

THE PROOF FROM CAUSATION

Before we leave the issue of the proof from movement, I should mention a couple of matters which add to the discoveries we have made. In those material things that move themselves, i.e., living things, the movent soul is *per se* immovable though it may be moved *per accidens*. I have used the illustration of Julian walking from Tarlo to Goulburn. He moves his body by means of his soul. Since his soul is necessarily tied to his body as its animating principle, wherever his body goes, his soul goes along too but only through the accident of it being Julian's animating principle.

Something similar occurs, I think, with the operation of Aristotle's heavenly body, *aether*, as the instrument of the First Unmoved Mover to move stars, planets, moons and asteroids in their circular orbits throughout the universe. As the most perfect of material bodies, *aether* too, is *per se* immobile, but may be moved *per accidens*. Aristotle and St Thomas agree that *aether* acts upon other bodies but it cannot be acted on by them. Yet it suffers the passage of our planet and the moon and the other heavenly bodies through its immensity.

Aristotle teaches that the First Mover is, likewise, immobile *per se*. It moves but cannot be moved. But, in contrast with other elements in creation, it cannot be moved even *per accidens*. That Mover, upon which all other mobiles depend, is utterly immobile.

Dr Woodbury used to tell his students that the highest thing any pagan philosopher ever uttered was the statement by Aristotle in his *Metaphysics*, "God is understand, the understand of an understand". (Bk. XII, ch. 9, 1096) He would insist on the point : "God is not an understand-er like you or me (who *have* intellect). He is Understand ; he *is* Intellect its very self." Far be it from me to disagree with so eminent a teacher, but I have found a quote from the Greek philosopher Xenophanes (c.570 – 475 BC) which must rival that of Aristotle for the profundity of its insight. Xenophanes, rejected the view that the Greek gods were anthropomorphic, and said there was but one God—

"Always he remains in the same place, moving not at all ; nor is it fitting for him to go to different places at different times, but without toil he shakes all things by the thought of his mind."
(Quoted by the neo-Platonist Simplicius in his *Physics*, reproduced in G S Kirk & J E Raven, *The Presocratic Philosophers*, Cambridge University Press, 1971, p. 169)

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We began by pointing out the five facts of experience upon which St Thomas bases his five ways of proving the existence of God. Let us review them before we proceed. Each manifests a way in which we are dependent in our earthly existence.

<i>Dependence</i>		<i>Fact</i>
in acquiring perfection	—	movement
in bestowing perfection	—	causation
in regard to <i>that</i> we are	—	be (existence)
in regard to <i>what</i> we are	—	essence (quiddity)
in regard to the order in reality	—	ordination

Proof From Causation

The second proof, then, is in respect of efficient causation, by which we bestow some sort of perfection upon material being. The definition of cause is *that which exercises influence unto the be (existence) of a thing dependent in regard to its be*. As we have previously observed, causes operate in one of four ways.

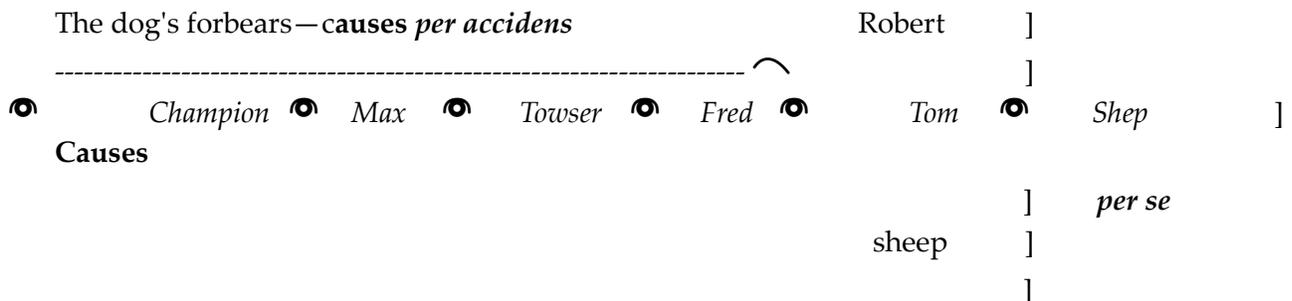
		[<i>formal</i>	
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Causes	[
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Efficient causes, as we know, are divided into *principal* and *instrumental*. When the carpenter drives a nail into wood with a hammer, the carpenter is the *principal* of the action, the hammer his *instrument*. Here we must pause to make a further distinction between accidental causes and essential, or proper, causes for we have to confine our considerations to the *proper* cause.

Proper Cause

What is a *proper* cause of an effect ? It is the cause which is essential for obtaining the effect, the cause that operates NOW. For instance, it cannot be argued that, since this dog exists, therefore its father exists. Its father was the cause of the 'become' of the dog, but is not the cause of its 'be' (existence). Nor is it evidently impossible that the series of generations of the dog be without beginning, so that there was never a first dog ('though modern scientific observation indicates there must have been). In any event, its father is not the proper cause of the 'be' of the dog here and now.

The proper cause of a thing is the cause without which that thing cannot be had, but given which the thing must be had. It is the cause on which the thing necessarily and immediately (the Latin expression is *per se primo*) depends and follows. So, for instance, the property 'equilateral' depends on, and follows necessarily and immediately on a triangle having each of its internal angles equal (at 60°). Again, it may be that a musician is writing a poem but it is *per accidens* that its writer be a musician. He must be writing as a poet, otherwise the poem cannot be written, and if he is not a poet, the poem will not be a poem !! The proper cause of the effect *poem being written* is *poet writing*. Here are the series of causes involved as local grazier, Robert, pens sheep with his dog *Shep*.





Shep is Robert's instrument for the action 'farmer penning sheep' and is the proper cause, the cause *per se primo*, of the effect 'sheep being penned'. *Shep's* forebears are causes, too, but not of the action. Of that they are only causes *per accidens*.

Notice that it is not merely a matter of *Shep* being moved to move by Robert. The dog is not merely passive ; he is active. And this, activity of the subordinate cause, is the characteristic that distinguishes an efficient cause from a mover. *Shep* is not merely moved to move, but caused to cause. An efficient cause *per se* subordinated causes inasmuch as it is itself caused to cause by another. So, the axe is not merely moved by the axeman when he uses it to fell a tree. It is caused to cause the cutting of the wood. Acid, applied to a metal, is not merely moved against the metal, it is caused by the agent to exercise a natural power it has to corrode the metal. When I stir Ambrose, sitting up the back, from his daydream, to think about what I am saying, I am not just moving him, I am causing him to cause the process of using his mind !

Now, nothing is the efficient cause of itself. It is caused to cause by another. Hence, every efficient cause of some action *per se* subordinated must be caused to cause by another and higher cause, and that by another, and so on. But this series of causes cannot go on to infinity. Otherwise there would be no ultimate source of the causative influence. Therefore there has to be a first efficient cause which is itself uncaused.

Here is the argument laid out rigorously.

FACT : It is evident that there exist in the world causes which are not merely caused efficiently to be, or to become, but caused to cause.

PRINCIPLE I

Every cause that causes efficiently is caused to cause by an earlier efficient cause. And this caused by a previous cause, and this by a previous, and so on.

PRINCIPLE II

But this regress cannot proceed to infinity, for if every such cause simply conveyed to its subsidiary the causation it had received, the source of such causation would never be found.

CONCLUSION :

Therefore there must exist an efficient cause which effects the causation of each and all of the series of causes and which, therefore, is a prime efficient cause itself un-caused in causing.

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As with the conclusion of a first unmoved mover, there is a further step to be taken to show that this first efficient cause, itself un-caused, is God.
