Thomist commentators.<sup>11</sup> I suspect that the prevalence of such constructs, which are more akin to Aristotle than Aquinas, has made the questions I am about to ask about the meaning of being inaccessible - even as questions - to many Thomists.<sup>12</sup> My questions might appear to those who think in what I have called an 'essentialist' way, as resting on false assumptions. It is precisely these assumptions that I am trying to bring into critical discussion, and for which I am suggesting alternatives.

My aim here, then, is to outline an alternative understanding of being, which I think is properly Thomasian. But before I do, I must 'digress' (though perhaps not really), and introduce explicitly the question of God as active source of being.

All of the above comments about 'essentialism' in the understanding of being, pave the way for an approach to God that is classic in the tradition, and that can best be described as 'apophatic'. If, on the above principles, we describe God as *IPSUM ESSE*, it follows that God is supremely unknowable, just as *esse in se* is supremely unknowable. In an entire amalgum of religious traditions, from Jewish to Arabic to Greek, God is in principle beyond our ken. If in fact, as we must, we use some names about God, and some of them are used in ways that are more than negative or relational, we use them either figuratively or properly. An excessive or even exclusive focus on the figurative use has led thinkers from Maimonides to Tillich to posit an unreachable beyondness in God, and even to 'define' God by it. A due attention to the proper use has led thinkers of a more Thomist persuasion to say that we can speak truly and properly of who God is, but that we do not and cannot know the mode by which God is. We are left then with an ultimately unknowable Source of a causality which alone can make sense of 'being'. At times, there is use of the expression 'essence of God', which is defined as *IPSUM ESSE*, and then *ESSE* as in God is treated as if it is a supreme instance of essence.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. Ioannes a S.Thoma, *Cursus Philosophicus, Philosophia Naturalis*, (ed. Reiser), Turonibus, 1933, tom.11.

<sup>12</sup> It is customary in many such approaches to make use of the three degrees of abstraction, as a schema for the distinction of three levels of knowing. In the first degree, the 'philosophy of nature' considers being as changeable; in the second, 'mathematics' considers being under the aspect of pure quantitative extension; and in the third, 'metaphysics' considers being as abstracting from all changeability and extension. The understanding behind this schema is that one ought to pass through the earlier levels in order to reach the latter ones. This is not compelling. It also seems to pave the way for a consideration of being as such in terms analogous to what I have outlined as 'essence', as this is conceived on the implied model of 'nature' in natural science. There is a simpler, more direct access to the mystery of being-as-act, and I think it is much more in line with the intuition of Aquinas.

<sup>13</sup> I am much indebted here to the writings of D.Burrell, especially, *Knowing the Unknowable God : ibn-Sina, Maimonides, Aquinas*, U. of Notre Dame Press, 1986.

But there is another way of approaching God. It goes back, basically, to the traditional and inherited 'participation schema' that governed the thinking of the fathers and the medieval doctors, including Aquinas. But Aquinas has interpreted it with his own personal intuition into being, and into God. Participation means that finite beings are given to share in the inherently unlimited and infinite richness of the Being of the Uncreated Being, precisely because that Being gives them this share by creating them. Participation is not a sharing in some 'essential' attributes of God, by the creature, attributes which are factually and somewhat 'randomly' selected for it by God. The actual existence of the creature is not just a happenstance or a 'fact', thereafter left out of reflection. The creature, in its very existence and being, participates in nothing less than the mystery of the Existence and Being of God. When God creates, God does much more than perform a selection process from a list of possible communicable attributes. God does much more than recognise, speculatively, one of a number of possible ways of being finite (in a divine 'simple intelligence'). God rather sees with a positively creative vision ('scientia visionis'), like that of a performing artist, an actuality that in our language can only be called a quasi extension of God's very own actual being. It is this notion of 'quasi-extension' that we need to peruse more minutely.<sup>14</sup>

What Aquinas was trying to do, was synthesise his speculative worldview with the intuition of the Church Fathers, who often spoke of creation as a 'Self-giving' of God outside of God. This is an almost mystical intuition that in its own way transcends, while remaining in continuity with, his genuinely metaphysical intuition into the meaning of being itself. In reality, the one is not complete without the other. As he puts them together, there is more than a touch of (metaphysically founded) mysticism in his notion of existence itself, as we shall see.

He sees the root and source of the creative act in the unlimited drive or desire, or better, enjoyment that God has in God's own actual Being. I am tempted to say, in our words, that it moves so to say 'outward' into the world of finitude without losing the energy of its own unlimitedness.<sup>15</sup> There is merit in putting it this way, as long as we remember that prior to creation there is no 'outward' at all, outside of God, and no world of finitude. That is why, it seems to me, God's intention in creating has to be that of calling the creature 'into' the very presence and being of the Creator. There is nowhere else to 'be'.

I suggest that the dynamics involved here go back to the mystery of the Trinitarian processions. There are only two possible modes of immanent procession in divinis, that of the Verbum and that of the Amor, as Aquinas has so tellingly and daringly and rightly insisted. I suggest here that the divine outreach involved in procession was not willing to be limited by the exhaustion of the two possible modes of immanent procession, and that it moved - but with the totality of divine outreach - towards the only other mode of procession that was available, that is, ad extra, not ad intra. This in the last analysis is why there is a quasi-infinity of divine meaning and mystery given to the term of the creative act, and why at the same time it is limited - in participation - by the finitude of what is ad extra Dei. In fact, the very 'reality' of 'ad extra Dei' is thus constituted by the unrestrainability of divine internal energy and its refusal to remain within the limits of immanent expression : it is not simply a 'given' that is there, that God has to work with. This, if you wish, is 'how' (and also 'why') the finite world of limitation originally came to be... God did not intend directly and primarily to set up a 'finitude' : God wanted a projection of 'infinite' that simply could not be - because of the exhaustion of the only possible immanent modes of procession - without the concomitance of that 'finitude'. I am not just saying that the limits of finitude (established indirectly by God's self-communication) do not stand in the way of what God wants; I am saying that they are part and parcel of what God wants in God's total perspective.

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<sup>14</sup> Throughout this presentation, I see an affinity between 'essentialist' thinking and what is called in God a 'scientia simplicis intelligentiae', and I see both of them as epistemologically amounting to a 'selection process' in a mind. In contrast, I see 'existentialist' thinking as linked with the divine 'scientia visionis', and as amounting to a distinctive mental activity that is not 'selective' of pre-known attributes.

The difficulties occur when there is an assumed primary intention on God's part, to create or constitute the ontologically finite as such, independently of the mysterious and larger purposes of God. <sup>16</sup> Part at least of a division of interpreters here, comes from their capacity to work primarily with something more than the 'obviously' ontological, that is, with the 'mysterious and larger' purposes of God..in a sense to be conveyed even more, I am prepared to call them 'mystical'.

What I am suggesting is that the basic reason why God creates the human person is to have before God a person that is more than a mere 'human or finite person'. The finite personhood so created is in some profound way intended intentionally by God to be 'equal' relationally to the very personhood of the Creator. This is so, clearly, not in actual ontological status, but in the overall meaning that the divine act is aiming to do, despite the accepted (and not directly intended) and real limitation of finitude. God does not set up what is 'outside' God for the sake of having something 'out there that is not God' : rather, God wants another person (other than Verbum and Amor) to be as far as possible still 'ad intra Dei', and ('reluctantly' ?) accepts the concomitant finitude as a necessary condition of that other person's being. <sup>17</sup>

Almost nothing of this almost-mystical dynamism of the creative act and of the depth-richness of created being, can be attained through an understanding of actuality that comes via the essentialist track, or via an understanding of creation in terms of some kind of divine selection by God of finite attributes from a pre-set range of possibles. <sup>18</sup>

The key insight into both being and God is thus an insight into creation. It understands creation in terms of the fundamental intentionality of the creative act. It interprets this intentionality as mystical : God wants to have, can I say, a 'divine' person with God (relationally) just as the immanent divine processions set up true divine persons (relationally), and once having done that, 'achieves' further persons-with-God while establishing (and tolerating) the limitations of finitude. I think it is a mistake to speak of finitude as absolutely 'outside' of God, ad extra Dei. We need a new language to express a divine 'outreach' which is more a 'drawing in' than a reaching 'out' : it prolongs and continues the 'compensative permeation in gentleness' that is characteristic of the terms of the immanent processions in the trinity.

God's creative act transcends the dichotomy of necessity and freedom that is established in the world of finitude. It is profoundly correct, and necessary, to speak of the creative act as free : it is free in a much larger sense of the word than the freedom that we know, in our kind of free selection of one among a range of possibilities. It comes from the Largesse of God that creates the other as if it were of the same Largeness as God ! But, as is already evident, it is also true to say that this kind of creative act comes from the very character of this kind of God, so that God would not be acting 'in character' if God did do this in this way. Is there some kind of 'divine "necessity"' that makes God freely look on what is not ontologically divine as if it is divine, and thus make it be with the (participated) being it is given... Indeed, is this what participation really means ?

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<sup>16</sup> Just as within the godhead, all is one nisi obviat relationis oppositio, so we might say that in the domain of the profound intention of creation, all is one with God nisi obviat finitudinis limitatio. This latter is not something primarily desired, but as it were 'tolerated' by the necessity of the situation.

<sup>17</sup> I think this comes close to a statement about 'how' a finite essence limits the act of being itself : how the conditions of finitude limit the inherent infinity of both personhood and being.

<sup>18</sup> A metaphysics that is content with simply and clearly defining the ontological status of finite beings, has not arrived at the fullness of 'being' indicated here - either divine being, or created being (they cannot be considered separately). A full insight seems to need a range of language that does not come from an ontological lexicon, but allows itself to make use of 'metaphor' and 'analogy', perhaps in a very different and new way.

Participation is not the organisation of chosen places in a range of describable and definable finite essences or matrices. It is participation in what is 'essentially' indescribable.<sup>19</sup> The whole mystery and majesty of it lies in the daring application of the word 'participation' to what is much more than we could have thought participation to be. It would seem that we are dealing, really, with something that is not participable at all, namely, the divinity itself, the divinity of divine persons. But the divine intention is larger than these rules of our grammar and logic, and asserts itself while remaining within the accepted and thereby constituted limits of finitisation. Participation is much more than finitisation as level-distinction in the universe. It is the divine desire to hold what is ontologically not divine, in the divine intention, as divine as possible... Ontological definition is not then a fully adequate designation of the 'reality' of persons created by God.

Once we see this, we can perhaps understand not only the full concept of participation, but also something of its 'necessity' as well. If God is really a God of this kind, then participation in this sense is the proper mode of the action of this kind of God. And the proper mode of being of the creature is to be related to this kind of God in this way.

It would follow that there is also an often undeclared mystery in created being itself. It is true to say that it is finitely adequate in its own being, and stands whole and complete as such in that. But it is also true that it cannot do that without as it were an 'more than ontological' desire for the Infinite Being, not just of God in the abstract, but of the Actual Creating God of this finite being in the concrete here and now. This 'more than ontological' yearning translates itself - at least in the human being or person - into an act of longing for the Creator (and 'Term of this longing), without which the creature is somehow incomplete, and without which the whole outreaching process of God has not achieved its intended result. There is indeed a striving to go beyond all the unsurpassable boundaries in the creature itself, and it is precisely by such striving that the creature is really the imago of the Creator who made it so in the very act of such outreaching. 'Order' cannot hold, at least in the restrictive and essentialist sense.<sup>20</sup>

There are consequences that might be mentioned here, for the human (personal) vocation. There is a legitimate desire for 'equality' with God in the created person. This person then has a desire for a positive and truly full union - in knowledge and love - with God, and so, as a gift from that same God, a capacity for such union.

This approach to God is not radically apophatic. In fact, the mystery of God-Creator is more intelligible in itself than the derivative mystery of a finite being. We do not know the mode by which God really is, nor do we know the mode by which Being is limited in us to be us. That, in the decisive words of Aquinas, is for us 'penitus ignotum'. But the metaphysical vocation is a call to realise that there is more intelligibility in the former than in the latter; the theological vocation is a call to give thanks for the gifts that now and later enable us to grasp (something of) that intelligibility; and the theological life is an option to live primarily in a kind of experiential consciousness of the primacy of the Divine as Outreach to the human... it is not required that we live with a primary focus on actually existing finite things around us, or in terms of an ontology that fits them : we can live by a realism that is much more real than that. This, in a nutshell, is the difference between a metaphysics regulated by human logic, and a metaphysics open to and animated by the Larger Realism of a Larger God.

In human life, then, there is a constant attempt to transcend the limits of finitude and to come to a 'more than finite' access to this God. This, at root, is why life itself is a mysterious combination of dimensions of entropy and negentropy, in which present finite structures break down (by wear and tear,

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<sup>19</sup> This is why at root 'participation' is not accessible to mathematics, or to science founded in mathematics.

<sup>20</sup> This is why a metaphysics that is content with simply and clearly defining the ontological status of finite being, has not arrived at the fullness of being - either divine being, or even created being...it effect it cannot arrive at one without arriving at the other.

or by ecstasy): both, indeed each of them, is the fruit of the deeper outreach of God which cannot be met by finite energy as such, but only by the descent of grace, divinely, into us.

The death of a human person is then not just an instance of decomposition of the constituents of a hylemorphic composite, as such, as if there was nothing more in it. In dying, the human person finally moves beyond the limitations of present mortal existence (which are the lived index of finitude) in order to come to a God who is desired with a desire larger than present conditions will allow, and who draws towards himself with a drawing that is not contained within the domain of either mortality or finitude. The final felicity bestowed upon the creature is indeed the Beatitudo proper to God in the Godself, and the Drawing that leads the human person to it is a Drawing Proper to the Largeness of this God.

In the metaphysics-plus we are sketching, there is a foundation for a capacity in finite and lower realities, to signify the latent presence of infinite and higher ones. The real-presencing of the More is the Mystery. But to become aware of it we do not need to rely on alleged powers of symbols and signs to convey it to us. No epistemology as such can set up this deep super-ontology : it can however convey its presence. The character of the real, metaphysically-plus, is such that it makes the finite the signifier of the DEEP REAL : the power of signification of Being-being is written into the fabric of reality. Finite being 'speaks' of Infinite Being...within it.

You could call it a kind of 'sacramental' principle. Everything finite (being, person, action, happening) is a kind of 'sacrament' of the Infinite-in-the-finite. It is the visibility of the Invisible-in-the-visible. Baptism is a traditional rite by which a commitment is made to seeing and living out this sacramental principle of the lower manifesting the All-High not just in the church, or in Christ, but everywhere. We are immersed in the More. Eucharist, in which the species of bread and wine are mysteriously sustained in being by the living body of the Lord, signifies again that Presence. Penance proclaims that reconciliation in and with the human church is also reconciliation and a being brought together into the Fullness of a Given God. Marriage is a continuum of human love, in its fullness, become a revelation of an Eternal-in-time mystery of given and never-withdrawn love. And so on...

It has been well said that the activity of the universe is a mysterious unity of order and chance. There is a dimension of both in the life of a person who has realised the primacy of the acting God. Chance, metaphysically, means the intersection of two or more lines of (extrinsic, efficient) causality, either as unforeseen by a given observer (as in games of 'chance'), or as independent objectively, that is, prescinding from any relationship to an observer, actual or potential. Chance presupposes two lines (at least) of causality : no chance can exist save on an underlying framework of causality ; no calculus of probabilities is possible save given certain determinate properties (otherwise the probability is equivalent to infinity, and nothing happens). The only thing that happens by chance, is really the intersection of the lines of causality. Chance is not an action in itself. In the initial state of the universe, there has to be a basic order or set of elements, from an intelligent cause : without it, chance is not even metaphysically possible. Chance cannot be responsible for everything ! (or, in the last analysis, for 'anything' without further statement of cause..) At the same time, the whole drift of this essay is to bring to consciousness something deeper and larger than what in an essentialist mindset is called 'order'. This 'More' is more than both order (in the essentialist sense) and chance. There is really a bit of both in it. What really happens is the Action of God, the Outreach of God. Unlike chance, it is an action. All we can do is develop a learned sensitivity to it as it actually happens, and whether we call it order of a new kind, or chance of a new kind, does not really matter. The real point is the mystical intention of a God who wants being that is not God to be with(in) the Being of God, in so far as that is possible. The 'order' is one of mystical-intentional identification, beyond the usual range of what we call analogy, although necessarily supported, from our point of view, by that analogy, even if also limited by it. What happens within and perhaps beyond that order, should not be called chance, but love.

A paradigm is then emerging, from trinity to creation to incarnation to sacramentality, in which an intrinsically unlimitable source outreaches itself and in so doing is limited only by the necessary

conditions into which it outreaches, and which it sets up indirectly by the very fact of having to outreach beyond the arena in which unlimitedness can be maintained. In this emergent paradigm, the human person is the fulcrum of participation-plus, and as such is the fruit of the free act of God (free with a divine kind of characteristic freedom), and the beneficiary of the 'chance'-filled arena into which that free act takes it. Person then cannot be grasped adequately via an essentialist approach to order in the universe.

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What is contexted being?

This is an attempt to put words on a number of issues. How 'new' can a realist metaphysics really be, when it goes through a process of 'renewal' ? How attentive to 'concrete reality' can a metaphysically founded 'spirituality' be ? How 'modern' can it be - or different at least from its medieval roots ? When we speak of a 'creative retrieval' of those roots, how much is 'retrieval' and how much is 'creative' ? How much can a realist metaphysics go along with some insights from 'modern' times, and dialogue seriously with 'modern' disciplines ?

The question on my mind is about the 'context' of metaphysical thinking. I am using 'context' in a mental sense, not a historical or cultural one (directly). I mean the entire (originally Greek) mindset that stems at root from Plato and Plotinus and Augustine, and that could be termed 'participationist'. It means that we and the entire universe cannot exist except in a mode of participation in and from a self-diffusive Goodness. The second half of this century has produced convincing studies that show that this mindset was determinative for Aquinas himself. Our intellectual life is then authentic only when the mind rejoices in the discovery of its participatedness, and when the will, our capacity for love, consequently lets itself be drawn on to the 'More' in which it participates and from which it owes its origin and destiny. Our existence is in the last analysis gift, and our primordial activity is in the last analysis response, and in that sense 'return' to the Giver : conscious life that is not God, is gratitude to God. Our intentionality consists in knowing this, and acting in terms of this : our very existence demands awareness of this, and given the possibility of mental dispersal among the manifold interests of the universe, it demands also a 'recollectio' of this awareness. We must live consciously in the presence of the One (God) working in and with us. We are not ultimately originators (except of response), and every act we perform is - in its deepest meaning - a form of doxology. We live in a vocation to speak this praise of the One, reciprocating the divine Creativity with the participated creativity that is proper to us, that of giving thanks, and not in a career to engage ourselves primarily in the midst of the many. The language of our life is then a 'liturgy', and indeed a 'eucharist'. It is in this 'context' that we become persons (not just with general self-awareness, but with context-awareness of this kind, and with consequence-implications) : to be a person is to be a grateful person, to be a steward of the gratitude of the universe that is owed consciously to the Creator. The entire responsibility of our speech (and action) lies in this sort of proportion it has with the pure Self-Gift of the Giver. It is from this base that all forms of analogy hold up. We cannot establish this directly, but we cannot escape it either : our capacity for making judgments includes self-corrective mechanisms of this kind, that is, ultimately a recollection of our participatedness, and our human community protects our calling with community-sanctioned parameters of our very language, that is, we betray in our very speech and behaviour that we are not the ultimate source of what we say and do. We are meant to live with a consciousness of the distinction of God from us, and yet with a consciousness of the permanent presence of the Gifting God to us. Life consists in realising that only the Infinite can give us meaning, and has given meaning to us, and still, and always, does, and that there is - almost ontologically - a kind of nostalgia for the recognition of this relationship, a nostalgia that needs to be given a conscious focus by us through effort, at all times.

In the middle ages, there was a providential historical moment of awareness of this 'context'. It came from the convergence of the three great religions, Israel, Christianity, and Islam, in the persons of

Maimonides, Avicenna, and Aquinas. The intellectual issues and visions that surfaced as a result are indeed perennial, and it is only in terms of them that the meaning of faith, or indeed the meaning of metaphysics itself, can be given a sufficiently vigorous articulation that can meet fully the demands of intellectual inquiry. Their 'point' abides. It spells out the 'context' of our existence.

It is also historically true that since then a 'modern' mentality has emerged (via Scotus, Suarez, and Kant for example) that fails the above criteria. It ought to be called 'post-medieval' or 'post-participationist'. Naturally, a theological (and philosophical) position developed that opposed this modern view, while being conditioned by it : it was 'anti-modern', or better, 'anti-post-participationist', a defensive construct of its own. Neither of these views can satisfy the intellectual vigour of the data of faith or indeed of metaphysics itself. This is why the discussions of the past decades in the catholic community, in terms of 'liberal' and 'conservative', are outside the key intellectual focus of philosophical and theological inquiry, and I think will be found to be ephemeral. Neither is capable of winning ultimately grounded intellectual assent. [I am not suggesting here that we must return to the historico-cultural ways of the middle ages, but that we must retain the metaphysical achievement that in fact emerged then, not because it was medieval, but because it is -not was - true.] The participationist context is not one view among many : it alone sees the One in the many, and the many in the One.

The genius of Aquinas, in particular, was to synthesise this context of participation with an intuition of being. In language that is more ours than his (because at root more phenomenological), he saw that being (*esse*) was fundamentally 'presence' - 'presence with the power to act, as ultimate cause of that act'. In doing so he had, I think, expanded the analogy of 'causality' very significantly, and indeed, in the very direction of the participationist context. I believe that he regarded God, the One, as the primary analogue of this new notion of self-participatable existence, and in that sense, realised in a very new way that this self-Giving God could be termed a conscious self-presencing active giver, that is a 'person'. [The primary analogate of person in this synthesis is not the human person : person is a subset of participation plus being-as-presence, and God is the primary analogate.] As that Person-God participates the divine personhood, into us, we are then indeed involved in the context of a personal response : our doxology is inherently interpersonal. This is one reason, I think, why the category of 'distinction' is not adequate by itself to describe the relation of God to us : while it is ultimately true, it needs, for our sake, to be balanced by categories of relational connectedness and interpersonal involvement. 'Distinction' gives too strong an impression that we are simply 'from' God : we need also to realise that we are 'in' God and that God is 'in' us. The analysis of interpersonal dialogue in which Infinity belongs to the initiator of the dialogue, as such, can epistemologically lead us to an awareness of this context : there is written into our existence an infinite need and capacity to give thanks to an Infinite Initiator of dialogue through Infinite self-giving in existence. It is in terms of this undeniable orientation that we have what is called an infinite desire to know (and also to love).

In the middle ages, Aquinas achieved the synthesis of the *Summa Theologica* in terms of this : he saw creation (and the ultimate gracing of the creature that it makes possible and implies) itself as the extension of the divine processions into missions. A trinitarian version of the 'context' emerged. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was 'Thanks', and the Word is the exemplar of our participated 'thank-existence'. Between the Word and the Source is the Love, and the Love is the bond between the Initiator-as-Thanked and the Thanker-as-Thanking. We participate in this bond.

Again, in modern times, this synthesis was lost, partly at least because of a forgetfulness of the mystery of being (*esse*) and its implicit reduction to facticity, with a resultant emergence of univocity in the created world, and a corresponding equivocity in the understanding of God in relation to that world. No personal context of participationism could survive, and the vocation of the human to thankfulness was swamped in the seemingly unlimited curiosity of the human for amplified global univocity. Unfortunately, the anti-modern refutation of this modern attitude upheld the existence of a God who was not participationally and personalistically a Self-Giver. The vision of ultimate personal truth was lost.

Is it possible to renew this metaphysical and theological vision ? Is it possible to be sympathetic to some of the insights of other disciplines today, and to use them to supplement it ? Is it possible thereby to suggest a real focussing on 'concrete reality now' without losing, and perhaps even increasing, the recollected attentiveness to the Source that the participationist context demands ?

I am aware of the difficulties in this. It could easily be misinterpreted as a concession to modernity in the wrong sense, just as advocacy of the above metaphysics could perhaps be interpreted as upholding a 'conservative' position. What I would put words on here, is intended to be neither. I have no desire either to lapse into secularism and forget transcendence, or to think that only certain historical expressions of participation are perennial.

I would like to look more closely at the difficulty of articulating the closeness of God-the-Source to us, while maintaining God's distinction from us. It is axiomatic that while we affirm the reality of pure perfections in God and of God, we are unable to grasp the mode in which they exist in God or pertain to God. The question here concerns the word 'distinction', God's distinction from us. We must affirm its reality : it is the core of our faith, and the heart of our articulation of faith in historical christianity, judaism, and islam. But do we know the mode in which it obtains in the case of God and ourselves ? I suggest that we do not. The best we can say, is that it is not like the mode in which distinctions obtain in our human and finite world. That would appear to run the risk of an apparent contradiction : we would perhaps appear to be affirming a distinction and denying it at the same time, to be affirming also a closeness and denying it at the same time. Can we do better than that, at the risk of a kind of apophatism that severely limits the ambit of the metaphysical insight that participation has given us ? Is the very need for 'recollectio' of the Source a subset of a certain kind of apophatism ?

I wonder if what we have here is a limit point in the religious use of participation as understood in Greek philosophy and culture. That 'use' was historically first of all a Hebraicisation of Greek culture, and Greek philosophical concepts, in order the better to express the unity of the One God. It was historically secondly a Christianisation of the same things, in order the better to express the unlimited belonging of divine personhood to one human being, Jesus Christ. The combination of those two combined manoeuvres meant that the 'distinction-emphasis' in participation theory was challenged. I believe it was re-emphasised in Islamic thought, and perhaps in later Jewish thought, and that Christian thought preferred to rest its case without examining either how the participation fabric had been torn by the affirmations of faith, or how the closeness of God to the human could be expressed in ways other than participationist.

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Perhaps it is only now that doors are opening in this area. There is a new interest in philosophies of Asia.

For example, there has been in the past, in Western academic circles, a tendency to give Buddhism (especially its Zen form) an atheist interpretation, and to say that it denies the reality of true personhood in humans. There has been recent recognition that other understandings of Buddhism exist (e.g. the Mahayana), and that they do - in their own different ways - respect the reality of God and the reality of the personal self, but that they want to express the closeness of the two in ways different from the Western tradition. Another example might be attitudes to Hinduism. We are moving, I think, from reducing Hindu thinking to something purely subjective in interior experience, and from equating it virtually with apophatic traditions like those of Eastern Churches or those of Nicholas of Cusa. There is some interest in Sankara's ideas, which speak of maia not as appearance or unreality, but as contingency and transitoriness. In particular, there is a possibility of looking at the apparent dichotomy (in Western minds) between the distinctness and the closeness of the Source, in terms of Advaita. Could this specify what Aquinas wanted to uphold, but had no language to do so, namely, the mystery that the Creator is 'infundens et creans esse in rebus' ? If this is so, then is every existent reality then not adequately

described if the infusing Source is left out of the description ? Perhaps a major attitudinal transition would be needed before western people could speak and think like this, but we are at the dawn of a new convergence of cultures in which such understandings might well influence older ponderings.

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A similar reflection is possible, in the west, in relation to certain forms of contemporary physics. In the light of present quantum physics in particular, a vision of material reality is emerging in which nothing stands independently of anything else. In effect, no description of any particular reality, particle or otherwise, that excludes all else from the focussed presentation of that reality, is a true description of that reality. Materiality is non-local, multi-dimensional, and 'entangled' in the quantum sense. The idea of a single isolate individual, adequately separate from anything else, is a derivative idea, coming from the emergence of the classic domain as a later phase of the history of an originality interconnectedness. There is an increasing tendency in quantum thinking to include rather than to offer alternatives: reality is wave and particle, rather than wave or particle. The overall result is that there is a new language of all-inclusiveness in the description of all material reality. Perhaps a philosopher could use it as an analogy for the mutual permeation of spiritual realities, and perhaps a theology might use both as a way of indicating how the Divine Source, though 'distinct' is never 'separate' from the finite concrete realities that are the fruit of creation. No such concrete reality can then be truly or adequately described without an indication of the divine active presence.

This means that such modern science is not in the sense used by philosophers 'modern' at all. It is rather a challenge to such 'modern' thinking by the sheer implications of experiment and enlarged mathematical theory. It is a vision that does not know how much it needs the metaphysical contextualisation that participation-creation thinking (alone) can offer it.

I believe then, that in this physical sense, the term 'empiric' is capable of an enlargement that was never envisaged by the empiricists who coined it, and indeed, is philosophically in real need of that enlargement. A full grasp of the presenting reality of any finite concrete reality must include the active Sourcing of the Source (as well as the entanglement of the universe). I believe we have here a language in which to grapple with the unsolved ancient problem of the distinction/closeness of the Source.

Perhaps scientific 'culture' is converging with global and Asian thinking ?

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It is in this context that I would like to return to the notion of 'person'. I think that the contemporary insight into person (phenomenologically if you like) adds something to the classic and perennial participationist grasp of person. In fact, over the centuries, there has been a profound christianisation of some basic ideas of human living, not achieved in Greek civilisation. I am thinking of a christianisation of practical wisdom in those in leadership roles; of a similar influence of Hebrew and Christian ideas on the Greek idea of friendship and brotherhood in the political community; on a consequent insistence on equality of human beings of all races, of man with woman, of master with slave, which initiated a gradual transformation of western society. Belief in such equality of persons is at the root of the rejection of slavery and of caste systems : the implications of the principle have not yet been worked out fully.

At the core of these developments is the thought that the very being of persons consists in relationships. Aristotle saw differences as resulting by accident for beings of one species : in the Jewish and Christian insight, the differences come from the uniqueness, the peculiar character and role of each one in a divine providence of participation. Human beings then, who could initially be thought of as mere 'individuals', become 'persons' because they discover that their very nature is to develop in and

through their relationships, and the full meaning of what it is for them to be persons is realised only in the completion of this development.

When today then we speak of a human 'person', we cannot describe that person adequately in isolation: persons are persons together. There is a developed phenomenology of interpersonhood today, and it is good to remember that it is the fruit of a Jewish-Christian rather than simply a Greek tradition. No person can be truly described alone: every person includes a personal orientation of the Personal Source to that person and all other persons, and vice-versa.

Sometimes our language is not clear or consistent. Do we call this notion of person 'modern' or not? It seems to me, like the notion of materiality in present physics, and the idea of bondedness in a present interpretation of Asian philosophy, to be counter to what western metaphysicians call 'modern' (in a pejorative sense), and yet very contemporary.

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In earlier papers, I had been deeply impressed by the eternal compenetrative permeation of distinct persons in the gentleness of the trinity, and sensed something of the extension or prolongation of that mystery first of all in the incarnation, and then in the creative act of the divine persons. I was led to an insight into the includedness of all beings together, 'including' the Divine Being (I hope, without a trace of pantheism, since distinction was determinedly maintained.)

It was in that sense that I was toying, as a thought-experiment, with ideas of a kind of 'consecration of the concrete', and had perhaps unhappily tried to describe it as kind of empiricism. I can see now how confusing it might be to use such terms in ways that are the diametric opposite of accepted usage. The idea in my mind was actually to criticise a banal and secularised empiricism. It was also indirectly an attempt to criticise a religiosity that tends to separate the divine too much from the existent concrete reality of the world. In pastoral practice, I see as much damage done by the latter as by the former. I am not sure, and still trying, to find a language that can mediate in the situation.

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Is it possible that we are entering now into a new 'context' of our thinking, that is less dominantly 'Greek', and that can give rise to ways of saying what we have always wanted to say, but could not, given the limits of the exclusively Greek model?

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The value of being as created?

The dearest freshness deep down things  
 non-separatist and non-fusional oneness  
     what French psychoanalysis calls relationship  
 non-discriminative inclusion  
     because all is included in God  
 non-eliminative choices  
     because we can never exclude the intentionality of God which is inclusive

Dancing with zeros  
 God's intentionality:  
     not 'scientia simplicis intelligentiae'  
     selection from range of possibles

but 'scientia visionis'  
 performative vision  
 as of an artist  
 in performative space  
 in artistic time  
 God does not know the world because it is  
 there, but it is there because God creatively  
 knows and wills it: the same is true for us –  
 God knows what we are doing by actually  
 doing it with and in us  
 as of a lover  
 'loving into being'  
 by way of 'attractor'  
 not in a programmed order  
 nor in random chance  
 [chance:  
 intersection of 2 causal lines  
 needs a causal framework  
 not an action in itself  
 can't be ultimate explanation  
 of every/any/thing]  
 so that the primary intent of the Creator is  
 not thing-beings  
 but persons  
 [rest is concreated, as home of persons]  
 God's motive as creator is  
 not to acquire any good outside of God  
 but the love of God's own infinite goodness  
 to enjoy it  
 to share it  
 Eckhart: God enjoys himself and  
 wants us to join him

But what/whom does God intend into being?  
 a finite human person as such ?  
 a person with whom God can have genuine mutuality ?  
 a person who is mystically considered by God to be 'divine' ?  
 not just in extrinsic denomination  
 but in intrinsic reality  
 because created being (of person) is  
 both a reception, limitation, composition of  
 Infinite Being and 'our' nothingness  
 and a permeative, compenetrative, inclusive  
 presence of Infinite Being to and  
 within our being  
 which is thus B(b)eing!

So that God in creating (and implicitly assuring Grace)  
 loves us into the B(b)eing of God as Creator  
 treats us with the Joy of such a God  
 so that the finite, singular, concrete person 'includes the

active God'

As a result, we have to realise that  
 perfections are not in God as they are in us, and neither are  
 distinctions (between us and god) in God as they are in us  
 we are closer to God than we can imagine

We also have to realise that  
 as God dances out into nowhere-else ('out' is paradoxical)  
 so we are meant to do the same in the 'nothingness' around us  
 so that God's outreach continues in us,  
 and there is a bond between  
 God's creation, and  
 our creativity....

Dialogue, larger than mutuality

There is a whole mystery here: we are called to something richer than mutuality as we  
 know it : to something we have to call a mystical identity.  
 In order to fulfill our creation...

As a result,  
 both God makes a difference to me and my being,  
 I would not be at all without God  
 and I make a difference to God and God's Being  
 God would not be the same without me  
 not physically  
 but intentionally  
 in the field of personal consciousness  
 certainly in mine,  
 but also in God's,  
 there is receptivity in God  
 not as imperfection  
 but as relational perfection  
 reciprocity  
 joyful receiving  
 responsiveness  
 care  
 concern  
 availability  
 presence  
 so that my contingent world and life make a difference to  
 God:  
 not just in anthropomorphic terms  
 but in reality  
 God is not immutable  
 unrelated  
 impassive  
 non-dialoguing  
 unavailable  
 like an indifferent  
 metaphysical  
 iceberg  
 or one-way non-receptive

giver-out

God is constant to me  
 faithful to me  
 indefectible to me  
 expressive to me  
 unchangeable in the fullness  
 of commitment to me

and so God is:  
 enfolded in my unfolding:  
 I am a numerically distinct item of  
 consciousness for God's love and  
 consciousness

so that God IS a pure intentional ecstasy focussed  
 in love on me  
 with compenetrative permeation  
 and divine gentleness  
 between the two of us

and there is something that  
 God-in-me can do that  
 God-in-se wouldn't do without me  
 i.e. my commitment  
 (to know, love God)  
 my focussing on God AS  
 God focusses on me  
 [this is not a 'doing; on my  
 part, and so is outside my  
 strictly causal dependency on  
 God]

with the result that  
 God-in-me and I-in-God love together  
 and 'do' together  
 [the creature, once created  
 is involved with the Creator  
 in the future of the cosmos]  
 a God-me 'work' in the cosmos  
 in knowing respect for the  
 dynamics of the cosmos itself

In 'Person in Cosmos', I tried to put words on some of this 'synergy' in terms of 'prayer':

'This openness to the real, on the basis that not all is clear yet, and not fully predetermined, is what prayer has always been 'all about'. I mean of course an actively participant openness. The traditional language puts this as opening up to God. It could be suggested today that one way of opening up to God is exactly to open up [with God] to the energies of the universe, and to its unpredictable self-organising patterns.

'Can we open up to the novelty of the vision, of the music, of the patterns, and listen – with respectful and hopefilled attention in a new way? Words are secondary, but if there were need to express them, then a 'prayer' might go something like this:

"Here I am, God, in your cosmos. I'm trying to open up to it all and to you in it all. I'm trying to remove the blockages to life and beauty that are still there, in me-in-it-all. You know, God, how at the beginning of creation you smiled the

loveliness into it, and whistled the music into it. Could you show me, through the energies you gave it then, how it still lives with the free life you gave it?"

Note. God's intentional consciousness in our regard is  
not changing,  
but is eternally contingently different because of what God and we  
do, that could have been otherwise  
e.g. God rejoices eternally but contingently  
in our free responses

Note. I think it is admissible to think of delight, and even surprise, in God when we pray...

Note. God and the unfolding of our lives.

The complete script of our lives isn't written anywhere ahead of time before it actually happens. The future as future has no real existence anywhere, not even in God. In non-free agents, the future and their acts in the future are 'there' already as determined in their causes, that God has placed in the cosmos. In free agents (us), we can't know ahead of time what we will freely do. (Note: there is no more useless knowledge than to know all the future now: it would take away the openness in us.) How does God relate to our free future unfolding?

God is timeless, in an eternal NOW. God is not a passive spectator. Ahead of time, God does plan for us, in great overall objectives, and in the divine interventions of world and background history. God is present to every real being or real event as it actually happens, 'in its presentiality'. God knows what we are doing by actually doing it with us, and seeing it as actual in God's NOW then at that moment.. God does not 'foresee' what we will do: God sees what we actually do as we actually do it. God knows what time things happen for us, and what time we do things, as we do them at that time. God is like a 'Great Jazz Player' improvising creatively in synergy with us as our history and freedom unfold.

God takes a risk in creating us: we might mess up the purpose of our creation, e.g. by coming up with fantasies about God that are not true. God is a Risk-Taker, an 'Ultimate cosmic Gambler', infinitely skilled at the game! The outcome is determined by our free choices, and God is present to and in those choices, but only in an immanent order as they actually occur existentially.

It is a false question to ask: if God foresaw someone abusing their freedom (in sin, and perhaps 'going to hell'), why create them? We must remember that God does not 'foresee', but 'sees' as things happen: when God so sees, it is too late to wonder about creating, God has done that already. It is not as though God chooses some general pattern of world order, and then leaves it to us: God is actively knowing-loving us into the actual reality we are-do all the time. So God's love and our freedom are working together as they work together: that is why existentially our freedom has to be a responsive one, to the actual creativity of God in us. We are never first causes, and our primordial activity has to be one of gratitude....

We have to be careful about attributing 'sequence' to God': God's acts of knowing are not one after another; rather, what God knows, namely, our acts, he knows as they are one after another in us. The sequencing is in us, not in God. We touch here the mystery of the immanence of God's eternity (a qualitative thing) to our time (a quantitatively durational thing).

All this has an explicit Trinitarian dimension:  
Within God (ad intra) there are only two processions possible  
the procession of the Word  
the procession of the Breath of Love  
God does not want another kind of procession

but God wants to prolong and extend the processions  
 and sends (missions) the divine Persons to and into us  
 and does so in the intentional-Creative act in our regard  
 so that God is

‘infundens et creans bonitatem in rebus’  
 including us in the Word and Breath of Love  
 so that

as our B(b)eing,  
 so our P(p)erson,  
 and our W(w)ords  
 and our B(b)reathing of L(I)ove...

This position is not apophatic, but kataphatic

It is a positive mystical identification, in God’s creative intention

This is the foundation of the DRAWING of us towards and into God.

You could call our reality the ‘deep R(r)éal’.

This is the basis of the ‘sacramental principle’ of all our reality: we are at  
 our best when we ‘signify and effect’ the tangibility of God’s  
 reality in us, and in the cosmos

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