

CHAPTER 9

EXTERNAL PRINCIPLES OF BEING SEPARATED SUBSTANCES AS EFFICIENT & FINAL CAUSES

As emphasized repeatedly in previous chapters, Metaphysics presupposes the existence of immaterial substances. It is the job of natural science to prove their existence. The study of these substances (and what they have in common with material substances) is the job of Metaphysics. In *Metaphysics*, Book XII, Aristotle wastes time discussing the spirits who, he thought, animate or push the heavenly bodies. But he touches on how God is the origin and end of creation, and Thomas takes this up in his Commentary and in other writings.

Book II, Lesson 2 —Dependence of everything on God

296. Now this is necessary, because everything that is composite in nature and participates in being must ultimately have as its causes those things which have existence by their very essence. But all corporeal things are actual beings insofar as they participate in certain forms. Therefore a separate substance which is a form by its very essence must be the principle of corporeal substance.

Quodlibetales III, q.8, a.1

Every created substance is composed of potency and act. For it is clear that only God is His own existence, that is, existing by essence, insofar as His existence is His substance. This can be said of no other, for subsistent existence can only be one. It is necessary, therefore, that every other thing be being by participation so that in it the substance that participates in existence is one thing and the existence participated in is another. Everything that participates is related to that which is participated in as potency is related to act. Thus every created substance is composed of potency and act, that is, it is made up of that which is and the act of existence, as Boethius says in the *Libro de Hebdomadibus*.

Summa theologiae I, q. 13, a.6 —Names of God are analogical

I answer that, in names predicated of many in an *analogical* sense, all are predicated through a relation to **some one thing**; and this one thing must be placed in the definition of them all. And since the essence expressed by the name is the definition, as the Philosopher says, such a name must be applied primarily to that which is put in the definition of the other things, and secondarily to these others according as they approach more or less to the first. Thus, for instance, healthy applied to animals comes into the definition of healthy applied to medicine, which is called healthy as being the cause of health in the animal; and also into the definition of healthy which is applied to urine, which is called healthy insofar as it is the sign of the animal's health.

So it is that all names applied **metaphorically** to God are applied to creatures primarily rather than to God, because when said of God they mean only similitudes to such creatures. For as smiling applied to a field means only that the field in the beauty of its flowering is like to the beauty of the human smile by proportionate likeness, so the name of lion applied to God means only that God manifests strength in His works, as a lion in his. Thus it is clear that applied to God the signification of these names can be defined only from what is said of creatures.

But to other names **not** applied to God in a **metaphorical** sense, the same rule would apply if they were spoken of God as the cause only, as some have supposed. For when it is said, God is good, it would then only mean, God is the cause of the creature's goodness; and thus the name good applied to God would include in its meaning the creature's goodness. Hence good would apply primarily to creatures rather than God. But, as was shown above, these names are applied to God not as the **cause** only, but **also essentially**. For the words, God is good, or wise, signify not only that He is the cause of wisdom or goodness, but that these exist in Him in a more excellent way. Hence (1) as regards what the name signifies, these names are applied primarily to God rather than to creatures, because these perfections flow from God to creatures; but (2) as regards the imposition of the names, they are primarily applied by us to creatures which we know first. Hence they have a mode of signification which belongs to creatures, as was said above.

BOOK XII: INCORRUPTIBLE SUBSTANCES

Lesson 5 *Their existence*

2489. Substances are the primary kind of beings, as has been shown above (2417-23), and when primary things are destroyed none of the others remain. Therefore, if no substance is eternal but all are perishable, it follows that nothing is eternal but that "all things are perishable," i.e., they do not always exist. But this is impossible. Hence there must be an eternal substance.

Lesson 8 *Perfection of God*

2536. Here the Philosopher relates the first being, which causes motion as something intelligible and something desirable, to that which understands and desires it. For if the first mover causes motion inasmuch as it is the first thing understood and desired, the first thing moved by it must understand and desire it. This is true according to the opinion of Aristotle inasmuch as he considered a heaven to be animated by a soul which understands and desires.

In regard to this he does three things. First, he shows that pleasure naturally belongs to the soul of a heaven, which

desires and understands, as a result of its understanding and desiring the first mover. He says that “its course of life,” i.e., the pleasurable state of the thing understanding and desiring the first intelligible being, is like the best which we can enjoy for a short time. For that which understands and desires this being is always in such a pleasurable state, though this is impossible for us, i.e., that we should always be in that state which is pleasant and best.

2537. Then he proves his statement. Pleasure attends the activity of the thing that understands and desires the first principle, for pleasure follows upon the operation connatural to anything that understands and desires, as is evident in Book X of the *Ethics*. A sign of this is that pleasure is greatest when a person is awake and actually sensing and understanding. For intellect and sense in actual use are to intellect and sense in potential use as being awake is to being asleep. That these states are the most pleasant is dear from the fact that other states are pleasant only because of these; for hope and memory are pleasant inasmuch as they bring past or future pleasant activities into consciousness as present.

2538. Hence, since pleasure consists in the actual use of intellect and sense, it is evident “that understanding,” i.e., the activity of the intellect as such, is concerned with what is best in itself; for an intelligible good surpasses a sensible good just as an unchangeable and universal good surpasses a changeable and particular good. It also follows that the pleasure experienced in intellectual activity is of a higher kind than that experienced in sensory activity. Hence the best and most perfect intellectual activity is concerned with what is best in the highest degree, so that the greatest pleasure follows. Therefore it is evident that the greatest pleasure is experienced in those intellectual activities by which the first mover is understood, who is also the first intelligible object.

2539. Then he shows that the act of understanding and the pleasure found in the first intelligible object are even more perfect than those found in the thing that understands and desires it. He says that it is characteristic of an intellect to understand itself inasmuch as it takes on or conceives within itself some intelligible object; for an intellect becomes intelligible by reason of the fact that it apprehends something intelligible. Hence, since the intellect becomes intelligible by conceiving some intelligible object, it follows that the intellect and its intelligible object are the same.

2540. He explains how an intellect attains its intelligible object. For an intellect is related to an intelligible object as potentiality is to actuality, and as something perfectible to its perfection. And just as something perfectible is receptive of a perfection, so too an intellect is receptive of its intelligible object. Now its proper intelligible object is substance, since the object of the intellect is a quiddity. Hence he says that the intellect is receptive of something intelligible and of substance. And since each thing becomes actual inasmuch as it attains its own perfection, it follows that the intellect becomes actual inasmuch as it receives its intelligible object. Now to be intelligible is to be actual in the class of intelligible things. And since each thing is active to the extent that it is actual, it follows that the intellect becomes active or operative, i.e., understanding, to the extent that it attains its

intelligible object.

2541. But it should be borne in mind that material substances are not actually intelligible but only potentially; and they become actually intelligible by reason of the fact that the likenesses of them which are gotten by way of the sensory powers are made immaterial by the agent intellect. And these likenesses are not substances but certain intelligible forms received into the possible intellect. But according to Plato the intelligible forms of material things are self-subsistent entities. Hence he claimed that our intellect becomes actually understanding by coming in contact with separate self-subsistent forms of this kind. But in Aristotle's opinion the intelligible forms of material things are not substances which subsist of themselves.

2542. Yet there is an intelligible substance which subsists of itself, and it is of this that he is now speaking. For the first mover must be a substance which is both understanding and intelligible. Hence it follows that the relationship between the intellect of the first sphere and the first intelligible substance, which causes motion, is similar to the relationship which the Platonists posited between our intellect and the separate intelligible Forms, inasmuch as our intellect becomes actual by coming in contact with and participating in these Forms, as Plato himself says. Hence the intellect of the first sphere becomes actually understanding through some kind of contact with the first intelligible substance.

2543. Further, since the cause of some attribute of a thing has that attribute in a higher degree, it follows that anything that is divine and noble, such as understanding and taking pleasure, which is found in the intellect having the contact, is found in a much higher degree in the first intelligible object with which it is in contact. Hence its intellectual activity is most pleasant and best. But the first intelligible object of this kind is God. Therefore, since the pleasure which we experience in understanding is the highest, although we can enjoy it only for a short time, if God is always in that state in which we sometimes are, His happiness is wondrous. But if He is always in that state (which we enjoy for only a short time) in a higher degree, this is even more wondrous.

2544. Third, since he has said that intellectual activity is proper to God, he shows how this applies to Him. He says that God is life itself, and he proves this as follows. “Intellectual activity,” i.e., understanding, is a kind of life; and it is the most perfect kind of life that there is. For according to what has been shown, actuality is more perfect than potentiality; and therefore an intellect which is actually understanding leads a more perfect life than one which is potentially understanding, just as being awake is more perfect than being asleep. But the first being, God, is actuality itself; for His intellect is His intellectual activity; otherwise He would be related to His intellectual activity as potentiality to actuality. Moreover, it has been shown (1066:C 2517) that His substance is actuality. Thus it follows that the very substance of God is life, and that His actuality is His life, and that it is the life which is best and eternal and subsists of itself. This is why common opinion holds that God is an animal which is eternal and best; for around us life is clearly apparent only in animals, and therefore God is called an

animal because life belongs to Him. Hence, from what has been said it is evident that life and continuous and eternal duration belong to God, because God is identical with His own eternal life; for He and His life are not different.

Lesson 11

God's knowledge

2611. He now answers the second question; and in regard to this he does three things. First, he establishes the correct answer to the second question. Second (2617), he argues on the opposite side of the question ("And its act of understanding"). Third (2619), he answers the arguments given ("But in certain cases").

He accordingly says, first, that, since it has been shown (2608) that the substance of the first mover is not an intellectual potency but is itself an act of understanding, it is evident from this that, if the first mover does not understand itself but something else, it follows that this other thing, i.e., what is understood by it, is nobler than the first mover.

2612. He proves this as follows. Actual understanding itself, i.e., thinking, also belongs to one who understands the basest thing. Hence it is evident that some actual understanding must be avoided, because there are some things which it is better not to see than to see. But this would not be the case if the act of understanding were the best of things, because then no act of understanding would have to be avoided. Therefore, since some act of understanding must be avoided because of the baseness of the thing understood, it follows that the nobility of the intellect, which is found in its understanding, will depend on the nobility of its object. Hence the intelligible object is nobler than the act of understanding.

2613. Since it has been shown that the first mover is its own act of understanding, it follows that if it understands something different from itself, this other thing will be nobler than it is. Therefore, since the first mover is the noblest and most powerful, it must understand itself; and in its case intellect and thing understood must be the same.

2614. Now we must bear in mind that the Philosopher's aim is to show that God does not understand something else but only himself, inasmuch as the thing understood is the perfection of the one understanding and of his activity, which is understanding. It is also evident that nothing else can be understood by God in such a way that it would be the perfection of His intellect. It does not follow, however, that all things different from Himself are not known by Him; for by understanding Himself He knows all other things.

2615. This is made clear as follows. Since God is His own act of understanding and is the noblest and most powerful being, His act of understanding must be most perfect. Therefore He understands Himself most perfectly. Now the more perfectly a principle is known, the more perfectly is its effect known in it; for things derived from principles are contained in the power of their principle. Therefore, since the heavens and the whole of nature depend on the first principle, which is God, God obviously knows all things by understanding Himself.

2616. And the baseness of any object of knowledge does not lessen His dignity; for the actual understanding of anything more base is to be avoided only insofar as the intellect becomes absorbed in it, and when in actually understanding that thing the intellect is drawn away from the understanding of nobler things. For if in understanding some noblest object base things are also understood, the baseness of the things understood does not lessen the nobility of the act of understanding.

Lesson 12

The good of the universe

2629. Then he answers the question raised; and in regard to this he does two things. First, he shows that the universe has both a separate good and a good of order. Second (2632), he shows the ways in which the parts of the universe contribute to its order ("And all things").

He accordingly says, first, that the universe has its good and end in both ways. For there is a separate good, which is the first mover, on which the heavens and the whole of nature depend as their end or desirable good, as has been shown (2521). And since all things having one end must agree in their ordination to that end, some order must be found in the parts of the universe; and so the universe has both a separate good and a good of order.

2630. We see this, for example, in the case of an army; for the good of the army is found both in the order itself of the army and in the commander who has charge of the army. But the good of the army is found in a higher degree in its commander than in its order, because the goodness of an end takes precedence over that of the things which exist for the sake of the end. Now the order of an army exists for the purpose of achieving the good of its commander, namely, his will to attain victory. But the opposite of this is not true, i.e., that the good of the commander exists for the sake of the good of order.

2631. And since the formal character of things which exist for the sake of an end is derived from the end, it is therefore necessary not only that the good of the army exist for the sake of the commander, but also that the order of the army depend on the commander, since its order exists for the sake of the commander. In this way too the separate good of the universe, which is the first mover, is a greater good than the good of order which is found in the universe. For the whole order of the universe exists for the sake of the first mover inasmuch as the things contained in the mind and will of the first mover are realized in the ordered universe. Hence the whole order of the universe must depend on the first mover.

2632. Here he shows the ways in which the parts of the universe contribute to its order. He says that all things in the universe are ordered together in some way, but not all are ordered alike, for example, sea animals, birds, and plants. Yet even though they are not ordered in the same way, they are still not disposed in such a way that one of them has no connection with another; but there is some affinity and relationship of one with another. For plants exist for the sake

of animals, and animals for the sake of men. That all things are related to each other is evident from the fact that all are connected together to one end.

2633. That all are not ordered in the same way is made clear by an example; for in an ordered household or family different ranks of members are found. For example, under the head of the family there is a first rank, namely, that of the sons, and a second rank, which is that of the slaves, and a third rank, which is that of the domestic animals, as dogs and the like. For ranks of this kind have a different relation to the order of the household, which is imposed by the head of the family, who governs the household. For it is not proper for the sons to act in a haphazard and disorderly way, but all or most of the things that they do are ordered. This is not the case with the slaves or domestic animals, however, because they share to a very small degree in the order which exists for the common good. But in their case we find many things which are contingent and haphazard; and this is because they have little connection with the ruler of the household, who aims at the common good of the household.

2634. And just as the order of the family is imposed by the law and precept of the head of the family, who is the principle of each of the things which are ordered in the household, with a view to carrying out the activities which pertain to the order of the household, in a similar fashion the nature of physical things is the principle by which each of them carries out the activity proper to it in the order of the universe. For just as any member of the household is disposed to act through the precept of the head of the family, in a similar fashion any natural being is disposed by its own nature. Now the nature of each thing is a kind of inclination implanted in it by the first mover, who directs it to its proper end; and from this it is clear that natural beings act for the sake of an end even though they do not know that end, because they acquire their inclination to their end from the first intelligence.

2635. However, not all things are disposed to this end in the same way. For there is something common to all things, since all things must succeed in being distinguished; that is, they must have discrete and proper operations, and must also be

differentiated essentially from each other; and in this respect order is lacking in none of them. But there are some things which not only have this but are also such that all their activities “participate in the whole,” i.e., are directed to the common good of the whole. This is found to be true of those things which contain nothing contrary to their nature, nor any element of chance, but everything proceeds according to the right order.

2636. For it is evident, as has been pointed out (2632-34), that each natural being is directed to the common good by reason of its proper natural activity. Hence those things which never fail in their proper natural activity have all their activities contributing to the whole. But those which sometimes fail in their proper natural activity do not have all their activities contributing to the whole; and lower bodies are of this kind.

2637. The answer briefly stated, then, is that order requires two things: a distinction between the things ordered, and the contribution of the distinct things to the whole. As regard the first of these, order is found in all things without fail; but as regards the second, order is found in some things, and these are the things which are highest and closest to the first principle, as the separate substances and the heavenly bodies, in which there is no element of chance or anything contrary to their nature. But order is lacking in some things, namely, in [lower] bodies, which are sometimes subject to chance and to things which are contrary to their nature. This is so because of their distance from the first principle, which is always the same.

2663. But many rulers are not good. For example, it would not be good for different families which shared nothing in common to live in a single home. Hence it follows that the whole universe is like one principality and one kingdom, and must therefore be governed by one ruler. Aristotle's conclusion is that there is one ruler of the whole universe, the first mover, and one first intelligible object, and one first good, whom above he called God (2544), who is blessed for ever and ever. Amen.

God's Universal Governance of All Things

St. Thomas, Summa Theologiae, I, q. 103, art. 1

We proceed thus to the First Article:

Objection 1. It would seem that the world is not governed by anyone. For it belongs to those things to be governed, which move or work for an end. But natural things which make up the greater part of the world do not move, or work for an end; for they have no knowledge of their end. Therefore the world is not governed.

Obj. 2. Further, those things are governed which are moved towards some object. But the world does not appear to be so directed, but has stability in itself. Therefore it is not governed.

Obj. 3. Further, what is necessarily determined by its own nature to one particular thing, does not require any external principle of government, But the principal parts of the world are by a certain necessity determined to something particular in their actions and movements. Therefore the world does not require to be governed.

On the contrary, It is written (Wis. xiv. 3): But you, O Father, govern all things by your Providence. And Boethius says (De Consol. iii): You who govern this universe by mandate eternal.

I answer that, Certain ancient philosophers denied the government of the world, saying that all things happened by chance. But such an opinion can be refuted as impossible in two ways. First, by the observation of things themselves. For we observe that in nature things happen always or nearly always for the best; which would not be the case unless some sort of providence directed nature towards good as an end. And this is to govern. Therefore the unfailing order we observe in things is a sign of their being governed. For instance, if we were to enter a well-ordered house, we would gather from the order manifested in the house the notion of a governor, as Cicero says (*De Nat. Deorum* ii.), quoting Aristotle. Secondly, this is clear from a consideration of Divine goodness, which, as we have said above (Q. XLIV, a. 4; Q. I-XV, a. 2), is the cause of the production of things in being. For as it belongs to the best to produce the best, it is not fitting that the supreme goodness of God should produce things without giving them their perfection. Now a thing's ultimate perfection consists in the attainment of its end. Therefore it belongs to the Divine goodness, as it brought things into being, so to lead them to their end. And this is to govern.

Reply Obj. 1. A thing moves or operates for an end in two ways. First, in moving itself to the end, as do man and other rational creatures; and such things have knowledge of their end, and of the means to the end. Secondly, a thing is said to move or operate for an end, as though moved or directed thereto by another, as an arrow is directed to the target by the archer, who knows the end unknown to the arrow: Hence, as the movement of the arrow towards a definite end shows clearly that it is directed by someone with knowledge, so the unvarying course of natural things which are without knowledge, shows clearly that the world is governed by some reason.

Reply Obj. 2. In all created things there is a stable element, even if this be only primary matter; and something belonging to movement, if under movement we include operation. And things need governing as to both, because even that which is stable, since it is created from nothing, would return to nothingness were it not sustained by a governing hand, as will be explained later (Q. CIV., a. 1).

Reply Obj. 3. The natural necessity inherent in those beings which are determined to a particular course is a kind of impression from God, directing them to their end; as the necessity whereby an arrow is moved so as to fly towards a certain point is an impression from the archer, and not from the arrow. But there is a difference, inasmuch as that which creatures receive from God is their nature, while that which natural things receive from man in addition to their nature is something violent. Therefore, just as the violent necessity in the movement of the arrow shows the action of the archer, so the natural necessity of things shows the government of Divine Providence.

God's Continued Act of Creation

St. Thomas, Summa Theologiae, 1, q. 104, art. 1

We proceed thus to the First Article:

Objection 1. It would seem that creatures do not need to be kept in being by God. For what cannot not-be, does not need to be kept in being; just as that which cannot depart, does not need to be kept from departing. But some creatures by their very nature cannot not-be. Therefore not all creatures need to be kept in being by God. The middle proposition is proved thus. That which of itself is included in the nature of a thing is necessarily in that thing, and its contrary cannot be in it; thus a multiple of two must necessarily be even, and cannot possibly be an odd number. Now being follows necessarily upon a form, because everything is a being actually, so far as it has form. But some creatures are subsistent forms, as we have said of the angels (Q. L., aa. 2, 5): and thus to be is in them of themselves. The same reasoning applies to those creatures whose matter is in potentiality to one form only, as was explained above of heavenly bodies (Q. LXVI, a. 2). Hence such creatures as these have in their nature to be necessarily, and cannot not-be. For there can be no potentiality to not-being, either in the form which has being of itself, or in matter existing under a form which it cannot lose, since it is not in potentiality to any other form.

Obj. 2. Further, God is more powerful than any created agent. But a created agent, even after ceasing to act, can cause its effect to be preserved in being. Thus, the house continues to stand after the builder has ceased to build; and water remains hot for some time after the fire has ceased to heat. Much more, therefore, can God cause His creature to be kept in being, after He has ceased to create it.

Obj. 3. Further, nothing violent can occur, except it have some active cause. But tendency to not-being is unnatural and violent to any creature, since all creatures naturally desire to be. Therefore no creature can tend to not-being, except through some active cause of corruption. Now there are creatures of such a nature that nothing can cause them to be corrupted. Such are spiritual substances and heavenly bodies. Therefore such creatures cannot tend to not-being, even if God were to withdraw His action.

Obj. 4. Further, if God keeps creatures in being, this is done by some action. Now every action of an agent, if that action be efficacious, produces something in the effect. Therefore the conserving power of God must produce something in the creature. But this is not so, because this action does not give being to the creature, since being is not given to that which already is: nor does it add anything new to the creature, because either God would not keep the creature in being continually, or He would be continually adding something new to the creature, either of which is unreasonable. Therefore creatures are not kept in being by God.

On the contrary, It is written (Heb 1:3): "Upholding things by the word of His power."

I answer that, Both reason and faith bind us to say that creatures are kept in being by God. To make this clear, we must consider that a thing is conserved by another in two ways. First, indirectly, and accidentally; thus a person is said to conserve anything by removing the cause of its corruption; as a man may be said to conserve a child, whom he guards from falling into the fire. In this way God conserves some things, but not all, for there are some things of such a nature that nothing can corrupt them, so that it is not necessary to keep them from corruption. Secondly, a thing is said to conserve another essentially and directly, namely, in so far as what is conserved depends on the conserver in such a way that it cannot exist without it. In this manner all creatures need to be conserved by God. For the being of every creature depends on God, so that not for a moment could it subsist, but would fall into nothingness, were it not kept in being by the operation of the Divine power, as Gregory says (*Moral.* xvi.).

This is made clear as follows: Every effect depends on its cause, so far as it is its cause. But we must observe that an agent may be the cause of the becoming of its effect, but not directly of its being. This may be seen both in artificial and in natural things. For the builder causes the house in its becoming, but he is not the direct cause of its being. For it is clear that the being of the house is a result of its form, which consists in the putting together and arrangement of the materials, and which results from the natural qualities of certain things. Thus a cook prepares the food by applying the natural activity of fire, and in the same way a builder constructs a house, by making use of cement, stones, and wood which are able to be put together in a certain order and to conserve it. Therefore the being of a house depends on the nature of these materials, just as its becoming depends on the action of the builder. The same principle applies to natural things. For if an agent is not the cause of a form as such, neither will it be directly the cause of the being which results from that form; but it will be the cause of the effect only in its becoming.

Now it is clear that of two things in the same species one cannot be essentially the cause of the other's form as such, since it would then be the cause of its own form, since both forms have the same nature; but it can be the cause of this form in as much as it is in matter—in other words, it may be the cause that this matter receives this form. And this is to be the cause of becoming, as when man begets man, and fire causes fire. Thus whenever a natural effect is such that it has an aptitude to receive from its active cause an impression specifically the same as in that active cause, then the becoming of the effect depends on the agent but not its being.

Sometimes, however, the effect has not this aptitude to receive the impression of its cause in the same way as it exists in the agent; as may be seen clearly in all agents which do not produce an effect of the same species as themselves. Thus, the heavenly bodies cause the generation of inferior bodies which differ from them in species. Such an agent can be the cause of a form as such, and not merely as being joined to this matter; and consequently, it is not merely the cause of becoming but also the cause of being.

Therefore as the becoming of a thing cannot continue when that action of the agent ceases which causes the becoming of the effect: so neither can the being of a thing continue after that action of the agent has ceased, which is the cause of the effect not only in becoming but also in being. This is why hot water retains heat after the cessation of the fire's action; while, on the contrary, the air does not continue to be lit up, even for a moment, when the sun ceases to act upon it. For water is a matter susceptible of the fire's heat in the same way as it exists in the fire. Therefore if it were to be reduced to the perfect form of fire, it would retain that form always; whereas if it has the form of fire imperfectly and inchoately, the heat will remain for a time only by reason of the imperfect participation of the principle of heat. On the other hand, air is not of such a nature as to receive light in the same way as it exists in the sun, namely, to receive the form of the sun, which is the principle of light. Therefore, since it has no root in the air, the light ceases with the action of the sun.

Now every creature may be compared to God as the air is to the sun which illumines it. For as the sun possesses light by its nature, and as the air is illumined by participating light from the sun, though not participating in the sun's nature, so God alone is Being by virtue of His own Essence (since His Essence is His being), whereas every creature has being by participation, so that its essence is not its being. Therefore, as Augustine says (*Gen. ad lit.*, iv. 12): If the ruling power of God were withdrawn from His creatures, their nature would at once cease, and all nature would collapse. In the same work (viii. 12) he says: As the air becomes light by the presence of the sun, so is man illumined by the presence of God, and in His absence returns at once to darkness.

Reply Obj. 1. Being naturally results from the form of a creature, given the influence of the Divine action; just, as light results from the diaphanous nature of the air, given the action of the sun. Hence, the potentiality to not-being in spiritual creatures and heavenly bodies is rather something in God, Who can withdraw His influence, than in the form or matter of those creatures.

Reply Obj. 2. God cannot communicate to a creature that it be conserved in being after the cessation of the Divine influence; as neither can He make it not to have received its being from Himself. For the creature needs to be conserved by God in so far as the being of an effect depends on the cause of its being. Hence there is no comparison with an agent that is not the cause of being but only of becoming.

Reply Obj. 3. This argument holds in regard to that conservation which consists in the removal of corruption: but all creatures do not need to be conserved thus, as stated above.

Reply Obj. 4. The conservation of things by God is not by a new action, but by a continuation of that action whereby He gives being, which action is without either motion or time; so also the preservation of light in the air is by the continual influence of the sun.

BOOK VI: METHOD OF INVESTIGATING BEING

Lesson 3

Chance and providence

1191. Having drawn his conclusions concerning accidental being, the Philosopher now rejects an opinion that would completely abolish this kind of being. For some men held that whatever comes to pass in the world has some **proper cause**, and again that given any cause its **effect necessarily** follows. Hence, as a result of the connection between causes it would follow that everything in the world happens of necessity and nothing by chance. Therefore the Philosopher's aim is to destroy this position; and in regard to this he does three things.

First, he destroys this position. Second (1201), he draws a conclusion from his discussion ("It is evident"). Third (1202), he poses a question that arises out of this discussion ("But to what kind of principle").

He says, first, that it will be evident from the following remarks that the principles and causes of the generation and corruption of some things "are generable and corruptible," i.e., they are capable of being generated and corrupted, "without generation and corruption, i.e., generation and corruption taking place. For if the generation or corruption of one thing is the cause of the generation or corruption of another, it is not necessary that the generation or corruption of the effect necessarily follows when the generation or corruption of the cause takes place, because **some causes are active only for the most part**. Therefore, granted that these causes exist, their effect can be hindered accidentally, either because the matter is not disposed, or because an opposing agent interferes, or because of some such reason.

1192. Yet it must be noted that *Avicenna* proves in his *Metaphysics* that no effect is possible in relation to its own cause but only necessary. For if when the cause is posited it is possible for its effect not to follow, and it does follow (and the potential as such is made actual by some actual being), then something else besides this cause will have to cause the actual effect to follow. Therefore this cause was not sufficient. This appears to be contrary to what the Philosopher says here.

1193. But it must be noted that *Avicenna's* statement should be understood to apply only if we assume that no obstacle interferes with the cause. For given the cause its effect must follow unless there is some obstacle, and sometimes this occurs accidentally. Hence the Philosopher says that generation and corruption need not follow when the causes of generation and corruption are posited.

1194. For if this statement were not true, it would follow that all things would be of necessity, granted that along with this statement: given the cause the effect must follow, another position is also maintained, namely, that there must be some proper cause, and not merely an accidental one, of each thing which is generated and corrupted. For from these two propositions it follows that all things are of necessity. He proves this as follows.

1195. If it is asked whether a thing will be or not, it follows

from the above remarks that one or the other is true of necessity; because if everything that is generated has a proper cause which produces it, and if given the cause its effect must ensue, then it follows that that thing about which it was asked whether it will exist or not, will come to be if its cause is held to exist; and if that cause will not exist, neither will its effect. And similarly it will be necessary to say that this cause will exist if some other thing which is its cause will exist.

1196. Further, it is evident that regardless of the amount of future time that may be taken, whether after a hundred or a thousand years, the amount of time beginning from the present moment up to that point is limited. However, since the generation of a cause is prior in time to the generation of its effect, then by proceeding from effect to cause we must subtract some part of future time and come closer to the present. But every limited thing is used up by having some part of it constantly taken away. Thus by proceeding from an effect to its cause and again from that cause to its cause and so on in this way, it follows that the whole period of future time is used up, since it is limited, and in this way the present moment is reached.

1197. This is clear in the following example. If every effect has some proper cause from which it follows of necessity, then this man must die of necessity, either from illness or violence, if he leaves the house. For his leaving the house is found to be the cause of his death by either violence (for example, if on leaving the house he is discovered by robbers and is killed), or illness (for example, if on leaving the house because he is hot he contracts a fever and dies). And in the same way it will also happen of necessity that he leaves the house in order to draw water from a well if he is thirsty; for thirst is the cause of his leaving the house in order to draw water. And similarly by the same argument it will also happen of necessity that he is thirsty if there is something else which causes his thirst; and thus by proceeding from effect to cause in this way one comes to "something which exists now," i.e., to some present thing or to "something that has already happened," i.e., to some past event. For example, if we were to say that a man will be thirsty if he eats highly seasoned or salty food which makes him thirsty, his eating or not eating salty food is in the present. Thus it follows that "the aforesaid future event," namely, that this man will die or not die, will happen of necessity.

1198. For since every conditional proposition is a necessary one, then granted the antecedent the consequent must follow; for example, this conditional proposition is true: "If Socrates runs, he moves." Therefore, granted that he runs, he must be moving so long as he runs. But if any effect has a proper cause from which it follows of necessity, then that conditional proposition must be true of which the antecedent is the cause and the consequent is the effect. And although there are sometimes several intermediates between a cause which exists at the present moment and an effect which will exist in the future (each of which is an effect in relation to those preceding it and a cause in relation to those following it), nevertheless it follows from first to last that any conditional proposition is true whose antecedent is present and whose consequent exists at some future time, for example, the

proposition: “If a man eats salty food, he will be killed.” Now the antecedent refers to what is present, and therefore it will be by necessity that he is killed. And in this way all other future events whose proximate or remote causes exist in the present will be necessary.

1199. The same argument applies if one in proceeding from effects to causes “jumps back to something that has already happened,” or to past events, that is to say, if one traces future effects back to some past cause that is not present; for that which is past nevertheless still is in some sense. I say this insofar as it has occurred, or is past. For even though Caesar’s life is not now, in the present, nevertheless it is in the past, because it is true that Caesar has lived. Thus it is possible to hold as true now the antecedent of a conditional proposition in whose antecedent clause there is a past cause and in whose consequent clause there is a future effect. And thus since all future effects must be traced back to such present or past causes, it follows that all future events happen of necessity. For example, we say that it is absolutely necessary that one now living is going to die, because this follows of necessity in reference to something that has already come to pass, namely, that there are two contraries in the same body by reason of its composition; for this conditional proposition is true, “If a body is composed of contraries, it will be corrupted.”

1200. But it is impossible that all future events should happen of necessity. Therefore the two premises from which this conclusion would follow are impossible, namely, that any effect has a proper cause, and that given the cause its effect must follow. For from this would follow the position already mentioned, namely, that there are some causes already posited for any future effect; for example, some causes have already been posited for the corruption of an animal. But no cause has yet been posited from which it will follow of necessity that this man will die either from illness or violence.

1201. He draws a conclusion from the foregoing discussion. He says that, since not everything which comes to be has a proper cause, it is therefore evident that in the case of future contingent events the reduction of a future effect to some proper cause goes back to some principle, and that this principle is not reduced to some other proper principle but will be the cause of “everything that happens by chance,” i.e., an accidental cause, and that there will be no other cause of that accidental cause; just as we have already said (1184) that accidental being has no cause and is not generated. For example, the cause of this man being killed by robbers is a proper cause, because he is wounded by robbers; and this also has a proper cause, because he is found by the robbers; but this has only an accidental cause. For if on his way to work this man is wounded by robbers, this is accidental, as is evident from the foregoing; and therefore it is not necessary to posit a cause for this. For that which is accidental is not generated, and thus it is not necessary to look for some proper cause which produces it, as was said above.

1202. Here he poses a question arising out of the foregoing discussion; for he has just said above that the causes of those beings which are accidental are ultimately reduced to some principle for which it is impossible to give another cause.

Hence he inquires here about this process of reduction or ἀναγωγή, which means the same as “**to what kind of principle and what kind of cause** it should be reduced,” i.e., to what class of cause or principle, whether to some first cause which is a material cause, or to one which is a final cause (or that for the sake of which a thing comes to be), or to one which is a mover. He omits the formal cause because the question here involves the cause responsible for the generation of things that come to be by accident. But in the process of generation a form has no causal role except that of an end, because in the process of generation the end and the form are identical. Now he does not answer the question which is raised here, but assumes its solution from what has been established in Book II of the *Physics*; for it was shown there that fortune and chance, which are the causes of things that come to be by accident, are reduced to the class of **efficient** cause. Hence he concludes from the above that we must omit any discussion of accidental being, because the truth concerning it has been established as completely as it is possible to do so.

1203. It must be noted, however, that the doctrine of the Philosopher set forth here seems to do away with certain things which some thinkers hold in philosophy, namely, **fate and providence**. For here the force of the Philosopher’s argument is that not all that occurs may be traced back to some proper cause from which it follows of necessity, otherwise it would follow that everything in the world would be of necessity and nothing by accident. But those who posit fate say that the contingent events occurring here, which appear to be accidental, can be traced back to some power of a celestial body, whose activity produces in a certain order those things which, viewed in themselves, seem accidental. And similarly those who posit providence say that whatever occurs here is ordained by the order of providence.

1204. From both of these positions, then, there seem to follow two conclusions which are opposed to what the philosopher establishes here. (1) The first is that **nothing** in the world happens **accidentally** either by fortune or by chance; for those things which occur in a certain order are not accidental, since they occur either always or for the most part. (2) The second is that **all** things happen **of necessity**. For if all those things whose cause is placed in the present or has been placed in the past occur of necessity, as the Philosopher’s argument maintains, and if the cause of those things which come under providence or fate is placed in the present or has already been placed in the past (because providence is unchangeable and eternal, and the motion of the heavens is also invariable), it seems to follow that those things which come under providence or fate happen of necessity. Thus if everything that occurs here is subject to fate and providence, it follows that everything happens of necessity. Therefore according to the mind of the Philosopher it seems impossible to posit either fate or providence.

1205. In clearing up this difficulty it must be noted that the higher a cause the more extensive is its causality, for a higher cause produces its own proper higher effect, which is more general and extends to many things. For example, in the case of the arts it is evident that the political art, which is higher

than the military art, has jurisdiction over the entire political community, whereas the military art has jurisdiction only over those things which fall within the military sphere. But the order found in the effects of a cause extends only so far as the causality of that cause extends, for every cause in the proper sense has definite effects which it produces in a certain order. It is evident, then, that (a) when effects are referred to **lower** causes they seem to be unrelated and to coincide with each other accidentally, but (b) that when they are referred to some **higher** common cause they are found to be related and not accidentally connected but to be produced simultaneously by one proper cause.

1206. For example, if the blossoming of one plant is referred to a particular power in this plant and the blossoming of a second plant is referred to a particular power in that plant, there seems to be no reason (indeed it seems to be accidental) why the first plant should blossom when the second does. And this is true, because the cause of the power of the first plant extends to the blossoming of this plant and not to that of the second, so that while it causes the first plant to blossom, it does not cause it to blossom at the same time as the second. But if this is attributed to the power of a celestial body, which is a universal cause, then we find that the first plant blossoms when the second does, not by accident, but by the direction of some first cause, which ordains this and moves each plant to blossom at the same time.

1207. Now we find three grades of causes in the world. (1) First, there is a cause which is incorruptible and immutable, namely, the divine cause; (2) second, beneath this there are causes which are incorruptible but mutable, namely, the celestial bodies; and (3) third, beneath this there are those causes which are corruptible and mutable.

Therefore causes in this (3) third grade are particular causes and are determined to proper effects of the same kind; for example, fire generates fire, man generates man, and plants generate plants.

1208. Now a cause belonging to the (2) second grade is in one sense universal and in another particular. It is **particular** because it extends to some special class of beings, namely, to those which are generated by motion; for it is both a cause of motion and something that is moved. And it is **universal** because its causality extends not only to one class of changeable things but to everything that is altered, generated and corrupted; for that which is first moved must be the cause of everything that is subsequently moved.

1209. But the cause belonging to the (1) first grade is **universal without qualification**, because its proper effect is existence. Hence whatever exists, and in whatever way it exists, comes properly under the causality and direction of that cause.

1210. If, then, we attribute all contingent events here to particular causes only, many things will be found to occur accidentally. This will be so for a number of reasons. (1) First, because of the **conjunction** of two causes one of which does not come under the causality of the other, as when robbers attack me without my intending this; for this meeting

is caused by a twofold motive power, namely, mine and that of the robbers. (2) Second, because of some **defect in the agent**, who is so weak that he cannot attain the goal at which he aims, for example, when someone falls on the road because of fatigue. (3) Third, because of the **indisposition of the matter**, which does not receive the form intended by the agent but another kind of form. This is what occurs, for example, in the case of the deformed parts of animals.

1211. But if these contingent events are traced back further to a celestial body, we find that many of them are not accidental; because even though particular causes are not contained under each other, they are nevertheless contained under one common celestial cause. Hence their concurrence can be attributed to one definite celestial cause. Again, since the power of a celestial body is incorruptible and impassible, no effect can escape from the sphere of its causality because of any defect or weakness of its power. But since it acts by moving, and since every agent of this kind requires a matter which is properly determined or disposed, then in the case of natural beings it can happen that the power of a celestial body fails to produce its effect because the matter is not disposed; and this will be accidental.

1212. Therefore, even though many things which seem to be accidental when traced back to these particular causes are found not to be accidental when traced back to a common universal cause, namely, to a celestial body, yet even when this reduction has been made some things are found to be accidental, as the Philosopher stated above (1201). For when an agent produces its effect for the most part but not always, it follows that it fails in a few instances; and this is accidental. If, then, the celestial bodies cause their effects in these lower bodies for the most part but not always, because the matter is not properly disposed, then it follows that, when the power of a celestial body fails to produce its effect, this happens accidentally.

1213. There is also another reason why things happen accidentally even if causality is traced back to a celestial body. It is that in the sphere of lower bodies there are some efficient causes which **can act of themselves without the influence of a celestial body**. These causes are *rational souls*, to which the power of a celestial body does not extend (since they are not forms subjected to bodies), except in an accidental way, i.e., inasmuch as the influence of a celestial body produces some change in the [human] body, and accidentally in the powers of the soul which are actualities of certain parts of the body, by which the rational soul is disposed to act. However, no necessity is involved, since the soul's dominion over the passions is free inasmuch as it may not assent to them. Therefore in the sphere of lower bodies whatever things are found to happen accidentally when reduced to these causes, i.e., rational souls, insofar as they do not follow the inclination produced by the influence of a celestial body, will not be found to be generated in any essential way by being traced back to the power of a celestial body.

1214. Thus it is evident that to posit **fate**, which is a certain disposition present in lower bodies as a result of the activity of a celestial body, is not to do away with everything that

happens by chance.

1215. But if these contingent events are traced back further to the highest, **divine cause**, it will be impossible to find anything that lies outside its sphere of influence, since its causality extends to all things insofar as they are beings. Hence its causal activity cannot be thwarted as a result of the matter being indisposed, because matter itself and its dispositions do not lie outside the domain of this agent, since He is the agent who gives things their being and not merely moves and changes them. For it cannot be said that matter is presupposed as the subject of being as it is presupposed as the subject of motion; it is rather part of the essence of a thing. Therefore, just as the power of changing and moving is not hindered by the essence of motion or its terminus but by the subject which is presupposed, in a similar fashion the power of the one giving being is not hindered by matter or anything which accrues in any way to the being of a thing. From this it is also evident that in the sphere of lower bodies no efficient cause can be found which is not subject to the control of this first cause.

1216. It follows, then, that everything which occurs here insofar as it is related to the first divine cause, is found to be ordained by it and not to be accidental, although it may be found to be accidental in relation to other causes. This is why the Catholic faith says that nothing in the world happens by chance or fortuitously, and that everything is subject to divine providence. But in this place Aristotle is speaking of those contingent events which occur here as a result of particular causes, as is evident from his example.

1217. It now remains to see how the affirming of fate and *providence* **does not eliminate contingency** from the world, as though all things were to happen of necessity. From the things that have been said above it is evident that *fate* does not do away with contingency. For it has been shown already that, even though the celestial bodies and their motions and activities are necessary, nevertheless their effects in these lower bodies can fail either because the matter is not disposed or because the rational soul may freely choose to follow or not follow the inclinations produced in it by the influence of a celestial body. Thus it follows that effects of this sort do not happen of necessity but contingently; for to posit a celestial cause is not to posit a cause of such a kind that its effect follows of necessity, as the death of an animal is a result of its being composed of contraries, as he mentions in the text.

1218. But there is greater difficulty with regard to **providence**, because divine providence cannot fail; for these two statements are incompatible, namely, that something is foreknown by God, and that it does not come to pass. Hence it seems that, once providence is posited, its effect follows of

necessity.

1219. But it must be noted that an effect and all of its proper accidents depend on one and the same cause; for just as a man is from nature, so also are his proper accidents, such as risibility and susceptibility to mental instruction. However, if some cause does not produce man in an absolute sense but such and such a man, it will not be within the power of this cause to produce the proper attributes of man but only to make use of them. For while the statesman makes man a citizen, he does not make him susceptible to mental instruction. Rather he makes use of this property in order to make a citizen of him.

1220. Now, as has been pointed out (1215), being as being has God himself as its cause. Hence just as being itself is subject to divine providence, so also are all the **accidents of being as being**, among which are found *necessity* and *contingency*. Therefore it belongs to divine providence not only to produce a particular being but also to give it contingency or necessity; for insofar as God wills to give contingency or necessity to anything, He has prepared for it certain intermediate causes from which it follows either of necessity or contingently. Hence the effect of every cause is found to be necessary insofar as it comes under the control of providence. And from this it follows that this conditional proposition is true: "If anything is foreknown by God, it will be."

1221. However, insofar as any effect is considered to come under its **proximate** cause, not every effect is necessary; but some are necessary and some contingent in proportion to their cause. For effects are likened in their nature to their proximate causes, but not to their remote causes, whose state they cannot attain.

1222. It is evident, then, that when we speak of divine providence we must say that this thing is foreseen by God not only insofar **as it is** but also insofar **as it is either contingent or necessary**. Therefore, just because divine providence is held to exist, it does not follow, according to the argument which Aristotle gives here, that every effect happens of necessity, but only that it must be either contingent or necessary. In fact this applies solely in the case of this cause, i.e., divine providence, because the remaining causes do not establish the law of necessity or contingency, but make use of this law established by a higher cause. Hence the only thing that is subject to the causality of any other cause is that its effect be. But that it be either necessary or contingent depends on a higher cause, which is the cause of being as being, and the one from which the order of necessity and of contingency originates in the world.