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PHILOSOPHICAL CREATIONISM: THOMAS AQUINAS' METAPHYSICS OF *CREATIO EX NIHILO*

In keeping with the prevalent philosophical tradition, all philosophers, beginning with the pre-Socratics, through Plato and Aristotle, and up to Thomas Aquinas, accepted as a certain that the world as a whole existed eternally. They supposed that only the shapes of particular things underwent transformation. The foundation for the eternity of the world was the indestructible and eternal primal building material of the world, a material that existed in the form of primordial material elements (the Ionians), in the form of ideas (Plato), or in the form of matter, eternal motion, and the first heavens (Aristotle).

It is not strange then that calling this view into question by Thomas Aquinas was a revolutionary move which became a turning point in the interpretation of reality as a whole. The revolutionary character of Thomas' approach was expressed in his perception of the fact that the world was contingent. The truth that the world as a whole and everything that exists in the world does not possess in itself the reason for its existence slowly began to sink into the consciousness of philosophers. Everything that exists, as it were, on credit. Hence the world and particular things require for the explanation of their reason for being the discovery of a more universal cause than is the cause of motion.

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Only the cause of existence, that is, the efficient creative cause, can be a more universal cause (than the cause of motion) from which everything that is comes.

St. Augustine, Boethius, John Damascene, and Hugh of St. Victor had spoken of the creation of the world *ex nihilo*, but Thomas Aquinas was the first to provide the philosophical foundations for this interpretation.¹ The questioning of the entire legacy of philosophy on how the world came into being is certainly an expression of Aquinas' great intellectual courage, his honesty, and cognitive freedom.² Thomas was aware of the importance of his endeavor, as we see in a passage from the beginning of the text *De aeternitate mundi*, in which he writes:

The question still arises whether the world could have always existed, and to explain the truth of this matter, we should first distinguish where we agree with our opponents from where we disagree with them. If someone holds that something besides God could have always existed, in the sense that there could be something always existing and yet not made by God, then we differ with him: such an abominable error is contrary not only to the faith but also to the teachings of the philosophers, who confess

¹ Św. Tomasz z Akwinu [St. Thomas Aquinas], *O wieczności świata* [*On the eternity of the world*], in Św. Tomasz z Akwinu, *Dziela wybrane* [*Selected works*], trans. into Polish by J. Salij (Poznań 1984), 277. Cf. S. Thomae Aquinatis, *Summa contra Gentiles*, ed. P. Marietti (Taurini 1888), II, c. 15.

² Gilson writes that Thomas kept himself free both in relation to Aristotle and to St. Augustine. Instead of passively swimming with the current of traditional Augustinianism, he developed a new theory of cognition, changed the foundations upon which were based the proofs for God's existence, made a new critique of the concept of creation, and raised a new edifice of ethics, or completely transformed the old one. But also, instead of following passively in the steps of the Aristotelianism of the Averroists, he considered its narrow framework, transforming to its depth the doctrine, upon which he could comment in such a way that it took on a completely new meaning. The entire mystery of Thomism is in the aspiration—and the absolute intellectual honesty—to rebuild philosophy on such a plane that its actual agreement with theology would turn out to be indispensable to meet the requirements of the reason itself, and not turn out to be an accidental result of an aspiration to reconcile them. (see Étienne Gilson, *Tomizm. Wprowadzenie to filozofii św. Tomasza z Akwinu* [*Thomism. Introduction to the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*], trans. into Polish by J. Rybalt (Warsaw 1960), 42).

and prove that everything that in any way exists cannot exist unless it be caused by him who supremely and most truly has existence.³

The discovery of the fact that the existence of beings was caused, a discovery that was the legacy of ancient and medieval philosophy, entails the need to seek the first and universal cause of everything that is. For this reason Thomas asserts: “it should be conceded . . . that something caused cannot always exist, for it would then follow that a passive potentiality has always existed.”⁴

The correction Thomas brought to the Aristotelian image of the world, showing that the world was not necessary in its existence, may seem to be trivial. However, it turned out to be revolutionary in its effects. The existence of the world as such is not, as Aristotle and all before him had held, something eternal and necessary. For we do not find in the world any being or element such that existence would have to belong to its essence, or that existence would be eternally connected with it. The world—not only in the form of its being, but also in content (matter)—comes from the First Cause; everything that exists in the world is from the First Cause.

For this reason Thomas required of philosophy an answer to the question of the ἀρχή of the existence of the universe, and so, to the question of the universal cause of the world’s existence. He knew that by accepting the idea that world as whole exists eternally and necessarily, we would be disloyal to the principle of neutrality in the starting point of our philosophical inquiry; the idea that the existence of the world was eternal and necessary, an idea philosophers had accepted and taught, was an *a priori* assumption in cognition.

³ Św. Thomas z Akwinu, *O wieczności świata*, 277. The English translation cited after: Thomas Aquinas, *De aeternitate mundi*, trans. Robert T. Miller (1997), <http://dhspriority.org/thomas/DeEternitateMundi.htm#f2>, accessed on March 15, 2016; hereafter cited as: Miller (1997).

⁴ Id.

The philosophical theory that the world was created *ex nihilo* was formulated for the first time in the history of philosophy in the thirteenth century by Thomas Aquinas together with the discovery of the contingent (non-necessary) existence of the entire world and of particular beings. It unveils not only the fact that world comes from the Creator, but also the truth that thereby the world is rational, knowable (intelligible), and purposeful. Particular things realize within them the plan of the Creator and they have an inscribed and determined end-purpose. Man as he gains knowledge of the world perceives it as the natural milieu of his existence, in which everything is ordered rationally and purposefully.⁵

As one appeals to the philosophical theory of *creatio ex nihilo* when explaining the coming-into-being of the world, one should point out that it grows, like the truth concerning the existence of the Absolute, from the nature of realistic philosophy, and it is a keystone of the rational explanation of reality. This means that the theory is not borrowed from Revelation or religion and transported to philosophy. The theory is strictly connected with an understanding of being as not hav-

⁵ This truth that the world was created *ex nihilo* was not welcome for long in the minds of philosophers. It was rather quickly removed from philosophy and cosmology and relegated to theology. The theory of *creatio ex nihilo* was regard as a *persona non grata* in philosophy and was presented as inaccessible to the human reason. It was “exiled” to the realm of faith. This paradox is deeper because of the fact that “this exile” was performed with the agreement of Christian philosophers, and sometimes with their active involvement. The general attitude toward the philosophical theory of the creation of the world *ex nihilo*, an attitude typical of modernity, is clearly seen in the words of M. Luther, who in the year 1545 wrote: “articulus de creatione rerum ex nihilo difficilior est creditu quam articulus de incarnatione” (“the truth concerning the creation of things from nothing is harder to believe than the truth concerning the incarnation”).

In more recent times an appeal, when explaining how the world arose, to the philosophical theory of the creation of the world *ex nihilo*—when what have become established in the minds of philosophers are theories derived from natural cosmologies, such as the big bang, pulsating black holes, or eternally evolving matter—is seen by certain philosophers and natural sciences as an expression of philosophical desperation or as a “Grundirrtum” (fundamental error) of metaphysics (Fichte). On the other hand, we must be aware that if we reject the truth concerning the creation of the world, we find no grounds for explaining the rationality and purposefulness of the world.

ing the reason for its existence in itself, and is connected with an understanding of the Absolute as the efficient creative cause that is the universal cause of the universe.

This close connection between the philosophical theory of *creatio ex nihilo* and the conception of being allows us better to understand why many ancient, medieval, modern, and contemporary philosophers, although they have come to recognize the existence of the Absolute, yet reject the explanation of the coming-into-being of the world of persons, animals, plants, and things by an appeal to the theory of *creatio ex nihilo*. The aversion to this type of explanation is sometimes so deep and so irrational that some philosophers are prepared to accept an absurdity in explanation (explaining order through accident, rationality through irrationality, that is, “being through non-being”), and the theory of “accident,” the “big bang,” or “blind evolution,” only to get away from creationism. Such an attitude often springs from ignorance of the philosophical theory of creation, and from a failure to distinguish it from the theological theory of creation. They need to be better acquainted with the philosophical theory of creation to see its rational weight and to see at the same time how it is indispensable when attempting to provide an ultimate explanation not only for the existence of the world, but above all for the rationality and purposefulness of the world.

On the History of the Formation of the Theory of *creatio ex nihilo*

The term “creation” corresponds to the word “creatio” in Latin, and to the word “κτίσις” or “γένεσις” in Greek. In its fundamental meaning it indicates the act of creative action with a specific power (Greek κτίζειν) or describes a general idea of the act of creation. It also designates a specific act of action that begins and causes something that did not exist or creates something from nothing.

The word “creatio” is one of the words that belong to universal religious expressions, and also to cultural expressions encountered in

archaic times (e.g., among Pygmies, paleo-Siberians, Californians, Australians, and others) and in ancient and modern times. We find it in the cultures and religions of the East and the West. It is present in the language of the peoples of South and North America, Africa, Australia, and Oceania. The term “creatio” constantly accompanies man’s religious and cultural life.

The situation is similar in philosophy. The term “creatio”—the Greek “κτίσις,” “ποίησις,” and “γένεσις”—has appeared since the beginning in the language of philosophers, but it largely designated a specific creative act of great power, an act capable of drawing out definite forms of things from shapeless matter.

In ancient and early medieval philosophy we do not encounter the word “creatio” in the strict sense as the act of creation *ex nihilo*, concerning all individual beings and the entire world.⁶ The idea that the world was eternal had become widespread among philosophers. Hence, before the theory of the creation of the world *ex nihilo* was formulated, philosophers conceived of the process of the coming-into-being of things most often as composition, ordering, division, projection, or formation from some primeval building material.

*From Ordering to the Formation of
Primeval Building Material*

The Greek myths concerning how the world came to be show manifold connections with the cosmogonies of the Far East. These myths show the coming-into-being of the world as a process of the separation of water from dry land, day from night, and order from chaos. Researchers remark that in those myths they did not use the

⁶ While Reale suggests that we may find such a meaning in Plato and Aristotle, in the context of the necessity-based existence of the world which we find also in Plato and Aristotle, his view seems untenable (Giovanni Reale, *Historia filozofii starożytnej* [*History of Ancient Philosophy*], trans. into Polish by E. I. Zieliński, vol. 1 (Lublin 1996), 360–361). Cf. Gilson, *Tomizm*, 213.

word “creation” or “creator” (Greek κτίσις or κτίστης) but rather the verb “to create” (κτίζειν). The term “creation” appeared only later.

Hesiod was the first (and probably the only one among the ancients) to use the word “γίγνεσθαι” (birth, coming-into-being) to describe how the world came into being, and the term has a shade of *creatio ex nihilo*. Chaos was the first to be generated (χάος γένετο), Hesiod informs us.⁷ Generation (γένεσις) is first. It is before the world and before the gods.

While the pre-Socratics spoke of the generation or coming-into-being (γένεσις) of all existing things and of their destruction (their passing away), which might suggest the concept of “creatio,” an analysis of the statements of ancient philosophers quickly dispelled this idea. The great majority of them shared the belief that the world as a whole existed eternally, and everything that was had come into being from an indestructible primordial material.

Heraclitus raised change to the rank of the main principle that rules the world, and he thus rejected the possibility that things came into being:

The living and the dead, that which is awake and that which sleeps, the young and the old, are one and the same in us, because these things become after their change those things, and those things again after their change become these things . . . Immortals—mortals, mortals—immortals; these live by the death of those, those die by the life of these. And good and evil are one.⁸

⁷ Hezjod [Hesiod], *Narodziny bogów [Birth of the Gods]*, trans. into Polish by J. Łanowski (Warsaw 1999), 116. Cf. Arystoteles [Aristotle], *Fizyka [Physics]*, trans. into Polish by K. Leśniak (Warsaw 1968), 208 b.

⁸ *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, hrsg. H. Diels, W. Kranz, Bd. 1–3 (Berlin 1951–1952⁶), B 88.

The true world of the laws of the Logos had always been and would always be, although its shapes and forms were changing like a river.⁹ Empedocles added to this idea and said:

There are no births (instances of coming-into-being) of anything that is mortal, nor is unhappy death an end. There is only mixture and exchange of what was mixed.¹⁰

Since that time, coming-into-being was understood as the activity of composition (*compositio*) or corruption (*corruptio*). This would be typical of the ancient atomists who conceived of the process of coming-into-being as the constant disintegration of the world into infinitely many other worlds.¹¹

Parmenides expressed in the most radical fashion his belief on how things arose and on the eternity of the world, arguing that they are “empty names, such as men give to things in the belief that they are true, such as coming-into-being and disappearance, existence and non-existence, change of place and change of bright color”.¹²

That which is always is and is identical to itself. That which is beyond being is non-being (τὸ οὐκ ὄν), and non-being is nothingness. Since, as Parmenides argued:

That which exists is unmade and not liable to destruction, for it is entire, immobile, and infinite, never was, and will not be, because now it exists together as something entire, one, and continuous. For indeed what sort of beginning would you seek for being? How and when could it take its increase? I do not permit you to say or think that it arose from what does not exist. For indeed it cannot be said or thought that it does not exist. What sort of necessity could force it to come into being and grow sooner or later, beginning from what is not? Therefore also it must necessarily exist or not exist at all. Indeed the power of conviction will

⁹ Id., B 30.

¹⁰ Id., B 8.

¹¹ Id., B 12.

¹² Id., B 7.

never agree that something other than nothingness could come into being from what does not exist . . . For indeed, how could what exists come into existence in the future? How could it have come into being in the past?¹³

Parmenides' belief that being could not have come into being at all on account of its identity and eternity, would over time be understood as the principle that *ex nihilo nihil fit* (from non-being, being does not arise), which would become a "sacred principle" underlying the explanation of how things came into being.¹⁴

Plato enriched the philosophical interpretation of how the world came to be (τοῦ κόσμου γένεσις) by bringing in a builder (δημιουργός) who was the maker and father (ποιητὴς καὶ πατήρ) and caused the world to come into being, since "he was good."¹⁵ He made the world in the following fashion:

having received all that is visible not in a state of rest, but moving without harmony or measure, brought it from its disorder into order, thinking that this was in all ways better than the other.¹⁶

He makes everything (δεδημιούργεται) in the world on the basis of a first model (παράδειγμα) that is eternal.¹⁷ The model according to which the "maker and father" constructed the world is "always the same" and is "the object of reason and thought."¹⁸ For this reason, the world as a whole remains something eternal: for indeed the model of the world (παράδειγμα) is eternal, coming-into-being is eternal, and space is eternal.

¹³ Id.

¹⁴ Id., B 8. The expression *ex nihilo nihil fit* was probably coined by Lucretius. Cf. Étienne Gilson, *Filozof i teologia* [*The Philosopher and Theology*], trans. into Polish by J. Kotsa (Warsaw 1968), 62.

¹⁵ Plato, *Timaeus*, 29 D–E.

¹⁶ Id., 30 A. The English translation cited after: *Platōnos Timaios. The Timaeus of Plato*, trans. Richard Dacre, ed. R. D. Archer-Hind (London: Macmillan and Co., and New York, 1888), 93.

¹⁷ Id., 27 A., 28 A–C, 29 A–C.

¹⁸ Id., 29 A–B.

Aristotle connected the process of coming-into-being only with the sublunary world, and so, with the “region surrounding the middle of the universe” in which material things exist.¹⁹ In this world, prime matter is eternal (ἀγέννητος) and indestructible. Everything comes into being from prime matter and returns to it after disintegration. Otherwise “something could come into being simply from nothingness”, and then non-being would have to exist.²⁰ And non-being “is neither something, nor of some sort, nor so large or so large, or anywhere.”²¹ Moreover, the heaven of the fixed stars is eternal, and the First Unmoved Mover (Ακίνητος Κινητής) is eternal. The First Unmoved Mover is the final cause of the world’s motion. In this way, Aristotle joined the Platonic primary model of the world (παράδειγμα) to his own cosmogony.²²

The process of coming-into-being and corruption (*generatio et corruptio*) is a specific process and differs from increase and decrease, which is a modification of a being with respect to extension, and it also differs from motion, which is a modification of being with respect to place, or alteration, which is a modification of being with respect to properties and qualities. Aristotle explains that we are dealing with coming-into-being and corruption when:

when nothing persists, of which the resultant is a property (or an accident in any sense of the term), it is coming-to-be, and the converse change is passing-away. Matter, in the most proper sense of the term, is to be identified with the *substratum* which is receptive of coming-to-be and passing-away: but the *substratum* of the remaining kinds of change is also, in a certain sense, mat-

¹⁹ Arystoteles [Aristotle], *O powstawaniu i niszczeniu* [*On Generation and Destruction*], trans. into Polish by L. Regner, in Arystoteles, *Dzieła wszystkie* [*Complete works*], vol. 2 (Warsaw 1990), 335 a.

²⁰ Id., 317 b.

²¹ Id., 318 a.

²² Arystoteles [Aristotle], *O niebie* [*On Heaven*], trans. into Polish by P. Siwek, in Arystoteles, *Dzieła wszystkie*, vol. 2, 192 a 27 ff.

ter, because all these *substrata* are receptive of contrarities of some kind.²³

The substrate (which, however, cannot be identified with any one primeval element)²⁴ from which things come into being, would be recognized as the potential element, and the process of coming-into-being would be regarded as a passage from potency to act. Hence, Aristotle explains, “some bodies come into being by passage from one to another, since one quality is destroyed, and others arise by the passage from two to one, since more qualities are destroyed . . . all bodies arise from all.”²⁵

Aristotle took the position that in the process of coming-into-being neither the substrate of a thing nor its form are produced. Thus coming-into-being is a passage from something that already is, but potentially—in the substrate of a thing. Hence Aristotle says:

Now since that which is generated is generated by something (by which I mean the starting-point of the process of generation), and from something (by which let us understand not the privation but the matter . . .), and becomes something (i.e., a sphere or circle or whatever else it may be); just as the craftsman does not produce the substrate, i.e., the bronze, so neither does he produce the sphere; except accidentally, inasmuch as the bronze sphere is a sphere, and he makes the former. For to make an individual thing is to make it out of the substrate in the fullest sense. I mean that to make the bronze round is not to make the round or the sphere, but something else; i.e., to produce this form in another medium. For if we make the form, we must make it out of something else; for this has been assumed. E.g., we make a bronze sphere; we do this in the sense that from A, i.e., bronze, we make B, i.e., a

²³ Arystoteles, *O powstawaniu i niszczeniu*, 320 a. The English translation cited after: *The Complete Works of Aristotle. The Revised Oxford Translation*, Vol. I, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 523.

²⁴ If everything came into being from some one primeval element, Aristotle explains, then there would be no coming-into-being, but only alteration (Id., 322 a).

²⁵ Id., 331 b–332 a.

sphere. If, then, we make the spherical form itself, clearly we shall have to make it in the same way; and the processes of generation will continue to infinity.

It is therefore obvious that the form (or whatever we should call the shape in the sensible thing) is not generated—generation does not apply to it—nor is the essence generated.²⁶

Thus coming-into-being is the formation of something to a definite figure (form). This cannot occur without the acting factor that actualizes this potency. This factor is the factor that is the source of eternal motion. The most proximate source of eternal motion, and so also the cause of the continuous coming-into-being of the beings in the sublunary world, is the motion of the planets and moon, and for the entire cosmos it is the First Mover. Thereby coming-into-being and destruction is an incessant process.²⁷

In this way Aristotle in explaining how the world came into being and how it exists was the first to dare to go outside this world and point to a transcendent cause—the First Mover, as the ultimate reason for all motion, and so for all coming-into-being.

In ancient philosophy this would be a noteworthy exception, one that made it possible in the quest for the reason behind the coming-into-being of things to break apart the schema of immanent explanation, which confined explanation to a search for the internal and most proximate causes, and made it possible to seek external causes, including especially the efficient and final cause.

With the Stoics the doctrine of the eternal *λόγοι σπερματικοί* appeared. The “logoi spermatikoi” were endowed with indestructible and inexhaustible power and potency whereby concrete individual things constantly come into being. The Stoics provided an argument for the already existing belief in the eternal nature of the world. Lucretius

²⁶ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, I, Books 1–9, trans. Hugh Tredennick (Harvard University Press, 1933), 345 (1033 a 24–1033 b 7).

²⁷ Arystoteles, *O powstawaniu i niszczeniu*, 336 a–b.

would argue that the gods did not create nature since they need nature as primary model for making things (“exemplum porro gignundis rebus”).²⁸

Among the ancient philosophers the prevalent belief (we can regard this as a general phenomenon) was that the world existed eternally and necessary as a whole, and that creative powers and forces were inherent in pre-existing elements. The process of coming-into-being and destruction, whether that process is conceived of as composition or disintegration, or as the actualization of potencies inherent in them, was for the ancient philosophers something eternal and stable, while the individual things that come-into-being (these concrete things here) were something completely accidental.²⁹ *Creatio ex nihilo* seems to have been unsuitable to their way of thinking.³⁰

Between Making and Creation ex nihilo

Early Christianity emphasized the power of the act of creation, as is seen from the words the Greek and Latin Fathers of the Church used. The most frequently occurring Greek terms describing the maker of the world are the following: Ποιητής, Κριστής, and Δημιουργός, which were rendered by Latin terms such as *Factor* (*Artifex*, *Opifex*), *Creator*, and *Conditor*. These words were intended primarily to indicate the power of the creative act, the power necessary in the coming-into-being of the world.

²⁸ Titus Lucretius Carus, *De rerum natura*, hrsg. K. Büchner (Stuttgart 1973), V 181–186.

²⁹ An exception here would be Aristotle, who discovered the final cause of the world, and also discovered finality or teleology in the world of things. However, according to Aristotle individual things obtain their individuality “accidentally,” since it is due to matter, and therefore they exist for the sake of species and in the species, and do not find the purpose for their existence in themselves.

³⁰ For the first time in the pseudo-Aristotelian work *De mundo* (probably written in the first century AD) the concept of God appears as the savior and creator (σωτήρ καὶ γενέτωρ) of all things *ex nihilo*. Cf. Arystoteles [Aristotle], *O świecie* [*On the World*], trans. into Polish by A. Paciorek, in Arystoteles, *Dzieła wszystkie*, vol. 2, VI 397–b 20 ff, 399 a 31 ff.

Early Christianity, which came into contact with the Greek (i.e., Platonic), Gnostic, and Judeo-Hellenic concept of creation as making, tried to reconcile with it. It adopted some of these conceptions (e.g., the Platonic one) and rejected others. This is especially visible in the second half of the second century in commentaries on the truth of creation *ex nihilo* present in the Book of Genesis³¹ and in the Books of Machabees.³² Expressions such as Κτίστης and Ποιητής (*Creator, Factor*) were used interchangeably. Also in that period the word Δημιουργός started to lose its dominant (Platonic) meaning, which described someone who formed the world out of indefinite matter, and took on the meaning of a maker endowed with power and might to make the world, a maker who comprehends everything, rules over everything, and brings order from disorder, and brings in good order.

Philo of Alexandria as one of the first ancient Christian philosophers to teach that the word “creation” primarily describes the power characteristic of the maker and father of the world (Ποιητοῦ και Πατρός). He also called for break from the Aristotelian concept of God as the Unmoved Mover, and from the mental pictures of other philosophers. For his own part, he wanted to combine and reconcile the Old-Testament belief in the creation of the world *ex nihilo* found in the Book of Genesis and Books of Machabees with the Platonic doctrine of the builder of world drawn from the *Timaeus*.

However, it should be noted that first-century Christianity basically did not pose the question of the existence of the world (of the cosmos) in general, or of a primeval building material from which things are made. They were interested in the coming-into-being of particular things, and primarily the human soul. For this reason Clement,

³¹ “In the beginning God created heaven and earth. The earth was void and empty, and darkness was over the surface of the immense waters, and the Spirit of God moved over the waters” (*Gen.* 1, 1–2).

³² “But the Creator of the world, that formed the nativity of man, and that found out the origin of all, he will restore to you again, in his mercy, both breath and life, as now you despise yourselves for the sake of his laws” (2 *Mch.* 7, 23).

describing God as the Κρίστης and the Δημιουργός, the maker and builder of the world, who makes out of nothingness (non-being), at the same time accepted “the existence of eternal unformed matter” as the primeval building material of the world. Justin also thought God the Creator had formed the world “out of unformed eternal matter” (ἐξ ἀμόρφου ὕλης).

Other Fathers of the Church taught in a similar spirit and emphasized that creation as such is primarily the productive formation of unformed matter. They regarded the formation of matter as the work of creation.

Such interpretations of creation would become a bone of contention among the ancient Fathers of the Church. Tertullian gave expression to this, when in accusation he stated that there were still Christians who believed in creation, and simultaneously accepted the pre-existence of the matter from which the world arose (*ex aliquae materia*), not that it arose out of nothing (*ex nihilo*).³³ So, for example, the Christian gnostic Basilides thought that the world arose out of “unformed matter,” and conceived of the Creator as an artist or builder. Other gnostics, such as the Valentinians, rejected the idea that world had been created by the Supreme God and thought that world had been created by lower causes.³⁴

Tatianus was probably the first among the ancient philosophizing Christian theologians to teach in a strict sense that the world was created *ex nihilo*. He emphasized the complete creation of the world, including matter.³⁵ Theophilus of Antioch followed this doctrine. He asserted that God “made being out of non-being,” Only the Word of God and His wisdom assisted God in this.

³³ Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem*, ed. E. Evans, vol. 1–2 (Oxford 1972), I 15, 4 ff, V 19, 7.

³⁴ Hippolytus, *Refutatio omnium haeresium*, hrsg. P. Wendland (Leipzig 1916), VII 21, 4, X 14.

³⁵ Tatianus, *Oratio ad Graecos*, ed. E. Schwartz (Leipzig 1888), 5, 3.

Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen were influenced by Theophilus' doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. They, and Irenaeus and Tertullian especially, rejected the gnostic theory of the pre-existence of matter, and they emphasized the Creator's absolute autonomy in creating the world. While Clement of Alexandria still tried to reconcile the ancient (i.e., Platonic) and Christian cosmogonies,³⁶ Origen was already teaching that everything had been created, and that matter was not eternal. In like manner Gregory of Nyssa taught, with emphasis on the creation of man.

The Syrian commentators, however, remained among those who thought of creation as construction out of pre-existing matter. Among these we may mention Ephraim. He was influenced by the Manicheans and remarked on a certain order in the act of creation. Thus, nature (substance) was created first, then darkness, then wind (not spirit), and then light, fire, and night. However, he thought that matter was co-eternal with God.³⁷ Consequently Lucretius would argue that "ex nihilo nihil fit" and therefore nature is the "female creator" of things—"rerum natura creatrix."³⁸

Neo-Platonic philosophy, which was based on emanationism, basically did not know the theory of creation in the sense of *creatio ex nihilo*. While Porphyry used expressions close to the Christian doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, he did so in a Platonic spirit. Proclus interpreted Plato's *Timaeus* and taught only of eternal becoming, and he did not take up the problematic of the beginning of the world and of time.

From the above outline of the history of the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* we encounter among the ancient and early medieval Fathers of the Church, we are struck by a certain ambiguity. This ambiguity is

³⁶ Klemens Aleksandryjski [Clement of Alexandria], *Kobierce zapisków filozoficznych dotyczących prawdziwej wiedzy* [*The Stromata*], trans. into Polish by J. Niemirska-Pliszczyńska, vol. 2 (Warsaw 1994), V 14.

³⁷ Syrus Ephraem, *In Genesim et in Exodum commentarii*, ed. R. M. Tonneau (Louvain 1955), 5 ff.

³⁸ Titus Lucretius Carus, *De rerum natura*, II 1 16.

expressed in the reconciliation of the biblical belief in *creatio ex nihilo* with the simultaneous acceptance of the pre-existence of matter and of the world as a whole. This fact also shows the defeat of Christian exegetes and philosophers. This would find expression in the Church's creed (*symbolum fidei*). Hence the eastern creeds mentioned *creatio ex nihilo* as a truth of the faith, while the western creeds speak only of *creatio* (creation) but do not mention *creatio ex nihilo*. In the *Constitutio Apostolica*, written around 389, God is not called Creator, but only the maker and builder (Κρίστης καὶ Δημιουργός) of everything.³⁹

*The Beginnings of the Philosophical
Theory of creatio ex nihilo*

In medieval times, the concept of creation *ex nihilo* made its way from exegetical theology and apologetics to metaphysics and the philosophy of nature. Along with the words “factio” and “creatio,” the words “conditio,” “production,” and “fabricatio” were also used to describe the act of creation.⁴⁰

Augustine of Hippo remarked that in the fact of creation we have first of all a proof for the divine origin of the world. However, he described the act itself of creation as the formation of formless matter according to a form. He also taught that creation in time and the eternal plan of the world did not come into collision, since God as the eternal principle of creation always comes out from himself with an initiative. The reason for creation is God's fullness of goodness (*plenitudo bonitatis*). Hence everything that God did is good, and in the entire history of creation there is nothing evil. God, however, is not perfected by creation, since God is the “plenitudo perfectionis.”⁴¹

John Scot Eriugena wanted to make a synthesis of neo-Platonic philosophy and Christian theology. He connected the act of creation

³⁹ *Enchiridion symbolorum, definitionum et declarationum . . .*, ed. H. Denzinger, A. Schönmetzer (Barcinone 1963³²), n. 40–55.

⁴⁰ Thomas Aquinas often uses the term *productio* to describe the act of creation.

⁴¹ S. Augustinus, *De civitate Dei*, vol. 2 (Turnholti 1955), XI 21.

with the “operation of the divine will.” It is by virtue of the will that the Creator brings being out of non-being. However, the act of creation in the proper sense may be reduced only to the making of so-called *primordiales causae* (primordial causes) that are produced prior to space and matter, and lead unformed matter from non-being to being. Only the *primordiales causae* are an effect of the act of creation.⁴² Every creature has a share in the divine nature, and so it can continue to create by itself, because apart from it there is no other nature. This participation of the created nature in the divine nature is assumed *a priori* for the knowing reason, and it makes it possible for the created being to know.

The terminological distinction between *creare* and *facere* was introduced by Peter Lombard. The verb “to create” (*creare*), according to him, indicates making something “out of nothing,” and the verb *facere* indicates the formation of something out of matter.⁴³ Lombard also thought that the terminology concerning creation used in the Sacred Scripture was not univocal.

Avicenna in turn repeated the Aristotelian doctrine of the eternity of the world based on his acceptance of the belief of the eternity of the first heavens and prime matter. He related the process of coming-into-being to the sublunary world and described it as the actualization of potencies. However, he presented another line of argument for the eternity of the world: the world is the result of God’s pure love, and God is entirely love, therefore the world must exist eternally. Moreover, God’s eternity also requires eternal creation, otherwise God himself would be changeable. For indeed he would be different at the moment of non-creation and at the moment of creation.⁴⁴ The changing material world

⁴² Johannes Scotus Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, ed. I. P. Sheldon-Williams, vol. 1 (Dublin 1968), 64, 3 ff.

⁴³ Petrus Lombardus, *Sententiarum libri quatuor*, t. 2 (Parisiis 1841), sent. II, dict. I, c. II.

⁴⁴ Avicenna [Avicenna], *Księga wiedzy [Book of Knowledge]*, trans. into Polish B. Składanek (Warsaw 1974), 133.

participates in the process of creation because the divine principles do not abandon this constant change.⁴⁵

God's creative action, however, was reduced only to establishing and determining the order of the world. God could determine principles (or rules) of creation, but he was not free to determine the fact as such of creation. For indeed creation is a necessity, just as generation and corruption were a necessity for Aristotle. Creation's dependence on the Creator, however, would be guaranteed by the determination of the principles or rules of creation.

Anselm of Canterbury accepted the neo-Platonic descriptions of God as *Summa Natura*, *Summa Essentia*, and *Summa Substantia*. He also accepted the neo-Platonic conception of creation. He accepted the existence of an eternal nature that was the supreme substance, comprehended or included all possible things, and was prior to any creature. The supreme nature of itself is everything.⁴⁶ The supreme nature precedes the act proper of creation. In that nature the thoughts of forms and the project (or model) of the entire universe were composed.⁴⁷ Prior knowledge concerning the order of the entire universe made creation *ex nihilo* possible. The supreme nature contains knowledge concerning the world before the creation of the world. On the basis of this knowledge, the nature brings out the thoughts (or ideas) composed within it to being, and in this sense creation is the bringing out of being from non-being.⁴⁸

Theirry of Chartres introduced a distinction between *creatio rerum* and *generatio hominum*. He explained the coming-into-being of the world by appealing to Aristotle's doctrine of the four causes, to which he tried to give a theological and philosophical interpretation.

⁴⁵ Id., 134.

⁴⁶ Anselm z Canterbury [Anselm of Canterbury], *Monologion*, trans. into Polish by T. Włodarczyk (Warsaw 1992), ch. IV.

⁴⁷ Id., ch. IX.

⁴⁸ Id., ch. VIII, XI. Cf. O. Rossi, "La nozione di creazione in Anselmo d'Aosta," *Studia Patavina* 32 (1985): 597–604.

So, God is the *causa efficiens* for the world, Divine Wisdom is the *causa formalis*, and Divine Goodness is the *causa finalis*, while the four elements, namely water, earth, air, and fire, are the *causa materialis*.⁴⁹ Time appeared at the very moment when God created matter. God's active participation in creation ends with the creation of matter. Creation then develops according to purely natural principles; the description of these principles is determined by the neo-Platonic tradition looking to the *Timaeus*.⁵⁰

Moses Maimonides was the first to come forth with the clear doctrine that God created the world *ex nihilo* and that prior to creation there was nothing apart from God, and that God was not guided by any internal necessity.⁵¹ Moreover, Maimonides for the first time, using purely philosophical argumentation, tried to refute the opposition of philosophers to the theory of *creatio ex nihilo*. To this end he called attention to the need for a distinction between God's eternity, which was before God created the world, from the temporal character of creation. Time as a property of the motion of created things appeared together with the creation of the world. But time appears only together with creation, and therefore this allows us for the first time to speak of the temporal character of the world. Time before creation would be an argument for the eternity of the world (meanwhile, there is nothing of the sort!). God as the cause of creation is not subject to change. God would have to be subject to change if temporality existed before creation. Furthermore, it is indifferent to an immaterial substance whether it acts or not. For indeed action is a passage from potency to act, and it is

⁴⁹ Thierry of Chartres, *Tract. de sex dierum operibus*, in *Commentaries on Boethius by Thierry of Chartres and His School*, ed. N. Häring (Toronto 1971), 555.

⁵⁰ N. M. Häring, *De Erschaffung der Welt und ihr Schöpfer nach Thierry von Ch. und Clarenbaldus von Arras*, in *Platonismus in der Philosophie des Mittelalters*, hrsg. W. Beierwaltes (Darmstadt 1969), 161–267.

⁵¹ F. Ueberweg, *Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie*, II: *Die patristische und scholastische Philosophie*, hrsg. B. Geyer (Basel 1956), 340.

characteristic of material things. This also does not apply to God when we are speaking of the act of creation.⁵²

Maimonides' argumentation paved the way for the formation of grounds for the philosophical theory of *creatio ex nihilo*. So it is not strange that with the reception of Aristotelian philosophy by the mediation of its Arab commentators, there appeared, this time already in philosophy, the problem of creation as one of the central issues of the philosophy of nature. However, disagreements concerning how to understand *creatio ex nihilo* also appeared.

Boethius of Dacia proposed to reconcile Aristotle (who taught the eternity of the first heavens and of prime matter) and Maimonides (who taught *creatio ex nihilo*). Boethius resolved the problem in accordance with the principle of "two truths." He said that the theory of the world's creation *ex nihilo* was impossible to accept in philosophy because *creatio ex nihilo* is contrary to all the principles of the Aristotelian philosophy of nature and metaphysics, and especially the principle that *ex nihilo nihil fit*. As a solution to the problem in the philosophy of nature, he proposed to use the Aristotelian concept of *generatio et corruptio* and to accept an eternal and indestructible material substrate, conceived of as pure potentiality. Boethius proposes that the term "creatio ex nihilo" should be reserved for theology and regarded as an object of faith.⁵³

The Church officially rejected this theory in the year 1277 and described it as Averroist, since it rested on the principle of "two truths," a theory in which "a truth is contrary to a truth."

Bonaventure, however, looked to Augustine and use the Aristotelian-Averroist concept of creation. He accepted the desire for good as

⁵² A. Hyman, *Maimonides on Creation and Emanation*, in: *Studies in Medieval Philosophy*, ed. J. F. Wippel (Washington 1987), 45–61.

⁵³ Boecjusz z Dacji [Boethius of Dacia], *O wieczności wszechświata* [*On the Eternity of the World*], in Boecjusz z Dacji, *O dobru Najwyższym czyli o życiu filozofa i inne pisma* [*On the Highest Good or on the Life of the Philosopher and Other Beings*], trans. into Polish by L. Regner (Warsaw 1990), 59–99.

the most important reason for creation. Hence he conceived of creation as the imparting of the Creator's goodness and wisdom. By retaining the Aristotelian concepts of matter and form he could treat creation as a high-minded form-creating action. In the act of "creating" a simultaneous union of form and matter occurs. However, they are indestructible and eternal. Hence he makes a distinction between divine creation (*creatio*) conceived as a high-minded and magnanimous action and *actio* conceived as arranging performed on prepared material. God's simplicity requires that the act as such of creation be treated as something that is "prior to God and the world." For indeed God as a simple being cannot bring out being from Himself, as this would disturb his simplicity. Hence creation precedes God and nothingness.⁵⁴

The next step, which brings us closer to the formulation of the philosophical theory of *creatio ex nihilo*, is the philosophy of Albert the Great. He was one of the first to attempt to refute the universality of the Aristotelian theory of *generatio et corruptio* as applied to the explanation of how material things come into being. Albert thought that the plurality and variety of forms could not be explained by alteration of indestructible matter. Therefore he remarked that we must look to a transcendental cause for matter and for forms, and also for change. This is precisely the purpose of metaphysical inquiries.⁵⁵

The doubt Albert raised concerning the Aristotelian theory of *generatio et corruptio*, and his calling attention to the fundamental difference between *generatio* and *corruptio* would become the inspiration and starting point for Thomas Aquinas' formulation of the philosophical theory of *creatio ex nihilo*.

Thomas conceived of the Aristotelian *generatio* as *mutatio* (change) that could not be identified with *creatio*. *Generatio a priori*

⁵⁴ St. Bonaventure, *Opera theologica*, ed. L. M. Bello, vol. 1: *Liber I Sententiarum* (Quaracchi 1934), q. 2.

⁵⁵ Albertus Magnus, *Opera omnia*, cura ac labore A. Borgnet, t. 3: *Physicorum libri VIII* (Parisiis 1890), 549–553. Cf. I. Craemer-Ruegenberg, *Albertus Magnus* (München 1980), 78–96.

assumes the eternal existence of matter and specific forms potentially contained in pre-existing matter. Meanwhile, *creatio* is not an alteration of substance, but the complete calling of substance to being (to existence).⁵⁶ Change (*mutatio*), like generation (*generatio*), must have a subject in a substrate that already is there. Therefore the act of creation cannot be defined in terms of motion or change.⁵⁷

The understanding of being or substance as developed profoundly by Thomas was primarily the key to resolving the problem of the existence of the world and the formulation of the philosophical theory of creation. It is expressed in the discovery of new compositions of being, namely essence and existence, in the place of matter and form. For indeed it turned out that when the eternity of the first heavens, prime matter, and forms was called into question, then neither matter alone, nor form, nor their composition were the reason for the existence of concrete things. Thomas' perception of these limitations and of the weakness of Aristotelian metaphysics enabled him to discover the efficient-creative cause of being, and to formulate the philosophical theory of *creatio ex nihilo* and the only rational theory that made it possible to explain ultimately the fact that the world exists as a whole, and that individual beings exist.

Thomas' Exposition of the Theory of *creatio ex nihilo*

When we discuss the philosophical theory of *creatio ex nihilo*, we must distinguish between the context in which the theory was discovered, and the context in which it was rationally justified. We must also note the fact that the theory of *creatio ex nihilo* is formulated in a negative form, that is, it does not explain in detail how the world came into being but merely shows that the world "did not come into being out

⁵⁶ S. Thomae Aquinatis, *Summa contra Gentiles*, II, c. 16.

⁵⁷ *Id.*, c. 19.

of something” that already existed.⁵⁸ If we do not treat the theory of *creatio ex nihilo* as a negative theory, we face the problem of conceiving of the world’s creation as the creation of being “out of nothingness,” which entails that the validity of the philosophical principle of *ex nihilo nihil fit* would have to be restricted. Meanwhile, the theory of *creatio ex nihilo* does not mean that being was called into existence “out of non-being,” but that the Creator is the cause of everything that is—form, matter, properties, and substance—and that nothing exists apart from Him that did not come from Him.⁵⁹ The universe was and is a work of creation (*creatio continua*).

The Context of Discovery

Without doubt, when he formulated the philosophical theory of *creatio ex nihilo*, Aquinas was inspired by the biblical doctrine of the creation of the world, and by some elements of the teaching of the Greek and Latin Church fathers. However, in this fact there is nothing that would lower the philosophical value of the theory as such. The context of discovery may differ from the context of rational justification. This is often the case when scientific truths are discovered (it suffices to recall Archimedes’ law or the discovery of the model of the atom).

The biblical doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* allowed Thomas to pose the important question of the validity of the philosophical assertion that the world as such was eternal. The argumentation to which Thomas resorted in questioning those views was not a theological or biblical one, but a typically philosophical (metaphysical) one. Consequently the real problem (not an illusory problem) of the world’s existence began to enter the minds of philosophers and natural scientists. That problem had not been previously resolved (or even properly presented). The *a priori* belief in the eternity of the world, eternal heavens,

⁵⁸ “Deus in esse res produxit ex nullo praeeistente sicut ex materia” (Id., c. 16).

⁵⁹ Id., c. 15.

eternal matter, and eternal form, presented an obstacle to that. This entailed the need to pose the question again on the foundations of the rationality and intelligibility (or knowability) of the world; that is to say, why particular beings (things, plants, animals, and human beings) realize a definite plan (idea, or thought), and are neither a “nameless” individual existing for the sake of species, nor a reflection of another reality, nor an accidentally shaped mass that only the human reason describes and rationalizes.

The question of the teleology of particular things and of the world as a whole would also require a new answer. Why do particular things and the entire world have an end inscribed in them, an end they realize, and why do they not appear as something accidental?

The philosophical theory of *creatio ex nihilo* that Thomas formulated was a philosophical summons to understand more profoundly the existence of the world of persons and things, and for this reason it showed his scientific honesty and courage and his philosophical genius. Moreover, as it was formulated in the terrain of philosophy, it appeared as a form of a purely rational explanation of reality against the belief, prevalent among philosophers, that the world existed eternally, and that things continuously came into being from a previously existing building material.

The Context of Rational Justification

- The Rejection of the *opinio communis*

Thomas had to oppose the *opinio communis* prevalent in philosophy and in part in theology that stated *ex nihilo nihil fit* (from non-being being does not come into being), according to which it was held that the world exists eternally, and things come into being from an eternal and indestructible substrate. The rejection of the *opinio communis* was a delicate problem for Thomas, because he often appealed to the general opinion in various lines of argument, and he saw in the general opinion an element of the heritage of truth-oriented cognition. On the

other hand, he was also aware that in this case he had to refute and reject the *opinio communis*.

For this reason, Aquinas first discussed the nature of the intellect, which is disposed to acquire knowledge of the truth—therefore all human beings strive to know the truth and achieve the truth. This was confirmed indeed by the general opinion that people achieve with respect to various matters, in various times, and in various cultures. Therefore, “what all say cannot be completely false.”⁶⁰ If the opposite were the case, that would show some insurmountable weakness of our mind in the effort to reach the truth.

Thomas cites Aristotle (Book I of the *Physics*) and recalls: “It is the general opinion of all philosophers that from non-being, being cannot come into being.”⁶¹

Therefore this opinion should have been true. On the other hand, *creatio ex nihilo* could not have been preceded by any previously existing substrate or primeval element. To defend the principle that the *opinio communis* could not be in error, but at the same time to question this particular *opinio communis* concerning the eternity of the world, Thomas pointed to the reasons why that opinion arose. Thomas said that the opinion concerning the eternity of the world was true and right in the thought-context represented by the ancient thinkers with respect to how the world came to be, and it was a result of the method of cognition they used. The ancient philosophers treated the coming-into-being of concrete things as an accidental operation, not as an essential one. This resulted in part from the fact that they thought, on the basis of observation and sense cognition, that the process of coming-into-being

⁶⁰ “Quod enim ab omnibus communiter dicitur, impossibile est totaliter esse falsum” (Id., c. 34).

⁶¹ “Defectus autem per accidens sunt, quia (sunt) praeter naturae intentionem; quod autem est per accidens, non potest esse semper et in omnibus . . . Iudicium, quod ab omnibus de veritate datur, non potest esse errorum. Communis autem sententia est omnium philosophorum, ex nihilo nihil fieri. Oportet igitur esse verum. Si igitur aliquid est factum, oportet ex aliquo esse factum; quod si etiam factum sit, oportet etiam et hoc ex alio fieri” (Id.).

and the substrate from which come things and the forms according to which the things are formed were stable and eternal. Thomas explains:

Wherefore those who sought the principle of things considered only the particular makings of beings, and inquired in what manner this particular fire or this particular stone was made. At first, considering the making of things more from an outward point of view than it behoved them to do, they stated that a thing is made only in respect of certain accidental dispositions, such as rarity, density, and so forth; and they said, in consequence, that to be made was nothing else than to be altered, for the reason that they understood everything to be made from an actual being.⁶²

Thomas explained that when they began to consider how things came into being internally, and so, how being came into being from potency, the philosophers began to assert the following:

[A] thing does not need to be made, except accidentally, from an actual being, and that it is made per se from a being in potentiality. But this making, which is of a being from any being whatsoever, is the making of a particular being, which is made for as much as it is this being, for instance a man or a fire, but not for as much as it is considered universally: for there was previously a being which is transformed into this being.⁶³

Considering all this, it is not strange that over time the opinion that in coming-into-being something always comes into being out of something else, and that “from nothing, nothing comes into being,” became strongly rooted. Moreover, this opinion was determined by the

⁶² “Communis enim philosophorum positio ponentium ex nihilo nihil fieri, ex qua prima ratio procedebat, veritatem habet secundum illud fieri quod ipsi considerabant . . . Et ideo primi, magis extrinsece quod oporteret fieri rem considerantes, posuerunt rem fieri solum secundum quasdam accidentales dispositiones, ut rarum, densum et huiusmodi, dicentes per consequens fieri nihil esse nisi alterari, propter hoc quod ex ente actu unumquodque fieri intelligebant” (Id., c. 37). English translation cited after: Saint Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Contra Gentiles*, Book II, trans. the English Dominican Fathers from the Latest Leonine Edition (London: Burns Oates & Washbourne Ltd, 1923), 80; hereafter cited as: SCG (1923).

⁶³ Id. SCG (1923), 80.

method of inquiry in which when they explained how things came into being they appealed to the most proximate causes, not to a universal cause that would explain how beings and the world in general came into existence. This attitude was typical of the inquiries of the philosophers of nature. Thomas, however, remarked that “neither does it belong to the natural philosophers to consider this same origin of things, but to the metaphysician, who considers universal being and things that are devoid of movement.”⁶⁴

This is how Thomas resolved the delicate and important problem of the *opinio communis* which enabled him to take further steps towards developing arguments for the rational justification of *creatio ex nihilo*.

- The Discovery of the World’s Contingency

The first argument to which Thomas resorted to refute the view that the world and matter were eternal can be counted among the group of indirect arguments. In this argument, Thomas accented that it was impossible to accept that there was in the world any being or element with which existence was necessarily connected (matter, form, or the first heavens). This, indeed, would lead to monism. That was in fact the case for the first Greek naturalists. Thales linked existence with the primordial element of water, others with the primordial element of air, fire, or earth. Therefore for Thales, to exist meant to be from water. For this reason, everything that existed should be the water of some kind. The consequence of making existence necessary in this way, and linking existence with some primordial element, is monism, but monism is a contradiction of the plurality of things.

⁶⁴ “In hac autem processione totius entis a Deo, non est possibile fieri aliquid ex aliquo alio praeiacente; non enim esset totius entis creati factio. Et hanc quidem factionem non attigerunt primi naturales, quorum erat communis sententia, ex nihilo nihil fieri; vel si qui eam attigerunt, non proprie nomen factionis ei competere consideraverunt, cum nomen factionis motum vel mutationem importet. In hac autem totius entis origine ab uno primo ente, intelligi non potest transmutatio unius entis in aliud . . . propter hoc quod nec ad naturalem philosophum primum, qui considerat ens commune et ea quae sunt separata a motu” (Id.). SCG (1923), 81.

Plato was another example. He linked existence with an immaterial idea or form. Hence “to exist” meant to be an idea. One consequence of this was that the realism of the material world was called into question, and the material world was presented in opposition to the immaterial world. Aristotle, on the other hand, linked existence with prime matter, substantial form, and the first heavens. Things in the world are only subject to incessant reorganization by the first cause of motion, which was the First Mover; the world as a whole retained its indestructibility and eternity.

The second argument Thomas used that the existence of the world was not necessary was his discovery of new ontological factors in composite things, namely essence and existence, and his perception that these factors were not identical. The identification of essence with existence in being would entail the acceptance of the existence of eternal essence, along the lines of the Platonic ideas, or would entail support for pantheism in which everything would be a manifestation of the same existence. Hence Thomas called attention to the inexhaustibility of existence in some one manifestation of being, in some one kind of substance. And that would be the case if essence were identified with existence in being. Moreover, only an individual and autonomous act of existence, an act not identical to the content of a being (or the arrangement of the content) can be the foundation of authentic pluralism.

All the analyses and arguments that Aquinas cited thereafter show that world could not exist eternally, because things are completely caused in their existence, caused both with respect to content, form, substance and accidents.⁶⁵ That which is not the cause of itself and does not exist in itself and through itself cannot have in itself the necessity of its own existence.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ “Non est necessarium creaturas fuisse ab aeterno” (Id., c. 31).

⁶⁶ “Si enim universitatem creaturarum vel quamcumque unam creaturam necesse est esse, oportet quod necessitatem istam habeat ex se vel ex alio . . . quod autem non habet esse a se, impossibile est quod necessitatem essendi a se habeat; quia quod necesse est esse, impossibile est non esse” (Id.).

- The Discovery of the Creative Cause

The second part of the arguments Thomas presented for the theory of *creatio ex nihilo* concerned the discovery of the creative cause. He wanted to show that the fact of the existence of the First Cause could not be reconciled with a simultaneous acceptance of the eternal existence of the world and eternal matter.

In discussion with the views of his predecessors he shifted the accent from the problem of the eternity of the world to the problem of its dependence in existence. For indeed one could accept that the world existed eternally, but this does not entitle one to conclude that the world in its existence is independent of the Creator, just as one cannot infer that a footprint in the sand is independent of a foot, or that it was there before the foot. Thomas here listed three kinds of arguments: those build on an understanding of the creative cause itself, those appealing to the nature of created beings, and those based on an analysis of the way things are created.

As he analyzed the understanding of the creative cause, Thomas noticed that it pertains to the essence of the Creator that He acts through reason and will without the mediation of anything else. The effects He calls forth receive the beginning of existence.⁶⁷ Hence, without falling into contradiction, one cannot accept a creative cause and simultaneously say that the existence of the world is eternal. Between the will and the act there is nothing intermediate that would move the will to act. Understanding and volition is the action of the Creator. The effect thus results from the resolution of the mind and will. Just as the mind determines every condition for the created thing, so it also determines time. Nothing stands in the way of the Creator's action being from eter-

⁶⁷ "Non enim oportet quod per se vel per accidens Deus moveatur, si effectus eius de novo esse incipiunt . . . Novitas autem divini effectus non demonstrat novitatem actionis in Deo, cum actio sua sit sua essentia . . ." (Id., c. 35).

nity, but the effect is not from eternity, but “at the time appointed by God from eternity.”⁶⁸ Moreover, Thomas remarks:

For if we suppose a sufficient cause, we suppose its effect, but not an effect outside the cause: for this would be through insufficiency of the cause, as if for instance a hot thing failed to give heat. Now the proper effect of the will is for that thing to be which the will wills: and if something else were to be than what the will wills, this would be an effect that is not proper to the cause but foreign thereto. But just as the will, as we have said, wills this thing to be such and such, so does it will it to be at such and such a time. Wherefore, for the will to be a sufficient cause, it is not necessary for the effect to be when the will is, but when the will has appointed the effect to be.⁶⁹

Thomas also noted that we cannot accept any difference in duration before the beginning of creation. The duration of the Creator, who is eternal, has no parts. It is simple and in it there is no before or after. So we should not compare the beginning of creation to different stages ordered in time according to a previously existing measure. The creator simultaneously calls the effect and time into existence. At best we may wonder why the Creator gave a beginning to creation, but not why he

⁶⁸ “Deus agit voluntarie in rerum productione, non autem ita quod sit aliqua alia ipsius actio media, sicut in nobis actio virtutis motivae est modica inter actum voluntatis et effectum . . . sed oportet quod suum intelligere et velle sit suum facere. Effectus autem ab intellectu et voluntate sequitur secundum determinationem intellectus, et imperium voluntatis . . . Nihil igitur prohibet dicere actionem Dei ab aeterno fuisse, effectum autem non ab aeterno; sed tunc cum ab aeterno disposuit” (Id.). SCG (1923), 75.

⁶⁹ “Ex quo etiam patet quod etsi Deus sit sufficiens causa productionis rerum in esse, non tamen oportet quod eius effectus aeternus ponatur, eo existente aeterno . . . Posita enim cause sufficiente, ponitur eius effectus, non autem effectus extraneus a causa: hoc enim esset ex insufficientia causae, ac sic calidum non calefaceret. Proprius autem effectus voluntatis est ut sit hoc quod voluntas vult: si autem aliquid aliud esset quam voluntas velit, non poneretur effectus proprius cause, sed alienus ab ea. Volumus autem, sicut dictum est, sicut vult hoc esse tale, ita vult hoc esse tunc” (Ibid.). SCG (1923), 74.

did not do this earlier or later. Otherwise, we would have to accept the idea that time is infinite and eternal.⁷⁰

Thomas explains that the essence (the purpose) of the Creator's will is goodness. The Creator, however, does not act in order to call this end into being, as man calls things and thereby perfects his own goodness. The creator does not need to perfect his own goodness. That goodness is eternal and unchanging, and nothing can be added to it. If He acts for an end, it is in such a way that He causes the effect so that the effect participates in the end (the good). Thus from the fact that the effect stands in a necessary connection to the end, we should not conclude that the effect is eternal, but at most that the effect cannot be without a purpose.⁷¹

The passages of argumentation for creation *ex nihilo* cited above, based on an analysis of the conception of the Creative Cause, show the metaphysical basis upon which Thomas based his interpretation.

The second part of the argumentation is built on an analysis of the nature of contingent beings. Thomas wants to show that the very nature of contingent beings requires that we indicate a reason for their being, since necessity of existence does not belong to their nature. This applies both to material and immaterial beings. Hence Thomas remarked that the necessity of an order occurring in created things (e.g., that a human being must have a body and soul, or that a triangle must have three angles) does not entail the necessity for this object to exist

⁷⁰ "Non est autem ante totius creaturae inchoationem, diversitatem aliquam partium durationis accipere . . . nam nihil mensuram non habet, nec durationem . . . quae quidem rationi requireretur, si aliqua duratio in partes divisibiles esset praeter totam creaturam productam: sicut accidet in particularibus agentibus, a quibus producitur effectus in tempore, non autem ipsum tempus. Deus autem simul in esse product et creaturam et tempus" (Id.).

⁷¹ "In producendo . . . res sicut propter finem, uniformis, habitudo finis ad agentem non est consideranda ut ratio operis sempiterni; sed magis est attendenda habitudo finis ad effectum qui fit propter finem, ut taliter producat effectus, qualiter convenientius ordinetur ad finem; unde per hoc quod finis uniformiter se habet ad agentem, non potest concludere, quod effectus sit sempiternus" (Id.)

eternally. Therefore from the fact, e.g., that there is no potency to non-being in the substance of heaven, which according to Aristotle is immaterial, it does not follow that its eternal existence is necessary, but at most this follows from the nature of substance of heaven, which as such (as indestructible) was called into existence.⁷²

This argumentation is a response to those who held that the species of things must be eternal, since in this way only can the nature of beings that particular individuals exhibit be retained. In Thomas' opinion, this argument starts from the existence of species already called into being, that is, it appeals to the nature (of beings) already created in this way.⁷³

The third group of arguments is based on an analysis of the process itself of creation. One of the most frequently assertions cited by philosophers is that each and every thing that begins to exist anew is a result of a passage from one state to another. This passage occurs through change and motion. Motion or change, however, must always occur in some subject, and that subject precedes the coming-into-being of the thing.⁷⁴

Regarding this argument, Thomas remarked that only metaphorically can we call creation a change or motion; namely, in the sense that a created thing has "being after non-being." We also speak metaphorically when we say that one thing comes into being from another in the case when one thing is not transformed into another but only occurs after the other (e.g., day after night). For indeed since nothing exists prior to being (created being), we cannot infer that when motion begins

⁷² "Necessitas enim essendi quae in creaturis invenitur, ex quo prima ratio sumitur, est necessitas ordinis . . . licet enim substantia coeli, per hoc quod caret potentia ad non esse, habeat necessitatem ad esse, haec tamen necessitas non sequitur eius substantiam" (Id., c. 36).

⁷³ "[I]ntentio naturalium agentium ad specierum perpetuitatem, ex qua quarta ratio procedebat, praesupponit naturalia agentia iam producta" (Id.).

⁷⁴ "Omne quod de novo esse incipit, antequam esset, possibile erat ipsum esse . . . Oportet igitur, ante quodlibet de novo incipiens, praexistere subiectum potentia ens" (Id., c. 34).

to exist, then it is in another state now than it was before. For indeed motion is a property of a being that has come into being.⁷⁵ The process of the creation of things consists in the calling of the things into being in entirety. Hence there is no need for a passive potency to precede this act.⁷⁶ In the things that come into being as a result of motion or change, however, coming-into-being is not equivalent to their being called into being, but it is only an actualization of the potency of matter that has existed from eternity. However, where coming-into-being is not a result of motion, becoming does not precede existence.⁷⁷

In the conclusion of the argumentation presented for the theory of *creatio ex nihilo*, Thomas remarked on the proper understanding of the “cause of the universe.” The “cause of the universe” must be first in relation to everything that comes into being as a result of its action.⁷⁸ For indeed creation means that a being has not come into being from something that already existed, but that from the Creator it has received everything that it is and possesses.⁷⁹ In the calling of things from non-being to existence, Thomas saw an expression of the supreme power and goodness of the Creator. Hence to the question of why the world came into being, Thomas has one answer: it did not come into being out of necessity, nor did it come into being from any pre-existing matter, but it is a sign of the Creator’s free will, and it bears within it such a sign.

⁷⁵ “Creatio mutatio dici non potest nisi secundum metaphoram, prout creatum consideratur habere esse post non-esse” (Id., c. 37).

⁷⁶ “Ex hoc etiam patet quod non oportet aliquam potentiam passivam praecedere esse totius entis creati . . . Hoc enim est necessarium in illis quae, per motum, essendi principium sumunt, eo quod motus est actus existentis in potentia” (Id.).

⁷⁷ “Nam fieri non simul est causa esse rei, in his quae per motum fiunt, in quorum fieri successio invenitur; in his autem quae non fiunt per motu, non prius est fieri quam esse” (Id.).

⁷⁸ “Causam autem oportet duratione praecedere ea quae per actionem causae fiunt” (Id., c. 38).

⁷⁹ “Cum totum ens a Deo sit creatum, non potest dici factum esse ex aliquo ente” (Id., c. 37).

The Formulation of the Theory of creatio ex nihilo

As we enter upon a reconstruction of Thomas' theory of the creation of the world *ex nihilo*, we should make a few important remarks. First, we should make a distinction between the theological theory and the philosophical theory of creation. Second, we should consider the theory's negative formulation, for indeed the theory states only that the world did not come into being out of something [else]. Third, the theory of *creatio ex nihilo* is an integral part of the philosophical interpretation of reality, and it is strictly connected with the conception of being and the Absolute developed in realistic metaphysics. Fourth, in realistic philosophy the theory of creation *ex nihilo* and the problem of the Creator are not questions brought over from theology (or from divine revelation), but they are a consequence of the rational explanation of the existence of the world of persons and things.

● Creation as *productio ex nihilo*

In Thomas' exposition of the philosophical theory of creation, there are two key formulations that he uses in the work *Summa contra Gentiles*. The first is the description of the act of creation as *productio* instead of *creatio*, and the second formulation conceives of creation as the constitution of *ipsa dependentia esse creati ad principium* (the dependence itself of created existence upon its source).

At first glance, the verb *producere* is weaker than the verb *creare*. However, this small change in the word used is important. The term *creatio* and its Greek counterparts κρίσις or γένεσις primarily indicate the power and might of the efficient cause. This power can be expressed in the ordering of chaos, the leading out from potency to act, in projection, etc. In accepting such an understanding of the term "creation" many philosophers tried to reconcile the view that the world was created with the view that prime matter and the first heavens exist eternally. Hence the term "creation," on account of its inconsistent usage, suggested more a process of "making," "organization," or "shaping,"

than a calling “from non-being to being” (*creatio ex nihilo*) of the world of persons, plants, animals, and things.

Hence it is not strange that the verb *producere* that Thomas uses so often, first, breaks from a tradition burdened with a wrong interpretation of the word *creare*, second, he remarks that creation is a “leading-out” (*pro-ducere*) of something to being. By resorting to the word *producere* (*-dixi, -ductum*), Thomas wanted to call attention to the fact that the essence of the theory of creation is that it does not assume that it is necessary for some substrate to exist from which things would come into being.

The most important image associated in history with the theory of creation is the Platonic metaphor of the work of a craftsman taken from the *Timaeus*, in which the building material is not subject to creation. This building material was conceived of in various ways: as matter, as darkness, as disorder (chaos), and as the indefinite. For this reason, the moment of creation was linked with ordering, motion, and the shaping of things in the eternal raw material. In order to depart from this type of reasoning, Thomas emphasized that the Creator “brought things into being out of no pre-existing thing as matter.”⁸⁰

The arguments Aquinas presents for *productio ex nihilo* show the philosophical basis of his theory; these arguments are many and various. They show how broadly Thomas used the metaphysical foundation to formulate the theory and justify it philosophically. The first argument for the theory of *productio ex nihilo* is based on an analysis of the relation of effect and cause, and it appeals to the principle that it is impossible to indicate first causes by *regressus ad infinitum*. When He calls forth effects, the Creator does not need any previously existing matter to act upon. Otherwise, we would need to seek subsequent reasons for the existence of “prime matter” thus conceived, and we would have to go to infinity, or we would have to accept that prime matter is God, and

⁸⁰ “Deus in esse produxit ex nullo praeexistente sicut ex materia” (Id., c. 16). SCG (1923), 21.

this would lead to pantheism. Thus, the Creator must be the beginning and source of the existence of the universe both with respect to content and to form.⁸¹

The second argument to which Thomas resorts concerns the distinction between a particular cause and a universal cause. He shows that an agent who by necessity in order to act needs some previously existing matter whereby it acts (for it introduces a form) is a particular cause. The Creator, however, is the universal cause, which means that the Creator is the cause of this concrete thing here, just as He is the cause of everything that is, including matter. The Creator in his action does not need any previously existing matter.⁸²

The third argument is based on an analysis of the cause of motion and the cause of existence and leads to distinction between them. Thomas shows that the cause of existence (being) is more universal than a cause of motion. For indeed not everything that exists is moved. So, above a cause that is only a cause of motion and change, there must be a cause that is a cause of the existence of being. Every cause that as a result of motion and alteration can call things into being from previously existing matter is a secondary cause in relation to the cause that can call being to existence, and do this without previously existing matter.⁸³

⁸¹ “Ostensum est enim (I, c. 17) quod ipse non est materia alicuius rei, nec potest esse a Deo, cui Deus non sit causa essendi . . . Relinquitur igitur quod Deus, in productione sui effectus, non requirit material praeiacentem ex qua operetur” (Id.).

⁸² “Agentes igitur quod requirit ex necessitate materiam praeiacentem ex qua operatur, est agens particulare. Deus autem est agens sicut causa universalis essendi” (Id.).

⁸³ “Esse autem est universalis quam moveri; sunt enim quaedam entium immobilia . . . Oportet ergo quod supra causam quae non agit nisi movendo et transmutando, sit illa causa quae est primum essendi principium . . . Deus igitur non agit tantummodo movendo et transmutando. Omne autem quod non potest producere res in esse nisi ex materia praeiacente, agit solum movendo et transmutando; facere enim aliquid ex materia esset per motum vel mutationem quamdam. Non ergo impossibile est producere res in esse sine materia praeiacente. Producit igitur Deus res in esse sine materia praeiacente” (Id.).

In the next argument, Thomas points to the ontological primacy of the cause of existence in relation to the cause of motion, appealing to his own existential metaphysics. He remarks that a cause of motion cannot be the ultimate cause of being. For indeed that which acts only through motion and change is not something proper to the universal cause, which is the cause both of the individual thing and of everything that is. What results from motion and alteration is not a being which comes into being out of nothingness in an absolute sense, but only a being which comes from another being.⁸⁴

In the next argument as he appeals to the suitability of action to the agent, Thomas shows that every agent acts in a way corresponding to how it actually exists and by what it actually exists. The imparting of a form to matter that already exists is proper to a being that has been actualized by the form within it, and such a being can be the cause of material things, but not the cause of forms themselves. The imparting of existence to form and matter can be done only by a being whose proper mode of action is to call an entire thing into existence, a being that exists *per se* and does not need previously existing matter in its action.⁸⁵

The next argument to which Thomas resorts is built on an analysis of the action of a subject. Action as such is a property of an acting subject and is ordered to it. Hence matter is sometimes compared to an

⁸⁴ “Quod agit tantum per motum et mutationem, non competit universali causae eius quod est esse; non enim per motum et mutationem fit ens ex non-ente simpliciter, sed ens hoc ex non-ente hoc. Ens autem est universale essendi principium . . . Non igitur sibi competit agere tantum per motum actu per mutationem; neque igitur sibi competit indigere praeiacente materia ad aliquid faciendum” (Id.).

⁸⁵ “Unumquodque agens sibi simile agit; agit enim secundum quod actu est. Illius igitur agentis erit producere effectum causando aliquo modo formam materiae inhaerentem, quod est actu per formam sibi inhaerentem et non per totam substantiam suam; unde Philosophus (Metaph. VII, text. comm. 28) probat quod res materiales, habentibus formas in materia, generantur a materialibus agentibus, non a formis per se existentibus. Deus autem non est ens actu per aliquid sibi inhaerens, sed per totam suam substantiam . . . Igitur proprius modus suae actionis est ut producat rem subsistentem totam, non solum rem inhaerentem, scilicet forma in materia. Per hunc autem modum agit omne agens quod materiam in agendo non requirit” (Id.).

acting subject that receives action or draws it out of itself. For indeed from matter actions are brought out, and matter also passively receives action (*ut in quo* and *ut a quo*). An acting subject must in its existence precede action. Hence every agent needs matter from which action comes forth, and which would accept the agent's action. Meanwhile, creative action is not a property of the Creator. For indeed the Creator does not act by action that is in him as in a subject and which must be received by another subject. The Creator's action is His essence and substance. To call forth an effect, He does not need any previously existing matter.⁸⁶

In the next argument Thomas appeals to an analysis of the concept of matter. He remarks on the fact that there is no single type of matter that could be common to everything that is. One kind of matter is in material beings, another in spiritual beings, one type in changing beings and another in unchanging beings. This is readily apparent because various kinds of action and reception occur. In material things action and reception are proper to matter; in spiritual beings they are immaterial (the reason receives ideas of things known); the celestial bodies, when undergoing change, do not change their being, but location. Thus there is no single matter that would be the primordial stuff for all beings.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ "Materia comparatur ad agens, sicut recipiens actionem quae ab ipso est; actus enim, qui est agentis ut a quo, est patientis ut in quo. Igitur requiritur materia ab aliquo agente, ut recipiat actionem ipsius; ipsa enim actio agentis, in patiente recepta, est actus agentis et formae, aut aliqua inchoatio formae in ipso. Deus autem non agit actione aliqua, quam necesse sit in aliquo patiente recipi; quai sua actio est sua substantia . . . Non igitur ad producendum effectum requirit materiam praeiacentem" (Id.).

⁸⁷ "Diversarum rerum diversae sunt materiae; non enim est eadem materia spiritualium et corporalium, nec corporum caelestium et corruptibilium; quod quidem ex hoc patet quod recipere, quod est proprietas materiae, non eiusdem rationis est in praedictis; nam receptio quae est in spiritualibus est intelligibilis, sicut intellectus recipit species intelligibilium non secundum esse materiae; corpora vero supercaelestia recipiunt innovationem situs, non autem innovationem essendi, sicut corpora inferiora. Non est igitur una materia quae sit in potentia ad esse universale. Ipse autem Deus est totius esse

Among the arguments for *productio ex nihilo* there is also one based on an analysis of order. If we perceive in nature some law and order among things, then one thing must come from another, or both from some third thing, and in one thing there must be a set order that would correspond to the other. All the more order must concern that which is recognized as first. Otherwise, everything would arise by way of accident. Thus if there is some prime matter proportional to the creative action, then only the Creator can be its cause. Otherwise He would not be the first being or the first cause.⁸⁸

The next important argument for *productio ex nihilo* is an argument built on an analysis of the primacy of act in relation to potency. Act is prior by nature and must be absolutely prior to potency. This is seen in the fact that only a being in act can reduce a potency to an act. Matter is a being in potency. Thus the Creator, who is the first and pure act (*actus primus et purus*), must be prior to all matter and to the world, and so must be their cause.⁸⁹

On the basis of the arguments cited, we can see that Thomas Aquinas had one goal before him: to reject the view of the ancient philosophers who taught that matter did not possess any cause for its existence, and that the concept of creation could not be reconciled with the concept of the eternal existence of the world. Thomas was aware of the revolutionary character of his interpretation in relation to Plato and Aristotle, and also in the context of the patristic tradition as broadly

causa universaliter. Ipsi igitur nulla materia proportionaliter respondet; non igitur materiam ex necessitate requirit" (Id.).

⁸⁸ "Quorumcumque in rerum natura est aliqua proportio et aliquid ordo, oportet unum eorum esse ab alio, vel ambo ab aliquo tertio; oportet enim ordinem in uno constitui, respondendo ad aliud; alias ordo vel proportio esset a casu, quem in primis rerum principiis ponere est impossibile, quia sequeretur magis omnia alia esse a casu. Si igitur sit aliqua materia divinae actioni proportionata, oportet vel quod alterum sit ab altero, vel utrumque a tertio . . . Relinquitur igitur, si invenitur aliqua materia proportionata divinae actioni, quod illius Ipse sit causa" (Id.).

⁸⁹ "Inter actum autem et potentiam talis est ordo quod licet in uno et eodem quod quandoque est potentia, quandoque actu, potentia sit prior tempore quam actu (licet actu sit prior natura), tamen, simpliciter loquendo, oportet actum potentia priorem esse" (Id.).

conceived. It should be emphasized that the arguments Thomas used are philosophical (metaphysical) arguments, not theological arguments.

- Constitution of the First Relations

The answer to the question of what is the act of creation was preceded by the argumentation that this act cannot be conceived of as the “formation of beings” out of an eternal building material. The action of the Creator is not connected with matter, and therefore it cannot be conceived of in terms of motion or change.

As he embarked upon a direct explanation of what real creation is (*productio*), Thomas started by showing what it is not.

(a) *The Negative Description.* Creation is not a motion or a change conceived of as an “actualization of potency as such.” Nor is it an operation of composing primeval elements, a process of reflecting the world of ideas, or the emanation of hypostases from the primeval One.⁹⁰ Why cannot the act of creation be defined in terms of motion or change?

Thomas responded that it is primarily because every motion or change is an act of something that previously exists in potency.⁹¹ Moreover, the terminal objects of motion and change (*extrema motus vel mutationis*) must always belong to the same order (as does motion). Hence, growth, alteration, and change of location belong to the same order of being of individual things, and they participate in one and the same potency conceived of as privation of form. Meanwhile, creatures and the Creator belong to different orders of being. The Creator is the uncreated (absolute) being, while creatures are contingent beings that have an imparted existence. The Creator is existence. The act itself of creation is not an actualization of potency, nor is it an action directed to

⁹⁰ “Creatio non est motus neque mutatio” (Id., c. 17).

⁹¹ “Motus enim omnis vel mutatio est actus existentis in potentia secundum quod huiusmodi” (Id.).

something.⁹² Moreover, in every motion or change there must be something “before” and “after.” Meanwhile, creation is the calling into being of a thing’s entire substance together with its accidents, and also with time.⁹³

Thomas rejected the definition of the act of creation in terms of motion and change and left no shadow of a doubt that creation is not the actualization of any potency, not an action on any sort of material, not generation or emanation. For indeed all motion and change, generation and coming-into-being imply the prior existence of a substrate of the motion and change. Thomas’ departure from that way of understanding the act of creation was essential for the new interpretation of *creatio ex nihilo* he formulated. Moreover, this was the basis for rejecting the arguments of all those who, as they conceived of creation as a motion or change, accepted the eternal existence of some sort of substrate necessary for this process of alterations. In this way Thomas reveals the dubious philosophical value of their arguments and the incoherence of their metaphysical (holistic) explanation of reality.⁹⁴

(b) *The Positive Description.* Thomas emphasizes that creation is primarily an act of God’s thought and will, and so it is a specific action that is not determined by anything, not by any nature or any matter. Creation is an act of the thought and will of the Creator who produces “the entire substance of a thing” (*tota substantia rei in esse productur*).⁹⁵

⁹² “Extrema motus vel mutationis cadunt in eundem ordinem; vel quia sunt sub uno genere . . . vel quia communicant in una potentia materiae . . . Neutrum autem potest dici in creatione; potentia enim ibi non est nec aliquid eiusdem generis quod praesupponatur creationi” (Id.)

⁹³ “In omni mutatione vel motu oportet esse aliquid aliter se habens nunc quam prius . . . Ubi autem tota substantia rei in esse productur, non potest esse aliquid idem aliter et aliter se habens; quia illud non esse productum, sed productioni praesuppositum (Id.)

⁹⁴ “Ex hoc autem apparet vanitas impugnantium creationem per rationes sumptas ex natura motus vel mutationi, utpote quod oportet creationem, ut ceteros motus vel mutationes, esse in aliquo subiecto, et quod oportet non-esse transmutari in esse” (Id., c. 18).

⁹⁵ Id., c. 17.

The act of creation thus conceived is primarily, as Thomas explains, a constitution of “the very dependence of created being on the principle whereby it is produced, hence it is a kind of relation. Wherefore nothing prevents its being in the creature as its subject.”⁹⁶

Creation—and let us note this specific understanding—is the Creator’s act which constitutes the first references, the first dependencies (relations), which did not exist before, because nothing existed prior to the Creator. The results of this act of the constitution of the first relations are concrete beings as the subjects which were called into being together with the relations. The contents of these references or relations will be expressed by existing beings through the fact that they are, and through what they are. Particular individual created things will thus show by themselves the plan (or thought) of the Creator and His will, which is inscribed (established) in them, and together with them in the moment they are called into being. For indeed the Creator is not determined by anything in his “action,” and so we may say that every thought of the Creator is the constitution of a new thing: the Creator thinks by things (and not as man, by concepts or ideas), and in this way He calls them into existence. For this reason creatures, and the entire world, are an externalization of the Creator’s thought and will.

It should be emphasized, however, that the act of creation, which is expressed in the constitution of the first references (or relations), is realized in fact in the creature (as in its subject), and not in the Creator. It is as in the case of an artist who makes an image; the act of his thought and will are really contained in the work produced, not in the artist himself. The difference, however, is that the artist does not call into being the whole of his work, but only the idea or plan which then he impresses into already existing matter, while the Creator calls the whole of His creature into existence by an act of his mind and will.

⁹⁶ “Non enim est creatio mutatio, sed ipsa dependentia esse creati ad principium a quo instituitur, et sic est de genere relationis unde nihil prohibet eam in creato esse sicut in subiecto” (Id., c. 18). SCG (1923), 27.

Thus He establishes, determines, and constitutes the content and form of a being, its substance and accidents, that is, the absolute entirety of a being. Hence everything that is is the “thought and will” of the Creator, that is, it is “thought of and wanted” by the Creator. For this reason, when we gain knowledge of things, we discover the reference of each of them to the Creator as to the source of existence and cognition.

Let us emphasize again that creation itself is the production (constitution).

It is clear however that if creation is a relation, it is a thing: and neither is it uncreated, nor is it created by another relation. For since a created effect depends really on its creator, this relation must needs be some thing. Now every thing is brought into being by God.⁹⁷

However, this act of the constitution of references-relations cannot be thought of along the lines of the formation of the Platonic “model of the world,” “ideas of things,” or “stable mathematical structures,” which as they would be eternal and uncreated would be models for demiurges to imitate.⁹⁸ Thomas wanted to break away from that sort of reasoning and to show that the Creator calls beings into existence in entirety and definiteness, and so particular individual human beings, particular individual animals, plants, or substances. Moreover, the Creator calls things into existence together with their entire endowment of content, that is, their matter and form, substance and every kind of its accidents, while He orders all this to a corresponding thought (idea) and end.

Aquinas states: “Because accidents and forms, just as they are not per se, so neither are they created per se, since creation is the pro-

⁹⁷ “Apparet etiam, si creatio relatio quaedam est, quod res quaedam est, et neque increata est neque alia creatione creata; cum enim effectus creatus realiter dependeat a Creatore, oportet huiusmodi relationem esse rem quandam. Omnes autem res a Deo in esse producitur” (Id.). SCG (1923), 27.

⁹⁸ Cf. Plato, *Timaeus*, 29 a ff.

duction of a being, but just as they are in another, so are they created when other things are created.”⁹⁹

Thomas emphasized that all creatures are objects of the Creator’s thought and will, and so they have the status of a “mental reality.” Hence this divine thought and will and its content are realized really in concrete created things.¹⁰⁰ Therefore the act of creation is discovered and known in created things. Together with this act the real relation of the creature to the Creator finds its subject, and creatures alone are the real terminal point of this relation (for indeed the Creator belongs to another order of being). Hence only in created beings and through them can the Creator be known—there is no other possible way for rational creatures to know Him. Thomas explains that this is so because:

A relation is not referred through another relation, for in that case one would go on to infinity, but is referred by itself, because it is essentially a relation. Therefore there is no need for another creation whereby creation itself is created, so that one would go on to infinity.¹⁰¹

This arrangement of relations established by the Creator’s reason and will is realized as a concrete being. In other words, beings are called to existence in a definite nature: as material or immaterial, simple or composite, rational or not, just as an artist who produces a work, as he formulates a thought of it, makes it dependent of himself (he establishes the first dependence), and as he brings to being a certain content of the work, he selects the form, shape, material, properties, and

⁹⁹ “Accidentia et formae, sicut per se non sunt, ita nec per se creantur, cum creatio sit productio entis; sed, sicut in alio sunt, ita in aliis creatis creantur” (*Summa contra Gentiles*, II, c. 18). SCG (1923), 27.

¹⁰⁰ For this reason the Creator and created things cannot be compared as correlates of creation, that is, as members of the relation of creation, since they belong to different orders of being. Hence the creative act is realized only in creation, not in the Creator.

¹⁰¹ “Relatio non refertur per aliam relationem, quia sic esset abire in infinitum; sed per seipsam refertur, quia essentialiter relatio est. Non igitur alia creatione opus est, quia ipsa creatio creatur, et sic in infinitum procedatur.” (Id.). SCG (1923), 27.

colors, and connects these elements with each other. However, there is a fundamental difference, namely that the artist always does this in some sort of material that he found already there in the world around him. And so he does not create things (images) by formulating ideas, since to produce a work he needs already existing elements of the world as objects for his ideas. Indeed, this applies not only to the material, but to the thought itself (the idea). Meanwhile, the Creator brings everything to being by an act of his thought and will. Hence everything is in accordance with the thought and will of the Creator.¹⁰²

The act of creation thus conceived is something specific and incomparable with any other action. Only on account of the feebleness of our mode of cognition (*secundum modum intelligendi tantum*) this act can be described as a motion or change. Our reason conceives of the act of creation as something that first was not, and then appeared. In other words, explains Thomas, our reason conceives of creation as a motion or change since “our intellect grasps one and the same thing as previously non-existent, and as afterwards existing.”¹⁰³

There is still more important achievement of Thomas’ exposition of the act of creation understood in terms of the constitution of real relations that should be noted here. Beings that are called into existence are thoroughly permeated by relations. Thus they are, as it were, an arrangement of the Creator’s thought that permeate the matter and form of a thing, its essence and existence, substance and accidents. Hence when man knows things, he encounters in each of them a relation which, as Thomas says, “is referred by itself, because it is essentially a relation.”¹⁰⁴

Thanks to this the world of persons, animals, plants, and things is given to us as a book in which the Creator has written the truth about

¹⁰² Id.

¹⁰³ “Dicitur tamen creatio esse mutatio quaedam, secundum modum intelligendi tantum, in quantum scilicet intellectus noster accipit unam et eandem rem ut non existentem prius et postea existentem” (Id.). SCG (1923), 27.

¹⁰⁴ “Per seipsam refertur, quia essentialiter relatio est” (Id.). SCG (1923), 27.

them and about Himself. We read from this book that the existence of the world is an evident gift, that man's existence is a gift, but so is the existence of an ant, a tree, and a stone. The entire world is rational and purposeful, for it is an act of the Creator's intellect and will, and as such it can be known without limits.

Let us recall once more that the theory of creation was formulated in opposition to the theory of the eternal existence of the world, and in opposition to the conception of creation as the formation and transformation of some primordial raw material. The major premise of Thomas' theory of creation is the demonstration that the world did not come into being from something that already existed. He would accent this thought with complete determination, as we see from a text from the eighth chapter of St. Anselm's *Monologion*, which Thomas cites to support his thought:

[T]hat something is made out of nothing is . . . that there is not something from which it is made. In a similar way, we say that someone who is sad without reason is sad about nothing. We can thus say that all things, except the Supreme Being, are made by him out of nothing in the sense that they are not made out of anything . . . On this understanding of the phrase "out of nothing," therefore, no temporal priority of non-being to being is posited, as there would be if there were first nothing and then later something.¹⁰⁵

The philosophical theory of creation is a negative theory. In the ultimate explanation of the world's existence it shows that the world did not come into being out of something (e.g., out of prime matter, out of ideas, or out of some sort of primeval element). Thus everything that constitutes this world is from the First Creative Cause. At the same time, the assertion that the world was created out of nothing is not a violation of the philosophical principle *ex nihilo nihil fit*, since the

¹⁰⁵ Św. Tomasz z Akwinu, *O wieczności świata*, 279. The English translation: Miller (1997).

world did not come into being “out of non-being,” but from God, and so this is not in contradiction to the assertion that the world has existed eternally, since it is not a question here of a beginning in time, but of a dependence in existence. In this question Thomas appeals to St. Augustine, who in chapter 31 of *The City of God* wrote about the Platonists:

They somehow contemplate a beginning in causation rather than a beginning in time. Imagine, they say, a foot that has been in dust since eternity: a footprint has always been beneath it, and nobody would doubt that the footprint was made by the pressure of the foot. Though neither is prior in time to the other, yet one is made by the other. Likewise, they say, the world and the gods in it have always existed, just as he who made them always existed; yet nevertheless, they were made.¹⁰⁶

So for the first time the philosophical theory of *creatio ex nihilo* appeared in philosophy. For the ancient Greeks this theory was a scandal and a philosophical heresy, and for modern and contemporary philosophers it was folly or an object of faith. They thought that it violated “the holy philosophical principle” that “being cannot come into being from non-being.” Meanwhile Thomas demonstrated it in realistic metaphysics as the only rational interpretation of reality. In the framework of this theory we discover the ultimate foundations of the rationality and purposefulness of individual beings, and that everything that constitutes this world and is not the cause of its own existence finds an explanation for its being in the fact of creation.

It should be noted that Aristotle in his cosmogony pointed to several causes for the existence of the world. And so prime matter, conceived of as pure potentiality, is in its own way one of the causes of the existence of the universe. The “first heavens” are also such a cause, whereby the process of the coming-into-being and the destruction of individual things is actualized in the world. The Unmoved Mover is

¹⁰⁶ Id.

also a cause of existence of the universe. The Unmoved Mover is conceived of as the source of all motion, and so as the source of the world's life. However, Aristotle's Unmoved Mover is only one of the causes of the world's existence, not the only cause.

As Gilson notes, Aristotle's metaphysics could not be directed "in entirety" to the discovery of the Creator. For indeed matter as a factor irreducible to God himself is opposed to the idea that first philosophy truly could aim to discover the truth about the Creator and the creation of the world *ex nihilo*.¹⁰⁷

Conclusion

Together with the discovery of the philosophical truth concerning the creation of the world, the entire previous interpretation of reality had to be more profoundly reconstructed.

First, everything that existed, in its content and in its essence, is from the Creator. The world's matter is not some sort of nameless and neutral material of the world, but it is a co-element of each and every being. Like the entire world, matter is called into being together with the world.

Second, the entire world, the individual beings, and their parts, are vehicles of the Creator's thought (or plan). The things realize within them the Creator's plan. The Creator's plan determines their nature and is an expression of their real being. Particular things are not illusory or postulated, some sort of a shade of an idea, or a reflection of a model. They are real signs of the Creator's thought and will. Concrete things are what they are, for indeed thus they have come into being, and apart from them there is no other order of their being.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Étienne Gilson, *L'être et l'essence* (Paris: Vrin, 2000), 88: "la métaphysique d'Aristote ne peut donc pas s'ordonner «tout entière» vers Dieu, parce que la matière s'oppose, comme une donnée irréductible à Dieu lui-même, à ce que la philosophie première s'achève vraiment toute en théologie."

Third, only the philosophical theory of creationism enables us to explain the rationality and purposefulness of the world and of individual beings. Otherwise individual things would be something postulated by man's mind.

Fourth, philosophical creationism enables us to discover and provide a rational justification for the universal rationality and purposefulness of particular beings and the whole world. The source of rationality and purposefulness is the Creator Himself who is a rational and free being, and who by an act of reason and will called everything into existence.

Fifth, together with the discovery of the truth about the creation of the world by the Creator's act of intellect and will, we discover that things are vehicles of the truth and the good. Therefore the human reason can learn rationality (*recta ratio*) from things, and the human will can learn rectitude (*recta voluntas*). For indeed the rationality of human cognition is grounded in the rational law of the being of things. In this way the assertion that the world is unknowable is fundamentally abolished.

Sixth, on the basis of the theory of *creatio ex nihilo* we discover that particular beings and all reality are purposeful, because they are an effect of the Creator's free will that has been written in beings under the form of a purpose and expresses their natural good. Every being bears in it the purpose of its existence, hence particular beings and the whole world realize defined ends that are really present in them. The purposes of things are not established, postulated, or assigned by man, but they are really present in the things and are discovered by the human mind. The reading out of them allows us to see and understand the meaning of particular things and of all reality, and to formulate the principles of action and conduct proper to them.

Seventh, all the types of theories about how the world (and particular beings) came to be that reject philosophical creationism appear as the result of a cognitive error that largely consists in the following: (1) the reduction of causes of explanation to the most

(1) the reduction of causes of explanation to the most proximate causes, and not to universal causes; (2) a transfer of the methods of inquiry from the natural sciences to metaphysics; (3) the reduction of philosophical cognition by separating it from being, and directing it to an analysis of the data of consciousness and language; (4) the acceptance of various kinds of *a priori* assumptions from scientific theories present in cosmology or physics.

Eighth, the rejection of the truth concerning the creation of the world *ex nihilo* by the Creator's act of intellect and will must of necessity give rise to skepticism in epistemology, to relativism in the theory of conduct, to atheism in religion, and to anti-substantialism (processualism) in metaphysics. Furthermore, this will directly become the cause for losing the objective meaning of the existence of the world and man.

Ninth, creation *ex nihilo* concerns being as a whole, both substance and accidents, matter and form, soul and body. One consequence of this will be another way of understanding reality, man, and man's action and conduct.

Tenth, as a consequence of the philosophical theory of creation, the scope of possibilities for explaining how things came into being is widened. In the world created *ex nihilo*, new beings can come into being by way of generation from other beings (plants, animals), by way of direct individual creation (man together with his soul), by way of production (works of art and technology), and by accident (byproducts). All this, however, comes into being ultimately due to the power of the major cause, which is the Creator, who is the cause of all causes and is the existence of all existences.

Modern and contemporary philosophy together with the mathematical-physical cosmology have regarded the doctrine of the creation of the world *ex nihilo* as philosophical folly or as an object of faith rather than an object of science. The most various theories and the strangest hypotheses concerning the coming-into-being of the world, have been formulated while being called "scientific," but these are

theories and hypotheses which sound like ancient cosmogonic myths rather than rational theories with a basis in really existing reality. Researchers, however, are stubborn in their desire to show the world as a “dark, irrational mass,” “blindly evolving matter,” or “a work of accident,” rather than the work of a rational and free Creator who in the laws that govern the existence and action of things has written as in a book the truth about Himself. To their own detriment and that of science, those researchers are unable to see the beauty and wisdom of the world. This is a pity, because only from the greatness and beauty of creatures do we know, by way of similarity, the truth about the beginnings of the world and about its Creator.

**PHILOSOPHICAL CREATIONISM:
THOMAS AQUINAS’ METAPHYSICS OF *CREATIO EX NIHILO***

SUMMARY

All philosophers, beginning with the pre-Socratics, through Plato and Aristotle, and up to Thomas Aquinas, accepted as a certain that the world as a whole existed eternally. The foundation for the eternity of the world was the indestructible and eternal primal building material of the world, a material that existed in the form of primordial material elements (the Ionians), in the form of ideas (Plato), or in the form of matter, eternal motion, and the first heavens (Aristotle).

The article outlines the main structure of the philosophical theory of creation *ex nihilo* developed by St. Thomas Aquinas and indebted to his metaphysical thought. It shows the wisdom-based and ratiocinative foundation of the rational cognition of reality—reality that comes from the personal creative act of God. It concludes that the perception that the beings called to existence by the personal act of God the Creator are intelligible is the ultimate rational justification for the fact that our human cognition, love, and spiritual creativity are rational.

KEYWORDS: creatio ex nihilo, Thomas Aquinas, philosophical creationism, creationism, creation, God, production, universe, world.