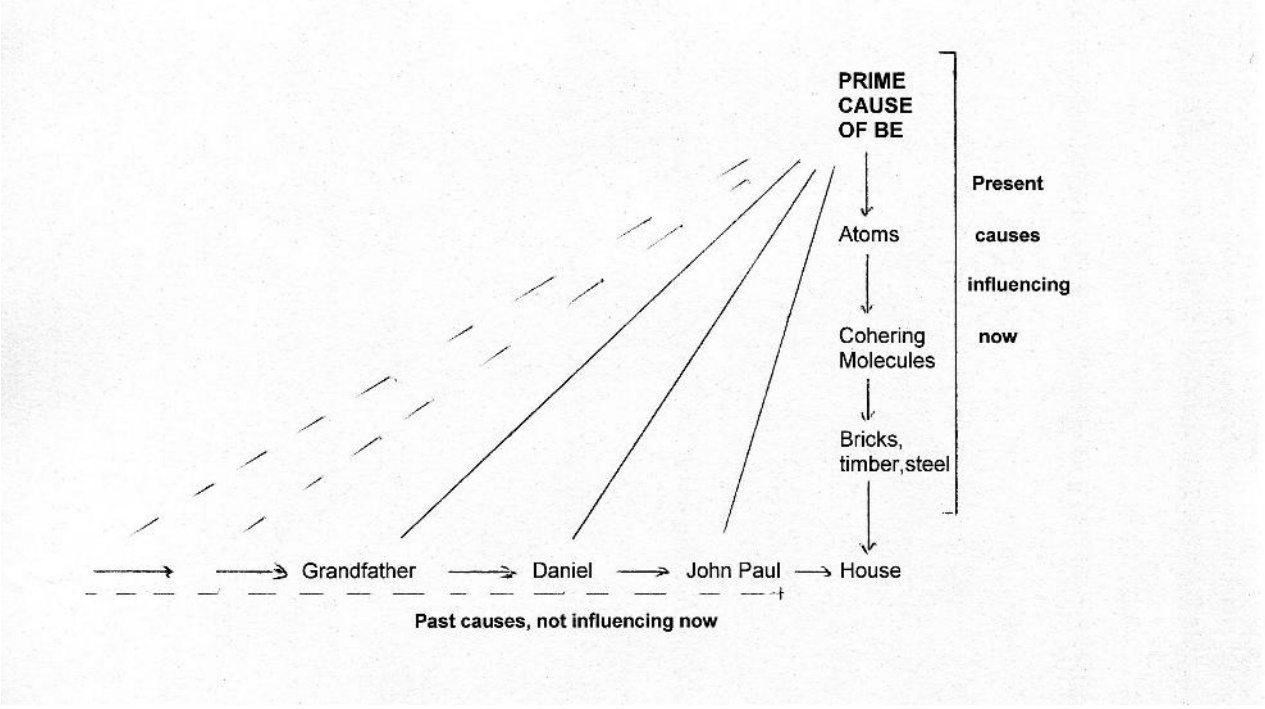
MORE ON THE PROOF FROM CONTINGENCY

Our builder, John Paul, is responsible for the *become* of the house. He is not responsible for its continuance in *be*, its existence. If we trace John Paul's provenance back through his father, his grandfather and his great grandfather and so on all the way back to Adam, we expose a series of causes relevant to his work in building. But the series is not essential to the *be*, the continuing existence of the house. In fact, they are not essential to the building, the *become*, of the house either, for they are not acting now as John Paul's mind, arms, hands, and the instruments he uses, saws, hammers, screwdrivers, drills and levels and so on, are acting to bring the house into existence.

But our focus is on the existence of the house, its *be*, rather than its *become.*



If any of the house's ingredients, bricks, timber, steel, etc., should cease to be the house will fail. If

any of the cohering molecules should cease to be, the ingredients which they constitute will fail, and the house will fail. Similarly, if any of the atoms that constitute the molecules should cease to be. All rely, ultimately, on that cause which preserves them in being.

The Prime Cause of *be* is a being which is independent and unsubordinated in the business of being, one that is not contingent in any way at all. Nor is this being merely *hypothetically* necessary, like a spiritual essence, or matter or *aether.* It is *absolutely* necessary. This being is, then, properly to be called BEING THROUGH SELF.

Therefore also, since the most fundamental effect in the universe on which all its substances and accidents are reliant, is that their *be* (existence) is received, the inevitable conclusion is that the cause of this most universal effect is this being, the most universal cause.

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Here is the proof formally exposed.

FACT : There exist beings which are contingent, that is, beings that can be or be not.

PRINCIPLE I

No thing (no reality) is without an adequate reason.

But 'become' and 'be' name two separate realities, the one *passage from non-be to be*, the other *continuance in be* (existence), for not the same is it that a thing be at one instant and that it be at the next.

Therefore every contingent being, if it is (exists), has distinct from itself an efficient cause not only of its *become*, but also of its *be* .

And if this efficient cause is itself a contingent being, it must also have an efficient cause of its *be*.

And if this cause, too, is contingent, it also must have an efficient cause, and so on...

PRINCIPLE II

But such a series of efficient causes must be subordinated *per se*, and in such a series there cannot be regress to infinity, for there would be no ultimate source of the *be* transmitted.

Therefore, there is a cause of *be* outside the series of contingent causes which is necessary, that is, a being which cannot be not.

PRINCIPLE III

And if this necessary efficient cause should be a being which is *hypothetically* necessary—i.e., in its nature indestructible—it yet supposes a being which is *absolutely* necessary since, again, in such causes there can be no regress unto infinity.

CONCLUSION

Therefore there exists an absolutely necessary efficient cause of *be* which is self sufficient, *being through self* , which is the Prime Cause and the Prime Being upon which all others depend ; and this fulfils the definition of God.

Therefore there is a God.

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A frequent objection to the assertion that there is a God, a caused uncaused, a being which is its own act of be, is the question—*If everything demands a cause, doesn't that include God ? Mustn't God have a cause too ?* The above proof needs to be explored slowly that the listener, the reader, may see its validity. A good start, however, may be made by insisting on a proper definition of cause.

A cause is that which exercises influence unto the be of a thing dependent in regard to be.

If there should exist a thing which is *not* dependent in regard to be, it does not need a cause.

Let us revisit, shortly, St Thomas's comment set out in the last lesson :

> "Every *quiddity* can be understood without including in its understanding *be* or existence... Hence, the *be* of a thing is other than its *quiddity*, nature or form, unless there should exist some entity whose *quiddity* is to be. Hence in any thing other that this thing, its *be* (existence) is other than its *quiddity."*

A thing whose *quiddity*, whose *essence*, is to be—a thing in which ***what it is* = *that it is***—does not need a cause of its being.

Once the listener, the reader, begins to grasp of the force of this consideration, he must be led to understand the differences between *univocal, equivocal* and *analogical* predicates, for 'be' and 'being' are *analogical* predicates. When we say that a creature is a being, and that God is a being we are not using 'being' in exactly the same way. Consider the predicate 'good' when used about the pie we are eating, and about a man. We know, even as we use the word, that we are using it in two completely different fashions. There is some same-ness in the two realities (both are attractive or derirable, and therefore 'good') but there is much more unsame-ness between them ; much more *dissimilarity* than *similarity*.

In the same way, 'being' when said of a creature and 'being' when said of God differ fundamentally. The reason is that the 'be' that a creature exercises is derivative ; it is 'be-from-other'. Whereas the 'be' that God exercises is 'be-though-self' : it is original.

Anyone who wants to explore the issue through the eyes of a (former) atheist, might read Thomas Merton's book *The Seven Storey Mountain*, or Evelyn Waugh's edited version of his book, *Elected Silence* for further insights.