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FOUR MEDIEVAL VIEWS OF CREATION

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Introduction

It is possible to view the natural world in two ways: as necessary, bound by consubstantial ties to whatever else has being; or as contingent, possessing being only through the free power of something else which is itself necessary. These two positions in their purest form are naturalism and supernaturalism, the one monistic and the other dualistic. According to the first, the natural world is all that is; and self-understanding and self-realization are the proper activities of man. According to the second, the natural world must bow before its Creator, Who brought it into being from pure nothingness; and the proper activities of man are work and worship. Exemplary of these positions are the *Timaeus* of Plato and the creation narrative of Genesis 1:1-2:4a.

In most philosophical and theological accounts of the origin of things, the two attitudes are mixed, and analysis is required to determine their consistency. This analysis will be applied to the thought of Augustine, Pseudo-Dionysius, Thomas Aquinas, and Nicolas of Cusa, in order to show how each attempted to bring the naturalist and supernaturalist positions into harmony, and in order to show in what ways each failed to achieve this goal.

Even the *Timaeus* and the Priestly account of creation are not without ambiguity. The stern, austere account of Genesis shows traces of the naturalist point of view. God broods over the chaos, the undivided waters, and the deep is *t'hôm*, cognate to the great primeval goddess, Tiamat, of the Babylonian epic. Yet the traditional interpretation corresponds to the apparent intent of the passage, that God indeed brought forth a world from nothing, not from some uncreated, undifferentiated matter.

The *Timaeus*, on the other hand, seems to support the Biblical idea of a Creator-God. Yet detailed study shows that Plato had

no such intent. It is important to a proper understanding of medieval philosophy to see that Plato was a thoroughgoing naturalist, and that his apparent digressions from naturalism can all be explained as intentional uses of mythological language. Plato was a dramatic poet, and he used myths to express philosophical ideas. The supreme example is Socrates himself, as the exemplar of the philosophical life and the philosophical way. Moreover, since it would have been out of character for Socrates to discuss cosmology — he had repudiated such matters at an early age — Plato put his myth of beginnings into the mouth of Timaeus, a mathematician who had expressed ideas on these matters. Since the Platonic myth of beginnings was used extensively by medieval philosophers, it is necessary to give detailed consideration to the *Timaeus* and its subsequent interpretation by Plotinus.

The basic problem of the *Timaeus* is that of the nature and origin of the world. Timaeus asserts:

First then, in my judgment, we must make a distinction and ask, What is that which always is and has no becoming; and what is that which is always becoming and never is? That which is apprehended by intelligence and reason is always in the same state; but that which is conceived by opinion with the help of sensation and without reason, is always in a process of becoming and perishing and never really is.¹

This was the basic problem of all Greek thought up to the time of Plato. It had been broached first by the Ionian philosophers, with their suggestions of water or air as the original and unifying factor in the universe. This naive naturalism had proved unsuccessful, and thus more sophisticated attempts had been made, the leading views being those of Heraclitus and Parmenides. The one had asserted change to be the fundamental reality, while the other had looked to the One, to immutable permanence, as the truly real. The two positions mutually complete and deny each other. To speak of the river as never the same and to ignore the fact that the term river is meaningful is to state only half the truth. And yet to ignore the river entirely because it has the unfortunate habit of being always in flux is to state only the other half.

¹ Plato, "Timaeus," *Dialogues*, tr. B. Jowett (New York, 1937), 27-28.

Plato tried to overcome this difficulty, relating change and permanence in one unified system. His method, moreover, was to bring the reader to an understanding of this unity by means of dialectic, of which myth is one technique. For Plato, truth is alive, and is to be found only in dialogue between earnest persons with the leisure to search for it. The written word is like a painting: it has only one thing to present, and, when questioned further, can only repeat what it has already said. Far more important is the word of discourse, of which the written word is only an image. Through discourse, the truth may perhaps suddenly show itself to the participants.

Plato's dialogues are records of such discourse, and therefore the reader ought to beware of seeking literal, specific truths therein. Rather, he should dig deep, and attempt to comprehend the vision of the unity of reality.

In the *Timaeus*, therefore, an attempt was made by Plato to show how permanence and change are related, using myth as the technique of explanation. *Timaeus* says, in his introductory speech:

As being is to becoming, so is truth to belief. If then, Socrates, amid the many opinions about the gods and the generation of the universe, we are not able to give notions which are altogether and in every respect exact and consistent with one another, do not be surprised. Enough, if we adduce probabilities as likely as any others; for we must remember that I who am the speaker, and you who are the judges, are only mortal men, and we ought to accept the tale which is probable and enquire no further.²

He goes on to speak, in mythical language, of an original chaos, ugly, disordered and irregular, from which the agents of the highest being brought forth the existing world of change. This highest being, which is the one and the good, of which Socrates was unwilling to speak directly in the *Republic*, is eternal and is the unity of the ideas. From it come forth the ideas, the eternal exemplars, which are then reproduced in copies in the original chaos.

Fundamental matter is inherently intractable, however, and hence material things could not be perfect copies of the ideas.

² *Ibid.*, 29.

The nature of the ideal being was everlasting, but to bestow this attribute in its fulness upon a creature was impossible. Wherefore he resolved to have a moving image of eternity, and when he set in order the heavens he made this image eternal, but moving according to number, while eternity itself rests in unity; and this image we call time.³

The essential limitation of material things is therefore that they are subject to change and decay. Yet they always reflect the orderliness of eternity through the use of number, which measures their movement. Through time, which is the moving image of eternity, the world of copies is only one step from the world of eternal exemplars.

Taken literally, the myth suggests the supernaturalist position. But Plato's warning should be remembered, that he is dramatizing an essentially naturalist scheme. This world in time is the essential fact, and the good, the eternal exemplars, the world-creative agency, and primeval chaotic matter are rational constructs designed to make the world in time intelligible. There exists no essentially creative power, but only a generative and organizing principle. It is the purpose of naturalist philosophy, and thus the purpose of Plato, to explain the phenomenal world in terms of such a principle.

Plotinus was the true inheritor of Plato's ideas, and, in fact, claimed to be simply an interpreter of Plato. In particular, his view of the structure of the cosmos is essentially that implied in the *Timaeus*.

But how explain its permanence? There, while the content of this sphere — its elements and its living things alike — are passing? The reason is given by Plato: the celestial order is from God, the living things of earth are from the gods sprung from God; and it is law that the offspring of God endures. In other words, the celestial Soul — and our souls with it — springs directly next from the Creator, while the animal life of this earth is produced by an image which goes forth from that celestial Soul and may be said to flow downwards from it.⁴

Plotinus, moreover, quoted the *Timaeus* 63 times out of a total

³ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁴ Plotinus, *The Enneads*, tr. S. McKenna, 2nd ed. (London, 1956), II.1.5.

of 162 references to Plato, and always to support what was to become the neo-Platonic understanding of the origin and unity of the cosmos. Plotinus believed that he was a faithful interpreter of Plato, simply rendering more intelligible that which was present in Plato in mythical form. He may have valued the sensible world less than did Plato, and yet for him too the beauties within this world are reflections from the ideal realm, "fugitives that have entered into Matter — to adorn, and to ravish, where they are seen." ⁵

Plotinus was a pure naturalist. He wished to find reality within this world, within each individual. The hierarchy of being, descending from the One and the Good (which are alternative names for the same supreme principle) to the Intellectual-Principle to the World-Soul and finally to the reflection of reality in matter, is essentially this-worldly. It is a hierarchy which, existing within the world as well as every individual, brings all multiplicity into essential unity. The quest for the One is a quest which takes place both cosmically and individually. Thus, in particular, the soul must rise from its preoccupations with change and the many, to realize that it is itself one with all souls.

There is one identical soul dispersed among many bodies, and . . . , preceding this, there is yet another not thus dispersed, the source of the soul in dispersion which may be thought of as a widely repeated image of the soul in unity — much as a multitude of seals bear the impression of one ring.⁶

The soul is kept by the body from realizing this truth of its essential unity with all other souls, but "There all stands out clear and separate."⁷

Yet the unity of all souls in the World-Soul is only a one-and-many, sharing both in eternity and time. Beyond it is the deeper unity of all phenomena, the Intellectual-Principle, itself the source and origin of the World-Soul. In it is the structure of the world, in it are the ideas, the exemplars. It is a one-in-many, the essential unity of the rational structure lying within and behind the World-Soul, and the many individual souls that make it up. It is the

⁵ *Ibid.*, I.6.3.

⁶ *Ibid.*, IV.9.4.

⁷ *Ibid.*, IV.9.5.

composite of all law, all order, all idea, and hence it is this-worldly, underlying and unifying all that is.

Yet even the Intellectual-Principle remains a multiverse, infected with plurality. Above it there is bare pure Unity, the One, One-without-Many, Beauty, the Good itself. It is that which ultimately satisfies the philosophic passion for the unity behind all unifying law, the Beauty which is not self-differentiated into beautiful structure, the Good which is not merely good-in-relation. The One, the Good and the Beautiful are, in a complex internal, yet undifferentiated, structure, brought together at the top of the hierarchy — and yet that structure is so completely self-gathered that it is not explicable. Thus the seeking soul finds that it is the One, and that all that it thought to be multiple is in fact only a fragmented reflection from that which truly is.

Thus Plotinus proposed the complete and ultimate form of unitary naturalism. The world as it is is really the One, beyond all time, beyond all rational structure, beyond all beauty, beyond all goodness. In fact the seeker finds that he is that One and that he is the world and that all is One in him. The “bacchanalian revel, where not a member is sober, [becomes] a state of transparent calm.”⁸

The ascent to the One is thus not an ascent from ontological level to higher ontological level. It is an approach by dialectic to the point of perfect understanding. The *Enneads* are an exercise in dialectic, and describe the world that is. Plotinus, to be sure, belittled the material world, but he did so, not in order to abandon it, but to find the rational vision of the true Unity immanent in and under and with it. Plato and Plotinus accepted the cosmos as the ultimate fact, and made it the task of the philosopher to explain its multiplicity in terms of unity, yet a unity found within the cosmos.

For the Christian, on the other hand, the world is the creation of an external, wholly transcendent God, Who, moved by love and free will, made another set of beings to exist over against Him and in relation with Him. Where there was one — speaking in terms of eternity and not temporality — now there are two.

⁸ G. W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, tr. J. B. Baillie, 2nd ed. (New York, 1931), p. 105.

God, existing in eternity, created a world in space and time, and gave it freedom within the framework of law.

Augustine, Pseudo-Dionysius, Thomas Aquinas, and Nicolas of Cusa believed in a Creator-God and in the contingency of the created world. Yet each of them used concepts drawn from Plato and neo-Platonism to explain this belief, not only because Greek concepts had been used since the second century to give coherence to Christian philosophy, but also because these thinkers accepted the *Timaeus* as confirming the Biblical account of creation. As a result, the thought of each of these men is a study in the conflict of ideas.

Augustine

According to Augustine, God created the world out of His goodness, His wisdom, His power, His truth and His Word. Underlying all these expressions is an ambiguity. They may represent qualities or attributes of God, or, on the other hand, they may be substances within God. In the former case, creation would be interpreted in terms of Biblical dualism. But in the latter case, creation would be interpreted in terms of naturalism, wherein the world is spun out of the very substance of God.

Augustine's intention was doubtless to support the dualistic interpretation of the universe, since he denied that God used pre-existent matter in creation.

All these things praise Thee, the Creator of all. But how dost Thou make them? How, O God, didst Thou make heaven and earth? Truly, neither in the heaven nor in the earth didst Thou make heaven and earth; nor in the air, nor in the waters, since these also belong to the heaven and the earth; nor in the whole world didst Thou make the whole world; because there was no place wherein it could be made before it was made, that it might be; nor didst Thou hold anything in Thy hand wherewith to make heaven and earth. For whence couldest Thou have what Thou hadst not made, whereof to make anything? For what is, save because Thou art? Therefore Thou didst speak and they were made, and in Thy Word Thou madest these things.⁹

⁹ Augustine, "Confessions," *Basic Writings of Saint Augustine*, ed. Whitney J. Oates (New York, 1948), XI.5.

This is obviously intended as a passionate and highly rhetorical defense of the traditional Biblical doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*.

Yet there is an ambiguity present in the last clause, "In Thy Word Thou madest these things," a reference to Psalm 32:6 (Vulgate), which reads "Verbo Domini caeli firmati sunt." Augustine's reading, however, is "in verbo tuo fecisti ea," which renders specific the ambiguity of the omitted preposition. The Hebrew also is ambiguous, reading *bidbar* YHWH *šāmayim na^aśū*, which could mean either "in" or "by" the Word of Yahweh. The Septuagint maintains the same ambiguity: τῷ λόγῳ τοῦ κυρίου οἱ οὐρανοὶ ἐστερεώθησαν. It is significant that the chief English translations chose the preposition "by" to render the passage, whereas Augustine preferred "in". The English versions tend thereby to exclude a neo-Platonic interpretation of Scripture, an interpretation which neither the Hebrew authors nor the Greek and Latin translators could have contemplated. However, Augustine, by his choice of preposition, implied that God created the world in the Word, thus in Himself.

Moreover, Augustine hypostatizes the idea of beginning. The Hebrew, Greek and Latin versions use the phrase "in the beginning" as an adverbial phrase modifying the verb "created," whereas Augustine apparently understood it to indicate location and origin. The one implies a functional and the other a substantial interpretation of creation. In the latter, the Beginning is perilously close to being a thing: "In Wisdom hast Thou made them all. And this Wisdom is the Beginning, and in that Beginning hast Thou made heaven and earth."¹⁰ Moreover,

Everything which begins to be and ceases to be, then begins and ceases when in Thy eternal Reason it is known that it ought to begin or cease where nothing beginneth or ceaseth. The same is Thy Word, which is also the Beginning, because also it speaketh unto us. . . . That we may know, He teacheth us, because He is the Beginning, and speaketh unto us.¹¹

This hypostatization of the Beginning is clear in the words Ἀρχή and *Principium*, which have the connotation of ruler as well as of

¹⁰ Ibid., XI.9.

¹¹ Ibid., XI.8.

beginning. The Word is the Ruler, the Beginning, the Origin, just as in Plotinus the One is the Origin, from which came all things. God is the One, above and beyond all things in eternity, not directly responsible for the world, but creating the World in the Beginning, which is His Word.

Moreover, the Spirit is that which breathes life into the creation, and brings the creation to God in the mystic ascent. Augustine placed the Spirit after the Father and the Son, thus agreeing with Plotinus and opposing Porphyry.

[Porphyry] speaks of God the Father and God the Son, whom he calls . . . the intellect or mind of the Father; but of the Holy Spirit he says either nothing, or nothing plainly. . . . For if, like Plotinus in his discussion regarding the three principal substances, he wished us to understand by this third the soul of nature, he would certainly not have given it the middle place between these two, that is, between the Father and the Son.¹²

As the soul of nature, the Spirit brings man's spirit to completion and fulfillment, making his heart restless until it rests in God. It is the true enlivener of the world, quickening dead matter and impelling it to seek its true being in God.

Augustine thus translated the neo-Platonic quest into Christian terms, a magnificent picture of which is given in *The Confessions*. Augustine traced first his personal journey to God from the darkness of sin and error; then the ascent of the individual who seeks deep within his memory for that knowledge of God which, as in Plato, has always been there; and, finally, the ascent of the whole creation into the Sabbath of eternity.

The world exists only insofar as it is good, since "whatsoever is, is good,"¹³ whereas evil is non-being and cannot participate in the good. That which is is thus bound by a substantial tie with God, and must seek its way back to God.

I looked back on other things, and I perceived that it was to Thee they owed their being, and that they were all bounded in Thee; but in another way, not as being in space, but because Thou holdest all things in Thine hand in truth: and all things are true so far as they

¹² Augustine, *The City of God*, tr. Marcus Dods (New York, 1950), X.23.

¹³ Augustine, *Confessions*, VII.12.

have a being; nor is there any falsehood, unless that which is not is thought to be.¹⁴

All things are bounded in Him, that is, they have their form, structure and being in Him. "Of the plenitude of Thy goodness Thy creature subsists."¹⁵ And again,

I viewed the other things below Thee, and perceived that they neither altogether are, nor altogether are not. They are, indeed, because they are from Thee; but are not, because they are not what Thou art. For that truly is which remains immutably. It is good, then, for me to cleave unto God, for if I remain not in Him, neither shall I in myself; but He, remaining in Himself, reneweth all things. And Thou art the Lord my God, since Thou standest not in need of my goodness.¹⁶

Thus the object of man's quest is God, Who is the Being of his non-being, the Good of his wickedness, the Light of his darkness. In Christian redemption is recapitulated the whole of creation, a redemption made possible because God's image is in man, placed there by the act of Word and Spirit.

But the Word was made flesh, and this Augustine admitted he did not learn from the neo-Platonists. Redemption cannot be achieved except through Jesus, the Lord and Savior. Plotinus urged the inner vision of the One, from which all excrescence of matter has been stripped away. But Augustine sought to know the living God, the Savior Who humbled Himself and took the form of a servant, obedient unto death.

Thus Augustine's system was inevitably a patchwork. The pure naturalism of Plotinus was modified, because the Word, or Intellectual-Principle, had taken flesh. To say, on the one hand, that the Word is the Beginning in which the world was made, a world consubstantial with His Goodness, is to speak the language of Plotinus. To say, on the other hand, that the world is utterly distinct from God, brought to righteousness in relation with God only through the Incarnation, is to speak the language of St. Paul. And the two are essentially in conflict.

Augustine asserted that the creation is in no way consubstan-

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, VII.15.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, XIII.2.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, VII.11.

tial with God. "Thou wast, and there was nought else from which Thou didst create heaven and earth."¹⁷ Yet the implication is present that, whereas God used no pre-existent matter to create, He brought the creation forth from His very being.

Moreover, Augustine asserted the importance of time and history. History is the arena of salvation, and God leads man in history from sin to redemption. Yet for Augustine the temporal and universal character of the last things is modified in a more individual, less historical, direction. Now that Christ has come, each man seeks God at the time of God's choosing. Time is thus both a symbol of corruption, and the bearer of salvation.

In summary, Augustine attempted not only to translate into Christian terms the neo-Platonic system of Plotinus, but also to defend the Christian view of creation, history and redemption. Moreover, Augustine's defense of the Christian Gospel is not simply a dramatic device, not simply a myth, since the words are of vital significance. Augustine used the dialectic method, but he insisted that the content be Christian, as the only guarantee of salvation. That Christ entered history is not merely a way of saying that the soul of man and the Word of God can be united.

For this reason Augustine did violence both to the Christianity he professed and to the neo-Platonic philosophy he used. He sought the neo-Platonic ascent from time into eternity, as well as the gift of salvation through Jesus Christ in history; and he sought them on the same terms. The result was, finally, that the inconsistencies were too great to be overcome.

Pseudo-Dionysius

Far less complex than Augustine was Pseudo-Dionysius, who attempted what Augustine dared not, namely, the logical completion and synthesis of the neo-Platonic world view in Christian terms. He attempted to preserve the mystery of the Incarnation within a naturalist understanding of creation. He gave elaborate, almost idolatrous praise to Holy Scripture, but interpreted Scripture to say that God is the Being and Life of all creation.

And we press upwards to those beams which in the Holy Scripture shine upon us; wherefrom we gain the light which leads us unto the

¹⁷ Ibid., XII.7.

Divine praises, being supernaturally enlightened by them and conformed unto that sacred hymnody, even so as to behold the Divine enlightenments the which through them are given in such wise as fits our powers, and so as to praise the bounteous Origin of all holy illumination in accordance with that Doctrine, as concerning Itself, wherewith It hath instructed us in the Holy Scriptures. Thus do we learn that It is the Cause and Origin and Being and Life of all creation.¹⁸

On the basis of this consubstantiality, which he claimed to find in Scripture, Dionysius built his theological system. He sought for rational completeness, and achieved a consistent and daring translation of Christianity into the language of neo-Platonism.

Dionysius felt keenly the mystery behind the universe, whose source is ultimately beyond all words and thoughts. The Godhead, the Super-Essential, is above all that has being, and beyond all existence. It is the source of Unity, Goodness and Being, but is beyond them all. It is wholly self-gathered, yet overflowing in Love and Goodness into the world. Nevertheless, what emanates from It remains within It and belongs to It.

For the Nameless Goodness is not only the cause of cohesion or life or perfection in such wise as to derive Its Name from this or that providential activity alone; nay, rather does It contain all things beforehand within Itself, after a simple and uncircumscribed manner through the perfect excellence of Its one and all-creative Providence, and thus we draw from the whole creation Its appropriate praises and Its Names.¹⁹

All things derive in hierarchical order from the Supra-Divine Godhead. The first step out of the Super-Essential Reality is Being, and in It are the eternal, incorruptible ideas and exemplars, called the Spiritual Beings by Dionysius. "Even so are they a perfect unity in the center itself, and, departing a little therefrom they are differenced a little, and departing further are differenced further."²⁰ In Being are the Laws of Nature, since it is the One-in-Many, and thus it is the Word of God. And below Being there

¹⁸ Dionysius the Areopagite, *On the Divine Names*, I.3 (tr. C. E. Rolt, *Dionysius the Areopagite, On the Divine Names and The Mystical Theology*; London, 1940).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, I.7.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, V.6.

is Life, a Life which gives life to all souls in the world, the Life which is the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Trinity.

The Trinity is nonetheless a Unity in the mystery of the Godhead. The Father is the primal Originative Godhead, while Jesus and the Holy Spirit are derived.

If we call the Super-Essential Mystery by the Name of "God," or "Life," or "Being," or "Light," or "Word," we conceive of nothing else than the powers that stream Therefrom to us bestowing Godhead, Being, Life or Wisdom; while that Mystery Itself we strive to apprehend by casting aside all the activities of our mind, since we behold no Deification, or Life, or Being, which exactly resembles the altogether and utterly Transcendent Cause of all things. Again, that the Father is Originating Godhead while Jesus and the Spirit are (so to speak) Divine Off-shoots of the Paternal Godhead, and, as it were, Blossoms and Super-Essential Shinings Thereof we learn from Holy Scripture; but how these things are so we cannot say, nor yet conceive.²¹

Below the threefold and yet unified Godhead, there is the realm of motion and variation. Matter is good insofar as it shares in Being, but is far distant from the Source of Goodness. In the higher reaches of Being there can be no discord or change, since all is in the form of Unity. But Unity is most attenuated in the material world, a world where non-being blots out being.

Evil is, then, a lack, a deficiency, a weakness, a disproportion, an error, purposeless, unlovely, lifeless, unwise, unreasonable, imperfect, unreal, causeless, indeterminate, sterile, inert, powerless, disordered, incongruous, indefinite, dark, unsubstantial, and never in itself possessed of any existence whatever.²²

There is an abyss at the base of creation, something never brightened by the rays of the Godhead, a nonentity beyond limits. Two things can be discussed only in negative terms: the Ultimate Mystery within the Godhead, and the ultimate emptiness of evil. Evil is dark, but God is the Darkness above intellect. At the bottom of the hierarchy and at the top is the abyss.

The whole created hierarchy of Being, therefore, from the One

²¹ *Ibid.*, II.7.

²² *Ibid.*, IV.32.

through Spiritual Beings and souls to the material and earthly bodies, and finally to the edge of emptiness, derives from the Godhead, and has its being in It. The Godhead overshadows and supports the universe, as its Measure, Eternity, Numerical Principle, Order, Power, Cause and End. The Godhead is abundant with all Perfection, but Perfection is contained in It in simple Unity.

The title "One" implies that It is all things under the form of Unity through the Transcendence of Its single Oneness, and is the Cause of all things without departing from that Unity. For there is nothing in the world without a share in the One.²³

However, this Unity is beyond all unity that we can know, as the Beginning, Cause, Principle and Law of unity. As in Augustine, the Beginning is the ruler and source and law of the universe. But Dionysius went beyond Augustine to assert that mere temporality is unimportant. Time is not the realm where holy history is made, but is merely the process of birth, corruption and death.

How then can the man who is caught in the multiplicity and sterility of matter and time return again to the unified brightness of Deity? There is a yearning, present originally in God the Creator, but found also in the whole creation, for this return.

The Divine Yearning is naught else than a Good Yearning towards the Good for the mere sake of the Good. For the Yearning which createth all the goodness of the world, being pre-existent abundantly in the Good Creator, allowed Him not to remain unfruitful in Himself, but moved Him to exert the abundance of His powers in the production of the universe.²⁴

This yearning is what the Scriptures term ἀγάπη, moving the highest to take thought for those below, and urging the lowest to mount upwards.

In Dionysius the quest for the Divine takes two forms: the analogical, or positive, way of On the Divine Names; and the negative way of The Mystical Theology. The positive way turns from that which merely has being, toward that which has material

²³ Ibid., XIII.2.

²⁴ Ibid., IV.10.

existence, then to that which changes and flows, then to that which has soul and understanding, then to Being and the intelligible exemplars, and finally to the undifferentiated Cause of all. But the negative way says that the Godhead transcends all these affirmations, which are, at best, only analogical.

It transcends all affirmation by being the perfect and unique Cause of all things, and transcends all negation by the pre-eminence of Its simple and absolute nature — free from every limitation and beyond them all.²⁵

Man transcends what he has in his yearning for what he does not have, until finally he reaches the outer abyss of Non-Being, wherein all being is fulfilled and negated in the Super-Essential One.

The seeker must renounce all things, therefore, even those which are good, in order to mount to the Ray of Divine Darkness which exceeds all light. At first he finds only the many lights in the darkness, the place where God dwells. But finally It breaks forth and

plunges the true initiate unto the Darkness of Unknowing wherein he renounces all the apprehensions of his understanding and is enwrapped in that which is wholly intangible and invisible, belonging wholly to Him that is beyond all things and to none else . . . and being through the passive stillness of all his reasoning powers united by his highest faculty to Him that is wholly Unknowable, of whom thus by a rejection of all knowledge he possesses a knowledge that exceeds his understanding.²⁶

Dionysius, despite his thoroughgoing neo-Platonism, claimed that the Christian mysteries of the Trinity and the Incarnation are consonant with his system. The Word, the Intellectual-Principle, the Fulness of Being, was contracted to a particular being as Jesus of Nazareth.

The Universal Cause which filleth all things is the Deity of Jesus, whereof the parts are in such wise tempered to the whole that It is neither whole nor part, and yet is at the same time whole and also part, containing in Its all-embracing unity both part and whole, and

²⁵ Dionysius, *Mystical Theology*, V.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, I.

being transcendent and antecedent to both. . . . And since that Supra-Divine Being hath in loving kindness come down from thence unto the Natural Estate, and verily took substance and assumed the name of Man He passed in His Supernatural and Super-Essential state through conditions of Nature and Being, and receiving from us all things that are ours, exalted them far above us.²⁷

Christ is both whole and part, and thus the Incarnation is the logical fulfilment and completion of the neo-Platonic hierarchy of being. God is in all things and is yet not all things. He is Being and is above Being. The fulfilment of this in the material world, which perfectly reflects the immaterial world, is Jesus, the God-man, human and Divine. Just as the individual souls in Plotinus mediated between divinity and humanity, and were, at their center, all one Soul, so Christ is universal manhood, a particular man, and the Fulness of Godhead become man through a self-emptying which is nonetheless self-fulfilling.

In this system, therefore, the Incarnation is no paradox, but is the expected fulfilment of a complex structure of reflection and emanation. God and man are ultimately a unity, and this unity is expressed in Christ. In Christian dualism, the Incarnation bridges the gap between God and creation. Dionysius, on the other hand, assumes an alien neo-Platonism which eliminates the mystery by reducing the dualism of the world and God to a monistic naturalism, a naturalism in which all being, from the abyss of the Godhead to the abyss of non-being, is focussed in the figure of Christ. Augustine dared not to go so far, because he had met the Lord Jesus, and knew the gulf between nature and supernature; but no such knowledge hindered Dionysius.

Thomas Aquinas

Thomas Aquinas also attempted the reconciliation of naturalism and supernaturalism, using the newly rediscovered works of Aristotle to rebuild the edifice of being. He followed Aristotle to the limits allowed by sense data and reason, and then completed the structure through revelation. Yet his interpretation of Aristotle was markedly Platonist in character.

²⁷ Dionysius, *On the Divine Names*, II.10 (quoting Hierotheus, *Elements of Divinity*).

Thomas established a *posteriori* the existence of a Creator, as well as certain of His attributes. His proofs depend on the naturalist assumptions that every fact true within the cosmos must have an explanation which is also within the cosmos, and that the system of causes must be closed. Thus an infinite regress of causes in the ontological and rational order is impossible.

According to the philosophers, it is impossible to proceed to infinity in the order of efficient causes which act together at the same time, because in that case the effect would have to depend on an infinite number of actions simultaneously existing. And such causes are essentially infinite, because their infinity is required for the effect caused by them. On the other hand, in the sphere of non-simultaneously acting causes, it is not, according to the partisans of the perpetual generation theory, impossible to proceed to infinity. And the infinity here is accidental to the causes; thus it is accidental to Socrates' father that he is another man's son or not. But it is not accidental to the stick, in moving the stone, that it be moved by the hand, for the stick moves just so far as it is moved.²⁸

The impossibility of an infinite sequence of ordered causes is crucial to Thomas' view of creation. He proposed three arguments in the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, all depending on Aristotle. The first proves that essentially related movers must exist simultaneously related through continuity or contiguity, thus moved in a finite time, which is impossible if the number of movers is infinite.

The second and third arguments assert that without a first mover there can be no motion whatever. The second states that,

In an ordered series of movers and things moved (this is a series in which one is moved by another according to an order), it is necessarily the fact that, when the first mover is removed or ceases to move, no other mover will move or be moved. For the first mover is the cause of motion for all the others. But, if there are movers and things moved following an order to infinity, there will be no first mover, but all would be as intermediate movers. Therefore, none of the others will be able to be moved, and thus nothing in the world will be moved.²⁹

²⁸ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* (On the Truth of the Catholic Faith), ed. Anton C. Pegis (Garden City, 1955-57), II.38.13.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, I.13.14.

The third argument is essentially the same. It is unthinkable to Thomas that such an ordered series can move without a first mover, which is equivalent to the assumption that a unity must underlie the plurality confronting the observer, that there must be a rational origin of all things. Plato, Aristotle and Plotinus felt the same desire to understand reality in terms of unity; and none of them, Thomas included, could accept the positivist assumption that each thing is moved only by the thing before it.

Of the First Cause of all things, which explains finite being in rational terms, Thomas said, "This everyone understands to be God," "To [this] everyone gives the name of God," "This all men speak of as God," "This we call God," and "This being we call God."³⁰ He assumed, but did not attempt to prove, that the First Cause is in fact the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Men learn the attributes of the First Cause, thus identified with God, by the use of analogy and negation. God is the origin of all distinction, and thus the ordinary logical method of distinction and difference cannot apply to Him. It is not possible therefore to know God in Himself, but only to know that, as head of the creation, He is eternal, impassible, immaterial, uncomposed, without anything violent or unnatural, not a body, without differences between essence and being, without accidents, not in any genus, not in the form of a body, not the formal being of all things. The last point is particularly important, since the formal being of all things can be identified with the Intellectual-Principle of Plotinus. He reinterpreted Dionysius in defense of his position.

There is in Dionysius this remark: "The being of all things is the super-essential divinity." From this remark they wished to infer that God is the formal being of all things, without considering that this interpretation could not square with the words themselves. For, if the divinity is the formal being of all things, it will not be over all but among all, indeed a part of all. Now, since Dionysius said that the divinity was above all things, he showed that according to its nature it was distinct from all things and raised above all things. And when he said that the divinity is the being of all things, he

³⁰ St. Thomas Aquinas, "Summa Theologica," Basic Writings, ed. Anton C. Pegis (New York, 1945), I.2.3.

showed that there was in all things a certain likeness of the divine being, coming from God.³¹

In fact, Dionysius had believed the formal being of all things to be consubstantial, not only with the things themselves, as in Thomas, but also with God. Thomas' reinterpretation is an attempt to soften the pure naturalism of Dionysius, and replace it with supernaturalism, which, however, is not compatible with his system.

For Thomas, God is the One, to Whom is ascribed the negation of all qualities belonging peculiarly to multiplicity. Yet God negates these qualities by transcending them and including them in Himself. Moreover, He knows them all within the divine essence, which is the likeness of all things, and in which all things find their unity. Their unity is not in identity with Him, nor in their having Him as their formal being. It is simply that He is the proper source of their individual unity and being. Thus they must pre-exist in the Unity which is His.

Positive knowledge of God, the source of all things, is thus possible. He is good, loving, free, blessed, living and omniscient. He is the unitive source and head of the hierarchy of being. He communicates "His being to other things by way of likeness,"³² because He contains all things in His Unity. He is powerful, and His power is His substance and His action. These are not God Himself, but are the creative outpouring of God. That God's power and action are His substance means that He is essentially creative, and creates by communicating the likeness of His being to His creation. In other words, by an essential act of His being, He gives actuality to that which is already within Him.

These things are, however, not in God as actual realities or necessary beings. They are in Him potentially, since He is a simple reality. Finite beings, using discursive reason, interpret this relation as a relation of multiplicity. But in fact it is God's utter simplicity which allows Him to be related by way of likeness to all of multiple reality, without loss of unity.

The more simple a thing, the greater is its power, and so of many more things is it the principle, so that it is understood as related in

³¹ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, I.26.10.

³² *Ibid.*, II.6.6.

so many more ways. Thus, a point is the principle of more things than a line is, and a line than a surface. Therefore, the very fact that many things are predicated of God in a relative manner bears witness to His supreme simplicity.³³

God is thus the cause of all being, although the wholly self-contained and simple cause.

God's creativity, however, does not involve motion, change, succession or bodily action, since they assume pre-existing matter within which the motion and succession take place. God's creativity is absolute and simple, which proves that the creation is not consubstantial with God.

The likeness in question is no proof that man is a part of the divine substance, for man's understanding suffers from many defects — which cannot be said of God's. This likeness, then, is rather indicative of a certain imperfect image than of any consubstantiality. . . . God, therefore, is said to have breathed the spirit into man's face, because He gave man the spirit of life, but not by detaching it from His own substance. For he who literally breathes into the face of someone — and this bodily breathing is evidently the source of the Scriptural metaphor — blows air into his face, but does not infuse part of his substance into him.³⁴

Yet there is a subtler form of consubstantiality, namely, that the goodness and being of creation are of God, and this Thomas affirmed.

God's creative act is not necessary, even though He imposes laws of necessity upon the world which He creates in His wisdom. Nevertheless, God does not act irrationally. He makes all things by the ordering of His intellect, and not through His will alone. The wisdom of God supplies law, order and necessity to created things. The world, created through wisdom and will, is thus not generated as a necessary emanation of the One, as in a purely naturalist system. Yet things are brought into being with their proper distinctions. The world is not fortuitous in its structure, but still creation must be as rich as possible, displaying the fullest range of God's creativity. No single individual could encompass the fulness of the image of God, poured out into the creation.

³³ *Ibid.*, II.14.1.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, II.85.15.

For, since the cause transcends the effect, that which is in the cause, simply and unitedly, exists in the effect in composite and multiple fashion — unless the effect attain to the species of the cause; which cannot be said in this case, because no creature can be equal to God. The presence of multiplicity and variety among created things was therefore necessary that a perfect likeness to God be found in them according to their manner of being.³⁵

The universe must therefore display the fulness of being, since it arises from the very nature of the ultimate, loving, life-giving God.

A thing approaches to God's likeness the more perfectly as it resembles Him in more things. Now, goodness is in God, and the outpouring of goodness into other things. Hence the creature approaches more perfectly to God's likeness if it is not only good, but can also act for the good of other things. . . . But no creature could act for the benefit of another creature unless plurality and inequality existed in created things. . . . In order that there might be in created things a perfect representation of God, the existence of diverse grades among them was therefore necessary.³⁶

God is the supreme workman and must therefore make the perfect work, including immortal intellectual substances, which are the angels and the souls of men, and matter, which the souls of men inform and enliven. In short, the plenitude of God is developed into creation, in such a way that the being of the creation adequately displays the image of God. The being of creation is not the same as the being of God, as it would be if the terms were used univocally. On the other hand, it is not totally different, as it would be if the terms were used equivocally. Thomas sought a middle ground in analogy and image. In this way he attempted to avoid the dangers of consubstantiality on the one hand and arbitrariness on the other. The created material universe thus displays in material multiplicity the fulness of the creative God-head, while remaining distinct from His essence.

God is the source of all creation, and thus also the end and finisher of the same. He is the supreme good, ordering all things to Himself as their final cause.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, II.45.2.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, II.45.4.

All things get their being from the fact that they are made like unto God, Who is subsisting being itself, for all things exist merely as participants in existing being. Therefore, all things desire as their ultimate end to be made like unto God.³⁷

God is the most perfect, most complete, most beautiful, most truthful, and thus all things desire Him, as the perfection of that which is in them. They yearn to be complete in Him, to find fulfilment in Him.

Thus, in particular, intellectual substances desire to attain to God to the fullest extent possible to them, that is, to understand Him. This ascent to God begins from that which has no being and mounts up to God, Who is pure being.

Each thing has actual being in accord with its essence. To the extent that it possesses being, it has something good; for, if good is that which all desire, then being itself must be called a good, because all desire to be. As a consequence, then, each thing is good because it possesses actual being. Now, good and evil are contraries. So, nothing is evil by virtue of the fact that it has essence. Therefore, no essence is evil.³⁸

The good that is in each thing is identical with the being in it, and hence each thing, in seeking the good, seeks being, and in so doing, seeks God, Who is Being-itself. And the ultimate felicity for finite being consists in the contemplation of God as most universal and most blessed. Knowledge of God in His essence is impossible, of course, for any creature below God, thus containing an admixture of non-being.

The most perfect vision possible to man is thus one in which all things are seen at once in God.

When each thing reaches its ultimate end it rests, for all motion is in order to attain an end. Now, the ultimate end of the intellect is the vision of the divine substance. . . . So, the intellect seeing the divine substance is not moved from one intelligible object to another. Therefore, it considers actually at once all the things that it knows through this vision.³⁹

³⁷ Ibid., III.19.3.

³⁸ Ibid., III.7.3.

³⁹ Ibid., III.60.3.

The quest for this vision is reminiscent of the dialectic in Plato, the realization of Authentic Being in Plotinus, the restlessness for God's rest in Augustine, and the ascent to Super-Essential Nothingness in Dionysius. Even though Thomas knew at the end of his life that same encounter with the living Christ that Augustine knew at his conversion, a knowledge which led Thomas to reject his system as straw, the system expresses the quest in unitive, naturalist terms. The vision is perfect, is outside time and space, and recapitulates in itself all that is good on the lower levels of reality.

The vision can only be achieved through grace, however, a grace which is given freely by God, Who is simultaneously the Creator and the head of the creation. The grace of God thus comes in two ways: as the fulfilment of the natural quest for being, and as the impartation of the mysteries of faith. The former is natural, and represents the completion of human possibility; while the latter is supernatural and represents the bridging of the gap between this world and the God Who is radically over against it. Dionysius had reduced the latter to the former, a reduction Thomas emphatically avoided. The hierarchy of reason does not, therefore, contain the Trinity and the Incarnation, even though each person of the Trinity reveals Himself to reason.

Yet Thomas identified the God of the Trinity and of Jesus Christ with the head of the created hierarchy, which can be known by natural reason. With this identification, Thomas reintroduced the consubstantiality between God and the universe which he so urgently tried to avoid. The ambiguities in his thought all stem from this identification, which forced him to align himself with his naturalist predecessors, even though unwillingly. Concerning the creation he was a monist and not a dualist, since his Creator is within the hierarchy of being, and the lower orders are continuous and consubstantial with Him.

Nicolas of Cusa

Nicolas of Cusa attempted a radical and intellectually daring solution to the problem. He knew that it makes God a part of the natural hierarchy of being to derive his being and his attributes by finite reason. Dionysius had made that attempt, and had re-

placed orthodox Christianity with neo-Platonic naturalism. Yet Dionysius had left hints to the solution of the problem: that God cannot be known by positive reason, that God is infinitely above this created realm, and that in God all things meet.

Thus Nicolas asserted that, whereas God may not be known directly, since He is at an infinite distance from man, he may be known through learned ignorance.

I observe how needful it is for me to enter into the darkness, and to admit the coincidence of opposites, beyond all grasp of reason, and there to seek the truth where impossibility meeteth me. And beyond that, beyond even the highest ascent of intellect, when I shall have attained unto that which is unknown to every intellect, and which every intellect judgeth to be most far removed from truth, there, my God, art Thou, who art Absolute Necessity. And the more that dark impossibility is recognized as dark and impossible, the more truly doth His Necessity shine forth, and is more unveiledly present, and draweth nigh.⁴⁰

Finite methods can only yield knowledge of multiplicity and contingency. If the permanence which underlies change, the unity which underlies variety, and the truth which underlies falsity are to be known, a new method must be used, a method which can link the natural world of impermanence to the supernatural world of Absolute Necessity. Yet this method has to achieve what Thomas achieved by analogy, since knowledge cannot mean different things in the different realms. God can thus be neither totally within human reason, nor totally beyond it.

Thus Nicolas recommended the learned ignorance, whereby the seeker is led by the realization of his ignorance of the Godhead to infer certain truths about It and about Its relation to the finite universe. The learned ignorance, moreover, uses the analogy of mathematics, which, already free from materiality, leads to the perfections of infinity. For instance, the straight line, triangle, circle and sphere, when allowed to expand without limit, are one at infinity. But at infinity all potencies are brought into act, and thus each of these is actually all others. Thus, by analogy, the Godhead combines into Himself as Infinite Unity the

⁴⁰Nicolas Cusanus, *The Vision of God*, tr. Emma Gurney Salter (New York, 1928), IX.

whole multiplicity of creation, so that all opposites coincide in an actual unity, a unity, however, which is infinitely removed from the finite world.

The One is, moreover, a Trinity in Unity. Unity brings forth Equality with Itself, while the Connection between them proceeds from both. In this way, the Trinity expresses the generative power of the One, in which all things have being in an undifferentiated fashion. There must be three and only three persons in the Trinity, since the triangle is the plane figure with the minimum number of sides, and is the simplest plane figure which coincides with the unity of the straight line at infinity. Moreover, the Unity in Trinity contains all things because the circle is the polygon with an infinite number of sides, and becomes a straight line when its radius becomes infinite.

God therefore embraces all things, and yet generates all things out of His Unity. The creation lies between nothing and God, and is thus a plurality within unity and a unity within plurality. God is the *complicatio* into unity of the multiplicity of creation, and the creation is the *explicatio* of God's unity into multiplicity. The truth of this can be known only at infinity, since this unity of opposites is only possible at infinity, and hence there is no finite rational solution to the problem of creation.

The creature comes from God, yet it cannot, in consequence of that, add anything to Him who is the Maximum. How are we going to be able to form an idea of creature as such? If the creature as such is really nothing and has not even as much entity as an accident, how are we to accept as explanation of the development of the plurality of things the fact that God is in nothing, since nothing cannot be predicated of any entity? If you say: "all theology is circular; God's will is the omnipotent cause, and He is His will and His omnipotence," you are thereby necessarily admitting that you are completely ignorant of how it comes about that God in His unity embraces all, whilst His unity is developed in plurality; you are simply admitting that you are conscious of your ignorance of the method even though you may know the fact that God's unity embraces all.⁴¹

The universe is therefore the image of God, and has its being

⁴¹ Nicolas Cusanus, *Of Learned Ignorance*, tr. Fr. Germain Heron (London, 1954), II.3.

as an emanation from God. This emanation did not produce first the intelligences and then the spiritual soul and finally the world of material things, as in "Avicenna and other philosophers,"⁴² but produced all simply and at once. God is therefore the Absolute Maximum, of which the universe is a restriction.

Thus the attributes of the universe and God can be known in their reciprocal relation to one another. For instance, the ideas exist in the mind of God in unity, whereas they exist in the world in the multiplicity of independent material things. There is therefore no middle realm where the ideas exist as abstract absolute exemplars. That which Plotinus called the Intellectual-Principle thus exists in contracted form in God and in multiple form in the world, but not as an ontologically independent being.

The Spirit of the World, moreover, exists as the Holy Spirit in God, the Connection generated by and enlivening Unity and Equality, and also as the multiple, living, creative, moving principle found within all living things in the world. The universal and the particular of living reality are thus brought together in the Spirit.

Nicolas thus displayed a threefold structure of being in both the Godhead and the created universe. There is the abyss of Unity, or the Father, which parallels Absolute Possibility; there is the Soul of the World, which is the Son or the Equality with the Father, which parallels the rational structure of created beings; and there is the Spirit of the World, or the Holy Spirit, which unites Father and Son, and which parallels the life of living beings.

Binding the entire system together is the Incarnation by which the absolute Maximum of Godhead and the contracted Maximum of the universe are brought into unity.

Source or cause of the being of all things, God is the creator of all, and all are made for Him. To this highest, maximal and absolute power of creating all things, the nature of humanity would be united. In consequence, God Himself would by this assumed humanity become all things in their limitation in that humanity, as He is the absolute power behind the being of all things. This man, therefore, since He would subsist by union in the highest equality itself of all being

⁴² *Ibid.*, II.3.

would be the son of God and would be the Word in which all things were made, i.e., the equality itself of all being; and, as was shown earlier, this is what the son of God is called. But He would not cease to be the son of man or cease to be man.⁴³

Through Jesus, at once the relative and the Maximum, the whole of the hierarchy of being is summed up and unified in the most complete way possible. Thus, in Nicolas, as foreshadowed in Dionysius, the Incarnation is the fulfilment of the naturalist, Platonist conviction that the cosmos is ultimately a unity, which unity can be expressed in terms of a creative hierarchy of being.

There men can climb the ladder of being and achieve the vision of God. To be sure, final salvation can only come through the acceptance of Jesus Christ as Savior through His life, death and resurrection. But for Nicolas salvation is vision, known in the ascent from created things to their creative source, and made possible by Him who unites creation with Creator.

Nicolas advised the monks at Tegernsee to take a portrait on the wall and consider its gaze as analogous to the vision of God. The eyes in the portrait follow all viewers wherever they may move, and yet they stand still. God is like this: the origin and end of all creation, watching and guiding what He has made, yet never changing. The vision of Him, therefore, is the union of all action into stillness, and can only be found in that far region where light is veiled in the superabundant darkness of the Godhead.

In all faces is seen the Face of faces, veiled, and in a riddle; howbeit unveiled it is not seen, until above all faces a man enter into a certain secret and mystic silence where there is no knowledge or concept of a face. This mist, cloud, darkness or ignorance into which he that seeketh Thy face entereth when he goeth beyond all knowledge or concept, is the state below which Thy face cannot be found except veiled; but that very darkness revealeth Thy face to be there, beyond all veils.⁴⁴

God is Absolute Simplicity, containing all earthly things in Himself, while, as Jesus Christ, He binds the hierarchies of Creator and creation into one. The seeker mounts up to the Godhead,

⁴³ Ibid., III.3.

⁴⁴ Nicolas Cusanus, *The Vision of God*, VI.

and finds that He contains all succession without succession, contains all creation in His abysmal lack of creativity, overcomes all finitude in His absolute infinity, comprises all things closely in His absolute Otherness, satisfies all desires in His eternal rest, and finally guides all created being into Himself through Jesus, at once God and man, at once *complicatio* and *explicatio*.

In this system, therefore, Nicolas attempted to avoid the dangers of a too easy naturalism, one in which all things are known to finite reason; and, on the other hand, to avoid the ultimate unthinkability of a dualistic gulf between Creator and creation. He believed God to be the rational fulfilment and foundation of the universe, but in a manner above reason. He attempted to avoid the schizophrenia of Augustine, the reductionism of Dionysius, and the bifurcation of Thomas. He put God infinitely above the world, yet tied Him to it through emanation and through Jesus, Who is at once the Absolute and the relative, binding the whole together, and making possible the return of man to God despite the infinite distance separating them. But, in so doing, Nicolas denied the radical dualism of the Biblical account of creation, and brought God once again within the total structure of natural reality. Even though in many ways he was subtler than Plato or Plotinus or Dionysius, because he benefitted from their ideas, he remained a monist and a naturalist.

Conclusion

It is important to ask the philosophical and theological questions implied in this history. Can the reason, using only that information concerning the world which is available to it from sense evidence and mental procedures, know the source and origin of the world? If such knowledge is possible, can it be identified with the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God made known to man in Jesus Christ? In other words, is it possible for created reason to bridge the gap between the Creator and His creation, without the gracious intervention of Him Who made the reason?

For those philosophers who do not know a God outside the system of nature, this is not a problem. In fact, the very statement of the question makes it nonsense. Reason, for all naturalists, is that function in man which is capable, to some extent, of

understanding the structure and organization of that which is. The question: "What caused that which is?" is meaningless if it is interpreted to refer to something beyond the sphere of inquiry. Thus the investigation, by use of reason, of the origin of being yielded, in the thought of the Greek philosophers, an intramundane source, required by monistic naturalism in order to see the system as a whole.

It is therefore absurd, meaningless, unverifiable and a waste of words to ask reason how that was brought into existence which previously had absolutely no existence. Reason is bound by the category of continuity, and can only yield conclusions in continuity with the information it has. Thus an investigation of the natural world as such can organize the world and explain it in terms of an intramundane source, but it cannot show that the world was brought into being from nothing by an independent, free Creator. In short, the a posteriori method cannot yield results discontinuous with the evidence.

Plato and Plotinus, as well as the other classical philosophers, agreed in seeking a monist understanding of the world. In speaking of the Good, the Ideas and the World-Soul, they sought to see the whole as a rational system, whereby the multiplicity of Heraclitus could be explained in terms of the unity of Parmenides, and they thus brought into one system the best insights of Greek naturalism.

Christian doctrine, however, speaks of the whole of nature in relation with an external Creator-God, in an essentially dualistic system. Such an understanding cannot be obtained from natural evidence by use of natural reason. It is as impossible as would be the attempts of the dwellers in Flatland to determine the character of three-dimensional space from their available evidence. It is, of course, possible for such a Flatlander to conceive intellectually the abstract, contentless idea of a third dimension, but he could not know it as actual. Just so it is possible for the natural reason to conceive the idea of creation from nothing, but any method reason may have for knowing what actually is must yield intramundane results.

Augustine, Pseudo-Dionysius, Thomas Aquinas and Nicolas of Cusa each had a certain measure of devotion to the Christian

doctrine of creation. Each, however, wished to explain this doctrine in terms of natural evidence. For this reason, each produced a hybrid system, in which God, to some extent, is made consubstantial with His creation. This tendency is less evident in Augustine and Thomas, is stronger in Nicolas of Cusa, and is almost completely dominant in Dionysius. Yet it is definitely present in each. For Augustine, creation has its Being and Goodness from God, Who, as the Word, is the Beginning in which creation was made. For Dionysius, the creation is the emanation from the Super-Essential Godhead. For Thomas, a first cause can be found, which he said all men understand to be God. For Nicolas of Cusa, God is the *complicatio* and the world is the *explicatio*.

The Law of Moses forbids the worship of any other god beside God, and in particular forbids the worship of anything within the created world. Christ Himself confirmed this prohibition. The Christian, therefore, must reject as blasphemous the identification, made by Augustine, Dionysius, Thomas Aquinas and Nicolas of Cusa, of God with some aspect of His creation. It would doubtless be wrong to arraign these men, with the possible exception of Dionysius, as blasphemers, since their primary intention was to glorify the God of the Bible. But the naturalist tendency in their thought must be recognized for what it is: an error which could become blasphemy if taken seriously.

However, it would also be wrong to reject all attempts to understand the natural world through the natural reason. The arguments of Plato and Plotinus are prototypes of the arguments of modern science, since they seek an understanding of the structure of the created universe. The Ideas which are unified in the Intellectual-Principle may be identified with the mathematical laws of modern science, and the One with that ultimate unity which the sensitive philosopher and scientist intuits to lie beneath the multiplicity of rational law.

The quest for rational understanding is a quest for knowledge of the unity within multiplicity. This quest culminates, in the thought of Plato and Plotinus, in the mystical vision of the One. To assert that God made His creation One, and made man such that he can realize his unity with the One, the intramundane source and meaning, is to praise God. This realization is a unitive mysti-

cism, in which the creation recognizes its already-existing unity, a unity extending from the abyss of non-being to the abyss of the One. The people of Israel knew of the corporate character of life, and Paul, in his letter to the Romans, spoke of the whole of creation groaning together in travail until the coming of the Lord. Yet to identify this intramundane created unity with God is to blaspheme. All such religion, whether in Boehme or in nineteenth-century romantic Protestantism or in the Upanishads, is idolatrous and anti-Christian.

True Christian mysticism is complementary to that intramundane, unitive mysticism which has no taint of idolatry. Christian mysticism is dualistic, and is expressed in dialogue with the living God, set over against the world and revealed in Jesus Christ. Yet this mysticism cannot be purely individualistic, if the creation is in fact a unity. The whole creation must return to relation with God, after breaking the bonds of evil and separation, bonds self-imposed by a creation which was given freedom by its Maker to choose its own way.

Man must therefore realize his unity with the created world, and in particular with his fellow men, so that within the body of God's people, the Church, all men can enter into a right relation with God. Thus the task of the present age is to weld humanity, indeed the whole creation, into a common body which accepts and promotes its natural unity, a unity extending from the physico-mathematical laws of matter to the moral and political laws of human society. The true natural, unitive mystic is the one who seeks to know and to implement this unity in the world.

But the task is not complete until this natural world is brought into right relation with God. The mission of God's people, the Church, is not only to achieve secular understanding, but also to bring the created world to Jesus Christ as its head. This goal can be reached not by the natural reason, which is confined to the understanding of the created world, but by the grace of God, by which this relation has already been renewed. The unitive, naturalist mystic can and should become the dualist mystic, related in love to his Maker and his Redeemer, and witnessing to this fact to all the world, so that finally the whole of created being will be drawn to Him to be renewed in the corporate life of eternity.