

ON THE NOTION OF CREATIVETRANSFORMATION

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SCHOLASTICISM distinguishes, to my knowledge, only two sorts of variations in being (movement).

1. Creation, that is to say 'productio entis ex nihilo sui et *subjecti*'.¹
2. Transformation, that is to say 'productio entis ex nihilo sui et *potentia subjecti*'.²

Thus for Scholasticism creation and transformation are two absolutely heterogeneous and mutually *exclusive* modes of movement within the concrete reality of one and the same act.

This absolute separation of the two notions means that we have to regard the formation of the world as being effected in two completely distinct 'phases':

1. Initially, the placing outside nothingness (*extra nihilum*) of a certain body of potencies (the initial creative phase).
2. Next, an autonomous development of these potencies, maintained by 'conservation' (the phase of transformation by secondary causes).
3. Finally, new placings outside nothingness (*extra nihilum*) each time the historical development of the world shows us 'true growths': the appearance of life, of a 'metaphysical species', of each human soul.

This concept obviously comes up against all sorts of historical improbabilities and intellectual incompatibilities.

- a. It obliges us to see, between the successive degrees of being (physical, organic, spiritual) which are so obviously linked in their *appearance*, no more than a logical connexion, a purely intellectual plan which has artificially disposed beings in an appearance of continuity.
- b. In consequence, it makes it impossible to explain the physical interdependence (in *their functioning*) which we observe in the various organs of the universe. And yet it is quite obvious that thought must have a certain organic support, which is itself a function of certain physico-chemical conditions.
- c. Finally, it denies any absolute value to the work of secondary causes: they no longer have any organic effectiveness in causing the world to pass through the different levels of being..

It appears to me that most of the difficulties presented to Scholasticism by the historical evidence of evolution derive from the failure to consider (in addition to creation and eduction) a third sort of perfectly well-defined movement: *creative transformation*.

Beside '*creatio ex nihilo subjecti*' and '*transformatio ex potentia subjecti*',³ there is room for an act *sui generis* which *makes use* of a pre-existent created being and builds it up into a *completely* new being.

This *act is really creative*, because it calls for renewed intervention on the part of the First Cause. And at the same time it *depends upon a subject* (a subjacent) —on *something in a subject*. It is most remarkable that Scholasticism has no word to designate this method of divine operation which:

- a. is conceivable *in abstracto*, and is therefore entitled to a place at least in speculation,
- b. is probably the only one which satisfies our experience of the world.

We should, I believe, have to be blind not to see this: *In natura rerum* (in nature) the two

categories of movement separated by Scholasticism (*Creatio et Eductio*) are seen to be constantly fused, combined, together.

There is not one moment when God creates, and one moment when the secondary causes develop. There is always only *one* creative action (identical with conservation) which continually raises creatures towards fuller-being, *by means of* their secondary activity and their earlier advances.

Understood in this way, creation is not a periodic intrusion of the First Cause: it is an act co-extensive with the whole duration of the universe. God *has been creating* ever since the beginning of time, and, *seen from within*, his creation (*even his initial creation?*) takes the form of a transformation. Participated being is not introduced *in batches* which are differentiated later as a result of a non-creative modification: God is continually breathing new being into us.

All along the curve followed by being in its augmentations there are, of course, levels, particular points, at which creative action becomes dominant (the appearance of life and of thought).

Strictly speaking, however, *every* good movement is, in some of its content, creative.

With creation continuing incessantly as a function of all that already exists, there is *never*, properly speaking, any '*nihilum subjecti*' (nothingness of subjacent matter) — *apart from so considering the universe in its total formation throughout the ages.*

This notion of 'creative transformation' (or creation by transformation) which I have just been analysing seems to me to be impregnable in itself, and the only notion that fits in with the world of our experience. What is more, it brings real 'emancipation': it puts an end to the paradox and the stumbling-block of matter (i.e. our bewilderment when we consider the part played by the brain in thought and by passion — *eros*⁴ — in mysticism); and it transforms them both into a noble and illuminated cult of that same matter.

If it is a fact, as it seems to me, that 'creative transformation' is a concept which as yet has no place in Scholasticism, then I think that it should be introduced without delay, and so prevent the orthodox *theological* notion of creation from being any longer stifled and distorted by the '*nihilum subjecti*' of one particular philosophy.

NOTES

1. Production of being out of nothing (without pre-existence of self or subjacent)'. The classic formula in Scholastic philosophy: '*Productio rei ex nihilo sui et subjecti*', means that the created substance is drawn in its entirety (matter and form) from nothingness. Nothing pre-exists: neither the thing itself in its formal perfection, nor a matter from which and in which the form could be produced (matter that would be the subject of a transformation). God produces the universe without using anything else, through his almighty will.

2. 'Production of being without pre-existence of self from potency of the subjacent (i.e. by causing a subjacent matter to pass from potency to act).'

3. See notes 1 and 2 above.

4. *Eros*, the love which desires, as opposed to *agape*, the love which gives.

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