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CHAPTER 9

Trinity, motion and creation ex nihilo

Simon Oliver

INTRODUCTION

The doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* apparently distinguishes theological cosmology from ancient Greek conceptions of a universe which has no temporal beginning (as in Aristotle) or a cosmos which is formed from pre-existent chaos, the *khora* (as in Plato's mythic cosmology, *Timaeus*). While the theological doctrine of creation marks a significant break from ancient Greek cosmology, more recently some have argued for a congruence between creation *ex nihilo* and contemporary Big Bang theories and the notion that the universe had a temporal beginning in the form of a singularity.¹

Does Big Bang cosmology confirm the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* and the teaching that 'in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth'? Numerous cosmologists seem to interpret Big Bang cosmology in a way which precludes the notion of creation and a creator. For example, some account for the Big Bang in terms of a fluctuation in a primal vacuum known as 'quantum tunnelling' from nothing, from which the universe expanded according to what is known as inflation theory. 'Nothing' is defined by the cosmologist Alexander Vilenkin as a state with no classical space-time in which the basic categories of physics – space, time, energy, entropy and so on – seem to lose their meaning. This utterly uncaused emergence of the universe from nothing apparently accounts for the universe's existence without reference to anything beyond the universe itself.² The universe is simply a brute fact.

¹ See, for example, Paul Copan and William Lane Craig, *Creation out of Nothing: A Biblical, Philosophical and Scientific Exploration* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), pp. 17–19 and passim.

² See Alexander Vilenkin, 'Creation of Universes from Nothing', *Physics Letters* 117B (1982), pp. 25–28, cited in Mark William Worthing, *God, Creation and Contemporary Physics* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996), pp. 98–100. See also Vilenkin, 'Boundary Conditions in Quantum Cosmology', *Physical Review D* 33:12 (1986), pp. 3,560–3,569; Vilenkin, 'Birth of Inflationary

An alternative to the inflationary theory of cosmic origins is offered by Stephen Hawking who, in *A Brief History of Time*, sets forth the case for a universe understood as finite and yet without beginning or end, rather like the surface of a sphere. Hawking famously states: ‘So long as the universe had a beginning, we could suppose it had a creator. But if the universe is really completely self-contained, having no boundary or edge, it would have neither beginning nor end: it would simply be. What place, then, for a creator?’³

Whether one accepts the Big Bang understood as a temporal boundary to the universe, as in the inflationary theory, or the Hawking model of a beginningless universe which is nevertheless finite, neither approximates to the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*.⁴ Natural science cannot truly think the *nihil*. Scientific cosmology still operates with the Aristotelian notion that *ex nihilo, nihil fit*. The vacuum of modern particle physics which fluctuates to bring the universe to existence through so-called quantum tunnelling is not ‘nothing’, for this ‘nothing’ is apparently subject to fluctuation. As Thomas Hobbes famously maintained against Robert Boyle and the vacuum in Boyle’s air-pump, even a vacuum is not ‘nothing’: it still maintains a material and political significance.⁵ Even attempts by mathematical physicists to identify ‘nothing’ with the empty mathematical set fail because, as William Carroll points out, ‘the empty mathematical set . . . is subject to the principles of logic and to the laws of quantum cosmology and, as such, cannot be identified with absolute nothing’.⁶ Joseph Yciski puts it succinctly thus: ‘The alleged nothing [discussed in contemporary cosmology by Hawking and others] turns out to be a complex reality of ordering principles without which there would be no uniformity in nature and no scientific study of natural phenomena would be possible.’⁷ Contemporary cosmological speculation seems magically to reify the *nihil*.

Universes’, *Physical Review D* 27:12 (1983), pp. 2,848–2,855; Alan Guth, *The Inflationary Universe: The Quest for a New Theory of Cosmic Origins* (Reading, MA: Perseus Books, 1997); and C. J. Isham, ‘Creation of the Universe as a Quantum Process’ in Robert John Russell, William R. Stoeger and George V. Coyne (eds.), *Physics, Philosophy and Theology: A Common Quest for Understanding* (Vatican Observatory Publications, 2005), pp. 375–408.

³ Stephen Hawking, *A Brief History of Time* (London: Bantam Press, 1988), pp. 140–141.

⁴ Big Bang theory and quantum cosmology do not conflict with creation *ex nihilo*. They provide a complementary, not alternative understanding of the origin of the universe, and of reality in general. See W. Stoeger’s chapter in this volume for a defence of this claim from a scientific perspective.

⁵ See Stephen Shapin and Simon Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air-pump: Hobbes, Boyle and the Experimental Life* (Princeton University Press, 1989).

⁶ William Carroll, ‘Thomas Aquinas and Big Bang Cosmology’, at www2.nd.edu/Departments//Maritain/ti/carroll.htm#N_12_.

⁷ Joseph Yciski, ‘Metaphysics and Epistemology in Stephen Hawking’s Theory of the Creation of the Universe’, *Zygon* 31:2 (1996), p. 272, cited in Carroll, ‘Thomas Aquinas and Big Bang Cosmology’.

Whereas those who first formulated the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* had to attend to the ancient Greek understanding of a universe that has no temporal beginning, so we must likewise attend to the tendency to reify the *nihil* and the consequent difficulty of speaking of God's act of creation from nothing. How are we to express the utterly unique instance of the divine creative act, and so distinguish God's act of creation from any natural process or human contrivance, so maintaining the radical nature of the doctrine of creation shared by the ancient Abrahamic faiths?

In order to articulate the radical nature of *ex nihilo* and avoid any tendency towards understanding creation as in any way univocal with natural processes or human contrivances, I would like to consider the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* with reference primarily to the doctrine of God. I will begin in the thirteenth century with Thomas Aquinas and the way in which he distinguishes between God's act of creation from nothing and the subsequent nature of the universe, namely through the category of motion. Creation is not, strictly speaking, a motion, whereas nature is understood by Aquinas in Aristotelian fashion as a principle of motion and rest.

I will offer a brief examination of Aquinas' understanding of motion, creative emanation and God's relation to a cosmos saturated with motion. This will present us with a question. If we are to claim that a study of nature involves, in the end, a study of motion, and creation *ex nihilo* does not fall into this category of motion (that is, it is not a natural process), are we establishing a division between the natural sciences on the one hand, and theology on the other? Is theology defined as that discourse about the motionless, divine origin of the universe, whereas the natural sciences are concerned only with motion, that is, natural processes which are, of necessity, absent from the divine?

I will attempt a tentative answer to that question by describing the way in which, for Aquinas, motion is analogically related to the eternal dynamism of the Trinity. I will describe Aquinas' understanding of creation as a 'motion' of emanation from God before considering emanation within created beings and its relation to the eternal emanation of the persons of the Trinity. We will see that, in the dynamism of the Holy Spirit proceeding from the Father and Son, we find the principle of natural motion. Motion, then, is not the wedge between creation and creator, but the means of creation's participation in the divine.

Having considered motion in relation to the divine processions, creation and emanation, I will turn to address the development of ideas latent in Aquinas' view by Hans Urs von Balthasar, referring particularly to

Trinitarian theology, the ontology of love and the structure of motion. I will suggest that Balthasar's emphasis on difference within the Trinity as the structure of love implies that motion, which, in its Platonic, Aristotelian and Thomist guise, requires difference, is also structured as a kind of kenotic self-donation.

In concluding this chapter, and in order to draw attention to the crucial place of the Trinity in thinking about the true nature of creation *ex nihilo*, I will examine the thought of Isaac Newton, the principle theorist of motion in early modern science, to suggest why his voluntarist, Arian and Unitarian theology prevented him from truly articulating the radical edge of the traditional Christian doctrine of creation. We will see that Newton's doctrine of God and understanding of motion paves the way for the separation of faith and reason, and therefore the separation of theological cosmology from the speculations of the natural sciences.

AQUINAS: CREATION AND EMANATION

Aquinas is frequently reluctant to describe God's act of creation as any kind of 'motion'. Why? To answer this question, we need to understand how Aquinas understands motion, which for us post-Newtonians seems to be a simple category belonging to physics with little, if anything, to do with theology or metaphysics.

Aquinas gleans much of his understanding from Aristotle. For Aristotle and his successors, motion – *kinesis* – is a mysterious and broad category which encompasses not only local motion of bodies through space, but also the changes of, for example, growing, learning or thinking. These different varieties of motion are analyzed by means of the categories which are fundamental to Aristotle's metaphysics, most particularly potency and act. At a general level, motion is passage from potency to act, and therefore the means of the actualization, or perfection, of creatures. A student, for example, is potentially knowledgeable concerning the history of France, and, by the motion of learning, becomes actually knowledgeable concerning the history of France. Aristotle identifies motion as 'the actualization of what potentially is, *qua* potentiality'.⁸

As far as Aristotle is concerned, every motion must be caused by something which is, in some sense, in act with regard to the motion concerned. For example, for something to move from cold to hot, it must be moved by

⁸ Aristotle, *Physics* III.1.201a. On this definition of motion, see L. A. Kosman, 'Aristotle's Definition of Motion', *Phronesis* 14 (1969), pp. 40–62.

something which is actually hot. In other words, there is always something that is moved, and – in the end – there is always a mover. This is also why Aristotle maintains his motor-causality principle which is so central to later medieval natural philosophy: ‘*omne quod movetur ab alio movetur*’ (whatever is moved is moved by another). Any motion can always be analyzed into the mover and that which is moved. So motion is always relational for Aristotle.⁹

Given an Aristotelian definition of motion which has at its heart the passage from potency to act and the postulation of a subject which preceded the motion, it is not surprising that Aquinas frequently avoids describing God’s act of creation *ex nihilo* as any kind of ‘motion’. However, on other occasions, Aquinas stretches his use of the term *motus* in such a way that it can be employed at least metaphorically, but without error, of the divine creative act and even of God’s immanent and perfectly subsistent intellectual life.¹⁰ How can this be so? It is necessary to begin with an examination of the character of emanation, for – as many commentators neglect to mention – Aquinas refers to creation as ‘the emanation of things from the first principle’.¹¹

It is important to recall at this stage that emanation is a term with a very complex history. It is deployed in numerous ways in ancient pagan and Christian thought, particularly within the Neoplatonic tradition. What Aquinas means by this term is certainly not what Peter Lombard still maintained a century earlier, namely that created natures emerge from God in a hierarchy in such a way that creatures are created by those immediately above them in that hierarchy. Neither does emanation refer to a necessary emergence of creation from the Godhead. Emanation, for Aquinas, concerns self-expression. It refers to the active self-expression of a nature in relation to others in the production of another self. In the *Summa contra Gentiles* he begins by noting that ‘one finds a diverse manner of emanation in things, and, the higher a nature is, the more intimate to the nature is that which flows from it’.¹² What does this mean? Take a fire, for

⁹ For a more detailed discussion of motion and the interpretation of the principle ‘*omne quod movetur ab alio movetur*’, see Simon Oliver, *Philosophy, God and Motion* (London: Routledge, 2005), especially Chapters 2 and 4; and James Weisheipl, *Nature and Motion in the Middle Ages*, ed. W. E. Carroll (Washington, DC: The Catholic University Press of America, 1985).

¹⁰ For example, see Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles* (hereafter, *SCG*), I.13.10. See also *Summa Theologiae* (hereafter, *ST*), 1a.19.1, ad. 3 on the entirely subsistent movement of the divine will.

¹¹ Aquinas, *ST* 1a.45: *De modo emanationis rerum a primo principio*. For a discussion of divine emanation and motion in relation to Aquinas’ understanding of the perfections of being, life and knowing, see R. A. te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), pp. 272–279.

¹² *SCG* IV.11.1.

example. A fire necessarily emanates a likeness of itself and so moves another object from cold to hot. This emanation terminates outside the mover, in the heating of another object.

For Aquinas, however, the highest form of emanation is not that which terminates externally from the being concerned (for example, an inanimate object locally moving another object) but that which has an internal termination, for this implies an increasing degree of self-subsistence. We find a clear instance of emanation and return in the human intellect, for the intellect is capable of self-knowledge and understanding. Thus a human being is able to produce a communication of its nature, an emanation of another self, in such a way that *self*-reflection is possible. When we reflect on or think about ourselves, it is as if a version of ourselves emanates from our intellect in such a way that we can, as it were, ‘look’ at ourselves. Yet the human intellect is imperfect because it must take its first knowledge – even of itself – from without, namely through sense perception, before returning from the external object to arrive at knowledge of itself by its relation to the external object in question.¹³ I know myself not through myself, but in my relation to external objects. I know myself, for example, as sat behind this desk.

Perfect emanation is found in God whose intellect and act of understanding, unlike those of angels, are identical with his being. Therefore, God’s being, intellect and understanding are one.¹⁴ For the divine to know himself and express himself through that knowledge is the divine essence, the very divine life itself. Aquinas goes on to maintain that God’s self-knowledge, although perfect, unitary and eternal, still maintains distinction. This distinction consists in the God who expresses his self-knowledge in himself and the God who is expressed or conceived, namely the Son who is the expression of the self-knowledge of the Father. The former is a perfect emanation of the latter in such a way that the being of both is identical and this emanation remains entirely immanent.¹⁵

As well as God’s knowledge of himself through himself, Aquinas elsewhere outlines the sense in which ideas subsist in the divine mind and are therefore known by him.¹⁶ He claims that these ideas are forms of things existing apart from things, and that the form of a thing can either be the exemplar or pattern of the thing whose form it is said to be, or it can be the means of knowing the thing whose form it is by its residing in the knower. In both these aspects, ideas subsist in the mind of God. Yet, as

¹³ *SCG* II.60. ¹⁴ *SCG* I.45.

¹⁵ On the difference between divine and human self-understanding, see *SCG* IV.II.II. ¹⁶ *ST* Ia.15.1.

regards the latter, it can be seen that it is by God's interior self-knowledge, namely the emanation of the Son from the Father, that he knows other things by their proper ideas subsisting in him. In a sense, therefore, all things are known primarily and per se as they exist most perfectly in God's knowledge, and as they are therefore known in God's self-knowledge, in God's interior emanation.

Aquinas also describes the place of the Spirit within the divine emanations and creative act.¹⁷ He seeks to make clear what we must understand of the Spirit with regard to God's immanent life and act of creation. Initially, Aquinas examines intellectual natures in general and states that there must be a will alongside intellect because such a nature must *desire* to know.¹⁸ Crucially, intellects are not merely passive recipients of 'information'; all knowledge is at once *willed* or *desired* knowledge. Just as any natural thing has an inclination to its own proper operations, for 'it tends to what is fitting [*convenientia*] for itself', so too an intellectual nature has an inclination, which we call will, towards its own proper operation in knowledge.¹⁹ Aquinas claims that, of all the acts which belong to the will, love (*amor*) is found to be a principle and common root. He describes this in terms of the 'affinity and correspondence' (*affinitatem et convenientiam*) between the principle of inclination in natural things and that to which they are moved. Thus, for example, if I am standing before a beautiful painting in one of Rome's magnificent churches, a 'species' or 'likeness' of the painting comes to reside in my mind. Meanwhile, the painting comes to reside in my will because there is a certain 'proportion and suitability' – a *convenientia* – between myself and the painting. My love of, or desire for, the painting draws me to knowledge of the painting. The *convenientia* between my intellect and will on the one hand, and the painting on the other, becomes the principle behind my intellectual nature's self-motion towards knowledge of the object, that motive attraction being a form of love.

However, in contrast to intellectual beings such as angels or humans, God is at one with his intellectual nature and, likewise, his will. The first and most appropriate object of the operation of the divine will – the object of God's desire – is the divine goodness, and so God, because God loves himself and is beloved and lover, must be in his will as the beloved is in the lover.²⁰ The beloved is in the will of the lover by means of a 'proportion and suitability' between the two. God has a most perfect proportion and suitability with himself because he is simple. Therefore, God is in his will with perfect simplicity. In addition, any act of will is, as Aquinas remarks, an

¹⁷ SCG IV.15ff. ¹⁸ SCG IV.19.1ff. ¹⁹ SCG IV.19.2. ²⁰ SCG IV.19.7.

act of love, but the act of the will is the divine being. So ‘the being of God in his will by way of love is not an accidental one – as it is in us – but is essential being’, hence the scriptural teaching that ‘God is love.’²¹

Coupled with what has been said of God’s self-knowledge in the emanation of the Son, we now have a twofold picture of the divine life. On the one hand, God loves himself because, as we have seen, the ‘proportionate and appropriate’ end of God’s operative will is himself and his own goodness. Yet this would not be loved if it were not known, and God knows himself through conceiving of himself in the eternal emanation of the Word. Yet it is not quite adequate to say that it is God’s knowledge which is beloved, for God’s knowledge is his essence. Therefore, coupled with the emanation of the Word must be a love whereby the lover dwells in the beloved, both in God’s knowing and in that which is known. The love by which God is in the divine will as a lover in the beloved ‘proceeds both from the Word of God and the God whose Word he is.’²² It is the Holy Spirit. It is as if the Father is the lover and the Son the beloved, but immediately and in eternity this is returned so the Son is the lover and the Father the beloved. This introduces a kind of circular dynamism to the inner divine life which Aquinas refers to as a kind of intellectual ‘motion’.²³

With regard to God’s self-knowledge and self-love in the persons of the Trinity, we now have a flickering sense of how the universe can be said to have the divine nature as its cause. Aquinas states that ‘effects pre-exist in a cause according to its mode of being. Since, then, God’s being is his actual understanding, creatures pre-exist there as held in his mind.’²⁴ Thus he states, ‘God’s knowledge stands to all created things as the artist’s to his products.’²⁵ However, in addition to the knowledge of things, Aquinas also notes that an act of will is necessary in the act of creating: creation *ex nihilo* is not a necessary emanation. God is so inclined because his own subsistent goodness wills that other things be in such a way that ‘by his will he produces things in being’ and his self-love thereby becomes the cause of the creation of things.²⁶ In a similar fashion Aquinas elsewhere states that ‘It is . . . from the fact that the Holy Spirit proceeds by way of love – and love has a kind of driving and moving force – that the movement which is from God in things seems properly to be attributed to the Holy Spirit.’²⁷ It seems, therefore, that God’s knowledge becomes the cause of creation and the ground of the continual subsistence of the cosmos, while the Holy Spirit, which proceeds from the Father and Son by way of love, is properly

²¹ *Ibid.*; 1 John 4:16. ²² *SCG* IV.19.8. ²³ *SCG* IV.19.12. ²⁴ *ST* Ia.19.4, responsio.

²⁵ *ST* Ia.14.8, responsio. ²⁶ *SCG* IV.19.12. ²⁷ *SCG* IV.20.3.

described as the principle of the motion of nature.²⁸ This means that what moves all things to their characteristic operation is love, namely a desire for fulfilment in the beloved, a desire for fulfilment in God.

In what sense can this emanation and return to self in God be described as any kind of motion? In answer, Aquinas begins by stating that there are two kinds of action.²⁹ The first is that which passes to matter outside the agent concerned, for example locally moving another body or the heating of one body by another. The second is that which remains in the agent, for example understanding, sensing or willing. In the case of the first, the motion is completed not in the agent of the motion, but in another. In the second, the motion is the completion or perfection of the agent of the motion. However, this latter is not motion in the strict Aristotelian sense of the passage from contrary to contrary or the actualizing of the potential *qua* potential. In Aristotelian terms, it may be regarded as *energeia* (actuality), a kind of constant similar to seeing which is not temporally divisible into parts. It is an activity which, at every moment, is the same, not having an end outside itself.³⁰ Therefore, Aquinas concludes, this 'motion' is different from the strict Aristotelian definition of the *Physics*. However, he does seem willing to assimilate the Aristotelian view with the self-moving soul of Plato when he writes:

Plato understood by motion any given operation, so that to understand and to judge are a kind of motion. Aristotle likewise touches upon this manner of speaking in the *De Anima*. Plato accordingly said that the first mover moves himself because he knows himself and wills or loves himself . . . There is no difference between reaching a first being that moves himself, as understood by Plato, and reaching a first being that is absolutely unmoved, as understood by Aristotle.³¹

Elsewhere, Aquinas explicitly states that life is especially manifested in motion, and specifically in self-motion and those things which put themselves into operation.³² He states that, if love, drive and motion are particularly suited to the Holy Spirit, as Scripture suggests,³³ it is here that we find the dynamism of the Trinitarian life fully expressed and mediated.

In expounding Aquinas in this way I am not attempting to give an account of the causal mechanism of the universe's creation. Creation *ex nihilo* is not ordinary causality, so much as the intrinsic basis of all causality. Neither do I wish slavishly to follow modern science's tendency to privilege the temporal origin of the cosmos in giving an account of the universe's

²⁸ *SCG* IV.20.3. ²⁹ *ST* Ia.18.3, ad. 1.

³⁰ On Aristotle's distinction between *energeia* and *kinesis*, see *Metaphysics* IX.6. ³¹ *SCG* I.13.10.

³² *SCG* IV.20.6. ³³ *Ibid.* Aquinas mentions John 6:64 and Ezekiel 37:5.

beginnings. Creation *ex nihilo* – the doctrine that creation, at *every* moment, is of nothing – as such privileges no *particular* temporal instant as revealing more acutely the nature of the cosmos as suspended over the *nihil*. Rather, my intention is to point to the way in which, for one of the most prominent theologians of the Christian tradition, effects analogically resemble their causes. Creation and motion are apparently opposed, for the former excludes the latter. Meanwhile, both are effects of something more real. They are reconciled and related, therefore, by their participation in the eternal and perfectly subsistent emanation of the divine persons. Yet, while Aquinas talks of emanation in creatures and God, he does so by analogy, always aware that, however great the similitude, the dissimilitude is always greater.

There is a sense, therefore, that if motion is the means of the perfection of creatures – their passage to actuality – then we might understand motion to be analogically related to the actuality of God's inner Trinitarian dynamic. I would now like to examine the way in which a more recent theologian, the Swiss Roman Catholic Hans Urs von Balthasar, develops this Thomist understanding of the doctrine of God and cosmic motion with particular reference to an understanding of both creation and motion as *relational*. More particularly, Balthasar moves beyond Aquinas in describing both motion and creation as related by analogy to the eternal kenosis within the Trinitarian Godhead.

BALTHASAR: DIFFERENCE AND THE DYNAMISM OF TRINITARIAN LOVE

The life of God, for Balthasar, is characterized by self-donation in the form of kenosis.³⁴ The revelation of this self-giving is recorded in the hymn to Christ's self-emptying in the incarnation in Philippians 2. Within the economy of salvation, this kenosis reaches its greatest intensity on Holy Saturday when God, in sovereign freedom, endures the dereliction of godlessness. Yet it is crucial for Balthasar that this kenotic moment is not an arbitrary act of God, as if the divine had suddenly become subject to godlessness in order to be fully himself (as in the thought of Jürgen Moltmann). Rather, it is suffering and dereliction which are made subject to God, and the godlessness of Holy Saturday is always the

³⁴ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, trans. G. Harrison, vol. iv (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), pp. 325ff.

economic outworking of God's immanent and eternal kenosis.³⁵ It is at this moment in the economy of salvation that it is revealed that even that which is *not* God is brought to be subject *to* God. Moreover, as Graham Ward observes, this kenosis is not christomonistic, an act confined to Christ's incarnation and crucifixion. Rather, divine kenosis, as Trinitarian and eternal, is the possibility of God's self-giving within the economy of salvation.³⁶ As Aquinas refers to the eternal emanation of the Son from the Father, so for Balthasar the Father pours out his life without remainder in the Son's eternal begetting. The Son's response is kenotic *eucharistia*, thus constituting a 'eucharistic movement back and forth from the Father'.³⁷ Importantly, the self-donation of the Father is also the self-reception of the Son, thus constituting the relational nature of the eternal divine gift: self-donation and self-reception are one. This love cannot be contained within an enclosed dyad, but opens in eternity in the procession of the Spirit who maintains the infinite difference between Father and Son. This infinite *diastasis* is revealed in the Son's cry of dereliction on the cross and the silence of Holy Saturday.³⁸ Within that hiatus is contained not only sin, but the whole of creation, for the 'otherness' of creation – the ontological difference – is itself the *imago* of the infinite difference which is being itself, namely the difference of the divine persons. Balthasar writes:

If, within God's identity, there is an Other, who at the same time is the image of the Father and thus the archetype of all that can be created; if, within this identity, there is a Spirit, who is the free, superabundant love of the 'One' and of the 'Other', then both the otherness of creation, which is modelled on the archetypal otherness

³⁵ Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, trans. E. Leiva-Kerikakis, vol. 1 (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982), p. 461: 'God's incomprehensibility is now no longer a mere deficiency in knowledge, but the positive manner in which God has loved us so much that he surrendered his only Son for us, the fact that the God of plenitude has poured himself out, not only into creation, but emptied himself into the modalities of an existence determined by sin, corrupted by death and alienated from God.' Crucially, in maintaining that Christ's kenosis on the cross is the economic outworking of God's eternal kenosis, Balthasar is *not* suggesting that there is an eternal suffering in God. Rather, within a sinful world, the cross is the way in which eternal love manifests itself. It is the way in which the eternal love of God, which has always flowed to creation, is maintained in its self-giving in the face of sin. I am grateful to D. C. Schindler for highlighting this point to me.

³⁶ See G. Ward, 'Kenosis: Death, Discourse and Resurrection' in L. Gardner, D. Moss, B. Quash and G. Ward (eds.), *Balthasar at the End of Modernity* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), pp. 15–68, at pp. 44–45.

³⁷ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, trans. G. Harrison, vol. II (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), p. 268.

³⁸ See Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale: The Mystery of Easter*, trans. A. Nichols (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990).

within God, and its sheer existence, which it owes to the intradivine liberality, are brought into a positive relationship to God.³⁹

In fact, for Balthasar, it is only the difference inherent within being itself which makes creaturely difference intelligible – especially the difference within all creatures, that between essence and existence.⁴⁰

The Trinitarian difference within the Godhead and the difference of essence and existence in creation indicate, for Balthasar, ‘both a *similitudo* (insofar as the multiplicity of creatures is one in *esse*) and a *maior dissimilitudo*, insofar as nondivine being necessarily cleaves in two and stands over against the divine identity in the form of non-identity’.⁴¹ This is to say that the diversity within creation is not to be interpreted as a fall, but is rather a participation in the Trinitarian difference of the Godhead.⁴² Yet, because of the ontological difference in which the essence of non-subsistent creatures is not one with their existence, the resemblance or *similitudo* is, as Aquinas would say, one of creatures to God, and not of God to creatures.⁴³ Likewise, Balthasar refuses to mitigate the ontological difference.

So what, for Balthasar, is the nature of the *analogia entis* through which creation is formed as an *imago* of the eternal Godhead? For Balthasar, this must be kenosis which is itself the form of love. As Ward notes, the view that love is kenotic has strong precedent in the early Church: love is self-abandonment and gift, whereas sin is the attempt at self-possession as a rejection of self-donation.⁴⁴ Kenotic love is a self-donation, not a ‘giving-up’. This economy of love involves reception and therefore the relationality and difference of the giver and the recipient.⁴⁵ In a move seemingly beyond Aquinas, and with an eye on the dangers of subordinationism, it is kenotic love which is elevated to the heart of Balthasar’s theology:

But if we reflect once more on the process of the intradivine processions, two approaches are barred to us: the idea of a Father who generates the Son in order to come to know himself as God and the idea of a Father who, because he has already

³⁹ Balthasar, *Theo-Logic: Theological Logic Theory*, trans. A. Walker, vol. II (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), pp. 180–181. See also Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, vol. IV, p. 323.

⁴⁰ Balthasar, *Theo-Logic*, vol. II, p. 182. This is not to suggest in any way that ‘difference’ is a straightforward concept. It is beyond the immediate purview of this chapter to enter into a detailed discussion. For such an assessment of the difficulty of ‘thinking difference’, see R. Williams, ‘Afterword: Making Difference’ in L. Gardner, D. Moss, B. Quash and G. Ward (eds.), *Balthasar at the End of Modernity* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), pp. 173–179.

⁴¹ Balthasar, *Theo-Logic*, vol. II, p. 183. ⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 184–185. ⁴³ See, for example, *ST* 1a.4.3.

⁴⁴ Ward, ‘Kenosis’, p. 46.

⁴⁵ For an exacting theological analysis of the theology of gift, including a critique of Derrida’s notion of the ‘one-way’ gift, see John Milbank, *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon* (London: Routledge, 2003).

known himself perfectly, generates the Son. The first position would be Hegelianism, the second, thought through consistently, would be Arianism. For this reason, the immemorial priority of the self-surrender or self-expropriation thanks to which the Father *is* Father cannot be ascribed to knowledge but only to groundless love, which proves the identity of love as the ‘transcendental par excellence’.⁴⁶

As the ‘transcendental par excellence’, it is love alone which is credible as our means of understanding God’s revelation of himself and creation’s analogical relation to its divine source. Creation bears the marks of its origin: the love of God which is kenotic in nature. So created entities are understood to participate in the eternal kenosis of the persons of the Trinity by continually giving themselves to be seen, known, understood and delighted in. As Rowan Williams points out, reality is therefore kenotic and ek-static for Balthasar, for all things continually move out of themselves in self-donation.⁴⁷

How might kenotic love at the heart of divine being, and its concomitant image in creation, illuminate the nature of cosmic motion? To answer this question, it is necessary to refer to the specifics of the Aristotelian–Thomist understanding of motion. It must be remembered that motion prior to the advent of modern natural philosophy is a broad category referring not only to the locomotion of bodies in space, but also to the motions of quality and quantity: learning, growing and maturing in character, for example, are varieties of motion. Central to Aristotle’s and Aquinas’ concept of motion is difference, which is also integral to Balthasar’s understanding of love. For Aquinas, following both Plato and Aristotle, motion is always relational: there is a mover and that which is moved. Motion takes place between contraries (for example, black and white, ignorance and knowledge) and is passage from potency to act. It is a necessary condition for motion that there be something in act and something in potency with regard to the motion in hand.

Crucially, therefore, motion requires the difference of mover and moved, and the difference of potency and act. There is also a sense in which motion might also be described as ecstatic and even kenotic. I have already alluded to the distinction made by Aristotle between *energeia* (actuality) and *kinesis* (motion). The being of something in motion is always constituted by its relation to a mover as it passes ‘beyond itself’ from potency to act. At every

⁴⁶ Balthasar, *Theo-Logic*, vol. II, p. 177.

⁴⁷ See R. Williams, ‘Balthasar and the Trinity’ in E. Oakes and D. Moss (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 37–50, at p. 41.

moment of the motion, that which is in motion is exceeding itself as it receives a new form and progresses towards actuality. Therefore, Aristotle characterizes motion as an *ecstasis* in which a being may receive a new form which is bestowed by its mover. Because nature is identified more particularly with form rather than matter, motion for Aristotle and Aquinas is a genuine transformation whereby something may receive a new form. By contrast, the being of what is fully actual is self-contained and, unlike that which is in motion, it is at every moment self-identical. However, this is not to say that an energetic being is self-enclosed. Quite the contrary is the case, for such actualized beings are the most potent and ready movers of those in potentiality.

In what sense might motion be kenotic in character? In any motion, the mover 'donates' the form it already possesses and pours this into that which it moves. For example, in the case of the motion of learning, the teacher donates knowledge or the means of thought in such a way that the student, who is moved to knowledge, receives a genuinely new form. It is not the case that the teacher 'gives up' knowledge in order to bring a student from potency to act; rather, this motion is brought about through self-donation. That which is moved receives and seeks a new actuality through desire. It is therefore not the case that creation is simply a series of ultimately passive objects which are moved or manipulated in mechanical fashion by a divine subject. Rather, creation participates in being moved by God, for in its cosmic motion creation exhibits the desire for its natural end in the divine. Where humanity fails of its own power to participate in its motion by God, the divine provides the gift of grace whereby humanity may once again seek motion to the beatific vision.⁴⁸

Motion, therefore, requires difference and is ecstatic and kenotic in character. Motion is the temporal image of the differentiated, ecstatic and kenotic self-donation and self-reception which characterizes the Trinitarian divine life. Cosmic motion is the 'watermark' of creation's divine origin, representing a *similitudo* – which is yet a *maior dissimilitudo* – of the cosmos to the divine life. This 'watermark' is the kenotic self-donation of love which moves the sun and other stars.

Moving to the last brief section of this chapter, I would now like to contrast this understanding of cosmic origins and motion with the theology and cosmology of the greatest theorist of motion in early modern science, Isaac Newton. Following theologians including Michael Buckley, I see here

⁴⁸ On motion and grace, see Simon Oliver, 'The Sweet Delight of Virtue and Grace in Aquinas's Ethics', *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 7:1 (2005), pp. 52–71.

the beginnings of the separation of cosmology from issues in theology and metaphysics, and the sundering of faith and reason.⁴⁹

NEWTON ON GOD AND MOTION

It is now commonly known that Isaac Newton, whose great work, the *Principia Mathematica*, was published in 1687, wrote far more theology than he did science. Because he denied the divinity of Christ and the doctrine of the Trinity – thus putting at grave risk his position at Trinity College, Cambridge – Newton, however, did not publish his theological manuscripts.⁵⁰

Newton expounded his Arian views of Christ at least fifteen years prior to the publication of the *Principia*. There are two principal reasons why Newton held such an Arian view of God. The first relates to studies in biblical interpretation and religious history which he initially undertook in earnest between the late 1660s and the mid-1680s, and to which he was to return in the early part of the eighteenth century. Through his studies, Newton became convinced that the earliest Christian Church held an authentic and uncorrupted non-Trinitarian faith which understood Christ as an exalted and yet created mediator between God and the universe.

The second reason for Newton's Arianism, and one which was at the same time a consequence of this Christology, is more explicit and, although this view was undoubtedly formulated much earlier, it appears in the General Scholium of the second and third editions of the *Principia*. This was the belief in the utter supremacy, power and freedom of the will of the Lord God of Dominion.⁵¹ It was a supremely free and sovereign will which, for Newton, was the supreme attribute of God. Because this will was supremely free, this entailed its inscrutability and arbitrary character. It was because of God's omnipotent wilful dominion alone that he was worthy of worship. This voluntarism featured a dualistic distinction between God's *potentia ordinata* and *potentia absoluta*. It was by the former that God ordained and preserved the regular workings of the laws of nature. However, in the latter was enshrined the absolute power of God's will to

⁴⁹ See M. Buckley, *At the Origins of Modern Atheism* (Yale University Press, 1987).

⁵⁰ At the time of writing, Newton's manuscripts are being made available on the Internet by a project substantially sponsored by the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the Royal Society, at www.newtonproject.sussex.ac.uk.

⁵¹ See Isaac Newton, *The Principia: Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy*, trans. I. B. Cohen and A. Whitman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), pp. 939–944.

suspend or change these laws at any moment. This was a kind of arbitrary ‘addition’ to God’s *potentia ordinata*.

Newton’s voluntarist Lord God of Dominion as described above was utterly remote and transcendent. This concept of the divine fitted neatly with Newton’s physics in which the universe was seen to be filled with discrete objects whose particular motion required no reference to a relation with any other being. Interaction between discrete objects constituted change brought about by conflictual forces. Remember that, according to Newton’s first law of motion, a body will continue in its state of motion or rest until it is subject to another force. Motion is a state, and any body will naturally resist a change in that state. What Newton is primarily concerned with is not motion per se, but forces which change a state of motion. Through the natural resistance to change possessed by bodies, the universe exhibited some degree of stability and changelessness, this being a reflection of the divine nature itself. However, this left a theological gap for Newton which was somewhat unpalatable: how was he to describe a mode of divine action within such a world so as not to make God incidental to cosmology?

Newton gave two apparently different answers to this question. The first, in typical Arian fashion, saw the divine as utterly remote and acting through Christ as an intermediary. God and Christ were not one in substance, but one in unity of will and dominion. Newton states that, on this view, Christ is understood as the ‘viceroy’ of God, putting into action the dictates of the divine will. The second means of divine action, however, is direct within absolute space. J. E. McGuire has argued that this latter form of divine action shows that Newton’s Arianism was limited in its effect upon his cosmology.⁵² However, I will suggest that the latter notion of divine action is also the result of Newton’s Arianism and that this conception of God reinforces his understanding of motion.

Absolute space is the context and basis for motion in Newton’s universe. He outlined his notion of space in *De Gravitatione et Aequipondio Fluidorum*, a treatise which was to form the basis of many arguments in the first edition of the *Principia*.⁵³ Newton explains that space is neither substance nor accident, but rather ‘an eminent effect of God, or a disposition of all being’.⁵⁴ Space is ultimately characterized as extension. We are

⁵² See J. E. McGuire, ‘The Fate of the Date: The Theology of Newton’s *Principia* Revisited’ in M. J. Osler (ed.), *Rethinking the Scientific Revolution* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 271–295.

⁵³ This text is available in A. R. Hall and M. B. Hall (eds.), *Unpublished Scientific Papers of Isaac Newton: A Selection from the Portsmouth Collection in the University Library, Cambridge* (Cambridge University Press, 1962), pp. 89–156.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

able to abstract 'the dispositions and properties of a body so that there remains only the uniform and unlimited stretching out of space in length, breadth and depth'.⁵⁵ Space is also 'eternal in duration and immutable in nature, and this because it is the emanent effect of an eternal and immutable being'.⁵⁶ In a fashion which appears to consider space as 'begotten' of God, Newton explains that, 'If ever space had not existed, God at that time would have been nowhere; and hence either he created space later (in which he was not himself), or else, which is less repugnant to reason, he created his own ubiquity.'⁵⁷

Thus it can be seen that, in the absence of a fully divine Christ, absolute space becomes the basis of creation, forming the 'disposition of being *qua* being', for such space is eternal in duration and immutable in nature, and this because it is the emanent effect of an eternal and immutable being. While space is not literally God's sensory medium, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Newton has described a spatial and three-dimensional Godhead. Indeed, Newton's absolute space – eternally of God, as it were – takes on the characteristics of an orthodox second person of the Trinity. Whereas, for Aquinas, God creates and sustains the world through the Son's emanation from the Father, so for Newton, God creates the world in a co-eternal and uncreated absolute space through the exercise of his will.

It seems, therefore, that absolute space coupled with the action of the divine will is the ontological precondition of all being. It is by means of co-eternal and infinite space that God is able to operate and instantiate a material cosmos. Whereas, for Aquinas (and those in the broad Thomist tradition such as Balthasar), the motion of a body is itself a participation and effect of the knowledge of the body's form in the perfect 'motionless motion' of God, namely in the emanation of the Son from the Father, for Newton, creation occurs through the inscrutable and arbitrary 'motions' of the divine will. This is expressed in a recent article by J. E. McGuire in which he states that, for Newton, 'God does not recreate similar conditions in successive regions of space; he maintains the same formal reality in different parts of space through a succession of times. In this way the continuity of motion is the real effect of God's motion.'⁵⁸

Yet what divine motions can these be within Newton's Arian voluntarism? They can only be the motions of an arbitrary and inscrutable divine will. Whereas, for Aquinas, the 'motionless motion' of the divine emanation was able to provide the ontological basis and goal of all motion, for Newton, who has already discounted the possibility of relationality within the

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 133. ⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 136. ⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 137. ⁵⁸ McGuire, 'The Fate of the Date', p. 282.

Godhead, motion can only be the effect of the imposition of divine volition. The lack of Trinitarian relationality in Newton's conception of God means that the universe cannot be thought of as a hierarchy and system of related motions which are images of the divine life, but rather as the action of one being, God, within absolute space to instantiate a material body, whereupon the created being retains a primitive state of motion which is discrete and self-explanatory.

CONCLUSION

Where does this leave us? There is a question which pervades the traditional reflection on creation which is pertinent: could a single, monadic, non-relational divinity of Newtonian variety 'create'? Some, including recently Tom Weinandy in the spirit of Balthasar, argue no.⁵⁹ Weinandy states that:

If God were a solitary monad existing in complete self-isolation, the 'thought' of creating something other than himself could never arise. It would be ontologically impossible for the thought of 'another' to arise, for there would be no ontological ground upon which this thought of 'another' could arise. Being the sole being that existed, it would be impossible for a single-person God to conceive of anything other than himself.⁶⁰

This is why one might suppose that a monadic personal God must create of necessity in order to be personal, for being personal necessitates relationality. Alternatively, a monadic God, in order to conceive of something other than himself, must create not *ex nihilo*, but out of a non-temporally bounded, always existent 'other' in the form of a pre-existent material nature akin to Aristotle's eternal cosmos or Plato's *khora*. It would then be God's relation to this eternal Aristotelian cosmos which was the basis of God's creating of an other.

Because Newton proposes just such a deity – a God devoid of relationality and characterized by freedom understood in terms of an arbitrary, all-powerful and inscrutable will – he cannot properly think creation *ex nihilo*. Rather, creation emerges within a co-eternal absolute space which then forms the basis of God's relation to his creation, an absolute space which, bizarrely, takes on the characteristics of an orthodox Christ. Moreover, there can be no reason intrinsic to God himself concerning *why* he would create. This is beyond intelligibility and reason, for the divine will, in being sovereign and free, is not bounded by 'reasons' for creating. The

⁵⁹ See Balthasar, *Theo-Logic*, vol. II, p. 181.

⁶⁰ Thomas Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), pp. 139–140, note 75.

consequence of the combination of Newton's theology and natural philosophy is a sense that creation – as a theological doctrine – stands outside the realm of reason, whereas the natural processes under examination in the *Principia* are merely the instantiation of an inscrutable divine will and the subject of a wholly autonomous natural philosophy. Moreover, with the central characteristic of nature – motion – understood non-rationally and through the category of force, there seems no basis of relating such motion to the life of God, as there had been in Aquinas where motion is understood as an analogue of the supreme relationality of the Trinity. It therefore comes as no surprise that early modern science divested itself so easily of metaphysical and theological concerns.

Properly to think creation *ex nihilo*, one requires a doctrine of God which is sufficiently rich, such that God himself is the full and wholly adequate reason not only for the universe's temporal beginning (if, indeed, we can properly conceive of such a thing), but also for God's continual sustaining of creation over the *nihil*. This, I would suggest, following Aquinas and Balthasar, is found only in a fully Trinitarian doctrine. The relation of God to the kenotic act of creation is analogically related to God's kenotic self-relation in the emanation of the persons of the Trinity. This much is proposed by, among others, Barth, Pannenberg and Torrance. Going just a little further, what I have also suggested is that the dynamic eternal emanations within the Godhead are also related by analogy to cosmic motion – the means of creaturely perfection – where motion is understood as fundamentally relational and the key characteristic of the cosmos. We might even suggest that God continually 'moves' creation from nothingness to being. Because such a doctrine of God is sufficiently rich that we need not postulate anything other than God to account for creation, this can be the only way of truly thinking creation which is of nothing, thereby maintaining the distinctiveness of theological cosmology and avoiding the reification of the *nihil*. As I have argued in more detail elsewhere, this also allows us to understand the subject matter of physics – motion – as included and taken up within the subject matter of theology by virtue of motion's analogical relation to the doctrine of God.⁶¹ Meanwhile, we would do well to remember that, for theologians such as Aquinas and Balthasar, the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* is first a doctrine of God and only then a cosmology.

⁶¹ See Oliver, *Philosophy, God and Motion*, esp. Chapter 6.