FAITH AND FREEDOM
An Interfaith Perspective

David Burrell

FAITH AND FREEDOM

Challenges in Contemporary Theology

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CONTENTS

Preface vii

Acknowledgments ix

Prologue xii

Part I Creator/Creation Relation 1

Chapter 1 Distinguishing God from the World 3

Chapter 2 The Unknowability of God in al-Ghazali 20

Chapter 3 Why not Pursue the Metaphor of Artisan and View God's Knowledge as Practical? 34

Chapter 4 Maimonides, Aquinas, and Gersonides on Providence and Evil 43

Chapter 5 Aquinas' Debt to Maimonides 64

Chapter 6 Creation and "Actualism": The Dialectical Dimension of Philosophical Theology 76

Chapter 7 Aquinas and Scotus: Contrary Patterns for Philosophical Theology 91

Chapter 8 From Analogy of "Being" to the Analogy of Being 113

Part II Divine Freedom and Human Freedom 127

Chapter 9 The Challenge to Medieval Christian Philosophy: Relating Creator to Creatures 129

Chapter 10 Freedom and Creation in the Abrahamic Traditions 143

Chapter 11 Al-Ghazali on Created Freedom 156

Chapter 12 Creation, Will, and Knowledge in Aquinas and Duns Scotus 176

Part III Interfaith Encounter 191

Chapter 13 God, Religious Pluralism, and Dialogic Encounter 193

Chapter 14 The Christian Distinction Celebrated and Expanded 217

Chapter 15 Incarnation and Creation: The Hidden Dimension 234

Chapter 16 Assessing Statements of Faith: Augustine and Etty Hillesum 245

Index 258

PREFACE

I have become increasingly convinced that human freedom is one of the least understood features of our existence, and that largely because it has been (especially in a capitalist culture) unduly limited to choosing. In fact, it seems that the major decisions of our lives have a kind of inevitability about them. A corollary of restricting freedom to choosing is a valuation of *choice* for its own sake, with little or no attention to its *telos*. My conviction is that this distortion of our views on human freedom, while congenial to and perhaps contributory to a capitalist culture, has its roots in the imperative of modernity to remove a free creator from the scene, and with that drastic elision, any hope of recovering that metaphysical perspective on freedom associated with ancient philosophy – Platonic, Aristotelian, Stoic, or Plotinian. It was these frameworks which Augustine and Aquinas employed to characterize human freedom, as did Maimonides and al-Ghazali. What has replaced them is a theory of freedom dubbed "libertarian," which identifies *freedom* with *autonomy*, so defined as to demand that a free agent parallel a creator *ex nihilo*, thereby making of free action an act initiated totally by the self, and so vulnerable to countless counterexamples of "external influence."

Alternatively, classical views of freedom see it as a response to the gift of being, whereby persons are drawn to return what they have received; ideally, even returning everything to the One from whom they have received everything. Such a view is inherently teleological, yet includes choosing as an integral part since the means to this inbuilt end cannot be determined antecedently. The fact that the orientation to an end is inbuilt has been offensive to moderns, and hence their concoction of a "libertarian" freedom. I hope, through these chapters taken cumulatively, to replace that theory with a far more robust account of human freedom which, while requiring a heftier metaphysical commitment, remains more phenomenologically accurate than the modernist theory it seeks to supplant.

Jews, Christians, and Muslims can ground the classical view of freedom in the free creation of the universe, buttressing our inbuilt orientation to the good as a return to the one from whom all comes as gift. Distinctively free human initiative then becomes a response to the call of existence, whereby through discrete actions one seeks to return everything to the One from whom they have received everything. Such a view of freedom will require, however, that we say something coherent about this grounding "fact" of free creation, and do so in such a say that the admittedly ineffable relation of creatures to creator does not entail competition. My Abrahamic guides – al-Ghazali, Moses Maimonides, and Thomas Aquinas – each developed ways of tracing that interaction, and we shall see how they involve an understanding of the creator adequately distinct from a creation which cannot *be* separate from it. The Prologue will set the scene for a journey which will make various attempts to articulate this grounding relation.

Decades of inquiry gather sweet debts of gratitude to those who have helped one along. Yet they are so densely interlocking that I shall limit myself to three mentors, then noting coworkers who have brought this edition to its completion. Years in Rome from 1956 to 1960 brought me in contact with Bernard Lonergan, S.J., whose mode of inquiry has shaped my own in subterranean ways. He was wont to divide the world into those who quest after truth and those who need certitude, and that pregnant divider has continued to steer my inquiry into intercultural and interfaith explorations. Later, in Jerusalem and Cairo, Marcel Dubois, O.P. and Georges Anawati, O.P. have guided me into the complementary domains of Jewish and of Islamic philosophical theology. Beyond these three, interlocutors young and old, from Notre Dame to Bangladesh and places in between (like Cambridge and Utrecht), have prodded me to reflect again and again on these recondite issues, often witnessing to a proper way to continue when one felt quite unable to say anything.

Most recently, Lewis Ayres and Rebecca Harkin solicited this endeavor by an offer to publish, while Steven Schweitzer and Kristin Brantman Colberg have contributed mightily to bringing it to completion. The inadequacies remain my own, but that simply allows us all room to continue to quest after the truth of these hidden things.

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A Note on Sources

The advantage of standard references is that readers can use any edition. Yet those references may need explanation.

For Plato, the standard numerical reference is to the Stephanus edition; for Aristotle, to the Becker edition. These numbers will be found alongside the page in any edition.

For Augustine, *Confessions* 5.26 = book 5, paragraph 26.

For Moses Maimonides, references to *The Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. Schlomo Pines (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 1.5: book 1, chapter 5.

For Aquinas, references to the *Summa Theologiae* will be abbreviated ST 1.2.4.5 for part 1, question 2, article 4, response to objection 5 (if the last be relevant). Translations are from the Blackfriars edition (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1964). References to *Summa Contra Gentiles* 3.2: book 3, chapter 2; *Questiones Disputatae de Veritate* will be noted as *de Ver.* 3.2.6: question 3, article 2, response to objection 6 (if last be relevant); *Questiones Disputatae de Malo* will be noted as *de Malo* 2.3: question 2, article 1, response to objection 3 (if relevant). Aquinas' commentaries on

Aristotle will be referenced as follows: on the *Metaphysics*: *In Metaphysica* 2.3 for chapter [*lectio*] 3 of his commentary on Book 2; on Aristotle's *On Interpretaton*: *In peri hermenias* 2.4 for chapter [*lectio*] 4 of his commentary on Book 2.

References to John Duns Scotus will adopt a format similar to that of Aquinas, with the parts spelled out: *Ordinatio*,1, d. 2, q. 1, a. 2 ad.2 = part 1, distinction 2, question 1, article 2, response to objection 2. *Ordinatio*, ed. Carl Balic (Vatican City, 1954–) may be abbreviated "*Ord*."

PROLOGUE: CREATION AND WONDER

Understanding, Aristotle reminds us, begins in wonder. Yet were that quest to reach its goal, wonder would cease, much as travelers can stop moving when they reach their destination. For Aristotle, understanding seeks explanation, and the sign that we have one consists in being able to identify the four causes germane to any thing or event. Finding the material, moving, formal and final causes will answer why something is what it is or happens the way it happens. We may not be very successful in finding all these causes; in fact, Aristotle himself often had to concede falling short of a proper explanation, yet the ideal stands. In fact, Aristotle's account of proper explanation offers a brilliant way of adapting Plato's central goal of knowledge to the changing world we experience. Plato, however, was less sanguine about achieving knowledge; indeed, his many inconclusive dialogues attest the way in which a seeker's quest never ends. If what Plato deems to be philosophical inquiry were to come to term, the animating *eros* would dissipate – as Aristotle's scheme appropriately acknowledges. Plato has a way of finessing the despair attendant upon unending inquiry, however, by having recourse to myth to signal harmony obtaining between inquirers and their objectives. Aristotle would of course profess to be true to Socrates in eschewing myth as unequal to the task of explaining the universe, yet the price he pays for this is to limit explanation to things or events within the universe. Indeed, the order of the universe itself – the objective correlate of our persistent wonder – apparently admits of no explanation. The prime mover accounts for its characteristic activity of change, but nothing accounts for the amazing order among the kinds of things inherently ordered to their proper goals. Where Plato had recourse to myth, Aristotle was mute. In short, he left his successors with a clear view of what explanation could be, yet an impossible dream of reaching it.

It was left to Plotinus (205–70) to attempt an account of the universe with its order, yet by his time a fresh proposal had entered the scene –

not as an explanation, but as a revelation. Philo had taken the book of Genesis to recast it in philosophic terms, thereby preparing the way for others to show how this revelation of a free creator would assure that inquiries which began in wonder would peak in wonder as well. It would require a millennium to effect that transition, as the path wound through thickets of Neoplatonic commentary, including philosophical adaptations made by thinkers presenting both Jewish and Christian reflections on the book of Genesis, soon to be joined by Islamic voices as well. In fact, it could be argued that the Qur'an provided the needed impetus for Jews and Christians to face up to the metaphysical implications of Genesis, since Judaism in its rabbinic phase, as well as Christianity in its Christological struggle, both tended to take creation for granted, as each focused on covenant or incarnation, respectively. For the revelation of the Qur'an eschews a particular covenant as well as the need for humankind's redemption in a way so dramatic as Jesus' death and resurrection, to say nothing of its proto-Trinitarian implications. As a result, everything must turn on creation, as the Qur'an will characteristically parry objections to bodily resurrection with references to the One "who says 'be' and it is,"[1] while reminding skeptics regarding free creation that this same God promises to reconstitute decayed corpses on "that day."[2] Never catering to a need for extrinsic proof, the Qur'an encourages seekers to adopt this startling revelation as their salvation. Yet the encounter with Hellenic philosophy, and notably Plotinus, demanded some elucidation of creation, much as that same philosophical tradition had helped Christians to clarify the ontological status of Jesus a few centuries earlier.

Indeed, by the twelfth century, a Jewish thinker of Mosaic stature, Moses Maimonides (1135–1204), immersed in the culture of the Islamicate, adapted the stringent criticisms his Muslim predecessor, al-Ghazali (1058–1111), had made of Islamic "philosophers," to defend the free creation of the universe by one God, in the face of alternatives inspired by Plotinus. (Indeed, as we shall see, Plotinus at once blocked and inspired the efforts of thinkers of the three Abrahamic faiths to articulate their respective revelations.) Thomas Aquinas (1225–74) adopted the signal philosophical work of the one whom he called "Rabbi Moses," *The Guide of the Perplexed*, to advance his project of expounding Christian revelation by using the philosophies of Aristotle and Plato which he encountered through the writings of Ibn Sina [Avicenna] (980–1037). Thus, the task of articulating the free creation of the universe, and thereby showing how

[1] Qu'ran 2.111.
[2] Qu'ran 50.38–9.

human inquiry begun in wonder can peak there as well, became the fruit of an unwitting but immensely fruitful collaboration among Jewish, Christian, and Muslim scholars, on the strength of initiatives taken by Islamic thinkers.[3] The earliest of these attempts to articulate the Qur'anic teaching on free creation was clearly modeled on Plotinus' image of *emanation*, yet adapted in a way that constrained that "overflowing" to the necessary parameters of logical deduction schemes. Al-Farabi's (875–930) logical model for Plotinus' metaphor effectively removed freedom from the creator, and so incurred the fierce critique of another Muslim, al-Ghazali, showing that internal criticism was never absent from these traditions. Aquinas encountered this trenchant discussion of these recondite issues in reading Maimonides' work, indicating how beholden was his treatment of free creation to Muslim and Jewish predecessors. Indeed, this early medieval interchange among paradigmatic thinkers of the three Abrahamic faiths has impelled us to mine all three traditions in our search for the ground of a responsive freedom, despite the fact that the Qur'an lacks an extended narrative and merely nods to the "seven day" account, contenting itself with reiterating the compelling phrase: "God says 'be' and it is." Yet free creation has been even more central to Islamic theology than to Jewish or Christian reflection, so recent attempts to develop its significance in those traditions can be bolstered from the side of Islam.[4]

Yet even though Moses Maimonides found al-Ghazali's critique of the "necessary emanation" scheme for creation extremely useful in underscoring the freedom of the One to create, Aquinas would need further intellectual strategies to carry out his endeavor to articulate more positively the relation of that One to creatures. A spontaneous way to pose the question would be to ask: "how does God create?" Yet the advantage of Plotinus' pregnant metaphor of "overflowing" is to remove that singular activity from any Aristotelian account of happenings in the universe. Indeed, Aquinas had profited from al-Ghazali's critique of Ibn Sina, as he had learned it through Moses Maimonides, to the point where he refused to picture creation as an orderly logic-like progression from "the First" (as al-Farabi always characterized the creator). He objected primarily, of course, to the logical necessity that model presumed, but Aquinas also

[3] See my *Knowing the Unknowable God* (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986) and *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions* (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993).

[4] See my *Original Peace: Restoring God's Creations* (with Elena Malits, C.S.C.) (New York: Paulist, 1997); John Levenson: *Creation and the Persistence of Evil* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988).

chafed at the need for intermediaries to effect the activity, as logical deduction must progress via a chain of premises. Insisting that creation-from-nothing could hardly involve any *change*, in Aristotle's sense, would also entail that no Aristotelian scheme (fashioned precisely to account for change) could serve to articulate this faith-assertion. Aristotle, after all, had eschewed accounting for the origin of all things, and Aquinas may have seen why: his four causes could not be stretched that far. So another intellectual strategy would be required to articulate the revelation of Genesis in Hellenic philosophical terms. At this point, after having removed any hint of necessity or mediation in creating, Aquinas turns to Plotinus' metaphor, now set free from the accompanying model of logical deduction, and offers a lapidary formula for *creation*: "the emanation of the whole of being from the universal cause of being [God]."[5] But how to characterize this "universal cause of being" when none of Aristotle's causes can do the job?

Here Aquinas makes an explicit turn to the Neoplatonic tradition, providing an extended commentary on the work known in Latin as the *Liber de causis*, which was in effect a translation of an Islamic adaptation of Proclus, the *Kitab al-khair mahd*, or "the Book of Pure Good."[6] Aquinas recognized its true origin, which may have helped him to make allowance (as we shall see) for its characteristic Neoplatonic idiom, which he in turn adapted to his purposes. Such an adaptation of Neoplatonic texts to Islamic use is also evident in the so-called "Theology of Aristotle," which adapted several of Plotinus' *Enneads* to harmonize the difference between Plato and Aristotle, so as to offer a single "philosophy" more appropriate to articulating a revealed creation.[7] What interests us, however, is the way in which Aquinas himself adapted the Islamic text, presented to him in Latin translation, to try to articulate a "cause of being." Again, if Aristotelian strategies tailored to intramundane explanations – the celebrated "four causes" – were not up to this task, how might this Neoplatonic account help? Recall that Aquinas had no apparent difficulty adopting the idiom of Plotinus – *emanation* – in his mature formula for creation. The strategy which the *Liber de causis* offered him was a description of that

5 *Summa Theologiae* (= ST) 1.45.5.1.

6 For an overview, see Cristina D'Ancona Costa, *La Casa della Sapienze* (Milano: Guerini, 1996), and also my "Aquinas's Appropriation of *Liber de causis* to Articulate the Creator as Cause-of-Being," in *Contemplating Aquinas*, eds Laurence Paul Hemming and Susan Frank Parsons (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), pp. 55–74.

7 See Peter Adamson, *The Arabic Plotinus: A Philosophical Study of the "Theology of Aristotle"* (London: Duckworth, 2003).

emanation in which the One first created *being* [*esse* = "to-be"], and through this *being* everything else that is. On the face of it, however, this strategy veers towards a stage-wise "process" of emanation which Aquinas had explicitly denied, insisting that creatures must come forth immediately from God, since there can be no change, no process, in creating.[8]

So Aquinas' strategy is to adopt another Platonic principle, and one which Aristotle had criticized as a "mere metaphor," *participation*, along with his own unique way of identifying "the One" as that One whose essence is identified with its very "to-be" [*esse*]. So creation becomes that act whereby the One whose essence is to-be makes everything else to-be by participating in being. *Participation* remains a metaphor, so this account cannot serve as an explanation in any ordinary sense, yet the assertion of revelation regarding the free creation of the universe is presented in an acceptable philosophical idiom. We remain bereft of any satisfactory idea of what creating is like, of course, but that was inevitable since we already knew that the "the emanation of the whole of being from the universal cause of being" could not be accounted for in terms tailored to any mundane process. So it is hardly surprising that a "cause of being" will transcend Aristotelian categories, and thereby invite the use of metaphors to serve a role not unlike the myths which Plato employed to conclude otherwise inconclusive inquiries. For like those myths, these metaphors invite us to an intelligibility beyond the standard parameters of explanation, so reminding us that *creation* is, after all, a properly theological notion. Yet determined as he was to show how *theologia* could be a form of knowing, paradigmatically exhibited in Aristotle's explanatory scheme of four causes, Aquinas will also offer us a way to move from that idiom to the one needed to articulate a "cause of being."

The way is embodied in his celebrated "five ways" of "proving" that God exists, located at the beginning of his *Summa Theologiae*, just after he has clarified how this "theological" inquiry can be construed as one leading to "knowledge." Many students have been treated to these "arguments" only to find out that they "do not work," so we need to clear the air regarding what they do and do not purport to do. Aquinas explicitly notes that they are not intended as "proofs" in the sense of demonstrations (or deductions), but are rather presented as a form of what Charles Sanders Peirce will call "abductions": if things were to be construed in this way, then what we see would follow. (It turns out that most of our scientific "explanations" also proceed in this hypothetical

[8] ST 45.2.2.

fashion.) Nor are they intended as "foundational" for the entire enterprise of *theologia*, as Aquinas perceives it; the preceding question had already established that this peculiar form of inquiry involves knowing-by-faith, and so is rooted in the "knowledge only the blessed can have" who share the vision of God![9] So what role do they play, located as they are so near the outset of his inquiry into "God as the source and goal of all things?"[10] They are offered as "proofs" (as in an automotive "proving ground") to "test" the limits of any purportedly total explanation of the universe itself. If none of these can achieve their goal, then we must undertake the enterprise of *theologia*, even though it cannot be "explanatory" in the paradigmatic sense established by Aristotle, for it emerges at the very point where total explanations give out.[11]

Let us focus on the "third way," from the "directness of things to a goal," which exposes how the leading presumption of Aristotle's universe – that each proper kind of thing has its specific goal – itself stands in need of an explanation. Yet Aquinas respects the fact that Aristotle offered none, apparently aware that his conceptual strategies would not have allowed him to do so. Indeed, only "what we call 'God' " will be able to account for the fact that each kind of thing displays a proper finality, for whatever displays intellect yet is not endowed with intellect must have been so endowed by an intelligent first cause. But such an account cannot be proffered as an explanation in any ordinary sense, for the cause will not emerge as the culmination of a chain of reasoning, but will have to be postulated as a unique cause transcending any causal chain we know: "what we call 'God.' " So the way is opened to considering the origin of the universe, but only upon realizing that any set of this-worldly strategies will not be up to the task. Considering the origin of the universe itself will have to move us beyond the universe: a move which will involve us in metaphorical strategies inspired by a revelation that begs for philosophical articulation. Yet the poetic, narrative, or paranetic mode of that revelation suggests that our attempts to articulate free creation will outstrip categories constructed for explaining things or events within the universe. But is not *metaphysics* – the study of "being *qua* being" – the supreme branch of philosophy designed to carry us beyond the universe to give an account of its origin?

9 ST 1.2.
10 ST 2.Prol.
11 See Nicholas Lash, "Ideology, metaphor and analogy," in *Philosophical Frontiers of Christian Theology: Essays presented to D. M. MacKinnon*, eds Brian Hebblethwaite and Stewart Sutherland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 68–94.

Responding to that query will introduce us to an arena contested between those who presume that a philosophical account can bridge the gap between creator and creatures (a position dubbed "onto-theology"), and those who insist that the best even metaphysics can do is to call attention to that "ontological difference" in such a way as to offer a "negative" articulation of it.[12] While one can find "Thomists" on both sides of this divide, it is my contention that it best illustrates what separates Aquinas himself from John Duns Scotus. To understand what is at stake, recall the strategies Aquinas used to appropriate the *Liber de causis* to his purposes of articulating a "cause of being." The Neoplatonic structure of the book had the universe emanating from the One in an ordered way which followed the Porphyrean tree of logic, moving from the most general to the most specific: from being to inanimate to rational creatures. While it may seem unlikely to most that these logical categories could in any way be generative, the scheme also requires that *being* name the most general category of all, as though something first had to be a thing before it could be a kind of thing. But to make such a stipulation serves to remind us of Aristotle's stricture against treating *being* as a univocal term. It simply makes no sense to ask how many beings are in the room; whatever-is must be as a kind of thing. That there can be no things that are simply beings – or "bare particulars" in more contemporary jargon – underscores the metaphysical fault lines operative here. So Aquinas proceeds to interpret the *Liber*'s insistence that "*being* is the first of created things" with his own insistence that every kind of thing that exists does so by participating in the being of God in an orderly fashion which distributes things according to their kind, as in Genesis.

Now the "ontological difference" between created things and their source is expressed by another Platonic strategy: distinguishing what exists in itself from what exists by participation. Used by Plato to distinguish forms from things named after them but subject to generation and corruption, the presence of a creator elicits a yet more radical "distinction": between the One whose essence is simply to-be, and everything which it brings into existence, whether those things be subject to generation and corruption or not. *Contingency* then means not only what could be otherwise, but what might not be at all. To celebrate this "distinction," as Robert Sokolowski dubs it, is to see how Aquinas' identification of God as the One whose essence is to-be effectively brings him into alignment

[12] See Robert Sokolowski, *The God of Faith and Reason* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1990); Jean-Luc Marion, "Saint Thomas d'Aquin et l'onto-théologie," in *Revue Thomiste* 95 (1995), pp. 31–66.

with Plotinus, whose One is said to be "beyond being." For by making the demarcation where he does, Aquinas disallows any talk of God as though it were an item in the universe – even a necessary one. So we are forbidden to think of *being* as a category spanning the uncreated and the created; indeed as a category at all. As Aquinas puts it, "God is not contained within the genus of *substance*."[13] And when asked whether creatures "resemble" their creator, he finesses the ordinary sense of the question by stating that "things resemble the source of their existence by possessing existence [*esse*],"[14] but of course the "One who is" does not "possess existence," and the metaphysical tools he has assembled make it clear that *esse* cannot be a feature of things, so "resemblance" can hardly mean what we normally take it to mean. In other words, he might just as well have answered "no," but then he would have been unable to articulate any connection between creatures and creator – a position he criticized "Rabbi Moses" for taking.[15] Yet astute readers might wonder what really separates these two, since the *resemblance* which Aquinas asserts is not a recognizable one. It turns out that what makes the difference is a vigorously analogical notion of *being*, which the Rambam [= *Ra*bbi *M*oses *b*en *M*aimon] could not comprehend.[16]

Yet a vigorous sense of the analogical structure of discourse about *being* is the semantic counterpart to "the distinction" of creatures from the creator – a realization which led the late Josef Pieper, a most astute contemporary interpreter of Aquinas, to remark that "creation is the hidden element in the philosophy of St. Thomas."[17] Where Duns Scotus will identify God as the infinite being, Aquinas will employ the metaphysical tools at his disposal – notably the distinction between *essence* and *esse* – to identify God as the one whose essence is simply to-be. Notice that Scotus' formula demands that something called "being" embrace both finite creatures and infinite creator, and will then require a separate argument to show that this "infinite being" is indeed the creator; whereas Aquinas' formula offers a direct metaphysical articulation of the revelation of a creator. For the characteristic activity of the One whose essence is to-be can only be to bring other things to participate in being. Indeed,

13 ST 1.3.5.1.

14 ST 1.4.3.

15 ST 1.13.2.

16 For a careful treatment, see Alexander Broadie, "Maimonides and Aquinas on the Names of God," in *Religious Studies* 23 (1987), 157–70.

17 Josef Pieper, "The Negative Element in the Philosophy of St. Thomas," in *Silence of St. Thomas* (New York: Pantheon, 1957), pp. 47–67.

whatever activity we can predicate of God must be in the form of creating – unless, that is, we would be privy to a form of activity "within" divinity itself, which Christians enjoy in the revelation of God in Jesus. The upshot of these apparently recondite reflections is that any attempt to articulate the creating activity of God, with the subsequent relation of creatures to their creator, must surpass ordinary ways of expression. So attempts to do so will invariably invoke poetry and art, for while *participation* remains a metaphor, metaphors can be elaborated by yet further metaphors, and often better by nonverbal forms of expression. As Aquinas taught us by his efforts to enrich and transform Aristotle's paradigm for knowing [*scientia*] to include knowing-by-faith, there are indeed "more things in heaven and earth than are found in philosophy" as he (or we) have received it.

For introducing a free creator into Hellenic philosophy demands that we learn how to speak of the One from whom all things freely flow, yet not as an item in the universe – even an "infinite" such item. For this One is indeed "beyond being" as we know beings. So our relation to this One who speaks the universe – "God says 'be' and it is" – cannot be on a par with our relation to any other thing. This crucial corollary of the "distinction" enshrined in Aquinas' analogical semantics has remained unappreciated in the west, though we find it expressed eloquently in Meister Eckhart's arresting paradoxes.[18] A recent set of reflections on Aquinas in relation to the Hindu sage, Shankara, offers that quality of "mutual illumination" which intercultural perspectives can often bring to formulations which have become too familiar. Sara Grant's 1989 Teape lectures, subtitled "Confessions of a Non-Dualist Christian," offer a narrative of the journey of this Religious of the Sacred Heart to India and her subsequent life of study and prayer in the context of a Hindu-Christian ashram in Pune.[19] Pondering the manner in which Aquinas characterizes creation in things as a *relation* to their source, she observes how malleable is this maverick Aristotelian category of *relation*: this relation (of creatures to their creator) can hardly be assimilated to the relations among creatures themselves, lest we fail to distinguish the creator from creatures. Her prolonged study of Shankara, with the subtle language he introduces of "nonduality," helps her to see what many commentators on Aquinas have missed: the way his insistence that the *esse* of creatures is an *esse-ad-*

[18] For a reliable guide, see Bernard McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart* (New York: Crossroad, 2001).

[19] Bradley Malkovsky (ed.), *Toward an Alternative Theology* (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002).

creatorem (their to-be is to-be-towards-the-creator) utterly transforms Aristotle's world, where the hallmark of *substance* is to "exist in itself." Yet ironically enough, the reason we may miss the transformation that Aquinas makes of Aristotle is that the relation is so *sui generis* that it does not alienate the creature from itself. Since God cannot be "other" in the sense in which other things are other, and God remains the very source of anything's being, anything's to-be [*esse*] is at once a participation in the very being of God and "more intimate to things than anything else."[20]

So we begin to see why a proper articulation of the mystery of creation undergirds any robust account of human freedom, as well as any attempt to articulate our intentional relations to our creator, any "spiritual" discourse. For if Jews, Christians, or Muslims end up praying to "someone else" in addressing their praise and thanksgiving to God, they are misdirecting attention which should be focused on the One who is the very source of their being. Only by carefully distinguishing this One from all other things can we properly relate to that same One, for if we think God must be separate from us, then we must be separate from God. That is the self-defeating notion of "autonomy" concocted by a modernity which felt it had to renounce a creator, so that anyone who employs such outmoded categories cannot help but misconstrue the God whom they wish to elaborate.[21] For once we appreciate how radical is our act of faith in a free creator, then it becomes clear that we cannot *be* separate from God. Yet we will fail to understand that corollary of free creation, perhaps even mistake it for "pantheism," if we have not seen how the unique character of the *relation* called "creation" also demands that we learn how to think the creator *not* as an item in the universe, but as its One free creator! That mode of thinking, which Kathryn Tanner dubs "non-constrastive," will also demand that we appreciate how to employ language analogously.[22] For this reason, a foray into metaphysics will require poetic sensibility as well, since all analogous speech – whether used of divinity or used to evaluate human situations, as in ethical discourse – will invariably display a touch of metaphor.[23] So we are brought, via these extended reflections, to the threshold of poetry and art as we attempt to attune our minds and hearts to the wonder of creation.

[20] ST 1.8.1. For a discussion of *participation* consult Rudi teVelde's *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas* (Leiden: Brill, 1995).

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

[22] Kathryn Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988).

[23] See my *Analogy and Philosophical Language* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 1973).

Part I

CREATOR/CREATION RELATION

Chapter 1

DISTINGUISHING GOD FROM THE WORLD

Two features which have shaped philosophical considerations of divinity in Jewish, Christian, and Muslim worlds since the beginnings of such reflection – God's simpleness and God's eternity – have recently been subject to severe questioning. An entire theological movement (so-called "process theology") has developed to offer an alternative construction of divinity, while an increasing number of philosophers of religion simply proceed as though these features (which are "formal features") no longer constrained discourse about divinity.[1] While the arguments which theologians offer for rejecting the "classical doctrine" differ somewhat in perspective from those which philosophers offer for avoiding the "Anselmian conception" of divinity, there is significant overlap between the two groups.[2]

I shall focus here on the forms of argument philosophers normally adduce for eschewing divine eternity and simpleness, and I shall try to show how alternative routes inevitably jeopardize the cardinal teaching of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim traditions, that of creation. (I have already shown [see note 1 below] how theological alternatives in fact replace creation with a far weaker notion of *creativity* borrowed from Whitehead; I shall merely state here that the tendency which some forms of Christianity have of virtually eclipsing creation by redemption can only weaken the import of redemption itself.) The direction of my constructive argument, then, shows how philosophical theology must answer not only to criteria

[1] On "formal features," see my *Aquinas: God and Action* (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979), pp. 14–17, where I acknowledge my indebtedness to Eddy Zemach.

[2] Schubert Ogden refers to "classical theism," following Charles Hartshorne, while Tom Morris speaks of "the Anselmian conception": "The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Anselm," in *Faith and Philosophy* 1 (1984), pp. 177–87.

of consistency but also do justice to practices and beliefs shared in living religious traditions, much as philosophers of science construct models of explanation with a keen eye to laboratory practice. The reference to three distinct "monotheistic" traditions is meant to offer converging and mutually corroborative testimony, as shall be seen, and not to propose a syncretic common faith.[3]

Philosophers have come to be persuaded that it is impossible to link an eternal God with temporal events (here their arguments often overlap with those brought forward by "process theologians"), and that the very notion of divine simplicity is freighted with incoherence. Yet the arguments which have persuaded so many of them display little understanding of the roots of the notions being disputed as they were elaborated in the service of the three traditions referred to above. Those dealing with divine eternity invariably settle for its abstract component – *timelessness* – without asking themselves whether that dimension captures the traditional sense of *eternity*.[4] Two articles by Norman Kretzmann and Eleanore Stump (on "Eternity" and "Absolute Simplicity") can be extremely useful in confronting this current myopia. Each offers constructive ways of recovering the tradition and responding to certain consequences of the traditional notions which many have judged should invalidate them.[5] While indebted to their treatment, I propose to undergird a wider endeavor to understand the central role played by *simpleness* and *eternity* in doing philosophical theology, by showing how these formal features secure "the distinction" of God from the world.[6]

Without a clear philosophical means of distinguishing God from the world, the tendency of all discourse about divinity is to deliver a God

[3] "Monotheism" is of course an abstraction, though useful in identifying a family of faiths; on the proprieties of speaking of a "common faith," see my review of Wilfrid Cantwell Smith's recent publications: "Faith and Religious Convictions: Studies in Comparative Epistemology," in *Journal of Religion* 63 (1983), pp. 64–73.

[4] A common starting point for philosophers is Nelson Pike's *God and Timelessness* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), which presumes the identification: see my "God's Eternity," in *Faith and Philosophy* 1 (1984), pp. 389–405. Characteristic arguments against the notion of divine simplicity can be found in Alvin Plantinga, *Does God Have a Nature?* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1980). I prefer "simpleness" to "simplicity" for rhetorical reasons: see *Summa Theologiae* (= ST), vol. 2*: Existence and Nature of God*, trans. Timothy McDermott, O.P. (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1964).

[5] Norman Kretzmann and Eleonore Stump, "Eternity," in *Journal of Philosophy* 78 (1981), pp. 429–58; "Absolute Simplicity," in *Faith and Philosophy* 2 (1985), pp. 353–82.

[6] For "the distinction," see Robert Sokolowski, *The God of Faith and Reason* (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983/Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1995).

who is the "biggest thing around." That such is the upshot of much current philosophy of religion cannot be doubted; that it stems from overlooking the crucial role of these "formal features" is the burden of this article. The wary will note that talking about a God distinct from the world will inevitably involve one in analogical forms of speech, yet the aversion many philosophers show to this dimension of our discourse can only reflect an oversight of recent explorations of this domain.[7] It may also be the case that this aversion stems from an overpowering concern for clear-cut meaning which issues in treatments of God in which little care is taken to do justice to the notion of God as "the creator of heaven and earth." If this be the case, the current surge of interest in philosophy of religion may ill-serve religion, since (adapting an observation of Aquinas) misleading conceptions of matters divine on the part of believers can only subject the faith to ridicule.[8] Lest my own efforts seem overly pretentious, I am not promising an adequate response to the objections raised to God's eternity and simpleness. I am trying to make the case for grappling with those objections more honestly and directly, after the manner of Kretzmann and Stump, in an effort to capture the role these formal features play in philosophical theology. For disregarding or overlooking their role risks failing to speak of God at all.

Inner Connection of Eternity with Simpleness

I have consistently referred to *simpleness* and *eternity* as "formal features" of divinity, thereby marking them off from attributes or characteristics. It is like determining whether to treat light as particles or waves, after which one may ask about the velocity of the particles or the length of the waves; or whether to adopt an "event" or a "substance" ontology. Formal features concern our manner of locating the subject for characterization, and hence belong to a stage prior to considering attributes as such – a stage which will in part determine which attributes are relevant and certainly how they are to be attributed to the subject in question. (Or if one remains wedded to an undiscriminating use of "property," these would be *ur*-properties.) The order of Aquinas' treatment in the *Summa Theologiae*

[7] See James Ross, *Portraying Analogy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Patrick Sherry, "Analogy Reviewed," in *Philosophy* 51 (1976), pp. 337–45; "Analogy Today," *ibid.*, pp. 431–46.

[8] Most notable are treatments of divine knowledge which proceed, quite innocent of the creator/creature relation, to presume God to be an omniscient onlooker.