

THE PROOF FROM MOVEMENT – PART I

We may think that movement is a pretty straight forward phenomenon. It is, after all, something we encounter at every moment of our existence. But there is more to movement than meets the eye.

First question, What is movement ? How do you define it ? Going and coming ? That doesn't say what it is ; it only expresses it in a different way. Let's ask another question. Why do things move ? To achieve something. That is certainly the case with men and with animals seeking prey, or avoiding danger. But what does water want to achieve when it runs downhill ? Or snow and rocks when rushing in an avalanche down a mountain valley ? And what about plants, trees and shrubs. Do they move ? True, they are moved, blown around by the wind, but they don't get up and move across a field. Isn't a living thing defined with the Latin tag *se movere* as something which moves itself ? And plants are living. But if plants move, *how* do they move ?

Movement is passage from can-be to does-be. Can-be-ness is, we recall, *potency*. And does-be-ness is *act*. Movement is passage from can-be to does-be, from potency to act.

Next question : how many species of movement are there ? Is there only one, the one we are all familiar with, movement from place to place, *local* movement. Or are there other forms too ?

You will recall the division of real material being into *substance* and the nine accidents, *quantity*, *quality*, *relation*, *when*, *where*, *action*, *passion*, *habitus* and *situs*. Aristotle is clear (in Book V of the *Physics*) that of these 10 categories of being, three only allow of passage from potency to act, *quantity* (as a thing can grow bigger, or smaller), *quality* (as a thing can pass from being hidden to being lit, or can alter in colour, or can pass from cold to hot) and *where*, change of location, *local* movement.

The *substance* of a thing does not admit of passage from potency to act. Something is either water or it is not water. Any substantial change (e.g., from hydrogen and oxygen to water) occurs instantaneously, one substance replacing another or others. Again, as regards *relation*, that I am the son of my father follows instantaneously on my being generated. *When* is the measure of change, of movement, so it cannot itself by any sort of motion. And so on for the rest. If you want to explore his reasons, read what Aristotle has to say, or read St Thomas's *Commentary on the Physics*, Book V, L. 3.

Here are the ten again with the three highlighted :

substance	
<i>quantity</i>	permits of movement
<i>quality</i>	permits of movement
relation	
when	
<i>where</i>	permits of movement
action	
passion	
habitus	
situs	

Now, let's consider some examples to help understand movement as passage from can-be to does-be.

As regards *location*

Julian is in Tarlo *in act* and in Goulburn *in potency*. When he is passing from be-in-Tarlo to be-in-Goulburn he is moving.

Tarlo → → → → Goulburn

As regards *temperature*

If Benedict is outside playing in the cold and his mother tells him to come inside and warm up, he is cold *in act* and hot only *in potency*. As he comes inside, under the influence of the fire, his body passes from be-cold to be-hot. It is moving as regards temperature.

Cold → → → → Hot

As regards *grasp of metaphysics*

Simon Pieter was ignorant *in act* and only *in potency* to understanding metaphysics. He is now passing from ignorant-of-metaphysics to understanding-metaphysics. As he studies and absorbs its principles he is moving towards the *act* of metaphysics called its *habit*.

Ignorance → → → → Understanding

As regards *growth*

Little Teddy Higginson is six months old. He is an adult *in potency*, but an infant *in act*. Day by day he passes from can-be-adult to does-be-adult, and the process is going to take some 18 years or so !

Infancy → → → → Maturity

As regards *motion* of a freight train

Imagine yourself beside the railway line that crosses the Nullabor Plain with a long freight train passing in front of you from your right to your left. You are so close you cannot see one end of the train or the other even though the line is as straight as a die. You have no idea how long the train is, it could be 10 miles for all you know. The train is passing from the *potency* be-to-your-left to the *act* be-to-your-left. It is moving.



We will come back to this last example as it is of particular assistance.

Note among these five examples : location, whether of Julian or of the freight train, is an accident, *where*. Benedict's temperature is an accident, *quality*. Simon Pieter's grasp of metaphysics is an accident, *quality*. Growth is an accident, or collection of accidents, of the genera *quality* and *quantity*.

Teddy will grow bigger and bigger (*quantity*) but he will grow more and more mature as a man (various instances of *quality*).

The things of this world are adequately divided into the four categories—

- Rational animal (man)
- Animal (brute)
- Vegetable, or vegetative
- Mineral

The movement of things is governed by their natures. *Inanimate* things, minerals, are moved, clearly, by extrinsic influences, as water runs downhill under the influence of gravity, as a rolling stone will disturb other stones, as an avalanche of snow will carry all things, living and non living, before it. *Animate* things, plants and animals, too are moved by extrinsic influences. But they also move themselves.

Now a thing which is moved, whatever its nature, is referred to in philosophy as a *mobile*, from the Latin adjective, *mobilis -e* meaning 'a moveable'. And an influence which causes it to move, as gravity causes water to run downhill, is called a *movent*. If Julian is the mobile, in the case of passage from Tarlo to Goulburn, what is his movent? It is his mother driving the car. She is the principal efficient cause and the car is the instrument she uses. In the second case, Benedict's body is the mobile and the movent is the fire in the house which brings him from cold to hot.

Simon Pieter is the mobile in the case of understanding metaphysics, and his teacher is the movent, bringing him from can-be-wise to does-be-wise. In little Teddy's case, it is his nature which ensures the passage from can-be-adult to does-be-adult. Note that neither Teddy or his parents have any say in the matter, Teddy's nature is incorrigible. It will not be turned aside. It will bring him to adulthood come what may! And the case of the freight train, of course, demands that among the great number of freight carriages there be a locomotive as movent. Here they are in summary:

<u>Movent</u>		<u>Mobile</u>
His mother		Julian
The fire		Benedict's body
His teacher		Simon Pieter
His human nature		Teddy
Locomotive		Freight Train

Notice that each mobile needs a movent which is *really distinct from* it to bring it from can-be to does-be, from potency to act. This is the first and fundamental principle for us to grasp with regard to movement in any of its forms—

Everything that moves is moved by another.

Or, to put it another way,—

Nothing moves itself.
